



# St. Clair County Parks

PROGRESS REPORT

Providing Recreational Opportunities since 1995

Fall 2013

## Blue Water River Walk



On October 30, the Community Foundation of St. Clair County celebrated the work of hundreds of donors, volunteers and partners on the rapid development of the Blue Water River Walk along the St. Clair River from the Great Lakes Maritime Center south to the Seaway Terminal. St. Clair County Parks and Recreation (PARC) is proud to be one of those project partners.

On October 17, St. Clair County completed the purchase of 2.75 acres of vacant land from Acheson Ventures using a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant and County Parks millage funds. The parcel is located just north of the Seaway Terminal.

PARC also contributed \$20,000 toward the \$200,000 local match for a \$211,000 MDOT Transportation Enhancement Grant to construct a nearly one mile long paved trail from the Military Street pedestrian underpass to the Great Lakes Maritime Center. Construction of the trail was completed in October.

St. Clair County has also been awarded a \$1,039,500 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to design and construct a wetland habitat between the new trail and the St. Clair River. The ultimate goal will be to directly connect the wetland to the St. Clair River to provide fisheries habitat in addition to wetlands habitat for birds and amphibians. Design work will begin this winter with the hope that construction of the wetland can begin next summer.



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# Park News

## Fall Colors Spectacular

Each year, when the temperature drops as we reach October, there is a dramatic change that sweeps through all the county parks and along the Wadhams to Avoca trail. That dramatic change comes in the form of vibrant colors. The change is quick for some trees, like the sugar and silver maples, and slower for others like the oaks and hickories. The ongoing change is what gives the landscape such a dramatic look, with a mix of multiple colors that include green, orange, yellow, red and brown.

What gives the leaves those vibrant colors? It is the combination of temperature, sunlight and soil moisture that determine just how bright the colors will be. If the growing season had abundant moisture and is followed by dry, cool, and sunny days in the fall, then the conditions are right for the bright colors. Multiple warm sunny days with cool, frostless nights provide the best weather conditions for development of the brightest fall colors.

This year, visitors to county parks and the Wadhams to Avoca Trail were treated to some spectacular colors. Each park offered a color palate that was unique in its own way. The trestle on the Wadhams to Avoca Trail offered breath taking views of the Mill creek with a backdrop of vibrant colors. Columbus County Park provided the experience on the trails that showed the colorful underside of the forest canopy. The yellow restroom building at Fort Gratiot County Park provided a contrast of color to the backdrop of oaks cloaked in dark crimson. The colors are now fading away, but they will return next fall, greeting you when visit your county parks!



# Fort Gratiot County Park

## Biggo Swing Coming

Plans are moving forward to update the playground at Fort Gratiot County Park. Next spring, a Biggo Solo swing will be added to the northwest side of the playground along with rubber safety tiles and border sidewalks.

A Biggo Solo swing was installed at Goodells County Park in 2012 and has been very popular. The swing seat is literally a “big O” shape that can accommodate multiple children or an adult and a child. The swing is considered ADA accessible for users of all abilities.

## Ceremony Pavilion Coming Soon

Each year, Parks and Recreation Office staff members receive numerous calls from residents interested in getting married on the Fort Gratiot County Park beach. In order to accommodate those requests, plans are being drawn up to construct a “ceremony plaza” overlooking the beach just north of the restroom building.

The plaza will be ADA accessible and accommodate about 100 folding chairs. In order to get the best construction bids, both the plaza and the playground construction will be done by one contractor in the spring.

# Fort Gratiot Light Station

## Equipment Building Restoration

Improvements to the Equipment Building wrapped up in October. Improvements included the construction of an ADA restroom in the former machine room and installation of a sink and cabinets in the furnace room. Restoration to the building included repairs and painting the first floor walls and ceilings with historically accurate colors from the 1930's. Finally, the building was made accessible with the installation of an ADA compliant door and barrier-free walkways. The access improvements were funded by the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation millage.



## Duplex Gets Needed Paint

This fall, contractors have been repairing and painting the trim and eaves of the Lightkeepers' Duplex. The brick building, which was built in 1874, desperately needed to have the fascia, soffit and trim cleaned and painted. In addition, two holes in the soffit were repaired on the east side of the building.



## Station Antennae Removed

Over the course of the last year, park maintenance staff members have removed four radio antennas ranging in size from 6 feet to 12 feet, from the retired Coast Guard Station's roof. The tricky job was made a lot easier with the use of the Parks and Recreation Commission's aerial lift truck. The lift truck reaches 45 feet in the air and is also used for tree trimming, light fixture repairs and even picture taking.

## Winter Hours

Beginning in November, and running thru December 15, the Fort Gratiot Light Station will be open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm. Groups tours of 20 or more and group overnight stays in the Lightkeepers' Duplex can be scheduled throughout the year. For more information, contact the Port Huron Museum Tour Manager at (810) 982-0891 ext. 118.

## Friends Helping Out

The Friends of the Fort Gratiot Light have already begun to invest some of the proceeds from their Sandfest fundraiser to make improvements to the Light Station. This fall, the Friends group is investing \$5,000 to finish the restoration of the lowest level of the lighthouse. Improvements will include the replacement of the plywood floor in the storeroom with authentic tongue and groove wood flooring; tuck pointing the interior brickwork in the access tunnel walls; leveling and re-laying the brick pavers in the tunnel and the first level of the light house; installing replica light fixtures; and installing a period shelving unit for the display of historic artifacts.

Thanks to the Friends' hard work and generosity, next spring visitors will enjoy their visit to the lighthouse even more.

# Columbus County Park

## Display Enhances Lodge

Columbus County Park recently received a donation and loan of the furry kind from the Pine River Nature Center.

Over a dozen animal mounts were put on display in the new cases at the Columbus Park Lodge, courtesy of the Pine River Nature Center. The creatures are part of an interpretive display that educates visitors about what animals they may encounter in the park.

The displays will also include critters that can be found in and along the Belle River.



## Eagle Scout Project

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation promotes various ways for today's youth to get involved within their community and to make a difference. The Boy Scouts of America is a great example with the Eagle Scout program.

This month, we give a special recognition and thank you to Troop 216 and Eagle Scout Logan Hoffman for their contributions and the work they performed building a bridge at Columbus County Park. Logan wanted to help improve the park trails, identified a wet trail area, implemented a design proposal to build a bridge. Park users can now access the Columbus trails west of Kronner Road a little easier in wet conditions thanks to Logan and Troop 216.



Over the past several years Columbus County Park has had several Boy Scout's complete their Eagle Scout award by building mallard nesting boxes, bat houses, screech owl houses, and purple martin houses.

## Hunting Provides Opportunity

St. Clair County purchased Columbus County Park in 2007 using a \$1.4 million Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant. One of the conditions of the acquisition grant was reasonable hunting opportunities had to be provided on the property. This is the 6th year that hunting has been allowed in Columbus County Park south of the Belle River and west of Kronner Road. Licensed hunters must register with the Parks and Recreation office and pay a registration fee based on residency. Around 60 hunters register each year and are issued an ID and a numbered metal tag. Whenever they are in the park, hunters are required to hang their tag on a hook on either the Big Hand Road or Kronner Road check-in board. The tag lets everyone know where they are hunting.

Bruce Fox, a Columbus Township resident says, "I go to the park with my dogs to hunt for pheasant. It's great to have a place close by to hunt." Hunters use the park to hunt for deer, small game, turkey, waterfowl and migratory birds. The park is also a popular place to fish along the Belle River.

The main part of Columbus County Park located north of the Belle River and east of Kronner Road is a "No Hunting" area. Everyone that visits the park is encouraged to wear orange especially during deer hunting season.

# Goodells County Park

## Open Pavilion Updated

The Open Pavilion, which is located just south of the Quonset Hut, is one of the oldest buildings in the equestrian area of Goodells County Park. This year, park work crews have been busy modifying the structure to make it more usable. The northern end of the building has been converted to a 24' x 24' storage area for portable horse stalls that are used in the Quonset Hut. The new common wall between the storage area and the pavilion was constructed with a serving table and new electrical outlets. New picnic tables will be assembled this winter for use in the pavilion.

## Volunteer Spotlight: Jeanne Mackay

Master Gardener Jeanne Mackay has spent 185 hours volunteering at Goodells County Park this year. Those hours were spent tending to the native plant garden near the MIA memorial. Her goal was to restore the bed "to create an area of biodiversity of native plants that supports pollinators and other insect species which are food for birds and other animals." This meant hours of thinning, weeding and watering plants that would lead to a native garden with identifiable plants that each play a role in the ecosystem. "Seeing the diversity and busyness of insects in this bed on a summer day is truly inspiring, making it my favorite place to work. It is satisfying to know that in this small space I am contributing to sustaining wildlife." It also is a beautiful addition to the park. Thanks Jeanne!



## Rare Historic Piano Restored

In 2012, Victoria Plotzke and her family donated a 1894 A.B. Chase piano to the Historic Village at Goodells County Park.

The piano was in beautiful shape, but needed some repairs to its inner workings. The historic Columbus Church needed a piano that could be played during weddings. To return the piano to working order, Steve Grattan, a local piano expert, was awarded the contract to restore the piano using a matching grant from the Community Foundation's Blue Water Arts Committee.

During the restoration, Mr. Grattan discovered that the piano had rare internal sound resonating components, making the piano one of only a handful of its kind left in the world. The restoration took nearly a year, but the sound was worth the wait.



On October 9th, 2013 the piano was dedicated in the historic Columbus Church. About 40 people attended the ceremony, which recognized the people who made donations to the project. Special thanks to the Wales Historical Society for providing a musical program that showcased the piano.

# Bridge to Bay Trail

## Trail Towns

A Trail Town is a destination along a long-distance trail. Whether on a rail trail, water trail or hiking trail - trail users can venture off the path to enjoy the scenery, services and heritage of the nearby community. A Trail Town is a community in which local officials have used their trail system as a focal point of a tourism-centered strategy for economic development and local revitalization.

The City of St. Clair and Marine City have been chosen as the first communities in the Trail Towns program. The pilot project is being funded through a grant from the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission, St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, and the Land Information Access Association of Traverse City.

The steps toward establishing a Trail Town are simple. Organize a local team of stakeholders. Create a safe and appealing environment for trail visitors. Revitalize existing and new businesses to expand and cater to bikers, paddlers and walkers. Promote the community as a Trail Town to all potential visitors.

The Bridge to Bay Trail, Wadhams to Avoca Trail and the Blueways of St. Clair water trails are popular recreation assets in our county. The Trail Towns program seeks to channel the use of these assets to bring renewal to the towns that they run through.

Look for flyers and meeting notices as the Trail Towns program gets underway in the coming months.



## New Trail Signs

Installation of the first phase of new Bridge to Bay Trail signage from Yankee Road in St. Clair to Chartier Road in Marine City has begun. MLS Signs hopes to have all of the new signs installed before winter. The signage upgrade is being fully funded by the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation millage.



## Views from the River Walk



# Wadhams to Avoca Trail



County Parks staff, assisted by JASP workers, continue the cleanup from the devastation caused by the Emerald Ash Borer and Dutch Elm Disease along the trail. Pre-emptive removal of dead and dying trees makes a safer and more attractive trail experience. Removal of invasive species allow the healthy native vegetation to gain a foothold.



## Labor Day Trail Walk

On Labor Day 2013, the sixth Annual Trestle Trek was held on the Wadhams to Avoca Trail. This year, over 300 participants made the five-mile trek from Avoca Road to Imlay City Road and back. The highlight of the event for many walkers was crossing the 640-foot long Mill Creek Trestle. The event has grown in popularity over the years, attracting more walkers each time. It has also become a Labor Day tradition for many walkers who make the trip every year.

The Labor Day walk is held in conjunction with the more famous walk across the Mackinac Bridge. Labor Day walks are held across the state as part of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness initiative to get Michigan moving!

## Volunteers Make a Difference

Twice each year, Adopt-A-Trail groups clean-up their assigned sections of the WTA Trail. The fall cleanup was held on October 5th. The spring cleanup for 2014 will be held on April 26th. St. Clair County Parks and Recreation would like to thank the following Adopt-A-Trail groups:

- Avoca Elementary
- Team Sandbag
- The Lachon Family/Maritime Title
- The McCalmon/Price Families
- IMPACT ARC Garden Group
- DTE Energy Greenwood Plant
- Port Huron Hospital Helmet Safety
- The Home Depot Fort Gratiot
- The Oberski Family
- The DeView Group
- Chain Gang Bicycle Adventure
- Blue Water Outdoor Club
- Rock-N-Riders 4H Club
- The Stammers Family
- Port Huron KOA
- The Govere Family





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**Trails**

- [www.bridgetobaytrail.org](http://www.bridgetobaytrail.org)
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