



# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

*Ottawa County Parks &  
Recreation Commission*

*Hike, bike, paddle, ski... explore!*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2015 was a busy and productive year for the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission. Efforts continued to operate and maintain the park system in a high quality manner and enhance the parks, programs, and services offered.

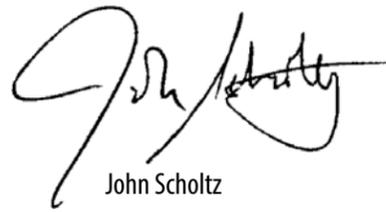
Although the weather in 2015 was not always cooperative, maintenance and operations staff worked hard to make the parks inviting and attractive. Completed work included a wide variety of improvements, both small and large, to provide an enhanced experience for park visitors. Natural lands stewardship work continued to focus heavily on invasive species management, with assistance once again from the goats. Work also included a special study to assess natural features at six of our coastal zone parks. The expanding volunteer program continued to play a key role in assisting with land stewardship efforts.

One of several large projects tackled by operations staff in 2015 involved upgrades to Paw Paw Park. The improvements followed approval of a long-term lease of the 50-acre city park from the City of Holland. This land was joined with Macatawa Greenspace to form a 172-acre county park, now known in its entirety as Paw Paw Park. Ottawa County Parks rarely takes over management of local parks, but this made sense because the parks were side-by-side and therefore cheaper to maintain by one entity, plus the natural area park was a good complement to the county's existing park property.

One of the more exciting undertakings in 2015 was the completion of first phase development at Grand Ravines. A new entrance drive and parking areas at Grand Ravines North provide access to a beautiful ravine overlook funded by private donors, as well as the newly renovated Grand Ravines Lodge, also made possible through the generosity of a private donor. The views of the river corridor from the lodge are some of the most scenic in the park system. A new off-leash dog park at Grand Ravines South continues to be off the charts in popularity with dog owners.

Equally as exciting as the Grand Ravines project were the completion of the Macatawa Greenway Trail through the Upper Macatawa Natural Area and the dedication of the Black Lake Boardwalk at Historic Ottawa Beach including the renovated pumphouse. The public response to both projects has been very positive.

It was an exciting year, and through it all, the Nature Education Center continued to offer a full range of education programs and activities and welcomed a growing number of visitors interested in learning more about the Ottawa County Park System.



John Scholtz  
Director, Ottawa County Parks



## OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

- David VanGinhoven, President
- Ray Statema, Vice President
- Philip Kuyers, Secretary
- Joe Bush
- Tom Elhart
- Matthew Fenske
- James Holtvluwer
- Roger E. Jonas
- Kelly N. Rice
- Tom Werkman
- Bobbi Jones Sabine (retired)

# INTRODUCTION

## The 2015 Annual Report

of the Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission provides a brief summary of Commission activities for the 2015 calendar year to the residents of Ottawa County and the Board of Commissioners who serve them. Additional information regarding all aspects of Parks Commission activities is available by contacting the County Parks office or by visiting the website: [miOttawa.org/Parks](http://miOttawa.org/Parks).

## PROPERTY OVERVIEW

The Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission oversees acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of 26 County Parks and 13 Open Space lands, totaling 6,455 acres (see Appendix A for a listing of all lands administered by the Parks Commission as of December 31, 2015). In addition, the Commission oversees management of the portion of the Musketawa Trail located in Ottawa County under an agreement with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

**PROPERTY AT A GLANCE**

- 26** County Parks
- 13** Open Spaces
- 6,455** Acres of land

## PARKS COMMISSION STAFF

The Commission's staff during 2015 was comprised of 18 full-time or nearly full-time positions:

- Parks & Recreation Director
- Coordinator of Park Maintenance & Operations
- Parks Operations Manager
- Natural Resources Management Supervisor
- Four Parks Supervisors
- Equipment Specialist
- Two Parks Maintenance Workers
- Coordinator of Park Planning & Development
- Parks Planner
- Coordinator of Interpretive Services
- Parks Naturalist
- Administrative Assistant
- Parks Secretary
- Communications Specialist

The Parks Commission also employs a part-time Volunteer Outreach Coordinator and a part-time Records Clerk, as well as over 100 seasonal and part-time staff, including Park Attendants, Grounds Attendants, an intern, and Gatekeepers.

“ I feel very fortunate to live in a county that is blessed with recreational opportunities and a Parks Department that continues to be a good steward of the natural resources in Ottawa County! ”



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*Parks & Open Space Acreage & Water Frontage*

# MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

Most of the park operations staff time is spent on tasks that make the parks experience more enjoyable. Daily duties include cleaning, litter pickup, and trash removal, as well as the repair of buildings, playgrounds, bridges, docks, and roads. Grass is mowed, branches are cleared from trails, and sand is removed from the parking lots. The staff addresses safety hazards and enforces park rules. At the same time, staff strives to continually improve park properties with different projects throughout the year.

## REVENUE

2015 began with a winter that was more on average than the record snowfall we had seen in the previous winter. As a result, Pigeon Creek Park saw just over \$54,000 in rental and concessions income during the winter of 2014-15, which was only 68% of the previous year's totals. As the snow melted and the days got longer, attendance at the beach parks picked up and was better than the previous year, mostly due to more warm-water days. Motor vehicle permit sales at the lakeshore parks increased by 15%.

## PROJECTS OF NOTE

While the large construction projects at Grand Ravines, Tunnel Park, Historic Ottawa Beach, and Upper Macatawa Natural Area (UMNA) are impressive, the smaller and more numerous projects carried out by Parks staff are also important to visitor experience, even if they aren't quite as exciting. Examples of the in-house projects completed in 2015 follow.

### PAW PAW PARK

After approval of the long-term lease making the City of Holland's Paw Paw Park part of the county park system, park operations staff played a significant role in upgrading the 50-acre site. Now merged with Macatawa Greenspace, the "new" Paw Paw Park encompasses 172 acres. Park staff completed the following improvements:

- Replaced the entrance sign
- Removed low hanging and dead trees along the roadways, sidewalks, turf areas, and trails
- Removed old stairs leading to the river and repaired observation deck
- Removed bollards along the entry drive
- Performed turf edging along all sidewalks and roadways
- Filled and seeded the small parking lot island and improved the parking lot
- Widened and trimmed trails
- Installed a recycle station



### KIRK LODGE

Renovations to the Kirk Lodge were completed, making the building fully accessible and exponentially more energy efficient.

- Widened doors and renovated bathrooms for accessibility
- Installed new flooring
- Repaired and upgraded walls and insulation
- Installed three sliding glass doors and replaced all windows
- Upgraded kitchen with energy efficient appliances
- Replaced lights replaced with LED fixtures
- Repaired and expanded deck and improved walkway to the fire pit



- Vehicle permits (\$379,360)
- Site reservations (\$179,430)
- Rental & concession (\$54,490)
- Boat launch fees (\$7,760)
- Programs (\$15,400)

*This chart reflects revenue only from fees & charges*

**1,272** Park facilities prepared for and cleaned after guest reservations

**270** Dead or fallen trees removed, cleared, or cut down for safety



Operations staff make changes in signage and park features as the seasons change. Park staff are shown installing buoys in Lake Michigan to prepare for the summer swimming season.



### SAVING ENERGY

In an effort to be more energy efficient, all light fixtures that required replacement in 2015 were replaced with LED lights. LED lights were installed at Pigeon Creek, Hager, North Beach, Kirk, Pine Bend, Historic Ottawa Beach, Grand Ravines, Deer Creek, Spring Grove, Olive Shores, Riverside and Upper Macatawa Natural Area (UMNA).

To take it a step further, the LED parking lot lights at UMNA (far left) are 100% off the grid solar powered. At Pigeon Creek, a section of cross-country ski trail that had previously only been partially lit, is now completely lit with new poles and LED lights every 100 feet (right).

### GRAND RAVINES DOG PARK

The operations staff spent many hours preparing for the opening of the new dog park at Grand Ravines South by installing benches, temporary fencing, dog waste stations, and signs. They also planted trees and built a storage closet for the supplies needed at the park.

### SPECIAL EVENT PREPARATION

The parks are constantly growing and improving, and the operations staff is there to ensure this is a smooth process. Operations staff prepared for open houses, dedications, or ribbon cutting ceremonies at the Historic Ottawa Beach Pumphouse, UMNA, Paw Paw Park, and Grand Ravines South.



### NEW EMPLOYEES

Two new full-time employees were hired in January of 2015 to replace one employee that was promoted and one that retired. We welcomed new Lakeshore Park Supervisor, Eric Frifeldt (left), and Parks Equipment Specialist, Jeremy Hamstra (right).

Toward the end of the year, a job fair was held at the Nature Education Center to fill seasonal employee positions for 2016. The turnout was good, with more than half of the open positions filled.



# NATURE STEWARDSHIP

Ottawa County Parks is committed to providing a high level of land stewardship through control of invasive species, development of land management and stewardship plans, restoration of degraded sites, managed deer hunts, and continued inventory of natural features throughout the park system.

## INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

### ECO GOATS

Year two of the Prescribed Browsing Project included a number of new, exciting changes and enhancements. Students from the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District's Agriculture Science program purchased and sold the goats at auction, before and after their time spent in the parks. An intern, who managed the day-to-day well-being of the goats, was hired, thanks to funding from the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation. The final year of the initiative will occur in spring 2016.



### GIS MAPPING SYSTEM

Based on a standard form used by conservation leaders in the state, Ottawa County's GIS department created a custom mapping system for Parks and other partners. This system is used to photo-document infestations and tie treatment to a GPS point. Type of treatment is able to be documented and changes can be seen over time, making reviewing progress and current infestations much more efficient and manageable.

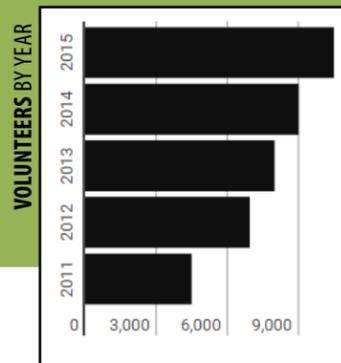


Ottawa County Parks volunteers served over 10,000 hours in 2015, two years earlier than anticipated!

## VOLUNTEERS

One way Ottawa County Parks achieves its land management goals is through the utilization of volunteers—1,908 volunteers cared for 30 parks and open spaces throughout 2015! The Greater Ottawa County United Way has been instrumental in helping Parks secure volunteers for a Day of Caring and two junior Day of Caring events. 2015 marked the fifth year anniversary for Adopt-a-Park, a program they helped to create and sustain with other partnerships, including 14 companies at 12 parks. Kirk Park has been the Greater Ottawa County United Way's adopted park since the inception of the program. Due to the years of attention and dedication from volunteers, Kirk Park is now functionally invasive-free.

**10,500**  
Volunteer hours in 2015



## PHRAGMITES PARTNERS

2015 was the second year of a Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Restoration Act grant to treat public and private land along the Grand River for phragmites, a common and invasive tall reed. Parks staff and volunteers worked alongside the Ottawa County Invasive Phragmites Group and GEI Consulting to treat land in a variety of ways.

While the treatments have been very effective, an essential component of the project is working cooperatively with private landowners. Outreach and education helps landowners understand the ecological impact of phragmites, as well as its effects on property value. Personal contact with each land owner makes a difference. Without their involvement, the success of the program would greatly diminish.

The first two years of the project were focused on treating large sections of land quickly, applying herbicides by helicopter. In 2016, the team will focus on more targeted areas that will be treated by boat and by hand, as well as with specialized equipment.



The Natural Features Inventory Project was a year-long survey launched in October 2014, targeting six coastal zone parks: Hemlock Crossing/Pine Bend, Port Sheldon Natural Area, Rosy Mound Natural Area, Paw Paw Park, Hiawatha Forest, and North Ottawa Dunes. The survey was completed in partnership with a local botanist, herpetologist, the local Audubon Club, and other volunteers.

## NATURAL FEATURES INVENTORY

Ottawa County Parks has conducted plant surveys, but grant funding allowed the most recent inventory project to encompass a survey of many other species, providing deeper understanding of the natural resources.

The quality of a site can be measured by the number of species at a site. However, numbers alone do not tell the complete story; finding rare species allows for the eligibility of more state and federal funding for further habitat restoration and protection.

"You can know you have a high quality site with rare species, but plants don't always reflect that," commented Natural Resource Management Supervisor, Melanie Manion. "A great example is Rosy Mound's dune ecosystem. If you only measure the number of plants, it doesn't quite capture how special the site is. Anecdotally, we know these sites are home to rare species, but when it comes to securing funding to protect these species, anecdotes are not enough."

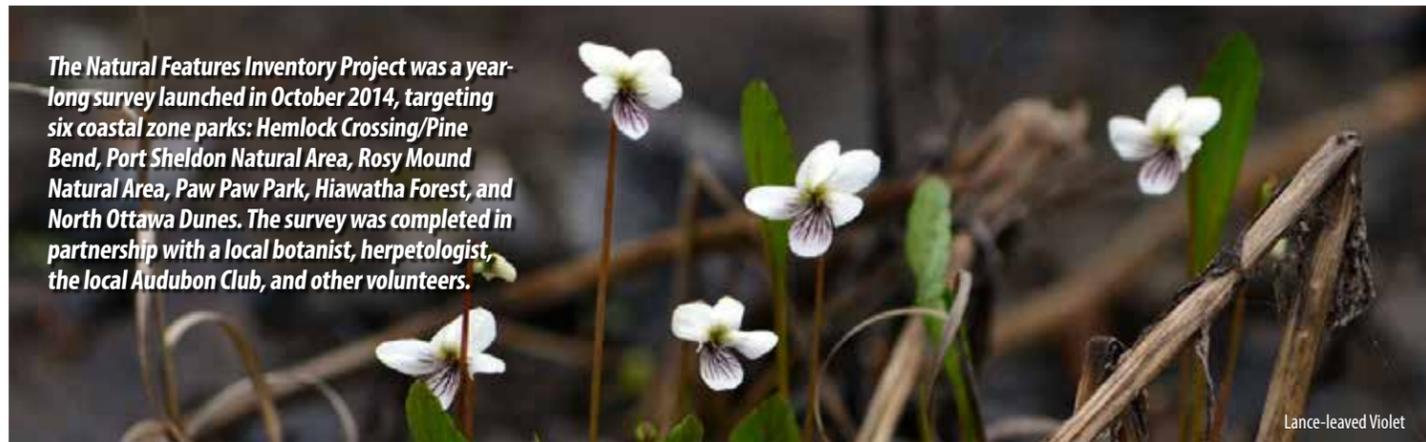
The data from this survey will help Ottawa County Parks make well-informed resource management decisions and secure grant funding for the protection of special park lands and the wildlife that inhabits them. "Our findings serve as the baseline telling us what is there now and how much work we have to do. It will also become our indicator of progress."

This project was supported by a \$35,000 grant from the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Office of the Great Lakes, Department of Environmental Quality, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as funding from the parks millage and the Ottawa County Environmental Fund.

## SUCCESS DISCOVERED

Most exciting is the return of many species designated by the DNR as *Species of Greatest Conservation Need*. The Black-billed Cuckoo and the American Woodcock are both designated as such, and were both discovered at Port Sheldon Natural Area! Also at home in this park is the Chestnut-sided Warbler, which is not a species of greatest concern but is uncommon.

The return of these rare and uncommon species is, in part, thanks to red pine plantation management. In recent years, Ottawa County Parks has thinned and removed red pine plantations on park land to restore native forests. The restoration of these forests increases bio-diversity by creating higher quality habitat for local wildlife.



Lance-leaved Violet

## WHO CALLS OTTAWA COUNTY HOME?



Meadow Beauty

Three of the six surveyed parks are home to one-fifth of the flora found in the state of Michigan. That's incredible when you consider that many plant species in the state are only found in the upper peninsula.

All six parks had a healthy presence of reptiles and amphibians, known to biologists as "bio-indicators." High levels of these species indicate a very healthy ecosystem.



Eastern Box Turtle, photo by Brad Ensing



Blue Spotted Salamander



Black-billed Cuckoo



Chestnut-sided Warbler

# PROGRAMS & EDUCATION

## NATURE EDUCATION CENTER

The Nature Education Center (NEC) continues to serve as an information and visitor center for the park system, as well as the home base for educational programs. The concerted effort in 2014 to increase public awareness of the venue has resulted in a significant increase in visitation from 10,650 to 13,000 visitors. The highway sign installed on US-31 during the spring of 2015 continues to bring first-time visitors from Ottawa County, as well as travelers from out-of-state and county to the NEC.



## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Ottawa County Parks is dedicated to providing free and inexpensive activities and programs to residents, visitors, and families. Regularly scheduled programming, such as the Wednesday Morning Bird walks and kayak trips, continue to draw many participants. NEC staff is working hard to continue to create and offer new programming, as well as make improvements to existing programs.

New and exciting program additions in 2015 included a free Mountain Biking 101 class at Riley Trails, where Ottawa County Parks partnered with a local bike shop to provide equipment at no charge for those who may not have the right gear; art classes by instructor Nancy Berg; and outdoor wilderness classes for adults, where participants were taught skills such as map and compass reading and learning the art of lighting a fire with a bow drill.

In the spring, Ottawa County Parks launched a new online registration system to improve the customer experience. Previously, program registration was done by phone or email. The new system made registering for programs easier for participants and increased the efficiency of tracking and reporting programs for staff.



## SUMMER CAMPS

Last year, a new camp schedule was developed to accommodate scheduling needs of families who have several children within the age range of three to nine years old. These camps were very well attended throughout the summer. Three multi-day camps were offered for older children including, Outdoor Survival Camp, Adventure Camp, and the Junior Naturalist Camp. Each drew between 10-15 campers.



## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

Ottawa County Parks used the Gabagouache Canoe to provide rides and share a brief experience of a French Voyager at the Project Clarity Watershed Festival on Windmill Island. It was a full day of paddling and singing *Allouette!*



## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Special school programming increased by 29% in 2015, serving 5,241 participants. The busy spring began by hosting 450 seventh grade students from Lakeshore Middle school over the course of three days.

Also in the spring were five Grand Lady River Boat programs, hosting 120 students from White Pines Elementary, Woodside Elementary, and Black River. A teacher from Bauerwood Elementary helped to host the fifth grade Ecobus program at Hemlock Crossing. The program was a success and has led to scheduling more schools from Jenison and Hudsonville in the upcoming year.

2015	Public Programs	Participants	Special Programs	Participants
January	11	266	9	203
February	9	107	9	177
March	20	217	12	576
April	20	316	18	1110
May	21	252	26	1592
June	25	211	8	261
July	25	129	5	99
August	26	35	2	31
September	17	160	2	169
October	25	143	9	589
November	15	113	8	340
December	11	179	4	94
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>2,128</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>5,241</b>

**+29%**  
Special program participants

# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

## PARK PLANNING

### BEND AREA

Planning and conceptual design work for the proposed greenway trail and other major site elements at the Bend Area were completed as necessary to apply for a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant.

### PAW PAW PARK

Following transfer of the management of Paw Paw Park from the City of Holland to Ottawa County Parks, preliminary design work, including a public input meeting, was completed to determine desired long-term and short-term improvements for this aging facility.

### GRAND RAVINES PHASE 2

Detailed design work and construction drawings were completed for the addition of paved trails and access to the riverfront.

### LONG RANGE PARKS PLAN

A tremendous amount of work was completed in 2015 on the long-range parks plan, which was formally adopted in 2016. Surveys of county residents and park users were completed, and a public workshop was held to get public input into the plan, which establishes priorities for a five-year period and makes projections for a ten-year time frame.

## DEVELOPMENT & IMPROVEMENTS

### TUNNEL PARK STAIR RECONSTRUCTION

Following a fire that destroyed the main beach access stairs, this project reconstructed the stairway, as well as the decks and walkways on the dune bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, including new paving and benches.



### GRAND RAVINES LODGE

Contractors and park staff completed extensive remodeling to the existing home purchased with the main portion of the Grand Ravines Park property. Improvements include public restrooms, reconfiguring the interior spaces to accommodate groups, a new deck overlooking the Grand River, and other structural and aesthetic improvements.

### GRAND RAVINES PHASE 1

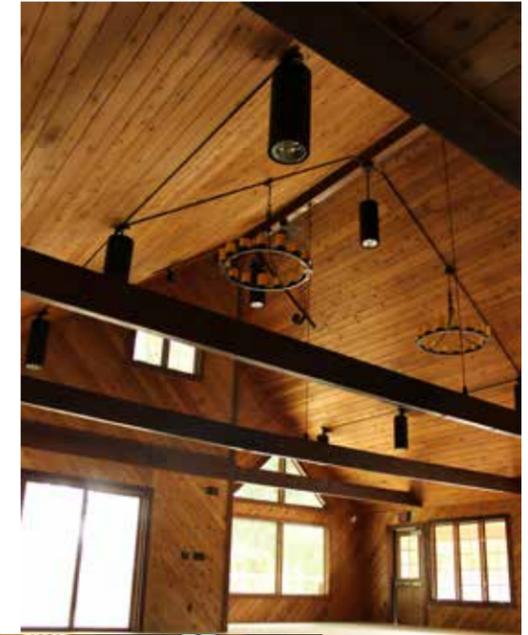
The first major portion of construction, as directed by the park master plan was completed with the development of a new vehicular entrance drive and parking areas accessible from 42nd Avenue, construction of a 21-acre dog park as well as development of a new stairway and overlook deck to provide access to the sensitive ravine environment of the site.

### GRAND RAVINES BARN

Major renovations to this century-old barn included structural repairs to beams and rafters, a new roof, new windows, and a fresh coat of paint.



“The Grand Ravines dog park is the best addition to any park system I have ever seen. Great job and keep up the great work.”



# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

## OTTAWA BEACH WATERFRONT WALKWAY

Substantially completed in the fall of 2014, final details and a dedication were completed in spring 2015. The project provides the final walkway and boardwalk linkage between existing park facilities along the Lake Macatawa shoreline. Special attention was given to interpretation of the historic Ottawa Beach Hotel, that once stood along the trail route.



## OTTAWA BEACH PUMPHOUSE RENOVATION

Aided by the fundraising efforts of the Historic Ottawa Beach Society, construction was completed to restore and renovate this iconic red brick building along the waterfront walkway. Improvements focused on structural repairs and reinforcing, roof and masonry repairs, door and window restoration, and a basic electrical system. These items will stabilize the building and make it suitable for special events and other basic uses. Other improvements to the site including walkways, seating, and a small shelter were also completed.



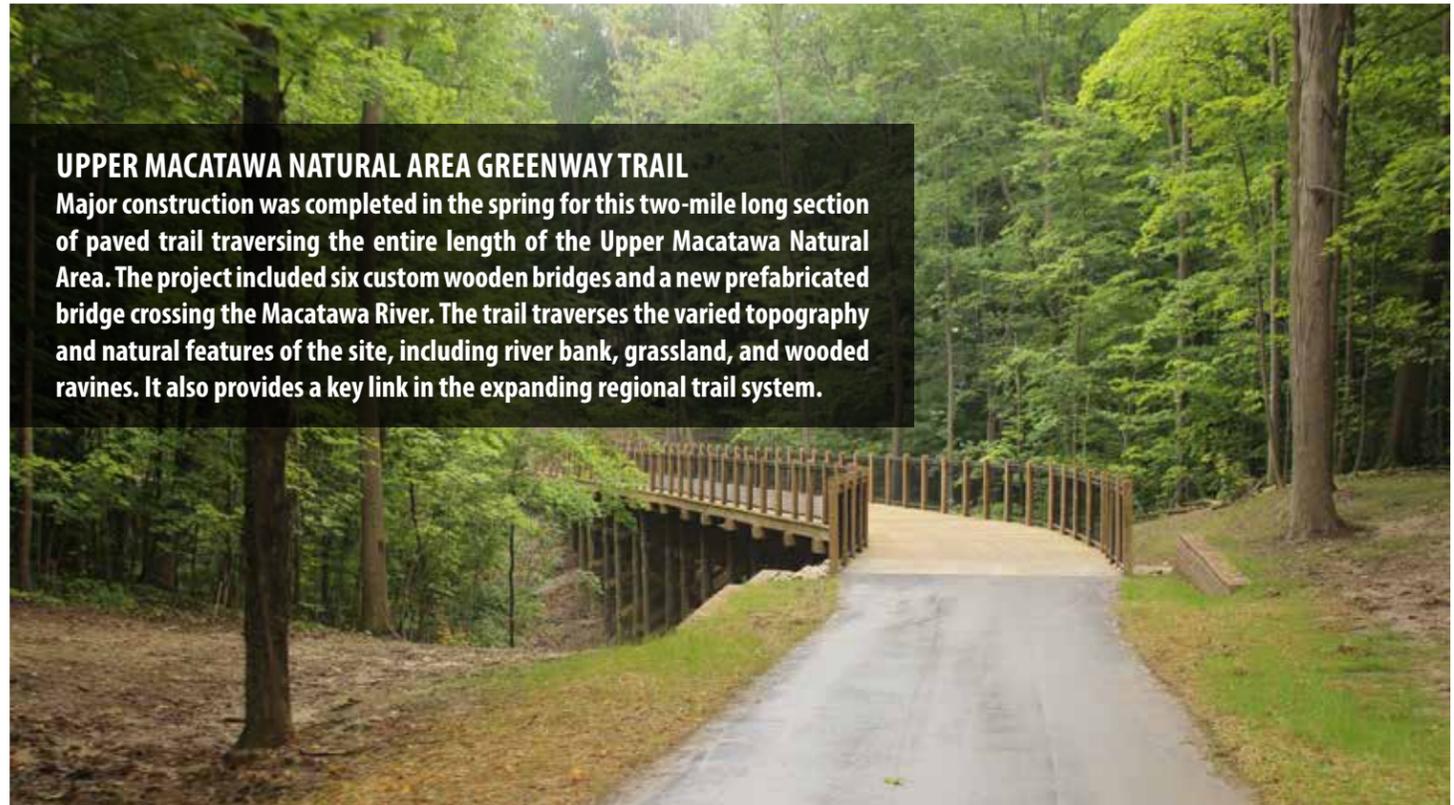
## A first look...

*The dedication of the Waterfront Walkway was also the public's first ever look inside the historic pumphouse building!*



## UPPER MACATAWA NATURAL AREA GREENWAY TRAIL

Major construction was completed in the spring for this two-mile long section of paved trail traversing the entire length of the Upper Macatawa Natural Area. The project included six custom wooden bridges and a new prefabricated bridge crossing the Macatawa River. The trail traverses the varied topography and natural features of the site, including river bank, grassland, and wooded ravines. It also provides a key link in the expanding regional trail system.



## UMNA 84TH AVE. PARKING AREA IMPROVEMENTS

In conjunction with the completion of the new non-motorized trail project, improvements were completed at this existing parking area in anticipation of greatly increased use by trail users on the new paved trail and expanded mountain bike trails. New amenities include paved parking, a small picnic/gathering shelter with electricity, water supply, and solar parking area lighting.

## NORTH SHORE SHARED USE TRAIL

Ottawa County Parks assisted the City of Ferrysburg in planning and implementation of this section of paved trail that connects the North Ottawa Dunes trailhead at Coast Guard Park with North Beach Park. The new trail follows the North Shore Road right-of-way but includes meanders into the North Ottawa Dunes property, which helped to save vegetation and make the route a more pleasing experience.

## PIGEON CREEK TRAIL LIGHTING

New poles and LED light fixtures were installed on a ski loop east of the Lodge building, replacing the ineffective system of bollard-type lights.

## MUSKETAWA TRAIL REPAIRS

Several areas of deteriorating pavement were repaved.

## KIRK PARK LODGE

Extensive improvements to this rental structure were completed including kitchen and bath remodeling, accessibility improvement, new sliding doors to the deck, epoxy floors, as well as new siding and painting.

Michigan Edge Mountain Bike Association volunteers completed nearly seven miles of technical mountain bike trails through the ravines at UMNA, attracting new park visitors.



## PAW PAW PARK INITIAL IMPROVEMENTS

Based on initial planning and public input, several improvements were implemented including, general cleanup, invasive species management, and trail improvements including vegetation trimming and new trail signs.

## PAW PAW PARK PAVED TRAIL

Made possible through collaboration with the Ottawa County Department of Public Health and a state grant, this project constructed a paved path connecting Paw Paw Park (west), a former city park, with the previously named Macatawa Greenspace, including connections to existing neighborhood sidewalks.

# COMMUNICATIONS

In 2015 Ottawa County Parks hired a full-time Communications Specialist to assist with a variety of communications tasks including: website management, creation of the quarterly newsletter, regular press releases and media relations, promotion of programs, management of social media, planning special community events, and more.

## WEBSITE

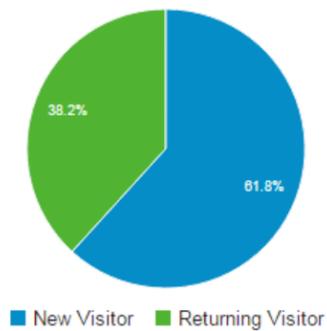
The Ottawa County Parks website, [www.miOttawa.org/Parks](http://www.miOttawa.org/Parks), receives a considerable amount of traffic. In 2015, there were over 193,000 visits to the site and well over half of those visits were from new users.

The vast majority of visitors to the site find Ottawa County Parks through search engines like Google and Bing. All of the park listings rank very well, but because of the way search engines work, each listing still has to be managed. Over the year, updates were made to correct details, such as park hours and entrance addresses. All of the park addresses were also added to Apple Maps to help iPhone users who are actively searching for the parks find their way.

Other website traffic sources include direct traffic (15%), reflecting a strong and memorable brand, and referral traffic (11%). Referral traffic came from our tourism partners: [holland.org](http://holland.org), [visitgrandhaven.com](http://visitgrandhaven.com), and [michigan.org](http://michigan.org).

Over half of the visits to parks pages are from mobile devices and tablets. In the fall, there was a county-wide update to its web pages to incorporate responsive design. The website should continue to be regularly monitored to ensure that it is easily accessible from all types of devices.

2015 WEB VISITS



## NEWSLETTER

*Outdoors Ottawa County* continues to be a popular way for park visitors to stay tuned in to Parks news and events. In 2015, circulation of the parks newsletter grew to over 6,000. Newsletters are also handed out at a variety of events. Annually, Ottawa County Parks distributes about 32,000 newsletters.



## SURVEYS

An important part of communication is listening to and requesting feedback. Throughout 2015, Ottawa County Parks solicited a wide-range of public input by surveying residents and park visitors in preparation for the development of the Long-Range Parks Plan.

- 1. Park User Survey**  
An extensive survey of actual users of the Ottawa County Parks system was conducted from February through July of 2015. The survey was conducted by the Frost Research Center of Hope College and was patterned after similar surveys completed by Hope College students in the summers of 1993, 2001, and 2010. Over 1,000 individual surveys were conducted at 27 Ottawa County Park locations.
- 2. County Resident Survey**  
A telephone survey of Ottawa County residents was conducted in the fall of 2015 to provide insight regarding resident perceptions of the current park system and their needs and preferences for outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The survey, completed by EPIC-MRA of Lansing, was patterned closely after surveys of residents conducted approximately every five years since 1994.
- 3. Online Survey**  
An online survey was available on the parks website in October 2015. This survey was based on the 2015 County Resident Survey and was available to anyone wanting to participate. It was advertised via email and social media to existing park mailing and Facebook lists. The survey elicited over 450 responses. Although not scientifically valid as a measure of the general county population, the survey does provide valuable information from a group of people familiar with and interested in the county park system.

## SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

### GOVDELIVERY

Ottawa County Parks utilizes the county-wide email communication system, GovDelivery. Launched in July 2015, it has made regular communication with residents and visitors, who have opted in to receive county emails, much more efficient. At the end of the year, Ottawa County Parks held two of the five top subscription topics, with the Parks newsletter being the most popular topic.

Regular email communication is important to continue to engage the community. Ottawa County Parks sends out Weekly NaturE-mails to nearly 2,000 subscribers and quarterly newsletters to over 5,500 subscribers. GovDelivery is also used to regularly send press releases to nearly 2,000 media subscribers.

### FACEBOOK

Facebook continues to be a very popular and effective communication tool for Ottawa County Parks. Likes on Facebook grew by over 30% in 2015, with nearly 4,000 fans by the end of the year.

Ottawa County Parks launched a Facebook page for the Grand Ravines Dog Park in September that quickly grew to nearly 750 fans by the end of the year. It has been an incredibly helpful tool to manage updates.



FACEBOOK PAGE LIKES IN 2015



### INSTAGRAM

Ottawa County Parks launched an Instagram account in February of 2015. With the picturesque scenery of the parks, Instagram is a natural fit. Photos taken and tagged #OttawaCountyParks enables Parks to share and use these photos, helping to build a larger library of photography. It is also an excellent way to make park visitors feel engaged and connected with the county brand. Rosy Mound, Tunnel Park, and Pigeon Creek are popular places for Instagrammers, though most users taking photos there do not yet tag Ottawa County Parks; there is significant room for growth.

#### The Power of Social Media

In April, this photo of Rosy Mound Natural Area was shared by mParks and subsequently by Pure Michigan. The photo reached over one million people!



### US-31 HIGHWAY SIGN

Ottawa County Parks unveiled a highway sign on northbound US-31, near the Nature Education Center. This sign continues to entice new visitors.



# GOALS



## 2016 PARKS COMMISSION GOALS

### INTEGRATE NEW OPERATIONAL COMMITMENTS WHILE CONTINUING HIGH QUALITY PARK OPERATIONS

Always a top priority, the Parks Commission will continue to focus on maintaining its operational capabilities at a high level as the park system grows and evolves. A new Maintenance Worker position was added in 2016 to help meet expanding needs.

### LONG RANGE PARKS PLAN

Approve the 2016 Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space early in 2016 to provide direction through 2021. The planning process is ongoing, and efforts to update that plan will begin almost immediately.

### DIVERSIFIED FUNDING STRATEGY

Maintaining the most diversified base of funding possible has long been a key strategy of the Parks Commission. The focus will continue to be on expanding donations from the private sector and identifying new sources of public grant support. There is hope the newly established Ottawa County Parks Foundation can evolve to be a focal point for private sector fund-raising efforts. Revenue producing facilities will be explored where appropriate.

### FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Explore opportunities to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness of methods and procedures in all aspects of the county parks program. Example: Explore expanded bidding of mowing services when it can be demonstrated the work can be done less expensively in a quality manner by outside vendors.

### COMMUNICATION

Communicating the opportunities available to residents is extremely important, as is explaining issues that arise with the management of the park system. The Parks Commission will continue to explore and utilize the full range of tools available to communicate with residents and visitors to Ottawa County.

### INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS AND NATURE EDUCATION CENTER

Continue to improve operations and programming at the Nature Education Center. Expand programs for schools and other youth groups. Increase efforts to raise awareness of the Nature Education Center and programs.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Maintain commitment to achieving universal accessibility throughout the park system while constructing new facilities and modifying existing parks. Add barrier-free access route to Kirk Lodge and connect Grand Ravines North and South via a universally accessible trail route.



### STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITIES

Continue to provide a high level of land stewardship through control of invasive species, development of land management plans, restoration of degraded sites, and habitat enhancements. Continue managed deer hunts and explore expanding in areas where deer populations are threatening the ecological health of park properties. Continue to inventory natural features throughout the park system to better understand park properties.

### VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Volunteers have become integral to the success of the stewardship program. Efforts will continue to expand the volunteer program in accordance with established plans to assist with park stewardship activities, park maintenance functions, and outdoor educational programming. Continue to recognize the contributions of Friends of Ottawa County Parks, whose members support the county park system in many ways.

### SUSTAINABILITY

Continue to implement the 2014 Sustainability Plan for the park system, encompassing environmental sustainability, as well as social and financial sustainability.

### OPEN SPACE LANDS

Continue to improve public awareness of and access to Open Space lands. Construct and mark additional trails at selected open space lands to facilitate expanded public use.

### LAKE MICHIGAN COASTAL GREENWAY

Follow through with commitments to evaluate marina options at Historic Ottawa Beach and develop plans and means of funding an upgraded marina for implementation beginning in late 2017. Upgrade facilities as needed at high use facilities.

### PIGEON RIVER GREENWAY

Continue to monitor the availability of key lands in the river corridor for potential acquisition, and promote the use of existing parks.

### GRAND RIVER GREENWAY

Work to build support for the greenway initiative. Identify funding and begin work on the first segment of the Grand River Greenway Trail. Efforts will also continue to monitor and acquire target properties in the river corridor, seeking grant support as needed.

#### Bend Area Site

Continue to work with the mining companies to acquire land consistent with the Bend Area Master Plan; seek grant support for major land purchases. Continue focus on the long-range goal of expanding opportunities for swimming and other water-based activities in eastern Ottawa County.

#### Grand Ravines, North and South

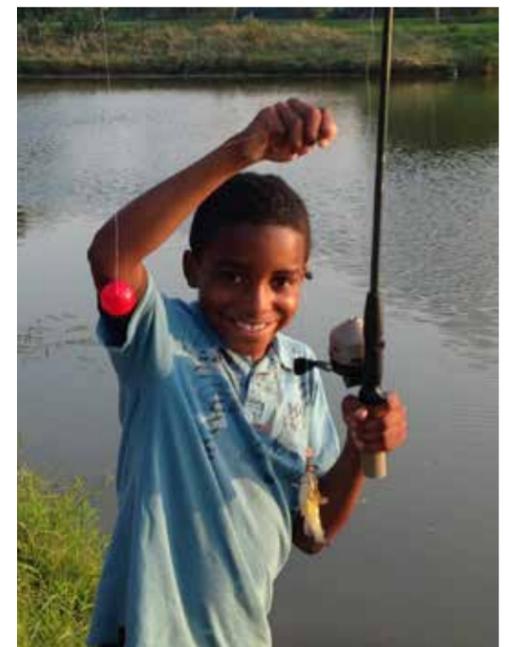
Continue improvements identified in the park master plan, including development of the paved pathway linking North and South and modern restrooms at Grand Ravines South. Seek funding support and implement further dog park improvements including the addition of shelters, and additional paved paths.

### MACATAWA RIVER GREENWAY

Refine management practices for recently completed segment of the Macatawa Greenway Trail through the Upper Macatawa Natural Area (UMNA) and raise awareness of the new facility. Continue to support the Michigan Edge Mountain Bike Association in managing the mountain bike trail system at the UMNA.

#### Paw Paw Park

Complete park improvements to the portion of Paw Paw Park leased from the City of Holland, including trail and upgrades, waterfront improvements, and the addition of a play structure.





# APPENDIX A

## OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

### ACREAGE AND WATER FRONTAGE

As of December 31, 2015

Parks & Open Spaces	Acreage	Lake Michigan Frontage (feet)	River Frontage (feet)	Bayou & Inland Lake Frontage (feet)
<b>Grand River Greenway</b>				
Connor Bayou	142	0	4,569	1,687
Crockery Creek Natural Area	334	0	2,640	0
Jubb Bayou (Open Space)	97	0	4,589	4,026
Riverside Park	95	0	6,737	0
Bur Oak Landing (Open Space)	263	0	7,392	5,267
Eastmanville Farm	229	0	1,365	0
Eastmanville Bayou (Open Space)	157	0	9,364	8,300
Deer Creek Park	2	0	530	0
Ripps Bayou (Open Space)	173	0	7,550	7,992
Kuits Bayou (Open Space)	80	0	6,191	2,650
Grand River Open Space	279	0	7,890	0
Grand Ravines	187	0	2,640	0
Grand River Park	162	0	2,505	0
Bend Area (Open Space)	258	0	6,931	0
Georgetown East Property	6	0	422	0
<b>Total Grand River Greenway</b>	<b>2,464</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>71,309</b>	<b>29,922</b>
<b>Pigeon River Greenway</b>				
Hemlock Crossing/Pine Bend	239	0	7,920	0
Pigeon River Open Space	46	0	2,354	0
Pigeon Creek Park	282	0	3,200	0
Pigeon Creek Forest (Open Space)	130	0	0	0
<b>Total Pigeon River Greenway</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13,474</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Macatawa River Greenway</b>				
Paw Paw Park	172	0	4,815	0
Adams Street Landing	10	0	1,100	0
Hawthorn Pond Natural Area	40	0	1,792	0
Upper Macatawa Natural Area	612	0	13,100	0
<b>Total Macatawa River Greenway</b>	<b>834</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20,807</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway</b>				
North Ottawa Dunes	513	0	0	0
North Beach Park	7	745	0	0
Rosy Mound Natural Area	164	3,450	0	0
Kirk Park	68	1,850	0	0
Olive Shores	21	738	0	0
Tunnel Park	23	950	0	0
Historic Ottawa Beach Parks	58	756	0	2,560
<b>Total Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>8,489</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,560</b>
<b>General Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails</b>				
Musketawa Trail	n/a	0	0	0
Un-named Site (Wright Township)	8	0	0	0
Grose Park	40	0	0	823
Marne Bog	83	0	0	0
Robinson Forest (Open Space)	80	0	0	0
Johnson Street Forest (Open Space)	50	0	0	0
Hiaiwatha Forest (Open Space)	365	0	0	0
Hager Park	104	0	0	0
Port Sheldon Natural Area (Open Space)	440	0	0	0
Van Buren Street Dunes (Open Space)	120	0	0	0
Spring Grove Park	16	0	0	0
Riley Trails	300	0	0	0
<b>Total Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails</b>	<b>1,606</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>823</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>6,405</b>	<b>8,489</b>	<b>107,636</b>	<b>33,305</b>
<b>TOTAL MILES</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>6.3</b>



## Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission

**The Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission enhances quality of life for residents and visitors, by preserving parks and open spaces and providing resource-based recreation and education opportunities.**

**The activities and programs of the Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission are brought to you by the members of the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners.**

Joe Baumann, Chair

Greg DeJong, Vice Chair

Roger Bergman

Allen Dannenberg

Don Disselkoen

Matthew Fenske

Mike Haverdink

James Holtvluwer

Philip Kuyers

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