

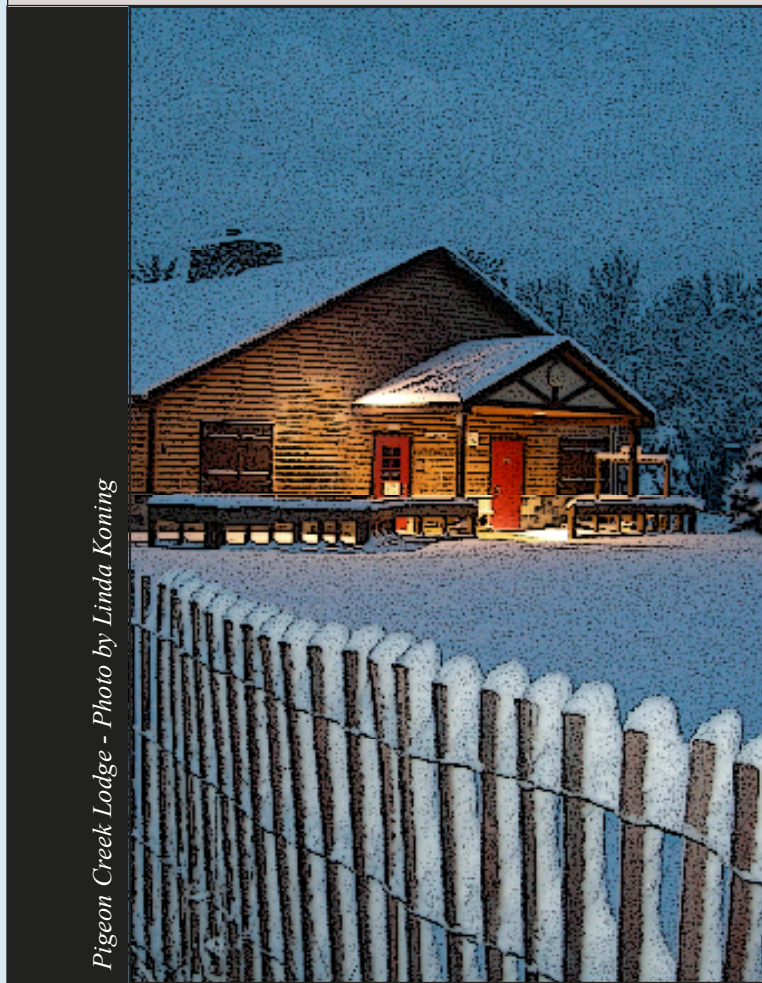
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Ottawa County Parks &  
Recreation Commission  
12220 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, Michigan 49460



## Winter 2010-11 **OUTDOORS OTTAWA COUNTY**

The quarterly newsletter of the  
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission



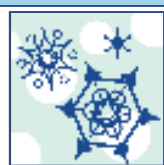
Pigeon Creek Lodge - Photo by Linda Koning

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### Pigeon Creek Park and Lodge Hours



**Pigeon Creek Park** - Park winter hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day from November 1 through March 31. 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 hill.

**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.**

#### Special Holiday Lodge 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 Sunday, December 26 and continuing through Saturday, January 1. On Sunday, January 2 the Lodge will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The Lodge will be closed 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.

### Long-range Parks Plan Update Underway

The Parks Commission and its staff are working to update the "Ottawa County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan", a planning document that incorporates all individual park master plans and outlines strategies for land acquisition, park improvements, park administration and financing for ten or more years into the future. The plan is formally updated every five years and the current update is scheduled to be completed by March 2011.

Public input is an important part of the planning process. A detailed opinion survey of county residents was conducted in fall 2010 by the Frost Research Center at Hope College to help guide the Parks Commission's decision making. The telephone survey of 500 county residents assessed opinions on a wide range of matters from broad issues, such as whether to focus on land acquisition or park improvements, to specific recreation activity and facility preferences. Another source of input will be a public workshop to be held late in 2010.

Check the parks website for survey results, notices of public workshops, and the draft parks plan that will be posted for review in January 2011. You may also let the Parks Commission know your feelings about issues facing the county park system by mailing the Parks Commission at the return address on this newsletter or by emailing parks&rec@miottawa.org.

### Ottawa County Parks Now on Facebook



Communicating effectively with the public is an on-going challenge as technology evolves and people change how they obtain information about what is going on in their community. For many people, social media has become a primary means of communicating and gathering information. Become a Facebook "friend" of Ottawa County Parks to get regular updates on what is happening in the county parks system including information on interpretive programs, park improvements, and suggestions for things to do and see in the parks.

### Trails in Ottawa County Parks

Trail activities are typically at the top of the list when citizens are asked about their favorite recreational facilities. Many people hike trails to explore and enjoy peaceful natural areas and to view wildflowers, trees, birds and other wildlife. Walkers, runners and bikers also use trails as part of their personal fitness program. Trails are a major emphasis of Ottawa County Parks and its nearly 6,000 acres of natural resource based parks. Currently, the park system features approximately 70 miles of trails for hikers, cross-country skiers, equestrians, bicycles and a range of other users. The following parks have five or more miles of trails. Check the parks web site at [www.miottawa.org/parks](http://www.miottawa.org/parks) for locations, more information and to print copies of trail maps for each property.

**Pigeon Creek Park** - Ten miles of trails meander through this 412 acre property that is centrally located and accessible to all residents for hiking, biking and equestrian use. In the winter, all trails are designated cross-country ski trails that are groomed for classic and skate skiing with three miles of lighted trails for night skiing.

**Hemlock Crossing/Pine Bend** - This six mile trail system winds through 239 acres of forest and field and is popular for hikers, skiers and snowshoers. The multi-use trails offer scenic views of the Pigeon River. Trail users may also visit the new year 'round Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing.

**Musketawa Trail** - Ottawa County Parks manages ten miles of this 26 mile paved state-owned rail trail between Marne and Muskegon. The trail is popular with cyclists, rollerbladers, walkers and equestrians (using a parallel dirt trail).

**Riley Trails** - This 330 acre park offers nearly seven miles of trails for hikers, bikers and cross-country skiers.

**North Ottawa Dunes** - The eight miles of trails in this 500 acre property link to additional trails at P.J. Hoffmaster State Park and Ferrysburg's Coast Guard Park providing hiking opportunities for the hardiest of hikers. The rugged wooded dunes provide an exceptional setting for hiking and cross-country skiing.

**Upper Macatawa Natural Area** - Over five miles of trails wind through restored grasslands, wetlands and woods at this 612 acre site. Trails provide hikers and cross-country skiers many opportunities for wildlife viewing.

**Future Trails** - To accommodate the growing number of trail users, the parks commission is adding new trails at a number of Open Space Lands including Van Buren Dunes and the Port Sheldon Natural Area. Additional trails are planned for Hiawatha Forest, Bur Oak Landing, the Bend Area, Eastmanville Bayou and the site of the former Holland Country Club. Parks expects that it will have a total of 100 miles of trails in the coming years.



### Holiday Gift Ideas



- ✓ Ottawa County Parks Annual Vehicle Permits for 2011 will be available to purchase in time for the holidays at the Nature Education Center or at the parks office at 12220 Fillmore Street in West Olive.
- ✓ Check out the Nature Education Center's Gift Shop for field guides, binoculars, children's books and many more items hand-picked by parks naturalists.

### Nature Education Center Education Endowment Fund

Consider the Education Endowment Fund in your end of year giving. This fund provides financial assistance for schools unable to afford to visit the Nature Education Center due to transportation and other costs. The fund also provides educational 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.



**Friends of  
Ottawa County  
Parks**

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.  
[www.friendsofocp.org](http://www.friendsofocp.org)

**Here Comes Santa Claus!** Sunday, December 12 Come anytime between 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. We've arranged a special visit by Santa and Mrs. Claus to take place at the Weaver House. Plan to bring the youngsters to tell Santa their holiday wishes. The grown-ups will have the opportunity to view the 100 year-old Weaver House decorated in period style and to enjoy old fashioned refreshments with their children. Bring your camera to capture a family memory! Advanced 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 Crowell Street and 156th Ave., travel south on 156th to the park entrance.

#### Friends T-Shirts Now Available

These t-shirts have the Friends logo on the front and a creative design on the back. Shirts are available in beige, grey or light blue and in sizes S, M, L, or XL. Each shirt is \$12. Visit the Friends web site for ordering information.



#### Other News

- ☛ Friends member Rick Bazany built and donated several bird nesting boxes. They are available for \$15 each. For purchasing information, send an email to [information@friendsofocp.org](mailto:information@friendsofocp.org)
- ☛ Friends members will be helping next spring with gardening projects at Spring Grove Park and at the Weaver House located at Pine Bend. If you are interested in assisting with planning or with preparations and planting, please email [information@friendsofocp.org](mailto:information@friendsofocp.org).



## Winter Sports Programs and Activities



### Snowshoe Clinic Saturday, January 8 at 11:00 a.m. at the Nature Education Center

Snowshoeing has become very popular in recent years for those wanting to enjoy the snowy months of winter and for its health benefits. Snowshoeing isn't expensive and can be enjoyed by all ages. Staff from The Outpost of Holland will bring equipment and discuss types of snowshoes, proper fit and much more. The indoor clinic is for adults and older children and will last one hour. There is no fee, however, advanced registration is required. The clinic will be canceled if weather or roads are unsafe.

### Cross-country Ski & Waxing Workshop Sunday, January 9 at 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Cross-country skiing is a great winter activity. This indoor workshop will introduce cross-country skiing to those interested in learning the basics of this popular sport or current skiers wishing to increase their ski knowledge. Instructor John Stoneburner has over 35 years of skiing experience and is a Nordic ski instructor with the Professional Ski Instructors of America. John will cover equipment (skis, boots, bindings, poles), wax vs. no-wax skis, how to select equipment and how to dress for skiing. John will also demonstrate how to wax your skis for optimum kick and glide (even no-wax skis should be waxed). **There is no fee, however, advance registration is required.** The workshop is for adults and older children and will be canceled if weather or roads are unsafe.

### 2011 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 highly recommended and a limited number of skate skis are available to rent.

Ski Clinic Date	9:30 a.m. Clinic	Noon Clinic
Saturday, January 8	Beginner	Intermediate
Saturday, January 15	Beginner	Beginner
Saturday, January 22	Ski Skating	Beginner
Saturday, February 5	Beginner	Intermediate
Saturday, February 12	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 Biathlon** - this annual run and cross-country ski event is scheduled for Saturday, January 29 at Pigeon Creek Park. For information, contact Russ Tiles at (616) 607-9338 or email at [rtiles@yahoo.com](mailto:rtiles@yahoo.com).

## BIRDING PROGRAMS AND TRIPS

### Winter Birding Trip Thursday, January 27

This all-day birding trip in west Michigan is 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 (some loaners available). **There is no fee for this trip, however, advance registration is required. A daily or annual state park vehicle permit may be required.** A letter with meeting location and more details will be sent in advance to those registered.

### An Introduction to Birding Thursday, March 3 and Saturday, March 5

Birding is a popular and fast growing outdoor activity. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there are 46 million birders over the age of 16 in the United States. This two-session workshop, designed for adults and older children with little or no birding experience, will begin with an indoor presentation at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 3 at the Nature Education Center. This session will cover field guides, equipment, bird distribution, birding locations and more. The second session of the workshop is an all day field trip in west Michigan scheduled on Saturday, March 5 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to learn techniques of finding and identifying birds. Transportation on the field trip is via personal vehicles. **There is no program fee, however, advance registration is required and registrants must attend both sessions.** Binoculars are required (some loaners are available). A letter with more details will be sent in advance to those registered.

## DIRECTIONS TO WINTER PROGRAM LOCATIONS

For directions and information on all Ottawa County Parks properties, visit [www.miottawa.org/parks](http://www.miottawa.org/parks) or call 616-786-4847 or 616-738-4810.

**Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing** (in 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 drive.  
**Kirk Park** (Grand Haven Township) On Lakeshore Ave. about 2 miles south of Lake Michigan Dr. (M-45). The lodge is on the left as you enter the park.  
**Pigeon Creek Park** (Olive Township) On Stanton Street between 128th and 120th Avenues.  
**Weaver House at Pine Bend** (Port Sheldon Township) From the intersection of Croswell Street and 156th Avenue, travel south on 156th Avenue and follow signs to the park entrance.



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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## Winter 2010 -11 Interpretive 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

## Sunday Fireside Story Hour at the Weaver House

Gather 'round the fireplace in the historic Weaver House to listen to a nature-related story read by one of the Nature Education Center's naturalists. After the story, the group will go outside for a discovery walk focused on the theme of the story. A craft activity may replace the walk depending upon weather conditions. These one-hour programs are for families with children 7 to 12 years old. All Story Hours begin at 2:00 p.m. and will be held on Sundays January 16, January 30, February 13 and February 27. There are no fees and advanced registration is not required. The program will be canceled if weather or roads are unsafe.



**Winter Programs** Ottawa County Parks interpretive staff has planned a wide variety of programs for your winter enjoyment and learning. There are no fees for any of these programs, however, **advanced registration is required.** Programs will be canceled if weather or roads are unsafe. Directions to locations are included in this newsletter.

### How to Know Your Holiday Trees

Saturday, December 11 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. Naturalist Chip Francke will conduct this 90 minute program for adults and older children. **Advanced registration is required.** This program will be canceled if weather or road conditions are unsafe.



### How Much Wood Would a Woodpecker Peck?

Saturday, December 18 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

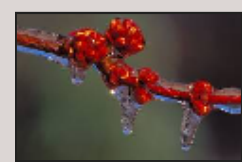
Join naturalist Kristen Hintz to discover the interesting characteristics of woodpeckers and to search Hemlock Crossing for their signs. This 90 minute indoor/outdoor program is great for families. **Advanced registration is required.**

### Winter Family Fun Sunday, January 2 2:00 p.m. at Kirk Park

Start your new year with naturalist Kristen Hintz and bundle up to participate in fun outdoor games and activities for the whole family. Meet at Kirk Park Lodge and be prepared to be outside for an hour followed by refreshments around the fire. **Advanced registration is required.**

### Animal Signs Saturday, January 15 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Many animals remain active during the winter. Join naturalist Kristen Hintz and become a "wildlife detective" to look for clues as to what animals are doing this time of year. This 90 minute indoor/outdoor program is great for families. **Advanced registration is required.**



### A Close-Up Look at Winter Trees

Saturday, January 22 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

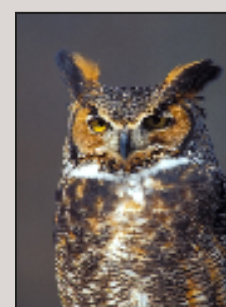
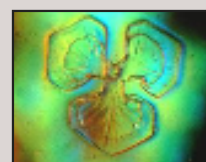
During the winter, twigs of woody plants have unique characteristics including buds, bundle scars and leaf scars. These characteristics are useful when identifying these plants in winter. This two hour indoor program for adults offers a close-up look at these twig characteristics and adaptations to winter. **Advance registration is required.** Instructor is naturalist Chip Francke.

### Sleepy Snakes and Tired Turtles! Saturday, January 29 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Animals prepare for winter in a variety of ways such as migration and hibernation. This program with naturalist Kristen Hintz will focus on Michigan's reptiles and what they do in the winter. This 90 minute indoor/outdoor program is great for families. **Advanced registration is required.**

### Snowflakes: Micro Gems of Nature Sunday, February 6 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Have you ever looked closely at a snowflake? Join Jim Benko for this fascinating look at snowflakes and crystals. Jim has spent over 25 years collecting and preparing microscope slides of thousands of different snowflakes. Many of these snowflakes have been painted and converted to photographic artwork which he will share during this indoor program. This one hour program is for adults and older children. **Advance registration is required.**



### Whoooo is Watching You?

Saturday, February 12 6:30 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

Owls are fascinating birds that were brought into the spotlight in Harry Potter movies. Naturalist Kristen Hintz will reveal which owls starred in the Harry Potter movies and whether these owls are found in Michigan. Participants will discover the fascinating characteristics of owls and will dissect an owl pellet to see what the owl was eating. After the indoor program, people are welcome to go on a night hike (bring a flashlight) to try our luck at calling some owls. This 90 minute program is for adults and older children. **Advanced registration is required.**

### What Skull Is That? Saturday, February 19 10:00 a.m. at the Nature Education Center

Have you ever found a skull and wondered what animal it was from? A skull can be identified by carefully looking at its size, teeth, shape and other characteristics. Join Hope College biology professor Kathy Winnett-Murray for this two hour indoor program for adults on skull identification. Participants will learn how to use a key (provided) to identify a number of skulls of mammals and other animals. **Advanced registration is required.**



### Galls: A Unique Relationship Saturday, February 26 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Education Center

What are those odd shaped structures on that plant? Galls are formed through fascinating interrelationships between insects and plants. This program with naturalist Kristen Hintz will begin indoors for a look at different types of galls and to discover the intricate relationship between plants and gall makers as well as how people and other animals use galls. An optional outdoor hike will be offered after the program to look for galls along the trails. This 90 minute program is for adults and older children. **Advanced registration is required.**



### Newsletter Photo Credits

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