

The Friends

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SPRING/ SUMMER 2025



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY TRAIL WORK

First Saturday of each month, 9 am,
meet at the Mansion.

EARTH DAY HIKE

Saturday, April 19, 10 am.
See page 1

FRIENDS ANNUAL PICNIC

Saturday, June 7, noon at Area 15

PHOTO CONTEST AWARD CEREMONY

Wednesday, June 25, 6 pm
at the Mansion

MANSION TOURS

Saturday, July 12, 10 am-2 pm
at the Mansion.

FRIENDS OF RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK NEWSLETTER

Editor..... Joan Nikelsky
Design.....Mark Dougherty



Into the Woods by Tori McClay, 2023 Photo Contest

Earth Day is Coming Up!

by Gary Sawyer, Board member and Trails Co-chair

Spring is a popular season in our park, a time to appreciate nature and a new season of life in the woods. We are offering an Earth Day Hike on Saturday, April 19 to celebrate!

The roughly 5-mile hike will begin promptly at 10 am, led by our Trails Co-chair Gary Sawyer, and will follow trails along the creek and over a few of the hills in the park. We will admire the early wildflowers, like this spring ephemeral, Dutchman's Breeches.

Registration is limited to 15 people. We'll have light refreshments following the hike. We should be finished by noon. So get your hiking boots ready and sign up!

You'll need to send an email to members@FriendsofRCSP.org, stating your full name and names of any others coming with you, email addresses for each one, and a contact phone number. A few days before April 19, we will send you information about the meeting place for the hike, so please check your email during this time. Significant rain will cancel the event and we will let you know the day before.

The sign up will be "first registered, first on list" of the 15-participant max. After that, we will keep a waiting list and let you know in case people drop out.



Misty Creek by Marian Hetherington, 2024 Photo Contest

Get Your Pictures Ready for Our Annual Photo Contest

by Paul Mickle, Photo Contest Coordinator

The Friends of Ridley Creek are happy to see another one of the longest running and most popular traditions live on with the annual 2025 Photo Contest. Coming this summer, this event will add to the many beautiful park photographs collected over the years. It is always neat to see the park through the lens of other park enthusiasts. Two decades of past entries can be seen on our website www.FriendsofRCSP.org - click on "photo contest" on the left panel. Photos from past contests are also displayed at various public events and make occasional newsletter appearances, as you can see here.

There will be a display of all submitted entries and an award ceremony on Wednesday, June 25, at 6 pm in the ballroom of the Hunting Hill Mansion. Cash prizes will be given for first, second, and third place, and for honorable mention. If there are youth entries (under age 18), prizes will be given for that category.

The deadline for submitting up to 3 photos is Wednesday, June 18, to allow time for judging. Please bring your photos to the park office, which is inside the Hunting Hill Mansion. The hours of the office are Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm. When the time gets closer to the deadline, we usually set up a box outside the building for off-hour submissions.

You can submit photos as late as Tuesday, June 24 to be displayed, but they will not be eligible for an award. The rules and entry form are available on our website www.FriendsofRCSP.org. Also, flyers have been posted in boxes on the Multi-Use Trail. Please direct questions to photocontest@FriendsofRCSP.org. Have fun and good luck!



Close Encounter by Tom Hooper, Honorable Mention, 2024 Photo Contest

Anyone Can Be a Friend of Ridley!

by Joan Nikelsky, Vice-President and Membership Chair

What keeps our organization going? Volunteers and donors, of course. We greatly appreciate the time and effort our volunteers put in to help us fulfill our stated mission to “preserve, protect, and enhance the beauty and integrity of the park.” We equally value our donors who contribute funds that allow us to buy materials used by the volunteers and to cover the costs of our events. In many cases, people do both - donate (as in membership dues) and volunteer (as in trail work).

We have decided to count as members anyone who volunteers and/or donates. Starting this year, 2025, we are simplifying our membership structure and saving time and costs by skipping renewal messages, membership dues, and membership cards. Instead, every April, we will send out a message to you (and everyone on our email list) summarizing our accomplishments of the year and ask for a donation of whatever amount you feel comfortable with. If you donated or paid dues recently, you can take that into consideration. If April is not a good time, you can donate any time of the year. With this new policy, our volunteers and donors will all be considered “Friends of Ridley Creek State Park.”

Most of the donations are given online through PPF, the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation, the non-profit tax-exempt organization which oversees all the Friends groups in the parks and forests in the state. They hold the contributions in a bank account for our use and send donors an acknowledgment letter. We add you to our email list so you can receive our biannual newsletter and occasional announcements about upcoming events.

It will take a little time to get used to the new system, so bear with us, and we’ll try to make sure everyone is included on our email list. In the meantime, we would be delighted to welcome you as a “Friend” of Ridley Creek State Park. To make a donation now, you can click on this link: [Friends of Ridley Creek](#). Or you can wait until you receive our annual fundraising message. If you have any questions or requests, feel free to send a message to members@friendsofrcsp.org. Thanks!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES TO ADOPT A TRAIL!

As mentioned in our previous article, we value our volunteers and donors alike. If you are interested in giving back to the park and enjoy hiking the trails you are invited to become a Trail Adopter. You would agree to do basic maintenance on a trail section by clipping back vegetation and reporting any problems, like tree obstructions. This would be done independently on your own time and convenience. To volunteer, contact Tim Higgins Trailtender42@Outlook.com. Thanks so much!

COME TO OUR ANNUAL FRIENDS PICNIC JUNE 7

Every year we have a free picnic to appreciate the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park’s volunteers and donors. This year it is on Saturday, June 7th starting at noon, rain or shine, after the trail workday. It’s also National Trails Day, so that adds to the celebration. All contributors and volunteers are welcome to come!

We have a different location this year – Picnic Area 15, off Sandy Flash Drive; pass the turnoff for the Mansion, pass the turnoff for 16 and 17, follow the signs for 14 and 15; it’s just past 14.

The picnic treats are compliments of the Friends: hamburgers (both meat and meatless), hot dogs, potato salad, coleslaw, beverages, and other fare. People are welcome to bring a dessert or other dish to share.

Please RSVP for the picnic so we can plan the food, especially if you are vegetarian. E-mail members@FriendsofRCSP.org or call Joan at 610-352-5685 by Wednesday, June 4, if you can. We hope to see you there!



Photo of the Mansion by Tom Brumbaugh, 2023 Photo Contest

Mansion Tours to be Offered in July

by Jack Miller, President

The Friends of Ridley Creek State Park have again been given the opportunity to offer guided tours of the interior of the Jeffords Hunting Hill Mansion, which currently serves as the headquarters of the park. We have collected considerable historic information on the Mansion and are eager to share that information with our tour guests.

The tours will take place on Saturday, July 12, 2025, starting at 10 am and lasting 20-30 minutes. The last tour will depart from the reception area at 2 pm. This will give us time for approximately 6 tours. We need to limit each tour to ten (10) people to ensure everyone can hear and see each room of the former residence of the Jeffords family.

There will also be an opportunity for guests to take a self-guided tour of the Mansion property exterior. Maps of the tour route will be provided near the driveway circle at the front of the Mansion.

Hunting Hill Mansion was built in 1914 by Walter and Sarah Jeffords and has seen many interesting events over the years. The Jeffords family heir, their only son, moved out when the State of Pennsylvania purchased the property to turn it into a state park in the mid-1960s. What we see today gives us some idea of how this family of means lived.

We will have a pre-registration form available on our website www.friendsofRCSP.org for sign-up information prior to the event so we can plan our tour groups. Walk-ins will be accepted for tours that are not filled. Send an inquiry to this email: members@FriendsofRCSP.org. There will also be an announcement on our bulletin board along the Multi-Use Trail down near the waterfall.

We hope to see you on the day of the tours to show you around this amazing building in Ridley Creek State Park.



John Walters prepares for an evening of star gazing and Whip-poor-wills at Weiser State Forest

Camping in Pennsylvania State Forests

by Gary Sawyer, Board member and Trails Co-chair

Pennsylvania is blessed with 2.2 million acres of state-managed forests, comprised of 18 districts across 50 of our state's 67 counties. But did you know you can camp there?

You can choose from hundreds of reservable campsites dispersed throughout the forests. And the good news: no neighbors, like in the State Park campgrounds. But be prepared to rough it in a tent or camper - no shower facilities or running water here! Which brings me to another point: the price is right, at just \$10/night. You get a picnic table, fire ring, and a flat piece of ground. Some sites you can back a camper into, some you walk a short distance to a secluded setting.

Driving through the forests on well-kept dirt roads can be a fun and scenic adventure as well. Ridge-top overlooks, inviting hiking trails, birdwatching, fishing, and even hang gliding are some of the reasons to visit.

One fine day last spring, a friend and I headed off to explore Weiser State Forest and spend the night. Campfires in the forests are prohibited from March 1 to May 25, so as the sun set and we watched the first stars come out, a sound came from the distance - whip-poor-WILL, whip-

poor-WILL. Soon they were all around us, a ground-nesting bird I haven't heard since I was a kid in New Hampshire. With no human habitation in sight, they were safe here, singing for mates at night.

Some of the closer state forests with ample camping opportunities include Michaux State Forest, south of Carlisle and east of I-81. The Appalachian Trail runs through here, and the stretch between Caledonia State Park and Pine Grove Furnace State Park makes a nice weekend backpack. Tuscarora State Forest, west of Carlisle, north of I-76, has some wonderful campsites (I liked site 81 on the South Block - a small field well off the forest road). Hike the ridgeline along the Tuscarora Trail, or stroll along the North Branch of Laurel Run in the Frank E. Masland Natural Area.

So if you like to get away from it all and avoid the campground scene, check out the primitive camping in our wonderful state forests. An interactive map is available here: [PA State Forest Camp Sites](#). You can see photos of the campsite and get vital information before you make reservations. Happy camping!