



Outdoors

Ottawa County Parks

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2024

Contact us: ocparks@miOttawa.org



Announcements

Parks Strategic Plan - Coming soon!

In 2024, the process of creating a strategic plan for Ottawa County Parks and Recreation will begin. Be a part of the conversation on the future of your local parks! Sign up for email alerts and stay informed of upcoming opportunities for public input here: bit.ly/OCpstrategicplan

Visit: news.miottawa.org/strategicplan

New Recreation Software - Coming soon!

The parks department is upgrading its recreation software to a more user-friendly system in early 2024. If you have an account in our current system, you will be alerted via email and prompted to set up your new account when the system is ready to go. We are excited to provide a better user experience, but know at first this may be difficult. Please call us with any questions you may have!

Stay updated: news.miottawa.org/recsoftware

Sledding Hill Livestream

The Sledding Hill Livestream is now available on our newly launched Parks YouTube channel.



miottawa.info/hillcam



Notice: Parking Lot Closed

The lower parking lots at Grand Ravines - North will be closed January-February.



Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
miottawa.org/parks

Kelly N. Rice - President
Jane Longstreet - Vice President
Linda McAffrey - Secretary
Joe Bush
Kate Harmon

Lukas Hill
Allison Miedema
Jim Miedema
Paul Sachs

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

Joe Moss, Chair
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Jacob Bonnema
Gretchen Cosby
Rebekah Curran
Lucy Ebel

Allison Miedema
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Ski ❄️ Snowshoe ❄️ Sled

Pigeon Creek Park offers groomed cross-country ski trails, a lit sledding hill, ski and snowshoe rentals for adults and children, and both cross-country and skate ski lessons (find a schedule on page 2). Pigeon Creek Lodge will be open throughout the season during good ski conditions offering equipment rental, concessions, and a warm fire. **Reminder:** Hiking, dogs, and horses are **not allowed** at Pigeon Creek Park once winter operations begin.

For more detailed information about winter operations, ski rental, a livestream of the sledding hill and main trail, and a video showcasing all the offerings at Pigeon Creek Park, visit: miottawa.org/winter-rec

Hemlock Crossing offers snowshoe rentals for adults and children at the Nature Center during regular business hours. Children can snowshoe for free with adult rental. While skis are not available to rent, they are welcome on the trails. Dog walking is allowed on the trails on leash.



Plan a fat-tire bike ride at Riley Trails!

Photo by Andrea Pratt

Check trail conditions & equipment rental hours before visiting:
miottawa.org/trails

Get Lakeshore Ready

Prepare for the summer season by purchasing your 2024 permit online! Permits are required at lakeshore parks from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.

ottawacounty.cmrpay.com/dashboard/landing

1) Log in or sign up

2) Apply for New Permit

3) Purchase Permit

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.

Park News & Updates

Habitat Restoration at Pigeon Creek Park

Visitors to Pigeon Creek Park this winter will notice significant changes in certain areas of the park. In early fall, forestry activities were completed on 140 acres of aging pine plantations. These forests were planted with one species of pine, red pine, primarily used for timber production or soil stabilization. Pine plantations, being a monotypic forest type, have lower biodiversity making them less ecologically functional and more prone to diseases and other stressors. Additionally, the red pine's native range lies further north causing them to be stressed in this slightly warmer climate.

For years, the pine plantations at Pigeon Creek have been declining due to disease and lack of diversity. Two fungus-driven diseases, diplopedia tip blight and armillaria root rot, were notably affecting stands at Pigeon, causing some areas of the forest to become unhealthy and even unsafe.

To ensure park visitor safety, the parks department proactively removed unhealthy sections of the forest. Moving forward, staff plans to monitor logged areas to determine if additional steps need to be taken for the restoration of a healthy, more diverse forest system. The removal of pines creates space for the understory trees to flourish. Our team will be monitoring these areas to prevent invasive plants from taking advantage of the newly disturbed soil and establishing themselves in the gaps left by the cut pines.



Learn more: news.miottawa.org/red-pines

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI CLASSES

\$8/person; all lessons offered at Pigeon Creek Park. *Ski rentals are available, rental fee is not included.*

Beginner: Learn about equipment and basic techniques. Ages 10+; one adult must accompany every two children.

Intermediate: For experienced adult skiers wishing to refine their technique and ski more efficiently.

Skate Ski: For experienced adult skiers who want to learn the basics of several techniques. Skate skis required; limited rental available.

Skate	Jan 2	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Jan 6	10-11:30 am
Skate	Jan 11	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Jan 13	10-11:30 am
Skate	Jan 16	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Jan 20	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Jan 25	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Jan 27	10-11:30 am
Beginner	Jan 30	6-7:30 pm
Intermediate	Feb 3	10-11:30 am
Beginner	Feb 8	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Feb 10	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Feb 13	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Feb 17	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Feb 22	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Feb 24	10-11:30 am



DISCOVERING MORE

Monotypic forest types consist of a single species that completely inhabits the area.

Biodiversity is the qualitative measure of biological diversity in an ecosystem.

Diplodia tip blight is a fungus that infects and eventually kills red pines.

Armillaria root rot stunts growth, kills needles, and causes decay in the base of the tree just below the soil surface.

Jenison Mill Segment Dedication



Grand River Greenway

This fall, we celebrated the completion of the Jenison Mill Segment of the Idema Explorers Trail connecting Ottawa and Kent County marked by the Secchia Gateway Arch. A very special thank you to the Secchia family, all of our speakers, volunteers, and friends who joined us to honor Peter Secchia and celebrate this addition to the Idema Explorers Trail. Peter's tireless work and leadership as co-chair of the Grand River Greenway Campaign helped pave the way for the resulting "Grand Connection."

This 1-mile segment connects bike/pedestrian trail users in Georgetown Township to 100-miles plus of trails in Kent County, including Millennium Park, downtown Grand Rapids, and the Grand Rapids riverfront.

Learn more about the greenway here: grandrivergreenway.org



miottawa.org/Parks

Explore a new MDOT Interpretive Exhibit along the M-231 Pedestrian Bridge

The *Ancestors, Archaeology, and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past into the Future* exhibit features three panels: Mijimi Sanjigowaanhsan (Cache Pits), Nmé (Sturgeon), and Manoomin (Wild Rice). These interpretive signs are an important added element to this trail network, helping users to understand the history of those who first inhabited the area. The signs were developed by MDOT in consultation with Michigan's Tribal Nations and Ottawa County Parks. Thank you to everyone involved!



Get Ready to Stay Active this Spring with Step-it-Up

Step-it-Up is a free walking program designed to help you stay active and explore new parks. Participants can look forward to setting & achieving fitness goals, motivation & accountability by logging activity, and much more.

All levels of fitness are welcome!

Sign up to receive an email when registration opens in 2024: miottawa.org/stepitup

Exciting Changes Coming to Kirk Park

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Significant upgrades are coming to Kirk Park thanks to a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant! The project involves renovating the current restroom to make it accessible, adding new changing rooms, and installing a new roof. An existing playground will also be relocated and replaced. Additionally, amenities and signage will be installed to establish Kirk Park as a trailhead for the Lakeshore Drive Pathway, US Bike Route 35, and the Lake Michigan Water Trail. Stay tuned for a dedication event in 2024!

The south access stairs are also being rebuilt. This summer, dog rules at Kirk Park will be revisited which regulate access to the beach. Learn more: news.miottawa.org/kirk-park-renovation



Expressing Gratitude with the Ottawa County Parks Foundation

This time of the year is a great time to reflect on what we are grateful for. Those of us at the Ottawa County Parks Foundation (OCPF) are grateful for Ottawa County Parks and Recreation and their ability to connect our community with nature. We are also grateful for our supporters who help us increase accessibility in our parks, provide new recreational opportunities, and bring children closer to nature.

Studies have shown that feeling thankful can improve sleep, mood, and immunity. Gratitude can decrease depression, anxiety, difficulties with chronic pain, and risk of disease. Studies have also shown that nature has similar effects. Together gratitude and nature are a powerful combination.

A way to combine these two is a gratitude walk. A gratitude walk involves gentle walking for 20 minutes or more, with a calm, grateful state of mind. As you focus on your breathing, your steps, and the surroundings, say quietly aloud things you are grateful for. Use all your senses to soak in positive sights, like ripples of water, trees gently swaying in the wind, or snow falling.

Here is a challenge for you, take a gratitude walk at an Ottawa County Park. If you don't live near an Ottawa County Park, find a park in your local community. Share on Facebook or Instagram and tag [@ottawacountyparksfoundation](https://ottawacountyparksfoundation.org) to let us know which park you are visiting and what you are grateful for. Finally, enjoy the positive forces of gratitude and nature.



"It really works! I took a Gratitude Walk at Rosy Mound, and quietly said aloud many of the things I am grateful for. It really put me in a better frame of mind. I'm so grateful for the wonderful access we have to such beautiful outdoor spaces - and I'm especially grateful to others like me who love and support our parks."

— Bobbi Jones Sabine, OCPF Board Member and Donor

Your Gift Matters

Thanks to donors like Bobbi, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation has helped grow Ottawa County Parks and our services. There's still time to make a gift this year! Scan the QR code to get involved.

Visit: ottawacountyparksfoundation.org/end-of-the-year-donation



Education & Stewardship

Celebrating the Volunteers of Ottawa County Parks

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our volunteers who generously donate their time and expertise each year to support our parks. To show our appreciation and celebrate their achievements, volunteers were invited to join us at the Nature Center at Hemlock Crossing County Park for an appreciation dinner. Special thanks to Jack Leaver for bringing the night to life with great music and to the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA) for leading an observatory program following the event.

Over the last year, 448 individuals have volunteered for a total of 6,815 hours of service. Thank you to our Adopt-a-Park partners, Park Monitors & Stewards, Friends of Ottawa County Parks, and all volunteers in the 100, 500, 1,000, 2,000, and 2,500 hour clubs.

Want to get involved? Visit: miottawa.org/volunteer

Jack Leaver performing for volunteers.



Members of the 2,000 and 2,500 hour club: Alice Hoban, Jeff Cobb, and Don Williams.



Five new organizations joined our Adopt-a-Park program including Reset Effect at Riley Trails.



Park Stewards completed 33 workdays. Thank you for your dedication!

Environmental Field Studies Students Create Paper from Invasive Species

Thanks to guest artist Jane Kramer, students at the OAISD Careerline Tech Center (CTC) were able to create paper from garlic mustard, an invasive species harvested during an Ottawa County Parks service-based workday. Following the paper-making process, students created ink and block printed plant species on the paper they made.

"It's imperative to know the best way to remove each plant in order to avoid spreading seeds and causing further growth. Some plants also require a permit from the DNR for harvesting and transporting."

— Jane Kramer, Guest Artist

An art reception will take place at the Ottawa County Parks Nature Center. Stay tuned for more details!

Learn more: news.miottawa.org/garlicmustardpaper

Support the Environmental Field Studies program by purchasing a Coffee with the Birds calendar featuring pictures from the Mug Club Photo Contest chosen by the students! *Find more info on page 5.*



Top right picture: Student lifts screen from filtered garlic mustard pulp.

Middle picture: Jane Kramer shows students how to blend garlic mustard.

Bottom picture: Student pulls a sheet of garlic mustard pulp from bin.



miottawa.org/Parks

Adventure Awaits: Spring Break with Ottawa County Parks

Join us for an unforgettable Spring Break outside with Ottawa County Parks at our brand NEW all-day, week-long camp! At our camp, we hope to provide a memorable and enriching experience for children that combines the best of nature, outdoor exploration, teamwork, learning, and of course - FUN!

Let your child embark on a journey that will ignite their love for the outdoors, create friendships, and nurture their curiosity about the natural world. For dates, pricing, and more, flip to page 7!

Registration opens on January 1: miottawa.org/ocpevents



Stay Informed on Family-Friendly Programs, Events, & More!

Ottawa County Parks provides enjoyable and educational activities that cater to the whole family, no matter the season. By signing up for our email updates, you'll be the first to know about upcoming events, fun programs for the kiddos, and special promotions.

Scan the QR code to sign up for emails!

bit.ly/ocp-kid-news



Summer Fun

EARLY SPROUTS - AGES 4-5 (W/ CAREGIVER) \$10/session • 9:30-11 am

Early Sprouts will engage caregiver and child with activities interacting in the outdoors. Caregivers will play an active role during the class.

NATURE BUDS - AGES 6-8 \$10/session • 9:30-11:30 am

Nature Buds will explore and engage with nature through activities that may include using dip nets in the wetland, catching insects, and searching for salamanders!

Mark your calendars for some summer fun!

Flying Dragons	Jun 26	Hemlock Crossing
Nature Takes Shape	Jul 10	Hemlock Crossing
Beetle Safari	Jul 17	Hemlock Crossing
Pass the Energy, Please	Jul 24	Hager Park
Eye See It	Jul 31	Hager Park
Pollinator Palooza	Aug 7	Hager Park

Mug Club Photo Contest



This year, we received 85 submissions for the 2023 Coffee with the Birds Mug Club Photo Contest. Thank you to everyone who entered! Our judges had a difficult time choosing a winner, as there were so many excellent submissions, but we are excited to announce the winner...



Jeanne Stoddard took home the grand prize with her striking capture of a Cape May Warbler. Her photo will be featured on the limited edition 2024 Mug Club member mug, which can be purchased for \$25 online or at the Nature Center. A calendar will also be available for \$25 (cash or check only).

Congratulations are also in order for our honorable mentions: a Prothonotary Warbler perched on a branch by Ryan Bebej, a side profile shot of an Eastern Bluebird by Andrew Byerly, a Green Heron in action by Carl Manning, and an Eastern Kingbird enjoying a snack by Lucas Timmer.

Be sure to join us for a Coffee with the Birds program this winter (find schedule on page 6).

Learn more: news.miottawa.org/cwb

Green Heron - Carl M.



Eastern Bluebird - Andrew B.



Prothonotary Warbler - Ryan B.



Eastern Kingbird - Lucas T.

Programs & Activities

Unless otherwise noted: Programs are recommended for ages 12+



Ottawa County Parks
Foundation Community
Engagement programs

Look for the monarch for
activities supported by the
Parks Foundation.



Into Nature

COFFEE WITH THE BIRDS **FREE**

Registration appreciated, ages 10+

Enjoy a hot cup of coffee and some baked goodies as you watch birds at the feeders and discuss various birding topics with a naturalist. Bring your bird questions, curiosities, and stories. Don't forget your favorite mug! *There are 2 sessions of Feeder Watching to choose from: 9:30 and 11:10 am.

Jan 20, 9:30 am-12 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 17, 9:30 am-12 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 16, 9:30 am-12 pm - Hemlock Crossing

WINTER BIRDING FIELD TRIPS

Registration required, \$10/person

Wintertime birding in Ottawa County can be an adventure worth the effort! Come along and see why as we venture to various local birding hotspots of winter. Choose one or both segments of this all day event. Details and meeting location will be emailed in advance to those registered.

Part 1: Winter Waterfowl

Feb 24, 10 am- 1 pm -Various Locations

Part 2: Birding the Barrens

Feb 24, 2-5 pm - Various Locations

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER: OWLS OF OTTAWA COUNTY

Registration required, \$5/person, ages 10+

Did you know that 7 species of owls can be found in Ottawa County? Don't be left in the DARK and come get en-LIGHT-ened on all 7, plus where they can be found, what they sound like, how they hunt at night and more! Afterward, venture into the park to see if you can encounter one.

Mar 1, 7-9 pm - Hemlock Crossing

EQUINOX EXPEDITION

Registration required, \$5/person, ages 10+

The days are getting longer and SPRING OFFICIALLY ARRIVES TODAY! Help celebrate the "Vernal Equinox" by joining us for an evening expedition to find signs of spring along the Grand River.

Mar 20, 7-8:30 pm - Grand River Park 

EARTH ENCOUNTERS: SAND SLEUTHING **FREE**

Registration appreciated

This program will introduce you to a definition of sand as well as many different varieties of it, how it is created and moved, and some of the local landforms associated with it. There will be a presentation, activities, and a short hike.

Mar 24, 3-4:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Recreation & Health

MOONLIGHT NIGHT HIKE

Registration required, \$5/person

Experience your favorite parks in a whole new way as you explore by moonlight! There is an option to use snowshoes when conditions are favorable. Please be sure to complete the snowshoe questionnaire when registering.

Jan 5, 7:30-9 pm - Grand River Park 

Feb 2, 7:30-9 pm - Crockery Creek Natural Area 

Mar 8, 7:30-9 pm - Riley Trails

INTRO TO NATURE JOURNALING

Registration required, \$5/person, ages 18+

Many of us seek ways to better connect with nature. Nature journaling helps us do this and you do not need to know anything about nature, drawing, or writing to begin! Learn how to start a nature journal, a few drawing basics, and some simple tricks to help you be successful.

Jan 6, 10-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 2, 10-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

FIRESIDE YOGA

Registration required, \$10/person, ages 18+

Come practice yoga fireside at the Nature Center! All levels of experience are welcome. *Yoga mats not provided.

Jan 7, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 4, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 25, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 10, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

WINTER WALK

Registration appreciated, ages 8+

Join us for a winter walk to enjoy the winter scenery and discover what nature is up to at this time of year.

Jan 13, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Jan 28, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 10, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 11, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 9, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 10, 1-2:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

NATURE JOURNAL CLUB

Registration required, \$5/person, ages 18+

Gather each month to learn new drawing and writing techniques specific to a theme while enjoying community connection with fellow journalers. *Journals are not provided.

Jan 27, 10-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 24, 10-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 9, 10-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing



Contact the Nature Center:

naturecenter@miottawa.org • (616) 786-4847

Online registration:
[miOttawa.org/OCEvents](https://miottawa.org/OCEvents)



[miOttawa.org/Parks](https://miottawa.org/Parks)

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.

Kids & Families

WINTER NATURE BUDS

Registration required, \$10/child, ages 6-9
Children will experience outdoor adventures and investigate wildlife and habitats through the lens of winter. Register for one, two or all three, but do come out and enjoy our winter season!



Our Frozen Wild

Jan 6, 9:30-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Winter Tales on Winter Trails

Feb 3, 9:30-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Owl Be There

Mar 2, 9:30-11:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER - KIDS!

Registration required, \$5/child, ages 5-10
The Wildlife Encounter - Kids! series introduces children to wildlife found in our own yards, parks, and region. *Adult must remain with child for duration of program.

The Mysterious Mink

Jan 14, 3-4:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Jan 28, 3-4:30 pm - Hager Park

Jump into Snow Fleas

Mar 3, 3-4:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 24, 3-4:30 pm - Hager Park

TUNED INTO NATURE

Registration required, \$5/child, ages 2-4
Kids can bring their favorite grown up to sing songs, dance, and learn about nature together. We'll spend time making and moving to music based on a nature theme and go outside for a walk to explore it outdoors. *Adult must remain with child for duration of program.

Jan 17, 9:30-10:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 14, 9:30-10:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 13, 9:30-10:30 am - Hemlock Crossing

FIRESIDE STORYTIME **FREE**

Registration appreciated, ages 3-8
Snuggle up by the fire with your kids for a relaxing time of seasonally-themed stories and a mug of hot chocolate! Don't forget a comfy pillow and blanket! An optional walk will be offered afterward. Recommended for ages 3 - 8, accompanied by an adult.

Jan 21, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 18, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Mar 17, 3-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing

SNOW FUN! **FREE**

Registration appreciated, ages 5+
Snow can be SO FUN! Come participate in several fun and energetic activities outside in the snow. Make sure to dress for the weather. Program is weather-dependent.

Feb 4, 3-4:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing

Feb 11, 3-4:30 pm - Hager Park

STORYWALKS **FREE**

Pages from a featured book will be posted along a path for your family to read together. StoryWalks are self-guided and available during park hours. Thank you to our local libraries, Loutit District Library & Herrick District Library, for making StoryWalks possible. For more information: miottawa.org/ocpevents

Jan 8-28 The Mitten

Jan 8-28 No Two Alike

Feb 5-18 Hiders Seekers

Feb 5-25 Best in Snow

Feb 5-25 Goodbye Winter

Hemlock Crossing

Paw Paw East

Rosy Mound

Hemlock Crossing

Paw Paw East

Spring Break Camp

NEW
ALL DAY

Registration required, *\$200/child, ages 6-14
Prepare for an unforgettable outdoor adventure this Spring Break with Ottawa County Parks! Our camp offers nature-based opportunities for children to connect with and develop a deep appreciation for the great outdoors.

Registration opens January 1 at miottawa.org/ocpevents

Apr 1-5, 7:30 am-5:30 pm - Pigeon Creek Park

*After care from 5:30-6 pm available for additional cost (\$15)

*Sibling discount available upon request

Special Events

ASTRONOMY PROGRAMS **FREE**

Registration appreciated
Join the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association for an astronomy program. They will have the observatory open and other telescopes available to view from (weather permitting).



Artemis Return to the Moon

Jan 13, 7-8 pm - Hemlock Crossing

NASA/OSIRIS REx Asteroid Return Mission

Feb 10, 7-8 pm - Hemlock Crossing

April Full Solar Eclipse

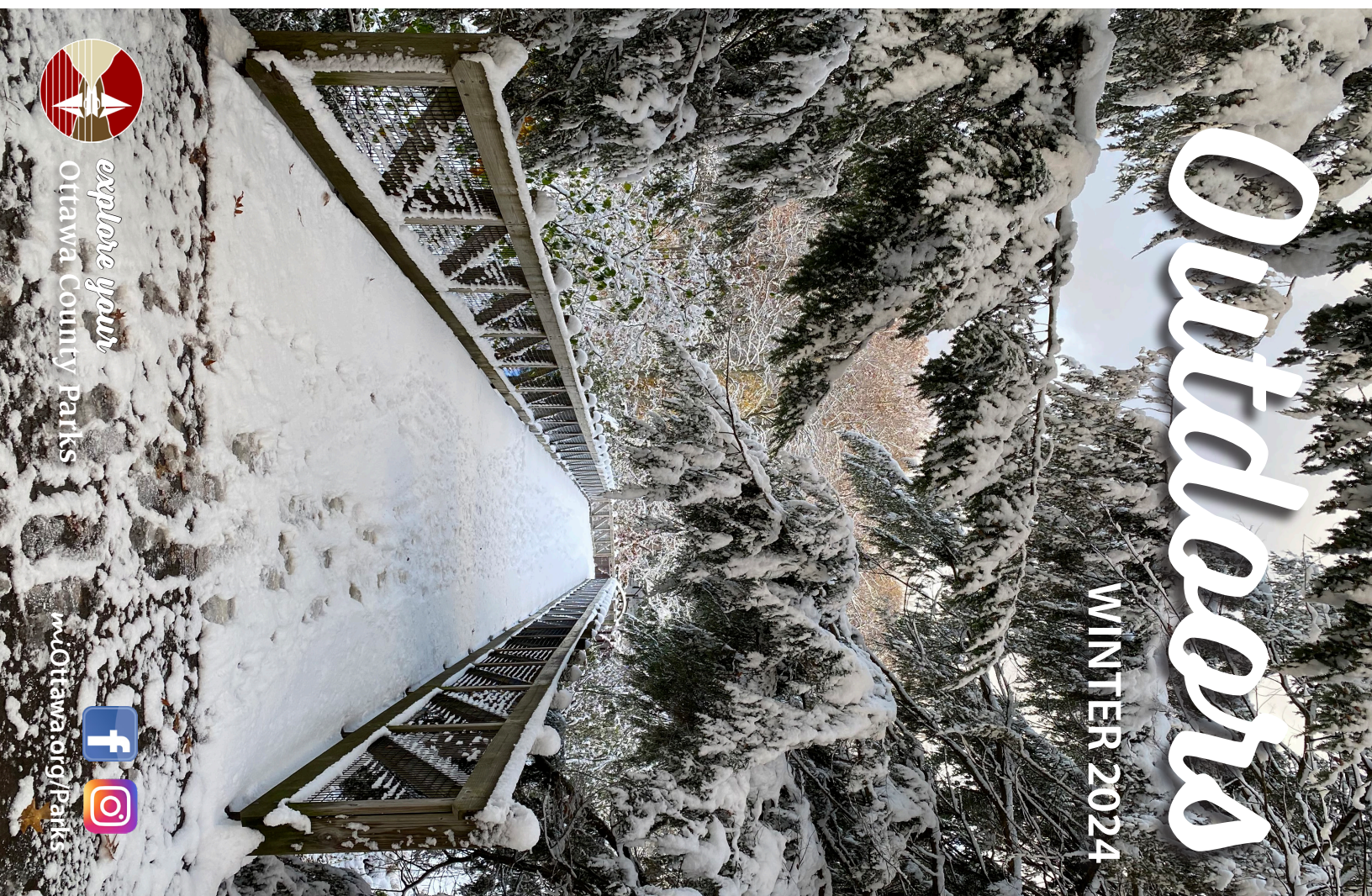
Mar 9, 7-8 pm - Hemlock Crossing

WILD WINTER FAMILY FUN DAY! **FREE**

Registration not required, ages 5-10

Don't hibernate all winter! Combat cabin fever and come to the Nature Center for this fun-filled event. Your family will have several indoor and outdoor activities to complete in order to earn a prize! Come at any time during the event. Designed for families with children 5-10 years old.

Feb 3, 10 am-4 pm - Hemlock Crossing



Outdoors

WINTER 2024



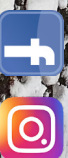
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