



Outdoors

Ottawa County Parks



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2021

Contact us: ocparks@miOttawa.org
Main Office: 616-738-4810 | Nature Center: 616-786-4847

Events & updates

Ottawa Conservation District Native Plant Sale

October 9, 9 am-1 pm | Hemlock Crossing
Pre-order your native plants through September 22. Day-of shopping will be available, while quantities last. Order online and schedule a pick up time: ottawacd.org/native-plant-sales
Questions? 616-842-5852 Ext. 5 / e-mail ottawacd@macd.org

231 River Run

October 30, 8:30 am | Connor Bayou
Run or walk along the Idema Explorers Trail, M-231 Bridge, and Spoonville Trail. Two distances, 10K and 4 mile, are available. Proceeds from the run will benefit the Ottawa County Parks Foundation's Grand River Greenway Campaign. Register today: runsignup.com/Race/MI/GrandHaven/M231K

Reminder: Park Closures

North Ottawa Dunes & Ottawa Sands will be closed for the annual lakeshore wildlife management hunt on Friday, November 19 through Monday, November 22, 2021.
Access is by permission only; those in the parks without permission will be ticketed. Both parks will re-open on November 23. For more information, visit: news.miottawa.org/nod-os-closed

find fall color

Look for these symbols for ways to *Get to know your Greenways!*



The Macatawa River Greenway connects parks along the Macatawa River



The Idema Explorers Trail connects parks along the Grand River Greenway



Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
miOttawa.org/parks

Kelly N. Rice, President
Jane Longstreet, Vice President
Philip Kuyers, Secretary
Joe Bush
Greg DeJong

Tom Elhart
Kate Harmon
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James Holtvluwer
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Activities and programs are brought to you by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners.

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Spring Grove, with its towering maples, glows gold in the fall.



You can't beat the view atop Mt. Pisgah any time of year.



North Ottawa Dunes provides a nice long hike with the sound of Lake Michigan in the distance.



The stroll along the Pigeon River at Hemlock Crossing delivers a diversity of color.



Paw Paw Park offers open spaces and interesting trees along Noordolos Creek.



Enjoy the view amongst the tree tops while crossing the Grand Ravines Suspension Bridge.

Park News

Expanding Nature Education Access

Grand River Greenway + Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

With a recently awarded grant of \$35,000 from the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation is excited to expand nature education in the following ways:

Permanent Virtual Programming

During the pandemic, Parks staff began to create virtual programming (while the Nature Center and other facilities were closed due to COVID) and found significant demand for this resource.

Pilot "Parks for All" Initiative

We believe it is vital for students to attend a parks program at least once in their school career. Our long-term "Parks for All" goal is to fully fund the cost for every fourth-grade student within the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District to attend one program annually.

Before we further develop this initiative, we will conduct a pilot program to fund transportation and program costs for 1,000 fourth graders in northern Ottawa County in 2022.

Generous donors who have contributed to the Emilie Baker Fund for the Environment, GHACF Environment Fund, Mary Ann Sherwood Families & Children Fund, and the William T. and Shirley A. Baker Family Fund at the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation made this funding available to benefit the community.



Nationally, young people who live in urban areas are often more disconnected from nature than their rural peers.

Public Observatory Groundbreaking

Pigeon River Greenway

On September 11, members of the Parks Commission, Parks Foundation, Friends of Ottawa County Parks, and the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA) gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking of the first public observatory in West Michigan at Hemlock Crossing County Park!

Thank you to everyone who pitched in to support this project. With your help, the SAAA raised \$75,000 for the building and a 16" Meade telescope.

We anticipate that the observatory will open next spring, but we welcome you to join us for an astronomy program this winter. Learn more on page 6.



ESCAPE Career Connections

Macatawa River Greenway + Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation has supported ESCAPE's Career Connections program since 2014. One of the goals of the program includes connecting young people with potential careers, which is why we got involved! We are happy to be able to give kids who live in the city an opportunity to work outside while learning from our maintenance, operations, and natural resources management staff.

This year's team assisted with trimming trails, removing invasive species, picking up litter, and other maintenance at Paw Paw Park, Riley Trails, and Historic Ottawa Beach Parks.

Although most of the team had little to no experience working in the outdoors, they powered through the heat, mosquitoes, and other challenges of park work. Motivational leaders fostered good work ethic and an appreciation for these important public spaces.



Greenway Campaign Reaches Goal

Grand River Greenway

The Ottawa County Parks Foundation is excited to announce that it has reached its \$7.2 million goal committed for this project.

The Grand River Greenway is a model ecological and cultural corridor along the Grand River. It will preserve significant natural, historical, and cultural features, as well as promote healthier, happier, and more vibrant communities.

When complete, the Idema Explorers Trail will be a 36.5-mile multi-use, ADA-accessible, land-based trail along the Grand River. It will connect to existing trails in Kent County allowing for travel from downtown Grand Rapids to Lake Michigan. There are currently 14 miles of trail completed. Learn more about the progress of this trail in the Summer 2021 Grand River Greenway update: bit.ly/greenway-update-21

You can still support this initiative! Many naming opportunities are still available along the Idema Explorers Trail. info@ottawacountyparksfoundation.org



\$7.2 million goal reached!

“While it has been great to see new spaces [like the Bend Area] open for public use and for the community to have bicycle/pedestrian access, the exciting thing is that this is really just the beginning.”

- Grand River Greenway Campaign Co-Chair Monica Verplank



This summer we celebrated the completion of the Georgetown Township segment of the Idema Explorers Trail and the expansion of the Bend Area Open Space.

Grand River Coastal Corridor

Grand River Greenway + Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Audubon Great Lakes worked with over 20 stakeholders to complete an assessment of and develop conservation recommendations for the Grand River Coastal Corridor.

What this report confirmed is that the area is of ecological value on a state, national, and global scale. It also confirmed the importance of connecting not only wildlife, but also people through a combination of natural area restoration and inclusive recreational access.

Learn more and read the full report: <https://gl.audubon.org/coastal-wetlands/grand-river-coastal-corridor>

Ottawa Sands Master Plan

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway + Grand River Greenway

Thanks to the Idema Family, funding exists for the future development of the Explorers Camp at Ottawa Sands.

The camping area will include yurts and a treehouse village, offering a low-impact experience that can't be found anywhere else in West Michigan!

Did you know only 8% of the property is slated for development, while 92% of the property will undergo some form of ecological restoration?

31% *undergoing intensive ecological restoration*

61% *undergoing moderate ecological restoration*

8% *slated for future development*



Restoration & Protection

Grand River Greenway + Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Thanks in part to the Grand River Coastal Corridor assessment, Audubon Great Lakes is being awarded a \$400,000 Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) grant for two years of wetland creation and restoration at Ottawa Sands, as well as wetland protection at Stearns Creek Park. The \$400,000 will be matched by Ottawa County Parks & Recreation through the millage and other grants, totalling nearly \$800,000 in wetland improvement!

Learn more: https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/NFWF-SOGL-20210722-GS_update.pdf

“The corridor is recognized as one of the richest areas in the state for species of greatest conservation concern and biodiversity, is a focal area for Lake Michigan fisheries restoration, is above-average for climate resiliency, and lies along a globally recognized Important Bird Area.”

- Audubon Great Lakes assessment of the Grand River Coastal Corridor



Stewardship & Education

Parks Public Service Announcement (PSA)

During the fall season our natural resource management team puts together a couple of Parks PSAs. These are easy ways you can support the health of our forests!

Bittersweet: a "gift" that keeps on growing

One of the most popular plants for fall and holiday decor are bittersweet berries, but its widespread use can wreak havoc on our natural lands!

While there are two kinds of bittersweet in Michigan, most decor utilizes the invasive Asiatic bittersweet. Why? It is easy to find and attractive, but beware... using this invasive plant unintentionally facilitates its spread. Birds eat the berries, but cannot fully digest them. When they dispose of the partially digested berries, the plant spreads.

Learn more: news.miottawa.org/parks-psa-bittersweet

Want to go a step further and help remove invasive bittersweet? Check out the Stewardship Workday schedule below.

Keep your paws off of Pawpaws

The Michigan banana is a unique fruit indeed and although the fruiting tree is native to our area, they need our help. We are asking foragers to leave the fruit to fall, providing wildlife with an important food source to encourage the spread of this tree.



Stewardship Workdays

Join us for a Stewardship Workday:

- Register online: miOttawa.org/ocpevents
- Bring work gloves (preferably leather), insect repellent, and appropriate attire for the outdoors.
- All tools, drinking water, and snacks will be provided.
- All ages welcome; 16 and under must be with an adult.
- Work days are cancelled if raining (or snowing).

Questions? Contact us: (616) 994-4748

WOODY INVASIVE REMOVAL		
Oct 2	Paw Paw Park-West 	9-11 am
Oct 7	Eastmanville Bayou 	5:30-7 pm
Oct 23	Hiawatha Forest	9-11 am
Nov 6	Ottawa Sands	9-11 am
BEACH CLEAN UP*		
Oct 2	Historic Ottawa Beach	1-4 pm
Oct 23	Kirk Park	12-3 pm
Nov 6	Rosy Mound Natural Area	1-3 pm

* Funding for local beach clean ups comes from an EPA Trash Free Waters grant awarded to the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council to support beach and river cleanups in Ottawa and Allegan Counties. Through this funding, the Lakeshore Clean Up Coalition and volunteers have spent over 1,000 hours collecting over 1,800 pounds of trash from public beaches and river access sites. Get involved: the-macc.org/clean-up-events



Volunteer Spotlight

Thank you so much to Richard Dragicevich who completed his Eagle Scout project at the Bend Area!



I chose this project because it meant a lot to me that I was able to conduct a cleanup of a future park. I love parks and trails, but almost all the time I see trash laying around and it bothers me.

When the Ottawa County Parks Department suggested this project, I knew it was the right one for me. I love Parks, but I love them even more when they are clear of the trash and litter people leave behind.

I had recruited a crew of about 20 people including scouts, friends, and family. We all came out and filled a 10 yard dumpster to the top and collected 10 tires and a trailer load of discarded lumber. Now we all can enjoy a clean new bike trail in the Georgetown-area thanks to all the people who came out and helped clean up!

— Richard Dragicevich

We have a variety of different volunteer activities for all ages! Learn more and become a volunteer: miottawa.org/volunteer





Arts for the Parks

Macatawa River Greenway

With a \$33,500 Mellon Foundation Grant, *Arts in the Parks for Holland* will forge a partnership between Hope College, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation, and the greater Holland-area. The partnership will create programming for people of all backgrounds and identities to pursue the connections between nature and artistic expression, with an explicit aim to reach under-served communities.

In the first phase of the project, the team will gather qualitative data to help inform how best to provide programs, events, or exhibits. This project intends to build lasting relationships in the community.

We are excited to work with community partners to build fresh, inclusive programs combining both nature and art!



Mug Club Photo Contest

Have you taken a bird photo in Ottawa County in 2021 that would look great on our 2022 Mug Club limited edition mug? We want to see it! Submission deadline is October 31, 2021.

How to enter:

Submit original image files (up to 3/person) online: bit.ly/photo-mug-club

The winning photo and 2022 mug will be revealed in December at the first Coffee with the Birds program. *Please note: the winning photo may be edited for printing*

Mug Club membership

2022 Mug Club Memberships will be available for sale for \$25. Mug Club members receive a limited edition mug and fun birding perks throughout the year. Funds raised through the mug club support birding programs. The mugs and membership make great gifts!

Sign up for birding updates for more information about mug club: miOttawa.org/birding



2021 Bird of the Year:
Tufted Titmouse by
Emily Tornga

New programs!

3 ways to experience your parks this fall...

We hope you can join us for some of our new programs. Check out the full schedule on page 6.

Recreation // Thru Hikes

Get out and enjoy the changing seasons as you venture ALL THE WAY THRU these amazing parks with a naturalist guide. Hikes are usually about 3 miles.

Natural features // Themed Walks

Take a deeper dive into a topic of interest that may focus on natural features of a park, tell the story of cultural connections to place, or weave both elements together.

Park History // Get to Know Your Parks

Get to know the natural & cultural history of each park as well as how any past, current, and future projects are actively enhancing both its natural and recreational value. We'll hike to different notable features.



The Nature Center at Hemlock Crossing offers programs for all ages, wildlife viewing areas, and a gift shop! Stop by for a visit.

55+ calling all active older adults

NEW! We are now offering walks designed for active adults ages 55 and older. Each program will last one hour and take place in parks with more accessible trails. They aim to provide an opportunity to connect with others, while learning a little more about these special places. Page 6 provides dates, times, and locations.



Weaver House Tours

On October 17 and December 5, the Friends of Ottawa County Parks will be hosting open houses and tours at the Weaver House from 1-4 pm. In December, it will be decorated for the holiday season!

The Weaver House at Pine Bend turns 120 years old this year!

The Friends of Ottawa County Parks is a 501(c)3 organization that assists Ottawa County Parks with many different stewardship and nature education activities. Friends offers annual memberships on a calendar-year basis. Become a member! Learn more: friendsofocp.org

Student: \$15 Individual: \$25 Family: \$35 Lifetime (55+): \$125



miOttawa.org/Parks

Programs & Activities

Look for these symbols for ways to *Get to know your Greenways!*



The Idema Explorers Trail connects parks along the Grand River Greenway.



The Macatawa River Greenway connects parks along the Macatawa River.

3 ways to experience your parks

THEMED WALKS

* Walks for active adults ages 55+

Take a deeper dive into a topic of interest that may focus on natural features of a park, tell the story of cultural connections to place, or weave both elements together.

Water Flowing Underground

Sep 25 10-11 am Hemlock Crossing

Meetings with Mittenleaves

* Sep 28 9-10 am  Bur Oak Landing-West
Oct 2 10-11 am  Bur Oak Landing-West

A Palette of Forest Colors

* Oct 5 9-10 am  Grand Ravines-North
Oct 16 10-11 am  Grand Ravines-North

Seeing Life in a Snag

* Oct 19 9-10 am  Connor Bayou
Oct 30 10-11 am Hemlock Crossing

Tales of Birds and Water

Nov 6 10-11 am Hemlock Crossing Park
* Nov 9 9-10 am Hemlock Crossing Park

Pineless and Poison-free

Nov 20 10-11 am Port Sheldon Natural Area-West
* Nov 23 9-10 am Port Sheldon Natural Area-West

Skeletons in the Aster Family Closet

Dec 4 10-11 am  Upper Macatawa Natural Area-84th
* Dec 7 9-10 am  Upper Macatawa Natural Area-84th

Five-Needled and Fascinating

Dec 18 10-11 am Hemlock Crossing Park
* Dec 21 9-10 am Hemlock Crossing Park

THRU HIKES

Get out and enjoy the changing seasons as you venture ALL THE WAY THRU these amazing parks with a naturalist guide. Hikes are usually about 3 miles.

Sep 26 3-4:30 pm  Upper Macatawa Natural Area-84th
Oct 10 3-4:30 pm Pigeon Creek Park
Oct 17 3-4:30 pm  Connor Bayou
Oct 23 9:30 am-3:30 pm North Ottawa Dunes (~8 miles)
Nov 7 3-4:30 pm  Grand River Park
Nov 14 3-4:30 pm Riley Trails

GET TO KNOW YOUR PARKS

Get to know the natural & cultural history of each park as well as how any past, current, and future projects are actively enhancing both its natural and recreational value. We'll hike to different notable features.

Oct 9 10-11:30 am  Bend Area Open Space

Land, water, & sky

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER: MONARCHS ON THE MOVE

Recommended for ages 10+

Monarchs embark on a momentous migratory journey each fall. Discover how they do it, what troubles they face, and what we can do to help. Then go for a hike to watch for them as they head south to Mexico for the winter.



Sep 25 3-4:30 pm  Ottawa Sands

COLORS BY KAYAK

\$8/person (kayak rental additional \$12); ages 13+
Registration required

Bask in the glorious fall colors along the Pigeon River by kayak as you paddle toward Pine Bend. Some experience is needed; a basic kayak review is included.

Oct 2 9:30 am-1:30 pm Hemlock Crossing
Oct 16 9:30 am-1:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

ASTRONOMY PROGRAMS

Programs and stargazing hosted by the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association. *Learn more about the public observatory coming this spring on page 2.*

Constellations Explained

Oct 9 7-8 pm Hemlock Crossing

Solar System 101

Nov 13 7-8 pm Hemlock Crossing

MOONLIGHT NIGHT HIKE

\$5/person; ages 10+
Registration required

Experience your favorite park in a whole new way and see what nocturnal creatures lurk there as you explore by moonlight!

Oct 15 7-8:30 pm  Connor Bayou
Nov 19 7-8:30 pm Hager Park
Dec 17 7-8:30 pm Hemlock Crossing Park

EARTH ENCOUNTERS: THE SANDS OF TIME

Take an in-depth look at the geologic history of Lake Michigan sand formation and how it makes our local sand so special! We'll also have microscopes available to closely investigate different sand samples following the program.

Nov 13 3-4:30 pm Hemlock Crossing Park



Visit our online learning page for videos, programs, & more:
miOttawa.org/naturetoyou

Program calendar & registration: miOttawa.org/OCPEvents

Unless otherwise noted:
Programs are recommended for ages 12+
Registration is encouraged

Contact the Nature Center
with questions:

naturecenter@miottawa.org
(616) 786-4847

Kids & family

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER - FOR KIDS!

Ages 5-12, with a caregiver
Registration required

Learn about wildlife found in your backyard and parks.

- Oct 31 3-4:30 pm Bats: Beyond Frightening
Hemlock Crossing Park
- Nov 21 3-4:30 pm Turkey & "Dressing"
Hemlock Crossing Park

TOT TIME

\$5/child; ages 0-3, with a caregiver
Registration required

Little ones and their caregivers are invited to explore the natural world with various age appropriate activities and a group walk along a stroller and wagon-friendly path.

- Oct 21 9:45-10:45 am Hemlock Crossing Park
- Nov 18 9:45-10:45 am Hemlock Crossing Park

STORYWALKS

StoryWalks are now available throughout the county! Pages from a featured book will be posted along a path for your family to read together. Stories are available during park hours. Registration not required; for more information:

miOttawa.org/ocpevents

- Sep 27-Oct 3  Outside You Notice
Ottawa Sands
- Oct 4-17  Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story
Hawthorn Pond Natural Area
- Oct 12-17  Fletcher and the Falling Leaves
Crockery Creek Natural Area
- Oct 18-24 Baby Bear Counts One
Hemlock Crossing Park
- Nov 1-15  Snack, Snooze, Skedaddle
Paw Paw Park-East
- Dec 6-12 Good-Bye Autumn, Hello Winter
Rosy Mound Natural Area
- Dec 6-19  Rabbit's Gift
Paw Paw Park-West

Thank you to our local libraries for making StoryWalk possible!

Loutit District Library, Herrick District Library,
Georgetown Township Library, Gary Byker
Memorial Library of Hudsonville, Patmos Library



Birding

BIRDING OUTINGS

Whether you are an avid birder or desire to experience birds beyond your backyard, join us for a birding program!

- | | | | |
|--------|-------------|--------------|---|
| Sep 22 | 8-10 am | Birding Walk |  Grand River Park |
| Oct 2 | 9-11 am | Birding Walk |  Riverside Park |
| Oct 6 | 9-11 am | Birding Walk |  Paw Paw Park East |
| Oct 20 | 9-11 am | Birding Walk |  Eastmanville Farm |
| Oct 30 | 9 am-12 pm | Lake Watch | North Beach Park |
| Nov 3 | 10 am-12 pm | Birding Walk |  Upper Macatawa
Natural Area (84th) |
| Nov 17 | 10 am-12 pm | Birding Walk | Hemlock Crossing Park |

WATERFOWL BIRDING TRIP

\$10/session; ages 12+
Registration required

Witness the spectacle of waterfowl migration! Part 1 will start at Holland State Park and explore areas near Holland and the lower Macatawa River. Part 2 will visit one of Michigan's premier waterfowl birding locations at the Muskegon Wastewater facility.

- | | | | |
|-------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| Nov 6 | Part 1 | 8-11 am | Historic Ottawa Beach |
| Nov 6 | Part 2 | 1-4 pm | Hemlock Crossing Park |

COFFEE WITH THE BIRDS

Enjoy coffee and baked goodies as you watch the birds at the feeders. Bring your bird questions, curiosities, and stories; and don't forget your favorite mug. Or, support birding programs by joining the Coffee with the Birds Mug Club! More info: miOttawa.org/birding



- | | | | |
|--------|--------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Dec 11 | Part 1 | 9:30-10:20 am | Hemlock Crossing Park |
| | Tidbit | 10:30-11 am | Hemlock Crossing Park |
| | Part 2 | 11:10 am-12 pm | Hemlock Crossing Park |

A little birdie told me there's
a new birding page:
miOttawa.org/birding



Photo by Judi Manning



This newsletter is printed on 10% post-consumer waste recycled paper



Ottawa County Parks &
Recreation Commission
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Outdoors

OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS



explore your
Ottawa County Parks



www.Ottawa.org/Parks