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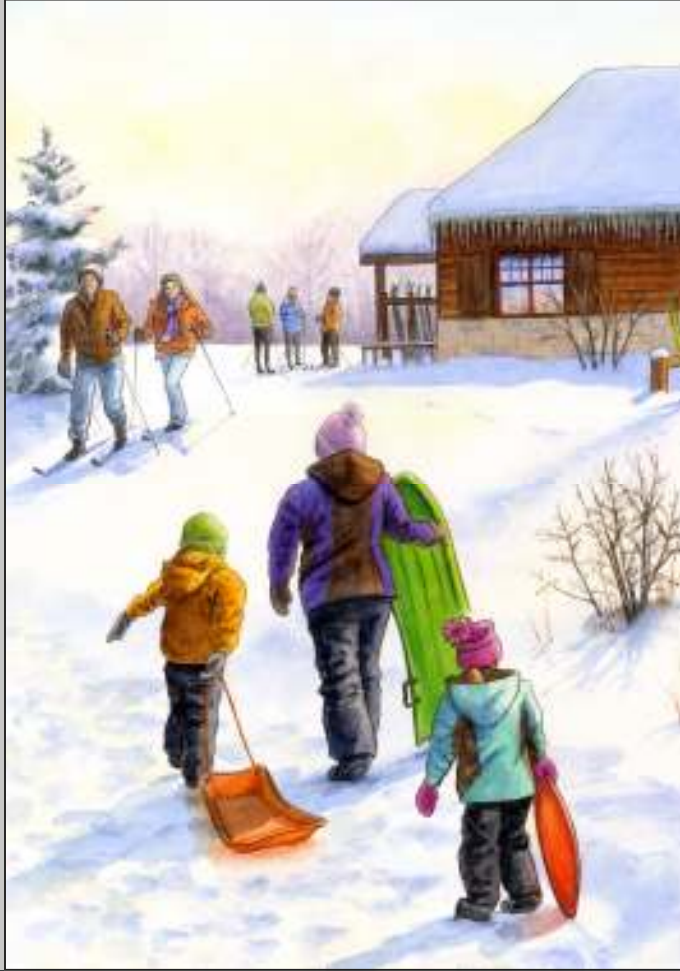
Ottawa County Parks &  
Recreation Commission  
12220 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, Michigan 49460



Winter  
2011-12

## OUTDOORS OTTAWA COUNTY

The quarterly newsletter of the  
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission



Pigeon Creek Park by Amelia Hansen

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### Grand River Greenway Celebration Planned for 2012

The Grand River Greenway has grown by leaps and bounds since 1995 when Ottawa County Parks first proposed the idea to local government units, landowners, and the public. To celebrate the importance and progress of the Grand River Greenway, a volunteer group known as the Greenway Backers is holding a year-long Grand River Greenway Celebration in 2012. The celebration will feature special events at various greenway properties, a Loutit District Library Speaker Series on topics relating to the natural and cultural history of the Grand River, and a series of interpretive walks at selected park properties. Below are just some of the events scheduled for this winter.



#### January 8 – Jigs and Jigsaws at Connor Bayou County Park

Come see one of the newest county parks and a big log cabin on the Grand as you experience a jigsaw puzzle competition, live Irish music, dogsleds, and snowshoes!

#### February 11 – Ski and Smooch at Riverside County Park

Adult couples can enjoy cross-country skiing by candlelight, hot cocoa, a blazing bonfire, and a photo memento!

#### March 2 – Seasons on the Grand

Enjoy art inspired by the Grand River at concurrent art receptions at the Gallery Uptown and Tri-Cities Historical Museum in Grand Haven. This event includes contemporary and historic art. Art competition winners to be revealed.

Watch your local newspaper for more information when the celebration officially kicks off on December 3. Information will also be available on the Ottawa County Parks web site [miottawa.org/parks](http://miottawa.org/parks), or by calling the parks office at 616-738-4810.

### Eastmanville Bayou Improvements

Improvements to the Eastmanville Bayou Open Space Land in Allendale Township are nearly complete. The highly visible site, located west of 68<sup>th</sup> Avenue immediately south of the Eastmanville Bridge over the Grand River, has been a popular destination for fisherman, kayakers, and hikers since it opened on Labor Day weekend. The site has a small boat launch providing access to Eastmanville Bayou, a floating canoe/kayak launch providing barrier free access to the Grand River, and a picnic area. New hiking trails extend along nearly two miles of riverfront including a pathway connection under the 68th Street bridge.



The roller system on the new barrier free canoe/kayak launch on the Grand River provides a safe and stable means of launching for people of all



### Connor Bayou Park Improvements

Land acquisition for the Connor Bayou property in Robinson Township was completed in 2005. Since then, the scenic 142-acre site located along nearly a mile of the Grand River has been open to the public. The parks commission recently approved a \$535,000 improvement project to implement portions of the 2010 Connor Bayou Master Plan. Site improvements will include a new entrance with park sign, widening the gravel entry drive, a paved parking area near the waterfront, trails for hiking and skiing, overlook decks, a kayak landing, a fishing dock, and picnic areas. The log structure on the site will be improved to facilitate group use including the addition of a large deck overlooking the river. Park improvements will be completed by early summer 2012.



Log structure at Connor Bayou



Friends of  
Ottawa County

Friends of Ottawa County Parks is a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting people with nature, recreation, and community by partnering with Ottawa County Parks. New members are always welcome.

### Here Comes Santa Claus! Saturday, December 17 Come anytime between 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Santa and Mrs. Claus will be expecting to see children of all ages at the Weaver House again this holiday season. Family and friends can enjoy the 100 year-old home decorated for the holidays and enjoy refreshments while children have that special talk with Santa. Bring your camera to capture the moment. Advance registration is not required and there are no fees. The Weaver House is located at Pine Bend in Port Sheldon Township. From the intersection of Croswell Street and 156th Ave., travel south on 156th to the park entrance.



### Friends Seeking Donations for the Parks Projects Fund

The newly established Parks Projects Fund is off to a notable start. With the hand puppets recently funded by Friends, staff from the Nature Education Center (NEC) gave an entertaining and informative production entitled "Wild Thing" at the annual meeting in September. Additionally, a Friends' donation is purchasing snowshoes that will be used in programs and available to rent at the NEC this winter. The fund is also helping to cover immediate program expenses for schools needing financial assistance to visit the NEC. If you would like to donate to the Parks Project Fund to support these and future projects, checks payable to Friends of Ottawa County Parks may be mailed to: Friends of Ottawa County Parks (Projects Fund), P.O. Box 84, Lamont, MI 49430.

### Friends Sponsoring Program on Rivers with Doc Fletcher

Friends is sponsoring a program called Paddling Michigan's Hidden Beauty on Sunday, March 4 beginning at 1:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center. See the program section for more details.

### Nature Education Center News

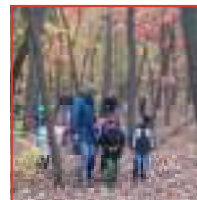
#### Check Out the Gift Shop for that Unique Holiday Gift

The NEC gift shop sells nature-related books (kids and adults), field guides, quality insect nets, insect cages, jewelry, puppets, stickers, book marks, note cards, photos, CDs, and more. A great gift for an older child or adult is a pair of binoculars. The NEC staff has hand-picked a number of quality binoculars designed for kids, birding, butterfly watching, or general nature use.



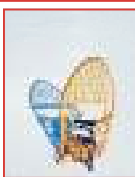
#### Nature Education Center Education Endowment Fund

Consider the Education Endowment Fund in your end of year giving. This fund will provide financial assistance for schools unable to afford to visit the NEC due to transportation and other costs. The fund also provides equipment for the center and training for the interpretive staff. Contributions to this fund may be made through the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation or The Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area. To make a contribution, visit [www.miottawa.org/parks](http://www.miottawa.org/parks) and select "Donate to the Nature Education Center Project" or call 616-786-4847 for information.



#### Try Snowshoeing at Hemlock Crossing this Winter

Thanks to a generous donation from Friends of Ottawa County Parks, the Nature Education Center is purchasing snowshoes to rent to park visitors beginning in January 2012. We will have a variety of sizes available for kids and adults. Call 616-786-4847 for more information.



#### Warm Up on Weekends This Winter at the Nature Education Center

The trails at Hemlock Crossing are great for winter hiking, skiing, and snowshoeing. After your outing on the trails, visit the Nature Education Center to warm up around the fireplace. Warm beverages will also be available to purchase. There will be a fire in the fireplace every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and every Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. from December 13 through February 26. The center will be closed on 12/23 (noon to 5:00 p.m.), 12/24, 12/25 and 1/1.



### Holland Harbor Fishing Access Dedication

The Holland Harbor Fishing Access improvements along the waterfront at the Historic Ottawa Beach Parks were completed in early fall 2011. The extensive fishing docks, waterfront walkway, parking area, and



interpretive displays were opened to the public following a dedication event on September 15. The \$565,000 project was made possible through a \$500,000 grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. The project marks an important step in the implementation of the 2004 master plan for the Historic Ottawa Beach Parks. The parks commission is currently seeking grant support to link the new waterfront walkway and fishing docks to Black Lake Boardwalk which was constructed in 2005.



Parks Commissioner David Van Ginhoven (left) and Brian Napont of the Great Lakes Fishery Trust Board of Directors cut the ribbon for the new facility.

## Winter 2011-12 Programs and Field Trips

- A program fee, vehicle parking fee, and/or advance registration is required for some programs and field trips. Check the program or field trip description for details.
- Space is limited on some programs and field trips.
- Directions to program locations are included in this newsletter.

For programs that require advance registration, call (616) 786-4847

Unless otherwise noted, programs and field trips will be led by naturalists Kristen Hintz (KH) or Chip Francke (CF). Look for the initials at the end of each description to see which naturalist is conducting the program or trip.

## Winter Interpretive Programs

These walks and programs last about 90 minutes and are canceled if weather or road conditions are unsafe. These programs are for individuals and families with children of all ages unless otherwise noted. There are no program fees and advance registration is not required.

### How to Know Your Holiday Trees Saturday, December 10 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

If you refer to all evergreen trees as "pines," this indoor program is for you. Using cut tree branches, participants will learn to tell the difference between pines, spruce, firs, cedars and hemlock by using a simple tree key. This program is for adults and older children. (CF)

### Fireside Story Hour 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Bring the family and gather round the fireplace inside the Nature Education Center to listen to a nature-related story followed by an activity or a discovery walk focused on the theme of the story. (KH)

- \* Sunday, December 18 The story for this program is "A Wish to be a Christmas Tree."
- \* Sunday, January 15 The story for this program is "Who has a Backbone."

### Winter Ecology Lab Saturday, January 7 Nature Education Center

Visit the Winter Ecology Lab anytime from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. and explore the wonderful world of winter. The indoor lab will include viewing a variety of objects through stereo microscopes, experiments with snow, and looking at animal fur, skulls, and tracks. This program is for adults and older children. (CF)



### A Close-Up Look at Twigs Saturday, January 21 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

During the winter, tree twigs have unique characteristics including buds, bundle scars and leaf scars. These characteristics are useful when identifying these plants in winter. This program for adults and older children will begin indoors with a look at collected twigs followed by a short outdoor hike to look at common trees. (CF)



### The Scoop on Skulls Saturday, January 28 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Skulls can be art. Skulls can be a mystery book, laden with clues about an animal's life. During this indoor program, adults and older children will use a key to identify skulls of common mammals and learn about some of their unique adaptations. (KH)

### Feeder Watch Saturday, February 4 10:00 a.m. at the Nature Education Center

There should be lots of activity at the feeders for this indoor program that will help participants hone their identification skills as well as observe a variety of wildlife behaviors. (CF)



### Tree Creations Wednesday, February 15 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Trees have amazing shapes and textures that really stand out on a winter's day. Join art teacher Heidi Camp to learn one technique used to draw trees. Then go outside with naturalist Kristen Hintz on a 30 minute walk to explore some of the unique shapes and textures of trees found at Hemlock Crossing. We'll come back inside to create unique artistic pieces reflecting the shapes and textures revealed on the walk. Adults and older children.

### Winter Walk At Pine Bend Saturday, February 18 10:00 a.m. at Pine Bend

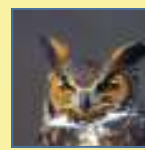
Explore the mature forest at Pine Bend for a look at what's happening outside in the winter. Be prepared for walking on the trails. Meet in the parking lot. (CF)

### The Owl with Many Names Saturday, February 25 6:00 p.m. at Pine Bend

"Hoot Owl," and "Eight Hooter" are two of many common names for the owl *Strix varia*. This program will begin with an indoor program about *Strix varia* followed by a walk to try our luck at calling owls. This program is for adults and older children. Meet in the Weaver House. (KH)

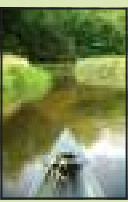
### Pass the Energy Please! Saturday, February 11 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

What can you learn from an owl pellet? Children will dissect an owl pellet to begin an investigation about food chains and food webs. This indoor program will last two hours and is for children in grades 2 to 5. **There is no fee, however, advance registration is required.** (KH)



### Paddling Michigan's Hidden Beauty Sunday, March 4, 1:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Join Michigan author Doc Fletcher for this hour-long photographic journey down rivers featured in his new book, "Paddling Michigan's Hidden Beauty." The program offers a visual delight of 20 rivers including Crockery Creek and the Pigeon River in Ottawa County. After the program, a drawing will be held for a free canoe or kayak trip on one of Michigan's rivers. Doc will also be selling and signing copies of his book after the program. **There is no fee, however, advance registration is required.** This program is sponsored by Friends of Ottawa County Parks.



## Winter Astronomy Programs and Sky Viewings

These programs, conducted by members of the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association, begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center with a one hour indoor program followed by an outdoor viewing session (weather permitting). The indoor programs will be held snow or shine (unless weather and road conditions are unsafe). For the outdoor viewing, telescopes will be provided. Bring a lawn chair, binoculars (if you have them), and dress to be outside. There are no program fees and advance registration is not required. Programs are for adults and older children.



### Friday, January 27 Life Cycles of Stars and Supernovas

Stars, just like people, go through a life cycle. They are born in "stellar nurseries," mature, and die. Some of them go away quietly while others explode with far reaching effects in the Universe. This program will feature these wonderful events and show how you are made of "star stuff."

### Saturday, February 11 Exoplanets & Wonders of the Universe

The Universe is a vast, infinite place. Is our Sun the only star with planets around it? Modern technology has allowed astronomers to discover that other stars have planets orbiting them. What are these planets like? This program will focus on these exoplanets and other objects.

## Basic Nature Photography Composition Workshop Thursdays, January 5 and 12 (must attend both sessions)

Have you ever wondered why one photograph is more pleasing than another? Join photographer John Dykstra for this two-part indoor workshop for adults designed to help you recognize these differences and help you incorporate the basic composition elements into your own photography. These basic concepts are the foundation that every visual artist uses to build their masterpieces. A program on composition at the first meeting will be followed a week later with a critique of photos. Both sessions begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center. There is no required equipment to attend this workshop. Learn more about John at [www.johndykstraphotography.com](http://www.johndykstraphotography.com). **There is no fee for this workshop, however, advance registration is required.**



## Winter Birding Trips Friday, January 13 and Saturday, March 3

These all-day birding trips in west Michigan are for adults interested in going beyond the backyard bird feeder to observe wintering raptors, songbirds, and waterbirds. Both beginning and experienced birders are welcome. The trip is from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and will be led by naturalist Chip Francke. Transportation is via personal vehicles and binoculars are required (loaners available). **There is no fee for these trips, however, advance registration is required. A daily or annual state park vehicle passport may be required.** A letter with meeting location and more details will be sent in advance to those registered.



## 2012 CROSS-COUNTRY SKI CLINICS AT PIGEON CREEK PARK

**Advance registration is required for all clinics** and each clinic is limited to 12 participants. The cost for children and adults is \$8 per person. Registrants will receive a letter in advance with more details. To register, call the county parks office at (616) 738-4810. Ski instructors are John Stoneburner and Jeff Faber.

**Beginner Ski Clinics** - No experience is needed for these clinics designed as an introduction to cross-country skiing. Participants will learn about equipment, clothing and basic ski techniques. Children 10 years and older may attend if accompanied by an adult and there must be one adult for every two children.

**Intermediate Ski Clinics** - These clinics are for adult skiers with some experience who would like to work on refining their technique thus enabling them to ski more efficiently.

**Ski Skating Clinics** - These clinics are for experienced adult skiers who want to learn the basics of several skate techniques. Skate skis are required for this clinic and are available to rent in the Lodge.

Ski Clinic Date	9:30 a.m. Clinic	Noon Clinic
Saturday, January 7	Beginner	Intermediate
Saturday, January 14	Beginner	Beginner
Saturday, January 21	Ski Skating	Beginner
Saturday, February 4	Beginner	Intermediate
Saturday, February 11	Ski Skating	Beginner

- \* All clinics are held on the groomed ski trails at Pigeon Creek Park and last 1½ hours.
- \* Participants must provide their own equipment.
- \* Ski rental is available (not guaranteed) at Pigeon Creek Park and is not included in the registration fee.



## Pigeon Creek Park and Lodge Hours



**Pigeon Creek Park** - Park winter hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day. When cross-country skiing and sledding conditions are satisfactory, the park remains open until 10:00 p.m. including the three miles of lighted ski trails and lighted sledding hills.

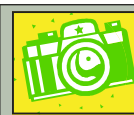
**The Pigeon Creek Lodge** - The Lodge provides cross-country ski rentals, a food and beverage concession, and a place to warm up. Lodge hours are Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Fridays from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. **The Lodge is only open during these hours when cross-country skiing and sledding conditions are satisfactory.**



### Pigeon Creek Lodge Special Holiday Hours

If conditions are satisfactory, the Pigeon Creek Lodge will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. every day beginning Monday, December 26 and continuing through Sunday, January 1. The Lodge will not be open on December 24 and December 25.

**Call the Pigeon Creek 24 hour "hot line" at 616-738-9531 for up-to-date skiing and sledding conditions and Lodge hours.**



Newsletter Photo/Art Credits: Cover art and cross-country skiers by Amelia Hansen; great-horned owl by Ed Post; geese at sunset by John Dykstra; glaucous gull by Charles DeWitt; All other photos and graphics by parks staff or public domain.

## DIRECTIONS TO PROGRAM LOCATIONS

visit [www.miottawa.org/parks](http://www.miottawa.org/parks) for other park information.

**Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing** (Port Sheldon Township) From US 31, travel west on Croswell St. to West Olive Rd. Travel south on West Olive Rd. to the park entrance. The center is at the end of the park drive.  
**Pigeon Creek Park** (Olive Township) On Stanton St. between 128th and 120th Ave.  
**Pine Bend** (Port Sheldon Township) From the intersection of Croswell St. and 156th Ave., travel south on 156th Ave. and follow the signs to the park. The Weaver House is located near the parking lot.



The activities and programs of this department are brought to you by the members of the **Ottawa County Board of Commissioners**  
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