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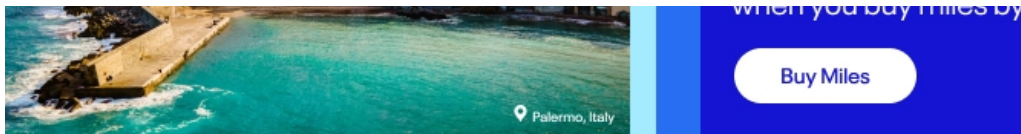


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NEWS

Northern lights fill the upstate sky

As predicted, dramatic solar storm makes auroras visible across New York's night sky. More possible throughout weekend

By **Mike Goodwin**, News Editor

May 11, 2024



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The northern lights are seen above the Ashokan Reservoir in Olive. The photographer, Marcus M. Harun and his wife headed from their New York City home to the Catskill Mountains to get a glimpse at the phenomenon, a rare sight in the state.
Photograph provided by Marcus M. Harun



 Listen Now: Northern lights fill the upstate sky

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Update: [Barring cloud cover, northern lights should be visible Sunday night](#)



People across the Capital Region and Catskill Mountains looked to the heavens Friday night to see colorful auroras across the sky, the first time in memory that the [phenomenon could be seen in this part of upstate](#).

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Social media was awash in photographs of the northern lights seen in places like Glenville, Wilton, Duaneburg and Schenectady as people heeded reports that a solar storm enhanced the likelihood of sightings upstate and across other parts of the northern U.S.

Auroras could be visible across New York throughout the rest of the weekend. The dazzling displays are the visual byproduct of a large geomagnetic event caused by solar storms buffeting the Earth.

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Marcus M. Harun and his wife drove up from their New York City home to see the aurora borealis over the Ashokan Reservoir in the Ulster County community of Olive.



"It was a stunning sight," Harun wrote in an email. "Seeing the northern lights has been on our bucket list for years, but I always thought we would have to fly to another country to see them. When the opportunity came to see the aurora a few hours from home, we had to take it."

The colorful auroras, or northern lights, are created as solar particles travel through the upper atmosphere, creating photons of light in different colors as they interact with nitrogen and oxygen molecules. The effect on our magnetosphere could also disturb some communications through the weekend.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the lights could be visible through Sunday. The forecast, and more details, are available on NOAA's [aurora viewing modeler](#).

A minimum of four coronal mass ejections, or CMEs — what [NASA describes](#) as “huge bubbles” of plasma, or charged particles, that are expelled from the sun “over the course of several hours” — began hurtling toward Earth over the past few days, and were expected to arrive by Friday afternoon and remain through Sunday, NOAA said.

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These charged particles burst millions of miles out into space and meet the Earth’s magnetic field before getting deflected toward the poles of our planet, where they enter the atmosphere and produce the glowing, shimmering clouds we know as the northern lights, explained Gerald McKeegan, an astronomer for [Chabot Space & Science Center](#) in California. The celestial spectacle could come into view over most of the northern half of the United States. “We are expecting quite a show on May 11,” [he told SFGATE on Thursday](#).

Because of the intensity of the storms, disturbances of the Earth’s magnetic field will likely result in communication disruptions over the weekend, McKeegan said.

Cloudy conditions are predicted throughout the weekend, but people who miss this storm need not worry. Solar activity is currently on an upswing and is expected to continue to increase over the next few years.

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The sun operates on an 11-year cycle with roughly 5½ years of decreasing intensity followed by the same amount of time of increasing activity. The sun’s current trajectory is expected to peak at a “solar maximum” in May 2025 with increasing and increasingly intense solar storms and auroras between now and then, according to NOAA.

— *SFGATE contributed to this report*
May 11, 2024



Mike Goodwin
NEWS EDITOR



Mike Goodwin has been a stock broker, garbage man, and house painter. He has been a journalist since 1995 and the Times Union has been his home since 2002. As a news editor, he’s on the front lines of newspaper. Think you have an interesting story? Contact him at mgoodwin@timesunion.com

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