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How to combat yard pests like starlings, sparrows

Hans Kunze  
Special to The Spectator  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Whether you feed the birds or not, chances are that you have some of nature’s pests in your back yard. They could be of the animal nature or even plants that quietly can take over your yard!

Unfortunately, there isn’t enough room here to cover all of them, but I will highlight a couple that I think you might be able to tackle for most effective results. We have a big yard and every time I walk out there, I see several more things that need to be addressed.

An invasive problem bird is the English sparrow, aka the house sparrow, which is not even a true sparrow, or what we call a native sparrow. It disrupts the nesting of several species of North American cavity nesting birds – especially bluebirds – and here at our home – the cliff swallows.

Another non-native pest is the European starling, also brought over by immigrants a couple centuries ago, which also steals native cavity-nesting birds’ preferred hollow cavities in trees. Neither of these two invasive species is protected as they are considered significant pests – essentially rats in my opinion!

Even if these birds aren’t affecting your backyard native birds, they may be affecting you

directly. They are notorious for building nests in hollow crevices in your house or barn. They plug up air vents and discharge pipes at home as well as at larger buildings like farm buildings, retail stores, and commercial facilities. Here at home the starlings constantly try nesting in our wood duck nest boxes and my greenhouse furnace chimney with as much as 18 inches of nesting material.

Whenever I go somewhere I am watching the birds and see so many starlings and English sparrows entering various vents and holes in buildings and houses. The population of these two invasive species is out of control, so please make sure that you aren’t letting them have free reign over your buildings. If the starlings are in your barn, they make a terrible mess with their droppings and the waste they carry away from their young. They seem to strategically drop it right where you do want it.

In late summer and all fall and winter, starlings form large flocks and love feeding on the wild grapes throughout fall and winter. When they land in your trees and buildings, they deposit their very noticeable waste as it is purple from the grapes. What’s worse is that they are transporting wild grape seeds into your yard which grow



A European starling perches on a branch in a tree. European starlings steal native birds’ preferred hollow cavities in trees. FEDERICO ACEVEDO/NPS

rapidly into a jungle if you aren’t on the ball. Those grapevines strangle your trees and shrubs.

So, the starlings are overwhelmingly to blame for the many wild grapevines growing in your flower beds and under your trees and bushes and choking out your desirable plantings. Those grapevines are hard to pull out after they have been growing for a few weeks. Most people just keep trying to break off the grapevine, but the grapevine sends up more sprouts as the root becomes even more prolific.

In order to get rid of an established grapevine you need to either dig it out – which isn’t very easy if it is coming up from deep under a tree or a bush – or kill it with weedkiller. Older grapes are almost impossible to dig out with a shovel so the herbicide be necessary. Always use protective gloves and check with your local garden or

farm store for more information and follow instructions.

If you have bluebird nest boxes, one of the reasons to do a check-up on them is to see if ants have invaded the bottom of the nesting material. If they have, it won’t be long until they start bothering the incubating adult female. If the bluebird eggs have hatched, the ants will eventually attack the young. Once the adult bluebird senses that the ants are infesting the nest she will abandon the nest full of eggs and/or babies.

As soon as you notice ants (hopefully before the bluebird does) simply lift the nest up higher in the box with a putty knife and scrape out the ants. I often take the entire nest out of the box and set it on the ground – even if the nest has eggs or babies. Try to shake out the ants and clean out the box with that putty knife. I generally try to squish

all of the ants and ant eggs that I can so that they don’t come back. They generally don’t, but a follow-up check-up is always wise to do a few days later. Carefully put the nest back in the box and close it up and usually the female will go right back to the nest and continue on with incubating her eggs or feeding her young.

Obviously, having the nest box open from the front or the side is key. Can you imagine what a pain it is to help out the bluebird if the nest box only opens from the top? Opening it from the front or side makes it so much easier to see what’s going on in there. Monitoring bluebird nest boxes is important. If you are checking on bluebirds I suggest you do it in the early part of the day – never in the evening! Your human scent will only attract the nighttime racoons and they will climb up to see what’s in the box where your human scent is especially strong after standing there for awhile.

Speaking of bluebirds, it is not too late to have a pair of bluebirds start a nesting right now. If you have been ignoring your bluebird nesting boxes for the last several weeks, go out there to see what’s going on. If it has house sparrows in it you know what to do! Make sure the box is empty so that a pair of bluebirds can build a new nest. They

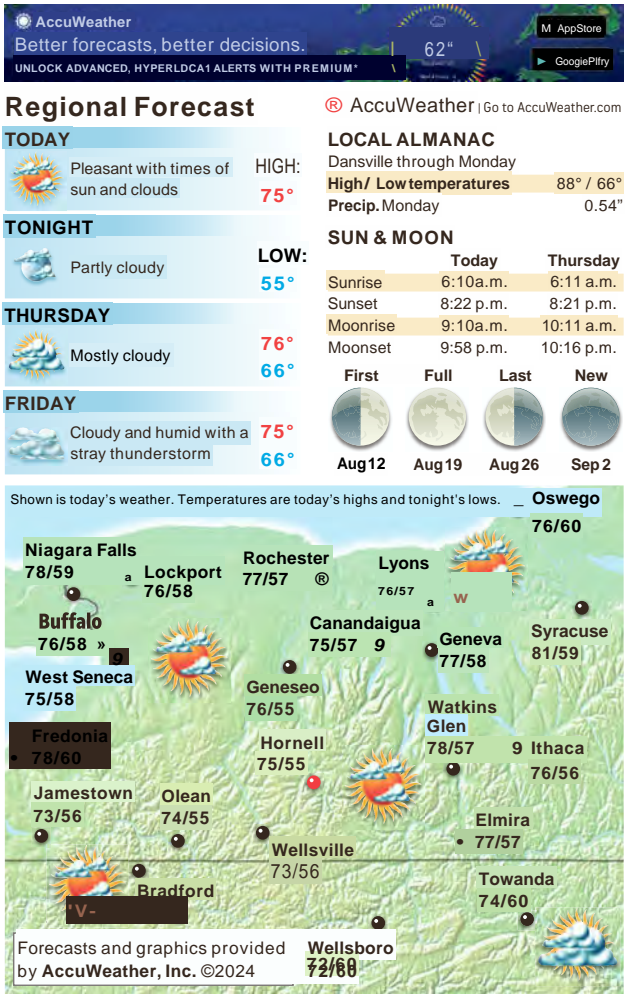
can build a new nest in two or three days pretty easily. We have a pair building a nest right now in our yard and will be laying eggs soon.

Well, I only covered a few pests, but the English sparrows, starlings, and ants are major ones. And as you can see, the starlings cause a ripple effect when it comes to those nasty invasive wild grapevines entangling all of your flower beds and trees and shrubs – thanks to the starlings defecating wild grape seeds around your home.

Go out in your yard and see if you can save some of your trees from dying from the overwhelming blanket of grape vines covering them. Simply cutting the main vine near the ground will do the trick. You don’t have to pull the vine out of the tree as it will just dry up. It’s simple and your favorite trees will thank you!

As much as I love birds, the rats of the birding world are definitely the English sparrows and the European starling! There’s always some bad with the good! Thank God we are overwhelmed with good! In a future article I can cover other pests. If you have questions about this article or any other questions, comments, etc. feel free to reach me by text or call at 585-813-2676.

Hans Kunze writes a biweekly birding column.



Forfeiture

Continued from Page 1A

their communities risk losing that benefit.”

Stone’s forfeited pension amounts to \$1,920 per month. She admitted to stealing more than \$100,000 but contests the total figure of over \$1 million alleged by prosecutors.

Steuben County District Attorney Brooks Baker said because of the nature of Stone’s crime, she agreed to forfeit her state pension.

“This is a relatively new law, but this is the first case in New York state we have been able to do this because of the incredible work of the New York State Police and the New York Comptroller’s Office,” Baker said. “I can’t say enough about their hard work.”



Steuben District Attorney Brooks Baker speaks Aug. 1 at the Steuben County Grand Jury Room about the Ursula Stone case. JEFF SMITH/CORNING LEADER

Why former Addison clerk was first in NYS to forfeit pension

The pension forfeiture was made possible under a 2011 state law and a 2017 constitutional amendment vote. Public officials who commit job-related crimes can lose part or all of their pensions. But, as the USA TODAY Network-New York reported earlier this year, the law has never been wielded in court, even though state lawmakers previously boasted of it as a means to curb corruption.

As the USA TODAY Network-New York reported in its investigation into the pension forfeiture laws, the statutes themselves can be confusing. There can be a lack of clarity as to who falls under the laws — educators and police, for instance, appear largely immune — and the for-

feiture process is separate from a criminal prosecution.

Forfeiture is a civil process that district attorneys can pursue; however, it appeared some (if not many) prosecutors were unfamiliar with the nuances and requirements of the statutes. Also, it’s possible some prosecutors have used the threat of a pension loss to leverage plea deals.

“A smart DA will know how to use this,” DiNapoli said of the forfeiture laws.

Baker said it’s important that the loss of a pension fit the scope of the crime.

“You’ve got to have a perfect case,” he said. “... It’s not the right thing to take a pension for a (crime of) a couple hundred dollars.”

**What’s next in Addison corruption case, statewide impact**

Stone pleaded guilty to one felony count of Corrupting the Government and will be sentenced to between three and nine years in state prison on Aug. 7 in Steuben County Court. She was also ordered to pay back roughly \$1.1 million.

Baker highlighted the negative fiscal impact on the small Steuben County village, calling it a “tremendous blow.”

“I know that there were times that the village did not have the money to have 24-hour

police service,” Baker said. “I know there were times when the village didn’t have money for youth programs. They didn’t know why ... because somebody they trusted, somebody who was part of that community, chose to steal from her neighbors.”

How much Stone will lose with the pension forfeiture is an uncertainty, but, were she to live to 90, she would have lost more than \$780,000, not considering interest earned or cost-of-living increases with the pension money.

DiNapoli told Baker that he should be prepared for calls from other New York prosecutors asking, “How did you do it?”

“This is the first time where that penalty of pension forfeiture is being utilized,” DiNapoli said. “That should really give people (thinking of corruption) pause. If you’re working, you’re earning a pension and you’re putting that at risk. You’re hurting yourself; you’re hurting your family. This case shows that can happen.”

DiNapoli said Baker took the bold, appropriate steps in using pension forfeiture as an appropriate penalty.

“This is a message not just for Steuben County, but really this is a message for all of New York state,” DiNapoli said.

Gary Craig and Asher Stockler, USA TODAY Network-New York, contributed to this report.

**NYSEG Service Territory – Commission Extends NYSEG’s Time Period in LAUF calculation to 10 years**

Notice is hereby given that, after petitioning the New York State Public Service Commission (“Commission”), New York State Electric & Gas Corporation (“NYSEG”) has been authorized by the Commission to modify its’ natural gas tariff, extending the period of time used in the calculation of the Loss Factor for NYSEG’s Lost and Unaccounted for (“LAUF”) gas to a ten-year average instead of the current five-year average. The Commission authorized the proposed tariff change to enable NYSEG to continue to reconcile LAUF gas costs and avoid potential inequities between Sales and Transportation Customers.

The amendment became effective on August 1, 2024.

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# Steuben County Flood Relief Fund receives \$100K boost from United Way

Jeff Smith  
Hornell Evening Tribune  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The United Way of the Southern Tier is committing \$100,000 to the Steuben County Flood Relief Fund to assist residents whose homes were damaged by flash flooding on Aug. 9.

United Way of the Southern Tier President and CEO Steve Hughes said the fund will provide grants to families and individuals where other resources do not exist, are limited, or may not be readily available.

"As we did in 2021 when much of this same area was devastated by flooding, United Way is stepping up to help our neighbors in need," Hughes said.

United Way of the Southern Tier is also working with several local non-profit organizations to support the needs of those impacted by the natural

disaster.

Hughes said they include American Red Cross, Arbor Housing & Development, Catholic Charities of Steuben & Livingston, and Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc.

Donations to the Flood Relief Fund can be made online or mailed to United Way of the Southern Tier, P.O. Box 284, Elmira, NY 14902, officials said. Make checks payable to "UWST Steuben County FRF."

Families and individuals who need assistance should register by calling the 2-1-1 Helpline or 800-346-2211 to report their damages.

## Steuben County encourages residents to report damages

Also on Monday, Steuben County Emergency Management said it is aware that some residents are encour-

tering issues when reaching the 211 Helpline in the wake of the flash flooding event. These issues are being addressed, the county said, but in the meantime, residents can call (800) 346-2211.

Residents are also encouraged to report damages caused by flash flooding by using the NYS Recovery Damage Self Report Tool. This is an online survey to gather both residential and business damages due to the storm and flooding.

Survey users will be able to include pictures of any damages. Using this tool will allow emergency response personnel to gather information on damages quickly and efficiently and help guide what necessary next steps there may be to aid the community.

"Steuben County Emergency Management is grateful for the abundance of information the community has and will continue to provide in the efforts to



Cleanup of Steuben County is underway, and aid organizations have been deployed to the area to assist with recovery from Friday's flood.

PROVIDED BY DARREN MCGEE/OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

address the damage caused by this event," said emergency management director Tim Marshall. "This information will be used to provide residents with volunteer help with clean up and document damages to the state for additional future disaster funding."

Residents can access the Damage Self Report Tool survey at <https://arcg.is/OybK4H0>

## Rains

Continued from Page 1A

"So many people are displaced and lost their homes. It's hard to imagine until you see it," James said. "Pictures don't do it justice. It's heartbreaking."

"A lot of people don't have flood insurance, including me, because I'm not in a flood zone," she said. "I still have five feet of water in my basement, and I lost everything in my basement. I still have a place to lay my head, and some people aren't that fortunate."

The floodwaters have

receded and crews are pumping out basements in Westfield, a community of about 1,200 people, and other locations across the Cowanesque Valley, James said.

It isn't just residents who have been affected by flooding.

At Electri-Cord Manufacturing, an electronics manufacturing firm on Main Street in Westfield, a recorded message indicated the company would be temporarily closed due to flooding and would reopen Aug. 19.

There was no answer at several other businesses in Westfield on Monday morning.

## Westfield command center assessing damage, assisting residents

The Tioga County Department of Emergency Services set up a command center in Westfield to assess damage and assist residents and others.

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) is also involved in the effort.

"We are continuing damage assessments and collecting damage reports from county and state agency partners," said PEMA Director of Communications Ruth Miller. "As you can imagine, the rural nature of some of these areas can make accessing places a challenge and will require more time to conduct assessments."

PEMA is also urging affected residents to reach out to the Pennsylvania Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (PAVOAD) and Crisis Cleanup for help with recovering from the flooding, Miller said.

Those agencies set up a call center to streamline the recovery process for people affected by the disaster. The phone number is 844-965-1386.

Several locations have been set up as distribution centers for needed items, including food, water, cleaning supplies and other things. Among those locations are Cowanesque Valley High School, the Westfield Fire Department, and the Knoxville Fire Department.

A lot of clothing has been donated and there is no further need for



Much of Westfield Borough, Pennsylvania, along with other communities in northern Tioga and Potter counties, were flooded after heavy rains from the remnants of Tropical Storm Debby swamped much of the Northeast on Friday.



Much of Westfield Borough, Pennsylvania, along with other communities in northern Tioga and Potter counties, were flooded after heavy rains from the remnants of Tropical Storm Debby swamped much of the Northeast on Friday.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BARB BALFOUR

clothing donations right now, officials said, but donations of other items are still welcome.

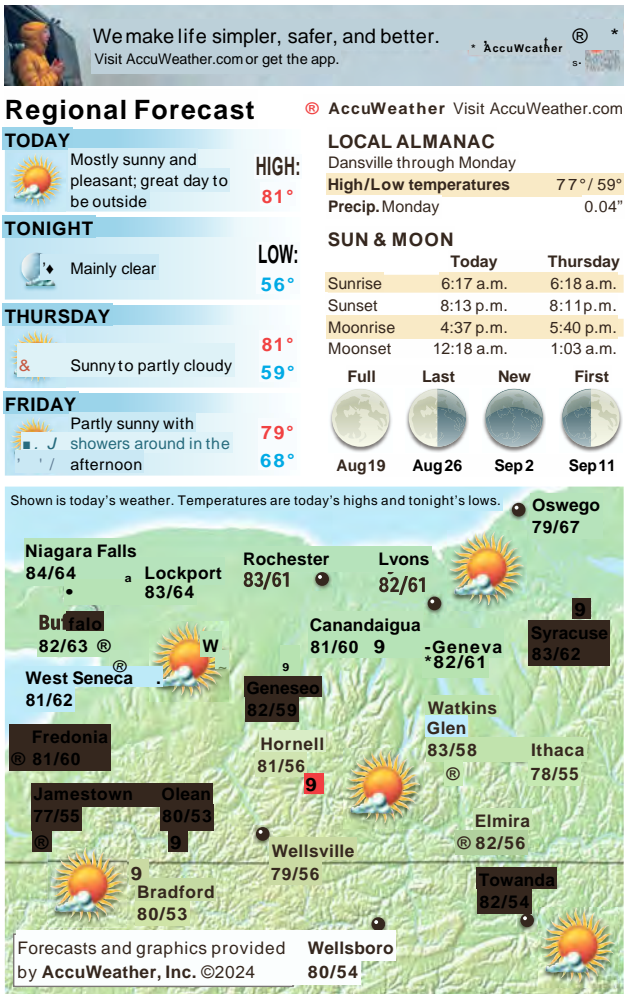
"Instead of making a trip to Walmart, your neighbors have done it for you and brought this stuff to your community," Owlett said. "We have it and we want to get it to you so please take advantage of this."

Owlett said local officials are still waiting to hear from the governor's office regarding the Northern Tier flooding. Local emergency officials say they will also be pushing for a federal disaster declaration for the region.

If there is a silver lining, it's the response affected communities have gotten from other areas, Owlett

said.

"The Coudersport Fire Department is covering Westfield. Their fire station is shot," he said. "Athens (fire department) covered Westfield on Saturday. Communities are coming together and helping out. It's really great."



## NYSEG Service Territory – Commission Extends NYSEG's Time Period in LAUF calculation to 10 years

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## BSI

Continued from Page 1A

revenue generated from this location, and will add another 8-10 jobs to the existing 15 already (in place) over the next few years," said Farrar.

The construction is expected to create an "overall better appearance for the grounds and the building itself," Farrar added.

BSI also intends to install a new flag-

pole in front of the office "as we are very proud to be an American manufacturing company," Farrar said.

BSI, which manufactures, engineers and repairs fluid film bearings and related parts, is headquartered in Illinois.

The BSI East Engineered Bearing Solutions division in Wellsville is equipped "to manufacture specific bearing types such as ball and socket style assemblies, making BSI East a full-service design, engineering and manufacturing facility," according to the company's website.



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Man charged with attempted murder in Hornell shooting

**Neal Simon**  
Hornell Evening Tribune  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Maple City resident faces attempted murder and other felony charges in connection with a shooting Saturday night on Rockwell Street. Police said Michael E.

Bloom, 33, of 128 River St., Hornell, was arrested following an investigation and charged with second-degree attempted murder, first-degree criminal use of a firearm, first-degree criminal contempt, along with reckless endangerment and weapon counts.

Hornell police said they responded shortly after 10 p.m. to the shooting report. An investigation determined three or four small caliber shots were fired from a vehicle parked on Hart Street toward the rear of a Rockwell Street residence. Police said the shots

were fired in the direction of a person on the rear porch of the residence. No one was injured, authorities said. A parked care was struck and damaged, police said, and according to witnesses, the vehicle involved in the shooting fled the scene.

Bloom was located and taken into custody without incident, police said. New York State Police helped process the crime scene and the Steuben County Sheriff's Office assisted the investigation. Bloom was listed as being held in the Steuben

County jail, with bail set at \$100,000. Hornell police said the case remains under investigation. Email Neal Simon at nsimon@gannett.com. To get unlimited access to the latest news, please subscribe or activate your digital account today.

2 men accused of commercial burglaries across 4 counties

**Jeff Murray**  
Elmira Star-Gazette  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Two Steuben County men face 38 felony and misdemeanor charges following an eight-month investigation by five law enforcement agencies into multiple

commercial burglaries across four Southern Tier counties. The investigation by the Steuben, Schuyler and Yates County sheriff's offices, Penn Yan Police Department and New York State Police linked numerous burglaries, arsons, stolen

vehicles, property damage incidents and narcotics sales to Dale M. Sutton, 50, of Colonial Circle in Campbell, and James R. Lisefski, 44, of Snyder Road in Prattsburgh, according to Steuben County Sheriff Jim Allard. As a result of the in-

vestigation, a grand jury indicted Lisefski and Sutton for enterprise corruption, a Class B felony, along with felony counts of third-degree burglary, grand larceny, tampering with physical evidence, third-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance

and criminal sale of a controlled substance. They were also charged with both felony and misdemeanor level counts of criminal mischief, as well as misdemeanor charges of petit larceny. Sutton was arraigned on the charges in Steu-

ben County Court and committed to the Steuben County jail in lieu of \$20,000 cash bail. Lisefski was also wanted on an active New York state parole violation warrant, and he was sent to the Steuben County jail without bail.

DEC

Continued from Page 1A

Marshall said he believes flash flooding in Steuben County and across the state would be greatly reduced if the DEC allowed this type of work to consistently be completed, but getting the necessary permits to do so had been a "struggle." Now, Marshall said, the DEC is "a lot more responsive." DEC spokesperson Michelle Margeson said DEC's Region 8 staff coor-

dinates with the Steuben County emergency manager and the county to mitigate potential issues before major storm events and has issued at least four stream disturbance permits and excavation and fill permits to Steuben County this year. "We're working with them. We're engaged with them," Marshall said. "The DEC seem to be a lot more responsive to this discussion now than they were previously. They have some emergency permits available right now ... and we're working with them on fu-

ture permits. I'm hopeful that we can address and deal with these issues and get these streams and creeks taken care of, so this flooding doesn't happen again." Margeson said the DEC continues to assess storm impacts on the ground and communicate directly with county and other local leaders to identify how the department can help and what it can do to help prepare for future storm events. This has included the issuance of an emergency declaration to help communities in Steuben County rebuild critical infrastructure after severe storms and flash flooding, expedite necessary permit reviews for work to repair infrastructure and structures on and over waterways, restore waterway channel capacity, and perform other activities necessary to restore public safety. Those permits include one for the removal of debris in a protected stream and identifying solutions to reduce the potential



Debris piles up in the Town of Canisteo on Thursday after heavy rain from Tropical Storm Debby flooded the local community. NEAL SIMON/THE SPECTATOR

impacts of flooding by removing a significant amount of debris accumulated along a railroad bridge, and working with the county to ensure its understanding of actions Steuben County can take without state permits or approvals, as well as what information is needed to

expedite future permit reviews. Marshall said he has reached out to the Steuben County DPW, and he is working with them to get all the needed work done to creeks and streams from causing floods in the future. The DEC is committed

to ensuring the protection of public health and the environment, Margeson said, and continues to work with Steuben County, and state, local and federal partners to protect infrastructure, homes and public safety for the long-term benefit of New Yorkers.

NASCAR

Continued from Page 1A

the Finger Lakes.

**WGI NASCAR tickets sales are on par with the past**

NASCAR's trip to Watkins Glen International had been held in August since 1986. This year, though, the stock car cir-

cuit pushed WGI's date back a month and included the track's 2.45-mile short course in the Cup playoffs for the first time ever. Watkins Glen is play-off race No. 2 of 10, the middle event of the round of 16 that begins Sept. 8 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. Will the play-off intrigue lead to more interest in tickets? Sales for the September race are in line with past events, Burlew said.

"We gauge it based on timing, whether it's in August or September," Burlew said. "We are some 30 days off, so we are right on par with where we need to be for our camper sales and our admission tickets are doing well." Kip Zeiter, Coordinator of Visitor Services and Outreach at the International Motor Racing Research Center in Watkins Glen, said there originally was some uncertainty about the impact on ticket sales when

the date of the race was changed because kids would be back in school, potentially affecting family travel plans. So far, though, the change has had no negative impact on interest levels. Burlew said watching the NASCAR race live at the Watkins Glen International road course is on the bucket list for many people, but the race is just one part of the fun. Concerts will be held Thursday, Friday and Saturday during the Go Bowling at the Glen Weekend, and several changes and additions have been made to the WGI fan zone. "This event is an economic driver for the region," Burlew said.

**Will the NASCAR race date change have a positive impact on the area?**

NASCAR attracts big crowds to the area. Last

year marked the eighth consecutive grandstand sellout for the Go Bowling at The Glen. The track also sold out infield camping in 2023 for the third straight year by the beginning of August — the earliest the track had sold out infield camping in recent history. Pushing NASCAR's visit back into mid-September may give area businesses a major boost in traffic when the season is typically winding down. "We look at the change as actually extending the tourist season," Burlew said. "In mid-September area hotels will be filled up with our NASCAR folks. In August hotels will be filled with people visiting the local wineries and breweries. So, it's really a win, win." Catarina Hong, of Watkins Motel at 212 S. Franklin St., agreed. "It's definitely extended our season a little bit," Hong said, "which is always a good thing."

NYSEG Service Territory – Commission Extends NYSEG's Time Period in LAUF calculation to 10 years

Notice is hereby given that, after petitioning the New York State Public Service Commission ("Commission"), New York State Electric & Gas Corporation ("NYSEG") has been authorized by the Commission to modify its' natural gas tariff, extending the period of time used in the calculation of the Loss Factor for NYSEG's Lost and Unaccounted for ("LAUF") gas to a ten-year average instead of the current five-year average. The Commission authorized the proposed tariff change to enable NYSEG to continue to reconcile LAUF gas costs and avoid potential inequities between Sales and Transportation Customers. The amendment became effective on August 1, 2024.

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COVID spreading at high level in New York

New 2024 vaccines arrive for back to school

David Robinson

New York State Team | USA TODAY NETWORK

Most New York communities faced COVID-19 infections spreading at high levels in recent days as health officials pushed new vaccines targeting currently surging strains, such as KP.3.1.1, state data shows.

Wastewater testing maps for New York lit up with red “high level” detections as of last week, as New Yorkers shed the virus at the highest amounts in cities from Rochester to Yonkers.

At the same time, emergency rooms in New York reported a plateau in COVID-19 visits in mid-August prior to an expected back-to-school uptick fueled by the cases showing up now in wastewater sampling.

Pharmacy chains Walgreens and CVS are also now booking appointments for New Yorkers looking to get the new COVID-19 vaccines for 2024-25, with availability varying at sites across the state. Doses began rolling out after the Food and Drug Administration on Thursday recommended the vaccines were safe and effective at limiting serious illness for everyone ages six months and older.

Is COVID surging in Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley?

With 1,141 COVID-19 patients hospitalized statewide as of Aug. 23, that key metric had declined about 10% from the summer surge peak in mid-August. Emergen-

cy room visits for the illness also leveled out in mid-August, with the seven-day average hovering at about 350 from Aug. 1 to 17, the latest state data shows.

But some of that leveling off stemmed from changes in the New York City area, including parts of the Hudson Valley, where the virus’ strain on hospitals retreated from summer peaks. Meanwhile, parts of upstate, including the Rochester area, faced steady climbs in COVID-19 patients flowing to hospitals in recent days, state data show.

A total of 175 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized as of Friday across the Finger Lakes, up about 64% from Aug. 1. state data show. By contrast, the Hudson Valley had 148 COVID-19 patients on Friday, down about 16% from its summer peak in early August.

How, when to get new COVID vaccines

New Yorkers seeking the new COVID-19 vaccines should visit walgreens.com and cvs.com websites, which include vaccine scheduling tools. Some regions listed Sept. 6 as the earliest date for getting the new vaccines, while others had availability sooner.

The federal vaccine booking website, vaccines.gov, is also undergoing an update to allow Americans to find and book appointments for the new COVID-19 vaccines.

Local county health departments in New York also hold vaccine clinics for children and adults, with a focus on providing free shots to kids or uninsured and underinsured adults. For details in Westchester County, call 914-995-5800. Monroe County’s vaccine clinic hotline is 585-753-5150.

And while most health insurance plans cover the cost of vaccines, officials suggest calling your health plan to confirm coverage. As CVS Health noted, the

out-of-network cost of a COVID-19 vaccine could be up to \$190, so checking on your health plan’s specific coverage could be key to avoiding out-of-pocket charges.

Experts recommend getting annual flu and COVID-19 vaccines together in September or October for winter protection. But people at higher risk of severe illness – such as older New Yorkers above 65 and those of all ages with underlying health conditions – should consult with health providers regarding the timing of shots, health officials said.

“Decades of research show that vaccines prevent disease, save lives, and are safe and effective,” state Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said in a statement this month promoting the fall vaccination push.

But health officials struggled in recent years to convince New Yorkers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, as only about 1.4 million, or 12% of, New Yorkers received the updated COVID-19 vaccine released last fall, state data show.

How to get free COVID at-home tests

U.S. households will soon be eligible to order four free COVID-19 tests at COVIDTests.gov. The tests will detect current COVID-19 variants and can be used through the end of the year, federal officials, noting the kits will become available at the end of September.

USA TODAY Network contributed to this report

David Robinson is the New York State Team health care reporter for the USA TODAY Network. His more than 15-year investigative reporting career has included awards for coverage of the opioid epidemic, hospital and nursing home abuses, health inequality, COVID-19 and emergency response failures.

AccuWeather Regional Forecast and Local Almanac for Oswego, NY, including temperature forecasts for today, tonight, and the weekend, along with sunrise, sunset, and moonrise data.

Whitesville Central School District advertisement for art and music teachers, including application details and contact information.

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Bampa’s House

Continued from Page 1A

has helped 100 families in the tri-county area.

Race participants can register online until Sept. 4, Keeler said, or they can register in person starting at 7:30 a.m. the day of the 5K. The race is scheduled to start at 9 a.m. and will follow the 3.1-mile walking trail at Craig Park.

“People are so thankful the house is here. It’s a god-send to families,” Keeler said. “I think a lot of families walk together. They do it as a family and support a good cause.”

For more information on Bampa’s House and the Sept. 7 5K, go to bampashouse.org.



The annual 5K Run/Walk and Kids Fun Run fundraiser is geared to raise funds for the Bampa’s House, a non-profit comfort care home on First Street in Corning.

Labor Day

Continued from Page 1A

Las Vegas, Nevada  
Denver, Colorado  
Chicago, Illinois  
Juneau, Alaska  
San Francisco, California

What are the best and worst times to drive for Labor Day weekend 2024?

You should avoid traveling in the afternoon

and early evening hours of Thursday and Friday, according to transportation data and insights provider INRIX, but travel in the afternoon if you’re planning to leave on Saturday.

If you’re returning home on Sunday or Labor Day, it’s best to leave as early as possible to avoid heavy afternoon traffic.

“Drivers should expect the most severe traffic jams before the holiday weekend as commuters mix with travelers,” INRIX transportation analyst Bob Pishue says. “Monitoring traffic apps, local news stations and 511 traveler information services may help drivers navigate around congestion and reduce driver frustration this Labor Day.”

Here are the best and worst times to travel by car this Labor Day weekend, according to AAA and INRIX:

Best times for departing

- Thursday, Aug. 29: Before 11 a.m.
- Friday, Aug. 30: Before noon, after 7 p.m.
- Saturday, Aug. 31: After noon
- Worst times for departing
  - Thursday, Aug. 29: 1-7:30 p.m.
  - Friday, Aug. 30: 2-6 p.m.
  - Saturday, Aug. 31: 8-11 a.m.
- Best times for returning
  - Sunday, Sept. 1: Before noon
  - Monday, Sept. 2: Before 10 a.m.
  - Tuesday, Sept. 3: After 1 p.m.
- Worst times for returning
  - Sunday, Sept. 1: 2-8 p.m.
  - Monday, Sept. 2: 11 a.m.-8 p.m.
  - Tuesday, Sept. 3: 8 a.m.-noon

What days of the week are the best days to fly this Labor Day weekend?

Here are the best and worst days to fly on Labor

Day weekend, according to NerdWallet.com. This list is based on an average from the past four years. The days are listed in order, from the most to least busy travel days of the week of Labor Day.

- Friday before Labor Day (most crowded)
- Labor Day Monday
- Sunday after
- Thursday before
- Friday after
- Monday after
- Thursday after
- Monday before
- Tuesday after
- Sunday before
- Saturday before
- Wednesday before
- Wednesday after
- Saturday after
- Tuesday before (least crowded)

Contributing: USA TODAY Network-Florida reporter Lianna Norman  
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