

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026 Issue



A red-winged blackbird roosts among the cattails. Photographed by Veronica Hayes.

Welcome Spring! Oh, dear friend, how happy we are to see you come back again...

It was truly a good old-fashioned winter this year along the River. For those that live here year-round, it was certainly a test of character and strength. The Nature Center was alive with outdoor enthusiasts. We had lots of snow for skiing and snowshoeing. Even our ice fishermen were thrilled.

We now look forward to warmer days and the sounds of the bird migration. Minna describes in detail how the marshlands provide a welcome home to all the returning birds in the spring. My favorite sound is that of the red winged blackbirds when they return. Our family keeps a list on our chalkboard of all the birds we see beginning on January 1st each year. As spring comes closer, our list gets longer and it becomes a challenge who can see the rarest birds. The marshlands and the Nature Center

trails provide two of the best places I know for birdwatching. When you come to visit after the spring thaw begins, be sure to bring your binoculars and your camera. You never know what you may see.

The Nature Center continues to host many wonderful activities throughout the year. We will have new opportunities for all to enjoy, learn, and create. We know you won't want to miss a minute of it.

Happy Spring to all!

Robin Colello-Poplaski
*Board President,
Friends of the Nature Center*

The Minna Anthony Common Series

Spring Marshes Draw Many Birds

by **Minna Anthony Common**
April 28, 1932

*Reprinted with permission from the
Watertown Daily Times.*

Flooded marshland in the spring seems at first sight to be the most uninviting place the outdoors has to offer. The water looks cold and last year's dead weed stalks, bent and brown, are depressing. It would be entirely dreary were it not for the birds and the bordering osiers.

These low shrubs are lovers of moist lands and thrive only where their roots are standing in water. Their one claim to beauty comes in early spring before the leaf buds swell, for with returning sap, they take on a rich red color. Osiers stand very erect in crowded companies and by their gay color and bright shining twigs offer compensation for the dreariness of the flooded marsh before them.

We find the marsh more attractive to birds than are the woodlands. That may be in part because water-loving birds usually go about in flocks.

There we find the red-winged blackbirds, fluting happily. The males fly about in a manner best calculated to display their gaudy red and yellow wing chevrons to their prospective brides, or they rest precariously on the tip of some dead weed stalk while they sing. There are the tree swallows skimming low over the water. Their backs, when they catch the sun's rays, are almost as blue as bluebirds. There are plovers – we may let it go at that or we may try to name them a difficult proceeding – flying with wings curved in a bend bow beneath their bodies. This is a family characteristic shared by no other birds. Land plover come to the marsh, too, in the spring so

killdeer will be there with their silver striped heads and silver-lined wings; and upland plover, all brown speckles like the meadow grasses where they make their homes. The yellow legs are easy to tell, else why would they have gotten the name, but there are a dozen other kinds puzzling enough to be fascinating.

Besides the plover there are duck – small flocks of pintails feeding in the distance or little scaup or a pair of large black duck, and perhaps some mergansers. They excite our admiration by their grace of movement as they glide over the water without apparent effort or bob, head down, to pick up some succulent weed from the bottom of the pool. If alarmed the flock of the bird stiffens, with heads held erect on extended necks and bills all pointed towards the disturbance, and then in a trice departs to safer feeding grounds.

Blackduck are the largest, being about the size of the barnyard denizens. They are mottled and have a blue, white-bordered, spot on their wings. Except at close range they appear black. The pintails have a descriptive name, for the tail extends to a sharp point. The males, and there are always some in every flock, have a white stripe down the sides of the neck which can be seen at some distance; the scaup are little fellows by comparison. They are dark and have a white spot on their wings. Their distinguishing mark is a gleaming white ring just at the base of the bill. The mergansers have top knots marked with a white triangle which is quite conspicuous quite afar off. There are so many kinds of duck it would be confusing if they all came to the marshes, but they do not because the food-likes of some species cannot be satisfied there.

Bitterns, herons, wild geese or a dozen other kinds of birds might be in the marsh and a few minutes stop when driving by may give surprising discoveries. Once I saw a pair of swans, great, white, long-necked beauties.

A study of marsh birds offers two advantages to the novice: there is no place for the birds to hide and, they are without an exception, large enough to be easily seen. ■

From the Director

Dear Nature Center Community,

We had a North Country winter to remember. Multi-week stretches of snow and sub-zero temperatures made for frigid conditions – and perfect ice fishing and winter trail conditions on warmer days. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing were spectacular this year. The Nature Center was abuzz with winter outdoor-recreation enthusiasts. Thank you again to Patrick Dove and Chet Sourwine for facilitating our sixth-annual Ice Fishing Clinic. Thank you to our bushcrafter-in-residence, Jack Downing for leading our Maple Sugaring Day; and to local archeologist Ken Knapp for his “Connecting with Native Heritage” lecture.

We are deeply grateful to our partner, the Friends of the Nature Center, for putting on an amazing *Holiday Bonanza*. See event photos on page 3. Nature Center events are always greatly enriched by our collaboration. Welcome aboard to new board member Karen Rockoff! The Nature Center team looks forward to many exciting cooperative opportunities in 2026.

This spring join us on one of our many public programs. Inspired by Minna Anthony Common’s articles, we’re launching the *Minna’s Remix* program series. Each quarter we’ll be reprising her field observations in the present day. On June 13, we’ll explore marshland birds. Thank you to the Watertown Daily Times for access to these treasured archives. Aside from our annual *I Love My Park Day*, we’ll be hosting an Earth Month Volunteer Cleanup, Luminary Hike + Night Sky Viewing, Turkey Calling for Beginners, Sound Bathing, Wool Felting, a Summer Solstice Celebration, a Patriotic Barn Quilt Workshop, and more! See our full calendar of events on pages 4-7. Happy Spring!

Gabriela Padewska
Minna Anthony Common Nature Center



Wide open: daffodil and garden spider.

For Your Consideration

2026 I BIRD NY Challenge – New Great Horned Owl Patch!

The 2026 I BIRD NY Challenge is open to all ages and ends Nov. 1, 2026. Identify 10 species of birds anywhere in New York State, submit online or by mail, and receive a commemorative patch, sticker, and certificate. The MAC Nature Center is part of the *New York State Birding Trail* and is great place to complete the challenge! Visit <https://dec.ny.gov/things-to-do/birding/i-bird-ny> to participate!



Highlights from Holiday Bonanza



Raffle table of great donated items.



Meredith Sullivan and family running the craft table.



Beautiful music provided by Brittany Cean.

Our Holiday Bonanza took place on December 13th, and was yet again a warm-hearted winter event! **Thank you** to all who made this event possible, especially the following businesses:

Alexandria Bay: Gouverneur Bank; Community Bank; North Country Seed and Feed; Cranberry Boggs; Dockside Pub; NorthStar Restaurant; T.I. Winery
Good Dog Charlies; Charles Garlock & Sons

Watertown: Comfort Inn & Suites; Hannaford's Supermarket.



A generous food spread provided by the Friends of the Nature Center.



Beekeeper Hans Junga vending his art and local honey.

Spring Calendar

Registration required for some events.
Please call **(315) 482-2479** to RSVP.
*Denotes registration requirements.



Scan to see the calendar of events on our website.

All programs meet at the Nature Center and are free unless otherwise stated. Our calendar of events can also be found on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

EVENT SERIES *Recurring programs with multiple date options*

FULL MOON HIKES*

Wednesday, April 1 // 7:15 p.m. *Pink Moon: RSVP by 3/29*

Friday, May 1 // 8:20 p.m. *Flower Moon: RSVP by 4/29*

Sunday, May 31 // 9:20 p.m. *Blue Moon: RSVP by 5/29*

Monday, June 29 // 9:00 p.m. *Strawberry Moon: RSVP by 6/27*

Join us on the trails for our monthly full-moon hikes! Please wear sturdy hiking shoes, layered clothing for warmth, and bring your own headlamp and/or flashlight. We'll leave the Nature Center promptly to catch a view of the moonrise. Following the hike, we'll host a campfire! Program subject to weather. Limited space, please RSVP no later than 2 days prior to event.

APRIL

FULL MOON HIKE*

Wednesday, April 1 // 7:15 p.m. *Pink Moon: RSVP by 3/29*

This is a recurring monthly event. Please see the description on the first page.

WILDLIFE HUNT

Saturday, April 4 // 10:00 a.m.

Join us on an expedition into the unknown! We'll have a hands-on learning activity about local wildlife in the classroom. Afterward, we will use our knowledge to view wildlife on a guided hike, weather permitting. Remember to dress warm!

PACK BASKET WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 11 // 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. (approx. duration 7 hours) *Full-size Pack Basket*

Come learn how to weave a traditional pack basket out of reeds! This heritage craft of the Thousand Islands and Adirondack regions can be learned in a day – we provide the materials and instruction for the class. Recommended for ages 10 and up. Full-size basket workshops are \$100. Mini pack basket workshops are \$50. Payment is due at event. Bring a lunch and water bottle and prepare for a fun day! *Class size is limited, please RSVP early.*

EARTH MONTH: VOLUNTEER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 18 // 10:00 a.m.

Celebrate Earth Month by volunteering at a local park! After the ice melts, all sorts of litter winds up on the shoreline. We'll gather to help clean up the Nature Center shorelines and grounds. Help us get a head start before I Love My Parks Day! Tools provided; BYO work gloves, water bottle, and light snack is recommended. Please RSVP by calling the Nature Center.

LUMINARY HIKE + NIGHT SKY VIEWING *with amateur astronomers Tim Abel & John Rusho* **Saturday, April 25 // 8:30 p.m.–10:30 p.m.**

Astronomy joins our signature luminary hike! Come experience our half-mile North Field Loop lit with trailside luminaries on this festive, self-guided, night hike. Then hike back to the Nature Center to enjoy a fire, music – and telescope viewing! Amateur astronomers Tim Abel and John Rusho will help us to see into the night sky and pick out interesting celestial bodies and phenomena. Please dress for the weather and bring a flashlight/headlamp. Note: this event is subject to clear skies. Thank you to the Friends of the Nature Center for sponsoring this event.

MAY

FULL MOON HIKE*

Friday, May 1 // 8:20 p.m. *Flower Moon: RSVP by 4/29*

This is a recurring monthly event. Please see the description on the first page.

I LOVE MY PARK *days*

I LOVE MY PARK DAY

Saturday, May 2 // 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Show your Nature Center some love! Volunteer to spruce up the Nature Center for spring and another busy summer season. This is the day when we get out our mop buckets, sponges, garden trowels, rakes, and clippers to beautify parks all over New York State. Volunteers receive an annual ILMPD t-shirt (first come, first serve). RSVP requested. Preregister at <https://www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day> or call the Nature Center.

TURKEY CALLING FOR BEGINNERS *with outdoorsman Patrick Dove*

Sunday, May 3 // 10:00 a.m.

Let's talk turkey! Learn about the skill of turkey calling from outdoorsman Patrick Dove. Watch and listen to turkey-call demonstrations. Have fun learning how to use various turkey calls. There will be a lot of gobbling going on here! This is an awesome experience for all ages and a wonderful outdoor skill to learn. RSVP appreciated.

SOUND BATHING *with certified sound healing instructor Destiny Myrick*

Saturday, May 9 // 1:30 p.m.

Find your inner peace and rejuvenate your spirit. Sound healing works with your body's natural energy, helping to relieve stress, increase mental and emotional clarity and restore harmony. No experience necessary. Bring your yoga mat and experience the calming and balancing effects of sound healing. Sound bath experience generously donated by *WildRoots Wellness & Revival* of Watertown, NY.

EXPLORING VERNAL POOLS

Saturday, May 16 // 1:00 p.m.

Ever wonder where all the frogs and salamanders go when they wake up from sleeping through the winter? Join us to learn about vernal pools and how they help our local wildlife. The program will include a hike, so dress for the weather. Recommended for ages 5+.

SUMMERTIME KICKOFF: FIELD GAMES *sponsored by the Friends of the Nature Center*

Saturday, May 23 // 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. (Greased Watermelon Relay Race: 1:00 p.m.)

Come up to our field for some awesome summer games! Weather permitting, we'll offer a variety of outdoor games that will be sure to have you primed for summer! Suitable for all ages. Call the Nature Center to sign your team up for the 1st annual *Greased Watermelon Relay Race!*

BIRDWATCHING: EDGE HABITAT

Saturday, May 30 // 9:00 a.m.

Discover the birding hotspot where the forest meets the field! Join us in exploring our dynamic edge habitat – a biodiverse boundary offering food, shelter, and nesting spots for birds. We'll practice "slow looking" and seating will be available. Suitable for all skill levels; binoculars available.

FULL MOON HIKE*

Sunday, May 31 // 9:20 p.m. *Blue Moon: RSVP by 5/29*

This is a recurring monthly event. Please see the description on the first page.

JUNE

SUCCULENT GARDEN *sponsored by the Friends of the Nature Center*

Saturday, June 6 // 1:00 p.m.

Calling all plant lovers! Come celebrate National Great Outdoors Month by creating a little succulent garden. Once our gardens are created, join us for a guided hike. This program is recommended for ages 12+. All materials provided. Program fee is \$10. Space is limited, please RSVP to reserve your spot.

MINNA REMIX: BIRDING THE MARSH

Saturday, June 13 // 9:00 a.m.

Inspired by Minna Anthony Common's 1939 article entitled *Spring Marshes Draw Many Birds*, we'll be reprising her field observations in the present day. Join us on the trail to look for birds in the marshlands. Beginners welcome; binoculars available. Articles reprinted with permission of the Watertown Daily Times.

WOOL FELTING *with primitive bushcrafter Jack Downing*

Saturday, June 20 // 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Join bushcrafter Jack Downing to learn a skill called "felting," and make a hat of your own! Felting is the blending of animal hairs to make fabric and has been around since 6500 B.C. Since then, it has expanded to make so many items of importance to people, not just for warmth but also for fashion. One of the most famous uses, felt hats have kept heads warm and sun out of the eyes for thousands of years! As with our other heritage crafts, please bring a lunch or snack and plan to settle in with us to learn this wonderful craft. Space is limited, so please call the Nature Center to register soon!

SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION *sponsored by the Friends of the Nature Center*
Sunday, June 21 // 6:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.

Join us for a special celebration of the summer solstice! We'll spend the evening with music, refreshments, natural mandalas, flower crowns, and more! Summer never started so good! RSVP appreciated by 6/15.

BARN QUILT WORKSHOP: PATRIOTIC

Saturday, June 27 // 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

This barn quilt workshop is a must for all patriots! Today, we'll tackle the larger 2'x2' barn quilts with a patriotic theme that'll make your home beautiful for America's 250th birthday! Please bring a lunch and water bottle. \$50 fee. Register by 6/22 by calling the Nature Center. Recommended for ages 12+.

FULL MOON HIKE*

Monday, June 29 // 9:00 p.m. *Strawberry Moon: RSVP by 6/27*

This is a recurring monthly event. Please see the description on the first page.



See our calendar of events
on our website:
macnaturecenter.com/calendar

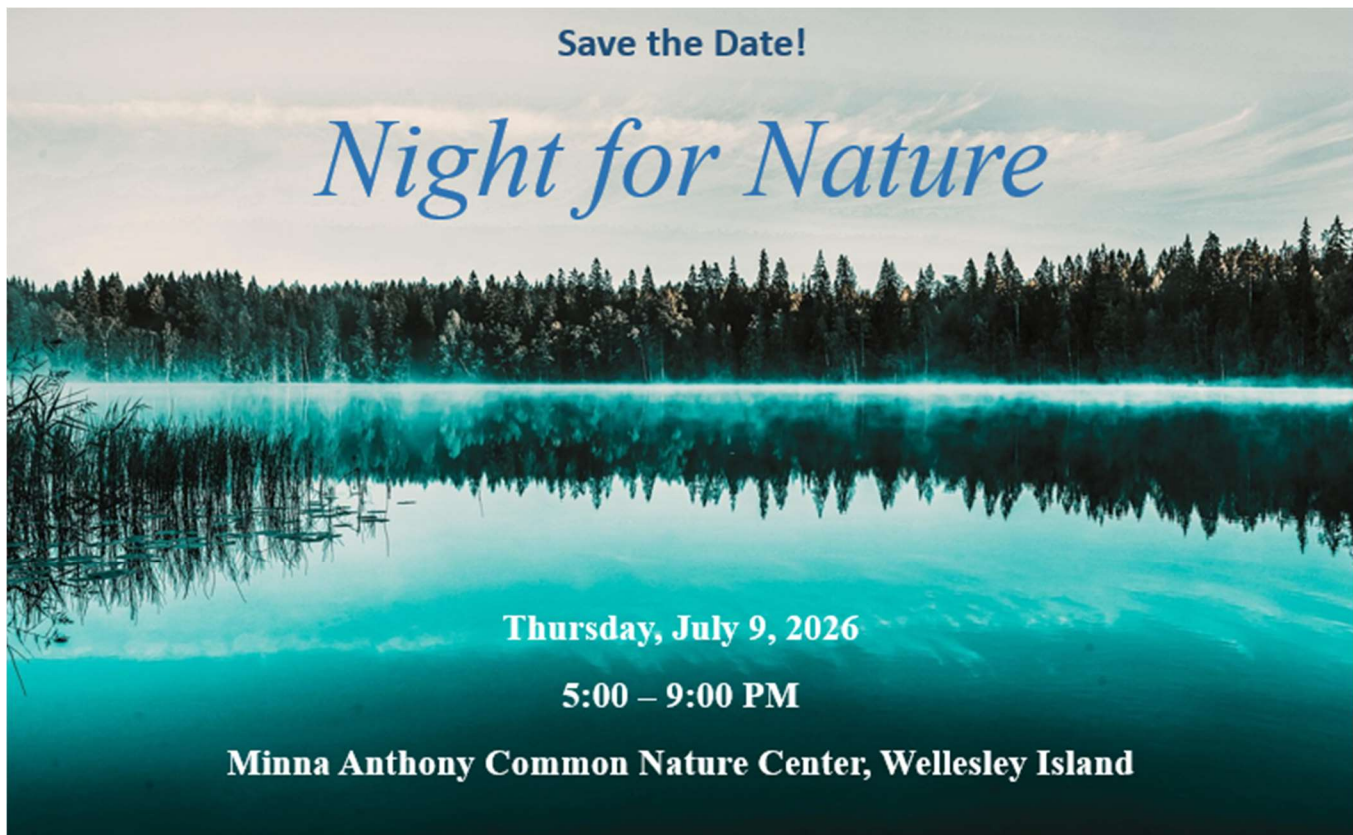
We'll see you out there



A common merganser family patrols the river. Photographed by Kristen Kratzert.

THANK YOU to the following 66 *Friends* for joining or renewing their commitment recently

Michael & Karen Burns	Manlius, NY	Don & Kate Dixon	Coventry, CT
Holly Dunn	Fairfax Station, VA	Emma Dundon	Clayton, NY
Chris Reagen	Denver, CO	Ali Fernaays	Rochester, NY
Skip Behrhorst Family	Basalt, CO	Jack Frears	Clayton, NY
Arthur Mack & Mary Jo Champion	Clayton, NY	Cork & Tippi Martusewicz	Cape Vincent, NY
Chuck & Libby Spaulding	Cortland, NY	Mary McNeill	Syracuse, NY
Bruce Alexander	Dexter, NY	Chris Murray	Clayton, NY
Erica Hoffman	Atlantic Beach, FL	Peter & Laurie Pike	Watertown, NY
Robert Nassau	Wellesley Island, NY	Maggie Reid	Fayetteville, NY
Stephen & Julie Dziewisz	TIP, NY	Kari Taylor	Lowville, NY
Robert & Kathleen Hanna	Clayton, NY	Mark Walczyk	Watertown, NY
Frederick Hager & Leslie Rowland	Wellesley Island, NY	Kristen Kratzert	Wellesley Island, NY
Frank & Victoria Martino	Brooklyn, NY	Bradley Kranz	Clayton, NY
Tom & Eileen Henion	Hilton, NY	Derek Jeffers	Clayton, NY
Stewart Dutfield & Jean Kerr	Delmar, NY	Rick & Janet Gregware	Clayton, NY
Darrel & Judith Rippeteau	Washington, DC	John & Claudia Topping	Wellesley Island, NY
Richard & Carolyn Glass	Dunedin, FL	Caroline Batterson	Sackets Harbor, NY
Jennifer Caddick	Clayton, NY	Jeff & Janet Staples	Clayton, NY
Tara Parmiter	Brooklyn, NY	Kathleen Hummel	Clayton, NY
Barbara Eldridge	Watertown, NY	Ken & Karen Green	Wellesley Island, NY
Sue Lipman	Naples, FL	Brian & Kate Breheny	Clayton, NY
Ken & Linda Adams	Wellesley Island, NY	Dennis & Sarah Baldwin	Clayton, NY
		Todd Atkinson	Vero Beach, FL

Save the Date: Night for Nature

Introducing a New *Friends of the Nature Center* Board Member**Karen Rockoff**

I dreamt of living at the River year-round since I was a child, when my family would spend our precious one week of summer vacation at the River. Every year, we looked forward to time-honored family traditions, always River-centric, enjoying the pristine waters of the St. Lawrence, kind hospitality, and the consistent gentle rhythm of everyday life.

My late husband and I bought a cottage on Wellesley Island, at the bottom of the Lake of the Isles, in 2009. Over time, we expanded the cottage to a camp, in keeping with River traditions, which slowly added fuel to my dream. When my husband passed away in 2020, I was ready to leave Florida for my beloved River, to live year-round in the place where I felt and still feel most at home. My soon-to-be husband gave up the sunshine of Florida and loves calling the River home.



Since becoming a full-time resident on Wellesley Island, I have been blessed to contribute my professional experience and personal passions to add value to a number of organizations. I am truly honored to be part of the Friends of the Nature Center, a Wellesley Island-based organization that adds so much to our beloved home.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Friends of the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center support environmental education programming that fosters conservation of local ecosystems, encourages outdoor recreation, and inspires our visitors to develop an increased respect for the natural world.

The Friends of the Nature Center, Inc. works in partnership with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.



**New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

**THE FRIENDS OF THE
NATURE CENTER, INC.**

BOARD MEMBERS

- Robin Colello-Poplaski, *President*
- Gifford Lewis, *Vice President*
- Richard Gefell, *Treasurer*
- Kristen Kratzert, *Secretary*
- Peter Adler
- Lori Arnot
- Jane Arras
- Emma Dundon
- Richard Gefell
- Sue Johnson
- Joseph Leskoske
- Maggie Lort
- Eileen Price
- Karen Rockoff
- Jeffrey Weldon

WELLESLEY ISLAND STATE PARK

- William Farrand, *Park Manager*
- Paula Torino, *Assistant Park Manager*

**MINNA ANTHONY COMMON
NATURE CENTER**

- Gabriela Padewska, *Director*
- Bridget Foley, *Environmental Educator*
- Dana Higgins, *Visitor Services Coordinator*
- Gary Phillips, *Maintenance Supervisor*
- Darlene Sourwine, *Community Outreach Coor.*

Mark Your Calendars!

FRIENDS OF THE NATURE CENTER ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, April 16, 4:00 p.m.

Join us for our 2026 Annual Meeting! Open to all members – the entire membership of Friends of the Nature Center is invited to attend.

The Friends of the Nature Center appreciate the support of members. Both charitable contributions and volunteer time are integral to the Nature Center’s continued success. Thank you!

I LOVE MY PARK DAY

Saturday, May 2, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Show your Nature Center some love! Volunteer to spruce up the Nature Center for spring and another busy summer season. This is the day when we get out our mop buckets, sponges, garden trowels, rakes and clippers to beautify parks all over New York State. Volunteers receive an annual ILMPD t-shirt (first come, first serve). RSVP requested. Preregister at:

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Scan to download the electronic version of this newsletter



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation



Friends of the Nature Center

P.O. Box 111
Wellesley Island, NY 13640

Minna Anthony Common Nature Center

HOURS OF OPERATION:

October–May (Off-Season):

Open Wed–Sun, 8:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.*
Closed Mondays and Tuesdays

Memorial Day–Labor Day (Operating Season):

Open Daily, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

**Trails open sunrise to sunset daily, year-round.*

