



Photo by @lydiaelizabeth

Outdoors

Ottawa County Parks

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2024

Contact us: ocparks@miOttawa.org



Announcements

Park Closures

North Ottawa Dunes and Ottawa Sands will be closed for the annual wildlife management hunt on Friday, November 22 to Monday, November 25. Access is by permission only; those in the parks without permission will be ticketed. Both parks will re-open Tuesday, November 26.

Learn more: miottawa.org/hunting

Strategic Plan

The Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) recently approved the 2024 Strategic Plan. The plan will serve as a compass for the department's next phase of development and service as it continues to provide high quality natural resources and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors of Ottawa County. For more details, flip to page 2!

Verify your Email Address



Our new recreation software is here! To stay updated with program information, reminders, and more, please verify your email address. Missing this step could result in missed communications. If you've already registered, we urge you to verify your email now. After verifying your email, you can personalize your communication settings.

Learn more at news.miottawa.org/recsoftware



Ottawa Sands Grand Re-Opening



October 17, 4-6:30 pm, Ottawa Sands

Join us at the confluence of the Grand River and Lake Michigan Coastal Greenways to celebrate the grand re-opening of Ottawa Sands! Staff will be present rain or shine to answer questions about park developments, ecological restoration, and the Idema Explorers Camp. Remarks & ribbon cutting begin at 4:30 pm. **Please note the grand re-opening will not include the Idema Explorers Camp.*

Flip to page 2 for more information!



Photo by GEI Consultants

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.

Lights at Night with Friends of Ottawa County Parks



December 1-14, Dusk to 10 pm, Pigeon Creek Park

The trails at Pigeon Creek will be decorated with festive lights for two weeks. Discover more about our special nights on page 3!

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
www.Ottawa.org/parks

Kelly N. Rice, President
Jane Longstreet, Vice President
Linda McAffrey, Secretary
Roger Belknap
Joe Bush

Bruce Greenlee
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
Sylvia Rhodea, Vice Chair
Roger Belknap
Roger Bergman

Jacob Bonnema
Gretchen Cosby
Rebekah Curran
Chris Kleinjans

Allison Miedema
Kendra Wenzel
Doug Zylstra

News & Updates

Reviving Ottawa Sands: From Surviving to Thriving



Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway + Grand River Greenway

Collaborative efforts at Ottawa Sands aim to provide improved habitat for wildlife and recreational opportunities for all park visitors. Join us in celebrating the latest improvements during a dedication event. The event will kick off with remarks and a ribbon-cutting ceremony on October 17 at 4:30 pm, followed by:

- Self-guided Park Tour
- Idema Explorers Camp* Sneak Peek
- Paddling the Sag

As you explore, you will see many changes. We are excited to share them with you! Enjoy the park's newest features, such as a paved path around the lake and a day-use area. Don't miss the opportunity to explore a yurt and a treehouse! In addition, signs located throughout the park offer details on various completed aspects of the restoration project. **The grand re-opening will not include the Idema Explorers Camp; camp opening date is TBA.*

Learn more: news.miottawa.org/ottawasands



Aerial view of paved lake loop path



Aerial view of created interdunal wetlands



Scan the QR code
to sign up for
email alerts about
Ottawa Sands!

bit.ly/ottawasandsupdates



Aerial view of constructed dune

All photos courtesy of GEI Consultants

Save the date!

**Ottawa Sands
Grand Re-Opening**

**October 17, 2024
4-6:30 pm
Ottawa Sands**

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission Approves Strategic Plan

The Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) is pleased to share its Strategic Plan with the public. This plan, approved by the OCPRC on August 21, 2024, outlines the department's goals and initiatives.

"The OCPRC has updated the mission statement, developed a new vision statement, and updated strategic initiatives as part of the plan. These tools will allow the OCPRC to build upon the incredible existing park system and help ensure that the OCPRC continue to meet the needs of its growing community and hundreds of thousands of visitors."

— Jason Shamblin, Director

The plan is an evolution of the Commission's past reports, plans, and investments. It details the planning process, goals, and action items, and outlines the steps OCPRC will take to ensure successful implementation.

We invite all residents and visitors to review the plan and learn more about the future of Ottawa County Parks and Recreation. The full Strategic Plan is available online at: miottawa.org/strategicplan



Scan the QR code
to read the 2024
Strategic Plan!

Our Mission

To enhance well-being by stewarding a connected system of natural communities and promoting outdoor experiences



Our Vision

To be a leader in creating a legacy of expansive, accessible, and biodiverse natural communities for all to enjoy



miottawa.org/Parks

Lights at Night

December 1- December 14, Dusk to 10 pm, Pigeon Creek Park

Last year, the Friends of Ottawa County Parks (FOOCP) had a remarkable turnout at their annual Holiday Luminary Event. Due to its success, this year's event is expanding! Join FOOCP for an illuminated night-time trail experience. From December 1 through December 14, a "Wow Trail" at Pigeon Creek will be decorated with festive lights! The beloved "Luminary Trail" from past events will return to close out the event on December 13 and 14. Don't forget to join us for a special night!

Children's Night

December 6, 5:30-7:30 pm

Bring your families for a special children's night!

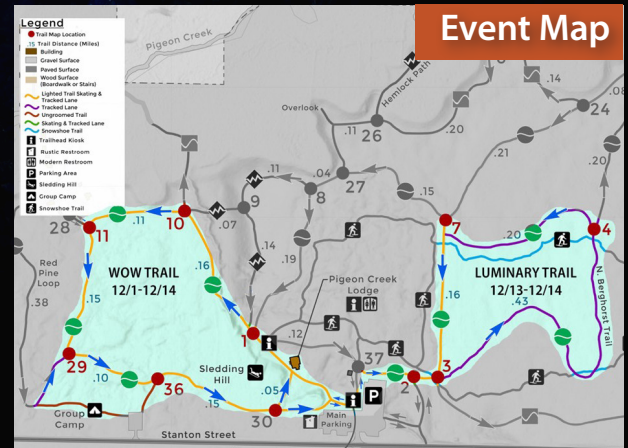
Activities include:

- Stories around the campfire
- Craft a pinecone bird feeder in the Lodge
- Explore the "Wow Trail" (see map to right)
- Lodge concessions available (\$)

Luminary Nights

Dec 13-14, 5:30-7:30 pm

We hope you are able to join us for this end of the year celebration!

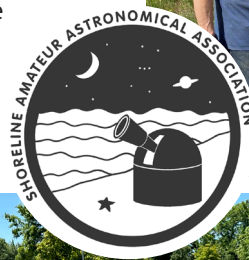


Solar Telescope Addition to Observatory

Pigeon River Greenway

Exciting developments are underway with the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA). This summer, the SAAA initiated the building of a custom steel pedestal to accommodate a Meade Coronado Solar Max III H-Alpha telescope for sun observation. Positioned beside the observatory building, the solar telescope will be used for viewing our local star during daylight events. Look out for future opportunities to keep your eyes on the sky with the SAAA!

Learn more: miottawa.org/observatory



Friday Public Viewing Nights

The observatory is open for public viewing on Friday evenings throughout the year courtesy of the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association.

These events are weather dependent and are cancelled in the event of overcast skies. Cancellations are noted on this page: holland-saaa.org

Please check the calendar before going to the park!

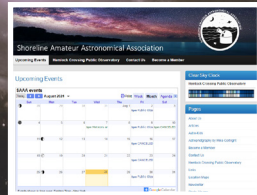


Photo by Mike Cortright



Fall Color Tour

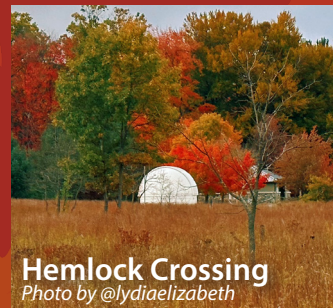
Witnessing the fall colors in Ottawa County Parks is an experience not to be missed. Lace up your hiking boots and see where our trails take you!

Share your fall photos with us to be featured on our social media:

news.miottawa.org/fall-pictures



Upper Macatawa NA
Photo by Todd Swanson



Hemlock Crossing
Photo by @lydiaelizabeth



Spring Grove
Photo by Todd Swanson

Education & Outreach



For all Parks related news, visit:
news.miottawa.org/departments/parks

Fall Native Plant Sale

The Ottawa Conservation District will be hosting their fall Native Plant Sale at the Nature Center at Hemlock Crossing on Saturday, October 5, from 9 am-1 pm. The sale will offer a wide assortment of Michigan-grown native flowering plants, garden kits, and grasses as supplies last. For questions, please reach out to ottawacd@macd.org or call the office at 616-842-5852 Ext. 5.

Learn more: ottawacd.org/native-plant-sales



Stewardship Grant Fund – Matching Donation Challenge

You have an opportunity to make a substantial impact on our community and environment. By participating in the Statema Stewardship Fund Matching Donation Challenge, you can help the Friends of Ottawa County Parks (FOOCP), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, approve more grants for youth groups focusing on stewardship projects and nature education.

If FOOCP raises \$1,500 in donations before October 15, a generous Friends member will match it with another \$1,500, doubling the impact. The member's company will also match their \$1,500 contribution, transforming the initial \$1,500 into a total of \$4,500 for upcoming grant projects. Your donation will help more students attend a nature education field trip, support the natural resources of Ottawa County, and much more.

Let's see what a few good friends can accomplish!



Here's how you can get involved:

- Write a check to 'Friends of Ottawa Co Parks' noting Statema Fund on the memo line.
- Mail it to FOOCP, PO Box 84, Lamont, MI 49430.
- Share your contribution story with friends and encourage them to join the challenge!

Volunteer with us on Service Saturdays

This fall, we will be hosting a Service Saturday on the third Saturday of each month. Volunteer with us to help protect wildlife habitats and native plant communities. Equipment and training will be provided. All ages are welcome!

Register online: bit.ly/OCPvolunteer

Type	Date	Time	Location
Woody Invasive Removal	Sep 21	10 am-12 pm	Hager Park
Seed Collection	Oct 19	1-4 pm	Riley Trails
Woody Invasive Removal	Nov 16	10 am-12 pm	Ottawa Sands
Seed Processing	Dec 21	10 am-12 pm	Hemlock Crossing

What to know:

- Closed toe shoes and long pants are recommended.
- Bring water bottle, insect repellent, and sunscreen (if desired).
- All tools, drinking water, and snacks will be provided.
- If constant rain/snow or storms are forecast, the service day will be cancelled.



Calling all Teachers!



Ottawa County Parks & Recreation is now scheduling field trips for the 2024-2025 school year, and we'd love for your class to experience the magic of learning in nature.

Our field trips are designed with students and teachers in mind, aligning with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) while sparking curiosity, discovery, and fun! We offer nature-based experiences for students from Pre-K to 12th grade across a variety of beautiful parks, including Hemlock Crossing, Grand River Park, Grand Ravines, and Connor Bayou.

Whether you're looking to enhance your science lessons or provide a memorable experience in the great outdoors, we have something for every class.

Get started at miottawa.org/fieldtrips



Mug Club Photo Contest

Have you taken a bird photo in Ottawa County in 2024 that would look great on our 2025 Mug Club limited edition mug? We want to see it! **Submission deadline is October 31, 2024.**

How to enter:

Submit original image files (up to 3/person) online: news.miottawa.org/mugclubcontest

Mug Club Membership

2025 Mug Club Memberships will be available for sale for \$25. Members receive a limited edition mug and fun birding perks throughout the year. Funds raised through the Mug Club support birding programs. The mugs make great gifts!

Sign up for birding updates for more information about Mug Club: miottawa.org/birding



2024 Bird of the Year:
Cape May Warbler by
Jeanne Stoddard



The winning photo will be revealed in November at the Coffee with the Birds Mug Reveal event (more details on page 7).

Volunteer Spotlight: CTC Environmental Field Studies

Thank you to CTC Environmental Field Studies students and other hardworking volunteers who cleaned up over 1,350 pounds of trash at a historic dump site along the Pigeon River this summer. After removing trash, they returned to the site to place live stakes, willow cuttings, that will grow roots and stabilize the riverbank. We are grateful to have so many amazing community members caring for our parks.

Get started volunteering at miottawa.org/volunteer



Ottawa County Parks Foundation

The Ottawa County Parks Foundation raises funds to support the Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission in acquiring land, building parks, and offering park services and nature education programs for Ottawa County residents and visitors. The Foundation has been instrumental in developing the Grand River Greenway, enhancing nature education opportunities, and other initiatives. Want to learn more about the Ottawa County Parks Foundation?

Scan the QR code to read the Ottawa County Parks Foundation's annual newsletter.

If you prefer a print copy, please contact: angela@ottawacountyparksfoundation.org or (616) 215-6544



SCAN
ME!



Programs & Activities

Unless otherwise noted, registration closes 24 hours prior to the activity.



Ottawa County Parks
Foundation Community
Engagement Programs

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



Explore Ottawa Sands!

OTTAWA SANDS GRAND RE-OPENING

Join us in celebrating the latest improvements at Ottawa Sands during a dedication event. Explore the park's newest features, such as a paved path around the lake and a day-use area, and tour a yurt and treehouse.

*Remarks and ribbon cutting at 4:30 pm.

Oct 17 4-6:30 pm Ottawa Sands



COLORS BY KAYAK - GRAND RIVER

Registration required, Res-\$25 / Non-Res-\$30 (ages 12+)

Bask in the glory of the fall colors on this leisurely guided kayak trip along the shores of the Grand River.

Oct 5 10 am-12 pm Ottawa Sands

Oct 5 1-3 pm Ottawa Sands

Oct 19 10 am-12 pm Ottawa Sands

Oct 19 1-3 pm Ottawa Sands

MOONLIGHT KAYAK TRIP

Registration required, Res-\$25 / Non-Res-\$30 (ages 12+)

Join us on this special guided nighttime kayak trip at Ottawa Sands! Kayaking experience is required.

Oct 16 7-9 pm Ottawa Sands

FAMILY NATURE DAY: HELPING NATURE **FREE**

Registration appreciated (all ages)

Bring the whole family and explore nature with activities, a craft, and more! Find out more about how people help nature and explore the projects completed at Ottawa Sands.

Oct 19 10 am-4 pm Ottawa Sands

OTTAWA SANDS HIKES **FREE**



Registration appreciated (ages 12+)

The Ottawa Sands landscape is defined by centuries of shifting. This hike is a first-hand examination of the complexities of the park's history as well as where it's heading into the future. Hikes are 2-4 pm at Ottawa Sands.

Oct 20 | Nov 10

Oct 27 | Nov 17

Nov 3

NATURALLY SPEAKING: THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF OTTAWA SANDS **FREE**



Registration appreciated (ages 12+)

The history of Ottawa Sands is as deep as the lake that stands as its centerpiece. Join us for this speaking series at other park locations to discuss Ottawa Sands!

Oct 3 7-8:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

Nov 7 7-8:30 pm Grand Ravines Lodge



Look for this symbol to find
more programs at Ottawa Sands!

Into Nature

BIRDING OUTINGS **FREE**



Registration appreciated (ages 12+)

Join us as we search for warblers, sparrows, and more on these birding walks that highlight parks all around the county.

Oct 5 9-11 am Bird Walk Ottawa Sands

Oct 6 1-4 pm Raptor Watch Mt. Pisgah

Oct 9 9-11 am Bird Walk Grand Ravines

Oct 23 9-11 am Bird Walk Hemlock Crossing

Nov 6 10 am-12 pm Bird Walk Riley Trails

Nov 20 10 am-12 pm Bird Walk Stearns Creek

EARTH ENCOUNTERS: GRAND RAVINES **FREE**

Registration appreciated (ages 8+)

The story of the ravines along the Grand River has many chapters. We'll explore the setting, the soils, and the human impacts on this landscape as we hike the trails at Grand Ravines.

Oct 12 3-4:30 pm Grand Ravines - North

WATERFOWL FIELD TRIPS

Registration required, Res-\$10 / Non-Res-\$15 (ages 12+)

Witness the spectacle of fall waterfowl migration!

Oct 26 8 am-12 pm Grand Haven Area

Oct 26 1-5 pm Muskegon Wastewater

AWARENESS, ART, & ACTION: SEEDS PLEASE!

Registration required, Res-\$10 / Non-Res-\$15 (ages 12+)

Seeing seeds? Us too! Join us for a seedy hike with a naturalist, then learn how to write and illustrate what you observed and learned. We'll wrap up by helping collect seeds for the Ottawa County Parks seed bank.

Nov 9 1-3 pm Hemlock Crossing

Kids & Families

TUNED INTO NATURE

Registration required, Res-\$5 / Non-Res-\$6 (ages 2-4)

Kids ages 2-4 can bring their favorite grown up to sing songs, dance, and learn about nature together.

Oct 16 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Nov 13 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Dec 11 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

FAMILY NATURE DAYS **FREE**



Registration appreciated (all ages)

Bring the whole family and explore nature with activities, a craft, and more! There's a different theme and location for each date.

Oct 19 10 am-4 pm Helping Nature at Ottawa Sands

Nov 16 10 am-4 pm Turkey Trot at Hemlock Crossing

FALL FEST FAMILY CAMPFIRE **FREE**



Registration appreciated (all ages)

Celebrate the fall season by spending an evening around the campfire. This event will include fun games, activities, and more.

Oct 25 5:30-9:30 pm Pigeon Creek Park

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

Online Registration:
miOttawa.org/OCEvents



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



The Macatawa River Greenway connects parks along the Macatawa River.

Recreation & Health

COLORS BY KAYAK - PIGEON RIVER

Registration required, Res-\$25 / Non-Res-\$30 (ages 12+)
Enjoy the fall colors on this leisurely guided kayak trip down the Pigeon River. Kayak included in fee. *See Ottawa Sands section for more!*

Oct 13 1-5 pm Hemlock Crossing

MOONLIGHT NIGHT HIKES

Registration required, Res-\$5 / Non-Res-\$6 (ages 12+)
Experience your favorite parks in a whole new way and see what nocturnal creatures lurk there as you explore by moonlight!

Oct 18 8-10 pm Ottawa Sands

Nov 15 7-9 pm Riley Trails

Dec 13 7-9 pm Pigeon Creek Park - South

NATURE JOURNALING

Registration required, Res-\$5 / Non-Res-\$6 (ages 18+)
Gather to learn new drawing and writing techniques specific to a theme while enjoying community connection. Journals are not provided. **Introduction program geared towards beginners*

Oct 26 10-11:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Oct 26* 1-2:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

Nov 9 10-11:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Dec 14 10-11:30 am Hemlock Crossing

THRU HIKES **FREE**

Registration appreciated (ages 12+)
Get out for a walk to revel in the seasonal changes of fall. You'll venture all the way THRU these amazing Greenway Parks.

Oct 1 5:30-7 pm Upper Macatawa NA - West

Oct 8 5:30-7 pm Jenison Mill Trail

Oct 12 9-10:30 am Jenison Mill Trail

Oct 12 11 am-12:30 pm Grand River Park

Oct 12 2-4 pm Riverside Park

Oct 15 5:30-7 pm Grand River Park

Oct 22 5:30-7 pm Connor Bayou

Oct 29 5:30-7 pm Ottawa Sands

Nov 5 5:30-7 pm Pigeon Creek

Thru Hikes are free or reduced cost thanks to the support of the Ottawa County Parks Foundation's health & wellness initiative!



NEW! - ALL DAY THRU HIKES

Registration required (ages 12+)
Res-\$15 / Non-Res-\$20

Join us for an all day thru hike event with transportation!

Grand River Greenway - Hike ten miles along three complete segments of the Idema Explorers Trail.

10/12 9 am-4 pm Various Parks

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway - Hike five miles from Ottawa Sands to PJ Hoffmaster State Park.

11/9 10 am-2 pm Ottawa Sands + North Ottawa Dunes

Special Events

STORYWALKS **FREE**

Pages from a featured book will be posted along a path for your family to read together during park hours.

Visit: news.miottawa.org/storywalks

Oct 1-Oct 31	Dreamers	Ottawa Sands
Oct 7-Oct 20	Red Knit Cap Girl	Pine Bend
Oct 21-Nov 3	On a Gold-Blooming Day	Paw Paw Park West
Nov 4-Nov 24	Dreamers/Sonadores	Hemlock Crossing
Nov 18-Dec 1	Bear Says Thanks	Paw Paw Park East



Thank you to our local libraries for making StoryWalks possible!

FALL NATIVE PLANT SALE

Join the Ottawa Conservation District for their fall Native Plant Sale. Learn more: ottawacd.org/native-plant-sales

Oct 5 9 am-1 pm Hemlock Crossing

ASTRONOMY PROGRAMS **FREE**

Join the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association for an astronomy presentation in the Nature Center, followed by viewing of the night sky (weather/cloud cover permitting). Learn more: holland-saaa.org

Fall and Winter Sky

Oct 12 7-8 pm Hemlock Crossing

How to Purchase a Telescope

Nov 9 7-8 pm Hemlock Crossing

WHEELIE SCARY RIDE WITH VELO KIDS

Grab your favorite Halloween costume, your bike, and your helmet and join us for a Velo Kids Wheelie Scary bike ride. Learn more: velo-kids.org

Oct 27 2-4 pm Riley Trails

COFFEE WITH THE BIRDS MUG REVEAL **FREE**

Be the first to know the winners of the 2024 Mug Club Photo Contest and which photo will be on the new mug! An entertaining birding presentation will follow.

Nov 26 7-9 pm Hemlock Crossing

COFFEE WITH THE BIRDS **FREE**

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! More info: miOttawa.org/birding

Dec 7	Session 1	9:30-10:20 am	Hemlock Crossing
	Tidbit	10:30-11 am	Hemlock Crossing
	Session 2	11:10 am-12 pm	Hemlock Crossing

LIGHTS AT NIGHT **FREE**

Join the Friends of Ottawa County Parks for an illuminated trail experience as Pigeon Creek is decorated with festive lights for two weeks. *See page 3 for more information.*

Dec 1-14 Dusk-10 pm Pigeon Creek



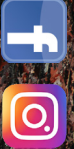
Ottawa

FALL 2024

Photo by Brady O'Brien



explore your
Ottawa County Parks



www.Ottawa.org/Parks



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Ottawa County Parks &
Recreation Commission
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West Olive, Michigan 49460