



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
July—August 2025 • Vol. 29 No. 4

Take On The New York Wellness Challenge!

According to the Governor's Office website - "Governor Kathy Hochul invites New Yorkers to participate in a 2025 wellness challenge offered by New York's State Park and Historic Site System. This challenge is a great way to start the new year — prioritizing well-being and reminding New Yorkers and our visitors of the wide range of benefits they can receive by exploring our magnificent landscapes."

"The [New York State Parks Wellness Challenge](#) includes 50 missions that can be completed at various State Parks. The challenge will be available throughout the entirety of 2025 both digitally on the Goosechase app and physically as a printed checklist brochure at more than 250 New York State Parks facilities. Once participants finish 25 of the available 50 missions, they will receive a commemorative sticker and postcard mailed to their address as a prize.

Goals of the New York State Parks Wellness Challenge are to:

- Encourage holistic wellness: mental, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, occupational, financial and environmental
- Increase both in- and out-of-state visitation by promoting New York as a recreation and wellness destination
- Educate potential visitors on free and low-cost opportunities, activities and events within the parks and sites system
- Offer accessible and inspirational wellness events, programs, and activities that can be completed at State Parks properties"

Friends groups together with State Parks across New York are hosting special programs and events to meet this Wellness Initiative. Friends of Thacher State Park are working together with Park staff to host Yoga Hikes and a Sunset Storytelling series. Other Park events included a Luminary Walk, coordinated by the Capital District Chapter of the American Association for Suicide Prevention: on June 7th 110 people hiked along the escarpment where 200 lights were placed along the trail

from the Overlook to the Visitors Center by a crew of Park staff and volunteers. Participants also carried luminaries decorated with loving messages of lost loved ones or messages of hope. It was a very moving and memorable event to behold. Attendees joined together at the end of the walk by the firepit at the Visitor Center – S'mores included.

30 people joined us for summer solstice sound baths at the Hop Field Warming Hut to welcome the slow, easy season of summer. Visitors have also joined us for art programs which foster creativity and mindfulness as participants try their hand at watercolors, paper quilling, rock painting and more!

Upcoming events throughout summer include Yoga and Sunset Stories. The Park is continuing its third season working with JAI Yoga for paddle board yoga classes on Thompsons Lake with assistance of Friends volunteer and board member Bert Schou. Also in the works are plans for Forest Bathing events.

The Friends will host their first yoga hike on June 28th at 9 am (to Hang Glider Point), a second will occur on July 26th (Escarpment Trail), and a third on August 17th (Escarpment, no hike). To register for yoga hikes please contact Bert Schou by phone (518 221-8693) or email bert.090355@gmail.com. Yoga will be taught by Jennifer Newman of JAI Yoga School, hikes will be led by Bert Schou. Meeting time is 9 am, place will be announced upon registration.

Sunset Storytelling will run through October. Two events are especially noteworthy, Perry Ground Onondaga (Turtle Clan) dressed in full Native regalia will be our July 4th storyteller. On August 15th, spooky stories coincide with the annual Halloween in August event at the campground. S'mores are provided.

Hope to see you! If you are unable to attend any of the Wellness activities at Thacher Park, similar programs can be found throughout 2025 at other State Parks and Historic Sites by visiting: <https://parks.ny.gov/events/>.

- by Bert Schou

Musings on Gnats

Drat those gnats. What an annoyance when all I want to do is go for a walk in the woods to relax. Those pesky critters just won't leave me alone.

Why is it they make a beeline (or should that be gnatline) for the eyes? According to my not-so-scientific research, i.e., online, it's because they are attracted to moisture and salt. Not to mention bad breath. And toiletries with sweet or fruity scents. Reportedly, gnats can give you pink eye too. What joy!

They swarm because of the birds and the bees. That is, it's how they can find each other to create more gnats that create more swarms to get up in your face. While the movies had the Rat Pack and the Brat Pack, nature has the Gnat Pack.

According to the National Park Service, there also are biting gnats, which are most active late spring/early summer during the day, especially mid-morning and at dusk. Fortunately, I haven't encountered those in Thacher Park, just the ones that swarm the face. Perhaps I should be grateful. I'm not.

It should help to know that gnats have a short life cycle, usually mid-May to late June, and can't withstand the cold. So that means relief 10 1/2 months of the year, yes? Not necessarily, because when you bring your plants in as the weather cools, gnats are happy to tag along and pester you all winter long indoors.

So what's a girl (or boy) to do? Apparently, before heading out for a hike, you should brush your teeth and gargle, shower and wash your hair with scentless soap, and use the same insect repellent you do for other pests. Just don't spray it in your eyes.

- by Jill Harbeck

You are Invited...!

Friends Potluck Mixer July 9, 7 pm

Please join the Friends of Thacher Park on July 9 at 7 pm at the **Visitor Center** (brief business meeting at 6:30 pm) for a potluck mixer. We appreciate all you do to support the Park and hope you can join us to celebrate!

Friends Recognize Volunteers During I Love My Park Day

The Friends and Thacher State Park staff hosted a successful I Love My Park Day event on May 3. Dodging raindrops, almost 100 volunteers participated in trail cleanup and Park beautification activities, followed by a community lunch hosted by the Friends.

The May event kicked off with the first ever Friends of Thacher State Park recognition event for volunteers who have made exceptional and sustained contributions to the Park.

Those recognized during the event were:

Tim Albright, Chuck Ver Straeten, Brian Horl, Sigrin Newell, Doug Fraser, Jim Kisselback, Thom Engel, Rosemary Mix, and the "Garden Gals," Sue Albright, Anita Wahlen, Leslie Hartnett, Jayne Maloney, Cary Patak, Ann Hein, and Bonnie Schaller.

-by Laure-Jeanne Davignon

Join board meetings virtually!

The Friends Board meets every second Wednesday of every second month. Anybody is welcome at our board meetings and we'd love to have you there! Can't join us in person? Join our Webex meetings virtually using this link!



Our next board meeting is Wednesday, July 9, at 6:30 pm. Hope to see you virtually, or in person (join us for a potluck mixer after!).

<https://meetny-gov.webex.com/meetny-gov/j.php?MTID=mb4509c267a4cf81609c3ead02331ca1f>

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2025

Wednesdays, July 9 (6:30 pm), September 10, and November 12.
7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center. Come join us!

Twinkle Twinkle...Firefly



It's that time of year when fields, bushes and trees start to twinkle at twilight. It's firefly season once again, with this year's sightseeing walk in Thacher Park taking place June 14. Led by Nature Center staff Audrey Trossen, with Florence Conway and Josh Horth pulling up

in the rear, expectations weren't particularly high. It was a bit early in the season, there had been heavy rains, and temperatures had been cool. Nevertheless, we were treated to a good display, one that will last only about two months.

Fireflies spend most of their time underground. Eggs are laid on or just below the surface, hatch three to four weeks later, and hibernate over the winter. The larvae feed on other larvae, snails and slug until they emerge from the ground in late spring/early summer. Adult diet varies, depending on the species. Some are predatory, feeding on other insects; some consume nectar and pollen; and others don't eat at all.

Once fireflies emerge from the ground in summer, they have one purpose and one purpose only - to mate. These soft-bodied beetles, also called lightning bugs, use light for their mating ritual. A chemical reaction in a specialized organ known as their lantern creates a bioluminescent light.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, bioluminescence in fireflies is nearly 100 percent efficient, i.e., almost no energy is wasted. In comparison, an incandescent light bulb is only 10 percent efficient, i.e., it wastes 90 percent of the energy as heat. And the heat

produced by a candle is 80,000 times greater than that given off by a firefly's light of the same brightness. Fireflies have to be so efficient to save energy.

In North America, a male flies around flashing this light to attract a female. If he "sparks" her interest, the female will flash back. If she's not interested, she doesn't flash so he can't find her.

Not all fireflies flash the same though. There can be distinctive patterns that differ in color, number, duration, and time between flashes, depending on the species.

Fireflies exist around the world in temperate and tropical areas and on every continent except Antarctica. Reportedly there are more than 2,200 species worldwide, at least 165 in the United States and Canada, and approximately 30 in New York.

Unfortunately, fireflies are in decline. Some reasons include habitat loss, light pollution, climate change, pesticides, poor water quality, invasive species, and over-collection. There is a long way to go in the study of these enchanting creatures. In the meantime, take a walk on a balmy summer evening and just enjoy watching the fireflies' annual mating dance.

- by Jill Harbeck



Top: Photo of male firefly in flight by Art Farmer https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Photinus_pyralis_Firefly_2.jpg

Bottom, photo of mating fireflies by Andreas Kay <https://www.flickr.com/photos/andreaskay/15116078093>

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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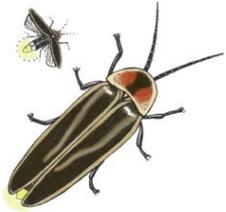
As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Bert Schou, Jill Harbeck, Laure-Jeanne Davignon, Betsey Miller, and Becky Schneider for their contributions to this newsletter.

— Christine Gervasi (Editor)

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<https://www.exploringnature.org/db/view/Firefly>

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

Next:

Board Meeting

6:30 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Successful Native Plant Sale

Our annual native plant sale on May 17 was a grand success. We sold over 2,000 native plants in less than 2 hours. It took 12 months of planning, and almost 50 volunteers (who helped with purchasing, potting, watering, setting up, and staffing the sale) to achieve this result. The Friends of Thacher and Wild Ones of the Capital region jointly run this operation with essential assistance from Park Staff. We want to give a special shout out to Ian Evans, the Park's volunteer coordinator for his help this year. We want to thank all of you who helped with this effort and all of you who came and shopped at the sale.

You may wonder why the Friends of Thacher are involved in a native plant sale? How does that help the Park? This sale was started about 30 years ago by a Nature Center staff member, Laurel Tormey—Cole. Her objective was to encourage people in the region to plant more native plants. These plants support the local ecosystem by providing food and shelter to native

animal species, and thereby enhance biodiversity. Supporting the local ecosystem supports the Park. Over the years these sales have enhanced education about native plants and increased the number of these plants in our region by more than 30,000 plants.

If you are interested in this initiative, [save the date](#) for the **2025 Wild Ones' Native Plant Celebration and Seed Swap**:

Saturday, November 15, 2025, 11 am to 2 pm
Helderberg Room,
John Boyd Thacher State Park Visitor Center

To ensure the native plant sale continues in 2026 and beyond, we need volunteers to help. Please contact Thacher State Park and sign up to volunteer.

- by *Betsey Miller*

Photo of native Ninebark by Christine Gervasi



As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org