



Outdoors

Ottawa County Parks

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2023

Contact us: ocparks@miOttawa.org
Nature Center: 616-786-4847



Ski ❄️ Snowshoe ❄️ Sled

Pigeon Creek Park offers a groomed, lit sledding hill and cross-country ski trails, ski and snowshoe rentals for adults and children, and both cross-country and skate ski lessons. Pigeon Creek Lodge will be open throughout the season during good ski conditions offering equipment rental, concessions, and a warm fire. Check hours and conditions before you make the drive: miOttawa.org/trails

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. While skis are not available to rent, they are welcome on the trails. Dog walking is allowed on the trails on leash.

For rental info, visit: miOttawa.org/winter-rec

StoryWalk Snowshoe Events

January 21, 10 am-12 pm - Riley Trails

February 25, 10 am-12 pm - Paw Paw East 

If conditions are favorable for snowshoeing, there will be an opportunity for children to try out some snowshoes. There is no cost, and these events are for ages 5+.

Check miOttawa.org/trails on Friday evening for a snow report. Snowshoe events are **ONLY** happening if there is adequate snow.



Get Summer-Camp Ready!

Prepare for the summer season by creating an account in Perfect Mind. Find more information about Summer Camps on page 6!

countyofottawaparksandrec.perfectmind.com

- 1) Log in/sign up
- 2) Select Summer Camps
- 3) Select Activity
- 4) Register



REMINDER: the Grand Ravines (North) lot will be closed January-February.

Check trail conditions & equipment rental hours: miOttawa.org/trails

Certain trails are only groomed intermittently by volunteers. Updates will be on the trail conditions website.

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

Joe Bush
Kate Harmon
Lukas Hill
Jane Longstreet
Linda McAffrey
Jim Miedema

Amanda Price
Kelly Rice
Paul Sachs
Board of Commissioner appointees (TBA)



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

Roger Belknap
Roger Bergman
Jacob Bonnema
Gretchen Cosby

Rebekah Curran
Lucy Ebel
Allison Miedema
Joe Moss

Sylvia Rhodea
Kyle Terpstra
Doug Zylstra

Project Updates

Observatory Grand Opening

On October 8, a grand opening was held for the NEW observatory at Hemlock Crossing. The completion of this project was made possible with support from the SAAA, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission, Friends of Ottawa County Parks, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation, as well as many members of our community who made financial contributions, large and small, to support this project. We want to thank the hundreds of people who came to view this addition to our Parks. We look forward to the ways in which this new development will enrich our community. For more details, visit: news.miottawa.org/public-observatory

The public calendar is now LIVE! Click the entries in the calendar for public viewing dates and details, as well as any weather cancellations. Visit, miottawa.org/observatory and scroll to the bottom!

Do you want to become a member of the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA)?

Apply for a membership to the SAAA! Some of the exclusive member benefits include:

- Monthly meetings and fellowship
- Use of the club's telescopes
- Public observing sessions

To learn more about the SAAA, attend one of their monthly meetings or public outreach programs!

- Annual Single/Family Membership \$32.00
- Annual Junior/Senior Membership \$22.00



People waiting in line to view the observatory



Showing off the 16-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope



Scan the QR code to be taken to the SAAA membership application form!

holland-saaa.org/membership-info

Grand River Greenway Updates



Did you know these segments of trail are supported by Ottawa County Parks Foundation donors? Check out pg 3 for more info!



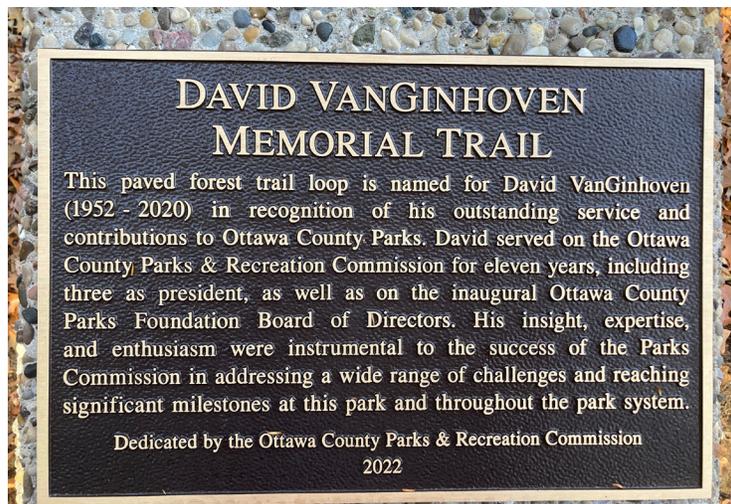
THRU hike participants hiking along a new section of trail that connects Grand Ravines to Grand River Park! The Bill Idema Moraine Nature Segment at Grand Ravines opened in November.



The Secchia segment is nearly complete! We are still awaiting the final installation of the arch, but the boardwalks and trails are open for use. Stay tuned for dedication events coming in 2023!

David VanGinhoven Trail Dedication

On October 27, a dedication event was held for the David VanGinhoven Memorial Trail located at Hemlock Crossing. The plaque honors David's 11 years of service and dedication to Ottawa County Parks and the Commission board. For more pictures and a map of the trail, visit: news.miottawa.org/vanginhoven-dedication



Park and Recreation Commission

We would like to thank the outgoing Commissioners that served on the Parks and Recreation Commission. Thank you for your leadership and all of the hours dedicated to Ottawa County Parks! We wish you success and happiness in all of your future endeavors.



Phil Kuyers served for 22 years. His favorite parks are Connor Bayou, Riverside, Pigeon Creek, Rosy Mound, and North Ottawa Dunes!



Jim Holtvluwer (pictured with his wife Rachel) served for 11 years, and his favorite park is Hager Park.



Greg DeJong served for two years, and his favorite park is Grand Ravines.

Your gift matters

Thanks to donors, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation has helped grow Ottawa County Parks and our services, providing even more opportunities to enjoy nature. Your continued support helps us do this work. There's still time to make a gift this year!



Scan the QR code or visit: ottawacountyparksfoundation.org/end-of-the-year-donation

Foundation Board Members: Tim Stoecker and Alice Hoban



Tim Stoecker joined the Ottawa County Parks Foundation Board of Directors in 2016 when we were still working on obtaining our 501(c)3 status. During that time, Tim volunteered as a committee member on the Foundation's first capital campaign, helping to raise funds for the Grand River Greenway. Since the founding of the Foundation he has served on the Finance and Investment Committee, and we hope he will continue to do so. Tim has always been available to provide just the right language when drafting new policies for the Foundation. He has regularly sponsored our annual fundraising event and hosted a table.

Alice Hoban also joined the Ottawa County Parks Foundation Board of Directors in 2016 and played a key role in the formation of the Foundation. She set up our endowments with the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation and served as Treasurer until 2018. During her tenure as Treasurer, she took care of the mail, processed donations and bills, and sat as chair of the Finance and Investment Committee. Alice currently serves as co-chair of the Donor Engagement Committee; a role we hope she will continue. She has hosted a table every year at our annual event and is a terrific fundraiser.

Tim and Alice have been an integral part of helping us get to where we are today. Thank you, Tim and Alice, for your dedication to Ottawa County Parks and Recreation and the Ottawa County Parks Foundation!

Education & Stewardship

Planting Pawpaws at Paw Paw Park



Macatawa River Greenway

Thanks to a generous donation by Yanfeng through their iCare program, Paw Paw Park finally has its namesake tree. Pawpaws are tropical-looking understory trees that grow naturally along rivers in Southwest Michigan. Although there were only a couple of recently planted pawpaws at the park, prior to European settlement, there were likely more. Therefore, OCPR staff were grateful when Yanfeng (YF) offered to purchase and plant 65 pawpaw plants to establish Paw Paw Park as a destination to learn about this unique species. Yanfeng's iCare program supports the community through project-based grants that are nominated by Yanfeng employees.

“Even though this is our first year doing an iCare project with the Ottawa County Parks, our team has been volunteering annually for the last eight years or so. Most of our work has been at Riley Trails through the Adopt-a-Park program. We were excited to work at Paw Paw Park and give back.”

-Darby Goodemoot

Darby Goodemoot is a Senior Manager of Costing from Yanfeng who submitted the project to the company's grant program. Thank you! For more info, visit: news.miottawa.org/pawpaws-planting



REMINDER:

Although pawpaws are edible, please refrain from picking the fruit within Ottawa County Parks. The seeds within the pawpaws are needed to continue the spread of this species within our parks!



Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Update

Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway

Ottawa County Parks staff, volunteers, and interns started treatments for hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) in 2019. Between the beginning of 2019 and now, 2,814 of the most imperiled hemlock trees in the Parks system have been treated. Using a systemic insecticide that will protect each hemlock for 5-7 years, parks staff prioritized hemlock populations that were already infested or close to known infestations of HWA. Lakeshore parks are considered the next highest priority due to their proximity to the lake which is a major flyway for migratory birds. This migration of birds along the coast is a significant mode of transport for HWA.

Parks that have been treated include Historic Ottawa Beach Parks, North Ottawa Dunes, Ottawa Sands, Riley Trails, and Tunnel Park. Eight County properties have undergone preliminary surveys including all but two lakeshore parks. The two remaining lakeshore properties, Kirk Park, and Olive Shores will be surveyed this winter.

Learn more: saveMIhemlocks.org



Never heard of HWA?

These tiny forest pests secrete white wax as they feed on sap from hemlock shoots and branches. This feeding can kill needles, shoots, and over time the entire tree. More than 100 million mature hemlocks in Michigan are at risk of being affected by this insect, especially along the lakeshore!

Mug Club Photo Contest



This year we had 95 entries to the 2022 Coffee with the Birds Mug Club Photo Contest representing a wide variety of bird species and Ottawa County locations. Thank you to everyone who entered! There were many amazing photos, and our judges had a difficult time, but a winner was chosen...



Our winner this year is Mike Bergeon for his breathtaking photo of a Cedar Waxwing feeding. His photo is featured on the limited-edition 2023 Mug Club member mug which can be purchased for \$25 online or in person at the Nature Center.

Common Redpoll



Evening Grosbeak



Carolina Wren



Northern Cardinal

Volunteer Spotlight: Park Stewards

In 2022, there were 39 Friday Park Steward workdays at 24 different properties! Park Steward volunteers have contributed nearly 600 hours of their time during those workdays. Thank you to all of the dedicated Park Stewards who help keep our Parks in great condition! We appreciate your attentive and thorough work removing invasives, collecting seeds, surveying animals, and much more. Keep up the great work! Learn more about how to join below.

Consider becoming a Park Steward!

This position assists the Ottawa County Parks' Natural Resource Management team with wildlife monitoring, invasive species removal, native plantings, and more. A steward must be 16 years or older and receive onsite orientation and training. Fill out a volunteer application to get started!

Learn more here: miOttawa.org/volunteer



Congratulations are also in order for our honorable mentions: Chris Sprik for her photo of a Common Redpoll braving the snow; Carl Manning for his striking capture of an Evening Grosbeak; Lonny Garris for his excellent shot of a Carolina Wren singing, and June Kuiper for her crisp picture of a Northern Cardinal.

Be sure to join us for a Coffee with the Birds program this winter (schedule on page 7). Learn more: news.miOttawa.org/cwb

NEW! 2023 Photo Contest Calendar

2023 Mug Club Memberships and calendars are for sale! They make great gifts, help support Coffee with the Birds, and feed the birds at the Nature Center. Buy a membership online and pick up at the Nature Center. Don't forget a calendar; they are available in-shop only!



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.



Recreation

NATURE JOURNAL CLUB

Registration required, \$5/person, 10+
Gather each month to learn new drawing and writing techniques specific to the theme and enjoy connecting with fellow journalers.

Jan 28	10-11:30 am	Hemlock Crossing
Feb 18	10-11:30 am	Pine Bend
Mar 18	10-11:30 am	Connor Bayou



FIRESIDE YOGA

Registration required, \$5/person, 18+
Come practice yoga fireside at the Nature Center! All levels of experience are welcome. *Yoga mats not provided.

Feb 26	3-4 pm	Hemlock Crossing
Mar 19	3-4 pm	Hemlock Crossing

INTRODUCTION TO NATURE JOURNALING

Registration required, \$5/person, 10+
Learn how to start a nature journal, a few drawing basics, and some simple tricks to help you be successful.

Mar 11	1-2:30 pm	Connor Bayou
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Summer Camps

EARLY SPROUTS - AGES 4-5 (W/ CAREGIVER)

\$7/session • 9:30-11 am

Activities in this camp will engage caregiver and child interactions in the outdoors. Caregivers will play an active role during camp.

NATURE BUDS - AGES 6-8

\$7/session • 9:30-11:30 am

Explore and engage with nature! Activities may include using dip nets in our wetland, scooping up butterflies in insect nets, and searching for salamanders.

Details & sign up: miOttawa.org/ocpevents

(Not so) Creepy Crawlies	Jun 28	Hemlock Crossing
Hooray for Herpetology	Jul 12	Hemlock Crossing
Dealing with Decomposers	Jul 19	Hemlock Crossing
Animals in Action	Jul 26	Hager Park
Things with Wings	Aug 2	Hager Park
Puzzling Plants	Aug 9	Hager Park

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 17	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Jan 21	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Jan 26	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Jan 28	10-11:30 am
Beginner	Jan 31	6-7:30 pm
Intermediate	Feb 4	10-11:30 am
Beginner	Feb 9	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Feb 11	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Feb 14	6-7:30 pm
Beginner	Feb 18	10-11:30 am
Intermediate	Feb 23	6-7:30 pm
Skate	Feb 25	10-11:30 am

THEMED WALKS

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

*All themed walks will be held at Hemlock Crossing.

Bear Paws: About Snowshoes	Jan 28	1-2:30 pm
Cache-ing In	Jan 29	1-2:30 pm
Needle-leafed Trees	Feb 25	10-11:30 am
Winter Silhouettes	Feb 26	1-2:30 pm
Re-defining Red Pines	Mar 11	1-2:30 pm

EARLY SPRING WALK

Join us for an early spring walk on the trails. You never know what you will discover along the way. Registration not required, but appreciated.

Mar 19	1-2 pm	Hemlock Crossing
Mar 26	1-2 pm	Pine Bend



A very special thank you to Friends of Ottawa County Parks for providing the hot chocolate for our winter programs!
Become a member: friendsofocp.org

Questions? Contact the Nature Center:

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

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.

Register online:
miottawa.org/OCEvents

Natural Resources

MOONLIGHT NIGHT HIKE

Registration required, \$5/person



Experience the nip of cold on your nose and the crunch of snow under your feet as you explore the park by the light of the moon! If snow conditions allow, we will snowshoe. Bring your own or reserve a pair when you register.

Feb 3 7:30-9 pm Connor Bayou

Mar 3 7:30-9 pm Pine Bend

ASTRONOMY PROGRAMS AT HEMLOCK CROSSING

Programs and stargazing are hosted by the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association at Hemlock Crossing. If conditions allow, the observatory will be open.

Feb 11 7-8 pm Artemis I - Mission Update

Mar 11 7-8 pm The Spring Sky

GEOLOGY OF HEMLOCK CROSSING

Come broaden your understanding of how the landscape of this park was formed with an outdoor educator.

Feb 18 3-4:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

COFFEE WITH THE BIRDS



Enjoy coffee and baked goodies as you watch the birds at the feeders. Bring your bird questions, curiosities, and stories. *The program will be in-person and live-streamed.*

Session 1: 9:30-10:20 am / Session 2: 11:10 am-12:00 pm

Birding Tidbits (bite-sized bird presentations): 10:30-11:00 am

Jan 21 9:30 am-12 pm Hemlock Crossing

Feb 11 9:30 am-12 pm Hemlock Crossing

Mar 18 9:30 am-12 pm Hemlock Crossing

WINTER BIRDING FIELD TRIP

Registration required, \$10/person

Wintertime birding can be an adventure worth the effort! Come along as we venture to local birding hotspots. Details and meeting location will be emailed to those registered.

Feb 18 Part 1 10 am-1 pm Pigeon Lake Area

Feb 18 Part 2 1-5 pm Hemlock Crossing

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS - WINTER'S GHOSTS: SNOWY OWLS

Come explore the natural history of these arctic visitors, the phenomenon of their winter irruptions to the south, and where you might be able to view one yourself.

Feb 19 3-4:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

EQUINOX EXPEDITION

The days are getting longer and the SPRING OFFICIALLY ARRIVES on Monday! Help celebrate the "Vernal Equinox" by joining this expedition to find signs of spring along the Grand River.

Mar 18 1-2:30 pm Grand Ravines

Kids and family

NEW!

NATURE BUDS WINTER CAMPS

Registration required, \$7/person • 9:30-11:30 am

At your request, a winter version of our summer Nature Buds Day Camp will be offered at Hemlock Crossing! Children will experience outdoor adventures, and investigate wildlife and habitats through the lens of winter. For ages 6-9.

"To Boldly Go" Feb 4 Hemlock Crossing
Winter Adaptations Mar 4 Hemlock Crossing

TUNED INTO NATURE

Registration required, \$5/person

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

Jan 18 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Feb 22 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

Mar 22 9:30-10:30 am Hemlock Crossing

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER - FOR KIDS!

Ages 5-12, with a caregiver; registration required, \$5/person

Learn about wildlife found in your backyard and parks!

Beavers: Busy Builders

Jan 29 3-4:30 pm Hager Park

Whose Track is That?

Feb 12 3-4:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

Feb 26 3-4:30 pm Hager Park

Bald Eagles

Mar 12 3-4:30 pm Hemlock Crossing

Mar 26 3-4:30 pm Hager Park

FIRESIDE STORYTIME

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 22 3-4 pm Hemlock Crossing

Feb 5 3-4 pm Hemlock Crossing

Mar 5 3-4 pm Hemlock Crossing

STORYWALKS

Pages from a featured book will be posted along a path for your family to read together. Stories are available during park hours. Thank you to our local libraries for making StoryWalk possible! For more info about snowshoeing and StoryWalks, head to page 1!

Jan 20-23 When Winter Comes Riley Trails
Feb 10-13 A Moon of My Own Hemlock Crossing
Feb 24-27 Over & Under the Snow Paw Paw East



miOttawa.org/Parks



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