



# Outdoors

## Ottawa County Parks

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2021

Singing frog by Mike Lozon

### Special events

**Bend Area Celebration**  
June 11, TIME TBD | Bend Area



It's time to celebrate the acquisition of 149 acres of land at Bend Area Open Space in Jenison. This property is undeveloped now, but its future is bright. Attendees are invited to explore a newly developed hiking loop and an important Idema Explorers Trail connection.

[news.miottawa.org/bend-area](http://news.miottawa.org/bend-area)

Look for these symbols for opportunities 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.

### Spring into wellness...

### join us for a Step it Up! walking challenge

This free, 8-week program is designed to help you get active and visit new parks. Step it Up! begins on May 10. Registration opens on April 12; visit us online to sign up for alerts: [miOttawa.org/stepitup](http://miOttawa.org/stepitup)



#### Step it Up! participants can look forward to:

- Weekly guided group walks with varying paces
- Guided group adventures
- Discovering new parks in Ottawa and Allegan counties
- Meeting new people
- Motivation and accountability by logging activity
- Incentive prizes

Please note that in addition to registering for Step it Up!, preregistration will also be required for all group activities.

### Spokes Fighting Strokes Grand River Greenway

July 25, TIME TBD | Connor Bayou  
(rain date July 27)



Join us for a social ride and a dose of inspiration! Local stroke survivors can test ride a trike at Connor Bayou and along the Idema Explorers Trail.

Following the ride, we'll hear from Dan Zimmerman and how he's changing lives across the nation.

[news.miottawa.org/spokes-fighting-strokes](http://news.miottawa.org/spokes-fighting-strokes)

### Coming Soon

#### Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

A brand new play structure is coming soon to North Beach Park!

Construction begins this spring and the new playground will be ready for beach-goers this summer.



Contact us: [ocparks@miOttawa.org](mailto:ocparks@miOttawa.org)  
Main Office: 616-738-4810 | Nature Center: 616-786-4847



Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission  
[miOttawa.org/parks](http://miOttawa.org/parks)

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Activities and programs are brought to you by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners.

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# Park News & Updates

## Ottawa County Parks Foundation expansion of support for community engagement

Beginning this year, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation will assist to financially support nature education programs, in addition to land acquisition and special park projects!

The Ottawa County Parks Nature Center opened in 2010 to provide and enhance nature education opportunities. Donors in our community supported this endeavor, raising over \$400,000 of the \$1.8 million needed to construct the facility. That investment continues to pay off year after year and serves as a shining example of private funds leveraging millage dollars for public benefit.

Ten years later, nature education and community engagement are more important than ever. Studies continue to show that nature and outdoor recreation make us happier and healthier. Unsurprisingly, adults introduced to the outdoors as children were more likely to participate in outdoor activities as adults than those not exposed to the outdoors as children.

Since first opening its doors, attendance at the Ottawa County Parks Nature Center has nearly doubled and the need for expanded educational programming is clear. We are grateful for the support of the Parks Foundation as we continue to provide programs for people of all ages in West Michigan. Check out nature education programs on pages 6-7.

*According to the Outdoor Foundation's Outdoor Participation Report, under half the U.S. population does not participate in outdoor recreation at all."*



celebrating  
**5** years of  
**BRIDGING  
COMMUNITY  
TO NATURE**



Interested in supporting this work?  
[ottawacountyparksfoundation.org/donate](http://ottawacountyparksfoundation.org/donate)



### Kids Bike Camp



This summer, we are partnering with Velo Kids to offer an adventure-based, week-long, half-day bike camp for youth ages 7-12. Sibling discounts available. Register online: [miOttawa.org/ocpevents](http://miOttawa.org/ocpevents)



More programs on pages 6-7

### MOUNTAIN BIKE CAMP JUNE 14-18

2 DAYS @ RILEY TRAILS  
2 DAYS @ UPPER MAC  
1 DAY @ PIGEON CREEK

### URBAN BIKE CAMP JUNE 21-25

WINDOW ON THE WATERFRONT  
DOWNTOWN HOLLAND  
EXPLORATION

### MOUNTAIN BIKE CAMP JULY 19-23

2 DAYS @ RILEY TRAILS  
2 DAYS @ UPPER MAC  
1 DAY @ PIGEON CREEK

### URBAN BIKE CAMP JULY 26-30

WINDOW ON THE WATERFRONT  
DOWNTOWN HOLLAND  
EXPLORATION

Explore their town and local trails on their bike and discover its excellent places.  
Learn how to bike safely and bike smart around town with their friends.  
Develop bike repair and maintenance skills - Know how to change a flat or adjust your brakes.  
Learn and practice stewardship for our trails, parks and our community.  
Meet new friends, be active, have FUN, and enjoy the great outdoors!

#### REQUIREMENTS:

- POSITIVE ATTITUDE
- ABLE TO COMFORTABLY RIDE 3-4 MILES (1ST-2ND GRADE), 5-6 MILES (3RD-4TH GRADE) AND 7-8 (5TH-6TH GRADE)
- A FUNCTIONING MOUNTAIN BIKE FOR MOUNTAIN BIKE CAMPS, ANY TYPE OF BIKE FOR URBAN BIKE CAMP

**COST: \$120/WEEK (MONDAY-FRIDAY 9:00AM-12:00PM) • REGISTER AT [MIOTTAWA.ORG/OCPEVENTS](http://MIOTTAWA.ORG/OCPEVENTS)**

## What's next: Ottawa Sands



Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Grand River Greenway

Much of the master plan will be years in the making, but there are ecological improvements that have already begun.

### Improved biodiversity

Last year, volunteers helped remove large amounts of invasive honeysuckle from the Sag area. In addition to removing invasive plants, staff and volunteers will also be planting native plugs, saplings, and live stakes. Species include varieties of dogwoods and willows, elderberry, and winterberry.

Staff is also seeking grants for wetland and shoreline creation along the Sag, as well as the in-land lake. Learn more about plans for the future of this property: [miOttawa.org/ottawasands](http://miOttawa.org/ottawasands)



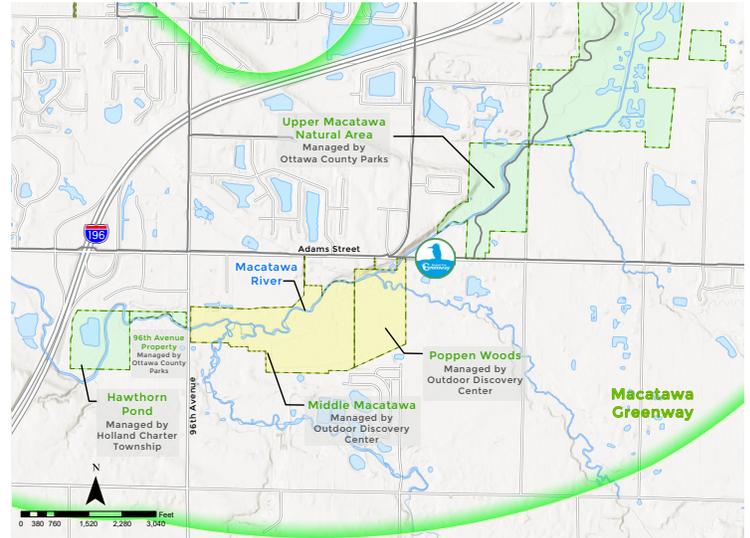
## Macatawa Greenway expansion in Holland



### Macatawa River Greenway

An agreement has been reached to purchase a small but important property along the Macatawa River Greenway. The parcel, near Hawthorn Pond Natural Area, includes river frontage, floodplain, and some wooded area. Keep an eye out for the official announcement of this acquisition.

More information will be posted here when available:  
[news.miottawa.org/mac-greenway](http://news.miottawa.org/mac-greenway)



## Celebrating history

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Lakewood Farm in Holland, formerly owned by Chicago coal executive George F. Getz, was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The property was nominated for this honor by the Historic Ottawa Beach Society, with the help of local historian and exhibit designer, Valerie van Heest.

Valerie's research for the nomination became the basis for the book *Lakewood Farm & Zoo: George Getz's Famous Attraction in Holland, Michigan*, as well as *Holland's Earliest Attractions*, an exhibit at the Pump House Museum. The book may be purchased online or at the museum when it re-opens this June. More info: [historicottawabeachsociety.org](http://historicottawabeachsociety.org)

**Correction!** The link to the Pump House Museum Virtual Tour was incorrect in our Winter newsletter. Here is the correct link: [bit.ly/ph-tour](http://bit.ly/ph-tour)

### Pumphouse Museum Hours of Operation

Weekends in June\*  
1-5 pm  
\*Opening date TBD

Daily July 1-Labor Day  
1-5 pm

Admission is FREE  
Donations welcome



## Planning for the future, reporting on achievements

In the last few months, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation has completed a number of planning documents. They are available for your review online: [miottawa.org/Parks/park-plan.htm](http://miottawa.org/Parks/park-plan.htm)

### 2021 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

Residents and park visitors helped build and guide this plan by completing surveys and directing comments and suggestions to the Parks & Recreation Commission. This plan is updated every five years and ensures eligibility for grant funding from the State of Michigan and provides a road map for park and trail development.

### Ottawa Sands Master Plan

Over a year in the making, the Ottawa Sands County Park Master Plan was formally accepted by the Parks & Recreation Commission in December 2020.

### 2020 Annual Report

Each year, Ottawa County Parks presents an annual report to the Board of Commissioners. This report is used to share information about the year, including financial information.

# Stewardship & Natural Resources



Blue-spotted salamander by Peter Paplanus

## Riverside Park BioBlitz



### Grand River Greenway

Join us on June 12 for our first-ever BioBlitz at Riverside Park (pre-dawn to dusk). This event will bring local scientists and conservation organizations together to work with community members to build an awareness of the biodiversity along the Grand River while collecting monitoring data.

### What's a BioBlitz?

A BioBlitz is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time. At a BioBlitz, scientists, families, students, teachers, and other community members work together to get a snapshot of an area's biodiversity. Learn more: [news.miottawa.org/riverside-bioblitz](http://news.miottawa.org/riverside-bioblitz)



### What will we be documenting?

- Birds and mammals
- Reptiles and amphibians
- Insects and arachnids
- Plant species and fungi
- Fish, mussels, and macroinvertebrates
- Water quality

## Citizen Scientist training

Learn how to become a Citizen Scientist this spring! Participants will learn how to help land managers by reporting invasive species to a regional mapping program, all while on a hike. Ability to identify invasive species not a prerequisite. This training is offered in partnership with the West Michigan Conservation Network. Check out the workday schedule below for more information.



## Stewardship Workdays

Here's what you should know about Stewardship Workdays:

- Register online: [miOttawa.org/ocpevents](http://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

Beach Clean Up	Apr 24	10-11:30 am	North Beach Park
Beach Clean Up	Apr 24	1-3 pm	Rosy Mound Natural Area
Beach Clean Up	Apr 10	10-11:30 am	Tunnel Park
Beach Clean Up	Apr 10	1-4 pm	Historic Ottawa Beach Parks
Beach Clean Up	Apr 17	10-11:30 am	Kirk Park
Beach Clean Up	Apr 17	1-4 pm	Olive Shores
Citizen Science Training	Apr 17	9-10 am	Grand Ravines North
Citizen Science Training	Apr 17	11 am-12 pm	Upper Macatawa Natural Area
Garlic Mustard Removal	May 1	10 am-12 pm	Stearns Creek
Garlic Mustard Removal	May 15	10 am-12 pm	Eastmanville Bayou
Garlic Mustard Removal	May 22	10 am-12 pm	Tunnel Park
Garlic Mustard Removal	May 22	1-3 pm	Historic Ottawa Beach Parks



## Ottawa Conservation District Spring Native Plant Sale

The Ottawa Conservation District native plant sale offers a wide assortment of Michigan-grown native flowering plants, ferns, and grasses. Get started on your own native garden this spring!

### Sale opens on March 10

Visit: [ottawacd.org/native-plant-sales](http://ottawacd.org/native-plant-sales)

- Order form
- Plant catalog
- Check out
- Schedule pick up

# Fire for restoration

Ottawa County Parks has four prescribed fires, also known as controlled burns, planned for 2021. In general, the goal of these fires is to use a natural and once common occurrence to turn back the clock on a mature forest. This creates once abundant early forest habitat that has become uncommon. Using fire can also help to combat invasive plants while stimulating the seedbank.

## Stearns Creek



- First controlled burn
- Conducted by contractor
- Managing for Oak Savanna in restoration area

## Eastmanville Farm



- First controlled burn
- Conducted by internal burn crew
- Managing for monoculture of hawthorn and brome grass

## Robinson Forest

- Third and final burn
- Conducted by contractor
- Managing for Oak Savanna in restoration area

## Hiawatha Forest

- Second controlled burn
- Managing for Oak Savanna in restoration area
- Conducted by internal burn crew, with assistance from GVSU



## Student support

Students who are training for their federal burn certificate through Grand Valley State University will be conducting research at Hiawatha Forest (in addition to many other areas across the state). Their research explores how burns affect the diversity of plant life when conducted in different seasons.

## Isn't fire destructive?

On the contrary, fire can be restorative for native ecosystems in southwest Michigan (like oak savannas). Many of our landscapes and the wildlife who inhabit them rely on wildfire to survive. Without it, their habitat is lost to forest succession.

Wildfire is naturally occurring, but because uncontrolled wildfire is dangerous, we have become adept at suppressing it. While this is beneficial for society, it impacts wildlife who thrive in a habitat dependent on flames.

Animals whose habitats are reliant on wildfire are adapted to it and instinctively know to fly, burrow, or scatter from the flames.



Prescribed fires rely on a specific prescription of conditions for success:

- Temperature
- Relative humidity
- Wind speed
- Ceiling height\*

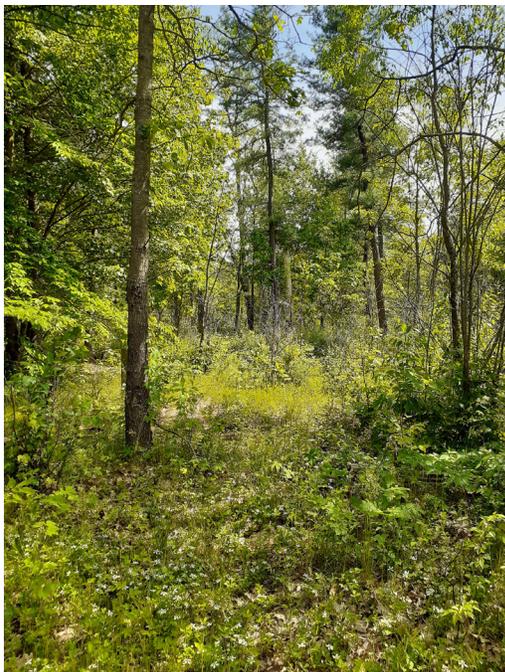
*\* This measurement refers to how well the smoke will lift up; the best rx is on high pressure days, so the smoke lifts up and away.*

## Success Story: Robinson Forest



### Pre-burn

The photo below on the left shows Robinson Forest after red pine removal and before a controlled burn. It was more open but still full of invasive plants.



### Post burn

Today, Robinson Forest looks more like an oak savanna with open areas and increased plant diversity. Notable returning species include the uncommon native lowbush blueberry and racemed milkwort.



### Internal burn crew

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation has an in-house team of certified burn crew members (two with national certifications and three with midwest certifications). We have also invested in safety equipment equivalent with what burn contractors would use. Our crew handles smaller burns with large burn breaks, like the Hemlock Crossing prairie (pictured above).

# Programs & Activities

1. Registration is required for ALL activities: [miOttawa.org/OCPEvents](http://miOttawa.org/OCPEvents)
2. Participants should respectfully maintain proper social distancing protocols
3. Participants will be encouraged to wear masks



## EQUINOX EXPEDITION

Celebrate the Vernal Equinox by joining this expedition to find signs of spring along the Pigeon River.

Mar 21 3-4 pm Hemlock Crossing

## EARTH ENCOUNTERS

These programs will introduce participants to the geologic features of, and stories behind, the landscapes of our region.

Mar 27 3-4:30 pm Amazing Agates Hemlock Crossing

May 16 3-4:30 pm Rock Walk Hemlock Crossing

## WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER: WOODPECKER WALK



Find out the hows, whys, and whos of the area's seven woodpecker species while on a walk to observe as many as we can find!

Apr 10 3-4:30 pm Upper Macatawa Natural Area

## WILDFLOWER WALK

Woodland flowers, called spring ephemerals, bloom before the trees leaf out. Join a parks naturalist to look for these spring beauties blooming in our parks.

 Apr 11 2-3 pm Grose Park 

Apr 18 2-3 pm Grand Ravines North 

Apr 24 10-11 am Hager Park 

May 2 2-3 pm Grose Park 

 May 8 10-11 am Rosy Mound Natural Area 

May 15 2-3 pm Historic Ottawa Beach Parks 

May 16 2-3 pm Grand Ravines North 

## WILDFLOWER WORKSHOP

Learn how to identify spring wildflowers using the Newcomb's Wildflower guide.

Apr 17 10 am-12 pm Grand Ravines North 

Jun 12 10 am-12 pm Hemlock Crossing 

## EAGLES OF GRAND RAVINES WALK



Bald Eagles frequent areas along the Grand River and have nested at Grand Ravines for a number of years. Join us on this hike to learn the story of the park's resident eagles and view their nesting activities.

Apr 25 Walks begin every hour: 1 pm, 2 pm, 3 pm, 4 pm Grand Ravines North

 May 9 Walks begin every hour: 1 pm, 2 pm, 3 pm, 4 pm Grand Ravines North

## LET'S GO... KAYAKING!



\$5/person; ages 10+

Have you ever gone kayaking? If not, this program is for you! Participants will receive basic kayaking instruction and have the chance to paddle on a calm pond. Kayaks and life jackets will be provided.

May 22 10-11 am Hawthorn Pond Natural Area

May 22 11:30 am-12:30 pm Hawthorn Pond Natural Area

May 22 1:30-2:30 pm Hawthorn Pond Natural Area

## KAYAKING TRIP

\$8/person; ages 13+

Enjoy the sights and sounds of the Pigeon River by kayak as you paddle through the park with a guide. Each trip includes a basic kayaking lesson; no previous experience necessary.

May 23 9:30 am-1:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

May 29 9:30 am-1:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

## GO EXPLORE!



Explore the natural and cultural history of these special parks as well as how past, current, and future projects are actively enhancing both their natural and recreational value.

Jun 5 2-3:30 pm Upper Macatawa Natural Area 

Jun 13 2-3:30 pm Historic Ottawa Beach Parks 

## FROM SAND TO FOREST: MICHIGAN'S DUNES



Freshwater sand dunes are unique landscape features to West Michigan. Walk these trails and discover what makes Rosy Mound and other lakeshore parks so special!

Jun 12 10-11:30 am Rosy Mound Natural Area

## In the parks... after dark

### TWILIGHT NIGHT HIKE

\$5/person; ages 10+

As light of day turns to dark of night, wildlife springs to life! Come experience your favorite parks in a whole new way as you explore them by the light of fading day!



Mar 27 8-9:30 pm Paw Paw Park East 

Apr 23 8:30-10 pm Crockery Creek Natural Area 

### WOODCOCK WALK

\$5/person; ages 12+

Join us for a short presentation followed by watching the sun set to the twitter of displaying birds.

Apr 3 7:30-9 pm Hemlock Crossing Park



Apr 9 7:30-9 pm Grand River Park 

### FROG CALL CHORUS

\$5/person; ages 10+

In spring, as light of day turns to dark of night, wildlife springs to life! Come experience your favorite parks in a whole new way as you explore them by the light of fading day! Bring a flashlight and good walking shoes.

May 7 8:30-10 pm Grand River Park

### WHISTLE OF THE WHIP-POOR-WILL

\$5/person; ages 12+

Introduce yourselves to this summer whistler of the woods! A short outdoor presentation will be followed by a walk in attempt to experience this bird first-hand.

Jun 11 9-11 pm Pigeon Creek Park



Jun 12 9-11 pm Pigeon Creek Park

# 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.

Ottawa County Parks Foundation Community Engagement programs



Did you know the Parks Foundation expanded their support to include nature education? Look for the monarch for activities supported by the Parks Foundation.

Learn more on page 2



## Kids & Family

### LOUIT DISTRICT LIBRARY STORYWALK®

As you explore the meadow and wetlands, read *Mud* and celebrate winter turning to spring! Pages from this children's book will be posted on signs along the trail for your family to read together.

*StoryWalk® series created by Loutit & Spring Lake District Libraries, Ottawa County Parks, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Village of Spring Lake, and City of Grand Haven; made possible through the generosity of Carol Alexander & Kevin Carbarry.*

Mar 15-21 Hemlock Crossing Park

### WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER - FOR KIDS!

Ages 5-12, with a caregiver

Learn about wildlife found in your yards and parks. Each program includes a guided walk and outdoor craft.

Apr 25	3-4:30 pm	Frogs and Toads	Hemlock Crossing Park
May 23	3-4:30 pm	Wood Ducks	Hemlock Crossing Park
Jun 13	3-4:30 pm	Hognose Snakes	Hemlock Crossing Park

### TWILIGHT HIKE

\$5/person; ages 5+

As day turns to night, wildlife springs to life! We'll listen to frog calls, search for nocturnal creatures in the moonlight, and set up a light trap to view insects. Afterward we'll relax around a campfire.

May 21 8:30-10 pm Pigeon Creek Park

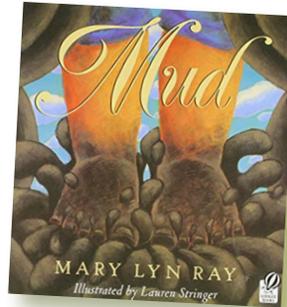
## Birding

### BIRDING WALKS

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

*Bird walks for beginners will introduce you to binocular use, bird identification and field guides and, to common birds in our parks! Binoculars and field guides provided.*

Apr 7	8-10 am	Pine Bend Park
Apr 11	2-3:30 pm	Grand Ravines N for beginners
Apr 14	8-10 am	Crockery Creek Natural Area
Apr 21	8-10 am	Paw Paw Park East
Apr 24	10-11:30 am	Hemlock Crossing for beginners
Apr 28	8-10 am	Ottawa Sands
May 2	2-3:30 pm	Grand Ravines N for beginners
May 5	8-10 am	Upper Macatawa Natural Area
May 12	8-10 am	Historic Ottawa Beach Parks
May 14	7 am-4 pm	Big Day Birding Field Trip*
May 15	10-11:30 am	Hemlock Crossing for beginners
May 19	8-10 am	Stearns Creek
May 22	7 am-5 pm	Greenway Birding Blitz*
May 26	8-10 am	Grand River Park
Jun 2	8-10 am	Connor Bayou



## From Home!

### ASTRONOMY

Ages 12+

These online presentations are hosted by the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association.

A link to the presentation will be sent to registered participants.

Apr 10	7-8 pm	James Webb Space Telescope
May 8	7-8 pm	Summer Night Sky
Jun 12	7-8 pm	Mars Perseverance Rover



Online registration:  
**miOttawa.org/OCPEvents**

Contact Nature Center staff with questions:  
(616) 786-4847 | naturecenter@miottawa.org

Visit our online learning page for more videos and programs: [miOttawa.org/naturetoyou](http://miOttawa.org/naturetoyou)

### LAKESHORE BIRDING

Join us for a stationary lake watch looking for migratory waterfowl, gulls, and shorebirds or a hike through dunes in search of migratory sparrows, warblers, and more.

May 8	8-9:30 am	North Beach Park
May 8	10 am-12 pm	North Beach Park

### BIG DAY BIRDING FIELD TRIP

\$20/session; ages 10+

How many bird species can we find in Ottawa County in one day? Several county parks, as well as other locations, will be searched for waterbirds, raptors, songbirds and more!

May 14	7 am-4 pm	Hemlock Crossing
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### GREENWAY BIRDING BLITZ!

Celebrate the migration by birding along the Pigeon River Greenway! Join us at one or more locations through the day.

May 22	7-9 am	Olive Shores
May 22	9:30-11 am	Pine Bend Park
May 22	12-2 pm	Hemlock Crossing
May 22	3-5 pm	Pigeon Creek Park



[miOttawa.org/Parks](http://miOttawa.org/Parks)



# Outdoors

OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS

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*explore your*  
Ottawa County Parks

  
  
[www.Ottawa.org/Parks](http://www.Ottawa.org/Parks)