

GRAND RIVER GREENWAY INTERPRETIVE PLAN

JUNE 2026

this page intentionally blank

COVER IMAGE: MILLENNIUM PARK / COURTESY DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS, INC

CONTENTS

SECTION 1 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

SECTION 2 — INTRODUCTION 6

The Place
The Grand River Greenway
What is a Greenway?
What is Interpretation?
Why Do We Need an Interpretive Plan for the Greenway?
Scope of the Plan
Planning Context

SECTION 3 — WHY INTERPRET? 14

What Interpretive Goals and Objectives Provide
Interpretive Goals and Objectives

SECTION 4 — INTERPRETIVE THEMES 17

Central Theme
Sub-Themes & Storylines

SECTION 5 — UNDERSTANDING GREENWAY VISITORS 20

Greenway Users

SECTION 6 — PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS 24

SECTION 7 — EXISTING INTERPRETATION 26

Self-Guided
Guided

SECTION 8 — RECOMMENDATIONS 31

Interpretive Media Methods
How These Methods Work Together
Guiding Principles for Media Development
Priority Site Profiles
Site Types
Key to Amenities

SECTION 9 — APPENDICES 141

A — References Consulted
B — Participants in the Planning Process
C — Management Direction
D — The Planning Process
E — Visitor Motivations
F — Demographics
G — What is Interpretation?
H — Accessibility Standards
I — Interpretive Project Checklist
J — Media Comparison
K — Outdoor Exhibit Design Examples

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE GRAND RIVER GREENWAY

The Grand River Greenway spans 85 miles of recreational trail and park space along the Grand River in Michigan's Kent and Ottawa counties, linking communities from Grand Haven on the shores of Lake Michigan to the inland riverside communities of Allendale, Jenison, Grandville, Walker, Grand Rapids, Plainfield, Ada, Cascade, and Lowell. The Greenway traces the course of the state's longest river and facilitates regional connections to more extensive hiking and biking trails.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Ottawa and Kent counties have developed this interpretive plan as a tool to guide the development of interpretive plans and products along the Greenway. This document provides a filter for decision-making about the Greenway, including design, funding, and implementation priorities.

Each of the priority sites selected for interpretive development along the Greenway connects to the Greenway's interpretive themes. While the overarching theme is an important part of creating consistency along the Greenway, each site's unique features and significance and relationship to the larger theme will be emphasized so that interpretation is both site-specific and theme-based.

This plan provides suggested themes and storylines for interpretation, as well as recommendations for both the overall Greenway and individual sites.

INTERPRETATION IS...

"a mission-based approach to communication aimed at provoking in audiences the discovery of personal meaning and the forging of personal connections with things, places, people, and concepts."

—Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*

GOALS FOR GREENWAY INTERPRETATION

GOAL 1—Increase awareness of natural communities of the forest, river, and ravine environments along the Grand River.

GOAL 2—Foster an appreciation of the settlement and development patterns that have shaped communities along the Grand River.

GOAL 3—Create opportunities for Indigenous perspectives and storytelling.

GOAL 4—Foster an increased sense of connection to the river, as well as stewardship for the river and Greenway.

GOAL 5—Facilitate an enjoyable, educational, and safe experience for visitors by orienting them to amenities, opportunities, and expectations along the Greenway.

THEMATIC STRUCTURE

The following central theme and sub-themes developed through the interpretive planning process will guide all Greenway interpretation. The complete thematic structure appears in the pages that follow.

Central Theme

The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.

Sub-Themes

1. Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.
2. The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.
3. People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.
4. There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand River Greenway Interpretive Plan recommends a coordinated, layered approach to interpretation that strengthens visitor understanding, fosters stewardship, and ensures a consistent experience across an 85-mile, multi-jurisdictional corridor. Rather than relying on a single interpretive method, the plan proposes a flexible mix of media strategies that respond to different site types, visitor needs, and levels of engagement.

At key access points, **Gateway Orientation Hubs and Trailhead Signage** introduce the Greenway's central theme, provide clear system orientation, and invite exploration. These first-contact experiences emphasize meaning, place, and connection—recognizing that for many visitors, these sites may be their only interpretive encounter.

Across the corridor, **Story-Point Wayside Signage** and interactive elements deliver concise, site-specific stories tied directly to landscape features, ecology, history, and culture. These elements are designed to provoke curiosity rather than exhaust content, reinforcing a shared Greenway narrative while allowing each place to speak for itself.

The plan further recommends expanding interpretation beyond signs through **thematic installations, nature-based play, and experiential design**, particularly at Interpretive Nodes. These embodied experiences support diverse learning styles, encourage exploration, and communicate ideas such as resilience, reciprocity, and adaptation through movement and interaction.

Integrating **Indigenous-led and Indigenous-guided** interpretation throughout the Greenway ensures that Indigenous perspectives are authentically represented as living, ongoing relationships to the river.

To extend interpretation without creating barriers, the plan **supports mobile-optional digital layers**, including mobile-friendly content and interactive tools that provide depth, multimedia storytelling, and seasonal updates while ensuring that on-site interpretation remains complete without technology.

Finally, **guided programs, events, and stewardship opportunities** activate interpretive sites and strengthen relationships between visitors, communities, and the river. Together, these strategies form a four-level interpretive framework—outreach, orientation, storytelling, and commitment—that supports discovery, learning, and long-term care for the Grand River Greenway.

INTRODUCTION

THE PLACE[1]

The longest river in the state, now known as the Grand, served as an early transportation route for the region. The river has witnessed Odawa traveling by canoe and settling on its shores, fur traders arriving in bateaux with trade goods, settlers coming on steamboats to start a new life, merchants using it to transport goods, and residents canoeing and kayaking for pleasure. This is a river of many names—O-wash-ta-nong ("far away waters") by the Odawa, La Grande Riviere by French fur traders, and the Grand River by English and Americans.

Natural Environment

More than 13,000 years ago, the last of the glaciers retreated from this region, and their meltwaters carved the path of our present-day Grand River. The longest river in the state, at 252 miles, the Grand flows from headwaters lakes in Hillside County to its mouth at Lake Michigan in Grand Haven, draining 5,575 square miles throughout 15 counties along the way.

Glacial activity during the last Ice Age deposited most of the gravel and soils that form the foundation of the Grand River Valley. Alluvial soils deposited over millennia of seasonal river flood pulses, combined with decaying vegetation, have accumulated on the floodplain and underlie the lakes, wetlands, and forests that are visible along the river today.

This section of the Grand River lies in an ecological "transition zone" where southern and northern forests overlap, resulting in high biodiversity. Extensive white pine forests to the north and mixed hardwoods to the south—combined with the rivers, lakes, and wetlands—contribute to a vibrant population of fish and wildlife species. Several native plants reach their northern limit in this region, including Virginia bluebells, pawpaws, Kentucky coffee-trees, and green dragons.

> The Owashtanong ("Far Flowing Water"), Gitchi Ziibiwing ("Big or Grand River"), or Grand River, is Michigan's longest river. It flows 252 miles from its headwaters in Hillsdale County to its mouth in Grand Haven at Lake Michigan. The Grand River watershed covers 5,575 miles across 18 counties.

First People

After the glaciers retreated, the first people to arrive in the Grand River valley came from the shores of Lake Michigan, plying the watery landscape with birchbark canoes. Evidence of their presence and culture was plentiful in the form of earthworks and mounds until most of it was destroyed by settlement, agriculture, industrialization, etc. Earthen mounds have been discovered near Grand Rapids and further up the Grand near the confluence with the Thornapple River in Ada, while pottery shards, stone tools, and food caches have been discovered downriver near Connor Bayou.

1 The following overview of significance was compiled from numerous sources which can be found in Appendix A.

The Anishinaabek[2] and their ancestors made their homes in this region of abundance for at least 12,000 years, establishing villages, hunting plentiful game, fishing, gathering plant resources, cultivating the rich soil, and trading with one another. The Anishinaabek—who call themselves Odawa, Ojibwe, and Bodéwadmi—established numerous villages throughout the southwest part of the state, including at least 13 villages along the Grand.

Trapping & Trading

As early as 1783, the French trapper Joseph LaFramboise was trading on the Grand. He built a series of trading posts along its length but centered his operations at the confluence of the Flat (near present-day Lowell) as it was the richest furring river in Michigan at the time. He brought trade goods from Mackinac Island to exchange for the beaver, otter, mink, ermine, muskrat, and fox pelts that the Odawa trapped and tanned.

When he was killed in 1806, his wife, Magdelaine (daughter of Odawa Chief Returning Cloud, Kewinaquot), took over as a fur trader and excelled, often competing against John Jacob Astor's American Fur Trading Company (AFTC). When she retired in 1821, her operation was taken over by Rix Robinson, an agent of the AFTC. He closed the Lowell operation and established his headquarters in Ada, where the Thornapple River empties into the Grand.

French fur trader Louis Campau established a fur-trading post in Grand Rapids in 1826, and Michigan was opened to settlement in 1830. A year later, in 1831, he purchased the land that eventually became the heart of Grand Rapids.

Increasing Settlement

As more white settlers arrived, the Anishinaabek experienced upheaval. Robinson facilitated the 1836 treaty negotiations between the federal government and the Odawa, forcing the removal and cultural erasure of the Odawa communities. When Michigan opened to settlement in 1830, mounting pressures forced villagers to break up into smaller groups and relocate to more remote regions. Treaty after treaty forced further change. The Grand River served as a major treaty line.

Travel By Water

In the early 19th century, canoes and pole boats carried goods back and forth to the region's early settlers, later replaced by steamboats and barges.

The first steamboat to run on a regular schedule between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven took its maiden voyage in 1837. Numerous boats followed, carrying freight, mail, and passengers up and down the river. But the rapids at Grand Rapids were a barrier to shipping. Boats were restricted to either the lower reach from Grand Haven to Grand Rapids or above the rapids at Grand Rapids.

About two dozen steamboat landings dotted the riverbanks between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven. At the time, it was customary to

2 Courtesy of riverforall.com: The river has been and remains home to many Native American tribal communities across the region since the end of the Ice Age, including the People of the Three Fires, an alliance of the Ottawa (Odawa), Chippewa (Ojibwa), and Potawatomi (Bodewadi) tribes. The People of the Three Fires call themselves the Anishinaabek or The Original People. The Anishinaabek people continue to live in this region of their ancestors and the river continues to hold cultural and historical significance to them. The language of Anishinaabek is Anishinaabemowin. The local tribe in the Grand Rapids area is the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians.

build houses facing the river, as that was the primary transportation route.

The first bridge across the Grand River was built at Lyons in 1837; the first in Grand Rapids was constructed in 1845. Before that, ferries were used to cross the river at numerous locations. The first ferries were poled across and later converted to hand winches and, eventually, to gas engines.

Railroads & Lumber

As the fur trade diminished, settlers cleared the land for farming and put the rivers' water to work powering mills and transporting lumber. The vast forests of the Grand River Valley seemed endless to the numerous lumber mills that sprang up along the region's waterways to support settlement in the region. The banks of the Grand River—along with numerous tributary waterways—were lined with white pines 100-150 feet tall and 3-5 feet in diameter. Lumber companies began floating logs downstream to the area's first sawmill in Grand Haven, built in 1834, and the harvest of the vast forest soon began in earnest. Located at the mouth of the Grand River, Grand Haven was founded in 1835 by William Montague Ferry.

The first railroad to arrive in the region was built on the south side of the Grand in the 1850s, bringing freight, mail, and passenger service. The railroad accelerated the settlement of northern Michigan and earned significant profits hauling lumber south from the northern forests. Between 1870 and 1890, Michigan was the nation's leading timber producer. Numerous lumber mills were constructed along the various railroad lines, rapidly replacing the previous transportation method of floating logs down the rivers.

Increased migration of settlers meant more lumber was needed for building, with demand spiking after the Civil War and the 1871 Chicago fire. As many as 26 lumber mills in the Grand Haven area alone shipped millions of board feet of lumber every year to destinations across the country. Much of the lumber was shipped to Chicago, and the cordwood was used to power Great Lakes steamships. The forest wasn't endless, though, and by 1890, aside from isolated timbering, the lumber industry had met its end.

When the forests were depleted, railroads pivoted and began marketing passenger service to tourists eager to enjoy the fishing opportunities in the north. The infrastructure and industries spurred by the lumbering era (such as furniture manufacturing) continue to shape the Grand Rapids area's economy.

Bending the River to Industry

On July 24th, 1880, Grand Rapids became the first city in the country to use waterpower to generate electricity for lighting. Electrification further bolstered industries, and the city was "off to the races," expanding transportation methods and building additional bridges.

To keep the river passable for steamboats in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Michigan Board of Internal Improvements funded numerous river channel improvement projects. The Army Corps of Engineers installed many miles of in-river walls made from thick bundles of brush held back by wooden poles. Steam-powered dredges removed sediment from the river bottom and deposited the spoils on the other side of the wooden walls. These efforts were ultimately abandoned after 1909, but large sections of these walls remain in the river today.

INTRODUCTION

The rapids in Grand Rapids presented a challenge to the industries that depended on the Grand River to transport goods, including logs during the timber boom. A series of dams was constructed for various reasons—the 4th Street dam was intended to divert water into the canals on either side of the river for industrial use, while the low-head dams were beautification dams to keep some water in the river at low water levels at all times.

Dams across the river submerged some rapids, while the removal of boulders and bedrock eliminated others. These changes to the river channel—combined with the overharvesting of species such as lake sturgeon, mussels, and clams—significantly affected biological communities.

Restoring Lands and Waters

Today, while the Grand River supports a diverse aquatic community, it contributes some of the highest nutrient loads to Lake Michigan, and only a fraction of its wetlands and associated habitat types remain. The remaining wetlands are therefore of high conservation value and provide a vital habitat for wildlife. Tribes are actively working to restore populations of wild rice and lake sturgeon, while numerous partners are collaborating to remove dams.

Partners and landowners have been working to implement best management practices on private land to reduce erosion, filter runoff, and improve wildlife habitat across the watershed, as well as address invasive species.

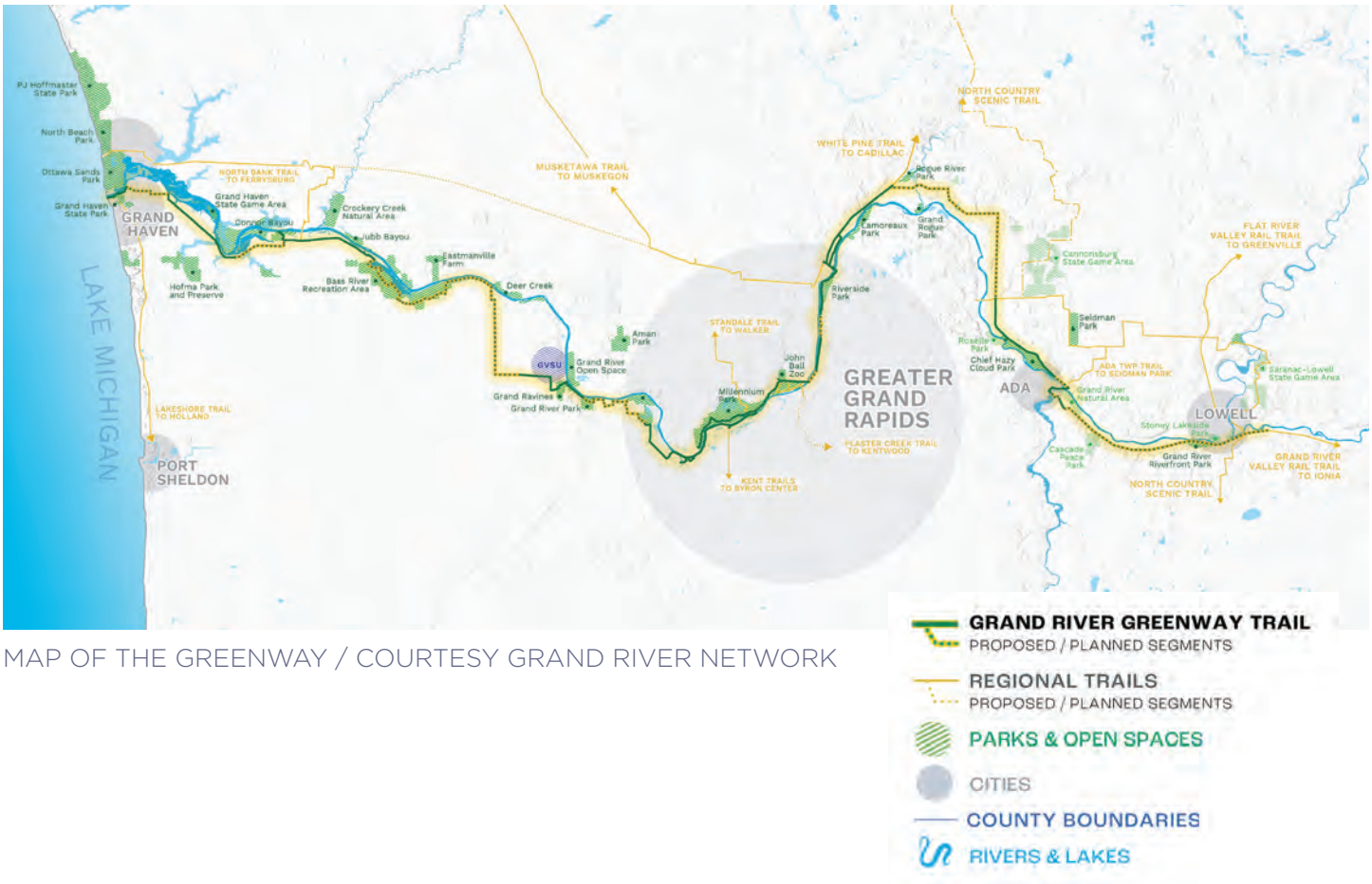


DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS / COURTESY DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS, INC

THE GRAND RIVER GREENWAY

The Grand River Greenway spans 85 miles of recreational trail and park space along the Grand River in Michigan's Kent and Ottawa counties, linking communities from Grand Haven on the shores of Lake Michigan to the inland riverside communities of Allendale, Jenison, Grandville, Walker, Grand Rapids, Plainfield, Ada, Cascade, and Lowell. The Greenway traces the course of the state's longest river and facilitates regional connections to more extensive hiking, biking, and water trails.

The original concept for the Grand River Greenway first appeared in Ottawa County's 1989 Parks and Recreation Plan, which called for the protection of key natural and recreational lands along the Grand River and a regional connection with a multi-use pathway. In Ottawa County, this pathway was eventually coined the Idema Explorers Trail and is now nearing completion.



MAP OF THE GREENWAY / COURTESY GRAND RIVER NETWORK



MAP SHOWING REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER TRAILS / COURTESY GRAND RIVER NETWORK

Kent County and a coalition of local governments and non-profit organizations have taken inspiration from Ottawa County and are working to continue the pathway along the Grand River eastward to Lowell.

Together, these two counties and numerous organizations are working in a partnership of public and private entities to provide and protect recreational access to land and water in the Grand River corridor. These collaborative efforts will deliver more than just a paved pathway—public investment in greenways and non-motorized trail systems is a proven strategy to elevate quality of life and promote community health, wellness, and culture for neighborhoods, cities, regions, and their residents.[1]

1 The Grand River Greenway Vision and Framework for Action, Grand River Network (2025)

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A GREENWAY?

Greenways are outdoor spaces that connect people and places. In addition to the community benefits of recreation and alternative transportation infrastructure, greenways provide wildlife habitat and migration corridors, native seed banks, and riparian buffers that mitigate and absorb the effects of floodwaters.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation is a communication process that seeks to convey information about natural, cultural, and/or historical resources in ways that foster a greater sense of appreciation and stewardship for those resources.

WHY DO WE NEED AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN FOR THE GREENWAY?

As Kent and Ottawa counties plan how to effectively use interpretation across the Greenway, this plan evaluates how visitor communication products and programs can best support the Greenway's vision. We identify overarching goals, objectives, and interpretive themes that bring consistency to the visitor experience across the Greenway.

This interpretive plan provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the diverse natural, cultural, and historical heritage assets of the Greenway, and the potential stories that can be presented to Greenway visitors about them. This process determines which stories and messages to tell, where to best tell them, to whom, and when. It is an effort to formalize interpretive products and programs for the Greenway and demonstrate the value of interpretation from a management perspective.

INTERPRETATION IS...

"a mission-based approach to communication aimed at provoking in audiences the discovery of personal meaning and the forging of personal connections with things, places, people, and concepts."

—Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*

Interpretation will both enhance the visitor experience and increase support for the Greenway.

SCOPE OF THE PLAN

This document provides a broad, conceptual framework for developing an integrated network of interpretive opportunities across the Greenway. The Greenway partnership has commissioned the consulting firm Conservation By Design, Inc. (CBD) to build on previous work and develop this interpretive plan to guide the development of interpretive products and programs for years to come.

The plan contains broad-level recommendations for interpretation across the Greenway, as well as site-specific recommendations for a network of interpretive nodes. The guidelines presented in this plan help Greenway managers and partners select and develop products and programs that, in a coordinated way, complement other efforts in the region.

PLANNING CONTEXT

In addition to the parks and recreation plans for Kent and Ottawa counties, the Grand River Greenway is an idea envisioned, characterized, and supported by a variety of organizations. Additional planning efforts that influence the implementation of the visitor experience are also called out here. Refer to Appendix A for an expanded list of documents consulted during the interpretive planning process, and that may serve as a resource during implementation of interpretive products and programs.

- A Natural and Cultural Features Inventory of the Grand River Greenway Corridor in Ottawa County, Michigan (1998)

  This inventory of important features along the Greenway describes geomorphology, vegetation communities, wildlife, and any natural or cultural features of note for sites along the Greenway.

- GR Forward Downtown & River Action Plan (2015)

  This strategic plan was developed by three key partners in Kent County—the city of Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., and Grand Rapids Public Schools—with input from more than 4,400 citizens, businesses, institutions, developers, and other stakeholders. The document details numerous goals, including:

  Goal 1: Restore the river as the draw and create a connected and equitable river corridor.

  Goal 5: Reinvest in public space, culture, and inclusive programming.

- River For All Grand River Corridor Implementation Plan and River Trail Design Guidelines (2019)

  These design guidelines provide general development requirements for the Grand River's edge within Grand Rapids city limits. The document provides concepts for site design as well as ideas for incorporating stories related to First Peoples and Logging and Furniture Industries into riverside developments.

- Grand River Identity: Advisory Team Perspectives on Interpretation and Programming (2021)

  This report details findings from an advisory team formed to gather information relevant to the later development of an interpretive plan for the Greenway in Ottawa County. The document identifies potential interpretive themes, special features, and possible programming elements to consider.

- Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide for West Michigan Trails and Bikeways (2023)

  This set of design guidelines envisions a unified system of trail wayfinding and regulatory signage.

- The Grand River Greenway Vision and Framework for Action (2025)

  This report provides an overview of the planned projects and those currently underway that are advancing the development of the Grand River Greenway in both Kent and Ottawa counties. It provides an overview of the Greenway's history, its values and benefits, demographics, maps, and a detailed project inventory.

WHY INTERPRET?

Interpretation is purposeful and mission-based. It offers experience-based learning opportunities that increase awareness, build personal connections with a place and its resources, and foster stewardship behaviors.

Information alone, however, doesn't inspire these changes. Merely understanding a topic isn't enough. To be effective, new information must spark insights and connections that are directly relevant to a Greenway user's life, interests, and values. Interpretation addresses both the intellectual and emotional realms of the Greenway user.

Management goals for interpretation describe the purpose of offering interpretive products and programs associated with the Greenway. The following goals for interpretation coalesce input from stakeholders with information presented in previous guiding documents (see References Consulted in Appendix A).

WHAT INTERPRETIVE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES PROVIDE

Interpretive goals and objectives provide guidelines for developing interpretive products and services. They also provide metrics for evaluating their effectiveness. They address both the values guiding the interpretation and the impacts that interpretation can have on Greenway visitors.

Recommendations in this interpretive plan are guided by the interpretive goals and objectives established during the planning process and address a variety of interpretive techniques and delivery systems to meet the needs of different audiences.

INTERPRETIVE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To chart progress toward the following goals, visitor objectives have also been identified to help achieve these goals. Together, these goals and objectives comprise important metrics that can and should guide the development of interpretive products and programming and will help keep individual projects on track.

Success upon implementation, as evidenced by these metrics, can be evaluated. Evaluation strategies might include observation and visitor surveys.

Visitor objectives are more specific than goals and, to the extent possible, are measurable. They spell out what we want visitors to know, feel, and do as a result of their visits to the trails, parks, open spaces, and waterways of the Greenway. Objectives provide details about how goals will be accomplished and can be developed to a variety of levels. In this planning process, we emphasize qualitative objectives that reveal abstract and intangible values.

INTERPRETIVE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1—Increase awareness of natural communities of the forest, river, and ravine environments along the Grand River.

a. Visitors will understand that ancient geological forces shaped the topography of the landscape, including the river and associated wetlands.

b. Visitors will understand the connections between the river and Lake Michigan (e.g. climate and weather, economy).

c. Visitors will understand that individual species are ecologically interconnected and demonstrate adaption and resilience.

d. Visitors will understand that limits to access or activities are sometimes warranted in order to protect a resource such as species habitat.

GOAL 2—Foster an appreciation of the settlement and development patterns that have shaped communities along the Grand River.

a. Visitors will understand what natural and cultural features influenced historic patterns of settlement and industry (mining, agriculture, button and cinder block manufacturing, etc).

b. Visitors will know that the abundant fur trade attracted economic activity, leading to displacement of Anishinaabek and white settlement.

c. Visitors will know that the lumber industry greatly influenced the history of Michigan (railroads, shipbuilding, tourism).

d. Visitors will understand how some species have been affected by industry (sturgeon, clam, wild rice, etc).

e. Visitors will know that place names always tell a story.

f. Visitors will have a greater sense of appreciation for the evolution of transportation and recreation along the Grand.

GOAL 3—Create opportunities for Indigenous perspectives and storytelling.

a. Visitors will understand that the Grand River and its wetlands and bayous continue to be central to the cultural identity, history, and spirituality of Anishinaabek and have long been a gathering place for trade, ceremonies, and sustenance.

b. Visitors will know that the Grand River represents an important treaty boundary that continues to shape the story of Anishinaabek.

c. Visitors will have a greater sense of appreciation for traditional ecological knowledge and traditional land management methods.

d. Visitors will understand that the concept of planning for “Seven Generations” guides Anishinaabek decision-making with concern for impact on future descendants.

e. Visitors will know that caretaking of non-human communities is an important act of reciprocity.

WHY INTERPRET?

GOAL 4—Foster an increased sense of connection to the river, as well as stewardship for the river and Greenway.

a. Visitors will feel a greater sense of ownership, responsibility, and pride in the Greenway.

b. Visitors will appreciate the collective urge to return the Grand River environment to a more natural state.

c. Visitors will understand the importance of water quality and how to protect it.

d. Visitors will have the opportunity to practice skills of observation and engage their senses (look, listen, and be patient).

e. Visitors will know about opportunities to get involved and deepen their experience (volunteer, attend, engage with apps).

f. Visitors will feel an increased sense of their own personal heritage and their unique connection to the river.

g. Visitors will understand that a visit to the Greenway has mental and physical health benefits.

h. Visitors will undertand that numerous sites along the Greenway are inspiring examples of reclamation and renewal.

GOAL 5—Facilitate an enjoyable, educational, and safe experience for visitors by orienting them to amenities, opportunities, and expectations along the Greenway.

a. Visitors will know where the Greenway is and how to navigate the system of land- and water-based trails, parks, and open spaces.

b. Visitors will understand that the Greenway is a work-in-progress of protected and accessible lands.

c. Visitors will know there are land and water-based recreation opportunities in every season along the Greenway.

d. Visitors of all cultural backgrounds will feel welcome along the Greenway and inspired to return.

e. Visitors of varying learning styles will have access to interpretive messages in a range of communication methods.



CONNOR BAYOU / COURTESY MIKE LOZON

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Picture the Grand River Greenway as embodying a compelling story, and the process of interpretation as a form of storytelling. Because interpretation is purposeful, we set interpretive goals to describe what we want these stories to do—both for the resource and the visitor. Visitor objectives help us translate the larger, more abstract goals into what we want visitors to know, feel, and do as a result of their experience.

Themes are where the art comes in. They are the core messages behind a story's facts. Their job is to highlight the deeper meanings of heritage resources, helping the visitor not only understand their importance but also see themselves as part of their ongoing story. A well-thought-out thematic structure, therefore, forms a unifying foundation for successful interpretation.

An effective interpretive theme is expressed in a single, powerful sentence that contains only one idea—an idea that weaves the tangible resource (the facts) with their intangible meaning(s). Themes are compelling and memorable. However, a theme isn't necessarily repeated verbatim in any particular story; instead, it forms the framework around which a story is built. Think of a theme as the "take-away" that you want visitors to remember, absorb, care about, and incorporate—not only into their knowledge base, but their lives. Themes answer the all-important question, "So what?" or "Why would our visitors want to know this—why would they care?"

A landscape as vast and varied as the Grand River watershed holds many stories, creating the opportunity to develop several strong themes. As varied as they are, though, these themes are organized into a unified message hierarchy that works as a system: one central, overarching theme capturing the significance of the Greenway as a whole, and three to five supporting sub-themes. Sub-themes are just like central themes—single, compelling statements of meaning—but their job is to expand on and illustrate the central theme by organizing the area's storylines into meaningful categories. We limit sub-themes to no more than five because of the way the human mind uses memory and assigns meaning.

Every story told on behalf of the Grand River Greenway, therefore, can stand alone yet can (and should) illustrate one or more sub-themes. This is how interpretation works its magic. By framing all stories around a thematic structure, every interpretive experience along the Greenway will, in the visitor's mind, connect to a growing and very personal understanding of—and appreciation for—this special place. Over time, each linked experience builds toward a stewardship ethic for the resource, respect for the missions of the land management agencies administering the Greenway, and advocacy for protected natural spaces in general.

The following theme statements are for internal administrative and communication planning use and are not intended as marketing slogans or exhibit content as shown. Further refinement, editing, and crafting of text for the Greenway visitor are later processes that occur during the development of specific interpretive products.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

CENTRAL THEME

The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.

SUB-THEMES & STORYLINES

1. Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.
    a. Glaciation, erosion, and other geological forces shaped the Greenway river corridor, ravines, and freshwater bayous.
    b. Seasonal floodwaters transform the river channel and nourish the floodplain with life-giving nutrients.
    c. The Grand River is interconnected with Lake Michigan and the oceans beyond.
        i. Proximity to Lake Michigan has great impact on the local climate, moderating temperatures and driving precipitation patterns.
    d. The plants and animals of the Grand River region are adapted to the ecological niches created by the area's diverse landforms.
        i. Aquatic zones
        ii. Wetlands and marshes
        iii. Freshwater bayous
        iv. Ravines
        v. Prairie savannas
        vi. Hardwood forests
    e. Old-growth forests are a remnant of an ancient landscape.

2. The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.
    a. For countless generations, the Grand River has been central to cultural identity, history, and spirituality of many Indigenous communities and continues to be a significant tribal meeting place for traditional gatherings and an important place for trade and commerce.
    b. The footpaths and water routes traveled by Anishinaabek were the precursors of the region's trails, roads, and rails.
        i. Railroads
        ii. Steamboats
        iii. Ferries
    c. The Grand River's treaty boundaries shape the history of Anishinaabek's struggles and resiliency.
    d. Industry throughout the region has depended on and left its mark on the river and surrounding landscape.
        i. Fur trading
        ii. Fisheries
        iii. Lumber
        iv. Agriculture
        v. Gravel
        vi. Furniture
        vii. Tourism
        viii. Brewing
    e. Anishinaabemowin and settler names for places, people, and objects tell a story.

3. People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.
    a. The Greenway is a work in progress—communities throughout the region continue to take action to create public access and protect natural areas.
    b. People work daily to protect the Grand River, preserve culture, and restore habitat.
        i. Ethnobotany
        ii. Community science
        iii. Academic research
        iv. Historical preservation
        v. Environmental stewardship
        vi. Storytelling
    c. Our actions and decisions shape the future of our communities for many generations to come.
    d. Communities continue to come together in ceremony to honor and celebrate the interdependence between humans and non-humans.

4. There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
    a. Greenways are a path to greater health.
    b. We engage our senses (sight, sound, touch, smell) in our discovery of the ever-changing nature of the Greenway.
    c. Pockets of solitude offer respite from our busy lives.
    d. There is an abundance of fishing, hunting, nature-watching, and paddling opportunities along the Greenway.
    e. Scenic viewscapes offer beauty and help people feel connected to a special place.
    f. The Greenway offers places to connect with our community.

INTERPRETATION'S FIVE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

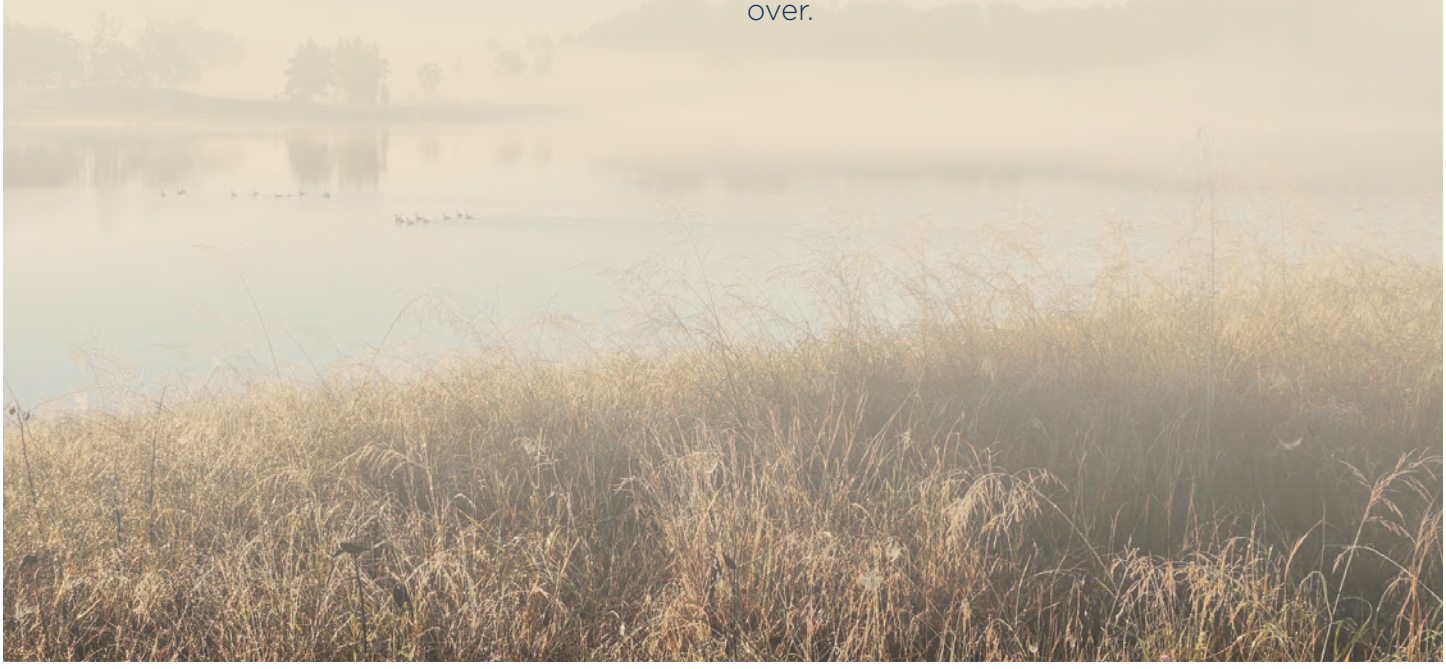
Purposeful: Interpretation's ultimate goal is engagement with and stewardship of our natural and cultural resources. Interpretation takes into account what we want the audience to learn, feel, and (most importantly) do as a result of their experience with us.

Enjoyable: Visitors are not captive audiences and tend to vote with their feet. To transcend the ordinary, capture imaginations, and inspire return visits, longer stays, and word-of-mouth marketing, we must provoke curiosity and present information in an enjoyable, interactive, and positive context.

Relevant: What we want visitors to know is not necessarily what visitors want to learn. Human communications are received through the filters of prior experiences, attitudes, intrinsic motivators, existing knowledge levels (and misconceptions), beliefs, and cultural influences. Therefore, interpretation takes the audience's perspective and captures interest by understanding, respecting, and engaging the audience's point of view.

Organized: Interpretation is structured to maximize learning and enjoyment, minimize demands on the audience, and produce a positive visitor experience from beginning to end. Byway interpretation should deliver memorable, coordinated, consistent, and effective messages across the entire visitor experience.

Thematic: Interpretation conveys a theme—a central take-home message that moves beyond facts and figures to reveal the deeper meaning of heritage resources. Themes help us tell a compelling story that will resonate with the audience long after the experience is over.



OTTAWA SANDS / COURTESY OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS FOUNDATION

UNDERSTANDING GREENWAY VISITORS

GREENWAY USERS

We have identified the following common types of Greenway users[1]. User groups are listed in no particular order.

Movement-Based Recreationists use the Greenway for regular or occasional recreation or fitness activities like running, biking, walking dogs, cross-country skiing, roller-blading, or just going for a stroll.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, updates on trail network status, wildlife viewing suggestions

Destination-Based Recreationists go to specific sites on the Greenway, such as parks, playgrounds, or areas where they fish, watch birds, hunt, or forage.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), recreation opportunities

Will benefit from: Information about connectivity, other recreation opportunities in the same area, special events

Routine Commuters use the Greenway as an alternative transportation route, primarily by bicycle.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, updates on trail network status, wildlife viewing suggestions

Casual Commuters might consider the Greenway as an alternative route to streets or public transportation.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Updates on trail network status, suggestions for featured destinations/activities and events to return for

Points of Interest Pursuers visit the Greenway to access a particular site or attraction, such as visiting blooming bluebells in the spring or seeing a site of historical interest.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, species identification, edible/poisonous species ID, ways to get involved, natural history of target species

Special Interest Groups such as scouts, fitness clubs, birders, plant enthusiasts, institution-based sports clubs, artists, and photography clubs use the Greenway as a venue for their activities. This category also includes Greenway users participating in special events such as 5Ks or BioBlitzes.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Updates on trail network status, natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, species identification,

1 No Greenway-specific visitor study has been done to date, but a 2019 study commissioned by Kent County Parks estimated household visits to park and trail systems in Kent County (Economic Impact Study: Kent County Parks, Seidman Research Office of Grand Valley State University, 2019).

edible/poisonous species ID, suggestions for featured destinations/activities and events to return for, ways to get involved

Urban Explorers use the Greenway as a means of exploring neighborhoods and checking out new restaurants, businesses, and parks.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity)

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, suggestions for featured destinations/activities and events to return for

Solitude Seekers use the Greenway to "get away from it all" and "unplug," valuing the Greenway for the natural environments and reduced presence of people.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites

Spiritual Practitioners use the Greenway for access to the riverside environment and its various habitats and important places. This category includes people participating in ceremonies and rituals along the river.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Indigenous place names and significance

Neighborhood Residents (including families and youth on their own) use the Greenway as a safe place for play and relaxation, and for the access it provides to nearby natural areas.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, suggestions for featured destinations/activities and events to return for, ways to get involved

Tourists use the Greenway to explore sites of natural, cultural, and historic significance and may be attracted to the Greenway as a destination as it is built out and completed.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, suggestions for featured destinations/activities

Water Seekers use the Greenway to access a bayou or the Grand River.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information (including boating safety)

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest along the river, suggestions for featured destinations/activities

UNDERSTANDING GREENWAY VISITORS

Environmental Stewards use the Greenway as a venue to conduct water quality monitoring and service projects like trash clean-up and invasive plant removal.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Ways to get involved, suggestions for featured destinations/ activities and events to return for, natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites

Students of all ages use the Greenway as a venue for curriculum-based studies and field trips.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity), etiquette, and safety information

Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, species identification, edible/poisonous species ID, suggestions for featured destinations/activities and events to return for

Casual Visitors might use the Greenway as a spot to eat lunch or for a quick break to experience nature and rejuvenate.

Needs: Wayfinding/maps, trail orientation (length, difficulty, features, connectivity)

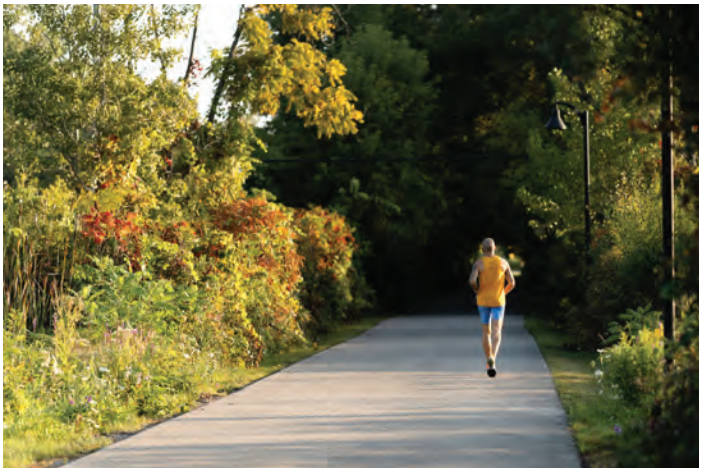
Will benefit from: Natural features and historical interest on trails and at sites, suggestions for featured destinations/ activities and events to return for



CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK / COURTESY NEIL BLAKE, MLIVE



CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK / COURTESY DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS, INC



BETWEEN WHITE PINE TRAIL AND ADA / COURTESY IMAGE

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

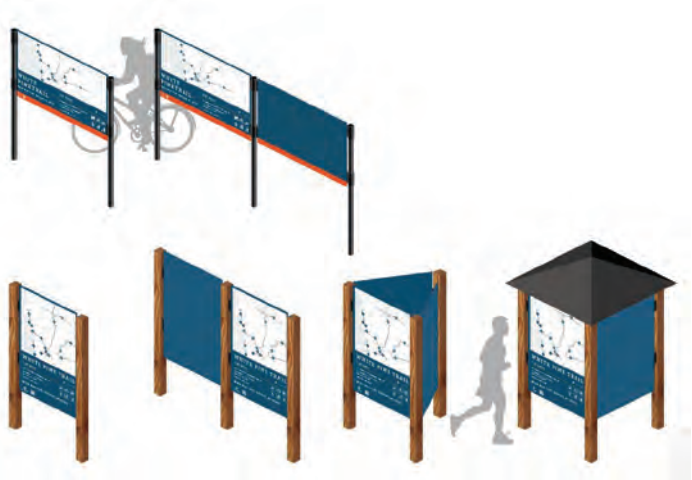
Every segment and site along the Greenway has unique and specific conditions, history, challenges, strengths, and requirements. These elements influence interpretation, including the selection of messages and themes, as well as design standards, formats, and methods used. The following summarizes the main interpretive parameters along the Greenway.

Work in Progress

The Greenway is not yet a complete experience, with years of additional land acquisition and development of trails, facilities, and other amenities ahead. This will enable the phased development of interpretive products and programming, as well as the expansion of interpretive offerings.

Non-Linear Experience

The Greenway's many access points and extensive length suggest a non-linear visitor experience. Just a fraction of visitors will travel its entire length. Interpretation must take this into account.



TRAILHEAD SIGNAGE ENVISIONED IN "WAYFINDING SIGN CONCEPTS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS AND BIKEWAYS" (2023)



THE EXISTING IDEMA EXPLORERS TRAIL LOGO IS COMMONLY SEEN ALONG THE GREENWAY IN OTTAWA COUNTY

Multi-entity Jurisdiction & Existing Branding

Branded trails such as the White Pine Trail, Idema Explorers Trail, Kent Trails, etc., fall under the umbrella of the Grand River Greenway, which spans multiple jurisdictions.

Ottawa County has developed a logo for the Idema Explorers Trail section of the Greenway and is actively using it to promote the Greenway. Partners must decide whether to adopt this particular logo for the entire Greenway or develop a new umbrella logo approved by all partners. Donor recognition remains an important priority.

This network of branded trails has the potential to create visitor confusion, so consistent reference to individual trails' status as "part of the Grand River Greenway" will be key to reinforcing the Greenway's identity and understanding of the overall connectivity. Recognition of local jurisdiction, such as county jurisdiction, is an important factor in fostering continued community support.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The non-profit West Michigan Trails organization led the development of a Regional Wayfinding Guide, which establishes a common approach to wayfinding and regulatory signage across the 18 counties that comprise West Michigan, regardless of jurisdiction.

Grand River Water Trails also has signage that should be considered as part of advancing a compelling and unifying Greenway identity.

Powerful Partnerships

Multiple entities advocate for public access to recreation, conservation, and habitat restoration, cultural vibrancy, and the promotion of historical resources related to the Greenway. All these players make for excellent opportunities for interpretive partnerships. Among these are the municipalities, tribes, park foundations, MI Department of Natural Resources, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., historical societies and museums, county library systems, special interest organizations, and venues such as the John Ball Zoo and Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, to name a few.

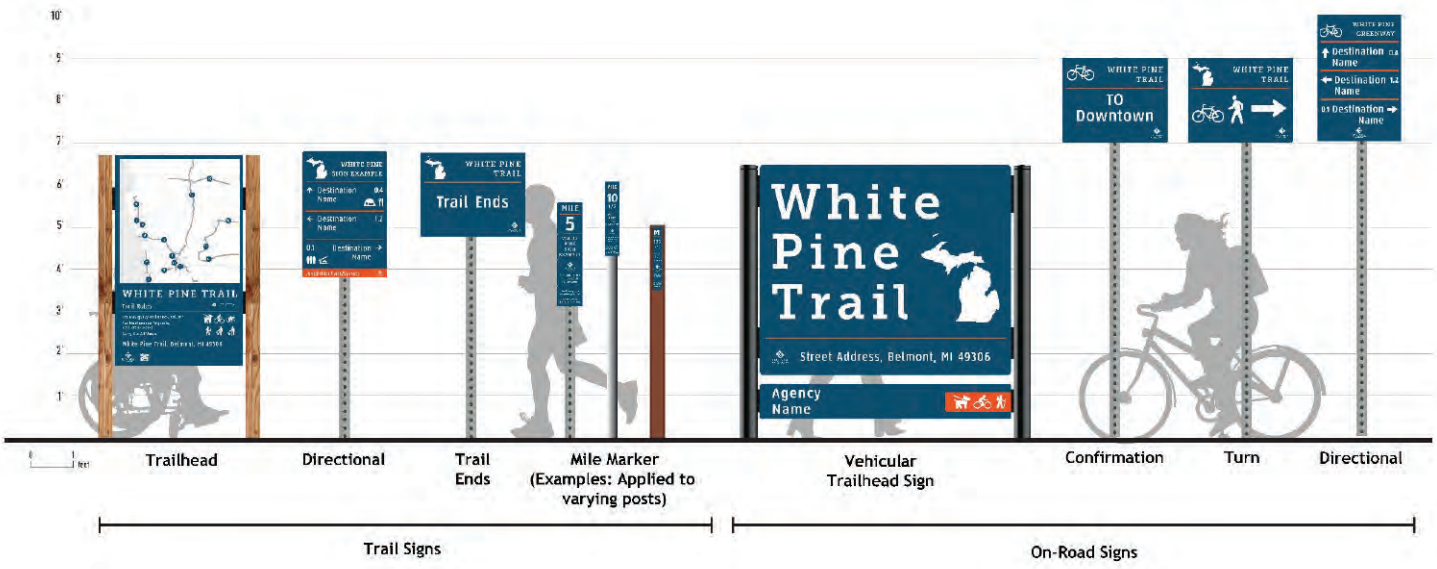
This interpretive plan provides overarching guidance to ensure consistency across the Greenway, regardless of the partner presenting the interpretation.

Careful Planning and Great Opportunities

The Greenway is an idea with many legs. Significant investment and prioritization by the two counties, along with many organizations and individuals, over the last two decades have positioned the Greenway as an idea with great momentum. The existing individual trail segments and park features have been planned and built to address specific needs and protect resources.

Safety in Numbers

While it connects two major cities, much of the Greenway is in rural, natural areas—an asset and a common characteristic of a greenway system. The solitude and isolation that are considered a benefit to some visitors are also considered a hazard to others. Some visitors may only feel comfortable accessing the Greenway when recreating with others.



SIGN FAMILY ENVISIONED IN "WAYFINDING SIGN CONCEPTS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS AND BIKEWAYS" (2023)

EXISTING INTERPRETATION

While the Grand River Greenway officially began in 1996, it remains a major undertaking and very much a work in progress. The Greenway builds on existing trail networks, parks, and open spaces to provide a continuous recreational travelway more than 85 miles long. Kent and Ottawa counties continue to acquire land and easements, raise funds, and oversee the construction of accessible trail surfaces, bridges, and other infrastructure that together comprise the Greenway.

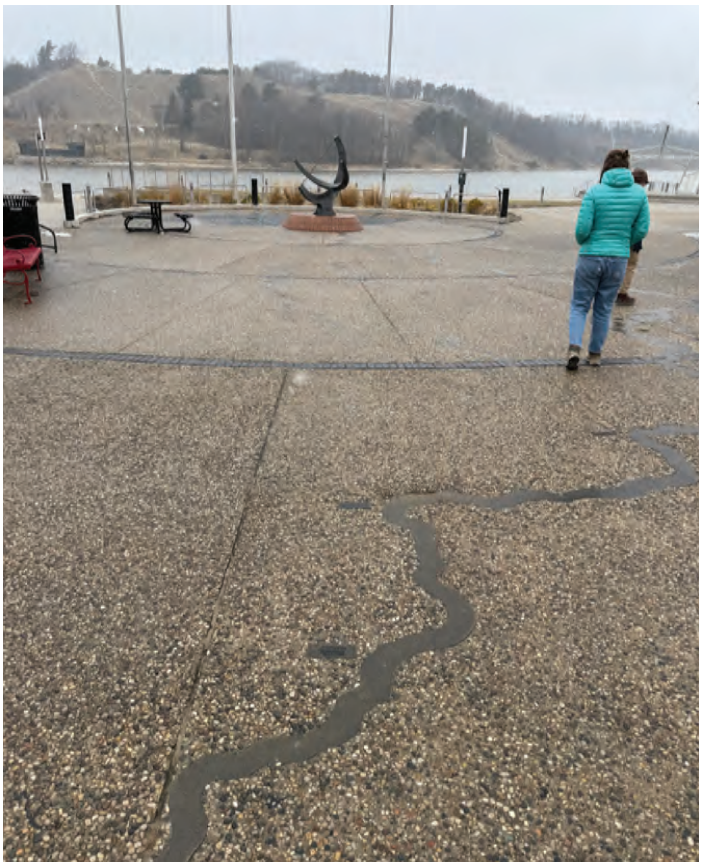
Though little Greenway-specific interpretation yet exists, interpretation by agencies and organizations of relevant topics (natural resources, historic sites, cultural significance, etc.) and associated sites has been occurring for many years. Visitors can stop at dozens of interpretive points along the Greenway and take in stories curated by municipal and county governments and non-profit organizations.

At present, visitors can walk, bike, skate, or cross-country ski significant sections of the Greenway; attend special events and programs; participate in clean-ups and invasive plant removal projects; view interpretive signage; take a guided tour; explore monuments and markers in parks and plazas; and take in documents, specimens, and artifacts in climate-controlled museum environments.

Coordinated Greenway-wide interpretation, however, is at its inception. Through this planning process, we consider the range of existing interpretation that Greenway users have access to and identify gaps in the visitor experience.



EXISTING INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE AT GRAND RAVINES COUNTY PARK (OTTAWA COUNTY), COURTESY PHOTO



MAP OF GRAND RIVER EMBEDDED IN CONCRETE IN GRAND HAVEN, COURTESY PHOTO

SELF-GUIDED

The following resources allow self-directed learning along the Greenway. Greenway partners offer a variety of interpretive materials related to the Greenway. Below is a sample of what is available to visitors.

Print Publications

No official visitor-facing Greenway brochure or other publication exists.

Audiovisual, Digital, and Social Media

Audiovisual and emerging digital media are rapidly changing fields, combining emails, audio, film, video, photography, websites, podcasts, smartphone apps, interactive maps, distance learning, social media (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, TikTok, etc.), and instant messaging—all delivered to a smartphone or computer. This makes sharing of information readily attainable and makes remote delivery of site interpretation commonplace.

The Greenway has some digital media presence hosted by partners. Ottawa County hosts a website (www.grandrivergreenway.org) that focuses on efforts in Ottawa County, including a StoryMap[1] that provides an overview of the acquisition and construction status of the Greenway and another StoryMap[2] that presents the history of the Greenway, downloadable maps of the water trail segments, trailhead locations, and links to another website (https://grandriver.network/) hosted by the Grand River Network, a coalition of public and private partners. At present, both websites focus on the acquisition and construction of the Greenway and associated infrastructure.

The downloadable water trail maps on grandrivergreenway.org include information about various points of interest highlighted on the map.

The Grand Rapids Historical Society hosts monthly programs at the Grand Rapids Public Library (Grand Rapids History Center at the main library campus), including lectures, demonstrations, collections, and special tours related to Greenway history themes. Recordings of past programs are available here: https://grhistory.org/past-programs.

The Kent County Parks Foundation maintains a website (https://www.kcpf.org/grand-river-greenways) that lists the Greenway as a featured project, as does the Ottawa County Parks Foundation (https://ottawacountyparksfoundation.org/projects/). Both foundations also maintain active social media accounts. Little interpretive information is included at this time.

The following social media opportunities also connect visitors to the Greenway:

- Facebook

  facebook.com/KentCountyParks
  (shares information about acquisition updates and events at parks, county-wide)

  facebook.com/OttawaCountyParks
  (shares information about acquisition updates and events at parks, county-wide)

  facebook.com/GrandRiverNetwork

- Instagram

  instagram.com/kentcountyparks/

  instagram.com/ottawacountyparks/

  instagram.com/grandrivernetwork

  Several partners are using the hashtag #grandrivergreenway on their posts.

1 https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/28b435d-d949a485dbba378f142643c4c
2 https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/27cfdf5e8ec-c4567be8f71f1469c2ca6

EXISTING INTERPRETATION

- YouTube

  youtube.com/@OttawaCountyParks

  youtube.com/@GrandRiver-Network

Other partners, including the county parks foundations, maintain social media accounts and webpages, and sometimes feature information about the Greenway.

Interpretive Signage

Exterior exhibit kiosks and low-profile wayside signs offer simple, relatively inexpensive ways to present consistent, readily available interpretation for a wide range of visitors.

With many miles of existing trails and dozens of individual sites and partners, there are many variations of interpretive signage that discuss sites along the Greenway. Individual partners have their own branding and design guidelines. The branding most often seen currently is that of the Idema Explorers Trail in Ottawa County. This planning process will provide the opportunity for all partners to decide on the branding for the Grand River Greenway moving forward.

Interior Exhibits (Museums and Visitor Centers)

There are currently no facilities where interior exhibits are focused entirely on the Greenway. The Grand Rapids Public Museum offers an array of high-quality interactive exhibits that support the Greenway themes, including transportation, settlement, and industry.

The permanent exhibit "Anishinabek: The People of This Place"[3] is currently closed for renovation following an extensive collaborative effort with the Anishinaabek people of Michigan. It is slated to re-open in Fall 2026. The new design was developed through consultation

3 The spelling used in the museum's exhibit title is another variation of the spelling used by riverforall.com, which we have adopted for use in this plan.



EXISTING INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE AT M-231 TRAILHEAD IN OTTAWA COUNTY, COURTESY PHOTO

with Tribal leaders and community members on the Eshtoojik (the ones who create) Advisory Council. Per the museum's website, the redesigned exhibit will include:

- Updated technology
- Natural elements
- Connections to the Grand River
- Opportunities for visitors to dig deeper into topics central to today's Anishinaabek communities
- Unique art from local Anishinaabek artists

This site charges an admission fee. Further expansions and riverfront facilities are underway.

Public Art

A number of creative, thematic public art pieces currently exist at various locations along the Greenway that relate to its themes; however, as described in the Grand River Public Art Plan[4], those pieces do not fully

4 The Grand River Public Art Plan is focused on the downtown Grand Rapids section of the Grand River Greenway. The Grand River Public Art Plan includes guidelines for siting, selection, acquisition, and maintenance of various types of public art—monumental sculpture, murals, gateway works, play-friendly and interactive artworks, new media works, and light-based works.

represent all communities along the river. This interpretive plan is intended to inform the Grand Rapids-focused public art plan, as well as the development and implementation of any art pieces along the Greenway, through its interpretive themes and storylines.

GUIDED

Guided Interpretive Programs

Personal interpretive programming refers to programs delivered "live and in person" by interpretive rangers, volunteers, educators, or subject-matter experts. In most developed locations along the Greenway, such personal programming varies by audience, visitation levels, staffing, and seasonal needs. Personal interpretive services may include guided tours, storytelling, ranger talks, supervised hands-on activities, educational programs, special events and festivals, or other face-to-face activities.

Ottawa and Kent counties continue to offer in-person programs focused on various Greenway topics led by staff and volunteers. Examples include:

Ottawa Sands Park (Ottawa County)

- Volunteer restoration projects
- Guided walks focused on natural history and paddling programs

M-231 Trailhead (Ottawa County)

- Guided bike tours focused on history

Connor Bayou (Ottawa County)

- Rendezvous on the Grand special event focused on history of fur trade

Bend Area (Ottawa County)

- Guided walks focused on natural history

Grand River Park (Ottawa County)

- Guided walks focused on natural history

Grand Ravines Park (Ottawa County)

- Guided walks focused on natural history

Hager Park (Ottawa County)

- Summer day camp for youth

Millennium Park (Kent County)

- Guided programs focused on natural history
- Discover! Millennium Park
- Volunteer restoration projects

Downtown Grand Rapids (Kent County)

- Various guided tours are focused on history, art, and culture offered by numerous private and non-profit organizations[5]

Rogue River Park (Kent County)

- Volunteer restoration projects

Johnson Park (Kent County)

- Guided walks and programs focused on natural history (by/with Blandford Nature Center)

5 Example: https://toursaroundmichigan.com/tour/riverfront-tour/

this page intentionally blank



RECOMMENDATIONS

ROBIN NEST / COURTESY KENT COUNTY PARKS

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA METHODS

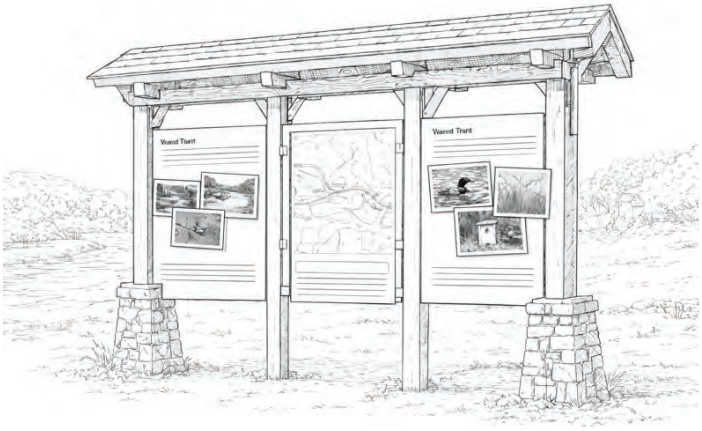
1. Orientation Hubs and Trailhead Signage
Larger kiosks at Gateways and simplified panels at Trailheads introduce themes, provide maps, and help visitors prioritize their time and energy.

At Gateway and Trailhead sites, orientation and interpretation should be intentionally combined rather than separated. Standalone trailhead signs and/or large kiosks introduce:

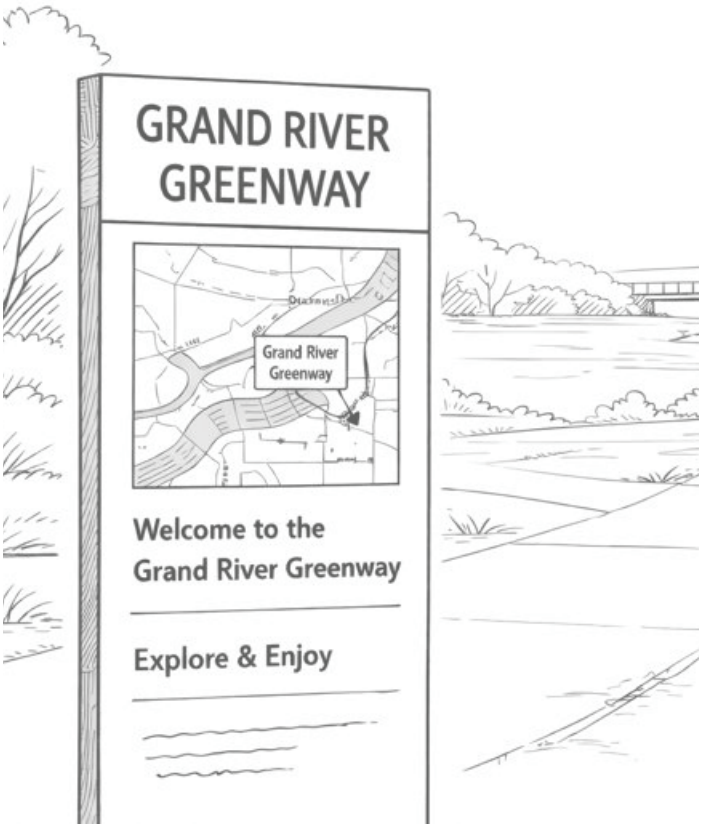
- The central Greenway theme
- Where the visitor is *within the whole system*
- Clear invitations to explore further (physically or digitally)

Key principles
- "Less is more" for first contact
- Emphasize *meaning and experience*, not construction history
- Design for non-linear use—this may be the visitor's only stop

Best locations
- Major parks, riverfront sites, and general trail access sites



ORIENTATION HUB SIGNAGE



TRAILHEAD ORIENTATION SIGNAGE

2. Story-Point Wayside Signage

Concise, site-specific low-profile panels deliver focused stories tied to landscape features, history, ecology, and culture. These should:

- Follow the 3–30–3 rule[1]
- Never exceed ~300 words
- Stand alone *and* reinforce the Greenway-wide narrative

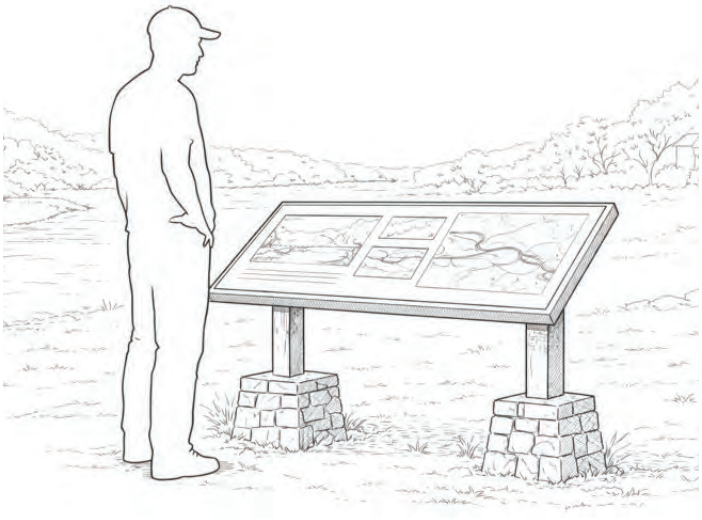
Key principles

- Panels provoke curiosity rather than exhaust content
- Each site tells its story through the shared thematic lens

Best locations

- Interpretive Nodes, river overlooks, historic or ecological features

1 See sidebar on page 38 for a description of this guideline



LOW-PROFILE WAYSIDE SIGNAGE





NATURE PLAY AREAS SHOULD EMPHASIZE OBSERVATION AND COORDINATION AND COULD DRAW INSPIRATION FROM LAND ART

3. Thematic Installations & Play-Based Interpretation

Interpretation is not limited to signs. Sculptural, tactile, and experiential elements communicate ideas through movement, play, and sensory engagement, supporting diverse learning styles. Sculptural, tactile, and play-based elements:

- Communicate ideas through experience
- Support families, youth, and non-text-based learners
- Reinforce concepts like adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience



SCULPTURAL INSTALLATIONS COULD DRAW INSPIRATION FROM EPHEMERAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURE

Murals, sculptures, mosaics, and other expressions can integrate colors and materials into surfacing, site furniture, and thematic focal point pieces. Such pieces could incorporate observation platforms to help visitors gain a different perspective of the Grand River Valley. A nature-based sculptural play element made from stone, wood, and other natural materials, inspired by land art and ephemeral environmental sculpture, could be devised to create sculptural portals, nest-like structures, and other pieces. Such installations could convey interpretive themes related to woodland and wetland ecology and encourage participants to consider what it is like to "inhabit" these environments. Planning for public art is already underway along the Greenway in the Grand Rapids downtown corridor. Refer to the "Grand River Public Art Plan" for more information.

Key principles

- Interpretation can be physical and embodied
- Play and art should *carry meaning*, not just decorate space

Best locations

- Interpretive Nodes

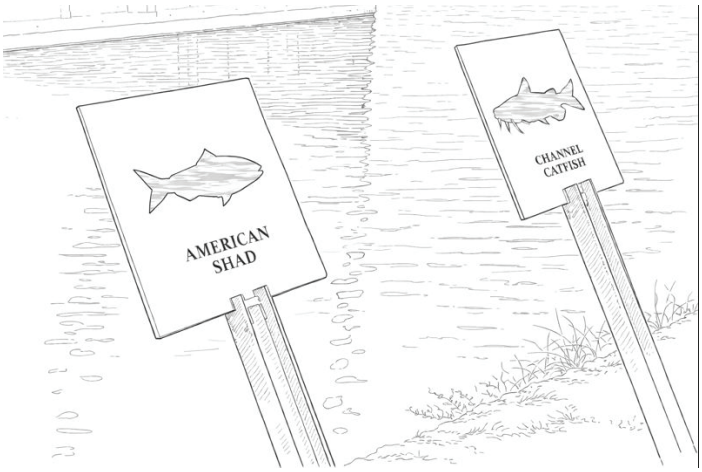
4. Additional Miscellaneous Signs

Additional miscellaneous signs provide flexible, small-scale interpretive support throughout the Grand River Greenway.

These signs address specific points of interest or resource identification needs that do not warrant a full interpretive node, while reinforcing broader interpretive themes and encouraging observation and connection. They may occur as standalone elements along the corridor or be integrated into priority interpretive sites.

Key principles

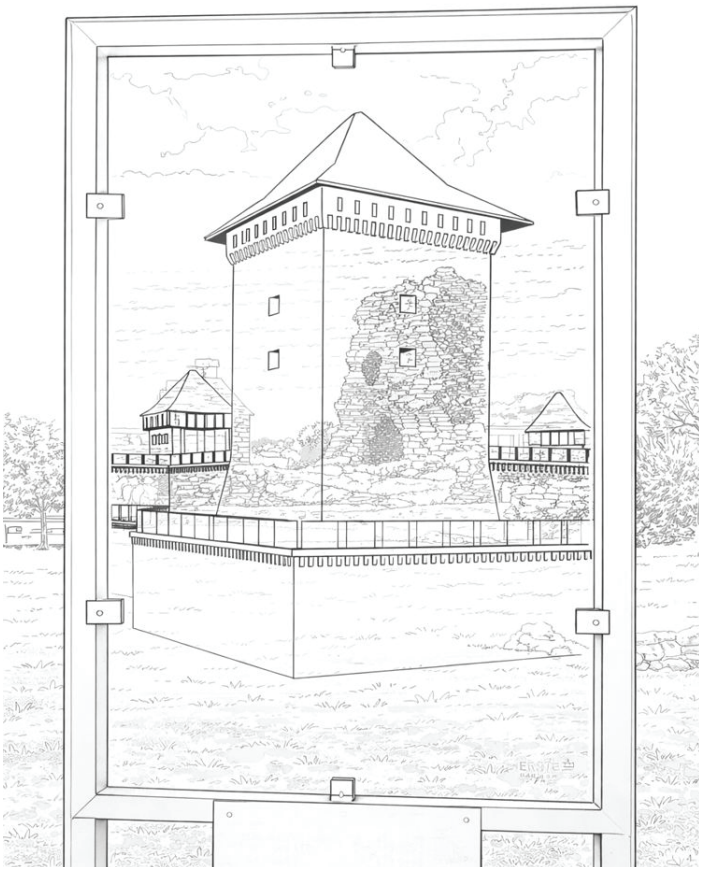
- Serve a focused interpretive purpose, typically highlighting a single species, feature, or idea
- Support recognition, awareness, and curiosity rather than in-depth interpretation
- Reinforce existing interpretive themes without introducing new primary narratives
- Maintain a low visual profile to avoid clutter and interpretive fatigue
- Use concise text and strong visual cues to support quick, informal engagement



AN ADDITIONAL SIGN TYPE MIGHT FEATURE A CUTOUT TO IDENTIFY A PARTICULAR SPECIES



ADDITIONAL SIGN TYPES MIGHT INCLUDE A SPECIES FEATURE PANEL



A TRANSCLUCENT SIGN MIGHT HIGHLIGHT WHAT A SITE OR VIEW ORIGINALLY LOOKED LIKE

- Allow flexibility for future additions as new opportunities or needs are identified

Best locations

- Along the Greenway corridor at standalone points of interest
- Near habitats or landscape features associated with a featured species
- At trail edges, overlooks, river access points, or habitat transitions
- Within priority interpretive sites as secondary or supporting elements
- Locations where visitors naturally pause, gather, or slow their movement

5. Indigenous-Led & Indigenous-Guided Media

Interpretive media developed in collaboration with tribal partners ensure that Indigenous perspectives are present, authentic, and integrated throughout the Greenway. Indigenous stories should be:

- Created with, guided by, or authored by tribal partners
- Integrated throughout the Greenway—not isolated
- Expressed through place names, oral histories, ethnobotany, and stewardship practices

Key principles

- “Nothing about us, without us”
- Emphasize living cultures and ongoing relationships to the river

Best locations

- Culturally significant sites, gathering places, river access points

6. Mobile-Optional Digital Layers

Digital media should extend interpretation, not be required for it. QR codes, mobile-friendly web content, and optional apps provide depth, multimedia storytelling, and seasonal updates without replacing on-site interpretation. Options include:

- Geo-referenced maps (Avenza or similar)
- Mobile-friendly web content
- Optional digital layers (e.g., audio stories, scavenger hunts)

Key principles

- Centralized web location focused on visitor services and orientation
- Digital content is ideal for depth, updates, and storytelling variety[2]

Best locations

- Dense story areas, urban segments, seasonal or changing sites

7. Guided & Program-Supported Interpretation

Guided programs help visitors experience interpretation as dialogue rather than instruction. Live interpretation activates sites, reinforces themes, and strengthens relationships between visitors, staff, volunteers, and the river, as well as deepening media already in place. Programs should:

- Use sites and signage as *anchors*, not scripts
- Emphasize dialogue, observation, and participation
- Reinforce stewardship and community connection

Key principles

- Personal services remain one of the most powerful tools
- Programs help media feel alive and relevant

Best locations

- Interpretive Nodes, restoration sites, education hubs

2 Continue to provide social media content that incorporates interpretive messages by focusing on species identification, significant events and individuals in history, and cultural interdependence with the natural resources of the Grand River environment.

HOW THESE METHODS WORK TOGETHER

Recommended interpretive media along the Greenway are intentionally organized into four complementary levels. Together, they create a holistic visitor experience that supports discovery, learning, and stewardship.

- Level I: Outreach & attraction (identity, web, social)
- Level II: Orientation (gateways, trailheads)
- Level III: Storytelling (waysides, installations, digital, programs)
- Level IV: Commitment (events, stewardship, follow-up)

Together, they support the plan's goals of connection, relevance, stewardship, and inclusivity across an 85-mile, multi-jurisdictional landscape.

Level I—Outreach and Attraction
These media introduce the Greenway and encourage visitation.

Primary media types
- Web presence and social media
- Roadway and community identification signage
- Downloadable maps and overview content

Primary functions
- Build awareness and name recognition
- Communicate the Greenway's purpose and significance
- Help visitors decide when, where, and how to visit

At this level, the media emphasize the Greenway's natural and cultural significance rather than its construction history or administrative details.

Level II—Orientation & Introduction
Orientation media welcome visitors at access points and help them understand their location within the larger Greenway system.

Primary media types
- Gateway orientation hubs
- Trailhead kiosks or upright panels
- System maps and overview graphics

Primary functions
- Provide spatial orientation and basic wayfinding
- Introduce the central theme and relevant sub-themes
- Invite visitors to explore further along the Greenway

Orientation media are often a visitor's first—and sometimes only—interpretive contact with the Greenway, making clarity and restraint essential.

Level III—Site-Specific Storytelling
This level delivers the most direct interpretive content, tied closely to the landscape and resources at hand.

Primary media types
- Low-profile wayside panels ("story points")
- Thematic installations and interpretive features
- Public art with interpretive intent
- Mobile-accessible digital content
- Guided programs

Primary functions
- Reveal the significance of specific places, features, or stories
- Illustrate Greenway themes through tangible resources
- Encourage observation, reflection, and curiosity

Interpretive content at this level should follow best practices such as the 3-30-3 rule, minimal text, strong visuals, and clear thematic focus.

The 3-30-3 Rule of Interpretive Design

This rule applies to every written interpretive product, whether it is an exhibit, newsletter, or brochure.

3 SECONDS
major information is read (title, subtitle)

30 SECONDS
additional information is processed (introduction, photo, first paragraph)

3 MINUTES
detailed information is read (maps, phone numbers, captions)

An interpretive panel can be designed and written so that it contains three levels of text with each level conveying a feeling of the theme. This approach provides all visitors with an interpretive opportunity.

Level IV—Engagement, Commitment, and Follow-Up
These media extend interpretation beyond the immediate visit and encourage ongoing relationships with the Greenway.

Primary media types
- Special events
- Stewardship and volunteer opportunities
- Feedback mechanisms and calls to action
- Digital follow-up content

Primary functions
- Deepen understanding through personal interaction
- Encourage stewardship behaviors and community participation
- Reinforce the idea that the Greenway is a shared, living system

Not every interpretive product must include a call to action, but all should offer a moment of reflection or connection that extends beyond the site.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

All interpretive media developed for the Greenway should adhere to the following principles:

Visitor-Focused
Media are designed from the visitor's perspective, not from an inventory of facts. They help visitors develop expectations, orient themselves, and discover meaning without overwhelming them.

Thematic
Every interpretive product should clearly illustrate the Greenway's central theme and one or more sub-themes. Media should provoke thought and connection rather than simply convey information.

Layered and Choice-Based
Recognizing the non-linear nature of the Greenway experience, media should allow visitors to engage at different levels—a quick glance, a brief pause, or deeper exploration—based on their interests, time, and ability.

Equitable and Accessible
Interpretation should be available without requiring technology, while offering optional digital layers for visitors who want deeper or more personalized engagement.

Flexible and Scalable
Media strategies must accommodate phased development, changing partnerships, and varying site conditions, while maintaining a cohesive Greenway-wide identity.

Adaptable
Interpretation should evolve over time as more becomes known about visitor preferences and visitation patterns. Continue to leverage artificial intelligence and anonymized cellular data to learn more about visitation patterns along the Greenway and its major access points through Placer.ai data, or otherwise.

Consistent Identity & Tools
Given the Greenway's multi-entity management structure, consistency is achieved not through uniform messaging but through shared frameworks and tools. A Greenway-wide interpretive identity[1]—expressed through materials, forms, and graphic standards—should be applied across media types while allowing for local expression. An Interpretive Media Toolkit can support partners by providing:

- Design templates and content guidance
- Thematic reference materials
- Best practices for placement, accessibility, and maintenance

Training opportunities for staff and volunteers further ensure that interpretation across the Greenway reflects shared values and goals.

Invite Visitor Participation
Promote participation in nature-based apps such as eBird and iNaturalist to help Greenway users practice observation, contribute to shared knowledge, and build a sense of stewardship for the Grand River Valley's living systems.

1 Implementation of the identity should reference the "Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide for West Michigan Trails and Bikeways" (West MI Wayfinding Guide) for guidelines on how to integrate the Greenway's identity, as well as the River For All guidelines that establish design intent for the 2 miles of Greenway with the urban core of downtown Grand Rapids.

PRIORITY SITE PROFILES

This report analyzes 20 sites along the Grand River Greenway. Each site is profiled and site-specific recommendations are made. The site profiles are arranged geographically along the Grand River Greenway starting in Lowell and leading out to Lake Michigan.

Many more potential interpretive sites exist along the length of the Greenway. The following sites have been chosen for inclusion in the interpretive plan solely as a means of focusing the scope of this planning effort. It is the intention of this plan to present analysis and recommendations for sites of varying character, size, and intepretive potential that can be used to shape interpretive developments at other sites in the future[1].

Each site is designated as a Trailhead, Gateway, or Interpretive Node. This designation reflects ease of access, visitation levels, site conditions, and interpretive potential—all factors that help determine the hierarchy of interpretive development. See the following pages for more information about the proposed levels of interpretive development envisioned.

Site profiles are included for the following locations. An overview map showing each site follows on pages 44-45.

<u>Kent County</u>

1. Grand Riverfront Parks (Interpretive Node)
2. McGraw Park (Trailhead)
3. Ada Covered Bridge and Legacy Parks (Interpretive Node)
4. Chief Hazy Cloud Park (Interpretive Node)
5. Grand Rogue Park (Interpretive Node)
6. Comstock Park (Interpretive Node)
7. Riverside Park (Interpretive Node)
8. Ah-nab-awen Park (Interpretive Node)
9. Millennium Park (Interpretive Node)
10. Johnson Park (Gateway)

<u>Ottawa County</u>

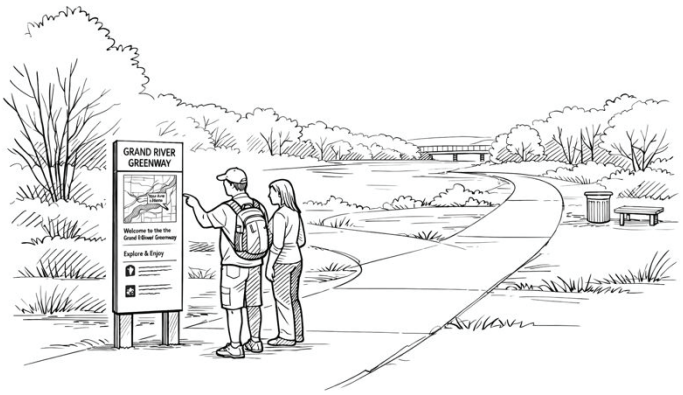
11. Jenison Mill (Gateway)
12. Hager Park (Interpretive Node)
13. Grand River Park (Interpretive Node)
14. GVSU campus (Gateway)
15. Eastmanville Bayou (Gateway)
16. Riverside Park (Interpretive Node)
17. M-231 TH Parking (Gateway)
18. Connor Bayou (Interpretive Node)
19. On trail near Pottawattomie Bayou (residential) (Trailhead)
20. Ottawa Sands Park (Interpretive Node)

1 For example, Bend Area Open Space is a 606-acre parcel that is in the initial phases of becoming built out as a major regional park and natural area in eastern Ottawa County, with several miles of river frontage and Greenway trail. A visitor/education center ("Explorer's Center") is envisioned for the site and thus would become an important Interpretive Node where interpretive concepts presented in this plan would be implemented.

SITE TYPES

Trailheads

Trailheads are regularly used access points that introduce visitors to the Grand River Greenway and help them understand where they are within the larger system. Interpretation at Trailheads focuses on thematic overview, orientation, and expectations, rather than detailed or site-specific storytelling. These sites establish the Greenway's identity, communicate the central theme, and support safe and confident exploration.



TRAILHEAD-STYLE SITE

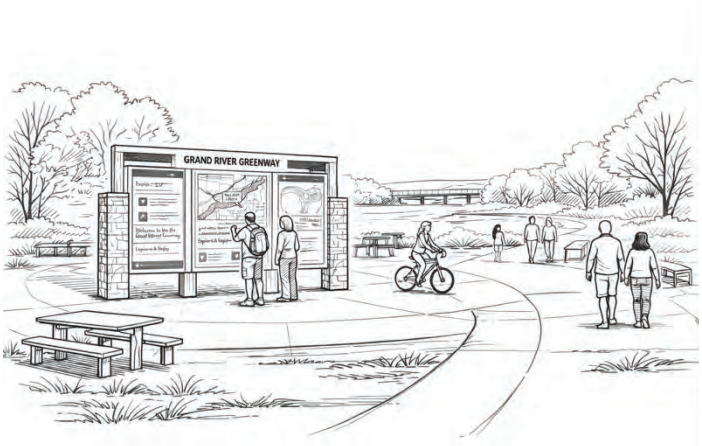
Typical media

Single or double-sided upright panels emphasizing system maps, thematic overview content, etiquette, safety, and connections to nearby destinations

Gateways

Gateways are high-profile sites and major access points where many visitors first encounter the Greenway. These locations may represent a visitor's only interpretive experience and therefore carry greater responsibility for communicating the full Greenway story.

In addition to orientation information, Gateways introduce the central theme and multiple sub-themes, and highlight key site-specific stories that bring the Greenway to life. Gateways typically accommodate higher visitation and more substantial interpretive infrastructure.



GATEWAY-STYLE SITE

Typical media

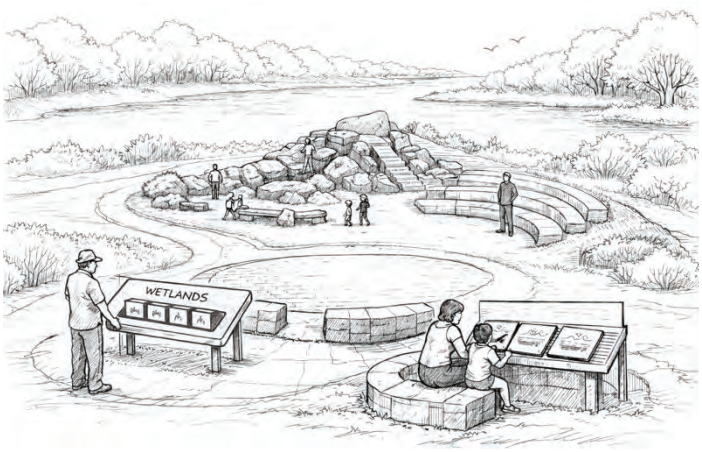
Greenway Orientation Hubs or larger kiosk structures with multiple graphic panels that integrate orientation, thematic interpretation, and site context

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Nodes
Interpretive Nodes are destinations with high interpretive potential, where visitors are encouraged to slow down, gather, and engage more deeply with place-based stories.

These sites focus on localized, resource-driven interpretation, using the Greenway's thematic framework to explore specific natural, cultural, or historical features in depth. Nodes often include amenities that support longer stays and immersive experiences.

Typical media
Multiple low-profile interpretive panels, nature play and thematic installations, text and/or icons embedded into surfacing or other architectural features, and interactive or tactile exhibit elements



INTERPRETIVE NODE-STYLE SITE

KEY TO AMENITIES

As part of the site analysis process, a list of amenities have been compiled and universally-recognized icons applied to see what is currently available at each site. All possible icons are shown on each site analysis; whether or not they are present is reflected according to the system at right.

Recreation Site Symbols
Within each site analysis is a list of amenities: dark is existing, light is not



Existing

Not existing



Parking



Restroom



Picnic tables



Covered picnic tables



Lodging



Tent camping



RV camping



Wildlife viewing



Drinking water



Info



Trash



Sports fields



Playground



Walking trails



Point of Interest



Scenic views



Fishing



Dogs allowed



Fires allowed



Amphitheatre



Boat launch



Interpretive sign

PRIORITY SITES





Gateway Trailhead Interpretive Node

1 GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARKS

Status
Interpretive Node

County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Lowell Charter Township

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Lowell Historical Museum, Lowell Arts, LGROW[1]

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
North Country National Scenic Trail, Lowell Historical Museum, Historic Downtown Lowell, Lower Grand River Water Trail, Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail

1 Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities

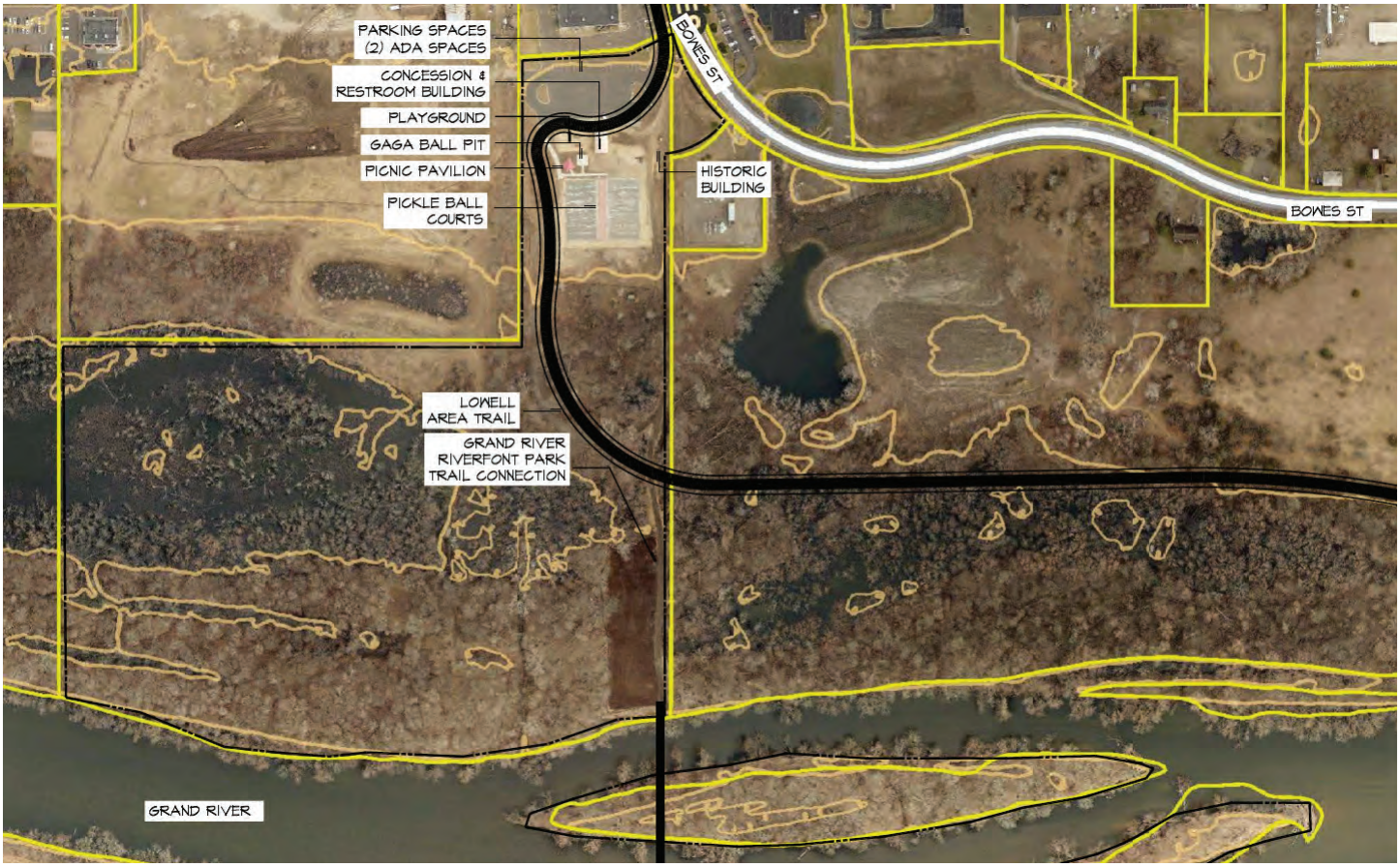


Site Description
Bisected by the Grand River into north and south zones, the Grand River Riverfront Park offers a wealth of recreation opportunities to residents and visitors and sits on the western edge of the town of Lowell. The Grand River Riverfront Park consists of 107 acres (70 on the south and 37 acres on the north side of the river) connected by a new 360' wooden bridge.

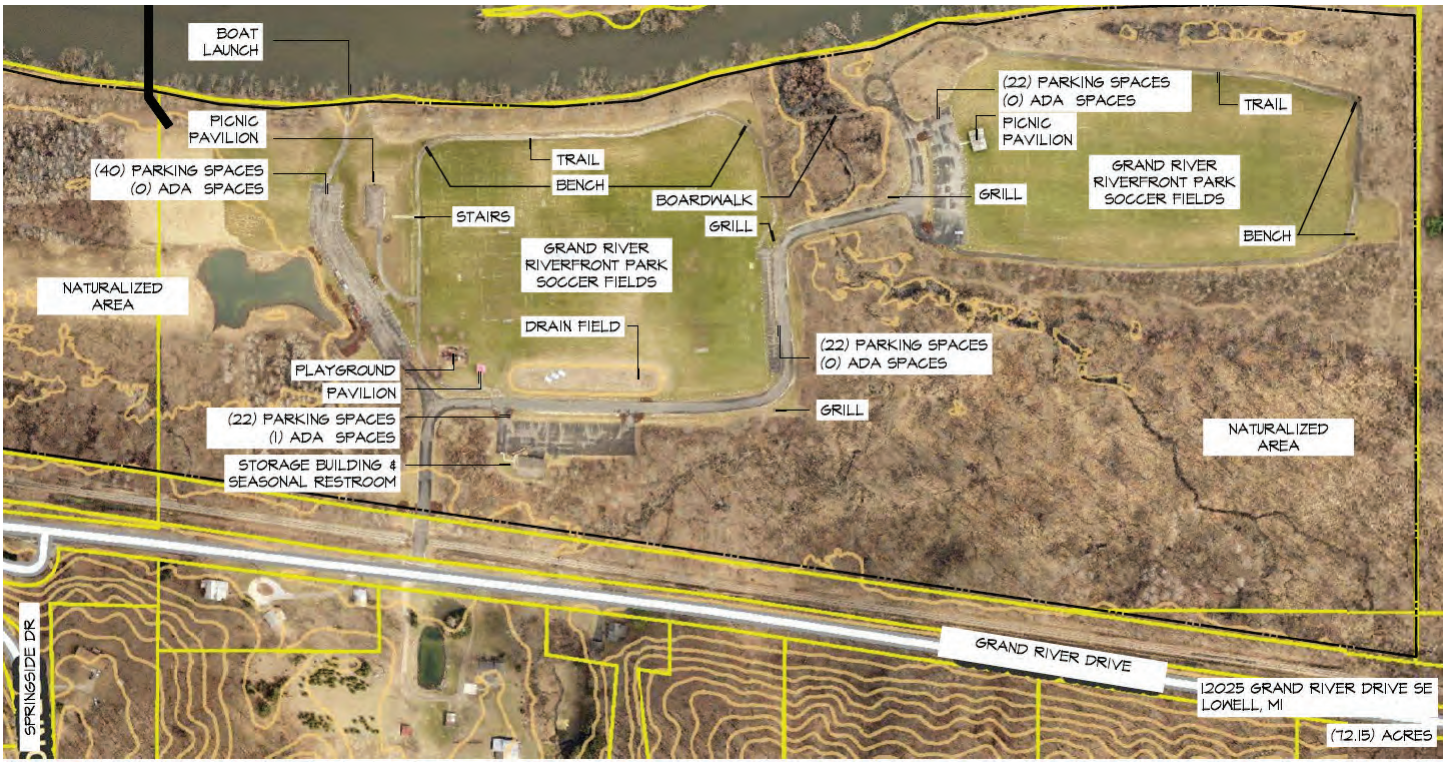
The northern zone features parking, paved and natural trails, restrooms, a concession building, pickleball courts, a playground, a splash pad, a gaga ball pit, and a shade structure with picnic tables. The Lowell Historical Museum maintains a historic log cabin in the northern zone.

The southern zone is a large multi-purpose community park with parking, canoe/kayak launch, restrooms, concession facilities, shade structures with picnic tables, paved and natural trails, and a playground. Ball fields are designed for soccer and lacrosse. Fishing access is also available. Much of this park zone lies within the Grand River floodplain.

A series of interpretive panels exists throughout the trail network within the park. Developed



GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARK NORTH



GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARK SOUTH

1 GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARKS

Site Description (continued)

by the Lowell Area Historical Museum, these very informative signs discuss the history and influence of important individuals such as Ernest R. Graham and Joseph and Magdelaine LaFramboise; the history of settlement in the area; important industries such as clamming, lumbering, and the fur trade; and the history of transportation methods such as steamboats and railroads.

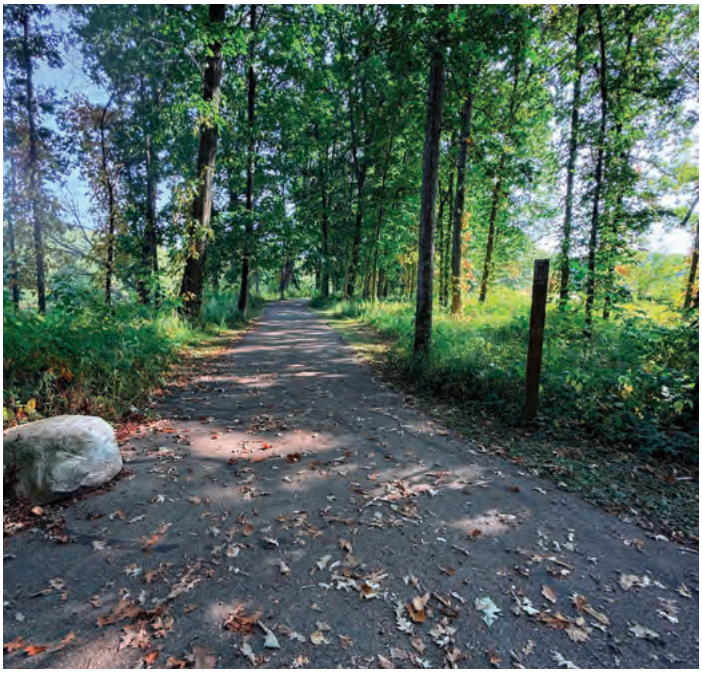
Acquisition and construction of the Grand River Greenway trail are still in progress; when complete, it will run along the southernmost edge of the south zone of the park, adjacent to Grand River Drive, and continue upriver past the confluence with the Flat River.

Interpretive Significance

The Anishinaabek village of Segwun was a cluster of wigwams and between 300-400 people living on the south bank of the Owashtanong (Grand) where the Quabaquasha (Flat) runs in. Archaeological evidence dating back 11,000 years has been found on the east bank of the Flat, just upstream of the confluence with the Grand.

The Flat River was the richest furring river in Michigan at the time of the first trading post built in 1783 by French trapper Joseph LaFramboise. When he was killed in 1806, his wife, Magdelaine (daughter of Ottawa Chief Returning Cloud, Kewinaquot) took over as fur trader and excelled, selling many of her furs to John Jacob Astor's American Fur Trading Company (AFTC). When she retired in 1821, her operation was taken over by Rix Robinson, an agent of the AFTC. He closed the Lowell operation and established his headquarters in Ada, where the Thornapple River empties into the Grand.







The founding of Lowell is credited to fur trader Daniel Marsac, who built a cabin in 1831 and lived here year-round. As more white settlers arrived, Anishinaabek first retreated upstream along the Flat and then further north. Treaty after treaty forced Anishinaabek to give up their land.

As the fur trade diminished, settlers cleared the land for farming and put the rivers' water to work powering mills and transporting lumber. In 1858, the first railroad arrived on the south side of the Grand. The population of Lowell grew to more than 3,000 by 1880 and has remained nearly the same ever since. Diverse businesses sprang up to supply the growing town, but it was dominated by the lumber industry until the turn of the 20th century.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the businessmen of Lowell recognized the economic benefits of tourism; they worked together to build a showboat to draw people to town. The showboat remains one of the most recognizable features in Lowell.

Sources Consulted

- Lowell Area Historical Museum Exhibits (interior and exterior wayside panels), 2025
- Lowell Downtown Historic District Walking Tour Brochure, n.d.
- Lowell Township 2021 Community Parks and Recreation Plan, 2021
- The ABCs of Lowell, 2020

Site Recommendations

This Interpretive Node is the furthest upstream from Lake Michigan along the currently planned extent of the Grand River Greenway. Here, park visitors may learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides. This large community gathering space also offers the opportunity to interpret the community's relationship to the Grand River throughout history, specifically the presence of Anishinaabek villages at this important confluence and the significance of the fur trade. Interpretation here emphasizes observation and connection to local landscapes and livelihoods.

Greenway users may continue along the Greenway to access historic downtown Lowell and its connection to the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: c
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: a, b, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, d, e

1 GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARKS

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Recommended media is in addition to the current interpretive offerings.

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub (larger kiosk structure with multiple panels) located at the primary junction between the Grand River Greenway and the park will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance and suggestions to visit nearby complementary experiences such as historic downtown Lowell and the Lowell Historic Museum. Care should be taken to avoid duplicating content delivered in detail through interpretive signage currently installed throughout the park. Interpretation at the Hub will serve to encourage Greenway users to get more of the story in the interior of the park.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary Gateway access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway Trail is constructed. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Thematic Installation & Play-Based Interpretation

Consider developing a thematic play area related to the importance of the fur trade, including elements representative of beaver lodges or other species significant to the fur trade, native villages, early settlement structures, and canoes. Collaborate with Indigenous stakeholders to ensure accurate and appropriate cultural depiction. Consider also the concept of "putting water to work" in developing interactive children's elements; this may include one or more water wheels, beaver dams, log jams, and a system of sluices and dams to illustrate how rivers are manipulated to harness the power of water.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

As part of any thematic play area, invest in a series of interactive waysides that incorporate tactile elements to illustrate the themes at this site related to Anishinaabek presence, the fur trade, early settlement, and industry (including clamming and milling). Incorporate then/now imagery to show how the riverfront has changed.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided canoe/kayak trips as well as pop-up programs that further explore the fur trading and clamming eras. Stewardship activities and events would also take place.

Digital Media

Digital content should complement physical interpretive panels. Seasonal updates might include information related to fish movement, flooding, and wildlife sightings. Visitors would be invited to participate in community science endeavors such as iNaturalist and eBird.

Additional Considerations

The confluence with the Flat River is located nearby[1] and should be marked with interpretive products and potentially programming that reveal the significance of the site.

1 Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) is building a trail to connect the parks with the Flat River.

Interpretive Media @ GRAND RIVER RIVERFRONT PARKS	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about: • presence of Anishinaabek • history of this community tied to the river • watershed awareness • connection to North Country National Scenic Trail • Lower Grand River Water Trail • trail connection to Flat River			
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway and directs to North Country NST
THEMATIC INSTALLATION & PLAY-BASED INTERPRETATION	• elements evocative of a beaver lodge	• elements address fur trade, Anishinaabek villages, canoes, early settlement structures, putting water to work		
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• natural benefits of river flooding as well as damage to permanent structures, impacts of industry on species and current status	• Anishinaabek presence and important people (Cobmoosa), fur trade, early settlement, and industry (incl. clamming & milling) • then/now imagery invites comparison		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• pop-up programming exploring the species central to the fur trade and clamming eras	• pop-up programming exploring the fur trade era	• stewardship activities and events related to caring for the river and habitat	• guided canoe/kayak trips
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal updates (fish movement, flooding, wildlife sightings)	• more detailed stories covering history and Indigenous context for the river (in partnership)	• iNaturalist and eBird	

2 MICHAEL MCGRAW PARK

Status
Trailhead

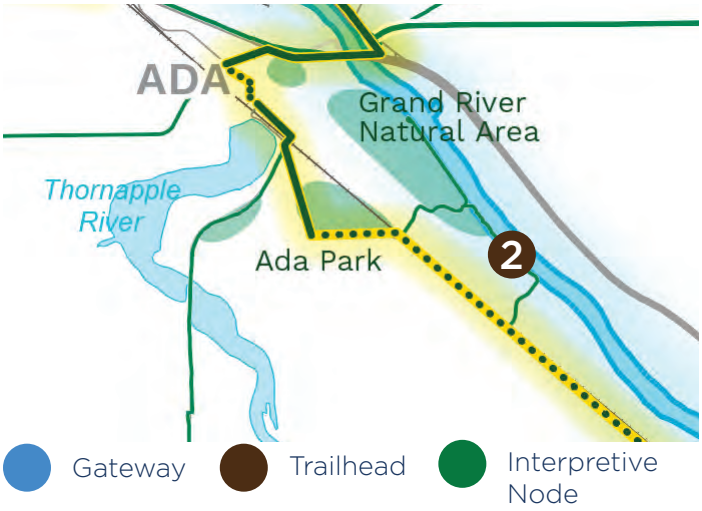
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Cascade Township

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, thematic overview

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Cascade Historical Society, White Pine Chapter / Michigan Botanical Society, Grand Rapids Area Audubon Chapter

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Cascade Historical Museum, Ada Township Grand River Natural Area Preserve



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
This 68.8-acre park borders the Grand River and the 120-acre Ada Township Grand River Natural Area Preserve and lies mostly within the floodplain. McGraw park contains a few hiking trails and a paved pathway—hiking and passive recreation are the main uses of the park. A small 2-acre parcel located on the south end of the park is owned by the Forest Hills Public School and serves as the school's access to the Grand River for its crew teams.

Acquisition and construction of the Grand River Greenway trail is still in process.

Interpretive Significance
This park, along with the adjacent Grand River Natural Area Preserve, preserves woodlands and riverfront, providing scenic views of the Grand River as well as wildlife habitat for birds, deer, and other wildlife. Observed species have included, but are not limited to:

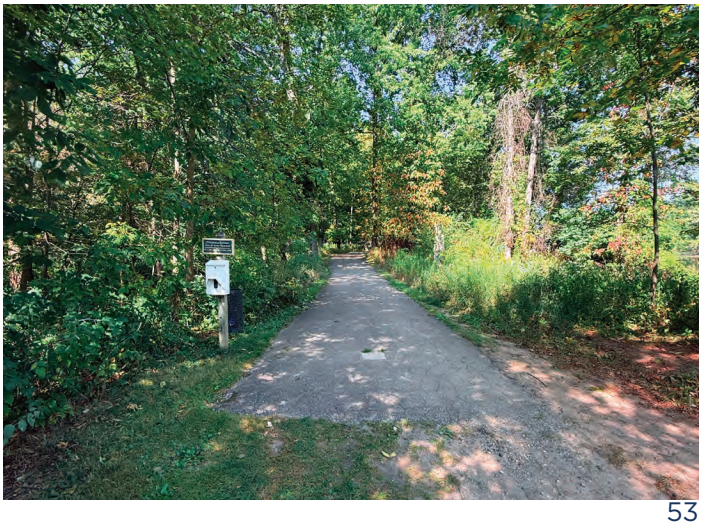
Plants

- Wood anemone
- Canadian wild ginger
- Common milkweed
- Trout lily
- Green arrow arum
- Willow



MICHAEL MCGRAW PARK MAP





2 MICHAEL MCGRAW PARK

Trees
- American elm
- Hickory
- Bur oak
- Sassafras

Birds
- Red-winged blackbird
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Great blue heron
- Canada goose
- Cedar waxwing
- Brown creeper
- Indigo bunting
- Scarlet tanager

Insects
- Blue-fronted dancer
- Monarch

Reptiles
- Common snapping turtle
- Northern map turtle

Mammals
- Muskrat
- Eastern chipmunk
- White-tailed deer

Sources Consulted
- iNaturalist
- Cascade 5-Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan: 2023-2026

Site Recommendations

At this trailhead, Greenway visitors may learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides. As the Greenway courses through the park, consider incorporating a series of wayside exhibits that convey the significance of the Grand River to this community and the native plants and animals that inhabit the riverside environment.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c
Goal 2: b, c, d
Goal 3: e
Goal 4: a, b, d, e, g
Goal 5: a, b

Location-Specific Interpretive Media
Recommended media is in addition to the current interpretive offerings.

Trailhead
A Trailhead panel here introduces visitors to the Greenway and helps them understand how it is part of a larger system of trails, and how this section of the Grand River is connected to the greater watershed. Information will include a localized map, as well as a context map of the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels
Consider a series of 3-5 wayside panels on this section of trail focused on history of this riverside environment as well as several featured species that visitors might encounter. Emphasize the biodiversity that thrives in a natural riverside environment.

Guided Programs
Explore the possibility of periodic ranger-guided walks here focused on natural history, as well as invasive plant monitoring and removal.

Digital Media
Digital content should complement physical interpretive panels. Seasonal updates might include information related to fish movement, flooding, and wildlife sightings. Visitors would be invited to participate in community science endeavors such as iNaturalist and eBird.

Interpretive Media @ MICHAEL MCGRAW PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

TRAILHEAD	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • the river shapes the landscape and influences settlement and development patterns
	  • the Thornapple River is part of the Grand River watershed			

INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• species and biodiversity of riverside environment	• role of the river to the community historically		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• guided walks focus on natural history			
DIGITAL MEDIA			• iNaturalist and eBird	

3 COVERED BRIDGE & LEGACY PARKS

Status
Interpretive Node

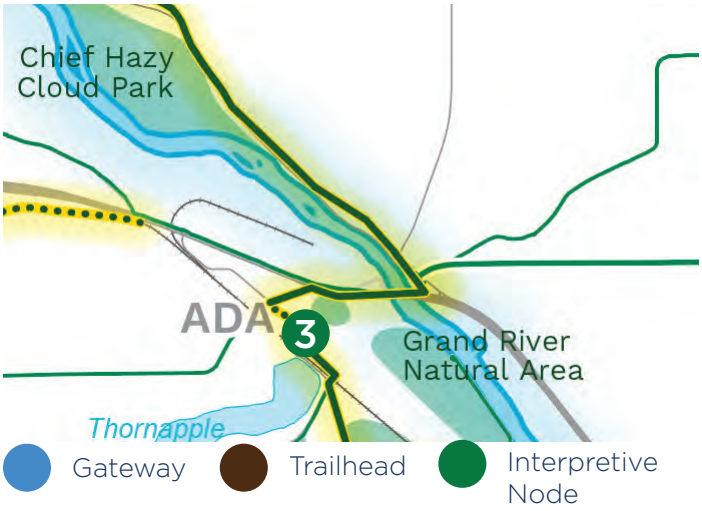
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Ada Township

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Ada Historical Society

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Averill Historical Museum, Downtown Ada



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
These recreation sites are located adjacent to each other in downtown Ada and will be connected more significantly with the addition of a pedestrian bridge planned for 2026.

The 3-acre Covered Bridge Park is currently under construction and is a reimagining of Ada's historic Leonard Field Park. Once completed in 2026, features will include a playground, splash pad, pickleball courts, dog park, shaded picnic tables, a veterans' memorial, and river overlook.

Located just downstream on the Thornapple River lies Legacy Park. Constructed in 2019, this 2.9 -acre neighborhood park includes a playground, pavilion, sculpture, amphitheater, and picnic tables. It is located adjacent to the Town's downtown shopping and dining district.

Acquisition and construction of trail to further connect these sites as part of the Grand River Greenway is still underway.

Interpretive Significance
The confluence of the Thornapple and Grand rivers has long been a place of gathering, travel, trade, and settlement. For centuries, Anishinaabek communities maintained seasonal villages, gardens, burial grounds, and travel routes at this strategic location, where two major waterways converged. The rivers provided food, transportation, and connections to a broader network of communities throughout the region, making the confluence



ARTIST RENDERING OF COVERED BRIDGE PARK



ARTIST RENDERING OF PLANNED PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

3 COVERED BRIDGE & LEGACY PARKS

an important cultural and economic center long before Euro-American settlement.

Among the most influential residents was Madeline LaFramboise, an Odawa trader whose extensive trading network connected communities throughout the Great Lakes. Together with her husband, Joseph LaFramboise, she established a successful fur trade enterprise in the region that later became part of the network managed by Rix Robinson, an agent of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Trading Company. Robinson established his headquarters in Ada in 1821, building upon existing Indigenous trade relationships and infrastructure. The trading post remained active until the decline of the fur trade in the 1830s.

Following the opening of Michigan to non-Indigenous settlement, increasing pressure on Indigenous lands led to the dispersal of villages along the Grand River corridor. Some families relocated north of the Grand River near present-day Chief Hazy Cloud Park, while others settled near what is now the Knapp Street crossing. By the late nineteenth century, many Anishinaabek families had moved to lands along the Manistee and Muskegon rivers as successive treaties forced the cession of Indigenous homelands.

As the fur trade declined, the confluence became an important center for agriculture, milling, lumber transport, and commerce. The railroad arrived in Ada in the 1850s, strengthening connections to regional markets and accelerating community growth. Navigating and crossing the Grand and Thornapple rivers remained essential to daily life and economic activity. The iconic covered bridge, constructed in 1867, became a vital transportation link and enduring symbol of the community. In the 1950s, the mouth of the Thornapple River was







relocated to accommodate bridge and roadway improvements, altering the historic confluence while maintaining Ada's role as a crossroads where transportation networks, commerce, and community life intersect.

Sources Consulted

- Ada Township 2022 Park, Recreation and Land Preservation Plan, 2022
- Ada Recreation Connection Newsletter, Spring/Summer 2025
- Averill Historical Museum Exhibits, 2025

Site Recommendations

These invigorated community gathering spaces offer the opportunity to reveal the history of Ada and its connections to the Thornapple and Grand Rivers.

In-depth interpretation will be achieved through a light touch that is to scale with the village feel, focusing on heritage at the Covered Bridge Park and ecology and stewardship at Legacy Park. Visitors will also learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: c
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: a, b
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Recommended media is in addition to the current interpretive offerings.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Numerous trail connections occur at these park sites. Single upright orientation panels should be used to identify the Greenway in each park, while trail marker posts can be used for additional trail access points in either park.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

At Covered Bridge Park, a series of low profile wayside panels near the bridge and river access focuses on the bridge as a connector of people, goods, and time. Interpretation provides brief context of river crossings, settlement patterns, and change over time. Acknowledge the contributions of Rix Robinson and Magdelaine LaFramboise.

At Legacy Park, low profile panels discuss river flow, flooding, and seasonal change, incorporating prompts that encourage observation ("What changes after high water?"). Stewardship messaging addresses water quality, invasive species, and river-friendly behaviors.

Miscellaneous Elements

At Covered Bridge Park, consider embedding subtle timelines into railings, seating, or path surfaces. At Legacy Park, consider small elements that encourage slowing down, observing surroundings, and sensory engagement. At one or both parks, explore the possibility of a translucent panel depicting a historic photo of the bridge or village that allows that visitor to compare and contrast views.

Guided Programming

At Covered Bridge Park, special events such as heritage days can feature thematic programming such as guided walks and thematic demonstrations.

Digital Media

Provide links to access deeper histories, including oral accounts and archival maps and photos of both park sites.

At Legacy Park, include prompts to explore community science through eBird and iNaturalist, and access information about river conditions, wildlife updates, and stewardship opportunities (trail maintenance and river cleanups, for example).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ COVERED BRIDGE & LEGACY PARKS	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• L—river flow, flooding, seasonal change; river-friendly behaviors, invasive species, water quality	• CB—role of the bridge as a connector of people, goods, and time (farms and mills with markets and railroad); river crossings, settlement patterns, change over time; acknowledge contributions of Rix Robinson and Magdelaine LaFramboise	L—stewardship efforts	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING		• CB—heritage days, guided history walks and thematic demonstrations		
DIGITAL MEDIA	• L—river conditions, wildlife updates, stewardship opportunities	• CB—deeper history, oral accounts, archival maps	• eBird and iNaturalist	
MISCELLANEOUS ELEMENTS	• L—small prompts encourage slowing down, observing surroundings, and sensory engagement	• Both—translucent panels depict historic image of bridge or village • CB—subtle timelines incorporated into railings, seats, paths		

4 CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

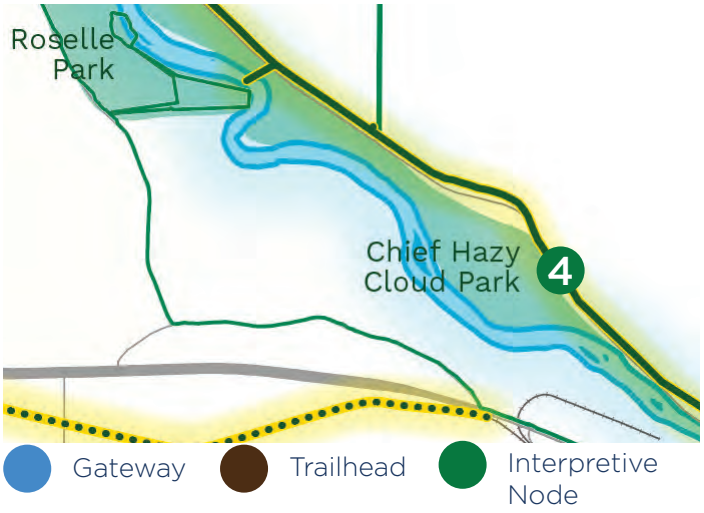
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Kent County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Ada Historical Society

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Averill Historical Museum, Downtown Ada



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
Originally a small roadside park, Chief Hazy Cloud Park was expanded several years ago through the purchase of an adjacent natural area. Today, the park includes more than 3 miles of Grand River frontage and more than 260 acres of woods and wetlands, with plans to expand to nearly 400 acres.

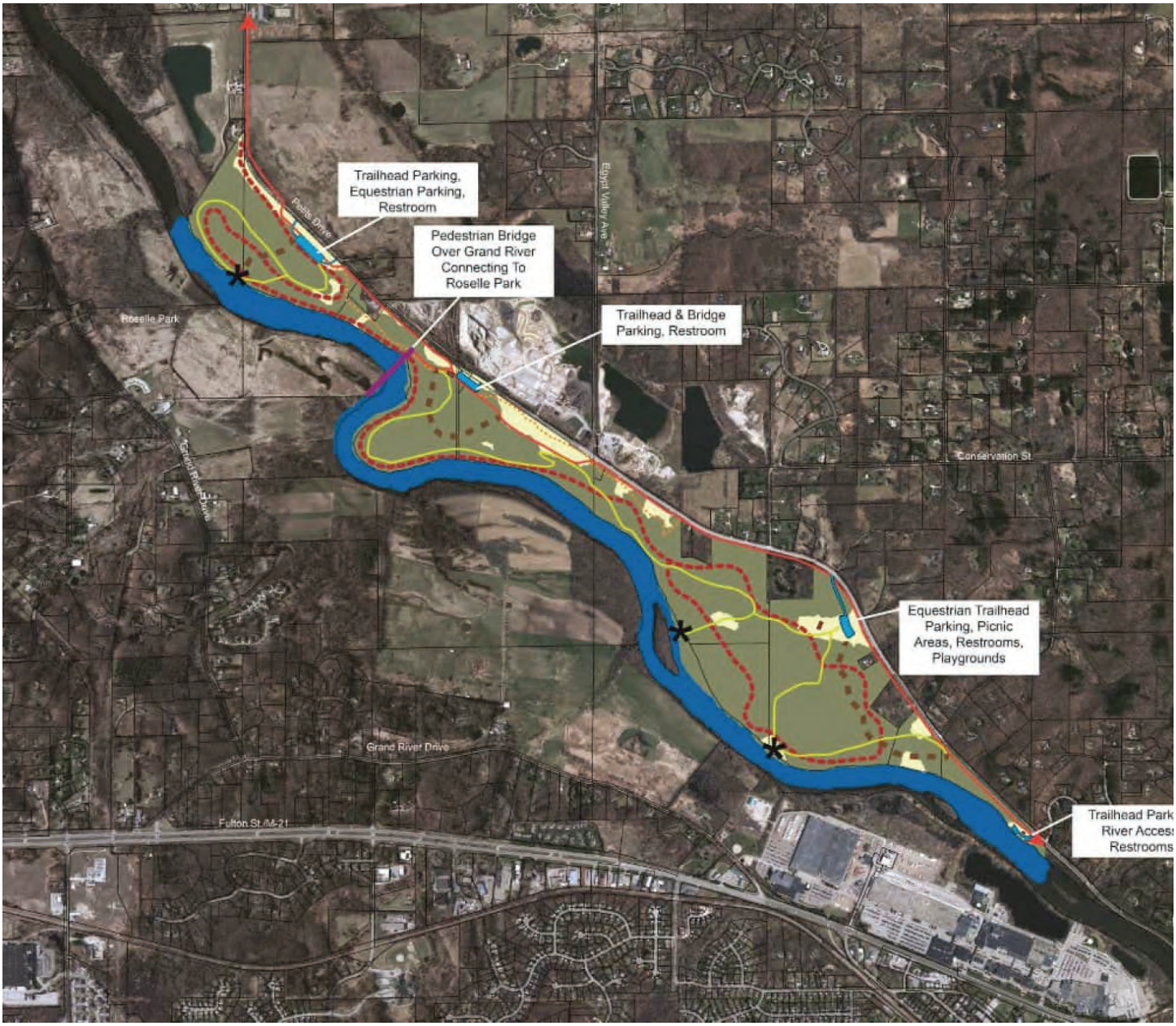
The park remains largely in its natural state with significant opportunities for wildlife viewing. A planned pedestrian bridge across the Grand River will provide access to Ada Township's Roselle Park.

Other planned improvements include new restrooms at multiple trailheads, equestrian parking, picnic areas, and playgrounds.

Interpretive Significance
Chief Hazy Cloud Park is significant as a place that acknowledges Indigenous presence, leadership, and continuity along the Grand River corridor and within the Lake Michigan watershed. Named for a respected Ottawa leader, the park creates an opportunity to recognize Indigenous history as living and ongoing, rather than distant or concluded. Its significance lies as much in what it represents—visibility, respect, and responsibility—as in its physical features.

The park is also significant for its role in contemporary ecological stewardship, particularly as a relocation site for the

RECOMMENDATIONS



PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

4 CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK

endangered Snuffbox mussel *(Epioblasma triquetra)*, a species highly sensitive to water quality and habitat conditions. The presence of Snuffbox mussels signals both the ecological value of this river reach and the care required to sustain it. Their relocation highlights the river as a living system where human decisions directly affect non-human communities, reinforcing the importance of protection, patience, and long-term management.

Situated within a riverine and wetland landscape, the park provides a tangible setting for understanding the deep relationship between Indigenous communities and water-based ecosystems. For generations, the Grand River system supported travel, trade, sustenance, and cultural identity. Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize reciprocity and caretaking of all living beings—values echoed today in efforts to protect species like the Snuffbox mussel and restore river health.

Historically and symbolically, the park's naming and its role in species recovery represent a contemporary act of recognition and responsibility. Chief Hazy Cloud Park connects Indigenous leadership, ecological resilience, and modern conservation practice, inviting visitors to reflect on how honoring people, protecting species, and caring for water are inseparable. As an interpretive site, it is best understood as a place of learning and reflection, where stewardship is framed as an ongoing relationship across generations.

Sources Consulted

- Kent County Parks, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan: 2024–2028
- McGregor, L. Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water, 2023
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Snuffbox Mussel, the Rock Monster Bulletin, 2014

Site Recommendations

Several trailheads with associated parking will be expanded and/or constructed at this park, offering the opportunity to provide orientation to the Greenway, as well as to recreation amenities within the park. One trailhead will offer picnic tables and a playground.

The site's interpretive power lies not in visibility or activity, but in helping visitors understand that some places are significant precisely because they are protected—and that stewardship is an ongoing relationship shared across generations.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c, d
Goal 2: b, e
Goal 3: a, b, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

RECOMMENDATIONS

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub situated at the primary park trailhead will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance and suggestions to visit nearby complementary experiences such as the Averill Historic Museum.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway trail is constructed. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Interpretive panels at this site should be minimal, carefully worded, Indigenous-authored, and strategically placed away from sensitive habitat areas. Content will highlight the principles of caretaking and reciprocity; the protection and restoration of water quality as a shared responsibility; and the living relationships between people, species, and river. Language should connect leadership, water, and responsibility and will frame conservation methods as aligned with Indigenous values.

Thematic Installations

A series of installations will feature sculptural elements that frame a view and/or invite visitors to slow down and observe, paired with concise interpretive framing. These elements invite reflection and presence.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided canoe/kayak trips and guided talks led by conservation professionals and tribal partners.

Occasional stewardship activities help visitors get hands-on experience making a contribution.

Digital Media

Here, digital media can expand on information related to freshwater mussels and water quality, and provide additional content on modern conservation, species recovery, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Invite visitors to engage with community science apps.

Miscellaneous Elements

Small elements invite reflection and observation whenever possible. Where public access is not allowed, small elements can frame this as intentional care for non-human communities. (Sometimes the most meaningful action is not entering a space.)

Interpretive Media @ CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • an Anishinaabek village was sited here
	  • treaties led to displacement of native Ottawa
	  • watershed awareness			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS		• living relationships between people, species, and river	• water quality as a shared responsibility; caretaking and reciprocity	
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS	• sculptural elements providing seating, portals to walk through or framing a view			
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• guided talks led by conservation professionals and tribal partners			• guided canoe/ kayak trips
DIGITAL MEDIA	• freshwater mussels and water quality		• modern conservation, species recovery, Traditional Ecological Knowledge • eBird and iNaturalist	
MISCELLANEOUS ELEMENTS			• prompts promoting reflection and observation	

5 GRAND ROGUE PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

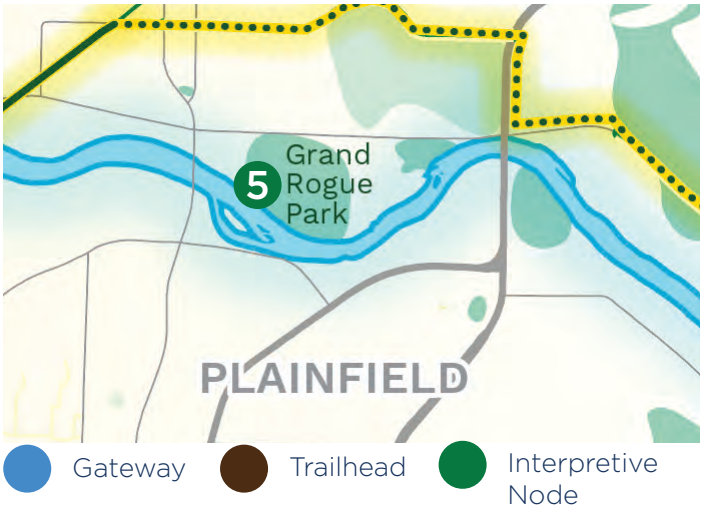
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Plainfield Charter Township

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Plainfield Historical Society, MI Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Rogue River Watershed Partners, Trout Unlimited

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Hyser Rivers Museum, White Pine Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
Grand Rogue Park is a 66-acre community park located at the confluence of the Rogue and Grand Rivers. The park provides access to both rivers and an inland lake and ponds. The park land was previously home to a privately owned campground and was acquired by the township in 2018. Amenities at the park include accessible kayak/canoe launches and fishing docks and a pavilion, playground, trails, and picnic areas.

The park is located adjacent to two other public holdings: Grand Isle Park (also owned by Plainfield Township) to the west and land owned by DNR to the northeast. The neighboring Grand Isle Park offers additional river frontage as well as restored wetlands and wildlife habitat and is slated for additional improvements in the years to come.

Acquisition and construction of the Grand River Greenway trail is still in process.

Interpretive Significance
Located near the confluence of the Grand River and the lower reaches of the Rogue River, the park provides a clear setting to interpret how tributaries shape the character, health, and use of the larger river system. The meeting of waters here illustrates watershed-scale processes such as flow, sediment movement, and ecological exchange, helping visitors



PARK MASTER PLAN

5 GRAND ROGUE PARK

understand the Grand River as a connected network rather than a single channel.

During the 19th century, timber was floated downstream to mills and markets. Once the landscape around the Rogue River was largely cleared of timber, agricultural expansion focused on pig farming. An abundance of pigskins then gave rise to tanning and shoe manufacturing in the late 19th century. The Rogue and Grand Rivers have a history as transportation corridors, driving settlement, industry, and economic expansion across the region.

At the same time, the park highlights a contrasting and evolving relationship to rivers through the Rogue River's designation as a Michigan Natural River. This designation recognizes the Rogue's ecological value and commits to protecting its natural character, water quality, and scenic qualities. The Rogue is known for its salmon and steelhead runs.

Together, the history of timber floating and the Natural River status create a strong narrative—from rivers as industrial tools to rivers as systems deserving protection and care.

Ecologically, Grand Rogue Park illustrates the importance of connected habitats at tributary confluences, where fish, birds, and other species move between the Rogue River and the Grand River. These environments reinforce the idea that stewardship at local tributaries has downstream impacts, linking individual efforts to the health of the larger watershed.

Partners and landowners have been working to implement best management practices on private land to reduce erosion, filter runoff, and improve wildlife habitat on the Rogue, as well as address invasive species.

As an interpretive site, Grand Rogue Park helps visitors understand how rivers have supported both the region's economy and ecology. Its demonstrates how changing values, management decisions, and relationships to water flow together over time, shaping a river corridor that has been worked through history and is actively protected today.

Sources Consulted

- Grand Rogue Master Plan, 2019
- Logging and Timber, Etten, 1926
- Rogue River Natural River Plan, 1973
- Rogue River Watershed Partners website, 2025
- Schrems West Michigan Trout Unlimited website, 2025

Site Recommendations

At this Interpretive Node, interpretation focuses on its role as a confluence site, a place shaped by working-river history, and a location that embodies the shift from extraction to protection through the Rogue River's Natural River designation.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b, c, d
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 4: c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the primary junction between the Grand River Greenway and the park will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway trail is constructed. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

A series of interactive waysides draws attention to the confluence of the Grand and Rogue Rivers, interpreting how tributaries feed and shape larger rivers; the flow, sediment, and ecological exchange that happens at confluences; and why actions on the Rogue have lasting impacts downstream on the Grand. One wayside interprets the timber era—focusing on labor, movement, and change—without dominating the site narrative, while another addresses what the "Natural River" designation means and how it reflects our changing relationships to rivers. Emphasize personal responsibility rather than regulation related to water quality awareness and habitat protection.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle and canoe/kayak trips as well as pop-up programs that further explore watershed health and fishery topics. Periodic stewardship activities or events reinforce water quality awareness and facilitate hands-on interaction for visitors.

Digital Media

Here, digital media can expand on information related to logging history and provide access to archival imagery, maps of the Grand-Rogue watershed connection, and more information and "Natural River" status and stewardship actions. Promote community science opportunities through eBird and iNaturalist

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ GRAND ROGUE PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • watershed awareness
	  • "Natural River" designation			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• river confluence	• timber and tanning eras	• "Natural River" designation • actions on the Rogue affect downstream on the Grand • personal responsibility/ stewardship actions	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• pop-up programming exploring watershed health and fisheries		• stewardship activities/events	• guided canoe/ kayak trips • guided bicycle rides
DIGITAL MEDIA	• watershed maps	• logging and tanning history	• eBird and iNaturalist • "Natural River" designation	

6 COMSTOCK PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

County
Kent

Jurisdiction
MI Department of Natural Resources, leased by Comstock Park Downtown Development Authority

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Alpine Township Historical Commission, MI Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Friends of the White Pine Trail, Grand Rapids Model Railroad Historical Society, Comstock Park Downtown Development Authority

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
White Pine Trail, Dwight Lydell Park



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
This section of Greenway overlies the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park (White Pine Trail). The preferred option to place an Interpretive Node along the Greenway in Comstock Park is a pocket park located near 3956 W River Drive NE (adjacent to an ice cream shop and near the county-owned Dwight Lydell Park). This location offers limited expansion potential, but is highly visible from passing cars.

Interpretive Significance
The site is located on the White Pine Trail, a 92-mile-long linear rail trail park stretching from the community of Comstock Park to Cadillac along the historic railroad bed of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad. At its height, this railroad provided passenger and freight service between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Michigan's Straits of Mackinac and was the longest North-South railroad line in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS



COMSTOCK PARK

6 COMSTOCK PARK

The railroad accelerated settlement of northern Michigan and earned significant profits hauling lumber south from the northern forests. Between 1870-1890, Michigan was the nation's leading timber producer. Numerous lumber mills were constructed along the railroad line, rapidly replacing the previous transportation method of floating logs down the rivers. When the forests were depleted, the railroad pivoted and began marketing its passenger service to tourists eager to enjoy the fishing opportunities in the north. The infrastructure and industries spurred by the lumbering era (such as furniture manufacturing) continues to shape the economy of the Grand Rapids area.

Sources Consulted

- Trains & Railroads webpage: Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad website, 2025
- Logging and Timber, Etten, 1926

Site Recommendations

Interpretation can provide an overview of the Greenway as well as in-depth interpretation of the significance of the railroad and lumber industries to the settlement and development of the region. Coordination with the DNR is recommended so as to not encroach on or duplicate plans held by trail managers and partners.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b
Goal 2: a, c, d
Goal 3: a
Goal 4: e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails such as the White Pine Trail and Meijer Rails to Trails network, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Invest in a series of interactive waysides that incorporate tactile elements to illustrate the themes at this site related to the lumber industry and railroad.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle trips that further explore the railroad and lumbering era.

Digital Media

Here, digital media can expand on information related to logging and railroad history and provide access to archival imagery.

Additional Considerations

This site could be considered the start of the White Pine Heritage Trail. Further coordination with MI DNR will be key to ensuring an optimal visitor experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ COMSTOCK PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about: • connectivity with White Pine Trail and Meijer Rails to Trails network			
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS		• railroad and logging history		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING		• guided bicycle rides that explore the railroad and lumbering era		• guided bicycle rides
DIGITAL MEDIA		• logging and railroad history		

7 RIVERSIDE PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

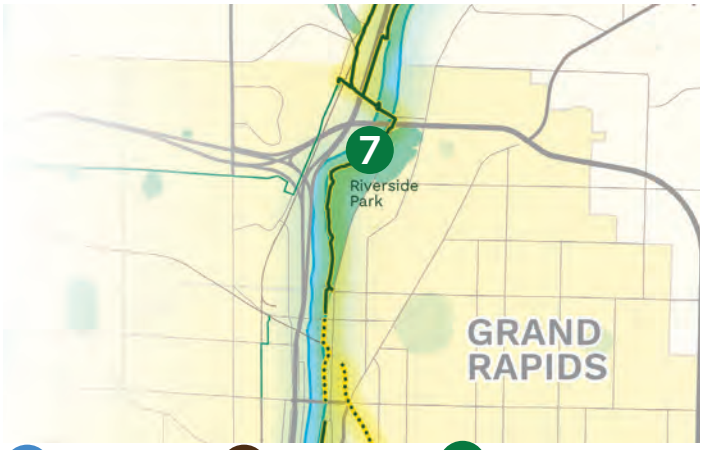
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
City of Grand Rapids

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Grand River Network, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., Grand Rapids Public Museum, City of Grand Rapids, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Leonard to Ann River Edge Trail, Coldbrook Pumphouse, Canal Park, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
At more than 180 acres, Riverside Park is the largest park in the City of Grand Rapids and one of the most prominent public landscapes along the Grand River.

Stretching for more than a mile along the river's east bank, the park encompasses open lawns, lagoons, wooded areas, and paved and unpaved trails that support a wide range of recreational uses.

Riverside Park serves as both a regional destination and a neighborhood park, hosting everyday activities such as walking, cycling, rowing, ball games, picnicking, and birdwatching, as well as large community events and festivals.

RECOMMENDATIONS



PARK AREA: 181.74 Acres



FLOODPLAIN FOREST

- Mature floodplain tree canopy
- Promote continued tree planting and removal of invasive species
- Selectively clear for visual connection to lagoon and river



SEASONAL FLOOD

- Seasonally wet areas
- Promote broader hydrological and plant diversity through green infrastructure



RIVER EDGE

- Provide native filter planting strips to capture nutrient and sediment loads before entering the river



WETLAND

- Standing/open water areas with poor water quality (algae blooms)
- Selective dredging to remove sedimentation and promote water depth and movement



← STORMWATER OUTLETS

- Directly discharges into river and lagoon
- Prioritize daylighting existing pipes through the park

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The largest park in the city, Riverside Park is defined by water. With 1.8 miles of riverfront promenade, the park is home to a diverse population of waterfowl and migratory birds. The park is prone to seasonal flooding, with the majority of its footprint within the 100-year flood zone. Existing wetlands are of poor quality due to stagnant water and stormwater discharge from the surrounding neighborhood. Within a drainage district of over 1,900 surface acres, over 24 million gallons of water is piped through Riverside Park, either emptying in the lagoon or the Grand River. There is potential to transition much of the Parks managed lawn areas into naturalized native plantings to restore habitat and improve water quality through the use of constructed wetlands, rain gardens, and bioswales.

EXCERPT FROM 2022 RIVERSIDE PARK MASTER PLAN / COURTESY VIRIDIS DESIGN GROUP

7 RIVERSIDE PARK

Interpretive Significance

Riverside Park is significant as a large riverfront floodplain landscape shaped by the natural processes of the Grand River and by evolving human relationships to the river over time. Its open lawns, lagoons, mature tree canopy, and wooded edges occupy a working river system influenced by seasonal flooding, sediment movement, and ecological succession within an urban setting.

As one of the largest contiguous green spaces along the Grand River in Grand Rapids, Riverside Park contributes to ecological connectivity within the city. The park provides habitat for birds, pollinators, and aquatic species, supports cooling and stormwater absorption, and offers residents access to nature within a densely developed environment. Its scale allows visitors to experience the river as a living landscape shaped by changing seasons and water levels.

The park also holds strong cultural significance as a shared public landscape where recreation, community life, and identity converge. Established in the early twentieth century on land donated by Clara Comstock Russell and Etta Comstock Boltwood, Riverside Park became one of Grand Rapids' most important riverfront parks. It has long supported walking, sports, picnicking, festivals, and other forms of everyday recreation. From 1931 to 1946, the park hosted a municipal tourist camp that welcomed automobile travelers during the early years of road tourism. During the 1930s, Works Progress Administration crews created and landscaped the lagoon system, and the park later became an important amenity for Riverside Gardens and other postwar neighborhoods on the city's north side.

Riverside Park occupies a much older cultural landscape. For thousands of years, the Grand River corridor served as a route for travel, trade, fishing, gathering, and seasonal settlement for Anishinaabek peoples, including Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi communities. Nearby rapids made the Grand Rapids area an important meeting place within a network of villages, trails, and river routes extending throughout the Great Lakes region. The 1821 Treaty of Chicago opened much of southwest Michigan to non-Indigenous settlement while reserving rights that continue to shape Tribal relationships to the river today. Floodplain habitats, fisheries, and native plant communities remain closely tied to traditions of hunting, fishing, foraging, and stewardship along the Grand River. The annual Grand Valley American Indian Lodge Powwow continues this connection, bringing Native communities and visitors together in celebration of living traditions and enduring ties to the river corridor.

Together, these layers of Indigenous history, ecological function, civic investment, and community use make Riverside Park a place where successive generations have depended upon, adapted to, and cared for the Grand River.

Sources Consulted

- City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Department 2022 Strategic Master Plan Update

Site Recommendations

As an Interpretive Node in downtown Grand Rapids, visitors will learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the immense connectivity it provides. Because this park is located primarily in the floodplain and is used regularly by repeat visitors, interpretive methods should reflect a lighter touch and be landscape-led.

7 RIVERSIDE PARK

Interpretation should emphasize the park's role as a living floodplain, as well as its evolution as a shared civic space. The park functions as a living interpretive landscape, where understanding, connection, and stewardship develop through repeated exposure rather than concentrated exhibits.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c, d
Goal 2: d
Goal 3: c, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Numerous trail connections occur at this park site. Single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway. (Primary orientation structures and signage located at the park would focus on orientation to Riverside Park specifically.)

Interpretive Wayside Panels

A number of low-profile interactive waysides are installed throughout the park—along trails, lagoons, and river edges. Themes address floodplain processes and seasonal change, river-lagoon relationships, wildlife movement and habitat, and how this landscape functions ecologically. Such signage will play off and complement the landscape features proposed in the master plan—native plantings that mark flood zones, mown/unmown transitions that signal ecological functions, and boardwalks or overlooks that frame river dynamics.

Because this park features a network of interconnected trails, consider one or more themed loops/routes with physical and/or digital interpretation. Possible routes might include a "Working River" loop (flooding, sediment, change), a "People and the River" loop (Indigenous presence, parks movement, recreation), and/or an "Urban Nature" loop (birds, wetlands, adaptation).

Digital Media

Consider providing digital interpretation in addition to or instead of wayside panels described above (themed loops/routes) to allow visitors to explore history, Indigenous perspectives, and change over time without cluttering the landscape.

Digital media could present archival photos, historic maps, Indigenous perspectives and oral history (with tribal partners), and seasonal wildlife or flood updates.

Invite participation with community science platforms such as iNaturalist and eBird.

Guided Programming

Explore the delivery of guided walks that discuss seasonal topics on birds, floods, trees, and river history and geomorphology. Stewardship events/activities will be tied to interpretation, and school and youth programs use the park as a living classroom.

Miscellaneous Elements

Consider embedding text or symbols into surfacing on or near trails and incorporating small "then/now" elements that document historic river courses and/or flood events.

Additional Considerations

The nearby Leonard to Ann River Edge Trail is undergoing redevelopment. Design plans call for an indoor event space, and terraces and overlooks.

Interpretive Media @ RIVERSIDE PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway and the Lower Grand River Water Trail • directions to White Pine Trail
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• wayside signage addresses floodplain processes, seasonal change, river-lagoon relationships, wildlife movement and habitat, and how the landscape functions ecologically	• wayside signage addresses Anishinaabek presence and impact of treaties, historic maps, archival photos		
DIGITAL MEDIA	• digital alternative or add-on to wayside panels described above • could address seasonal wildlife or river/flood updates	• digital alternative or add-on to wayside panels described above • could incorporate Indigenous perspectives and oral history (with tribal partners) • park history	• eBird and iNaturalist	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• pop-up programming exploring birds, floods, trees, river history and geomorphology		• stewardship events/ activities	
MISCELLANEOUS ELEMENTS	• embed text/ symbols into surfacing • mark historic river courses/flood events			

8 AH-NAB-AWEN PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

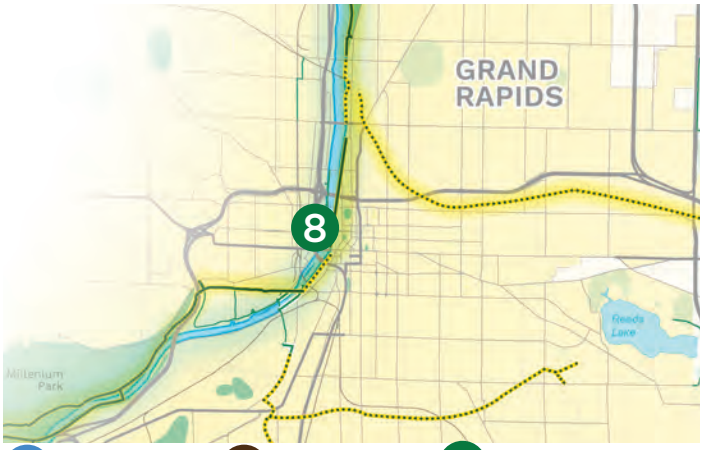
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
City of Grand Rapids

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Grand River Network, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., Grand Rapids Public Museum, City of Grand Rapids

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Grand Rapids Public Museum, Fish Ladder Park



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
Ah-Nab-Awen Park is a prominent downtown riverfront park located along the west bank of the Grand River in the heart of Grand Rapids. Framed by the city skyline and adjacent to cultural institutions, the park provides direct access to the river through terraced lawns, pathways, and gathering spaces—supporting everyday use as well as large public events, performances, and community celebrations.

Interpretive Significance
Ah-Nab-Awen Park is significant as a riverfront floodplain landscape. Its sloping banks, seasonal inundation, and river edge illustrate the dynamics of a living river system—water movement, sediment deposition, and ecological succession—within an urban setting.

The park plays an important role in urban ecological resilience, providing riparian habitat, supporting biodiversity, and helping manage flooding and stormwater along a highly engineered stretch of river. Recent and planned river edge improvements, including native plantings and terraced banks, reinforce the park's function as a place where natural processes are accommodated rather than excluded.

Ah-Nab-Awen Park holds deep cultural significance as a place of gathering, ceremony, and community life along the Grand River.



MASTER PLAN FOR AH-NAB-AWEN PARK / COURTESY VIRIDIS DESIGN GROUP



EXISTING PARK INTERPRETATION / COURTESY DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS, INC.





EXISTING PARK INTERPRETATION / COURTESY DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS, INC.

8 AH-NAB-AWEN PARK

The park's name—meaning "resting place" in Anishinaabemowin—acknowledges the river's longstanding role as a place of meeting, travel, and connection for Indigenous peoples.

Today, the park continues this tradition as a civic gathering space for festivals, performances, ceremonies, and everyday use. Its open lawn, amphitheater, and proximity to downtown make it a place where people come together to celebrate culture, express identity, and engage with the river as a shared presence. The park's design and ongoing reinterpretation reflect evolving values around inclusivity, Indigenous visibility, and respectful relationship to place.

Historically, Ah-Nab-Awen Park occupies a landscape layered with thousands of years of human use. Long before Grand Rapids was established, the Grand River corridor was central to Indigenous lifeways, serving as a route for travel, trade, seasonal encampment, and ceremony. The river's rapids nearby made this area an important gathering point.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the riverfront was reshaped by industrial development, channelization, and infrastructure that limited public access and altered natural systems. The creation of Ah-Nab-Awen Park in the late 20th century marked a turning point—symbolizing a renewed civic commitment to reclaiming the riverfront as public space rather than industrial edge, as well as a return to a more natural river.

More recent redesign efforts further reflect changing attitudes toward history, equity, and stewardship, recognizing Indigenous presence, restoring access to the water, and reframing the river as a cultural and ecological asset rather than a barrier.

Sources Consulted

- City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Department 2022 Strategic Master Plan Update
- Grand River Public Art Plan: Indigenous Engagement Summary, 2025

Site Recommendations

This park functions as a downtown civic stage—hosting ceremonies, performances, public art, and major events. The park's name, design elements, and interpretive intent explicitly acknowledge Indigenous presence and the river's role as a gathering place. Culture here is expressed, named, and activated, rather than incidental. Interpretation here emphasizes presence, voice, and public meaning, positioning the site as a symbolic and experiential gateway. Interpretive products and programs will be Indigenous-led and Indigenous-guided. Anishinaabemowin must be integrated thoughtfully throughout all media.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: c
Goal 2: b, e
Goal 3: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 4: a, b, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

8 AH-NAB-AWEN PARK

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Numerous trail connections occur at this park site. Single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway at various points within the park. Consider the possibility of installing a Greenway Orientation Hub that provides an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails both upstream and downstream, as well as greater connectivity, if the site design allows it. For either level of orientation structure, Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Wayside panels should be few and must be Indigenous-authored, focused at least in part on Indigenous perspectives, treaty history, and living cultural connections to this place and the Grand River. Consider recognizing significant persons including Chiefs Pontiac and Noonday. Signage here should focus on meaning, rather than chronology, and avoid duplicating information available elsewhere. Use wayside signage as prompts to frame experiences.

Thematic Installations

A series of installations will feature sculptural elements tied to river processes and hydrology, gathering, and reciprocity, paired with concise interpretive framing. These elements invite reflection and presence.

Digital Media

Here, digital media can be accessed that reveals treaty history and maps, archival imagery showing riverfront change, and Indigenous perspectives and contemporary voices, as well as event-based or seasonal content.

Guided Programming

Indigenous-led talks, ceremonies, or cultural demonstrations are centered here, with river walks or history programs tied to events. Explore on-going partnership with tribal members and the Grand Rapids Public Museum for interpretation at this site.

Miscellaneous Elements

Consider embedding text or symbols into site elements such as surfacing, amphitheater seating, and walls.

Additional Considerations

The City of Grand Rapids' river restoration project includes plans for low-head dam removal near this site. Requirements by the State Historic Preservation Office and Natural Resource Conservation Service related to the restoration project stipulate that information about dam removal and river restoration must be located here at this site. Interpretive implementation must thoughtfully consider how to integrate this information with other interpretation here and explore collaborative messaging at other nearby sites.

In addition, the Grand Rapids Public Museum is located just downstream of this park. New and on-going interpretive developments along the river edge provide interpretation of many Greenway themes, including:

- geology
- sturgeon, mussels, and other important species in the watershed
- the role of historic mills and hydropower canals that reshaped the river
- pollinator ecology

Interpretation at Ah-Nab-Awen will complement rather than duplicate interpretation at the museum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ AH-NAB-AWEN PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS		• wayside signage must be Indigenous-authored (consider perspectives, treaty history and lasting effects, as well as living cultural connections to place • Consider acknowledging influential Indigenous individuals		
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS	• sculptural elements tied to river processes	• consider sculptural elements tied to gathering and reciprocity	• sculptural elements invite reflection and presence	
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal content	• treaty history and maps, archival imagery that shows riverfront change • Indigenous perspectives and contemporary voices		• event-based info
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• river walks tied to events	• Indigenous-led talks, ceremonies, or cultural demonstrations • history walks tied to events		
MISCELLANEOUS ELEMENTS	• embed text/ symbols into surfacing, amphitheater seating, walls			

9 MILLENNIUM PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Kent County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Kendall College, John Ball Zoological Gardens, Blandford Nature Center

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Johnson Park, John Ball Zoological Gardens



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
Millennium Park consists of more than 1,400 acres spread over four cities, featuring 17.5 miles of paved and natural trails, extensive lakes and wetlands, restored natural areas, and six miles of Grand River shoreline. It was dedicated in 2004 and remains one of the nation's largest urban parks.

The park features a wide array of recreation facilities, including a beach, splashpad, courts for various sports, picnic shelters, a boat rental facility, fishing decks, an amphitheater, and playgrounds. Several historic silos remain on site as a reminder of the site's industrial past, and are situated on a hillside above the floodplain.

Natural features include a fen, extensive wetlands, open meadows, and woodlands of varying ages. Much of the land was previously used for industrial and agricultural purposes, including as a sand and gravel quarry, and gypsum/plaster mines; restoration efforts continue.

Rich cultural resources include the prehistoric Norton Mounds burial site on the southern portion of the park. The site is managed by the Grand Rapids Public Museum.



TRAIL MAP



CONCEPTS FOR SILOS REDEVELOPMENT WERE CREATED BY STUDENTS AT KENDALL COLLEGE, SUCH AS THIS ONE BY ALEXANDER MOSS

9 MILLENNIUM PARK

Interpretive Significance

Millennium Park embodies the long arc of human relationships with land and water within the Grand River watershed, from Indigenous stewardship to agricultural and industrial use, and ultimately to ecological restoration and public recreation.

The park is especially meaningful because of its proximity to the Norton Mounds, an important Indigenous burial and ceremonial site that demonstrates people have lived in and cared for the Grand River valley for thousands of years. These earthworks mark a culturally rich homeland shaped by enduring relationships to land, water, and community. The Norton Mounds connect Millennium Park to a broader Indigenous landscape of travel, food gathering, ceremony, and stewardship that predates the modern city.

Developed on former agricultural and industrial lands, Millennium Park's lakes, wetlands, and restored habitats help manage water, improve water quality, and create habitat before flows reach the Grand River. Interstate bridges, railroad corridors, utility transmission lines, oil derricks, and other infrastructure remain prominent elements of the landscape, placing natural and human-built systems side by side. The park provides a setting to consider how ecological function can coexist with transportation networks, energy infrastructure, and urban growth.

Millennium Park marks a shift in values from extraction and production toward restoration, public access, and long-term stewardship. Landscapes once dedicated to industry now support ecological health, recreation, and community well-being while retaining visible traces of earlier uses. Created through regional cooperation, the park represents a collective investment in environmental care and future generations.

As an interpretive landscape, Millennium Park brings Indigenous history, industrial infrastructure, restored habitats, and contemporary recreation into a single setting. Together, these elements encourage visitors to consider how communities shape the environment over time and how today's decisions influence the future of the Grand River watershed.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Public Art Plan: Indigenous Engagement Summary, 2025
- Kent County Parks, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan: 2024–2028
- McGregor, L. Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water, 2023
- National Historic Landmark Registry archive website, 2003

Site Recommendations

Millennium Park is a place where visitors learn that landscapes are shaped by choices—and that stewardship today becomes the legacy of tomorrow.

Water is a dominant feature of the park, whether in lakes, wetlands, or river. Interpretation along the Greenway should focus on watershed awareness, the importance of biodiversity, the role that natural landscapes provide in determining water quality and overall quality of life for people and wildlife, and the need for habitat restoration.

Interpretation should also address the significance of the area to Anishinaabek without compromising the integrity of the protected sites. Collaboration with tribal representatives

is key in moving forward with any interpretive developments here. Recommendations emphasize systems thinking, experiential learning, and family-friendly discovery, while handling sensitive cultural resources with care.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c, d
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

Greenway Orientation Hubs should be located at numerous locations within the park adjacent to the Greenway. These hubs will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway trail is constructed. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

A series of waysides here explain key processes related to stormwater treatment and water quality improvement, change in land use over time, habitat creation in restored wetlands, seasonal change, and ecological succession.

Given the proximity to the Norton Mounds and deep Indigenous history, interpretation that acknowledges Indigenous presence and stewardship should be carefully framed and partnership-driven. Language should emphasize respect, continuity, and responsibility rather than any site-specific details.

Thematic Installations & Play-Based Interpretation

Consider incorporating sculptural elements and possibly play elements related to woodlands and wetlands, evoking important habitat elements (logs to crawl through or balance on and nest- and/or beaver lodge-like structures to explore, for example).

Pair with interpretive prompts that encourage discovery of how water moves across the landscape and through the watershed, and look-and-find activities related to birds, plants, and water features.

Miscellaneous Elements

Consider embedding text and/or icons that reinforce the principles of water, connectivity, reciprocity, and observation into surfacing, seating, and walls.

Observation Platform

Consider creating one or more observation platforms to help visitors gain a greater sense of the Grand River Valley, potentially activating the historic silos located at the park. Interpretation would provide identification of landmarks as well as raptor species.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided wetland and other water-related walks, as well as periodic stewardship activities/events. Indigenous-led programs could address perspectives and history.

Digital Media

Visitors access digital content that features interactive maps that reveal landscape changes over time; expanded stories about restoration and Indigenous history; and seasonal updates on wildlife, river news, and stewardship activities and events. Invite participation with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist.

Interpretive Media @ MILLENNIUM PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • watershed awareness, including how water flows through the park and connects to the Grand River
	  • acknowledgement of Indigenous presence and stewardship			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• ecological succession • seasonal change	• Indigenous presence • change in land use • stormwater treatment and water quality improvement	• restoration and stewardship	
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS & PLAY-BASED INTERPRETATION	• sculptural habitat elements in woodlands and wetlands • look-and-find activities			
MISCELLANEOUS ELEMENTS	• text and/or icons depicting water and interconnectivity		• text and/ or icons depicting reciprocity and observation	
OBSERVATION PLATFORM	• rail-mounted signage to identify landmarks	• rail-mounted signage to identify raptor species and ecology		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• woodland and wetland ecology, biodiversity, and watershed health	• Indigenous-led programming		• guided walks
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal updates on wildlife, river news	• interactive maps reveal landscape changes over time • Indigenous history	• stewardship activities and events • restoration efforts • eBird and iNaturalist	

10 JOHNSON PARK

Status
Gateway

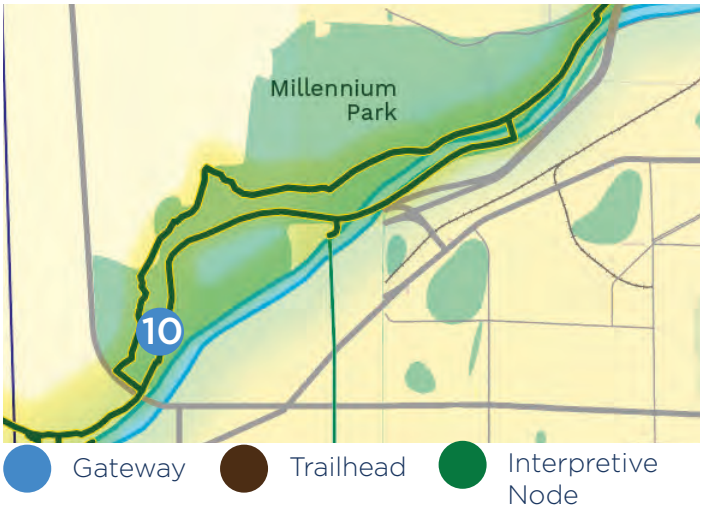
County
Kent

Jurisdiction
Kent County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Kendall College, John Ball Zoological Gardens, Blandford Nature Center, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Johnson Park, John Ball Zoological Gardens, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
This 224-acre park located just south of Millennium Park consists of scenic woods covering hills, valleys, and lowlands as well as 1.4 miles of Grand River frontage. Native grassland and wildflower species have been cultivated along the riverfront and in the main recreation area, adding to the park's diversity of habitats and scenic quality.

Easy access from I-196, diverse recreational facilities, expansive natural areas, and riverfront make Johnson Park one of Kent County's most active and heavily visited parks. The park boasts a new singletrack system of mountain bike trails, as well as 1.5 miles of paved trail through the woodland area. Facilities include picnic areas, multiple shade structures, ball fields, playgrounds, fishing areas, a recently improved disc golf course, boat launch, and a winter sledding hill. The park is also in close proximity to boat ramps.

Interpretive Significance
Johnson Park is significant as an ecologically intact riverine landscape along the Grand River. Located at a broad bend of the river, the park encompasses floodplain forests, wetlands, and river edges that clearly demonstrate natural river processes, including seasonal flooding,



JOHNSON PARK IMPROVEMENTS

10 JOHNSON PARK

sediment deposition, and ecological succession. These processes shape the park's dynamic landscape and provide a visible example of how a large river functions when given space to move and change.

The park plays an important role in regional ecological connectivity, supporting habitat for birds, mammals, amphibians, and aquatic species. Its wetlands and wooded floodplain serve as critical stopover and breeding areas, while the river corridor enables wildlife movement through an otherwise developed landscape.

Johnson Park is also significant for its contribution to water quality and watershed health. Floodplain vegetation and wetlands help slow floodwaters, filter runoff, and improve water quality before flows continue downstream. Together, these features make the park a key example of how natural systems provide essential services—habitat, flood mitigation, and resilience—while offering opportunities for quiet recreation and nature-based learning along the Grand River.

Sources Consulted

- Kent County Parks, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan: 2024–2028
- Maintain and Restore Floodplain Connectivity Climate Hubs website
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory: Floodplain Forest website

Site Recommendations

At this trailhead, Greenway visitors may learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides.



Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b
Goal 2:
Goal 3:
Goal 4: a, e, g
Goal 5: a, b, c

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content.

Digital Media

Here, visitors can access digital content that provides additional information about floodplain forests and vegetation, including wetland species. Seasonal wildlife updates and stories related to Indigenous presence and stewardship should also be presented. This might also be an opportunity to discuss the Great Grand River Log Jam of 1883. Invite participation with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist, possibly focusing on this site as a BioBlitz destination.

Interpretive Media @ JOHNSON PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • watershed awareness, including river movement and floodplain ecology
	  • importance of water quality
	  • importance of wetlands and floodplain vegetation in flood mitigation
	  • wildlife habitat and connectivity
	  • Lower Grand River Water Trail			

DIGITAL MEDIA	• expanded information on floodplain forests and wetland species • seasonal wildlife updates	• Indigenous presence and stewardship • Great Grand River Log Jam	• eBird and iNaturalist	

11 JENISON MILL

Status
Gateway

County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, thematic overview

Partner Opportunities
Steamboat Park, Jenison Historical Association

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Millennium Park, Grand Lady Riverboat at Steamboat Park, Jenison Historical Museum



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
The Jenison Mill trailhead provides access to the Secchia Gateway Arch and Plaza which marks the border between Ottawa and Kent counties.

An existing interpretive panel provides an overview of the Rush Creek watershed.

Interpretive Significance
The Jenison Mill Site is significant as a place where the power of Rush Creek—a tributary of the Grand River—shaped early industry, settlement, and the surrounding landscape. The site supported a water-powered sawmill that relied on the creek's flow to process timber harvested from nearby forests. During the nineteenth century, waterways of all sizes served as engines of local economies, providing power, transportation, and access to natural resources that supported community growth.

As part of a larger network of working waterways, Rush Creek was modified with dams, millraces, and channel alterations designed to capture and direct water power. Lumber processed at the mill contributed to the construction of homes, barns, bridges, and other infrastructure throughout the region, linking forested uplands to downstream markets



SECCHIA GATEWAY ARCH AND PLAZA AT COUNTY BORDER





11 JENISON MILL

via the Grand River. These changes affected stream flow, sediment transport, and aquatic habitat, creating impacts that continue to inform contemporary approaches to watershed management and restoration.

The Jenison family arrived from New York in 1836 and purchased 1,600 acres of white pine timberland in the area. Hiram Jenison established a sawmill on Rush Creek powered by a waterwheel. More than one million board feet of lumber were produced during the first year of operation and four million during the second. Brothers Hiram, Lucius, and Luman Jenison expanded their enterprises to include a farm, flour mill, general store, boarding house, blacksmith shop, machine shop, factory, and foundry, helping establish the economic foundation of the surrounding community.

The site also connects visitors to the relationship between tributaries, floodplains, and the larger river system. Healthy floodplains slow and store water during high flows, reduce erosion, stabilize riverbanks, recharge groundwater, and support diverse plant and animal communities. Understanding how Rush Creek once powered industry alongside the ecological functions provided by intact floodplains offers an opportunity to consider how communities balance economic activity, river health, and long-term resilience.

The river landing at Jenison was one of many in Georgetown Township, but it provided an important connection for residents at a time when steamboats carried freight, mail, and passengers along the Grand River. Beginning in 1908, the Jenison Ferry provided regular passage across the river, strengthening connections between Jenison, Grandville, and neighboring communities. Together, the mill, landing, and ferry place the site within a transportation network that linked tributaries, villages, and the Grand River corridor.

Sources Consulted

- Jenison Historical Association website
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

This important trail access point offers the opportunity to orient trail users to the Greenway and interpret the community's relationship to the Grand River throughout history, specifically the significance of the lumber industry to this community and how the power of water was harnessed to power the community's early enterprises.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1:
Goal 2: a, c, d, e
Goal 3:
Goal 4: a, c, d, e, f
Goal 5: a, b, c, d

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the trailhead will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance and suggestions to visit nearby complementary experiences such as Millennium Park and the private riverboat at Steamboat Park.

Content should address how the lumber industry benefitted from and impacted this site, and reveal how this timber mattered to settlement and building in the community and beyond. Interpretation might include historic photos or maps to complement present-day views, and show diagrams of how the water was transformed to energy. Interpretation should acknowledge the presence and role fo the water treatment plant located nearby.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle trips or walks that further explore the lumber industry.

Digital Media

Digital content could include expanded history of the mill and community, including archival photos and oral histories or quotes from community members (if available). Visitors could also access broader context of the lumber era.

Interpretive Media @ JENISON MILL	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • watershed awareness, including the presence and role of the water treatment plant located nearby
	  • the lumber industry depended on and left its mark on the creek and surrounding landscape
	  • restoration opportunities			

GUIDED PROGRAMMING		• guided bicycle and walking tours explore lumber and community history		• guided bicycle and walking tours
DIGITAL MEDIA		• mill and community history, incl. images • oral history • broader lumber-era context	• restoration opportunities	

12 HAGER PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Jenison Historical Association

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Grand Lady Riverboat at Steamboat Park, Jenison Historical Museum



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities

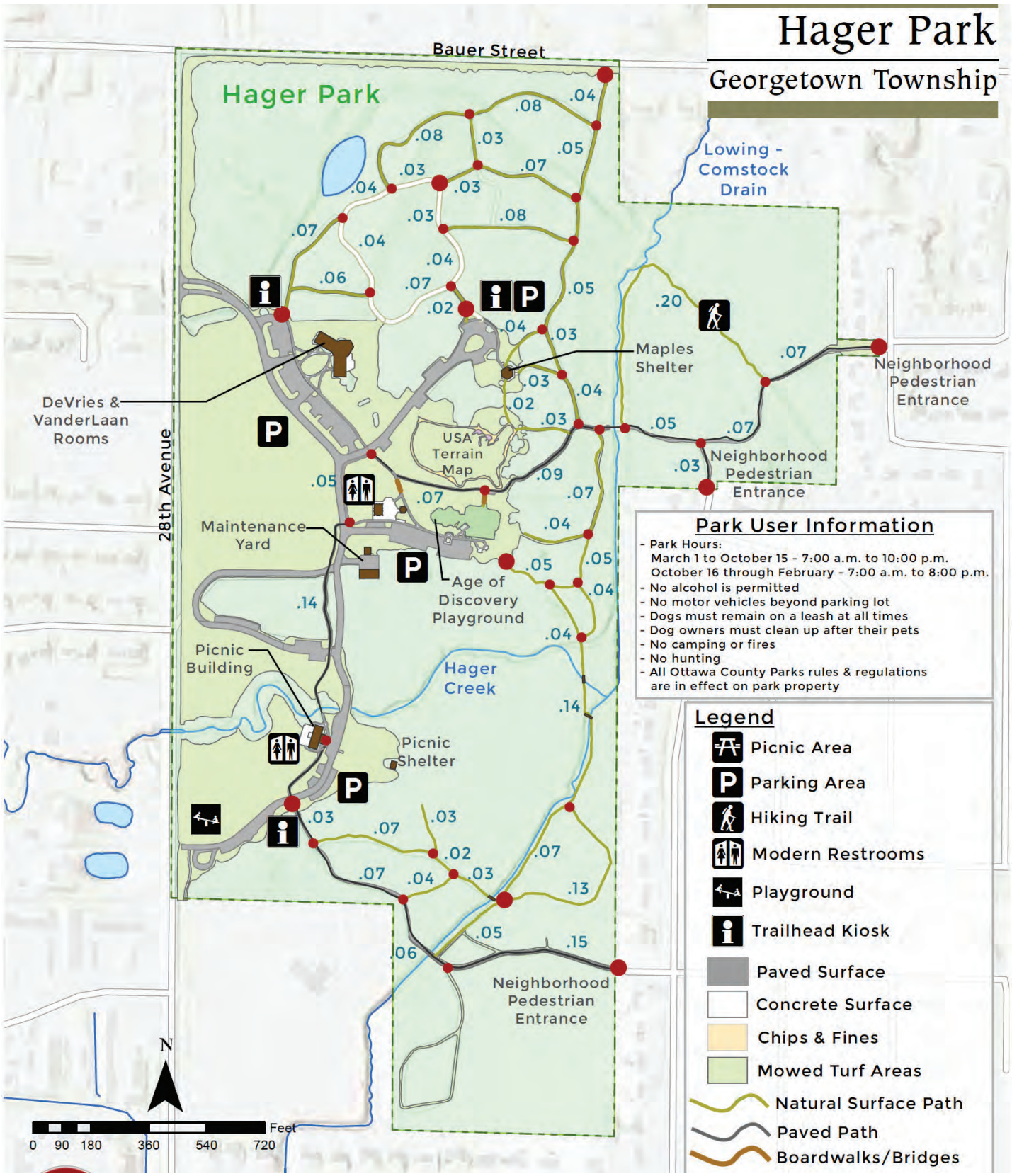


Site Description
This 104-acre park features nature trails winding through a mature hardwood forest, horseshoe pits, grills and picnic tables (covered and uncovered), and the "Age of Discovery" playground overlooking a terrain map of the United States. Reservable meeting room facilities are also available. The park is known for significant wildflowers in Spring.

The park is located on Hager Creek, a tributary of the Grand. The Greenway trail does not currently extend to this property, however, County officials plan to create an extension of the Greenway to this tributary location due to its high visitation and educational infrastructure.

Interpretive Significance
Hager Creek is a tributary of the Grand River, the state's longest river at 262 miles. Hager Creek flows through land used for agriculture, industry, and residential purposes before flowing into the Grand. Only a fraction of the region's historical wetlands and associated habitat types remain, making those that do remain high in conservation value.

As an interpretive site, its significance lies in helping visitors understand that care for rivers and landscapes occurs not only at iconic riverfronts but also in neighborhood parks, where everyday choices, habits, and relationships with the land accumulate over time.


Hager Park
Georgetown Township
Bauer Street
Hager Park
Lowing - Comstock Drain
28th Avenue
DeVries & VanderLaan Rooms
Maintenance Yard
Picnic Building
Hager Creek
Picnic Shelter
Age of Discovery Playground
USA Terrain Map
Maples Shelter
Neighborhood Pedestrian Entrance
Neighborhood Pedestrian Entrance
Neighborhood Pedestrian Entrance
Park User Information
- Park Hours:
March 1 to October 15 - 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
October 16 through February - 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- No alcohol is permitted
- No motor vehicles beyond parking lot
- Dogs must remain on a leash at all times
- Dog owners must clean up after their pets
- No camping or fires
- No hunting
- All Ottawa County Parks rules & regulations are in effect on park property
Legend
Picnic Area
Parking Area
Hiking Trail
Modern Restrooms
Playground
Trailhead Kiosk
Paved Surface
Concrete Surface
Chips & Fines
Mowed Turf Areas
Natural Surface Path
Paved Path
Boardwalks/Bridges
N
0 90 180 360 540 720
Feet

PARK MAP

12 HAGER PARK

The initial 30 acres of the park were donated to the County by Titus Hager, a Grand Rapids lumberman. The park was designed as an arboretum featuring hundreds of trees representing dozens of species.

This park continues to preserve mature hardwood forest and wildlife habitat for birds, deer, and other wildlife. Observed species have included, but are not limited to:

Trees

- Red maple
- Black oak
- White ash
- Black cherry
- Black maple
- Common hackberry
- Basswood
- Northern red oak
- Eastern black walnut
- Green ash
- American elm
- Eastern white pine
- Shagbark hickory
- White oak
- Red pine
- Honey locust
- American beech
- Sassafras
- Slippery elm

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Greenway: Vision and History Storymap, 2021
- iNaturalist
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

This site offers an opportunity to interpret how small parks, tributaries, and community spaces collectively shape the health, identity, and future of the Grand River system.

At this Interpretive Node, park visitors will learn about the Greenway and the connectivity it provides. In-depth interpretation explores the significance of the Hager Creek watershed and the challenges and successes related to water quality over time. Interpretation should address the significance of featured tree species and the role that the lumber industry had on the history of the community (include acknowledgement of park namesake Titus Hager). Interpretation will also address the importance of biodiversity and habitat restoration.

Explore the feasability of refitting the rental space into a nature education center.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c
Goal 2: c, d, e
Goal 3: e
Goal 4: c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub should be located at the primary Greenway access point within the park. This hub will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater watershed connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway trail is constructed. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Thematic Installation & Play-Based Interpretation

Consider developing a thematic installation or play area related to woodlands, evoking important habitat elements (logs to crawl through or balance on and nest- and/or portal-like structures to explore, for example), and possibly elements representative of the lumber industry, complete with murals or other large-scale graphics.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Interpretive panels here should be family-friendly—low text, highly visual, some interactivity. Examples include interpretive prompts that invite consideration of land use changes (flip panels showing then/now land uses), how water moves across the landscape (spinners that illustrate water flow from yard to stream to river), and observation of the environment (textured panels featuring wood, stone, and leaf patterns). Or text-based prompts like “where does rain go from here?,” “can you find signs of animals that use this stream?,” or “what changes after a big rain?”

Frame stewardship for the park and nearby water as something that families already do, aligning stewardship with pride and care rather than rules.

Acknowledge the contributions of Titus Hager with a small recognition panel.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of hosting nature play days with pop-up activities for families. Activities could focus on stream exploration or rain-related topics.

Digital Media

Digital media could include short family challenges and scavenger hunts, or seasonal nature notes. Any upcoming volunteer or stewardship opportunites should also be posted. Invite participation with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist.

Interior Exhibits

If the interior of the building is repurposed as an education/interpretive center with equipment rental, interior exhibits will reflect the scale of use. A separate feasibility study would be called for. If that study finds such a center feasible, an operations and education/interpretation plan would reasonably follow, tiering to this interpretive plan for overarching thematic guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ HAGER PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • watershed awareness and how tributaries connect neighborhoods to the larger river system
	  • seasonal changes			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS & PLAY-BASED INTERPRETATION	• habitat elements of woodlands and wetlands			
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• watershed awareness and biodiversity	• family-friendly approach to land use changes, hydrology, and nature observation skills • light touch on lumbering era and contribution of park namesake	• stewardship behaviors	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• pop-up programming exploring watershed awareness and native wildlife • nature play days • stream or rain-focused activities			
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal nature notes		• volunteer or stewardship opportunities • eBird and iNaturalist	• short family challenges or scavenger hunts

13 GRAND RIVER PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

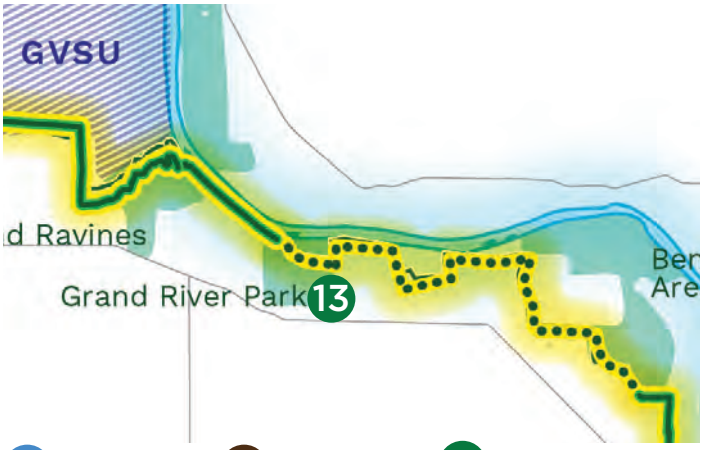
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Jenison Historical Association, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Grand Ravines Park, Grand Lady Riverboat at Steamboat Park, Jenison Historical Museum, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



Site Description
This 162-acre park preserves and provides recreational access to floodplain and upland forest, open fields, and almost a half mile of Grand River shoreline. Nearly four miles of trail are available for hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing. The park features a boat launch, picnic tables, playground, and opportunities for dock-based and shore fishing. The covered picnic building is currently available for rental, however a Facility Use Plan is in development and may shift plans at this site, including the potential use of indoor space for indoor exhibits and/or storage of recreation equipment.

To avoid confusion for visitors along the length of the Greenway, recreation officials are considering a name change to Grand Ravines East.

Interpretive Significance
Grand River Park is a place to understand how the natural geology of the Grand River valley connects with the river's history as a transportation route. Glaciers shaped this part of the river, carving wide floodplains, leaving behind sand and gravel, and creating the river's slope toward Lake Michigan. These natural changes made the river easy to travel, with steady banks and landings, which encouraged


Grand River Park
Grand River Greenway
Cross Country Ski Info
EASIER
Park User Information
- Park Hours:
March 1 to October 15 - 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
October 16 through February - 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- No alcohol is permitted
- No motor vehicles beyond parking lot
- Dogs must remain on a leash at all times
- Dog owners must clean up after their pets
- No camping or fires
- No hunting
- All Ottawa County Park rules & regulations are in effect on park property
Idema Explorers Trail:
Bill Idema Moraine Nature Segment
To Grand Ravines (1.1 miles)
Idema Explorers Trail:
Willow Creek Crossing
Grand River
Grand River Heritage Water Trail:
Trailhead and Accessible Kayak Launch
Boat Launch
Private Property
YOU ARE HERE
Idema Explorers Trail:
Peter C. & Emajean Cook Foundation Trailhead
Observation Platform
Rental Facility
Observation Platform
Playground
Lake Boardwalk
Lake
Willow Creek
.43 Mile Loop
28th Avenue
Fillmore Street
Legend
Trail Map Location
.15 Trail Distance (Miles)
Grassland
Wetland
Mixed Woodland Area
Mowed Lawn Area
Buildings
Asphalt Surface
Wood Surface (Boardwalk or Stairs)
Wood Chips
Natural Surface Trails
Concrete
Mountain Biking Route
Idema Explorers Trail
Existing - Aaphalt
Conceptual Future Route
Grand River Heritage Water Trail
Existing Route
Trailhead Kiosk
Seasonal Portalet
Modern Restroom
Parking Area
Fishing
Mountain Biking Route
Hiking
Bicycle Route
Accessible Kayak Launch
Boat Launch
0 60 120 240 360
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
Trail Etiquette
- All trail users must stay on designated trails at all times
- Hiking is allowed year-round on trails
- Bikers and cross country skiers must follow directional arrows on one-way trail sections
- Bikers should always yield to other trail users
- Hikers should always yield to skiers

PARK MAP

13 GRAND RIVER PARK

both wildlife and people to use the area for thousands of years.

In the 1800s, this area was known for Ohio Dock, or Lowing Landing, which was an important river stop during the lumber and steamboat days. The settlement grew to have a sawmill, boarding house, homes, a general store, school, and a jail. It became a place where timber from upriver was gathered, sorted, and shipped, and where steamboats linked local communities to Lake Michigan and other markets.

The presence of a reliable landing at this location reflects how geology and river morphology directly influenced the development of industry and transportation along the Grand River.

Ecologically, Grand River Park continues to illustrate the function of a working floodplain shaped by seasonal flooding, sediment movement, and riverbank processes. Wooded river edges and floodplain areas support wildlife habitat while also revealing how natural processes persist even in landscapes with a history of intensive use. The same sands, gravels, and gentle slopes that supported landings and docks now contribute to habitat complexity and river resilience.

Former farm fields at the park have been restored to native grasslands, supporting several species of warm-season grasses and more than 20 native wildflower species. Restoring native habitat is vital for the region's resident and migratory wildlife.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Grand River Park Exhibits, 2025
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021
- Steamboat Park Exhibits, 2021

Site Recommendations

This park offers a layered story of time—from glacial formation, to Indigenous travel and use of the river corridor, to the lumber and steamboat industries that transformed the region, and finally to contemporary recreation and stewardship.

Its significance lies in helping visitors understand that the Grand River's history as a highway of commerce was made possible by its geology, and that today's opportunities for access and enjoyment are rooted in both natural forces and human decisions made along this stretch of river.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b
Goal 2: a, b, c, e
Goal 3: b
Goal 4: a, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

RECOMMENDATIONS

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the primary junction between the Grand River Greenway and the park will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance.

Trail Access Markers

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park once the Greenway trail is constructed. At these locations, trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Wayside panels address geology as the foundation of natural and human history at this site, paving the way for messages about why landings and docks succeeded here. Include historic imagery, maps, and illustrated diagrams of log rafts and steamboats, emphasizing strong visuals with minimal text. Consider incorporating information about the Lowing family here. Interpretation should emphasize how the river was used rather than any remaining structures. (Avoid dense technical geology text.)

Thematic Installations & Play-Based Interpretation

Consider developing a thematic play area depicting the steamboat era.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided walks and canoe/kayak trips focused on geology and the river trade. Consider heritage-focused special events when possible.

Digital Media

Here, visitors are prompted to access expanded lumber and steamboat history, including historic maps, shipping routes, Lowing family significance, and oral histories, if available.

Interpretive Media @ GRAND RIVER PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about: • geology made possible the river's role as a highway of commerce			
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway and Lower Grand River Water Trail
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• geology (glacial deposition of sands and gravels, floodplain formation and river gradient, stable banks and channel width facilitated navigation • why landings and docks succeeded on this river	• Grand River as transportation corridor • Lowing family		
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS & PLAY-BASED INTERPRETATION		• play elements depict steamboat era		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• geology	• river trade		• guided canoe/ kayak trips • guided walks
DIGITAL MEDIA		• lumber and steamboat history, including the Lowing family story		

14 GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Status
Gateway

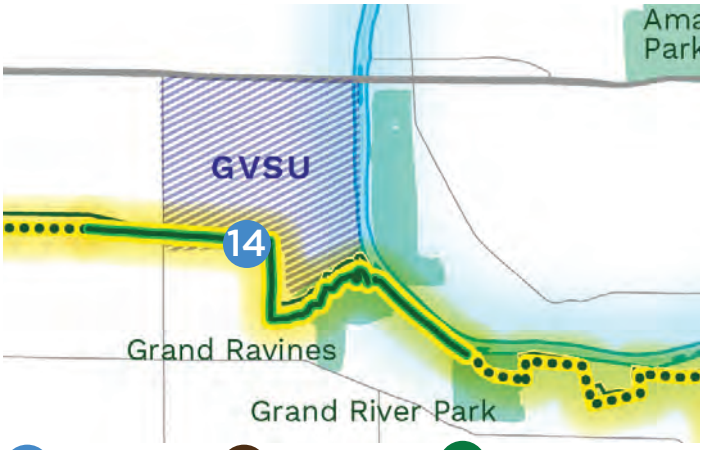
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Grand Valley State University (TBD)

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, thematic overview

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, GVSU, Allendale Historical Society

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Grand Ravines Park, Grand River Park, Grand Lady Riverboat at Steamboat Park, Knowlton House Museum



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

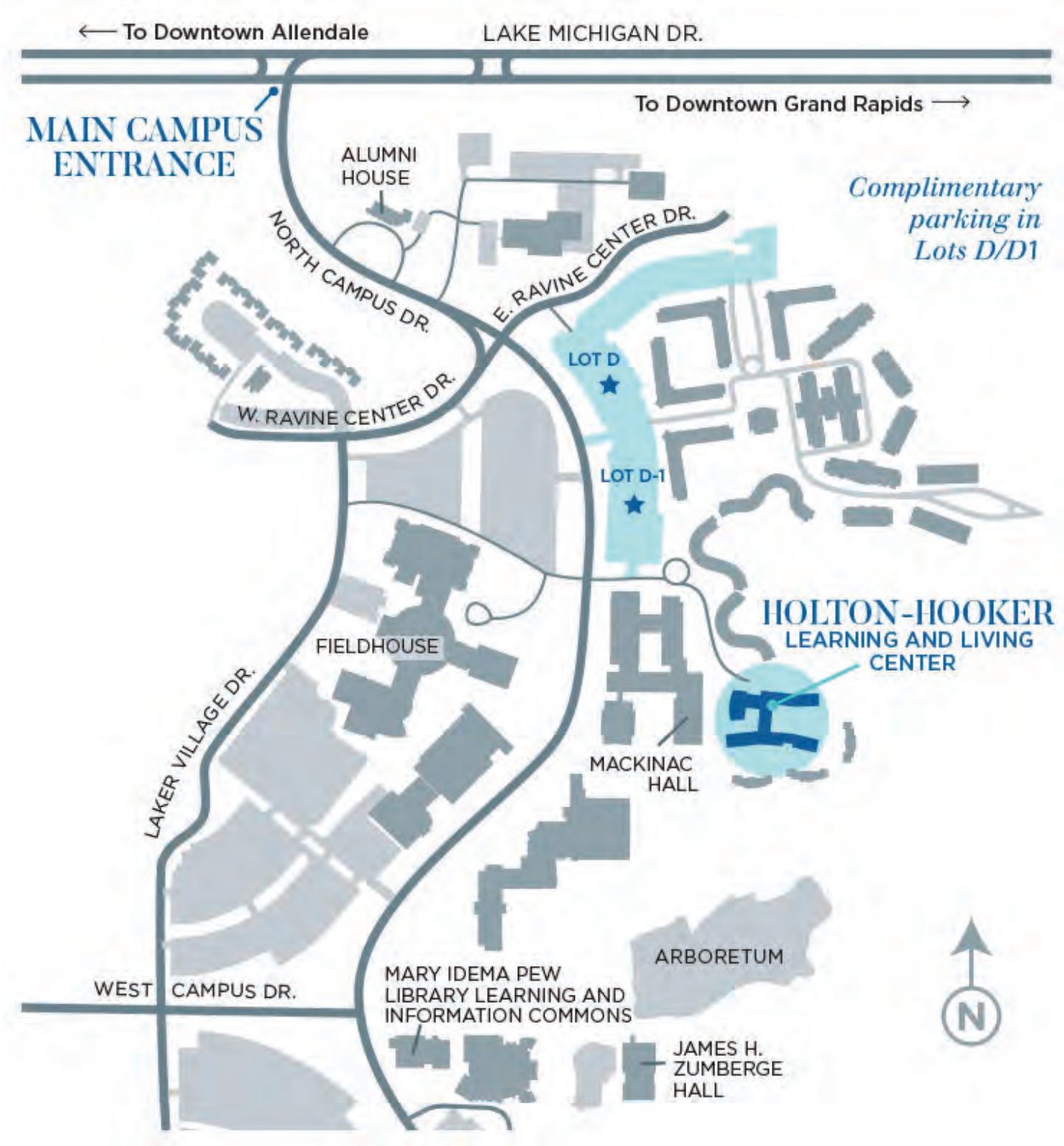
Use and Amenities



Site Description
GVSU is a public university; its main campus is located along the Greenway in Allendale. The precise location for the Greenway Gateway has yet to be determined.

Interpretive Significance
Long before Euro-American settlement, the Grand River served as a major transportation corridor for Indigenous communities. Anishinaabek people traveled the river and its tributaries in birchbark canoes, moving between seasonal camps, villages, trading locations, and gathering places throughout the watershed. The river provided an efficient route for travel, communication, trade, and cultural exchange, linking communities across the region.

In 1836, armed with $10,000 from New York investors, John Ball arrived in the Grand River valley in search of pine forests suitable for logging. Nearly two decades later, those investors formed the Blendon Lumber Company and established a settlement along the river. A.C. Litchfield built what was then the largest sawmill in Ottawa County in 1859. The community included a boarding house, general store, school, blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, brickyard, shipbuilding yard, and a four-mile


← To Downtown Allendale
LAKE MICHIGAN DR.
To Downtown Grand Rapids →
MAIN CAMPUS ENTRANCE
ALUMNI HOUSE
NORTH CAMPUS DR.
E. RAVINE CENTER DR.
W. RAVINE CENTER DR.
Complimentary parking in Lots D/D1
LOT D
LOT D-1
HOLTON-HOOKER LEARNING AND LIVING CENTER
FIELDHOUSE
LAKER VILLAGE DR.
MACKINAC HALL
ARBORETUM
WEST CAMPUS DR.
MARY IDEMA PEW LIBRARY LEARNING AND INFORMATION COMMONS
JAMES H. ZUMBERGE HALL
N

CAMPUS MAP

14 GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

logging railroad. Litchfield also built seven schooners and a steam tug at Blendon Landing before leaving to serve in the Civil War.

As logging and settlement expanded, the Grand River continued to function as the region's primary transportation route. Before railroads and highways, steamboats carried freight, mail, and passengers between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven. The first regularly scheduled steamboat entered service in 1837, followed by numerous vessels that connected communities along the river. Approximately two dozen steamboat landings operated between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven, supporting commerce and travel throughout the valley.

Maintaining a navigable river became a priority as steamboat traffic increased. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Michigan Board of Internal Improvements funded channel improvement projects along the Grand River, including in this section of the corridor. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed miles of in-river training walls made from bundled brush secured by wooden pilings. Steam-powered dredges removed sediment from the river bottom and deposited it behind these structures in an effort to concentrate flow and deepen the navigation channel. Although these projects were largely abandoned after 1909, remnants of the training walls remain visible today, providing evidence of a period when communities actively reshaped the river to support transportation and commerce.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021
- Steamboat Park Exhibits, 2021

Site Recommendations

At this Gateway, trail users learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides. This important trail access point also offers the opportunity to interpret the community's history stemming from the lumber industry and the steamboat era.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b
Goal 2: a, c, e
Goal 3: a, b
Goal 4: a, e, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the main access point will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Coordination with GVSU is key to implementation at this site.

Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance and suggestions to visit nearby complementary experiences such as Grand River Park, Grand Ravines and its geological features, and the private riverboat at Steamboat Park.

Trail Access Markers

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur on campus. At these locations, trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle trips or walking tours that further explore the lumber industry and steamboat era.

Digital Media

Trail users can access more detailed history about Blendon Landing and the river trade, including the role that GVSU has had in discovering and preserving that history.

Interpretive Media @ GVSU	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • the lumber industry depended on and left its mark on the river and surrounding landscape
	  • moraine and ravine geology			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
GUIDED PROGRAMMING		• lumbering and steamboat era • Blendon Landing		• guided walking tours • guided bicycle trips
DIGITAL MEDIA		• lumber and steamboat history • Blendon Landing		

15 EASTMANVILLE BAYOU

Status
Gateway

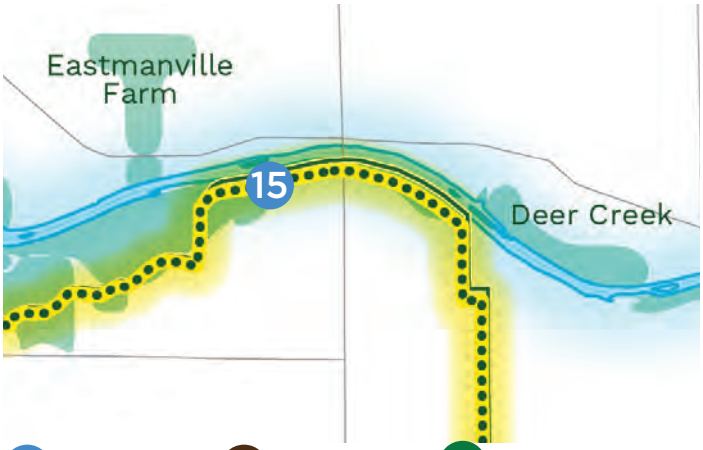
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, thematic overview

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Allendale Historical Society, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Grand Ravines Park, Grand River Park, Grand Lady Riverboat at Steamboat Park, Knowlton House Museum, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

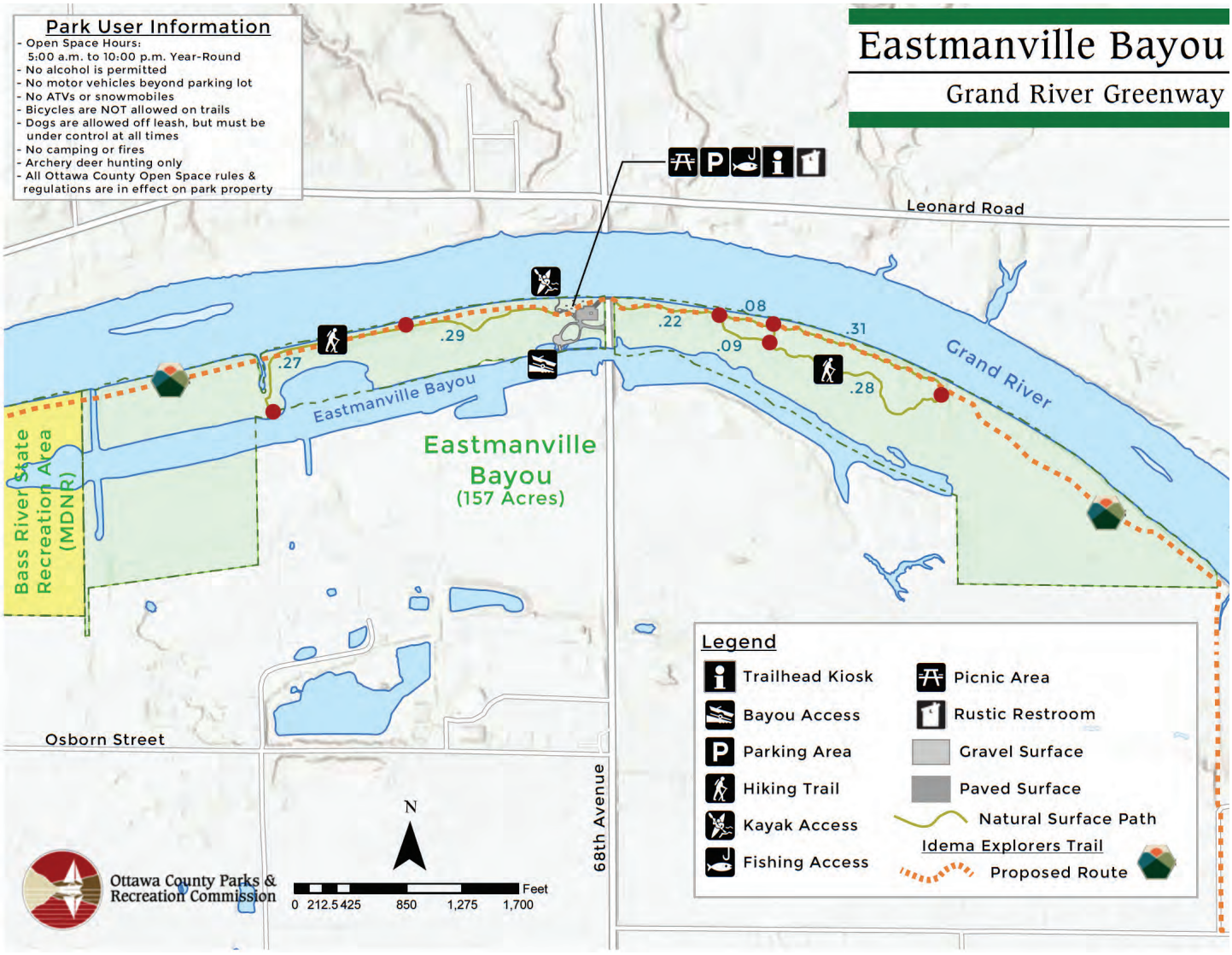
Use and Amenities



Site Description
This 157-acre open space includes nearly 2 miles of Grand River shoreline as well as more than 1.5 miles of bayou shoreline. The site features a kayak launch into the river, a small boat launch into the bayou, as well as picnic tables (covered and uncovered) and a mile and a half of hiking trails. Fishing is popular at this site, both on the river and the bayou. Ice fishing the bayou is also popular.

Interpretive Significance
Formed as a backwater channel of the Grand River near its transition to Lake Michigan, Eastmanville Bayou occupies a landscape shaped by glacial geology, sediment deposition, and changing water levels. These processes created calmer waters beside the main river channel and influenced where people traveled, crossed, settled, and worked along the river.

The bayou lies within a transition zone where southern and northern forest communities overlap, supporting an unusually diverse assemblage of plants and wildlife. Several native



OPEN SPACE MAP

15 EASTMANVILLE BAYOU

species reach their northern range limits here, including Virginia bluebells, pawpaw, Kentucky coffee tree, and green dragon. The occurrence of Virginia bluebells underscores the importance of the bayou's floodplain habitats within the lower Grand River corridor. Slow-moving waters and forested shorelines provide nursery and refuge habitat for fish, amphibians, waterfowl, and aquatic invertebrates. Historically, the Grand River supported productive fisheries that sustained Indigenous communities, early settlers, and commercial harvests, linking the health of backwaters and floodplain habitats to aquatic life throughout the watershed.

Eastmanville Bayou also occupies an important place within the transportation history of the Grand River. Before railroads and highways, the river served as the primary route for travel and commerce by canoe, pole boat, barge, and steamboat. Nearly two dozen steamboat landings once lined the riverbanks between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven, while sheltered locations such as the bayou provided access, mooring, and protection from river currents. Because the river functioned as a transportation corridor, homes and communities often faced the water rather than inland roads.

Crossing the river was equally important. Before the first bridge was completed in 1917, ferries carried people, livestock, and goods at numerous locations along the Grand River. Early ferries were poled across the channel, later operated by hand winches, and eventually powered by gas engines. The arrival of permanent bridge crossings altered patterns of travel and commerce, reducing dependence on ferries and strengthening connections between communities on opposite sides of the river.

Eastmanville Bayou formed part of this broader network of movement and exchange.

The site also speaks to changing approaches to land management. More recently, goats have been used to control invasive vegetation and maintain native plant communities, providing a contemporary example of active stewardship. Together, the bayou's habitats, fisheries, transportation history, and ongoing management contribute to its significance as a place where ecological diversity and human use have long occupied the same landscape.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Eastmanville Bayou Exhibits, 2025
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021
- Steamboat Park Exhibits, 2021

Site Recommendations

As an interpretive site, Eastmanville Bayou offers a powerful counterpoint to faster, more engineered stretches of the river. Its significance lies in helping visitors understand that the Grand River is shaped as much by stillness as by movement, and that sheltered waters supported both biological diversity and human connection.

The bayou invites interpretation centered on patience, observation, and stewardship, reinforcing the idea that protecting quieter, less visible parts of the river system is essential to the health, history, and resilience of the Grand River as a whole.

Trail users would most benefit from removing all existing interpretive materials and replacement with the following methods.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b, c, d
Goal 2: a, c, e
Goal 3: b
Goal 4: a, e, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the main trailhead will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and thematic messaging related to backwater and bayou formation, transition-zone biodiversity/biological crossroads, bayou as nursery and refuge habitat, river movement vs. still water, as well as historic navigation, landings, and ferries. Emphasize diagrams and minimize text; prompt trail users to observe ("why is the water calmer here?").

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle, canoe/kayak, and fishing/ice fishing trips that further explore the history of river navigation and biological diversity (spring ephemerals, birding, etc.).

Digital Media

Trail users can access expanded information about ecology and historic steamboat and ferry narratives, as well as updates about seasonal blooms and wildlife information. Invite participation with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ EASTMANVILLE BAYOU	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about: • river movement vs. still water • bayou as nursery & refuge habitat • overview of river navigation • bayou and backwater formation • biological crossroads • historic navigation, landings, and ferries • Lower Grand River Water Trail			
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• biological diversity	• river navigation		• guided canoe/ kayak tours • guided bicycle trips • guided fishing/ ice fishing trips
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal blooms and wildlife information	• steamboat and ferry history	• eBird and iNaturalist	

16 RIVERSIDE PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

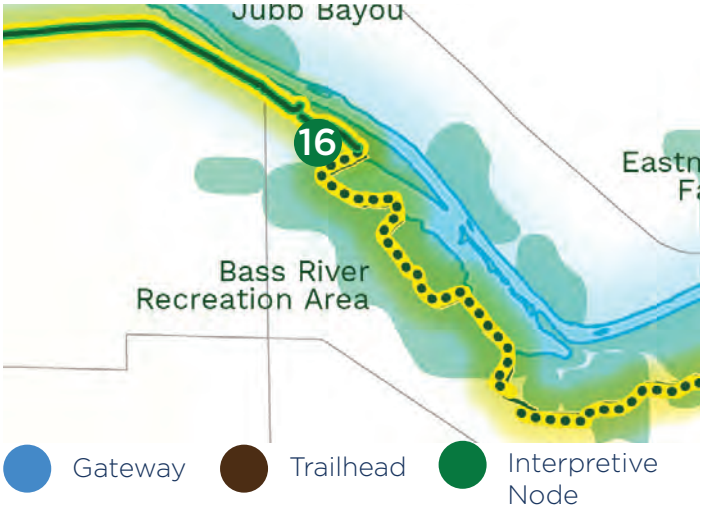
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Allendale Historical Society, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Eastmanville Bayou, Bass River Recreation Area, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities

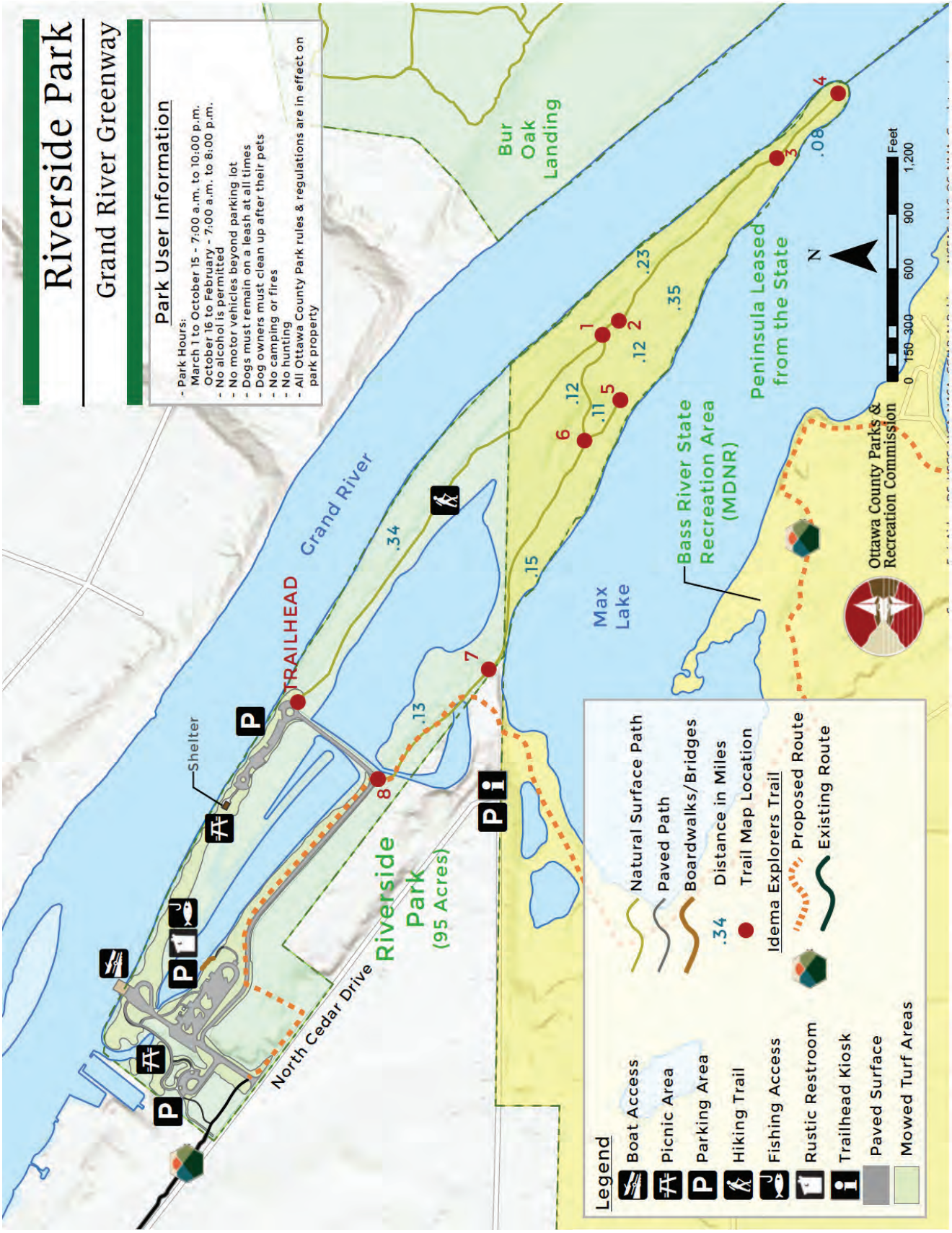


Site Description
Located adjacent to the Bass River Recreation Area (itself connected to Eastmanville Bayou), Riverside Park encompasses approximately 95 acres with more than a mile of Grand River shoreline[1]. The park includes extensive wetlands and floodplain forest with direct river access, supporting activities such as walking, fishing, picnicking, and informal recreation. Its setting along a broad, slow-moving stretch of the river offers expansive views and a relatively quiet experience within a predominantly natural and residential landscape.

1 Together, these three properties provide more than 6 contiguous miles of publicly accessible shoreline.

Facilities include a large boat launch with four concrete ramps, two docks, and associated trailer parking.

Interpretive Significance
Riverside Park occupies a bayou and backwater landscape that represents the quieter side of the lower Grand River system. Unlike the faster-moving main channel, this area is characterized by slow flow, shallow gradients, seasonal flooding, and sheltered waters that support wetlands, floodplain forests, and diverse aquatic habitats. These conditions contribute to the ecological complexity of the lower river and


Riverside Park
Grand River Greenway
Park User Information
- Park Hours:
March 1 to October 15 - 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
October 16 to February - 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- No alcohol is permitted
- No motor vehicles beyond parking lot
- Dogs must remain on a leash at all times
- Dog owners must clean up after their pets
- No camping or fires
- No hunting
- All Ottawa County Park rules & regulations are in effect on park property
Bur Oak Landing
Grand River
TRAILHEAD
Shelter
North Cedar Drive
Riverside Park
(95 Acres)
Max Lake
Bass River State Recreation Area (MDNR)
Peninsula Leased from the State
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
N
Feet
0 150 300 600 900 1,200
.08
.13
.34
.15
.12
.11
.12
.23
.35
Legend
Boat Access
Picnic Area
Parking Area
Hiking Trail
Fishing Access
Rustic Restroom
Trailhead Kiosk
Paved Surface
Mowed Turf Areas
Natural Surface Path
Paved Path
Boardwalks/Bridges
.34 Distance in Miles
Trail Map Location
Idema Explorers Trail
Proposed Route
Existing Route

SITE MAP

16 RIVERSIDE PARK

support plant and animal communities adapted to calm-water environments.

Ecologically, the park's bayou system functions as an important refuge and nursery habitat within the lower Grand River watershed. Still water and vegetated shorelines support fish spawning and rearing, amphibians, waterfowl, and aquatic invertebrates that depend on slower-moving conditions. Floodplain vegetation and wetlands filter runoff, moderate water temperatures, and store floodwaters, contributing to water quality and resilience as the Grand River approaches Lake Michigan. More recent restoration efforts have focused on reestablishing hydrologic connections between backwaters, wetlands, and the river, strengthening ecological processes that support habitat diversity and water movement throughout the system.

The park also occupies a landscape shaped by transportation, commerce, and changing patterns of land use. Historically, the corridor between Grand Haven and Allendale served as an important route connecting communities along the lower Grand River. The bayou's proximity to this transportation corridor linked the area to regional travel, trade, and settlement while maintaining its connection to the river and floodplain. Portions of the surrounding landscape were later altered by gravel extraction, part of a period when natural resources along the river supported regional growth and development.

Today, Riverside Park combines habitat conservation, hydrologic restoration, and public access within a landscape where ecological processes and human activity continue to influence one another. Its significance lies in connecting visitors to the quieter waters of the Grand River system and to the floodplain habitats that contribute to the health of the river as a whole.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Maintain and Restore Floodplain Connectivity Climate Hubs website
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory: Floodplain Forest website
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

At Riverside Park, visitors learn that the stillness and shelter of the bayou are important features in a healthy river ecosystem. Its bayou landscape offers an opportunity to cultivate observation and stewardship, reinforcing the idea that the health of the Grand River depends on caring for its less visible, slower-moving edges as much as its main channel. Interpretation here prioritizes observation, systems thinking, and protection of sensitive habitats.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c, d
Goal 2: a, c
Goal 3: e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

16 RIVERSIDE PARK

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located near the main parking area or trailhead will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and an overview of interpretive themes. Interpretation should acknowledge that the bayou changes throughout the year.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

A small number of discreet, well-spaced panels are located near access points or overlooks and address what a bayou/backwater is and how it forms; nursery habitat for fish and wildlife; floodplain wetlands and water filtration; and the relationship between bayous, the main channel, and Lake Michigan. Include observation prompts where possible—"Why is the water calmer here than in the main river?" and "Look for young fish near vegetation," or "What changes after spring flooding?" Visitors learn about stewardship practices and restoration efforts that affect water quality.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided canoe/kayak trips and walks that further explore wetlands and fish habitat, and birding programs.

Digital Media

Visitors access more detailed information on fish and amphibian ecology, additional details on water quality, and seasonal wildlife sightings. Visitors are invited to engage with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist.

Interpretive Media @ RIVERSIDE PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.
GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about: • seasonal bayou changes			
TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway and Lower Grand River Water Trail
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• what a bayou/ backwater is and how it forms • nursery habitat for fish and wildlife • floodplain wetlands and water filtration • relationship between bayou, main channel, and Lake Michigan		• restoration of hydrologic connections	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• wetlands and fish habitat • birding			• guided canoe/ kayak trips • guided walks
DIGITAL MEDIA	• aquatic ecology • water quality • seasonal wildlife sightings			

17 M-231 TRAILHEAD

Status
Gateway

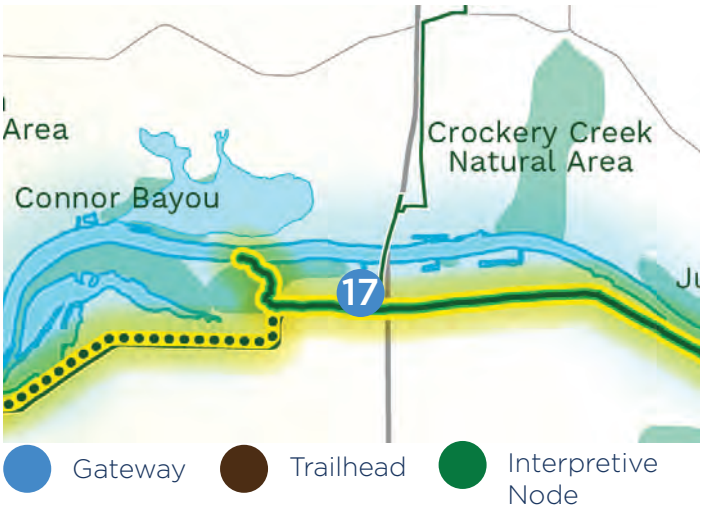
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Northwest Ottawa Recreation Authority

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Connor Bayou, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Spoonville Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

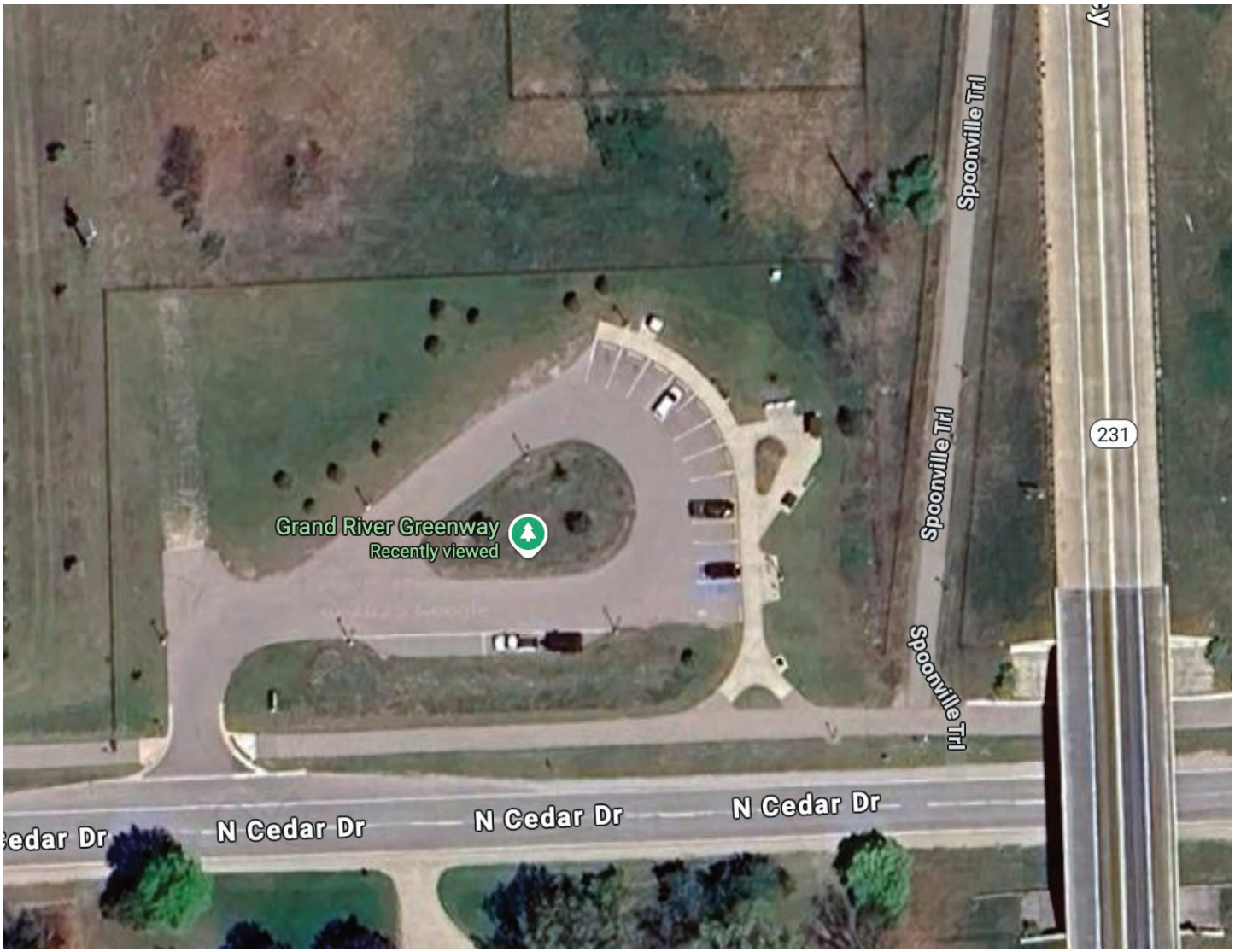
Use and Amenities



Site Description
This trailhead is located at the junction of the Greenway with M-231, providing connection to Connor Bayou and Riverside Park, as well as the Spoonville Trail that crosses the Grand River and traverses the north bank of the river back to Grand Haven (the Grand Crossings Loop route). This site features parking as well as a bike repair station.

An existing kiosk provides orientation to various trail connections, and a series of interpretive panels discusses the archaeological finds.

Interpretive Significance
When the MI Department of Transportation was excavating this area during construction of the Grand River Bridge, artifacts dating to Anishinaabek occupations between 800 and 350 years ago were discovered, including pottery shards, stone tools, and food caches. These excavations provided evidence that this site was used for harvesting wild rice and fishing for lake sturgeon.



AERIAL VIEW OF SITE





17 M-231 TRAILHEAD

The site's significance is also shaped by its proximity to Spoonville, a prominent 19th-century lumber town. Timber floated down the Grand River from upriver forests, and nearby backwaters and bayous helped sort, stage, and move logs. This working-river history shows how industrial use of the river often disrupted much older Indigenous relationships to the land and water.

Sources Consulted

- Ancestors, Archaeology and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past Into the Future Archaeological Lesson Plans
- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- M-231 Trailhead Exhibits, 2025
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

This site provides the opportunity to update site orientation and integrate the Greenway's overarching interpretive messages. Existing in-depth interpretation developed in partnership with tribal representatives explores the presence of Anishinaabek villages in this area, tribal fish reintroduction efforts, and the ecology and restoration of wild rice fields and lake sturgeon. These interpretive panels should remain intact.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: c, d
Goal 2: b, d, e
Goal 3: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub should be located at the trailhead and will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to other local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance and significance of the nearby Spoonville community.

Guided Programming

Explore the possibility of guided bicycle trips that further explore Anishinaabek presence and ecology and restoration of wild rice and lake sturgeon.

Digital Media

Visitors access more detailed information about sturgeon and wild rice conservation efforts, and expanded history of Spoonville.

Interpretive Media @ M-231 TRAILHEAD	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • communities continue to come together in ceremony to honor and celebrate the interdependence between humans and non-humans
	  • the plants and animals of the Grand River region are adapted to the ecological niches created by the area's diverse landforms
	  • the footpaths and water routes traveled by Anishinaabek were the precursors of the region's trails, roads, and rails
	  • Spoonville lumber town			

GUIDED PROGRAMMING	• ecological significance of wild rice and lake sturgeon	• Anishinaabek presence and cultural significance of wild rice and lake sturgeon		• guided bicycle trips
DIGITAL MEDIA		• expanded Spoonville history	• conservation efforts related to sturgeon and wild rice	

18 CONNOR BAYOU

Status
Interpretive Node

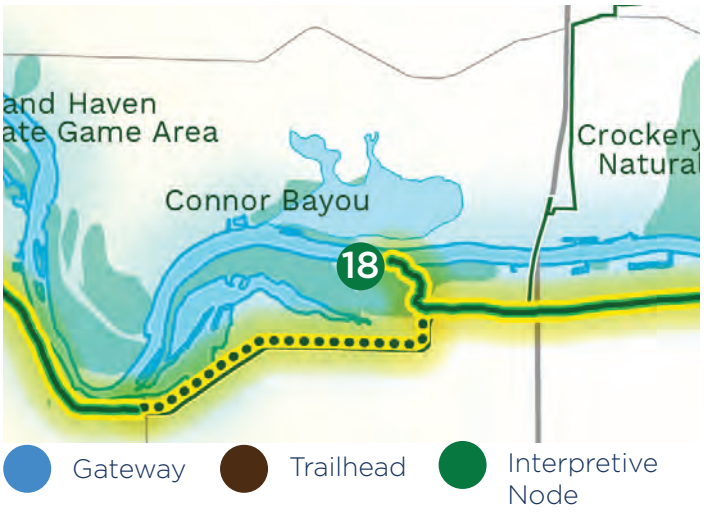
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Grand Rapids Public Museum, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



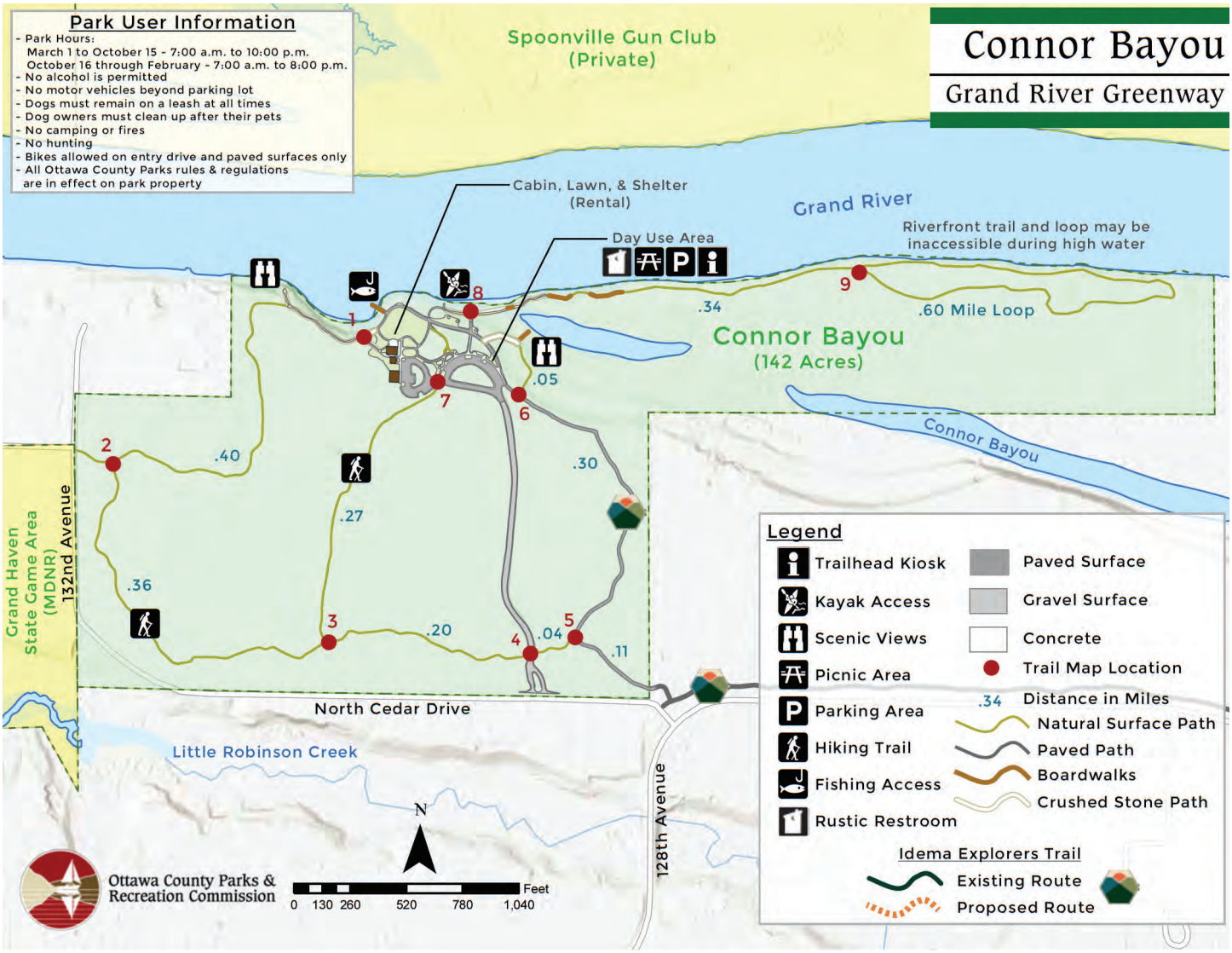
Site Description
This 142-acre riverside park features extensive wetlands, remnant prairie, as well as hardwood and pine forest. Picnic tables, fishing dock, and hiking trails are available here, as is an accessible kayak launch. A renovated log cabin is available for rent. Several interpretive signs are also present.

This site is used for "Rendezvous! Fur Trade on the Grand"—Ottawa County's annual public event celebrating Michigan's fur trade history.[1]

Interpretive Significance
As a quiet backwater connected to the main river, Connor Bayou supports biological communities and human activities that differ from those of the main channel. Its sheltered waters, wetlands, and tributary connections occupy an important position within the network of habitats and travel corridors that characterize the lower river.

At nearby Stearns Creek, wild rice (manoomin) historically grew and remains closely associated with the shallow, slow-moving waters that support both ecological diversity and Indigenous cultural traditions. These conditions also align with current interest in sturgeon

1 While this is offered as a public event, it is designed with 3rd and 4th grade history curriculum standards in mind. Hundreds of students experience this program every year.


Park User Information
- Park Hours:
March 1 to October 15 - 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
October 16 through February - 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- No alcohol is permitted
- No motor vehicles beyond parking lot
- Dogs must remain on a leash at all times
- Dog owners must clean up after their pets
- No camping or fires
- No hunting
- Bikes allowed on entry drive and paved surfaces only
- All Ottawa County Parks rules & regulations are in effect on park property
Spoonville Gun Club (Private)
Connor Bayou
Grand River Greenway
Cabin, Lawn, & Shelter (Rental)
Day Use Area
Grand River
Riverfront trail and loop may be inaccessible during high water
.60 Mile Loop
Connor Bayou (142 Acres)
Connor Bayou
Grand Haven State Game Area (MDNR)
132nd Avenue
North Cedar Drive
Little Robinson Creek
128th Avenue
.40
.27
.36
.20
.04
.11
.30
.05
.34
Legend
Trailhead Kiosk
Kayak Access
Scenic Views
Picnic Area
Parking Area
Hiking Trail
Fishing Access
Rustic Restroom
Paved Surface
Gravel Surface
Concrete
Trail Map Location
.34 Distance in Miles
Natural Surface Path
Paved Path
Boardwalks
Crushed Stone Path
Idema Explorers Trail
Existing Route
Proposed Route
N
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
0 130 260 520 780 1,040 Feet

SITE MAP

18 CONNOR BAYOU

reintroduction, as bayous and backwaters provide habitat for spawning, rearing, and refuge. Together, wild rice and sturgeon connect ecological restoration with the recovery of culturally significant species and relationships to the river.

Culturally and historically, the bayou forms part of a landscape shaped by Indigenous presence and sovereignty, including the Musketin (Maskotin/Muscoten) people associated with the Battle Point area. This stretch of the Grand River supported travel, subsistence, trade, and conflict for generations.

More recent history adds additional layers of meaning. Named for early settler Jared Connor, who arrived in 1837, the land later passed to William Ferry, founder of Grand Haven, before being logged and subdivided. Stumps of virgin white pine remain visible reminders of the lumber era that transformed forests and river communities throughout the region.

The site later became a popular destination for large community picnics and social events, aided by its open riverfront setting, access by road, and connections to river travel. Together, these layers of Indigenous history, resource extraction, transportation, and recreation position Connor Bayou within a landscape shaped by both natural processes and changing human uses of the Grand River.

Sources Consulted

- Ancestors, Archaeology and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past Into the Future Archaeological Lesson Plans
- Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water, 2023
- Expanding Tribal Partnerships to Restore Native Wild Rice Bulletin, 2025
- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Grand River Public Art Plan: Indigenous Engagement Summary, 2024
- Hidden History of Grand Rapids
- I Remember... A History of Grandville Avenue
- M-231 Trailhead Exhibits, 2025
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

Connor Bayou offers a rare chance to tell a layered story of continuity and change: from Indigenous stewardship and wild rice harvesting, to conflict and displacement, to lumber extraction, and now to restoration and recovery efforts such as sturgeon reintroduction.

Interpretation asserts that bayous are not peripheral landscapes, but essential places where ecology, culture, and history meet. Future stewardship decisions here can reconnect people to the river in ways that honor both past and living relationships.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b, c
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: b, e
Goal 4: a, b, d, e, f
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located at the main access point will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the regional interpretive significance.

Trail Access Markers

Outside of the primary access point, other trail connections may also occur here. At these locations, trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Interpretive Wayside Panels

Interpretive panels at this site should be minimal and carefully worded, developed in partnership with tribal nations, with Indigenous voices guiding what stories are told and how.[2]

Content might feature co-created messages about wild rice, sturgeon, and river relationships, integrating Anishinaabemowin language where appropriate. Emphasis should be on living cultures and ongoing stewardship.

Interpretation should also address what bayous are and why they matter ecologically (refuge and nursery habitat; connections between wild rice beds, fish health, and water quality; and why backwaters are critical for species recovery). Interpretation will present a layered history discussing Indigenous presence and lifeways, and recovery today.

2 Battle Point might be included as part of a larger story about Indigenous travel and conflict.

Guided Programming

Continue facilitating the annual interpretive event focused on the fur trade as well as ongoing school programming. Explore the possibility of guided canoe/kayak trips that further explore sturgeon and wild rice ecology and restoration. Guided programs should be Indigenous-led whenever possible.

Digital Media

Visitors might access audio/video of Indigenous storytelling (if appropriate) and how bayous were used in timber sorting and storage, as well as updates on sturgeon recovery or habitat restoration efforts. Invite visitors to participate in community science platforms like eBird and iNaturalist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ CONNOR BAYOU	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • presence of Anishinaabek
	  • the lumber industry depended on and left its mark on the river and surrounding landscape
	  • importance of habitat restoration for species with particular cultural significance
	  • history as a gathering place			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• bayou ecology • species reintroduction and habitat restoration	• history of site as a gathering place		
GUIDED PROGRAMMING		• continue annual event focused on the fur trade	• Indigenous-led stewardship efforts of wild rice and sturgeon	• guided canoe/ kayak trips • guided walks
DIGITAL MEDIA		• Indigenous storytelling • how bayous were used in timber sorting and storage	• updates on sturgeon recovery and restoration efforts • eBird and iNaturalist	

19 ON GREENWAY NEAR POTTAWATTOMIE BAYOU

Status
Trailhead

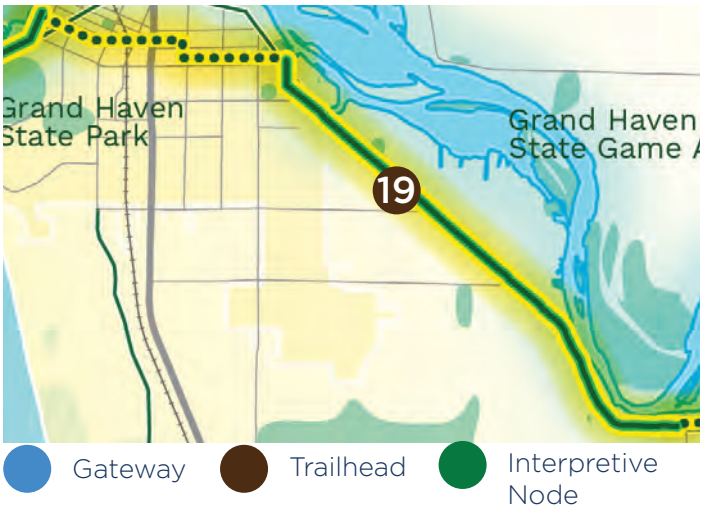
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Grand Haven Township

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, thematic overview

Partner Opportunities
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Grand Haven Township

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
Connor Bayou, Ottawa Sands, Pottawattomie Park, Tri-Cities Historical Museum



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities

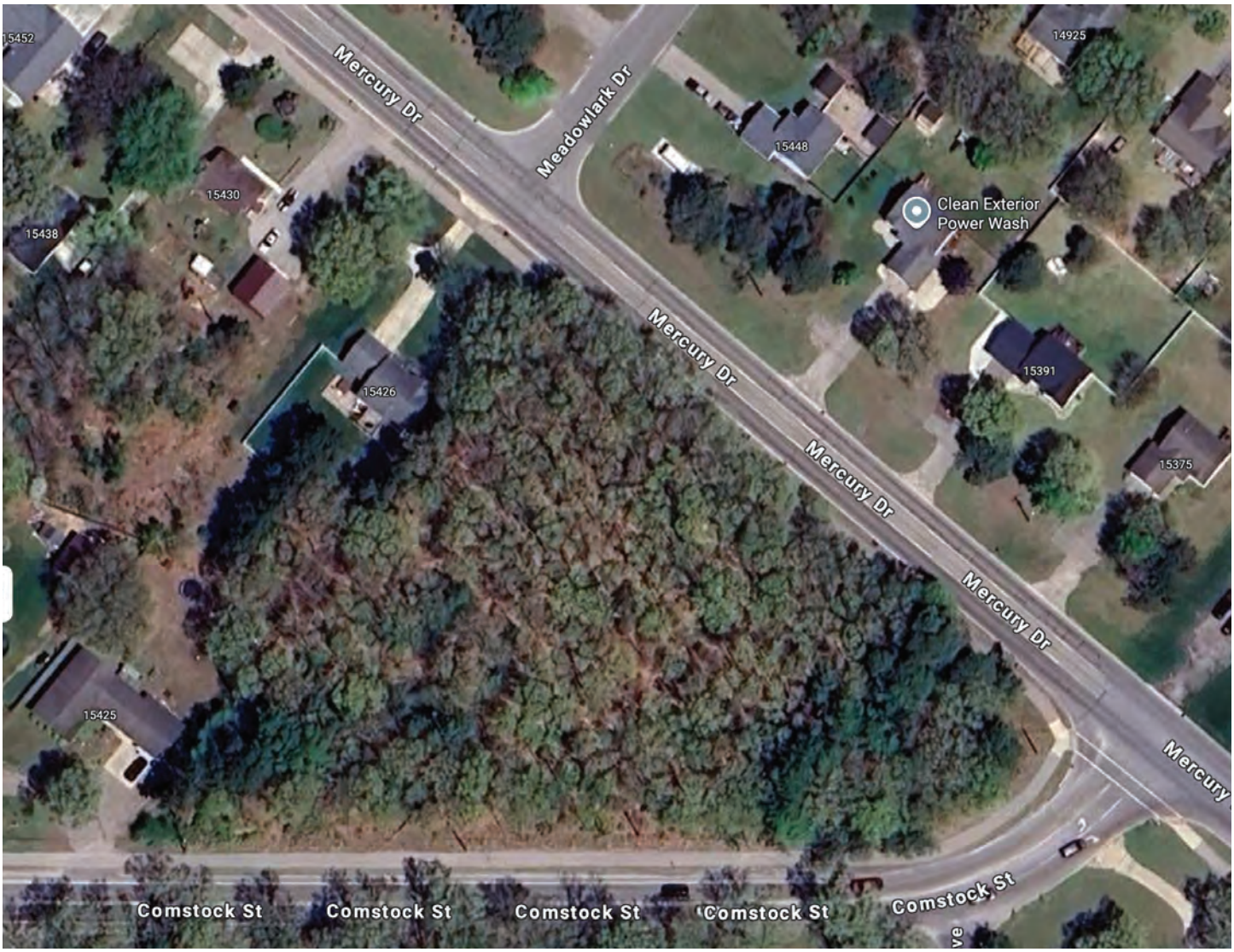


Site Description
This site is in a residential neighborhood at the corner of Robbins Rd. and Mercury Dr., several blocks from access to Pottawattomie Bayou. The site is currently maintained by the township, with a bench, drinking water fountain, bike rack, and a trash receptable. This section of Greenway utilizes surface street sidewalks.

Interpretive Significance
The nearby Pottawattomie Bayou is part of a network of bayous, backwaters, and sheltered channels along the lower reach of the Grand River, where the river slows and meets Lake Michigan. This bayou system occupies a landscape shaped by glacial geology, sediment deposition, changing water levels, and lake currents. The calm, shallow waters differ from both the main river channel and the open lake, creating an ecological transition zone that supports a wide variety of plants and animals.

The bayou system provides important nursery and refuge habitat where fish and amphibians spawn and grow, aquatic plants flourish, and migratory and resident waterfowl find food and shelter. Wetlands slow and store water, filter sediment and pollutants, moderate water temperatures, and contribute to the health of both the Grand River and Lake Michigan.

RECOMMENDATIONS



AERIAL VIEW OF SITE

19 ON GREENWAY NEAR POTTAWATTOMIE BAYOU

These backwaters play an important role in the ecological function of the lower watershed, particularly near the river's mouth.

The bayou system also occupies an important place within Indigenous history and culture, as evidenced by local place names and its long use by Anishinaabek peoples, including the Odawa. For generations, these sheltered waters provided protection from wind and waves, reliable food sources, and access to travel routes that connected communities throughout the region.

The lower Grand River also served as an important transportation corridor that linked communities, industries, and destinations along the river. During the fur trade, lumber era, and age of commercial shipping, sheltered waterways such as Pottawattomie Bayou supported travel and commerce near the river mouth.

Nearby landscapes were shaped by additional layers of activity. Across from the bayou, the Driving Park attracted visitors arriving by excursion boats such as the May Graham to attend horse races and community events, while the nearby Peach Plains area formed part of West Michigan's fruit belt, where thousands of peach trees contributed to a thriving agricultural economy. Together, these connections place Pottawattomie Bayou within a larger landscape shaped by transportation, recreation, agriculture, and the enduring influence of the Grand River as it enters Lake Michigan.

Sources Consulted

- Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water, 2023
- Grand River Coastal Corridor Ecological Assessment and Conservation Recommendations, 2021
- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Grand River Public Art Plan: Indigenous Engagement Summary, 2024
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021

Site Recommendations

At this Gateway, trail users learn about the existence of the Grand River Greenway and the connectivity it provides. This important trail access point also offers the opportunity to interpret the natural and cultural significance of Pottawattomie Bayou, including for biodiversity, the cultural significance of wild rice to Anishinaabek, and the presence of the M&ORR and how transportation methods in the region have evolved over time.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: b, c
Goal 2: c, d, e
Goal 3: a, c, e
Goal 4: e, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d

RECOMMENDATIONS

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails and recreation amenities, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of what bayous and backwaters are and how they formed, and the role of wetlands in filtering water and supporting biodiversity. Signage should also include a suggestion to visit the nearby Pottawattomie Park and acknowledge the Indigenous origin of the place name for the bayou.

Digital Media

Trail users are prompted to access deeper ecology and restoration content, as well as expanded Indigenous storytelling (with tribal approval).

Interpretive Media @ GREENWAY NEAR POTTAWATTOMIE BAYOU	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • ecology of bayou system
	  • presence of Anishinaabek			

DIGITAL MEDIA	• bayou ecology • the role of wetlands in supporting water quality and biodiversity	• Indigenous perspectives on the bayou system and conservation of culturally significant species • riverboat excursions • historic land use patterns (fruit belt)		

20 OTTAWA SANDS PARK

Status
Interpretive Node

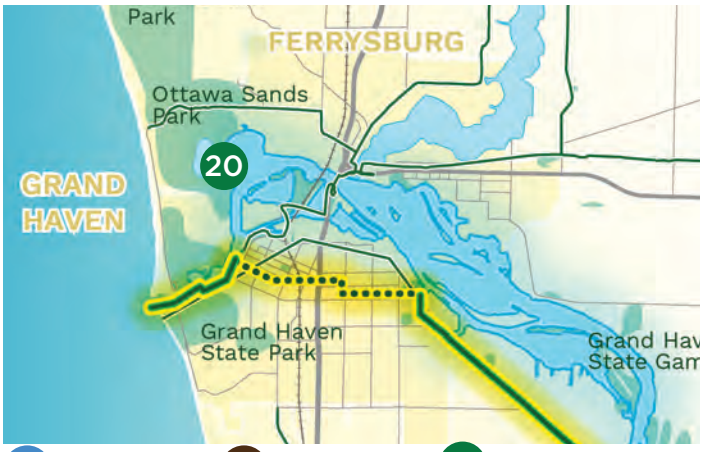
County
Ottawa

Jurisdiction
Ottawa County

Interpretive Opportunities
Orientation, trip planning, in-depth interpretation

Partner Opportunities
Tri-Cities Historical Museum, LGROW

Complementary Visitor Experiences Nearby
North Ottawa Dunes, P.J. Hoffmaster State Park, North Beach Park, Tri-Cities Historical Museum, Lower Grand River Water Trail



GREENWAY CONTEXT MAP

Use and Amenities



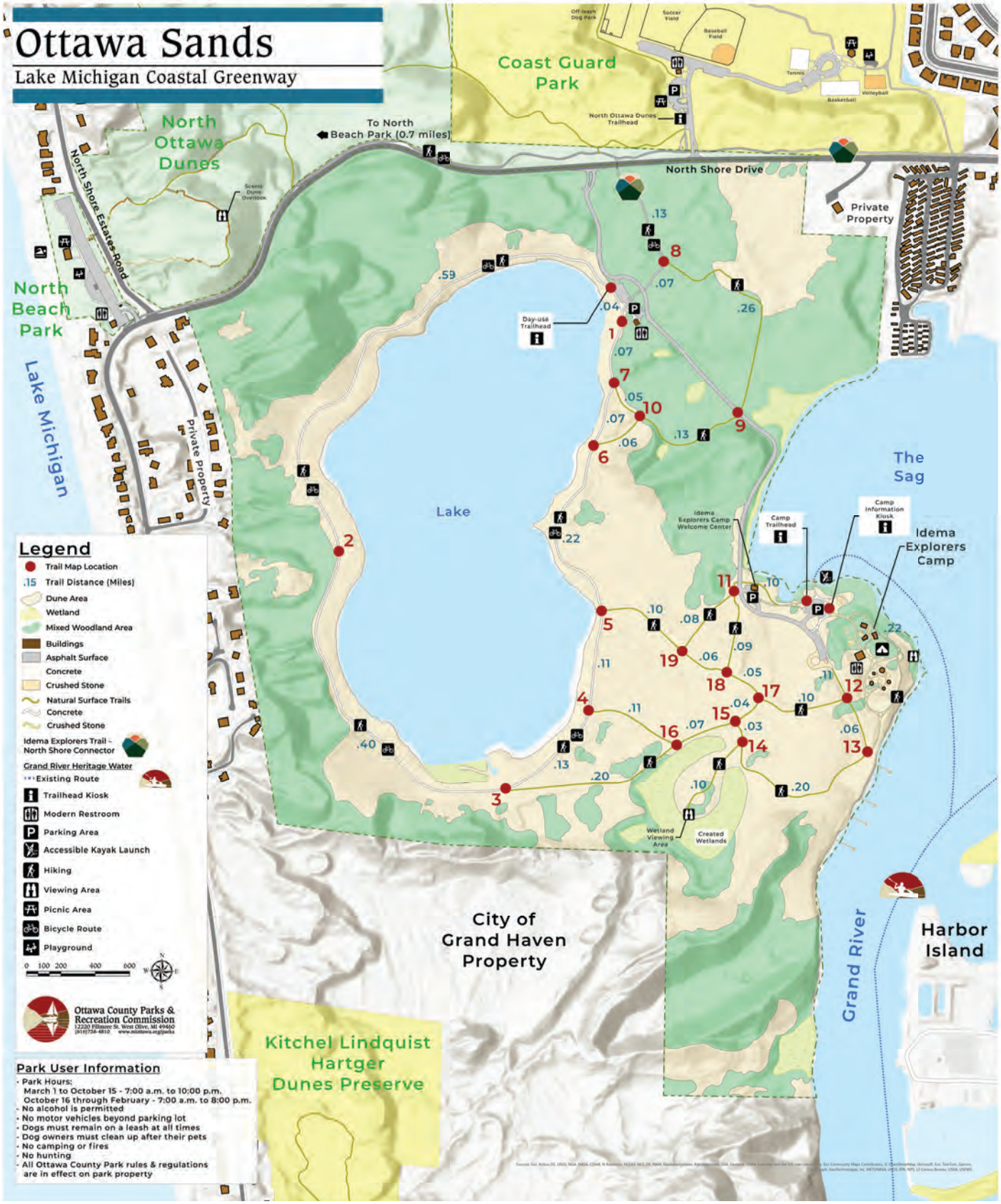
Site Description
This recently opened park lies at the confluence of the Lake Michigan Coastal and Grand River greenways at the mouth of the Grand River. It consists of 345 acres of forested dunes (part of a larger corridor of 2,479 acres of interconnected dunes along the Grand River), interdunal wetlands, an 80-acre inland lake, and riverfront wetlands.

Visitors can access a 1.6-mile paved loop trail around the lake, a day use area, and an accessible kayak launch into the Sag, a bayou on the Grand River. A key feature of the park is the Idema Explorers Camp, providing options for tent camping as well as cabin and yurt rentals.

Conceptual plans have identified that, at full activation, supported recreation activities at the park might include snorkeling, climbing wall, cross-country skiing, and ice skating.

Interpretive Significance
Ottawa Sands Park occupies a landscape shaped by the meeting of Michigan's largest river and Lake Michigan. Over thousands of years, seasonal floods, shifting channels, and changing lake levels repeatedly altered the course of the Grand River. At one time, the river flowed through what is now Ottawa Sands, leaving behind the sandy deposits, dunes, wetlands, and lowlands that characterize the park today. These landforms place Ottawa Sands within a dynamic transition zone where

RECOMMENDATIONS



SITE MAP

20 OTTAWA SANDS PARK

river, lake, and coastal processes continue to influence one another.

The park lies within a region long inhabited and stewarded by Indigenous peoples whose relationships with the river, dunes, forests, and wetlands shaped the landscape for generations. The mouth of the Grand River served as an important center for travel, trade, fishing, and seasonal use, connecting communities throughout the watershed and across the Great Lakes. During the early nineteenth century, fur trader Rix Robinson built upon existing Indigenous trade networks established by figures such as Madeline and Joseph LaFramboise. After operating a trading post at Ada, Robinson expanded his activities downstream and secured land rights near the river mouth in 1833, helping set the stage for Euro-American settlement in the area.

In 1835, William Montague Ferry established Grand Haven at the mouth of the Grand River. Ferry's success depended in part on relationships with Native American communities who continued to live, travel, and trade throughout the region during this period of transition. Together, Robinson and Ferry occupy important places in the history of the lower Grand River, linking the fur trade era to the emergence of one of Michigan's most significant river and harbor communities. As the fur trade declined, the Grand River became a major corridor for lumber, commerce, and transportation. Timber harvested throughout the watershed moved downstream toward sawmills, docks, and shipping facilities clustered near the river mouth. Steamboats, railroads, and harbor improvements transformed Grand Haven into an important gateway connecting inland Michigan to regional and national markets.

Most of this nineteenth-century development occurred across the river from present-day Ottawa Sands, yet the park remains part of the same landscape. From its shoreline and overlooks, visitors can appreciate the scale of the river as it approaches Lake Michigan and consider how both banks contributed to the economic growth of the region. The river connected forests, farms, villages, mills, and ports across hundreds of miles, making the lower Grand River one of the state's most important transportation and commercial corridors.

As the lumber era waned, portions of the Ottawa Sands landscape became destinations for recreation, including dune rides across the lakeshore sands. During the mid-twentieth century, demand for industrial sand transformed the property once again. Large-scale mining operations excavated the site's interior, creating the inland lake that remains a defining feature of the park today. While mining altered much of the landscape, forests, wetlands, and dune habitats persisted along the perimeter and now form an important link within the Lake Michigan coastal corridor.

Today, Ottawa Sands supports a diverse mosaic of wetlands, forests, open water, and dune communities that provide habitat for migratory birds, raptors, reptiles, amphibians, and other wildlife. Located along a major migratory pathway, the park serves as an important resting and feeding area for birds traveling between seasonal ranges. Ongoing management efforts focused on invasive species, deer browse, and habitat restoration continue to strengthen ecological conditions across the site. Together, the park's geology, Indigenous history, harbor heritage, industrial past, and recovering ecosystems position

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ottawa Sands as a place where visitors can experience both the natural power and historical significance of the Grand River at its meeting with Lake Michigan.

Sources Consulted

- Grand River Coastal Corridor Ecological Assessment and Conservation Recommendations, 2021
- Grand River Greenway Natural and Cultural Features Inventory, 1998
- Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2021
- Ottawa Sands Park: A Collective Community Visioning Plan, 2020

Site Recommendations

At this Interpretive Node, visitors learn about the Greenway and the connectivity it provides. The riverside setting among dunes is a fitting venue to emphasize scale and openness associated with the mouth of the Grand River.

In-depth interpretation explores the geologic origins of this landscape, positive outcomes and negative results of sand mining, site biodiversity, and the importance of habitat restoration. Interpretation should also explore Indigenous presence and continued species recovery efforts. The park is well positioned to provide an overview of Grand Haven's industrial history.

Relevant Management Goals & Visitor Objectives

Goal 1: a, b, c, d
Goal 2: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 3: a, b, c, d, e
Goal 4: a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Goal 5: a, b, c, d, e

Location-Specific Interpretive Media

Greenway Orientation Hub

A Greenway Orientation Hub located near the river will provide an overview of the Greenway and connections to local trails and recreation







amenities, as well as greater connectivity. Information will include maps and overarching introductory thematic content, including an overview of the Greenway's thematic arc as well as suggestions to visitor other nearby heritage destinations.

Trail Access Markers & Orientation Panels
Outside of a primary access point, other trail connections may also occur at this park. At these locations, single upright orientation panels and/or trail marker posts should be used to identify the Greenway.

Thematic Installations
A Greenway Plaza is in the planning stages for this park. This plaza near the riverfront will function as a high-visibility interpretive space—a place of gathering, orientation, expression, and shared meaning. It will provide seating and gathering areas, shade, wind protection, views of the river and the city beyond, and will function as a space for events, programs, and everyday gathering.

Here, public art features are agents of interpretation, incorporating sculptural elements that reference geology (layers, flow, sand, movement); murals or surface treatments that reference river change, industry, and restoration; and possibly temporary or rotating art that responds to seasonal or cultural themes. Abstract timelines could be embedded into paving or seating, a watershed map could be embedded into the surface, and cross-sections of dunes, the river, and lake could be integrated into sculptural depictions reflecting a land in constant motion.

These elements are paired with visually integrated interpretive cues and prompts that encourage observation, reflection, and comprehension of the architectural and public art elements. The Greenway Plaza becomes the place where ecology, history, art, and community meet—a contemporary expression of stewardship in a landscape defined by change.

Interpretive Wayside Panels
Interpretation will address the history of sand mining on this land, and will recognize the history of extraction as what created the lake enjoyed by visitors today.

A series of panels will incorporate maps showing the river's changing course over time, and provide an overview of the region's settlement and historic industrial events and influence that can be perceived from this vantage point.

Interpretation also addresses how this site is part of a greater coastal ecosystem, the ecological significance of the site, and the continuing efforts of habitat restoration amidst ongoing management challenges present at the site (deer browse, invasives, fire suppression).

Guided Programming
Explore the use of the Plaza to support live interpretation such as guided walks, stewardship-related talks, art performances, or community gatherings. Create the opportunity for Indigenous storytelling, where feasible.

Digital Media
Visitors can access expanded history and archival imagery, as well as artist statements tied to Plaza artworks. Provide prompts to access updates on restoration efforts and seasonal wildlife news. Invite participation with community science platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist.

Additional Considerations
Explore the possibility of integrating Greenway interpretation at the nearby Grand Haven State Park, a popular summer destination featuring public beach access to Lake Michigan. Consider extending the Greenway to the end of the boardwalk at the park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretive Media @ OTTAWA SANDS PARK	The Grand River reveals inspiring stories of adaptation, reciprocity, and resilience that continue to shape our community's future.			
	Powerful forces have created a landscape that is a rich haven for life.	The Grand River region has attracted settlement by humans throughout time, resulting in patterns that continue to shape the landscape.	People join together as stewards to preserve and share what they value.	There's something for everyone along the Greenway.

GREENWAY ORIENTATION HUB	• signage provides an overview of the Greenway (via text and imagery, including maps) and introduces the sub-themes, including information about:
	  • mouth of the Grand River/significance of the watershed
	  • a landscape of constant change			

TRAIL ACCESS MARKERS & ORIENTATION PANELS				• signage identifies and orients visitors to the Greenway and Lower Grand River Water Trail
THEMATIC INSTALLATIONS	• geology (layers, flow, sand, movement) • changing river course • watershed map			
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE PANELS	• mining history • changing river course and the "sag" • ecology of site and habitats within • connection to larger coastal corridor	• historic settlement and industrial overview • management challenges	• habitat restoration	
GUIDED PROGRAMMING				• guided walks • Indigenous-led storytelling • stewardship-related talks • art performances • community gatherings
DIGITAL MEDIA	• seasonal wildlife news	• expanded history and archival imagery	• updates on restoration efforts • eBird & iNaturalist	



APPENDICES

COURTESY KENT COUNTY PARKS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A — References Consulted

- Ada Township. *Ada Township 2022 Park, Recreation and Land Preservation Plan.* Prepared by MCSA Group, Inc. 2022.
- Ada Township. *Recreation Connection.* Newsletter. Spring/Summer 2025.
- Averill Historical Museum. *Exhibits at the Ada History Center.* 2025.
- Beld, Gordon G. *Grand Times in Grand Rapids: Pieces of Furniture City History.* n.d.
- Bodbyl-Mast, Aaron. *The Grand River Greenway: The Vision and its History.* Storymap. 2021.
- Cascade Township. *5-Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan: 2023-2026.* 2023.
- City of Grand Rapids. *Parks and Recreation Master Plan.* 2010.
- City of Grand Rapids. *Your City, Your Parks: City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Department 2022 Strategic Master Plan Update.* 2022.
- Day & Associates. *A Natural and Cultural Features Inventory of the Grand River Greenway Corridor in Ottawa County, Michigan.* Prepared for Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. 1998.
- Design Plus. *Grand River Greenway Study.* Prepared for Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. 1995.
- Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. *Grand River Public Art Plan: Grand Rapids, Michigan.* Draft. 2025.
- Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. *Grand River Public Art Plan: Indigenous Engagement Summary.* Draft. 2025.
- Ellis, Matthew A. *Hidden History of Grand Rapids.* n.d.
- Ferry, William Montague. *The Story of Grand Rapids.* Edited by Z.Z. Lydens. 1966.
- Grand River Network. *The Grand River Greenway Vision and Framework for Action.* 2025.
- Grand Rapids Forward. *Downtown & River Action Plan.* 2015.
- Grand Rapids Public Museum. *Community Engagement Report.* 2017.
- Grand Rapids Public Museum. *Exhibits.* 2025.
- Grand Valley State University Kutsche Office of Local History. *Connections Along the Grand River: A Journey Through West Michigan History.* n.d.
- Great Lakes Audubon. *Grand River Coastal Corridor Ecological Assessment and Conservation Recommendations.* 2021.
- Hazlewood, Karolee R. *Historic Photos of Grand Rapids.* n.d.
- Jenison Historical Association website. n.d.
- Kent County Parks. *Kent County Parks, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan: 2019–2023.* 2019.
- Kent County Parks. *Kent County Parks, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan: 2024–2028.* 2024.
- Longwoods International. *Pure Michigan Travel USA Visitor Profile—Day Report.* 2023.
- Longwoods International. *Pure Michigan Travel USA Visitor Profile—Overnight Report.* 2023.
- Lowell Area Historical Museum. *Exhibits (interior and exterior wayside panels).* 2025.
- Lowell Area Historical Museum. *The ABCs of Lowell, Vols. 1-3.* 2020.
- Lowell Area Historical Museum. *Historic Downtown Walking Tour.* Brochure. *n.d.*

APPENDIX A — References Consulted

- Lowell Charter Township. *Lowell Township 2021 Community Parks and Recreation Plan.* Prepared by MCSA Group, Inc. 2021.
- McGregor, L. *Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water.* Journal of Great Lakes Research. 2023.
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources. *Expanding Tribal Partnerships to Restore Native Wild Rice.* Bulletin. 2025.
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources. *Rogue River Natural River Plan.* 1973.
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources. *Snuffbox Mussel, the Rock Monster.* Bulletin. 2014.
- Michigan Department of Transportation. *Ancestors, Archaeology and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past Into the Future.* Archaeological Lesson Plans. n.d.
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation. *Tourism Economic Impact County Tables—Michigan.* 2023.
- Michigan Genealogy on the Web. *Logging and Timber, Etten.* 1926.
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory. *Emergent Marsh.* 2026.
- Michigan State University Extension. *Michigan Natural Features Inventory: Floodplain Forest.* Website. n.d.
- National Park Service. *National Historic Landmarks Program: Norton Mounds Group.* Archived website. 2003.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service. *Watershed Project Plan – Environmental Assessment for the Lower Grand River Habitat Restoration Project, Lower Grand River Watershed (HUC 04050006), Kent County, Michigan.* Draft. Prepared in cooperation with the City of Grand Rapids. 2025.
- Neegan Burnside Ltd. *Credit Valley Trail Indigenous Experience Implementation Plan.* Prepared for Credit Valley Conservation. 2020.
- Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. *Annual Report.* 2024.
- Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. *Grand River Greenway Project Update.* 2025.
- Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. *Ottawa County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan*. 2021.
- Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. *Ottawa Sands Park: A Collective Community Visioning Plan.* Prepared by Viridis Design Group. 2020.
- Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission. *Strategic Plan.* 2024.
- Ottawa County Parks Foundation. *Annual Report.* 2024.
- Plainfield Charter Township. *Grand Rogue Park Master Plan.* Prepared by Prein & Newhof. 2019.
- River For All. *Grand River Corridor Implementation Plan and River Trail Design Guidelines.* 2019.
- Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association. *I Remember... A History of Grandville Avenue.* n.d.
- Schrems West Michigan Trout Unlimited. *Rogue River.* Website. 2025.
- Seaver, Jefferson. *Steamboat Park Exhibits.* 2021
- Seidman Research Office, Grand Valley State University. *Economic Impact Study: Kent County Parks.* 2019.
- Thomas R. Dilley. *Grand Rapids Community and Industry.* n.d.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A — References Consulted

- Toole Design. *Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide for West Michigan Trails and Bikeways.* Prepared for West Michigan Trails. 2023.
- Tourism Economics. *Economic Impact of Visitors to Michigan.* 2025.
- Trains and Railroads. *Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad.* Website. 2025.
- United States Census Bureau. *Census Data.* n.d.
- United States Department of Agriculture. *Maintain and Restore Floodplain Connectivity.* Climate Hubs website. n.d.
- West Michigan Conservation Network. *Rogue River Watershed Partners.* Website. 2025.

APPENDIX B — Participants in the Planning Process

- Myron Aldrink—Idema Family
- Thomas M. Amon—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Annabella Bailey—Ada Parks & Recreation
- Dan Behler—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Eric Brown—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Nancy Brozek—North Country Trail Association
- Mike Burns—City of Lowell
- Jeff Carlson—formerly Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
- Laura Cleypool—City of Grand Rapids
- Wesley Deason—Ada Township Parks Department
- Bob Dompierre—Friends of Grand Rapids Parks
- Curtis Dykstra—Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
- Karie Enriquez—City of Grand Rapids
- Jane Ewing—independent
- Wally Ewing—independent
- Christa Ferguson—Plainfield Charter Township
- Alex Forist—Grand Rapids Public Museum
- Mara Gericke—Grand Valley Metro Council
- Alex Gezon—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Randy Goble—Kent District Library
- Mike Gray—Grand Rapids Historical Commission
- Chase Gumbs—City of Walker
- Dave Haagsma—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Jerry Hale—Lowell Township
- Kate Harmon—Grand Valley State University
- Todd Harvey— Kent County Parks Foundation
- Kristin Hedges—Grand Valley State University
- Shelley Irwin—Kent County Parks Foundation
- George Jaeger—Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
- Lynne Jarman-Johnson—Kent County Parks Foundation
- Travis Mabry—City of Walker
- Liz Morse—Kent County Parks Foundation
- William Martinus—independent
- Linda McAffrey—independent
- Jerry Miller—Kent Conservation District
- Sam Moore—Kent County Parks Foundation
- John Morrison—West Michigan Trails
- Aaron Mowen—Grand Valley State University
- Rhiannon Mulligan—John Ball Zoo
- Dan O'Keefe—Michigan State University Extension/SeaGrant
- Todd Olson—Connor Township
- Stephanie Ogren—Grand Rapids Public Museum
- Lisa Plank—Lowell Area Historical Museum
- Kelly Rice—Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission
- John Scholtz—retired Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
- Jessie Schulte—Kent County Parks
- Jefferson Seaver—independent
- Erin Sloan-Turner—Kent Conservation District
- Dan Spegel—MI Department of Natural Resources

APPENDIX B — Participants in the Planning Process

- Ben Swayze—Kent County Parks
- Rory Thibault—Land Conservancy of West Michigan
- Al Vanderberg—Kent County Administrator
- Jim VanderWest—City of Grandville
- Jessica VanGinhoven—Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
- Marjie Viveen—independent
- Kristen Wildes—Ada History Center
- Catherine Zietse—Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.

APPENDIX C — Management Direction

Grand River Greenway Vision (from Winter 2025 Project Update by Ottawa County Parks Department)

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

Ottawa County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2021)

Mission

THE OCPRC enhances quality of life for residents and visitors by preserving parks and open spaces and providing outdoor and natural resource-based recreation and education experiences.

GOAL 1—Preserve and manage park and open space lands which protect and enhance significant landscapes and natural communities to benefit both people and wildlife.

Objectives:

- Provide a high level of stewardship for natural lands.
- Identify high quality natural resource features in Ottawa County and seek to preserve key parcels and interconnected natural lands through establishment of new parks and open spaces.
- Advocate for improved water-quality levels for all regional waterways and water bodies.

GOAL 2—Provide high quality outdoor and natural resource-based recreation opportunities for residents and visitors of all levels of ability.

Objectives:

- Provide a wide range of outdoor and natural resource-based recreation opportunities and facilities to meet identified needs in the long-range parks and open space plan.
- Identify areas within Ottawa County not adequately served by county park lands and facilities, and expand recreation opportunities in these areas when natural resource features suitable for county park development are available.
- Maintain high standards for maintenance and operation of all park and open space lands and facilities.
- Provide lands and facilities which are accessible to individuals of all levels of ability (comply with and exceed standards established by the Americans with Disabilities Act, with a goal to achieve universal accessibility).

GOAL 3—Promote understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural history of Ottawa County and awareness of Commission-operated facilities, programs, and services.

Objectives:

- Provide a wide range of educational and outdoor recreation programs and special events for people of all ages, interests, and abilities.
- Provide interpretive facilities for both natural and cultural history at park lands and open spaces. Promote good stewardship of county park lands and open spaces.
- Utilize programs and special events to promote awareness and use of the park and open space system.

APPENDIX C — Management Direction

GOAL 4—Ensure organizational stability.

Objectives:

- Continue to emphasize responsible financial management and transparency in all aspects of park system administration.
- Maintain and operate the park system in a cost-effective manner which minimizes environmental impacts and demonstrates organizational commitment to conservation values.
- Emphasize a strong communications and marketing program to make the public aware of the lands, facilities, and programs offered by the Parks Commission.
- Maintain a diversified financial base for both short- and long-term development, expansion, operation, and maintenance of the park system.
- Leverage tax dollars whenever possible by maximizing grant funds and private donations.
- Implement user fees where appropriate and consistent with Commission policies and in a socially responsible manner.
- Expand partnerships to help achieve identified goals.
- Sustain the dedicated parks millage as the base funding source for maintenance and operation.

Kent County Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas Master Plan 2024-2028

Mission

The Kent County Parks Department enriches lives in Kent County by providing outstanding parks, natural areas and trails that are accessible and inclusive for all County residents. The Department achieves this vision through efficient operations, sound stewardship of resources, active community partnerships, and by preparing for the needs of future generations.

Goal 1—Continue to address the growing need for additional recreational space in Kent County through strategic acquisition of parklands green spaces, and trail corridors.

- Objective 1a—Develop an evaluation system to prioritize future acquisitions.
- Objective 1b—Establish a working inventory of potential property acquisitions.
- Objective 1c—Reduce the county's deficit in regional-quality recreational space.
- Objective 1d—Acquire select parcels to improve the quality, scope and/or accessibility of recreational experience at existing parks and trails.
- Objective 1e—Where possible and appropriate, permanently protect key trail routes through the acquisition of easements or corridors.
- Objective 1f—Preserve unique natural areas if acquisition is consistent with the Department's mission and priorities.

APPENDIX C — Management Direction

Goal 2—Continually maintain and improve facilities to provide diverse, high-quality recreational opportunities that meet public demand.

- Objective 2a— Implement a method of projecting, prioritizing, scheduling, and budgeting for significant asset maintenance needs.
- Objective 2b—Continually improve accessibility of facilities with a focus on playgrounds, water features, shelters, restrooms and trail systems.
- Objective 2c—Collaborate with partners to improve the ease of trail crossings at major roads and intersections.
- Objective 2d—Implement a department-wide repair and reconstruction program for paved trails.
- Objective 2e—Continue the current practice of regularly repairing, upgrading and replacing all play structures.
- Objective 2f—Maintain and upgrade other facilities as needed and in keeping with this plan to meet safety requirements and public demand for high quality recreational opportunities.

Goal 3—Strategically develop facilities to improve services and recreational opportunities.

- Objective 3a—Evaluate existing parks for opportunities to improve safety and traffic flow during heavy use times and implement improvements as needed.
- Objective 3b—Evaluate and implement new development in undeveloped park properties to provide general public access.
- Objective 3c—Provide public access with fishing opportunities, canoe/kayak launches, and trails at parks with water access.
- Objective 3d—Develop and expand other new in-park trails to improve access to parklands and the availability of diverse trail experiences.
- Objective 3e—Collaborate with sports advocacy groups to assess service gaps and support the development of new sports facilities where appropriate.
- Objective 3f—Pursue opportunities to develop off-leash dog areas at parks if appropriate.

Goal 4—Develop and support a broad network of trails within Kent County that maximizes connectivity between communities, parks and other trail systems.

- Objective 4a—Establish a regional committee of local townships within the Grand River Greenway corridor to guide the project.
- Objective 4b—Support connections to Parks and other regional assets via trail system.
- Objective 4c—Implement construction of the Grand River Greenway Trail within Kent County.
- Objective 4d—Support and assist efforts to establish regional trails and local connectors in West Michigan.
- Objective 4e—Support development of a single-track trail system adjacent to shared0use path systems through the County.

Goal 5—Enhance the sustainability and habitat quality of natural areas and waterways.

- Objective 5a—Create land management plans identifying high-priority sites to provide high impact environment projects for volunteers and/or capital improvement projects.

APPENDIX C — Management Direction

- Objective 5b—Expand partnerships for managing invasive species with adjacent landowners and conservation organizations.
- Objective 5c—Naturalize agricultural fields by utilizing best management practices for naturalization.
- Objective 5d—Conduct routine maintenance on naturalized areas to limit exposure to invasive plants and to provide high quality habitat and ecosystems.

Goal 6—Engage the community by providing rewarding opportunities for volunteers and the public to participate in projects, events and programs that support the recreational and environmental attributes of Kent County Parks.

- Objective 6a—Continue to develop recruitment and retention initiatives to support an engaged and diverse volunteer base.
- Objective 6b—Increase participation in high impact and service-learning projects.
- Objective 6c—Increase participation, training, and recognition of individuals and groups in the Park and Trail Steward Program.
- Objective 6d—Provide staff support, workshops, and specialized training for high impact volunteer projects.
- Objective 6e—Expand educational opportunities, nature programs, and interpretive trails for all age groups that further encourages community learning, outreach, and engagement.
- Objective 6f—Expand the Invasive Species Program through increased volunteer and staff support.
- Objective 6g—Engage more community partners for collaborative programs, projects, and events.
- Objective 6h—Develop additional projects, programs, and training to support the success of Native Species planting.

Goal 7—Expand public outreach, brand recognition and support for Kent County Parks.

- Objective 7a—In collaboration with the County Communications leadership team, assess the current communications efforts of the Parks Department and develop a plan for improving its effectiveness.
- Objective 7b—Increase interpretive sites, materials, and opportunities available to the public.
- Objective 7c—Continue to identify and adapt to changing trends in communications, public relations, and outreach to increase awareness and use of Kent County Parks.

Goal 8—Ensure that staffing levels continue to meet the overall operations and management needs of Kent County's park and trail system.

- Objective 8a—Regularly review all seasonal positions and implement changes as needed to maintain required levels of reliable staff.
- Objective 8b—Continue to respond to evolving requirements for park and facility management by adapting staffing as needed.

APPENDIX C — Management Direction

Goal 9—Protect the quality and sustainability of the Kent County Parks system by continuing to develop and grow diverse funding sources.

- Objective 9a—Analyze and adjust eared revenue opportunities on a yearly basis to ensure that the Department continues to provide a minimum of 40% of department funding through earned revenue.
- Objective 9b—Support capacity-building and long-range planning efforts of the Kent County Parks Foundation through collaborative planning, technical assistance, and other resources as appropriate.
- Objective 9c—Regularly explore and pursue grant and private philanthropy funding.
- Objective 9d—Explore and develop new revenue streams to improve department funding.

APPENDIX D — The Planning Process

The planning process began in February 2025 with review of background information and a site visit in March 2025 to tour and assess the Greenway. Representing CBD, Melanie Mae returned in May 2025 to lead a series of interpretive planning workshops to gather input from stakeholders.[1] Several one-on-one interviews were also conducted to gather additional input. This document considers information gathered during those sessions as well as during review of background information.

Following multiple interim review opportunities by the committee, the 75% draft was released to stakeholders in February 2026, followed by a series of in-person meetings in March 2026. Stakeholder comments were collected through April 2026, with the revised document submitted for final acceptance in June 2026.

The process of interpretive planning holds the Greenway visitor experience central, considering the following questions:

- Why would a person want to visit the Greenway?
- Can visitors easily find the Greenway?
- What's the first impression?
- Where/how can visitors get information about the Greenway and its key messages?
- What are those key messages?
- Can Greenway visitors find their way around?
- What will Greenway visitors do, feel, learn, and experience during their visit?
- How can the counties and their partners meet the interpretive goals identified herein in the most cost-effective manner, considering long-term costs, usage trends, and sustainable values?

1 A list of participants is included in Appendix B. Participants provided input on key messages (over-arching and site-specific), Greenway users, and goals for interpretation.

APPENDIX E — Visitor Motivations

Effective interpretation is enjoyable and relevant to visitors' lives. To provide experiences that are enjoyed by Greenway users, we must first understand their needs, expectations, motivations, knowledge base, and values. Understanding what motivates visitors to come to trails, parks, open spaces, and waterways and to seek out interpretation will enable us to develop the best strategies and methodologies for reaching our audience.

The Grand River Greenway encompasses meaningful and significant places in the lives of County residents and tourists. These trails, parks, open spaces, and waterways provide opportunities for people to identify with natural surroundings and feel a sense of belonging through their experience with the natural world.

Visitor experiences are dependent on visitors' mindsets, motivations, and identity-related needs. According to research from Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good, visitors decide to visit natural places to satisfy both mental and emotional connections, or "heartwired" connections, negotiating these among their interests, values, beliefs, and life experiences. How these factors interact inform visitor behaviors and attitudes about nature.

Of the six "heartwired" mindsets identified in the research, four relate directly to Greenway audiences—the All-Senses mindset, the Amazing Wildlife mindset, the Feeling-At-Peace mindset, and the Family Traditions mindset. These mindsets align with author and visitor experiences researcher John H. Falk's five primary audience types: Experience Seekers, Explorers, Professionals/Hobbyists, Facilitators, and Rechargers.



COURTESY MICHIGAN TRAILS MAGAZINE

APPENDIX E — Visitor Motivations

Consider the following characterizations of visitor motivations:

Heart-Wired Visitor Mindsets	Falk's Visitor Motivation Types
All Senses Mindset Value multi-sensory experiences and are attracted to areas where they can use their bodily perceptions to connect with their surroundings	**Experience Seeker** Motivated by sensory experiences Example: Recreationists and tourists
Amazing Wildlife Mindset Value a sense of wonder and possess deep, meaningful connections to living things; motivated by the chance to see unique wildlife	**Explorers** Motivated by curiosity and discovery Example: Children
Family Traditions Mindset Value family bonding and opportunities to create long-lasting memories	**Facilitators** Motivated by social meaning and a desire to meet the needs of others Example: Parent(s) with children
Feel-at-Peace Mindset Value wellness and opportunities to relax and transcend the everyday stresses of life	**Rechargers** Motivated by opportunities to rejuvenate outdoors Example: Solo hikers and/or meditators
	Professionals/Hobbyists Motivated by their interest and knowledge of a subject Example: Birders, naturalists or nature photographers

MINDSETS AND MOTIVATIONS ALIGNED

Experience seekers visit the Greenway to collect experiences and may be recreationists like mountain bikers or regional tourists seeking a fun weekend day trip. All Senses visitors may arrive at the Greenway to hike, bike, walk, run, kayak, fish, camp, or pursue other recreation opportunities.

Explorers are motivated by curiosity and discovery like Amazing Wildlife visitors. People with this mindset are often naturalists, birdwatchers, or nature novices hoping to engage with the local ecology present along the Greenway. With curious minds and interests in plants and animals, children are often Explorers and Amazing Wildlife visitors; however, people of any age can be found within these categories.

As attentive caretakers, Facilitators are motivated by social meaning like Family Traditions visitors. Family Traditions visitors often arrive at parks to have picnics or parties, to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and ceremonies or to recreate together as a group while Facilitators participate in activities that everyone in their group can enjoy.

Rechargers are motivated by opportunities to rejuvenate in the outdoors like Feel-At-Peace visitors. A Recharger/Feel-At-Peace

APPENDIX E — Visitor Motivations

visitor might be a solo hiker or a meditator, meandering leisurely along the Greenway, contemplating personal and spiritual aspects of their lives.

GREENWAY USER NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

When planning and designing Greenway user experiences, it is important to remember that all Greenway users need to know where they area and what's expected of them. As psychologist Abraham Maslow outlined in 1954, people need to have their basic needs met—food, water, safety, and security—before they can attend to personal growth or take in new information.

Restrooms, wayfinding and orientation, and etiquette information all play into creating an environment where Greenway users are relaxed and able to receive information. Greenway users need to feel welcome, comfortable, and clear about how they should interact with the site or trail. Any facilities that are open to the public must be well maintained, sanitary, and safe to ensure that these facilities are accessible and support community equity.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The 85-mile length of the Grand River Greenway spans scenic and hard-working waters and landscapes within two counties. Each county has a distinct socioeconomic character, as reflected in the table in Appendix F (based on U.S. Census data).

With the shores of Lake Michigan on the west, Ottawa County attracts many seasonal residents during the summer. Compared with the inland county of Kent to the east, Ottawa is largely agricultural and is the less populous county.

As psychologist Abraham Maslow outlined in 1954, people need to have their basic needs met—food, water, safety, and security—before they can attend to personal growth or take in new information.

Both counties are more than two-thirds White, yet Kent is home to more Black and African American residents (9.16% in Kent, and 1.46% in Ottawa) and more foreign-born persons (8.4%, more than the statewide average of 6.99%). Homeownership rate is higher in Ottawa, as is median property value (78.5% and $291K, compared with 70.4% and $265K in Kent).

Kent County has a significantly higher rate of residents holding a bachelor's degree, as well as a higher rate of employment. Ottawa County, however, has a higher median household income ($87K per year), compared with Kent ($80K).

Focusing in on the 2-mile urban core along the river in Grand Rapids, a 2020 study[1] found that median household income is 35% lower than Kent County as a whole. The non-white population of that focus area is 61% higher that the Kent County average, and the population of residents under 18 is 24% compared with 18% for the county as a whole.

1 Benefits Case by HR&A, 2020

APPENDIX E — Visitor Motivations

TOURISM IMPACTS

Tourism is a significant driver in West Michigan's economy. Of the $29 million in visitor spending statewide in 2023, Kent County was the third highest, attracting nearly $2 million and following only the Detroit Metro region.[2]

According to the 2023 visitor studies released by Longwoods International, the majority (60%) of visitors to West Michigan are in the area only for the day. Regardless of whether they are visiting for the day or staying overnight, the primary purpose is to visit friends and family (47% of all visitors to West Michigan). Other top activities include spending time in the outdoors (12%), touring (11%), and attending a special event (7%). Nearly three-quarters of overnight visitors were repeat visitors and tend to stay either at hotels or with friends and family. During their trip, more than half (53%) participated in outdoor activities (such as hiking, biking, swimming, camping, and time at the beach/waterfront). Nearly a quarter engaged in shopping (23%) and sightseeing (22%). Most shoppers visited locally owned businesses (59%). The average income of visitors to West Michigan was $69.3K in 2023 and the vast majority (76%) had at least some college education. More females (57%) than males were represented as visitors.

2 Tourism Economic Impact County Tables–MI–2023, Michigan Economic Development Corporation

APPENDIX F — Demographics

U.S. Census Categories	Kent County	Ottawa County	Michigan
Population			
Population Estimates, 2023	658,844	298,614	10.1 million
Median age	35.7	36.3	40.1
Foreign born persons, percent	8.4%	4.95%	6.99%
Race and Hispanic Origin			
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	71.1%	82.4%	73%
Hispanic or Latino	11.5%	10.1%	5.74%
Black or African American alone	9.16%	1.46%	13.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.17%	0.11%	0.33%
Asian alone (not Hispanic)	3.06%	2.66%	3.26%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%
Two or More Races, incl. Hispanic	4.35%	3.13%	1.91%
Housing			
Homeownership rate	70.4%	78.5%	72.9%
Median property value	$265,700	$291,200	$217,600
Families & Living Arrangements			
Primary language other than English spoken at home, percent	0%	0%	10.2%
Education			
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+	42.0%	25.3%	32.7%
Health			
Persons without health insurance	4.86%	3.24%	5.02%
Economy			
Employment rate, civilian labor force	67.3%	65.6%	58.9%
Transportation			
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+	21.1	20.4	24.4
Income & Poverty			
Median household income	$80,390	$87,144	$71,149
Persons in poverty	10.6%	8.16%	13.1%

Data from Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimate on datausa.io. Education and employment rate directly from census.gov website (American Community Servey data)

APPENDIX G — What is Interpretation?

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Most people think of it as the process through which a person translates one language into another, like Spanish into English. At its most basic level, that's what it is – translating. Environmental interpretation involves translating the technical language of a natural science or related field into terms and ideas that people who aren't scientists can readily understand. And it involves doing it in a way that is entertaining and interesting to these people (Ham, 1992).

Interpretation is different from environmental education per se, in that interpretation is often defined as being "informal instruction" with volunteer participants. Environmental education is something more like "formal instruction", either in a classroom or in the field, but with a captive audience. Both have underlying structure – environmental education has learning standards; interpretation is guided by themes, goals and objectives.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

In 1998, Larry Beck and Ted Cable expanded upon Freeman Tilden's original six principles of interpretation, and proposed a total of fifteen. In short, they are:

1. Relate subjects to peoples' lives;
2. Go beyond information – reveal deeper meaning and truth;
3. Design a story that informs, entertains, and enlightens;
4. Inspire and provoke people to broaden horizons;
5. Develop a complete theme or thesis and address the whole person;
6. Use different approaches for children, teens, and seniors;
7. Bring the past alive, make the present more enjoyable & the future more meaningful;
8. Incorporate technology with care;
9. Give focused, well-researched presentations;
10. Use basic communication techniques, and develop knowledge and skills;
11. Write what readers want to know, with wisdom, humility and care;
12. Attract support – financial, volunteer, political or administrative;
13. Instill a desire to sense beauty; encourage spiritual uplift and resource protection;
14. Optimize experience through intentional and thoughtful program and facility design;
15. Exude passion –for the resource and the people inspired by it.

APPENDIX H — Accessibility Standards

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR INTERPRETIVE FACILITIES, PRODUCTS AND PROGRAMS

- Include captioning on all films/videos. Captioning must be visible when video is shown in public.
- Make brochures available in alternate formats upon request (such as 18 point print, audio and computer disc).
- Make Web sites fully accessible in compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Offer an accessibility guide, available in alternative formats and include the guide on your web site.
- Make sure all signage related to accessibility are appropriately posted and use appropriate language and terminology (i.e. “Accessible Parking” instead of “Handicap Parking,” etc.).
- Involve people with disabilities in planning, design, etc.
- Provide written scripts wherever audio information is presented.
- Create accessible routes to exhibits.
- Display content of information redundantly or in part – aurally, tactually and visually when appropriate.
- Eliminate obstructions to viewing exhibits (i.e. high pedestals, railings, etc.)
- 11 million people are visually impaired, 5 percent are blind and only 0.25 percent -0.35 percent actually read Braille. The 95 percent with low vision would benefit most from large print (18 point).
- All materials for distribution are to be within the reach ranges stated in the accessibility guidelines—maximum forward reach of 48”, maximum side reach of 54”. All controls must operable with one closed fist and force of no greater than 5 lbs.
- Use Braille only where it counts (restrooms, elevators, etc.).

Wayside Exhibit Accessibility Notes

The following notes are compiled from a variety of sources, including the National Park Service and miscellaneous texts on interpretation and design.

GUIDELINES AFFECTING MOBILITY-IMPAIRED VISITORS

Wayside panels should be:

- Installed at accessible locations wherever possible.
- Installed at heights and angles favorable for viewing by most visitors, including those in wheelchairs.
- For standard NPS low-profile units, the recommended height is 30-34” from the bottom of the exhibit panel to finished grade;
- For vertical exhibits and bulletin boards the height is 24-28”, depending on panel size.

GUIDELINES AFFECTING VISUALLY-IMPAIRED VISITORS

- Exhibit type will be as legible and readable as possible.
- Panel colors will be selected to reduce eye strain and glare, and to provide excellent readability under field conditions. White should not be used for a background color.

APPENDIX H — Accessibility Standards

LINE OF VISION

- Eye level (dimension NOT shown in Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards or UFAS): Eye level for people in a wheel chair is 3'7" to 4'3" (43-51") – important consideration for exhibit design.
- Eye level for adults in a wheelchair is about 1½' below that for the average standing adult. Labels, exhibit viewing and lighting should take this into consideration. There can be conflicting elements to consider here, as reflections on cases differ for standing and seated people as well.
- Text above eye level is also difficult for people wearing bifocals to read. Also consider the eye level of children when they are part of the target audience.

INTERPRETIVE PROJECT CHECKLIST

Site Name _____

Site Location _____

	ACTIVITY		YES	NO	N/A	TEAM MEMBER(S)
1	KNOW YOUR VISITORS	Has your target audience for this exhibit been identified?				
		Have the visitors' needs and previous experiences been considered for this exhibit?				
2	ENSURE YOUR EXHIBIT ALIGNS WITH THE GREENWAY THEME STRUCTURE	Have you documented how the exhibit ties into the overall Greenway theme structure?				
		Have you clearly developed the location-specific storylines that support the Greenway themes?				
		Are the themes and messages supported by facts?				
3	DEVELOP THE EXHIBIT CONTENT	Have you identified resources for information and graphics?				
		Have you followed the "3-30-3 rule"* to organize the interpretive content?				
		Are your titles catchy, yet brief?				
		Have you used humor where appropriate?				
		Does the reading ability align with the target audience?				
		Are the interpretive concepts supported by images and/or other graphics?				
		Is the written material relevant to visitors' lives and interests?				
		Does the interpretive material ask a question or provoke the visitor to action?				
		Does your exhibit word count fall within the 150-200 word range?				
		Does the content build on experiences visitors may have held elsewhere?				
		Does the content provide suggestions on where to get more detailed information?				
4	DESIGN PANELS ACCORDING TO DESIGN GUIDELINES	Have you followed the design style adopted by the Greenway advisory committee?				
		Are photos and illustrations of adequate resolution?				
		Have graphic use rights been secured for this project and appropriate credit/attribution made?				
5	CONTENT REVIEW	Have facts been checked for accuracy?				
		Has the text been proofread for spelling errors/grammar, etc?				

This table was adapted from the National Park Service's "Interpretive Media Matrix."

INTERPRETIVE PROJECT CHECKLIST

Site Name _____

Site Location _____

		ACTIVITY	YES	NO	N/A	TEAM MEMBER(S)
6	EXHIBIT BASE PLANNING & DESIGN	Does the base design reflect the "look and feel" set forth in the interpretive plan design guidelines?				
		Does the proposed material meet durability requirements for the specific location?				
		Are the specifications for hardware and mounting method appropriate for the environment (indoor/outdoor, heavy use, etc)?				
		Who will install and maintain the exhibit?				
7	SITE PLANNING	Does the installation method require excavation?				
		Has the design been approved by the governing body's design review committee, if necessary?				
		Have all permits for sign placement and installation been secured?				
		Will the exhibit be oriented to take advantage of pedestrian traffic flow?				
		Has visitor accessibility been considered?				
		Does the site plan provide site dimensions, orientation/viewing angle of exhibit, and final height of installed exhibit?				
8	FABRICATION & INSTALLATION	Fabricate panels and bases in accordance with design guidelines				
		Inspect fabricated items immediately upon delivery. Take appropriate caution when unpacking and document damages immediately, if necessary.				
		Ensure site plan is followed during installation and inspect quality of workmanship.				
9	ANNOUNCE PROJECT	Celebrate the completion of project with press releases, ribbon cutting, as appropriate.				

APPENDIX J — Media Comparison

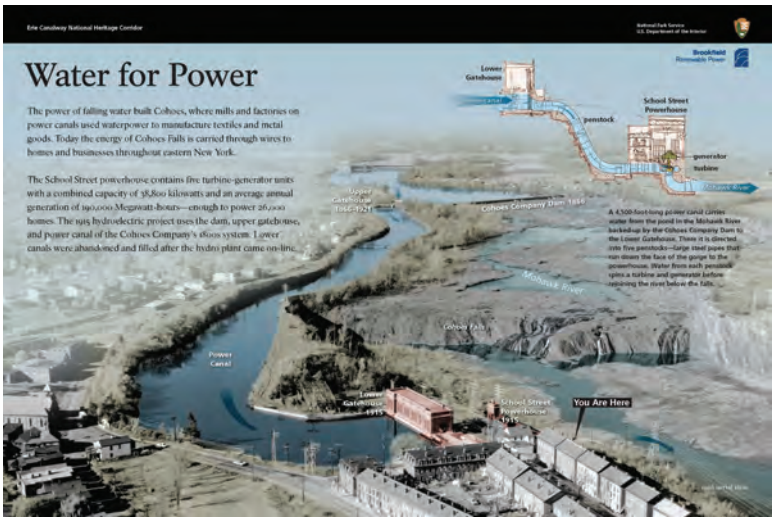
As you decide how to tell your story, consider the following comparison of pros and cons of various interpretive media.

All media types have development and maintenance costs that must be factored in to your decision, as well.

NON-PERSONAL SERVICES

Media	Advantages	Limitations
ORIENTATION PANELS & OUTDOOR INTERPRETIVE EXHIBITS: Often the first or only interpretation a visitor may receive. These physical structures are ubiquitous with a trail-based interpretive experience and help interpret a significant feature, typically within viewing distance.	• Helps identify physical resources • Orientation and interpretation 24/7 • Can show changes in a resource over time • Can direct viewers to additional resources via QR code	• May frustrate visitors who have additional questions • Hard to interpret complicated stories • Subject to vandalism and weathering
MOBILE PHONE APP or MOBILE-FRIENDLY WEBSITE: Smart phones are ubiquitous. Common features include: navigable maps, augmented reality, photo galleries, and social media integration.	• Can host multimedia content • Interpretation on demand • Can present geo-specific information • Easy to evaluate statistics • Acknowledges 21st century visitor needs and expectations	• Most rapidly evolving medium and challenging to stay current • May require cell phone coverage to work (though not always) • Requires regular updating for fresh content and technology developments
SOCIAL MEDIA: Social media websites have exploded in popularity over the past decade. For many users, they are the primary form of social interaction, the place where news, events, conversations, and memories are collectively shared.	• Creates dialogue and allows Greenway managers to receive input from audiences • Easy-to-share tools encourage content to go viral • Access to hundreds of millions of online community members	• Challenging to stay current • Not all visitors like to share private/personal information online • Content is short-lived • Requires choosing to focus on one or more platforms
BROCHURES: Visitors often seek out brochures when they first arrive, seeking an informative resource they can carry throughout the trip and a tangible reminder of an experience. At best, these are well-written and contain inspiring images and useful maps; at worst, they are forgettable and become litter or campfire fuel.	• Useful as self-guided tour and orientation map • Provides a souvenir and interpretation at home • Meets visitor expectations • Can be developed in-house	• Requires frequent revision to remain current • Creates litter once no longer useful • Discourages those who don't want to learn by reading
AUDIO/VIDEO: Multimedia can include Greenway films, digital tours, podcasts, and web features. This combination of audio and moving images can create strong emotional connections and memories. Visitors have high expectations because of exposure to popular media.	• Creates mood or atmosphere • Provides views of inaccessible places or resources • Presents material sequentially • Easy to distribute online using visitors' own devices	• Disappoints visitors who want to learn at their own pace • Visitors expect professional production value
BLOG: Short for web log, blogs are journal-like web pages where posts appear chronologically. This format is appropriate for narratives and articles around a common theme.	• Users can comment on posts • Easy to share links and multimedia • Automatic archiving • Appropriate for seasonal or timely topics	• Presents information in a linear format • Can be hard to find old content • Requires commitment to produce original content on a regular schedule

APPENDIX K — Outdoor Exhibit Design Examples



This example uses a labeled aerial image, as opposed to a map, to help visitors understand where they are in relation to significant features. A diagram depicts the flow of water, an important concept at this site.

This panel uses a sepia-toned contemporary image inset with close-ups to enable visitors to "see inside" the structure. Diagrammatic elements depict how water flowing in the flume helped to power the mill.





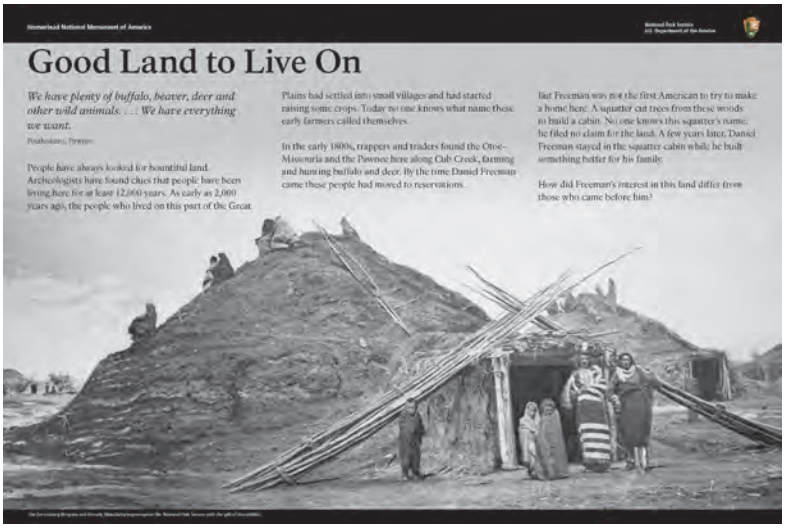
Here, a series of historic landscape photos and a photo of a model are used in a collage to illustrate Orville Wright's story of crashing into a tree. It effectively illustrates the story through clever placement of imagery and avoids the costs associated with commissioning an artist's illustration.

APPENDIX K — Outdoor Exhibit Design Examples



This example depicts the use of illustrations to show how the lighthouse structure evolved over the years.

This example shows the impactfulness of a single powerful image.





This example demonstrates how an image may be marked up and labeled and used in place of (or in this case, in addition to) a map.

