

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

PROPERTY OVERVIEW

Hike, bike, ski, paddle, play...
explore Ottawa County Parks



The Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission oversees acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of 26 County Parks and 12 Open Space lands, totaling 6,538 acres. See page 20 for a listing of all lands administered by the Parks Commission.

In addition, the Parks Commission oversees management of the portion of the Musketawa Trail located in Ottawa County under an agreement with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

6,538

ACRES

26

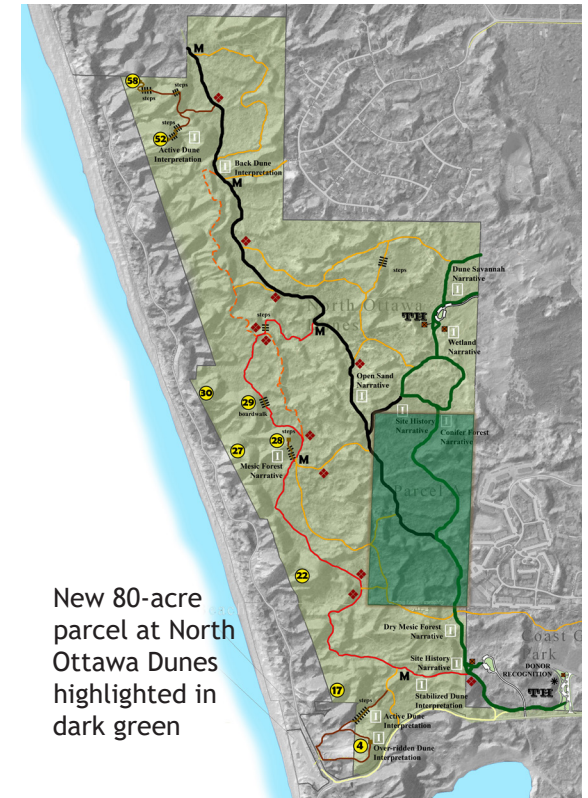
COUNTY PARKS

12

OPEN SPACES

LAND ACQUISITION

After years of waiting, complex land negotiations and transfers facilitated by Spring Lake Township, were completed resulting in an 80-acre tract of pristine dune land being added to the North Ottawa Dunes park site. This addition is a logical extension of efforts to secure a contiguous block of natural land along the Lake Michigan shoreline for both people and wildlife.



MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

Maintenance & Operations is by far the largest division of the County Parks Department. Responsibilities of the operations staff include maintaining and updating all of the Park and Open Space land, facilities, and equipment spread across 6,500+ acres. They work to keep the parks clean, safe, and fun. Here are some stats for FY2017.

IT TAKES...

11
FULL-TIME STAFF

89
PART-TIME &
SEASONAL STAFF

75,000
HOURS OF LABOR

...TO MAINTAIN PARKS TO
HIGH STANDARDS



1 MILE
OF SNOW FENCE USED
TO CONTROL BLOWING
SAND ON BEACHES
(520 T-STAKES)

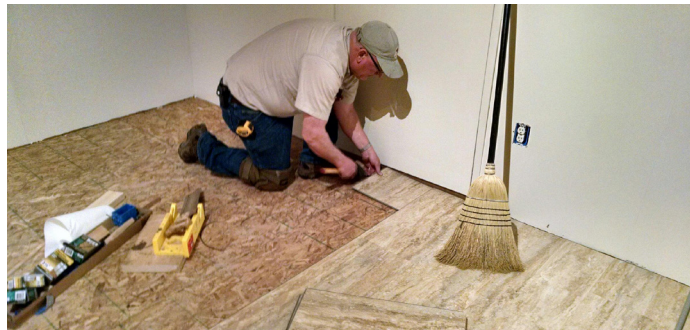


1,100
FEET, OR 22,000 LBS OF
ACCESSIBLE WALKWAY,
INSTALLED & REMOVED
AT LAKESHORE PARKS



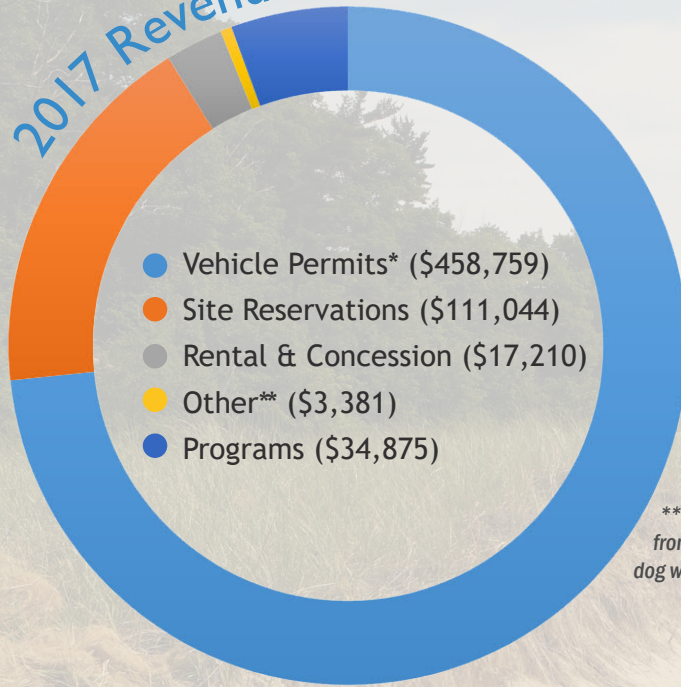
1,520
FACILITY RESERVATIONS
PREPARED

372
DOWNED TREES
CLEARED



56
SWIM BUOYS
INSTALLED

2017 Revenues



This chart reflects revenue from fees & charges only

* Vehicle permits include boat launch fees (new in 2017)

** Other revenues are from hunting and the dog wash station

9,406
ANNUAL PERMITS SOLD

33%
SOLD FROM KIRK PARK

↑ 18%
REVENUE FROM PERMITS SINCE 2015

28%
OF PERMITS PURCHASED BY RESIDENTS WERE HANG TAGS

HANG TAGS

2017 was the first year residents could choose to purchase a hang tag instead of a sticker. The hang tags are transferable between cars and hang from the rearview mirror instead of being stuck on the windshield. The cost was equal to purchasing a resident annual, plus a multi-car permit. The hang tags were popular, and many residents appreciated that they did not need to stick it to their windshield.



MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

CROCKERY CREEK NATURAL AREA

Parks staff made many improvements to Crockery Creek in 2017, including the creation of a new entrance sign and an accessible path to the updated information kiosk. Staff also installed:

- Boulders to keep vehicles off the grass
- New picnic tables
- A solar-powered parking lot security light

Trails were graded, and ditches and culverts were installed to increase drainage and prevent muddy trail conditions. A particularly muddy and treacherous portion of trail was improved with new on-grade stairs. The completed improvements create a longer, more usable trail system with an additional loop connection.



GRAND RAVINES LODGE

Following the conversion of the home at Grand Ravines to a rentable facility, parks staff made a number of improvements to ready it for the public. They completed finishing work, purchased and installed appliances, installed an audio-visual system, created a “Bride’s Room” from attic space that was not being used, landscaped, and added signage.

MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

RULE ENFORCEMENT

One of the most important and often under-appreciated duties of a park operation staff person is rule enforcement. Park rules ensure that everyone can enjoy the park safely.

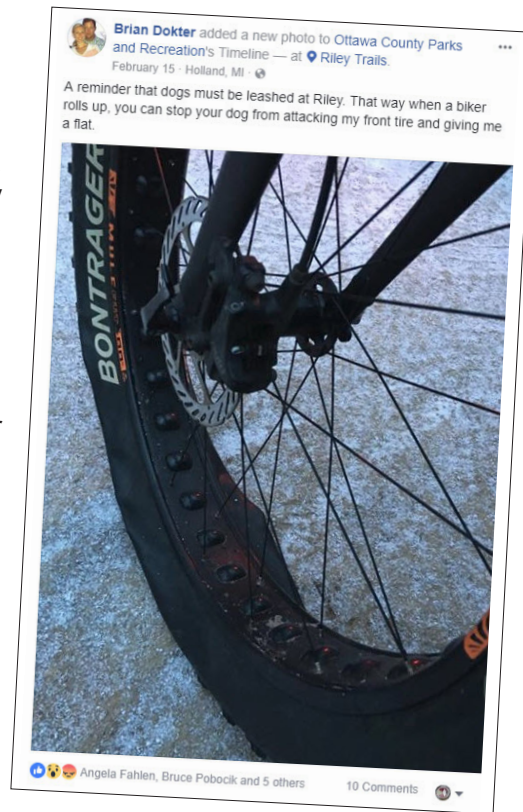
The Parks Commission updated its Park and Open Space rules in 2017 to clarify visitor questions and accommodate changes in technology and trends, including drones and hammocking.

While incidents of vandalism and theft are uncommon, and violence in our parks is almost unheard of, dogs off-leash remains a real hot button issue for many visitors. Unauthorized camping and/or fires, drone use, and the use of hammocks where not permitted were some other common issues.

Many park employees are authorized by the Ottawa County Sheriff's office to write civil infraction tickets for park rule violations.

627

CIVIL INFRACTIONS
WRITTEN



SUSTAINABILITY

The Parks Commission published its first Sustainability Plan in 2017, incorporating goals for both environmental and financial sustainability.

An easy target is continuing to convert light fixtures that need to be replaced or repaired to LED. New LED parking lot lights were installed at Grand River Park, Spring Grove Park, and Hager Park. More lights on the sledding hill and trails at Pigeon Creek were upgraded to LED.

In addition to lighting, staff reviewed and reduced mowed areas. About 25% of the mowed turf was eliminated at Riverside Park without negatively affecting recreational opportunities. This saved over 100 hours of labor and 150 gallons of fuel (~\$1,500).

RIVERSIDE BOAT LAUNCH

An annual motor vehicle permit is required to use the boat launch at Riverside Park (the daily boat launch fee was eliminated). Instead of staff collecting money at the park, the nearby Oaklea Store sells annual vehicle permits. Boat launch revenue increased 35%, from \$9,294 in 2016 to \$14,294 in 2017.

DOG WASH STATION

A dog wash station was installed in the new restroom building at south Grand Ravines. It is similar to a self-service car wash, with settings such as flea shampoo, conditioner, fragrant dog perfume, vacuum, and blow dry. The wash has proven to be very popular. While it was only in use for a quarter of the year, within that short time it generated almost \$2,000 in revenue.



OLD LIGHTING
AT PIGEON CREEK

3,550

WATTS

LED LIGHTING

840

WATTS

35%



REVENUE FROM
BOAT LAUNCH

NATURE STEWARDSHIP

INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT & HABITAT RESTORATION



Middle school students clearing bittersweet

THE POWER OF KIDS² AT EASTMANVILLE BAYOU

Hard working students and hungry goats are the dream team for invasive plants removal! Allendale Public School students and the goats returned for a third year at Eastmanville Bayou.

The service-based learning partnership with Allendale Public Schools was formed because school leaders were interested in teaching students about invasive plant management and goats. In addition to the time spent volunteering, each student in the program worked on a year-long writing project about the effect of invasive species on natural lands.

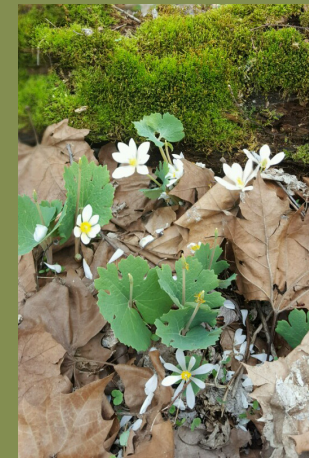
While students made significant progress clearing oriental bittersweet on their own, progress in areas where both the goats and the students worked was incredible.

The ultimate goal of service-based learning projects, like these, is to increase capacity to do stewardship at the landscape level by educating and empowering our community.



Welcome, wildflowers!

Parks staff was excited to find trout lily and bloodroot this spring. These wildflowers were found in an area where students have been pulling garlic mustard and other invasive plants for multiple years. Wildflowers had not been seen in this area of the park prior to this year.



2011



Eastmanville Bayou overrun with bittersweet.
You can't tell, but this is a view of the river.

Below are similar spots along the river where the goats & students have been working.
Not only were they able to *significantly* knock back bittersweet, creating a view shed
along the river, but sedges, wildflowers, and young trees have begun to grow in these areas.

2017



NATURE STEWARDSHIP

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers help Ottawa County Parks provide a high level of land stewardship through invasive species control, implementation of land management and stewardship plans, restoration of degraded sites, and continued inventory of natural features throughout the park system.

“We love the diversity of projects that are offered. Every year we get to explore new parks and help with new projects. My children have gained a wealth of knowledge about nature, wildlife, and conserving the environment. They have learned what it is to work and try and make a difference. We have been so fortunate to have met friends who we now consider part of our family.”

— Estelle Charroud, Volunteer Park Steward (Holland)

PARK STEWARDS

The Park Stewards program celebrated its first anniversary in 2017. It was created for a number of particularly enthusiastic volunteers who had the time and desire to volunteer frequently. Caring for our natural resources could use an infinite amount of staff and financial resources, so tasking dedicated volunteers with some of these projects seemed like a perfect fit. Spring through fall, a project is offered once during the work week and once on a weekend. Park Stewards aren't required to attend every workday, but many of them do!

The program isn't connected to a specific property or project, so it complements the consistency of other programs where groups return to one park many times per year. Park Stewards' projects have included tree planting, bank stabilization, surveying for and pulling invasive plants, planting monarch waystations, and installing blue bird boxes. They have worked in various parks and open spaces all over the county.

“The bog search was my favorite adventure to date. It provided me with a wealth of information and it was a joy to venture out on such a challenging trek. Although I appreciate the plantings and managing invasive plants, adventures like the search for Marne Bog renew my desire to help our environment. Thank you for giving us volunteers such interesting tasks. I continue to be amazed at the number of parks and land available for the public to explore. I'm so privileged to be a part of this group.”

— Mark Schroder, Volunteer Park Steward (Holland)



10,595

VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,811

VOLUNTEERS

448

ACRES MANAGED
WITH THE HELP OF
VOLUNTEERS

31

PROPERTIES
MANAGED WITH
THE HELP OF
VOLUNTEERS

HWA TASK FORCE

Last year, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) was detected for the first time in the Upper Midwest and in Ottawa County. This invasive pest has devastated forests along the East Coast of the United States since the early 1950's. Within Michigan, there are an estimated 170 million hemlock trees that are at risk of dying from HWA; the loss of hemlock within local forests is just the beginning.

Long-term studies from the East Coast have documented extensive negative effects caused by the loss of hemlock on the ecology and economy of the infested areas.

Ottawa County Parks spearheaded the creation of a local task force dedicated to saving the state's hemlock trees. The task force will search for funds to survey for the pest, assist land owners with the cost of treatment, and educate the community.

In conjunction with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, Ottawa County Parks applied for a \$600,000 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant to help cover surveying and treatment costs for private land owners. Funding from Ottawa County's Environmental Fund (\$25,000) was approved by the Board of Commissioners in December. The task force continues to search for funds to assist land owners with the cost of treatment, as well as to survey for the pest and educate the community.



Identify



Report



Take Action



Learn More

saveMIhemlocks.org



SLOW THE SPREAD

In March, the HWA Task Force invited Allison Kanoti, a forest entomologist with Maine's Forest Service, to present to natural resource professionals and the general public.

Kanoti shared her experience managing for HWA on the leading front of the East Coast invasion. The presentation was followed by a question and answer session. There were about 50 attendees, and the presentation was streamed via Facebook Live for those who were unable to attend. Over 350 people viewed the presentation online.



PROGRAMS & EDUCATION

4,564
PUBLIC PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS

↑ 40%
ATTENDANCE

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

EAST SIDE PROGRAMMING

The Nature Education Center has served as “home base” for interpretive programs since its opening. Last year, regularly scheduled public programming was expanded to the eastern part of the county. Additional owl prowls, woodcock programs, and night walks were intentionally scheduled at Grand Ravines to serve families in the area.

A few of the summer camps offered at Hemlock Crossing were also offered at Grand River Park.

SOLAR ECLIPSE

On August 21, approximately 250 people gathered at Hemlock Crossing to observe the partial solar eclipse event. The Holland Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA) members brought their telescopes with filters so visitors could get a good view of the event. Solar eclipse glasses were shared and passed around for people to use as they waited to view through the telescopes.



Spring eagle hike at Grand Ravines

STEP IT UP

What began as a cross-collaboration with Parks and the Department of Public Health has grown to include IT/GIS and Planning & Performance, as well as the Parks and Health Department of Allegan County. Hundreds of Ottawa County residents, employees, and neighbors participated in this walking challenge that aims to get participants moving more, specifically outdoors in parks.

“Thank you for these walks! Because of these walks, my husband and I are getting out into our county parks, spending time together, meeting new people, and learning new things. These activities have improved the quality of our life.”

– Step it Up participant / Ottawa County resident

PROGRAMS & EDUCATION

K-12 & OTHER SPECIAL PROGRAMMING



Interest in K-12 nature-based education continues to increase each year. A special brochure was created highlighting the year-round, curriculum-based programming that the Nature Education Center staff offers. Nature Education Center staff expects to serve more students each year.



Rosy Mound Natural Area

6,866
SCHOOL PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS

10% ↑
ATTENDANCE

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

While many K-12 programs are hosted at Hemlock Crossing, teachers are interested in visiting a variety of parks throughout the county. The number of students served in parks other than Hemlock Crossing increased by **67%** in FY 2017.



Grand Ravines

PADDLE NATION GRANT AWARD

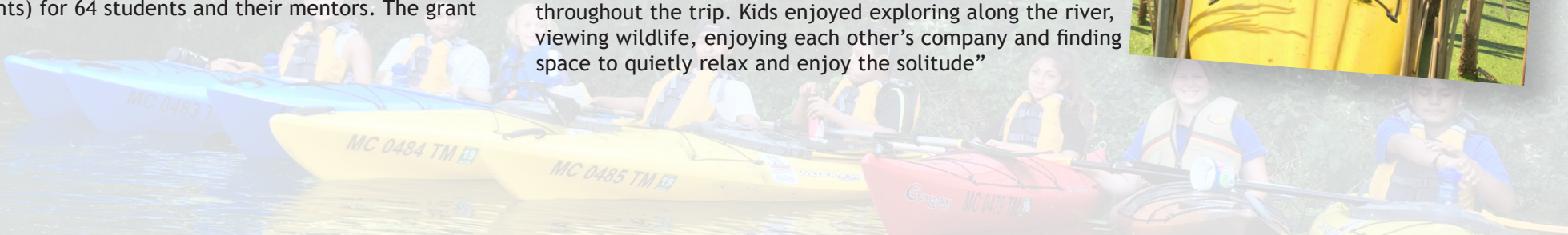
This summer, Friends of Ottawa County Parks (FOOCP) was awarded funding (\$2,496) through the Paddle Nation Grant Program to provide opportunities for adolescent youth to enjoy local waterways through kayaking trips. FOOCP partnered with Ottawa County Parks and GR Paddling to introduce underserved populations to the sport by providing equipment, instruction, and guidance needed for positive experiences along the Pigeon River and Grand River.

Parks staff organized kayak trips with the Heights of Hope Leadership Program and three Boys and Girls Clubs of Holland (Northside, Southside, and Holland Heights) for 64 students and their mentors. The grant

award covered the cost of the program, as well as six fully funded scholarships to an Ottawa County Parks kayaking summer camp.

Kristen Hintz, Parks Coordinator of Interpretive Services, was very excited for the opportunity to take these groups on kayak outings. “Most kids had never kayaked before,” said Hintz. “They enjoyed paddling quietly down the river... just relaxing and getting the opportunity to view wildlife.”

“Many of the participants had never kayaked on a river before,” said Hintz. Even after through paddling instructions and demonstrations, some students were timid starting out, but quickly became more comfortable throughout the trip. Kids enjoyed exploring along the river, viewing wildlife, enjoying each other’s company and finding space to quietly relax and enjoy the solitude”



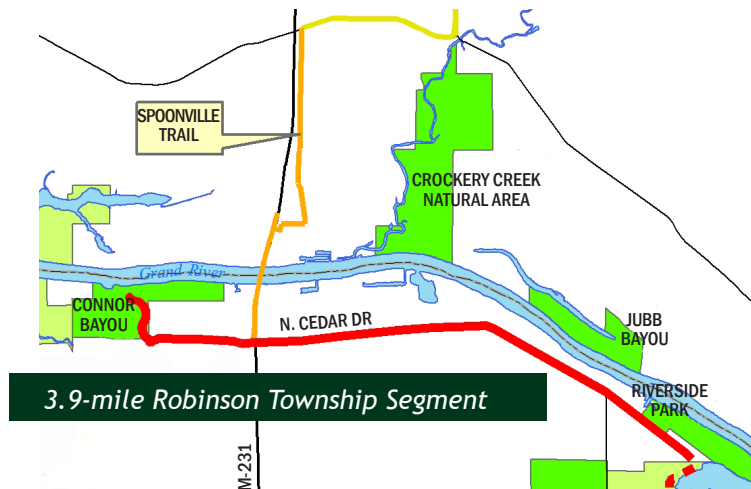
PARK PLANNING

Many planning efforts to efficiently develop and manage existing park and open space properties were made in FY 2017.

GRAND RIVER GREENWAY & EXPLORERS TRAIL

Work continued to finalize a route for the proposed non-motorized paved trail along the Grand River, including working with landowners, securing funding, and developing final design and engineering plans for segments in both Robinson and Georgetown Townships.

A new logo was also developed to promote the trail and its unique features.



PUMPHOUSE ADDITION

Detailed engineering and architectural design work was completed for a small addition to the existing Historic Ottawa Beach Pumphouse building. The addition includes new modern restrooms and a small covered area which will make the building much more suitable for group gatherings and other events including Historic Ottawa Beach Society sponsored interpretive functions.

NORTH OPERATIONS CENTER

Detailed planning, design, and construction documents were prepared for a new operations building at Eastmanville Farm. This building is intended to serve all of the park properties in the north management zone of the park system.

HAGER VISITOR CENTER ROOF

Architectural analysis and conceptual design was completed to address continuing leaks and other problems with the roof system at the Hager Visitor Center. This building houses the Vanderlaan Room and DeVries Room, two rental facilities that are popular year-round.

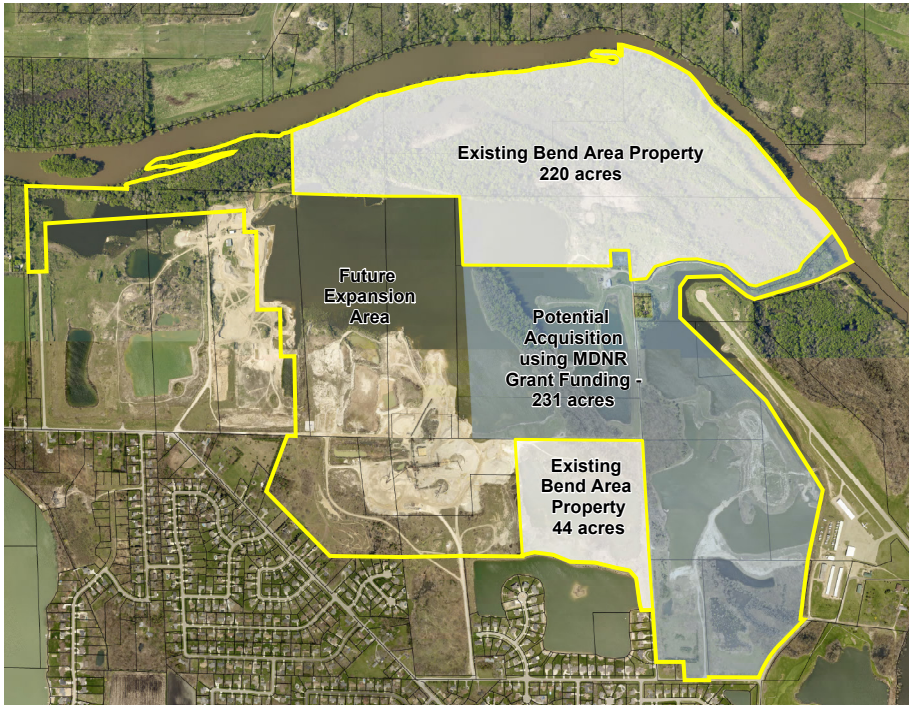


OTTAWA BEACH MARINA

Design development has continued on this project to improve public waterfront land at Ottawa Beach. Grants, permitting, financial feasibility, collaboration, and public relations have all been addressed as part of this process.

BEND AREA EXPANSION

Following notification of a successful grant application to help fund purchase of an additional 231 acres of property adjacent to existing open space land, planning and environmental work has continued in preparation for future park access and improvements.



STEARNS CREEK ACQUISITION PROJECT

Analysis and preliminary planning for this 117-acre site at the headwaters of Stearns Bayou was completed in preparation for submittal of a grant application to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.



“As a new resident to eastern Ottawa County, having bicycle access to Bend Area Park was a factor in choosing the house we bought. With the options that it currently provides our family of four and the future plans for it, it is a very exciting time to be a witness to the recovery of the land and the development of a foundational type of park. This park will be a gateway to the rest of the county as the park system develops around it.”

— Patrick Garrett (Jenison)

IMPROVEMENTS & DEVELOPMENT

OTTAWA BEACH PUMPHOUSE RENOVATION

Continued improvements to the historic building included the completion of brick paving and a glass floor in one corner of the building to help interpret the historic water pump that functioned to supply water to area residents in the early 1900's.

CROCKERY CREEK TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

In conjunction with an addition and improvements to the existing trail system by park staff and volunteers, a particularly muddy and treacherous portion of trail was improved with new on-grade stairs (photos on page 5).

WEAVER HOUSE DECK RECONSTRUCTION

Following the unfortunate collapse of the deck connected to the historic Weaver House, engineering analysis and improved design were completed, as well as reconstruction of the 700-square-foot deck that adds valuable outdoor space to this popular rental facility.



HAGER PARK FOOTBRIDGE

A deteriorating wood bridge that impeded stream flow was replaced with a new steel-framed, single span bridge as part of continuing efforts to improve and make trails more accessible.

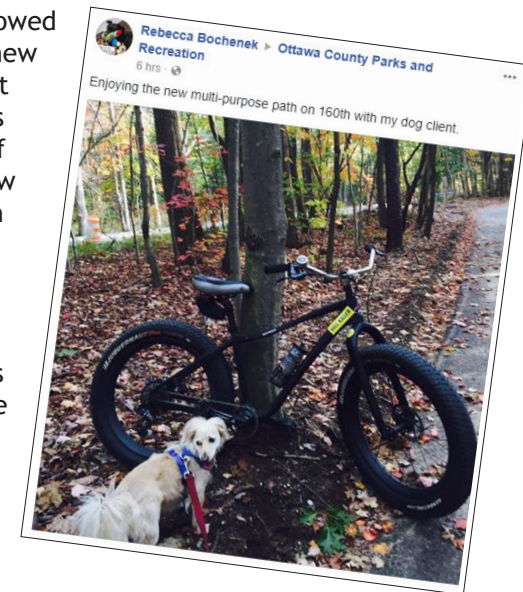


RILEY TRAILS PARKING AREA PAVING

Heavy use at this main access to Riley Trails resulted in drainage problems at the existing gravel parking area. This project regraded and paved the lot to create a clean all-weather surface for park users.

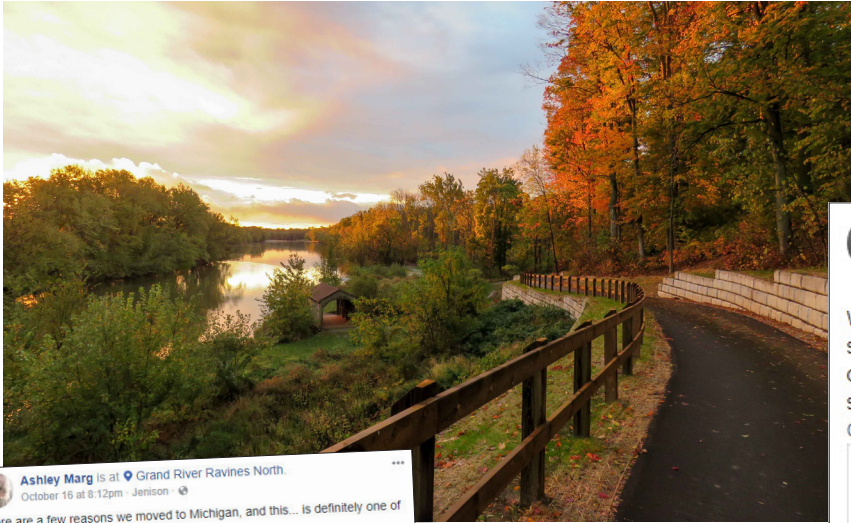
RILEY TRAILS/I 60TH AVE. TRAIL

In support of Park Township's efforts to expand and improve their non-motorized pathway system, Ottawa County allowed construction of a new path along the east edge of Riley Trails on the west side of 160th Ave. This new trail winds through a heavily wooded section of park and provides an attractive route for both park users and others who are passing through.



GRAND RAVINES

More than three years of planning and construction culminated in the formal opening and dedication of this signature park adjacent to Grand Valley State University on the Grand River. Completion of paved trails, waterfront improvements, additional parking, a modern restroom building, and a spectacular pedestrian suspension bridge highlight the beautiful woods, ravines, and riverfront.



BEA IDEMA

The generous individual responsible for the suspension bridge, Bea Idema, was the first to walk across the bridge at an event in September.



Bethany Metzger ▸ Hudsonville - Georgetown - Jenison **Informed**
 October 9 at 8:12am · Jenison · 🌐

Went to the Grand Ravines Park last night. If you haven't been there you should really check it out!! Beautiful walking trails, new suspension bridge over the ravine, canoe/kayak launch on the Grand River. So thankful for such a beautiful family (and dog) friendly place in our community!! — at [Grand Ravines North County Park](#).

Grand Ravines North County Park
 Travel & Transportation · Jenison
 Kate Alvarez and 5 others have been here

146 Reactions 17 Comments

Ashley Marg is at [Grand River Ravines North](#).
 October 16 at 8:12pm · Jenison · 🌐

There are a few reasons we moved to Michigan, and this... is definitely one of them 🍂🍁🌳🌲🏡🐕

79

2 Comments



Greg Conti reviewed [Grand Ravines Dog Park](#) — **5**
 September 29 · 🌐

If my dog died and went to heaven THIS PARK is what doggie heaven would look like... well, except it would also have a large pond to swim in... but this dog park is really close to perfect! Large fenced-in areas to play in, off-leash walking trails through grassy areas and some forested underbrush. Then there's also the larger park's on-leash trails... with its wooden features like stairs decking and 2 bridges (suspension, covered), WOW! And if that's not enough, there's even more: Doggie poop bag dispensers and poop containers everywhere... benches... human bathrooms and vending machines... a doggie wa\$h/rin\$e facility... plenty of parking... zillion of friendly dogs and owners... whew, I'm outta breath. I just want to say "thank-you" to the doggie gods who made this all possible.

Grand Ravines Dog Park ✓
 Dog Park
 3,544 Likes
 177 talking about this

Like Comment Share

Grand Ravines Dog Park, Jeff Larabel and Nancy Pedersen Wright



COMMUNICATIONS



New Parks Brochure

An updated version of the Parks Brochure was created in spring 2016. They are very popular at community events, public libraries, and at the Nature Education Center. Approximately 40,000 are distributed over three years.

Measurable shortlink to GovDelivery press release

FEB 22
Press Release: 80 acres additional acres at North Ottawa Dunes
<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIOTTAWA/bulletins/18046ca>

[bit.ly/NorthOttawaDunes](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIOTTAWA/bulletins/18046ca) COPY SHARE EDIT

360 TOTAL CLICKS

Maximizing Reach

Once you have all of the necessary marketing tools, and the time to use them, the key is making them all work together to maximize reach.

Social Media

Social media continues to be an easy and efficient way to communicate with the community.



GovDelivery

Ottawa County Parks holds three of the top 10 topics in GovDelivery. Roughly 150 bulletins were sent in FY 17.

↑ 32%
FACEBOOK LIKES

Website

The website remains a crucial communication tool, with over 250,000 visits annually (an increase of 7%).

7,871

QUARTERLY E-NEWS
SUBSCRIBERS
(GOVDELIVERY)

Quarterly Newsletter

Over 30,000 parks newsletters are distributed each year. Efforts will be made in 2017 to add more of these stories to the website, in a search-friendly way.

258,754
ANNUAL WEB VISITS

Facebook Live

In 2016 Ottawa County Parks used Facebook Live to reach broader audiences during select programs and presentations. The *Advice from Isle Royale* presentation had 90 attendees the Nature Education Center and another 700 online.



BRIDGING COMMUNITY TO NATURE
LEARN MORE | DONATE | GET INVOLVED
ottawacountyparksfoundation.org



friendsofocp.org

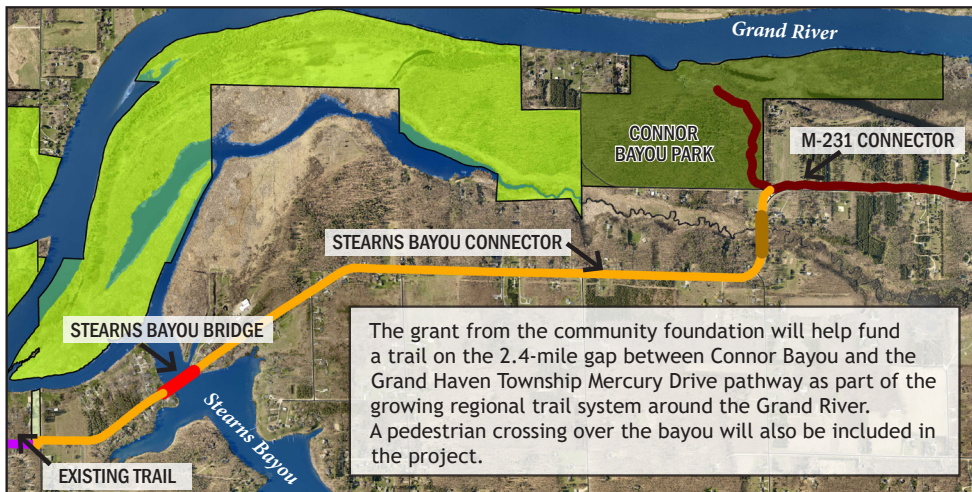
The Ottawa County Parks Foundation officially launched in the spring of 2017. Since then, the board members have worked hard to raise funds for operating expenses, as well as apply for grant funding to support the Grand River Greenway Explorers Trail.

\$125,000 Grant Award

The Grand Haven Area Community Foundation Board awarded a \$125,000 grant to the Ottawa County Parks Foundation for the Grand River Explorers Trail/Stearns Bayou Connector.

The Friends of Ottawa County Parks support the parks system in many ways, including volunteering at parks, promoting the parks at community events, leading hikes, and more!

In 2017 they applied for grants to assist WMEAC with costs of the Grand River Clean Up, to expand the stewardship program model for middle school age students, and to promote kayak training and excursions. All of these endeavors are undertaken through cooperative plans involving multiple groups or organizations in Ottawa County.



PARKS COMMISSION

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Ray Statema, Vice President
Philip Kuyers, Secretary
Joe Bush
Tom Elhart
Matthew Fenske
James Holtvluwer
Roger E. Jonas
Kelly N. Rice
Tom Werkman

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Park Planning & Development
Coordinator of Park Planning & Development
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Park Planner
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Parks Secretary
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Kristen Hintz

Parks Naturalist
Curtis Dykstra

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Park Maintenance & Operations
Coordinator of Park Maintenance & Operations
Jason Boerger

Park Operations Manager
Bob Reichel

Guest Services Supervisor
Elaine Eberling

Natural Resources Management Supervisor
Melanie Manion

Parks Supervisors
Anne Engvall (North)
Eric Frifeldt (West)
Collin Zackrison (East)
Leif VanHorssen (Central)

Parks Equipment Specialist
Jeremy Hamstra

Parks Maintenance
Aaron Goodell
Bob Shannon
Tom Dorton

The Parks Commission also employs a part-time Volunteer Outreach Coordinator as well as over 100 seasonal and part-time staff, including Naturalist Guides, Park Attendants, Grounds Attendants, an intern, and Gatekeepers.

LONG-TERM FUNDING

Income from fee revenues provides an important source of operating revenues; grants for park improvements and land acquisition provide crucial help for expanding and improving the park system. However, it is the voter-supported parks millage that provides the core funding which supports all facets of the parks program. This 10-year millage was renewed in 2016 with over 72% of public support.

As the park system has grown over the past 20 years, so has the percentage of the millage required to operate and maintain the park system. While the bulk of the funds will be used for that purpose, there are still new projects on the horizon for the next 10 years, including completion of the Grand River Greenway, expansion and development of the Bend Area, continued progress on the Macatawa Greenway through land acquisition and trail extension, improvements to the

Crockery Creek Natural Area, progress on the Pigeon River Greenway, and renovations and upgrades at all parks and open spaces.

The Ottawa County Parks Foundation was created to raise funds to assist the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission in achieving its goals.

