In this issue

- Park News | Page 2
- Poor Farm 150th | Page 3
- Celebration Photos
- Environmental Stewardship | Page 4
- Winter Wonderland | Page 5
- Winter Programs | Page 6

Pigeon River Public Hearing

Slow-no wake speed zones are established by local governments working through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Port Sheldon Township passed a resolution requesting a slow-no wake speed zone on the Pigeon River east of Lakeshore Drive and in the channel to Lake Michigan. As part of their investigation, MDNR has scheduled a meeting to hear public comment on the proposal for December 15 at 7:00 pm at the Port Sheldon Township Office: 16201 Port Sheldon St, West Olive, 49460. Following their investigation, MDNR will make a determination as to whether a slow-no wake speed zone is warranted.

Calling all local artists

Ottawa County Parks is having a t-shirt design contest! Up to five designs from eligible entries will be chosen to print on shirts and sold at the Nature Education Center. One Grand Prize will be awarded. Read the official rules online: miOttawa.org/Parks

We are hiring!

Have you ever considered working for Ottawa County Parks? We are currently searching for candidates interested in working outside over the summer. The opportunities would be perfect for students (18+) who are home on break, retirees who want to spend more time outside, or anyone interested in the parks and looking to make some extra money during the summer months.

The Parks Department will be hiring over 60 seasonal employees for the 2017 season. There are many Lakeshore jobs available, but opportunities exist at parks throughout the County. Because of the large number of seasonal hires, the Parks Department will be hosting a job fair on Tuesday, January 3 from 9 am -12 pm at the Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing County Park.

Interested candidates can expect immediate interviews with Parks Management. There is a potential for on-the-spot hires. Computers will be available for on-site online application, but candidates may review available positions and apply online before the job fair event. They will be posted online by Monday, December 12.

We encourage anyone who may not be able to attend, such as a high school senior who would be in school that day, to apply online in December.

2017 Job Fair: January 3, 9 am-12 pm
**Expansion of North Ottawa Dunes**

The Ottawa County Board of Commissioners and the Spring Lake Township Board approved a revised agreement to acquire 80 acres of property for North Ottawa Dunes in 2016. The land will be acquired by way of a property exchange between Spring Lake Township and David C. Bos of Spring Lake Development LLC, a negotiation spearheaded by the township. Ottawa County Parks will contribute $400,000 from the Parks millage for the 80-acre parcel, which has an estimated value of $1.3 million. We are especially grateful to the Spring Lake Township Board and John Nash, Spring Lake Township Supervisor, who have led the efforts to secure this land for North Ottawa Dunes.

Currently, the parcel is privately owned. It is located on the eastern edge of the park and surrounded on three sides by park property. Because of the parcel’s geography and natural features, it has been considered a key segment for the park by both Ottawa County Parks and Spring Lake Township for a decade. The additional land will increase the total acreage of North Ottawa Dunes to 593 acres and allow for expansion of the trail system.

**Grand River Greenway Update**

Completion of the Robinson Township trail, a key component to the Grand River Greenway Explorers Trail, is expected this spring. The trail is a 3.9-mile paved path along the north side of North Cedar Drive, connecting Connor Bayou to Riverside Park. The path serves as the southern connection to the new M-231 bridge non-motorized trail crossing.

Ottawa County Parks is seeking a $1.24 million grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) to help fund the $1.85 million project. The grant proposal would potentially include funds for a parking area near the access point for the M-231 Grand River Bridge trail. The local match for the TAP grant would be provided through a $50,000 contribution by Robinson Township as well as $560,000 in funding from the Parks millage.

**Grand River Explorers Trail**

The Robinson Township trail will be one of the first completed segments of the Grand River Explorers Trail, an endeavor we anticipate completing in 2021. The trail will be 30 miles long and will connect Grand Haven to Grand Rapids, and a dozen parks along the way!

We are looking for community members who are interested in this project to be part of an outreach committee. The committee would speak on behalf of the trail at regional non-motorized trail meetings and other public events, as well as help guide us in our efforts. If you have interest in regional trails and the Grand River Greenway and would like to be part of this committee, please contact us: ocparks@miOttawa.org.

**Historic Pumphouse Renovations**

Improvements continue at the historic pumphouse building. Ash wood floors were added late in the fall, with a total of $30,000 in funding assistance from Park Township and the Historic Ottawa Beach Society.
When the Ottawa County Poor Farm received its first resident in 1866, no one could have imagined the benefits it would provide over the decades. It was a haven for indigent people who, due to the happenstance of birth, misfortune, or poverty, were in dire straits and needed a place to call home. Though the Poor Farm is now closed, the property remains open to the public as Eastmanville Farm. 2016 marked the 150th Anniversary of the Ottawa County Poor Farm, and celebrate we did! On Saturday, October 1, the 1,200 guests who attended the Poor Farm Sesquicentennial Celebration took a journey back through local history.

Over 20 historical re-enactors shared stories of farm residents and local musicians played between acts. The Happy Daze Kitchen Band paid tribute to those who once performed at the farm, singing and using instruments like pots and pans and spoons.

A traditional 1899 dinner, organized by the Tri-Cities Historical Museum, was served in Keepers Hall. Judge Ed Post emceed, posing as Judge David Fletcher Hunton, who spent the end of his life at the farm.

“Upstairs at the Infirmary” showcased stories affixed to doors, taking you down a hallway, arriving at an exhibit demonstrating what a room looked like in the infirmary.

“No One Walks Alone” hung in the barn – leather panels with hand-lettered calligraphy naming over 500 people who had once lived or worked at the farm.

The last standing historical building on the property, the barn, hosted a variety of tributes to the farm. “Upstairs at the Infirmary” showcased stories affixed to doors, taking you down a hallway, arriving at an exhibit demonstrating what a room looked like in the infirmary.

The Coopersville Historical Museum showcased “Historical Eastmanville” amongst hand-stitched quilts created by Coopersville Crazy Ladies Quilting Society and the Lighthouse Quilting Guild. They also brought a petting zoo!

Keepers Hall featured profiles of Keepers and Matrons who worked at the Poor Farm. Guests gathered for the exhibit and to watch re-enactors.

Ottawa County Parks formally recognized volunteer and local historian Marjorie Viveen. She chaired the event planning committee and has dedicated countless hours over the years to connecting the community to its local history.

“UPCOMING DOCUMENTARY

Inspired by the success of the recent Poor Farm Sesquicentennial, plans are moving forward for a documentary on the facility. The film is being made in association with the Ottawa County Parks Foundation and Ferris State University. Additional research is being collected, and many of the re-enactors who participated in the celebration are being interviewed for the film. The film will premiere in May. All proceeds from the documentary will be donated to the Ottawa County Parks Foundation. Stay tuned for dates.
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Is there hope in fighting invasive plants?
Yes, only because of our volunteers!

Our volunteers and school groups help us fight the worst infestations in the county. Without volunteers, treatment of these larger infestations would be incredibly expensive and time consuming. Sometimes it may feel as though the battle against invasive plants is hopeless, but invasive species are a threat that all individuals can do something about.

What is EDRR?
Early detection, rapid response is a nationally-recognized strategy used to manage and treat invasive plants. Detecting invasive plants early significantly decreases the time and cost of treatment.

We employ a dedicated staff, the Stewardship Crew, who focus on early detection and treatment. One of their most important tools is a GPS unit they use to constantly survey and map-out where invasives pop up. They then turn to volunteers to start pulling.

Success story
Over the summer our Stewardship Crew detected a small patch of buckthorn at Hiawatha Forest. Buckthorn is one of the worst invasives in the state, but through monitoring and removal of small infestations, we have been successful at keeping it in the early detection stage in Ottawa County.
**WINTER WONDERLAND**

**Popular destinations, equipment to rent**

**Pigeon Creek**

Pigeon Creek Park offers groomed, lit cross-country ski trails, ski and snowshoe rentals, ski lessons, and sledding. The lodge opens for the season once a good base of snow has fallen. Visitors can rent skis and snowshoes as well as warm up with hot chocolate, hot dogs, or chili by the fire. Hours rely on the weather, so keep the hotline number handy. Visit our website for more information: miOttawa.org/Parks. Please remember that once the snow falls, hiking, dog walking, and horseback riding are not allowed in the park.

**Hemlock Crossing**

Hemlock Crossing offers snowshoe rentals for adults and children (4+) at the Nature Education Center. Guided walks are available throughout the winter; take a look at our program calendar for dates. Visitors are invited to warm up in front of a fire in the Great Room after their snowy outing!

**Pigeon Creek Lodge**

Hotline: 616-738-9531

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**Parks PSA: Avoid bittersweet in your holiday wreaths**

It’s festive, but it’s a “gift” that keeps growing

Wouldn’t it be great if all of the invasive plants we work to eradicate were terribly unattractive? It certainly would make the job easier.

One of the most popular plants for holiday decor is the very lovely, but very invasive, Oriental bittersweet.

Birds will eat the berries, but they can’t fully digest them. When they dispose of the partially digested berries, it spreads the plant to other places.

Eastmanville Bayou is one of our properties where Oriental bittersweet has flourished. It grows rapidly, wrapping itself around trees, girdling them. It is so strong it can choke out and bring down a full grown tree.

The plant is so prolific there, it inspired our Prescribed Browsing Project. Luckily, the goats think it’s delicious.

There is a native bittersweet, but it can be difficult to find and identify. There is only one American bittersweet recorded in our park system, and it has only flowered once in five years.

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Where to explore?

Pigeon Creek and Hemlock Crossing are excellent winter destinations, especially if you need equipment, but there are many other beautiful places to enjoy and explore. Below are some of our favorites.

In frequently, we pack and roll trails at parks other than Pigeon Creek. Keep an eye on Facebook for these announcements.

Riley Trails in Holland is popular for cross-country skiing. The mountain bike trails are often used for fat tire biking. Photo by Instagrammer @bwycling

Upper Macatawaw Natural Area in Zeeland is a great place for a ski or snowshoe outing, or a winter hike!

Crockery Creek Natural Area in Nunica is a hidden gem, offering gorgeous winterscapes. Photo by Ed Post

In the Grand Haven area, North Ottawa Dunes has many miles of trail frequented by cross-country skiers.
**Winter Programs**

### Coffee with the Birds

Session 1: 9:30-10:20 am / Session 2: 11:10 am-12 pm
Birding Tidbit: 10:30-11 am • Hemlock Crossing

Enjoy a hot cup of coffee and baked goods as you watch the birds at the feeders and discuss various birding topics with a naturalist. Don’t forget your favorite mug. Between the two sessions we will offer a Birding Tidbit, a bite-sized presentation on anything bird-related. Please plan to attend session one or two, but not both.

- Dec 10 - Birding Local
- Jan 7 - Finches at My Feeder
- Feb 4 - Home is Where the Harris’ (sparrow) is
- Mar 4 - Identifying Woodpeckers 101

### Winter Walk at the Ravines

1-2:30 pm • Grand Ravines (North)

With dramatic views of the Grand River, steep ravines, nesting Bald Eagles, and a beautiful lodge, Grand Ravines is a wonder to explore! Join a naturalist on a winter walking tour of this popular park.

When there is adequate snow, we will use snowshoes! Register ahead to reserve a pair for only $5. Registration encouraged.

- Jan 8 - Grand Ravines (North)
- Mar 5 - Grand Ravines (North)

### Winter Weeds Walk

3-4 pm • Various locations; recommended for ages 3-8

Snuggle up by the fire with your kids and listen to nature stories - don’t forget a comfy pillow and blanket. A walk will be offered afterward. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

- Dec 11 - Hemlock Crossing
- Jan 8 - Grand Ravines (North)
- Mar 5 - Grand Ravines (North)

### Winter’s Best Gift to Kids is Snow!

3-4 pm • Various locations; recommended for ages 7+

Winter's best gift to kids is SNOW! Join us for some fun “snow play” and warm up afterward with a hot drink. Your kids will have SNOW much fun!

- Jan 15 - Hemlock Crossing
- Feb 5 - Grand Ravines (North)

### Winter Birding Field Trips 🦅 $

Jan 21 • Various locations
Registration is required; fee varies

Register for one or both - additional information and meeting location will be emailed to participants prior to the trip.

- 10 am-1 pm - Winter Waterfowl Birding: Search Pigeon Lake and the Lake Michigan shoreline for waterfowl of winter. Finish off at lunch time by viewing birds at the Hemlock Crossing Nature Education Center feeders.
- 2-5 pm - Birding the Barrens: After watching the feeders for a while, trek the snowy open farmland “barrens” of central Ottawa County in search of winter birds.

### Winter Walk at the Ravines 🌃

3-4:30 pm • Hemlock Crossing

The Wildlife Encounters series aims to introduce children to wildlife found in our yards, parks, and region. Programs include activities and a craft; an optional walk will follow. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

- Jan 22 - Whose Track is it Anyway?: Snow allows us a deeper look into the lives of our resident mammals. Follow along as we search for signs of life in the winter woods.
- Feb 12 - Jump into Snow Fleas!: Fleas in Winter?! While not actually “fleas”, snow fleas (aka springtails) do jump, and in the snow to boot! Come jump along as we investigate this active arthropod of winter.
- Mar 12 - Frogcicles, Wood Frogs & Winter: Amphibians of the unusual sort are not reserved for just the tropics. In fact, the end of winter in nearby woodlands and wetlands reveals one of the most bewildering of all: the Wood Frog.

### Winter’s Best Gift to Kids is Snow! 🌼

3-4 pm • Various locations; recommended for ages 12+

These 30-45 minute presentations are followed by an optional guided nature hike.

- Jan 28 - Learn some tracking basics for local wildlife and go for a walk to see what you can find.
- Feb 18 - Snowy Owls: Learn how and why these “Tundra Ghosts” often visit our area in winter.
- Feb 19 - Snowy Owls, Grand Ravines (North)
- Mar 18 - Frogcicles, Wood Frogs & Winter: Amphibians of the unusual sort are not reserved for just the tropics. In fact, the end of winter in nearby woodlands and wetlands reveals one of the most bewildering of all: the Wood Frog.

### Full Moon Snowshoe Hike 🌃 $

7:30-9 pm • Various locations

Experience the nip of cold on your nose and the crunch of snow under your feet as you explore parks by the light of the full moon. Afterward, warm up with a hot drink inside by the fire.

- Jan 13 - Hemlock Crossing 🌃
- Feb 10 - Grand Ravines (North) 🌃

### Snow Fun! 😊

3-4 pm • Various locations; recommended for ages 7+

Winter’s best gift to kids is SNOW! Join us for some fun “snow play” and warm up afterward with a hot drink. Your kids will have SNOW much fun!

- Jan 15 - Hemlock Crossing
- Feb 5 - Grand Ravines (North)

### Wildlife Encounter 🐦

3-4 pm • Hemlock Crossing (unless otherwise noted)
Recommended for ages 12+

These 30-45 minute presentations are followed by an optional guided nature hike.

- Jan 28 - Learn some tracking basics for local wildlife and go for a walk to see what you can find.
- Feb 18 - Snowy Owls: Learn how and why these “Tundra Ghosts” often visit our area in winter.
- Feb 19 - Snowy Owls, Grand Ravines (North)
- Mar 18 - Frogcicles, Wood Frogs & Winter: Amphibians of the unusual sort are not reserved for just the tropics. In fact, the end of winter in nearby woodlands and wetlands reveals one of the most bewildering of all: the Wood Frog.

### Winter Astronomy 🌃

7-8:30 pm • Hemlock Crossing

- Jan 28 - The Winter Sky: Learn about constellations and their lore as well as what planets are visible.
- Feb 25 - The Moon: Our planet’s natural satellite is the Moon. It’s the only extraterrestrial body where humans have set foot. Where did the Moon come from? Did it ever have water or support life? How does it directly affect life on Earth?
- March 25 - The Spring Sky: Things are beginning to turn green and the constellation Virgo rises in the east. We will learn about the spring constellations and their lore.
WINTER TREE ID
1-2 pm • Various locations
When the leaves of summer are gone, do all trees look the same? Walk the woods to find out how you can still identify trees in the dead of winter.
- Feb 25, Hemlock Crossing
- Mar 5, Grand Ravines (North)

KEEP IT ACTIVE WINTER WALKS
Various dates & locations
Registration encouraged
Don’t hibernate... activate! These winter walks are a continuation of the “Step it Up” guided walks previously offered this fall. Join parks naturalists for a one-hour “sauntering” walk. Meet new people, discover a new Ottawa County park, or enjoy the same one in a different season.
When there is adequate snow, we will use snowshoes! Register ahead to reserve a pair for only $5. Registration encouraged.
- Dec 8, 5:30-6:30 pm - Hemlock Crossing
- Dec 13, 9:30-10:30 am - Grand River Park
- Dec 16, 9:30-10:30 am - Riley Trails
- Dec 20, 9:30-10:30 am - Connor Bayou
- Dec 29, 5:30-6:30 pm - Hager Park
- Jan 5, 5:30-6:30 pm - Paw Paw East
- Jan 17, 9:30-10:30 am - Grand Ravines North
- Jan 19, 5:30-6:30 pm - Pine Bend County Park
- Jan 27, 9:30-10:30 am - North Ottawa Dunes
- Feb 7, 9:30-10:30 am - Riverside Park
- Feb 24, 5:30-6:30 pm - Upper Macatawa Natural Area
- Mar 2, 5:30-6:30 pm - Grand Ravines North
- Mar 7, 9:30-10:30 am - Crockery Creek

SKI CLASSES
Pigeon Creek, registration required; fee $8
Ski rentals are available at the lodge. Rental fee is not included.
Beginner: Learn about equipment and basic techniques. For adults & children 10+; one adult must accompany every two children.
Intermediate: For experienced adult skiers wishing to refine their technique and ski more efficiently.
Skate Ski: For experienced adult skiers who want to learn the basics of several skate techniques. Skate skis are required; limited rental available.
- Jan 5, 6-7:30 pm - Beginner
- Jan 7, 10-11:30 am - Beginner
- Jan 10, 6-7:30 pm - Skate
- Jan 14, 10-11:30 am - Intermediate
- Jan 19, 6-7:30 pm - Skate
- Jan 21, 10:00-11:30 am - Beginner
- Jan 24, 6-7:30 pm - Skate
- Jan 28, 10-11:30 am - Intermediate
- Feb 2, 6-7:30 pm - Beginner
- Feb 4, 10-11:30 am - Skate
- Feb 7, 6-7:30 pm - Beginner
- Feb 11, 10-11:30 am - Intermediate
- Feb 16, 6-7:30 pm - Beginner
- Feb 18, 10-11:30 am - Skate
- Feb 21, 6-7:30 pm - Intermediate
- Feb 25, 10:00-11:30 am - Beginner

Questions?
Call the Nature Education Center
616-786-4847