



2016 ANNUAL REPORT

*Ottawa County Parks &
Recreation Commission*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2016 was a busy and productive year for the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission as efforts continued to operate and maintain the park system in a high quality manner and enhance the parks, programs, and services offered.

Without question, the most significant occurrence in 2016 was the strong approval for the renewal and restoration of the parks millage for an additional 10-year period. First approved in 1996 in a relatively close vote (53.5% yes), voter support jumped significantly in 2006 when 67% of voters supported the renewal. Facing such a clear measure of public approval for the direction of the parks program, the Parks Commission was reassured to see the support level increase even further to 72.3% in 2016. The strong public backing provides assurance that current park initiatives can continue for the foreseeable future.

Parks operations and maintenance staff continue to face new challenges, most notably with operation of the new Grand Ravines County Park, with its busy dog park and popular lodge. The park will only get busier as dramatic improvements are completed in 2017.

The department's volunteer program continues to expand and provide an important source of labor supporting all aspects of the parks program. Volunteers are especially important in the effort to manage invasive species and restore native habitats. They will be tested in the coming year and beyond as Ottawa County Parks provides a leadership role in slowing the spread of the hemlock woolly adelgid in West Michigan, a threat to the health of hemlocks trees here and throughout the state.

One of the major undertakings in 2016 was the groundwork laid for the development of the Grand River Explorers Trail. Funding and other challenges lie ahead, but the first major segment of the trail is scheduled to be built in 2017, linking Connor Bayou and Riverside Parks and providing access to the M-231 non-motorized bridge crossing.

It was an exciting year, with large plans on the horizon. Through it all, the Nature Education Center continued to offer a full range of education programs and welcomed a growing number of visitors interested in learning more about Ottawa County Parks.

John Scholtz
Director, Ottawa County Parks

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	02
Maintenance & Operations	04
Natural Stewardship	06
Programs & Education	08
Planning & Development	10
Communications	14
Parks Commission Goals	16
Appendix A	19

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Collin Zackrison (East)

Leif VanHorsen (Central)

Parks Equipment Specialist

Jeremy Hamstra

Parks Maintenance

Aaron Goodell

Bob Shannon

Tom Dorton

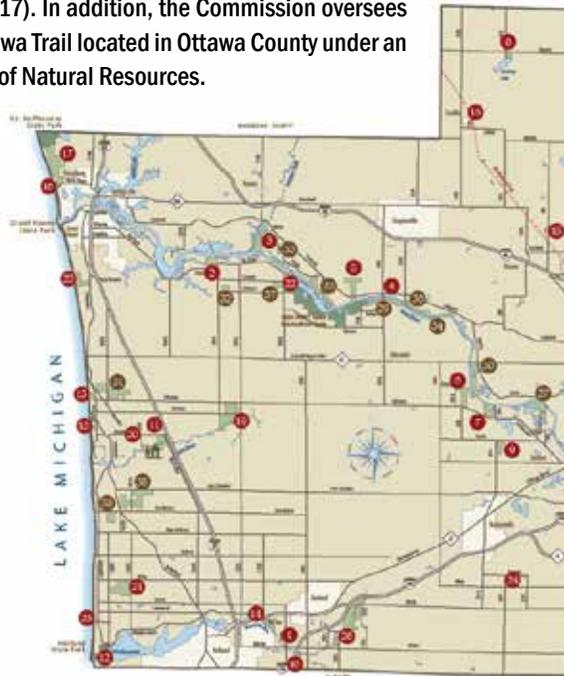
The Parks Commission also employs a part-time Volunteer Outreach Coordinator as well as over 100 seasonal and part-time staff, including Park Attendants, Grounds Attendants, an intern, and Gatekeepers.

PROPERTY OVERVIEW

The Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission oversees acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of 26 County Parks and 12 Open Space lands, totaling 6,538 acres (see Appendix A for a listing of all lands administered by the Parks Commission as of March 22, 2017). 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
12 Open Spaces
6,538 Acres of land



LONG-TERM FUNDING

Income from fee revenues provides an important source of operating revenues; grants for park improvements and land acquisition provide crucial help for expanding and improving the park system. However, it is the voter-supported parks millage that provides the core funding which supports all facets of the parks program. The successful renewal of the millage in 2016 is highlighted below, along with a new effort to expand private donor support for the parks program through the establishment of a new Parks Foundation.

Dedicated Parks Millage

Renewal and restoration of the 10-year county parks millage in 2016 was a high priority for the long-term health of the park system.

An overwhelming 72.3% of the voters supported the parks millage on the August 2 ballot which restored the millage to its original 0.33 level.

As the park system has grown over the past 20 years, so has the percentage of the millage required to operate and maintain the park system. While the bulk of the funds will be used for that purpose, there are still new projects on the horizon for the next 10 years, including completion of the Grand River Greenway, expansion and development of the Bend Area, continued progress on the Macatawa Greenway through land acquisition and trail extension, improvements to the Crockery Creek Natural Area, progress on the Pigeon River Greenway, and renovations and upgrades at all parks and open spaces.

Ottawa County Parks Foundation

Work has been underway since 2015 to develop a new organization to assist Ottawa County Parks in raising private dollars to support park initiatives.

A milestone was reached in 2016 when the 10-member Ottawa County Parks Foundation Board achieved non-profit status.

With funding assistance from the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation, the group completed strategic planning in 2016. The planning laid the groundwork for fundraising to assist with county park initiatives in 2017, with special focus on the Grand River Greenway project.

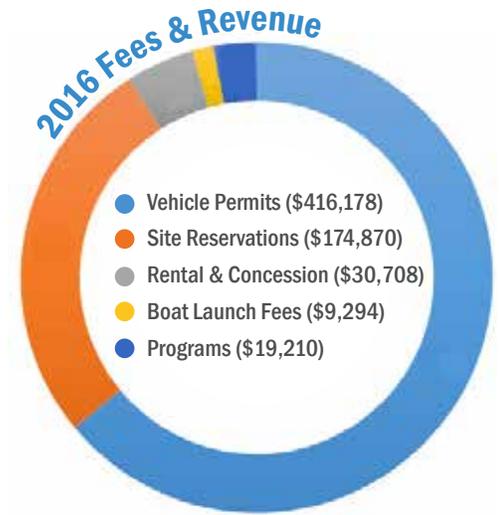


MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

The Parks Maintenance & Operations division is by far the largest division of the County Parks Department. It consists of 11 full-time and 89 part-time and seasonal employees. Responsibilities for the operations staff include maintaining and updating all of the Park and Open Space land, facilities, and equipment spread across over 6,500 acres. It is their job to keep the parks clean, safe, and fun.

SEASONAL REVENUE

Since the winter of 2014 provided us with ample snow for a full season of skiing, sledding, and snow shoeing at Pigeon Creek Park, the following winters have seen progressively less snowfall and therefore less income at the Pigeon Creek Lodge. The 2015-2016 winter operations at Pigeon Creek brought in \$30,708, which was only 57% of the previous season's income. Luckily, good summer weather helped to make up for the slow winter. The lakeshore parks' motor vehicle permit sales were \$416,178, which was an 11% increase over 2015.



This chart reflects revenue from fees & charges only

PARK MAINTENANCE

- Readied and cleaned up after 1,411 facility rentals, a 12% increase over 2015.
- Sawed up, chipped, and hauled away 228 fallen trees.
- Printed, mounted, and installed over 200 signs.
- Cleaned 12,000 toilets; replaced 9,600 rolls of toilet paper.
- Placed 103,000 dog poop bags in the parks.
- Emptied 25,000 trash cans.

Routine Work

Each year, time is spent installing kayak launches and lake buoys; starting up and shutting down seasonal water systems, including the associated water testing; painting and staining; inspecting playgrounds; mowing grass; trimming trails, enforcing rules; and unfortunately, cleaning up after vandalism.



Installing universally-accessible kayak launch at Connor Bayou



Staining outdoor entryway at the Nature Education Center



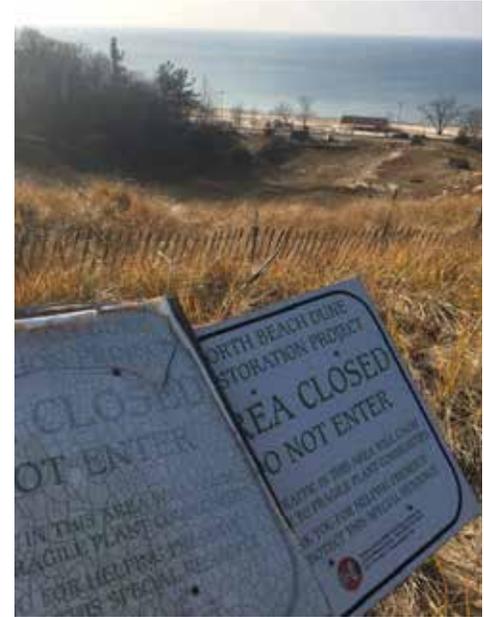
228
downed
trees

many of which were blocking trails, were sawed, chipped, and removed from park property in 2016.

Signage

One thing all park properties have in common is signs. Parks and Open Spaces have any number of signs, including entrance signs, trail maps, informational signs, warning signs, rules signs, and many, many more.

In 2016, the necessary equipment to print and mount signs was purchased. This saves time and money and allows staff to print new signs and update old signs much more quickly. Parks office staff design and print the signs with our new, wide-format printer using UV-stabilized, waterproof ink on self-adhesive vinyl. Park Operations staff then mount the vinyl on a wooden backing using a pneumatic press and adhere a clear protective layer of vinyl. The signs are then ready to be mounted in the parks.



Old versus new

Rising Water

Lake Michigan water levels were up in 2016 and, water always wins; that was very clear at Rosy Mound Natural Area. The steps leading to the lake were washed out. If nothing was done, the last step would have been a 10-foot drop into Lake Michigan, 15 feet from the shore. Operations staff removed a large portion of the steps and reconfigured them to continue to allow access to the lake. That material then had to be hauled off site, which is no easy task at Rosy Mound!



New Hires



Aaron Goodell was welcomed to the team in February. Aaron is the North Area Parks Maintenance Worker. He reports to Eastmanville Farm and works with Supervisor Anne Engvall.

Operations Staff

Although the Operations team spends most of their time fixing and maintaining, they enjoy making parks better with improvement projects. The staff is an extremely talented group of men and women that can do almost anything. Updates continue to be made to the Weaver House at Pine Bend Park, like the new tile floor, pictured below, being installed below by Parks Maintenance Worker, Tom Dorton.

Maintenance Crew Worker, Lynn Bradtmueller, headed up a massive trail project for mud mitigation at the Grand Ravines Dog Park. This project included over a mile of drainage ditches, 38 drain pipes, and over 100 tons of rock and gravel.



The new Guest Services Supervisor, Elaine Ebeling, started in August. She is the main point of contact for those renting any of the park's premium rental facilities, including the Connor Bayou Woodland Cabin, the Weaver House, the Lodge at Grand Ravines, and the Nature Education Center.



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 & HABITAT RESTORATION

Oak Wilt at North Ottawa Dunes

Oak wilt was discovered in North Ottawa Dunes in 2015. Treatment took place in 2016, which was a year of working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and other partners to create a plan of action.

Oak wilt spreads through tree damage, often a result of pruning at the wrong time of year, but it can also spread through the root system. In order to protect the thousands of other oaks on a critical dune, a barrier had to be created between the infected oak roots and the dune. Although shocking to look at, it was the only way to prevent long-term loss of oak in the system.

Ottawa County Parks managed over 1,000 acres of public land for 25 different invasive species in 2016.

Monarch Waystations

Monarch Waystations were established and registered at 12 park sites. The darling story of the project has been Tunnel Park. Neighbors complained they hadn't seen monarchs at the park for years. After treating bromegrass and spotted knapweed at the top of the dune, milkweed grew rapidly, as it had been waiting in the seedbank. Monarchs flourished in the restored habitat over the summer!



Success Story

Over the summer, the Stewardship Crew detected a small patch of buckthorn at Hiawatha Forest. Buckthorn is one of the worst invasives in the state, but through monitoring and removal of small infestations, the team has been successful at keeping it in the early detection stage in Ottawa County.

Prescribed Browsing Project Update



The successful partnership with the the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District's Careerline Tech Center (CTC) continued in 2016. Students were responsible for purchasing goats at auction, conducting basic training, and completing a wellness check prior to bringing them to the park to work.

The partnership has given students hands-on training while significantly cutting staff cost for the parks system.

At Eastmanville Bayou, the goats cleared Oriental bittersweet, pushing back the invasive plant while creating a viewshed of the Grand River. After their time at the bayou, they helped clear the overgrown Ottawa County ropes course.

Their final stop of the year was Riverside Park, where they worked through October clearing poison ivy. Poison ivy is not invasive, but it can spread rapidly



Scholten weighing in a goat at Eastmanville Bayou.

and create a trail hazard. It's one of the goats' favorite snacks, and they can eat it without any allergic reaction.

An intern position was funded, once again, by the Grand Haven Community Foundation. Travis Scholten, a recent graduate of CTC, was hired to care for the goats daily and collect data throughout the summer. The data collected was used to help create a model for the project, as well as a viable business model for local goat contractors. We are happy to announce that Scholten has decided to purchase the goats and pursue this as a local contractor! Scholten's goats will return to Ottawa County Parks for a short time in 2017.



The innovation of the Prescribed Browsing Project continues to shine a spotlight on Ottawa County, capturing the attention of the press and public. On August 24, Detroit PBS filmed a segment about the project.

VOLUNTEERS

One way Ottawa County Parks achieves its land management goals is through the utilization of volunteers. The volunteer program continues to increase significantly each year.

VOLUNTEERS AT A GLANCE

2,311 Volunteers
32 Properties
11,050 Volunteer Hours

Adopt-a-Park

Adopt-a-Park was launched in 2010 in partnership with the United Way of Greater Ottawa County. Since then, the program has grown to 17 companies and schools caring for their favorite parks and making great progress.

Adopt-a-Park Companies & Parks 2016

Tyson Foods Inc.	Pigeon Creek
GHSP	Hemlock Crossing
Automatic Springs	Rosy Mound Natural Area
Inspired Health	Rosy Mound Natural Area
Allendale Christian Schools	Grand Ravines
Jenison Public Schools	Hager Park
Black River Public Schools	Adams Street Landing
Yanfeng Automotive Interiors	Riley Trails
Brilliance Publishing	Riverside Park
Sekisui SPI Thermoplastics	Historic Ottawa Beach Parks
Haworth	Historic Ottawa Beach Parks
Alpha Sigma Phi	Grand River Park
GVSU's Biology Department	Bend Area
Chow Hound Pet Supplies	Grand Ravines Dog Park
Paragon Pet Grooming	Grand Ravines Dog Park
Tri-Cities Garden Club	Weaver House Garden, Pine Bend
West Michigan Plumbers, Fitters, & Trades Local #174	Eastmanville Bayou

SAVE MI HEMLOCKS

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) was first established in the Upper Midwest in 2016, and unfortunately right here in Ottawa County. This invasive pest has devastated forests along the East Coast of the United States.

In Michigan, there are an estimated 170 million hemlock trees that are at risk of dying from HWA. However, the loss of hemlock within our forests is just the beginning.

Ottawa County Parks is spearheading the creation of a local task force dedicated to saving the state's hemlock trees. The task force will search for funds to survey for the pest, assist land owners with the cost of treatment, and educate the community.

Photo by Vicki Everitt



Service-Based Learning

Service-based learning projects are a special segment of the Parks' volunteer philosophy. In addition to getting the community outside and caring for local natural lands, it's an educational opportunity, which connects students with the outdoors and their natural heritage. It teaches students about ecosystems while improving an ecosystem. In 2016, 12 schools and groups were able to participate in service-based learning projects.

Featured Project: Kelloggsville Public Schools at Hager Park

For the past three years, fifth grade students from Kelloggsville Public Schools have visited Hager Park to learn about and remove invasive plants, pick up litter, have lunch, and enjoy the Age of Discovery playground.

The trip is funded by a Kids to Parks Day grant, a nationwide contest. The students are required to choose their project and write the majority of the grant.

Fifth grade teacher, Maureen Bradley, is happy to return each year. "The students are excited to learn about nature and to do the work. My excitement comes when students see that writing can lead to great things. Winning this grant and being at Hager Park is so motivating for our young biologists and future writers!"

These students are making a difference. When they began this project, the area they have been working on was 100% dead nettle. This year, nodding trillium was found growing there.



Yanexis Odelin reflected on her time spent at Hager Park:

I learned that invasive plants ruin and kill the native plants. If all the native plants disappear, then bugs and insects don't eat. We can't let that happen. If there are no insects and bugs, then other animals, like birds, can't find food and they will starve. So today we pulled an invasive plant called dead nettle. We pulled as many as we could. It actually made a difference and that made me happy.

PROGRAMS & EDUCATION

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Nature Education Center (NEC) staff continues to hone the interpretive programming offered to the public. While fewer public programs were offered in 2016 than 2015, the number of total program participants increased. On average, there were 21 more participants in each program.

Social media, specifically Facebook, has been a great way to increase program participation.



Wildlife Encounters for Kids hike through Hemlock Crossing

A key piece of the Parks' mission is to provide educational programs about the natural and cultural history of Ottawa County. Several new programs were offered to reach people who may not be "nature enthusiasts" but are drawn to nature through other interest and hobbies, and for some the opportunity to see and hold live animals.



Young guest taking a close look at a turtle at the Nature Discovery program

In October, Jim and Carole McGrath from Nature Discovery hosted a program about Michigan's reptiles and amphibians. Over 65 adults and children enjoyed their presentation and the opportunity to get a good look at the living frogs, turtles, and snakes!

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Special programming continues to grow each year, particularly to school groups. As more teachers learn about year-round program offerings, the NEC has been able to expand to multiple grade levels and new schools.

Schools have been better served by the offering of programs at many of our park sites, including Hemlock Crossing, Upper Macatawa Natural Area, and Rosy Mound Natural Area.

	# Programs Offered-2016	Participants 2016	# Programs Offered-2015	Participants 2015
Public Programs	166	3,751	225	2,128
Special Programs	142	6,906	112	5,241
TOTAL	308	10,657	337	7,369



Dune Ecology at Rosy Mound Natural Area



Mindy Stanton helping a visitor at the Nature Education Center

Nature Education Center

The NEC serves as the main information and visitor center for the park system, as well as the home base for educational programs. In 2016, there were nearly 19,000 visitors to the NEC, a 30% increase from 2015, and a 90% increase from 2014.

The NEC adopted a full-time reptile resident from Jim and Carole McGrath—a young, female black rat snake. Her parents are educational specimens that Jim and Carole raised from hatchlings. The black rat snake is housed in a terrarium in the wildlife den and has quickly become a favorite among visitors and staff.

New Hire

At the beginning of the year, Mindy Stanton was hired as a full-time NEC Secretary. Since coming on board, she has provided the much-needed administrative support, such as the scheduling and tracking of school and public programs, maintaining the gift shop, and providing excellent customer service to park visitors.

Healthy Partnerships

The Ottawa County Department of Public Health teamed up with Parks to offer a free walking program: Step it Up. The program was offered in both spring and fall, and it encouraged participants to keep track of their daily steps and activity, as well as get outside and visit parks. One fitbit, paid for with grant funds, was given away each week to a randomly selected participant who submitted their activity that week.

Ottawa County GIS created an interactive map that participants could use to track their steps along a virtual path each week, with photos of the scenic routes.

Over 1,200 people participated in the program throughout the year. The group walks that were offered each week of the program regularly had 30-50 walkers in attendance. In the fall, nearly 40% of participants increased their level of activity throughout the program.

Grand Ravines

The completion of the Grand Ravines Lodge has allowed it to serve as a secondary program hub. Many of the outdoor programs offered at the NEC are also offered at Grand Ravines.



Snowshoeing program at Grand Ravines



"This program was absolutely perfect for me! I got moving! I enjoyed it! And I am hooked on walking every day now! I loved the opportunity to visit so many parks."



Across County Lines: Grand Rapids Public Schools

Ottawa County Parks first hosted nearly 600 GRPS students for a Dune Ecology program at Rosy Mound Natural Area in 2016. Some visited in the spring and others in the fall.

For many of the students, this field trip was their very first visit to the lakeshore and first time seeing Lake Michigan.

"It was wonderful to watch the students in my group experiencing the lake for the first time," said Coordinator of Interpretive Services, Kristen Hintz. "One boy told me that the tall dune grass reminded him of his home in Rwanda. To witness the joy of students connecting to a new outdoor experience, to embrace their natural curiosity probed by new experience and observations and to see the 'ah ha' moment as they made connections cemented my internal gut feeling of how important it is to provide positive outdoor learning experiences to kids through programs like ours."

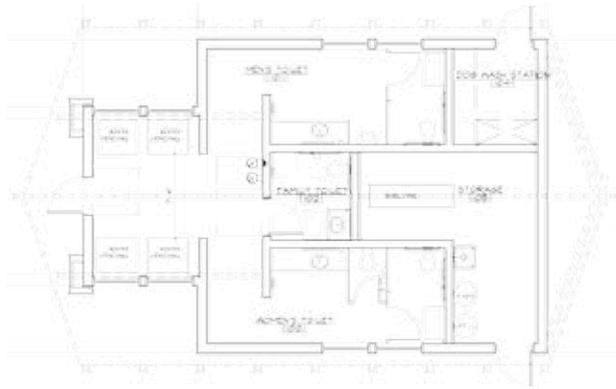
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT



PARK PLANNING

Restroom Design

In preparation for new restroom construction at Grand Ravines Park and other locations, a new prototype public restroom design was developed. This new design utilizes desirable and functional features from some of our existing restrooms with the addition of a family/unisex restroom, covered entry, and vending machine space.



2016 Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Plan

Following extensive work in 2015 to develop a final draft for this important document, public input, revisions, and approvals were completed as required to submit the plan to the State.

This document guides all of the efforts of the Parks Commission for the next five to ten years and meets requirements to maintain State grant eligibility.



Grand River Greenway

Significant time and effort was spent to determine the route for the proposed non-motorized paved trail along the Grand River. Supplementary efforts included landowner contacts and negotiations, coordination with local governmental unit partners, funding development, and developing phasing strategies.

Beach wheel chair now available

Thanks to a generous donation from the Friends of Ottawa County Parks, there is now an accessible beach wheel chair available for the public to use, free-of-charge at North Beach Park. The wheel chair was designed to navigate the sand and can also float in the water!



LAND ACQUISITION

Seeking to establish ownership of lands required for development of the Grand River Explorers Trail, the Parks Commission acquired 2.8 acres of land in 2016. This small parcel in Georgetown Township is part of a larger acquisition effort in Jenison to connect the proposed trail along Cottonwood Drive with the riverfront and Kent County border.



North Beach Park stairs

Climbing the large open dune straddling the border between North Beach Park and North Ottawa Dunes has been a popular activity with residents and visitors for decades. A system of boardwalks, stairs, and decks provides access to this fragile area and is used by many for exercise and recreation. This project reconstructed a key segment of this stair system that had been in place since the early 1980's.

Paw Paw Park

Efforts to improve the former city-owned (west) portion of Paw Paw Park continued with the construction of a section of boardwalk at a particularly wet portion of the trail system and the replacement of sunken and broken concrete paving under the existing picnic shelter.

Project highlight: Nathan Gutknecht, with the help of Boy Scout Troop 157 (Holland), constructed a large portion (70') of the new boardwalk at Paw Paw Park as part of his Eagle Scout project. Their help significantly reduced our construction cost, and it improved a section of trail that was previously unwalkable due to flooding during wet conditions.



Nature Education Center Wildlife Viewing Area

The Wildlife Den at the Nature Education Center is a popular spot to enjoy the wildlife that come to the feeders outside the large windows. This project added a small pond, waterfall, and landscaping to improve the aesthetics of the area around the feeders and provide a year-round water source and attraction for birds.

The water feature was partially funded by a donation from Bob Elliott, as well as donations given in memory of Ardith Larink.





Grand Ravines

Progress toward completion of this large park continued with the construction of several new park elements, including additional accessible paved trails through the dog park, a paved trail connector and bridge between the north and south portions of the park, and a stairway traversing a particularly steep portion of trail through the ravines. Other work started and slated for completion in 2017 includes a new modern restroom at the south parking area, additional parking near the riverfront, and a spectacular section of the Explorers Trail winding down the bluff to the riverfront near the Grand Ravines Lodge. This section includes large retaining walls to ensure accessible slopes for all park visitors. Additional work was completed by park staff to improve drainage along trails as well as reseeding many areas to alleviate muddy conditions caused by high use.





Ottawa Beach Pumphouse Renovation

Following major renovations in 2015, improvements continued to this historic building with the installation of a new, ash hardwood floor, underfloor electrical system, and improvements to the area around a large historic pump. Interpretive signage for the pump was also installed.

Improvements were made in collaboration with the Historic Ottawa Beach Society. Funding assistance was provided through the Park Township Community Service Program.



Historic Ottawa Beach Projects

Several small projects were completed on Ottawa Beach park properties and right-of-ways. Recent high lake levels revealed several areas requiring additional shoreline rip-rap to protect walkways and other built structures. Work also continued on another phase of work to replace deteriorating railroad tie retaining walls with new modular concrete block walls along public walkways.



Kirk Lodge Site Accessibility

In conjunction with extensive remodeling of the existing lodge building, including doorway and barrier-free restroom improvements, new accessible paved parking and connecting walkways were constructed adjacent to the lodge building.

Tree Plantings

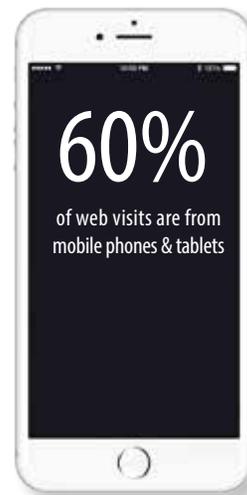
Emerald Ash Borer has had a significant impact on several county parks. This project replaced trees at Tunnel Park, Kirk Park, and Riverside Park with new disease resistant, shade tree species. The plantings focused on high-use areas and parking lot islands.

Updated retaining wall at Historic Ottawa Beach

COMMUNICATIONS & EVENTS

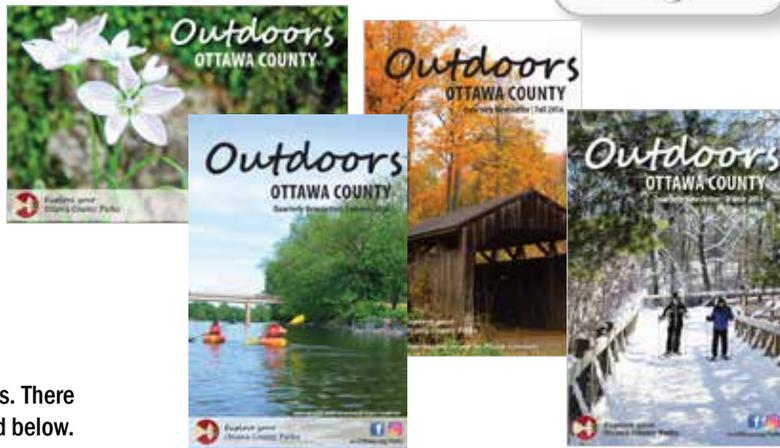
WEBSITE

The Ottawa County Parks website, www.miOttawa.org/Parks, received a considerable amount of traffic in 2016. There were over **235,000** visits to the site, a 10% increase from 2015.



NEWSLETTER

The quarterly *Outdoors Ottawa County* newsletter continued to be one of the most popular ways for park visitors to stay tuned in to Parks news and events. The size of the newsletter was increased in 2016, so more information could be included. Annually, Ottawa County Parks distributed about 32,000 newsletters.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events, large and small, are an excellent way to reach residents. There were a number of successful special events in 2016; two are highlighted below.

Poor Farm Sesquicentennial Celebration

2016 marked the 150th Anniversary of the Ottawa County Poor Farm. On October 1, the 1,200 guests who attended the Poor Farm Sesquicentennial Celebration took a journey back through local history that featured historical re-enactors, exhibits, vendors, musicians, and more.

A traditional 1899 dinner, organized by the Tri-Cities Historical Museum, was served in Keepers Hall. Judge Ed Post emceed, posing as Judge David Fletcher Hunton, who spent the end of his life at the farm.



Ottawa County Parks formally recognized volunteer and local historian, Marjorie Viven. She chaired the event planning committee and has dedicated countless hours over the years to connecting the community to its local history.



Seasonal Employee Job Fair

After an extremely successful job fair in 2015 for the 2016 season, Ottawa County Parks hosted a hiring event for the 2017 season around the holidays. Interested applicants applied in advance and on-site and received immediate interviews with Human Resources and hiring managers. Following the job fair, nearly all of the seasonal positions across the County Parks were filled for 2017. The majority of attendees learned about the job fair on Facebook.



SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

GovDelivery

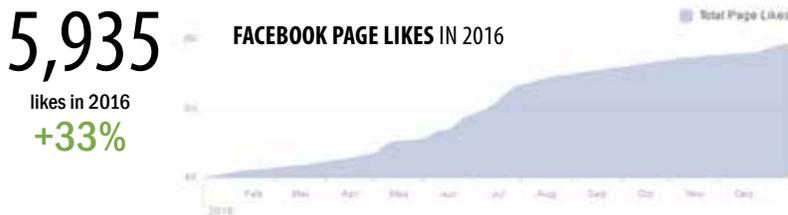
Ottawa County Parks utilizes the county-wide email communication system, GovDelivery. It continues to make regular communication much more efficient with residents and visitors who have opted-in to receive county emails. At the end of the year, Parks held two of the county's top six subscription topics, with the Parks newsletter being the most popular topic. Currently, there are 27,000 subscribers to Parks topics.

Ottawa County Parks sent Weekly NaturE-mails to nearly 2,500 subscribers and quarterly newsletters to over 7,000 subscribers. GovDelivery was also used to regularly send press releases to over 1,200 media subscribers.



Facebook

Facebook proved to be a crucial communications tool for Ottawa County Parks. It was used to share news, updates, programs, and camps. For the past two years, the number of followers has grown by about 30% each year.



In 2016, Ottawa County Parks began utilizing Facebook ads and boosts to expand the reach to other residents. Often \$1-2 is all it took to fill an interpretive program. Facebook allowed the Parks Department to reach thousands of residents who wouldn't otherwise be engaged with their content.



Instagram

The Ottawa County Parks Instagram account grew to over 1,000 followers.

Users who tagged their photos #OttawaCountyParks allowed the Parks Commission to share and use these photos, which helped to build a larger library of photography. It was also an excellent way to make park visitors feel engaged and connected with the county brand.



VIDEO



Multiple properties along the future Grand River Explorers Trail (see page 10 for more details) were captured on film this fall.

The video, which premieres in spring 2017, will be used to promote and fundraise for the trail project. Video was taken aerially by a local drone operator, as well as on the ground. The City of Holland has proven to be an excellent partner in shooting and editing video footage for local government at cost.



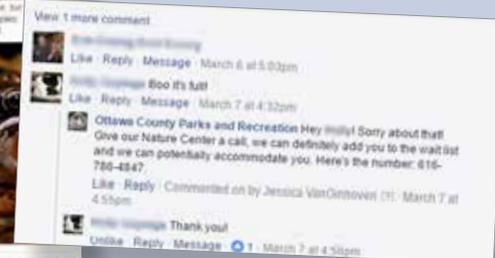
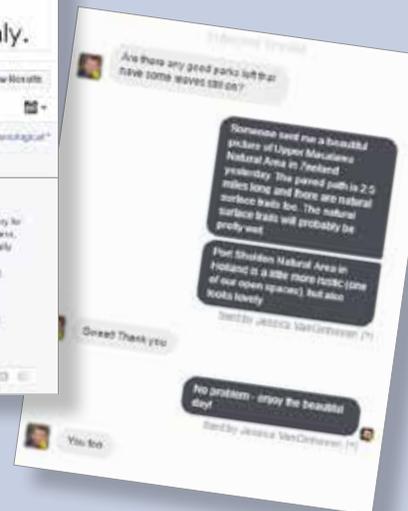
A "casting call" was made via GovDelivery and Facebook and quite a few residents showed up in their hiking, running, kayaking, and cycling gear... some even brought their painting easels to be part of the video that was shot over two days.



Residents reached out to the Parks Commission by commenting on the Facebook page or sending a note in Messenger more than ever before.



Asking questions or raising concerns via Facebook, rather than calling or e-mailing the office, has become more commonplace. Responding quickly and professionally is part of the Parks' customer service commitment.



2017 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 key focus in 2017 will be the development of a new North Parks Operations Center at Eastmanville Farm.

Diversified Funding Strategy

Maintaining the most diversified base of funding possible has long been a key strategy of the Parks Commission. Always aggressive in seeking public grant support, several potential new sources will be explored in 2017. Focus will continue on expanding donations from the private sector with the newly established Ottawa County Parks Foundation expected to be a focal point for private sector fundraising 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 and expand programs for schools and other youth groups. Continue to offer programs at park locations with emphasis on use of the Grand Ravines Lodge for interpretive programs. Increase efforts to raise awareness of the Nature Education Center and programs at all locations.

Accessibility

Maintain commitment to achieving universal accessibility throughout the park system while constructing new facilities and modifying existing parks.

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 enhancement of habitat. Continue managed deer hunts, and explore expanding hunts 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. Take a leadership role in addressing the spread of the hemlock woolly adelgid threat to hemlock trees in West Michigan.

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

Involve all staff and the Parks Commission in an update to sustainability plans 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.



Family enjoying the Grand Ravines overlook



Father & son at a Nature Education Center program



Honoring Friends volunteers

FOCUS ON GREENWAYS

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Continue to evaluate marina options at Historic Ottawa Beach and develop plans and means of funding an upgraded marina with an emphasis on options that maximize public access to public land at Historic Ottawa Beach.

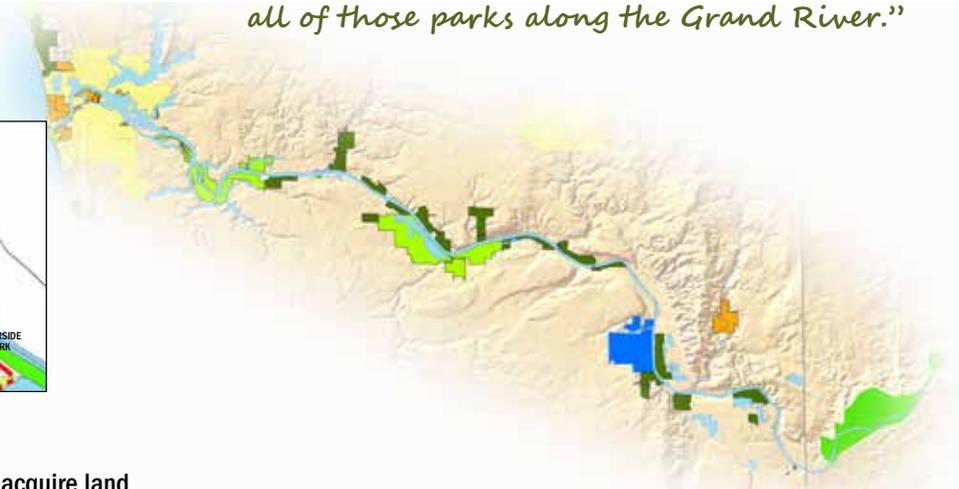
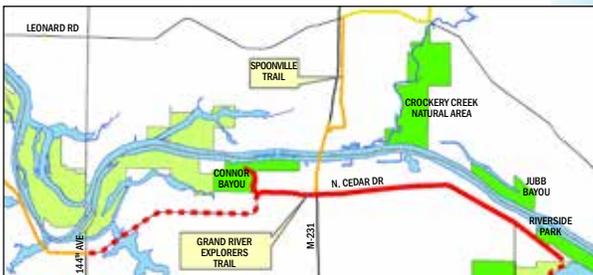
Pigeon River Greenway

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

Continue to build public and financial support for the greenway initiative. Complete the first segment of the Grand River Explorers Trail in Robinson Township. Continue to monitor and acquire target properties in the river corridor, seeking grant support as needed.

"I look forward to following the development of the Grand River Explorers Trail. It sounds like it will be one of Michigan's best trails, connecting all of those parks along the Grand River."



Bend Area Site

Continue to work with the mining companies to acquire land consistent with the Bend Area Master Plan; seek to complete acquisitions targeted with grant support. 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

Complete most improvements identified in the park master plan, including development of the paved pathway linking North and South and modern restrooms at Grand Ravines South. Complete dog park improvements including the addition of shelters, and additional paved paths.



Kayakers at the Bend Area; photo by Kevin Povenz

Macatawa River Greenway

Upper Macatawa Natural Area

Continue to raise public awareness of the recently completed segment of the Macatawa Greenway Trail through the Upper Macatawa Natural Area. Continue to support the Michigan Edge Mountain Bike Association in managing the park's mountain bike trail system.

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.



Cyclist at UMNA; photo by Matt DeWitt

Paddling Crockery Creek



Explore Your Ottawa County Parks

Grand Ravines Lodge Viewing Deck



Eastmanville Farm, Barn of the Year



Ottawa County Parks was awarded the 2016 Barn of the Year Award in the category of Non-Profit or Adaptive Use for the restored barn at Eastmanville Farm by the the Michigan Barn Preservation Network.

Skiiers at Upper Macatawa Natural Area



APPENDIX A

OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACES ACREAGE AND WATER FRONTAGE

As of December 31, 2016

Parks & Open Spaces	Acreeage	Lake Michigan Frontage (feet)	River Frontage (feet)	Bayou & Inland Lake Frontage (feet)
Grand River Greenway				
Connor Bayou	142	0	4,563	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	3	0	0	0
Georgetown East Property	6	0	405	0
Total Grand River Greenway	2,467	0	71,292	29,922
Pigeon River Greenway				
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
Total Pigeon River Greenway	697	0	13,474	0
Macatawa River Greenway				
Paw Paw Park	172	0	6,878	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
Total Macatawa River Greenway	834	0	22,870	0
Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway				
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
Total Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway	854	8,489	0	2,560
General Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails				
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
Hiawatha 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
Total Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails	1,606	0	0	823
GRAND TOTAL	6,458	8,489	107,636	33,305
TOTAL MILES	-	1.6	20.4	6.3



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.

Greg DeJong, Chair
Roger Bergman, Vice Chair
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Matthew Fenske
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James Holtvluwer
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