

St. Clair County Parks

PROGRESS REPORT

Providing Recreational Opportunities since 1995



Summer 2023

Fort Gratiot County Park Opens New Non-County Parking Booth

Earlier this spring, a change was implemented at the entrance to Fort Gratiot County Park. In order to make the park more accessible to all St. Clair County residents, a new parking booth was installed. Residents of St. Clair County will continue to have free parking. County residents will receive a window decal upon entry with proof of residency to be displayed on their windshield for free parking.

Non-county residents will pay a parking fee of \$20 per day, per vehicle. The parking fee will be collected from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Fees for out-of-county residents will be charged Friday through Sunday and on holidays during the park's summer hours. Cash and credit card payments are accepted at the booth. Parking passes are non-refundable and only issued upon arrival at the park.

For more information, please contact the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission office at (810) 989-6960.



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Park News

North Channel County Park Grant Updates

St. Clair County Parks recently received one grant for the new North Channel County Park in Clay Township, and applied for three more. Notification of the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund award was made public earlier this year, with the official grant agreement expected to arrive in early August. The \$270,000 Trust Fund grant with \$280,000 match is for the development of a trailhead and parking lot. County Parks will have two years to complete the funded projects.

The other applications that were submitted for the North Channel County Park were for an EGLE (Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy) grant that would help fund a protection wall on the shoreline. This "soft" shoreline stone wall would provide protection for a future beach development. County Parks asked for \$75,000 with a \$25,000 match. Awards are expected to be issued in mid-July.

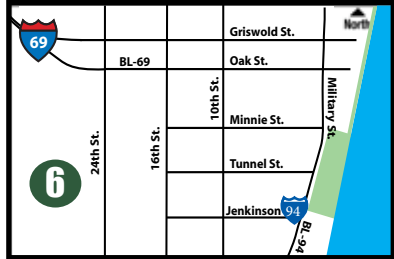
Another Natural Resource Trust Fund Grant application was submitted for a phase II of North Channel County Park. The award decisions for this grant will be made in the spring of 2024. This grant would help to construct a restroom, pathway and fishing/observation pier. The request is for \$300,000 with a \$300,000 match.

Recently a SPARK grant was also applied for. Funds would be used for the purchase and installation of inclusive play features at North Channel County Park. Local match will come from annual millage allocation and/or private and public donations. This request was for \$200,000 with a \$25,000 match.



Directions to all Seven St. Clair County Parks

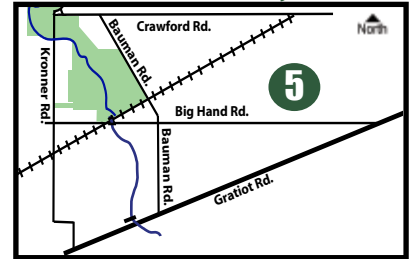
Blue Water River Walk County Park



2200 Military Street, Port Huron, MI

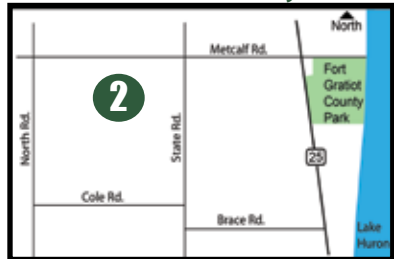


Columbus County Park



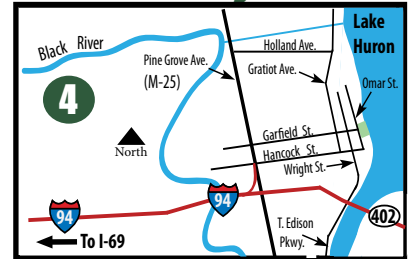
1670 Bauman Road, Columbus, MI

Fort Gratiot County Park



3325 Metcalf Road, Fort Gratiot, MI

Fort Gratiot Light Station



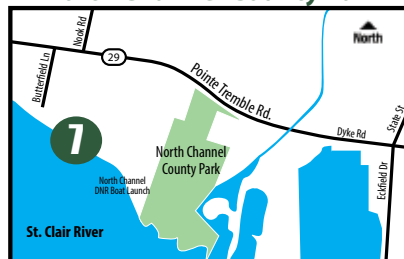
2800 Omar Street, Port Huron, MI

Goodells County Park



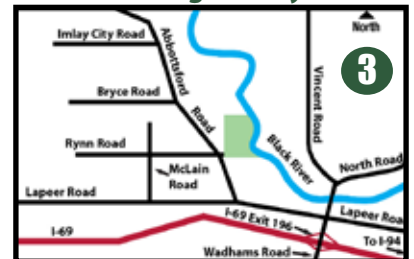
8264 County Park Drive, Goodells, MI

Future Site North Channel County Park



2431 Pointe Tremble, Algonac, MI

Woodsong County Park



5980 Rynn Road, Clyde, MI

Park News

Staffing Changes

It was the end of an era for one County Park employee, and a new beginning for five more. After 25 years with St. Clair County Parks, Darel Williamson officially retired March 24th. Darel served as the Park Manager for Goodells County Park, Woodsong County Park and the Wadhams to Avoca Trail. Park Manager Nathan Kenner has moved from Columbus County Park to take over Darel's former position. Nathan has been with County Parks since 2006.



Nate Kenner,
Park Manager of
Goodells County Park



Fred Houle,
Park Manager of
Columbus County Park

Fred Houle was hired to fill the manager position at Columbus County Park. Fred has been employed with St. Clair County since 2018 and previously served as the County's electrician. Welcome to County Parks, Fred!

In January, Skylar Helms, Billy Piper and Jason Clough were internally promoted from part-time rangers to full time maintenance staff. These three skilled employees were hired as rangers in 2016 (Helms), 2018 (Piper), and 2021 (Clough). Congratulations to these three dedicated employees on their respective promotions!

Workshops and Volunteering

Have Fun in the Field this Season!

Join Kirsten, our new Park Naturalist-Invasive Species Specialist this season to learn about and care for the environment at our parks and trails. Volunteer field sessions and workdays are ongoing at Columbus, Fort Gratiot, Goodells, North Channel, and Woodsong County Parks to study, protect, and improve plant and wildlife habitats. Help collect native seeds, go on a guided hike, become a community scientist, or explore the diversity of life in a river this season during one of our nature programs. You can find more information on upcoming events on our social media sites listed on the back of this newsletter.



Kirsten Lyons,
Park Naturalist - Invasive
Species Specialist

including St. Clair County Parks. The hybrid virtual and in-person program is geared toward those who are enthusiastic about learning and applying science-based ecosystem management principles and sharing this knowledge with others. To learn more and register for the St. Clair County course this fall, please visit the website at canr.msu.edu/csp. Partial scholarships are available. Registration closes August 30th and classes begin September 13th.

Registration now open for Michigan Conservation Stewards Program in St. Clair County

Kirsten is also coordinating the St. Clair County class of the Michigan Conservation Stewards Program this fall. This is a 10-week education program offered by Michigan State University Extension and many partner organizations,

MICHIGAN CONSERVATION STEWARDS PROGRAM

10 WEEK HYBRID CLASS
 BEGINNING WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 11
 THROUGH WEEK OF NOVEMBER 13, 2023

Learn the foundations of Michigan conservation and how you can apply your knowledge in your community.

Blue Water River Walk County Park

Friends of the St. Clair River Continue Shoreline Protection Work

One of our longest running eco-stewardship projects continues every Tuesday at 10 am. Join the Friends of the St. Clair River to help protect the Blue Water River Walk in Port Huron. Work to remove invasive plants, care for native plants, and monitor pollinators. Tuesday Treks meet every Tuesday at 10 am at the Ferry Dock just south of the River Walk Arch.

Are your kids out of school and need something to do? We've got a fun outdoor event planned for you! Join the Friends of the St. Clair River for Wetland Wanderings on August 16th from 6 - 7pm. Dig in, explore and play with us!

A Friendly Reminder: It is state law to keep your pets on a leash at all times. Smoking is prohibited in all parks. Please do your part to keep our parks safe and clean!

Bridge to Bay Trail

Trail Expanded with Campus-Canal Pedestrian Bridge Addition



There are multiple trail projects underway edging St. Clair County closer to connecting and completing gaps in the Bridge to Bay Trail, our region's longest pedestrian trail.

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held June 7th for the Campus-Canal Pedestrian Bridge. This pedestrian bridge over the Black River Canal connects Port Huron Northern High School and Holland Woods Middle School campuses and bridges Fort Gratiot Township to downtown Port Huron. Three new trail projects are in various stages of construction this year; the Clinton Avenue route in St. Clair, River Road and Davis Road extensions in Marysville, and a bike path on Gratiot Avenue in Port Huron. Currently we are working with communities in the southern part of the county to begin engineering and design phases of three new trail projects; Marine City's Downtown Loop, an Algonac State Park connector through Cottrellville Township, and a safe bike boulevard through Algonac.



Campus-Canal Pedestrian Bridge Ribbon Cutting
Photos courtesy of the Keel

Additional trail projects include a \$50,000 grant from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund administered by Friends of the St. Clair River to install trail kiosks, signs, and way-finding markers in communities along the trail. Look for these to be installed later this summer and fall.

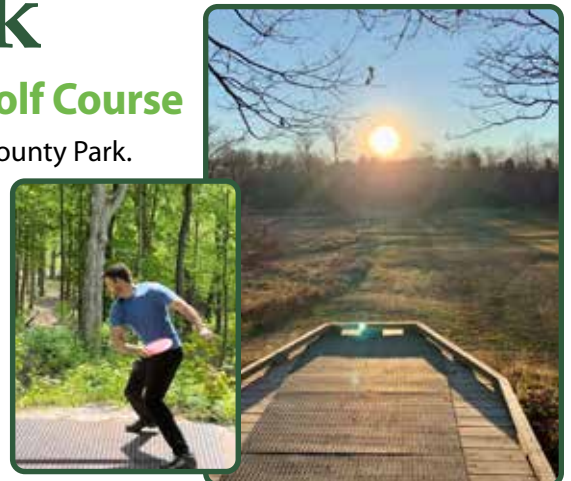
You can help us promote a culture of trail use by familiarizing yourself with our trails and getting out and riding paths near you. Explore trail maps and project updates at www.BridgeToBay.org.

Columbus County Park

Completion of Will Bendik Memorial 18-Hole Disc Golf Course

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation is thrilled to offer disc golf at Columbus County Park. The back-half of the course was recently finished in 2022, making this 18-hole course one of the top-rated public disc golf courses in southeast Michigan.

The course offers large meadows, hills and dense woods along the east side of the Belle River, with scenic views and challenging holes. The vast ecosystem presents Mother Nature at its finest while participants enjoy the beautiful natural habitat as they play at their own pace.



Goodells County Park

Experience the New Mountain

Bike Trails!

Last fall, the Bluewater Trail Advocates (BTA) volunteered hundreds of hours building and maintaining new mountain bike and hiking trails at Goodells County Park. Their support has been a tremendous help to St. Clair County Parks and the community to expand the local trail network.



A ribbon cutting was held in December for the new 2-1/2 mile trail that winds through the park's old growth maples and oaks. Future plans are to expand the trail to at least 5 miles.

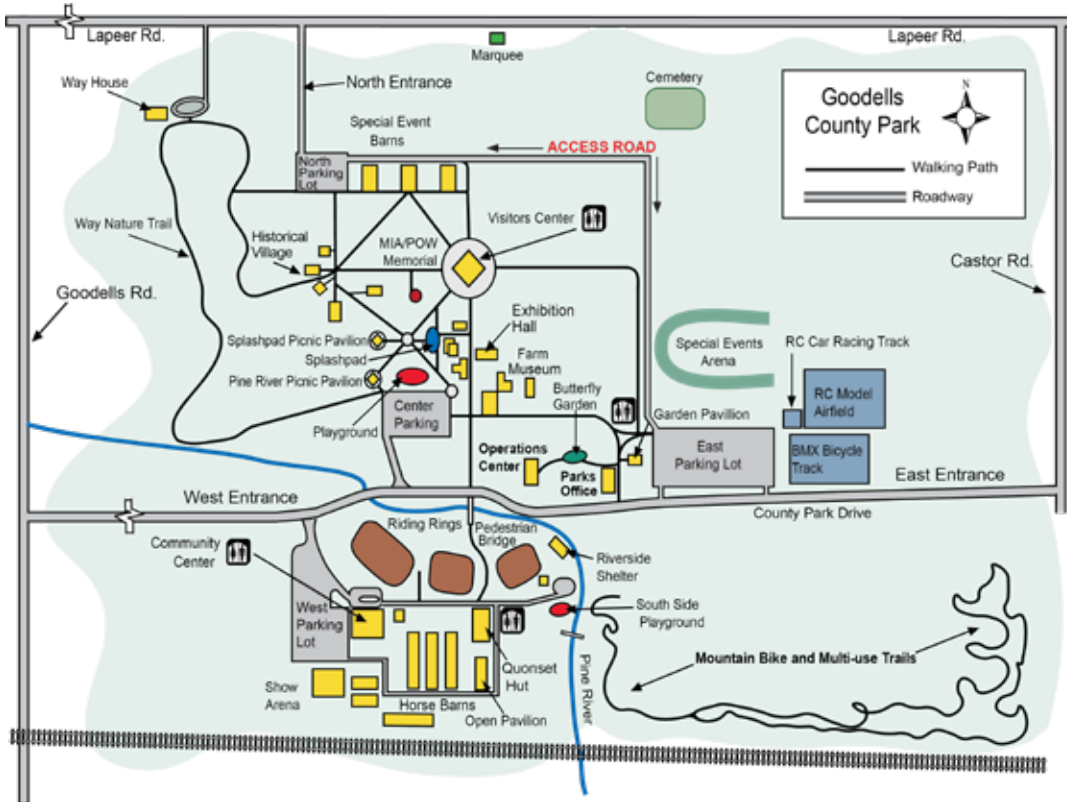
The single-track trails are perfect for beginner and intermediate bikers. Fat tire bikes and mountain bikes are

welcome. We are excited for the community to come and explore the new trail!

A special thank you to Bluewater Trail Advocates, Community Foundation of St. Clair County, Friends of the St. Clair River, City of Port Huron, Wales Township and CRAMBA for their involvement in this project!

New Farm-Themed Playscape

The playground equipment on the northwest side of the park, near the Splashpad has been replaced with a new farm-themed playscape that focuses on the agricultural heritage of the park. A chicken coop, farm tractor, silo, and handicap accessible saucer swing are just a few of the new fun features.



New Park Access Road

A new access road has been added to help park patrons navigate Goodells County Park more easily. The access road runs from the North entrance off Lapeer Road to the East parking lot off County Park Drive, allowing for more accessibility. Walkways have also been blocked off from traffic to ensure safety for everyone.

Our Volunteers Rock!

This spring, 4-H equestrian groups volunteered their time to paint the horse barns at the park. Thank you to everyone that helped give the barns a fresh new look!



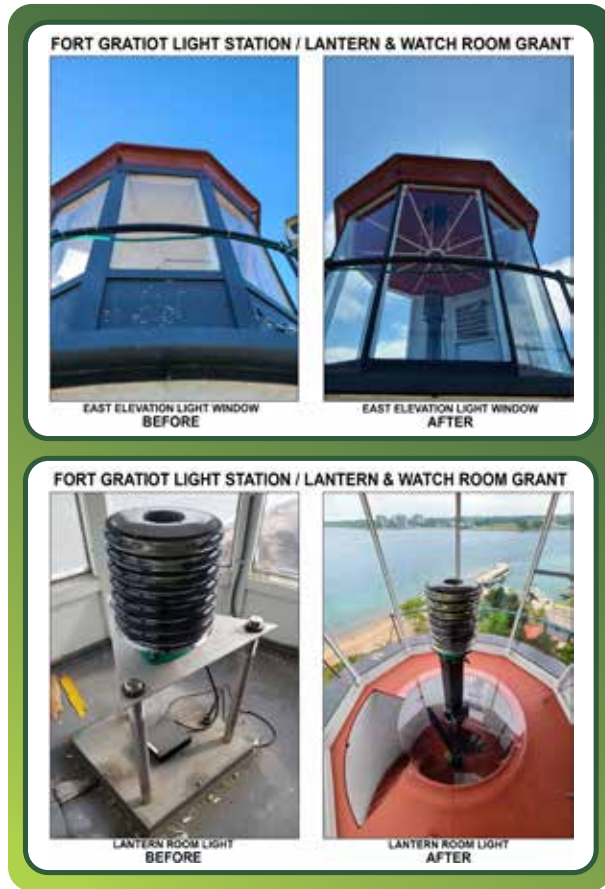
4-H Fair Returns

The St. Clair County 4-H & Youth Fair will be returning to Goodells County Park July 17-22, offering entertainment, livestock auctions and carnival.

The fair provides a great opportunity to explore the many amenities of Goodells County Park. The Historical Village and Farm Museum will both be open during fair.

Fort Gratiot Light Station

Lantern Room Restoration



The Fort Gratiot Lighthouse Lantern and Watch Room Restorations were made possible through the Michigan Lighthouse Assistance Program (MLAP). The St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission has wrapped up the project in 2022, restoring the Watch Room and Lantern Room within the Fort Gratiot Lighthouse. Extensive work was done on the Lantern Room, Watch Room, and landing areas to repair and bring them back to their original historic appearance.

The Lantern Room had all non-historic materials removed exposing the original tin ceiling and vent. All the original interior and exterior surfaces were cleaned, repaired, and repainted and new 3/8" tempered glass panels were installed in the original openings. The most unique change was the removal of the wood floor that was added in the 1940s. With the floor removed, visitors now can see into the Lantern Room from the Watch Room below.

In the Watch Room, much-needed repairs were done to the interior brick walls using the correct mortar and then a special masonry coating was applied. Ventilation ports were cleaned out and the historic brass louvers were restored to function properly, which are crucial to air circulation. The iron flooring, ceiling, and ladder to the Lantern Room were stabilized, repaired, and repainted to restore their 1930's appearance.

The landing below the Watch Room had extensive repairs made as well. A unique built-in storage cabinet was repaired and replica wood doors were made to match the original openings. The cabinet will securely

hold artifacts and replicas to enhance interpretation of the keeper's duties. Missing doors on the clock weight cavities were replicated and installed along with the missing weight slot shelf.

The project was made possible through grants from MLAP, awarded by MSHDA in the spring of 2021, and a local grant from the Friends of the Fort Gratiot Light with the remaining funds coming from the St. Clair County Park millage.

The Fort Gratiot Lighthouse is a historic structure. All work was done in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties" and with guidance from the State Historic Preservation Office.

Save the Date! SandFest Returns for 2023

The annual Blue Water SandFest will be held August 4-6 at the Fort Gratiot Light Station. As Michigan's first master and amateur sand sculpting competition and festival, the event raises money each year for the restoration of the Fort Gratiot Light Station. This year's event will include master and amateur sand sculpting competitions, sand sculpting demonstrations and lessons, kid's zone, food trucks, beer garden, live music, and corn-hole tournament.



Wadhams to Avoca Trail

Volunteers Needed!

St. Clair County Parks has a large network of trails and parks, and we are always looking for dedicated volunteers who want to make a difference.

County Parks is currently accepting applications for our Adopt-a-Trail Program. We have two available openings for groups that want to help keep our Wadhams to Avoca Trail beautiful. The volunteer groups will be responsible for two clean-ups a year (Spring and Fall). Sections available vary in length. For more information on how to apply, contact the parks office at (810) 989-6960.



Save the Date - Trek the Trestle 2023

September 4th at 9:00 a.m. - Labor Day

This annual 5-mile walking event, hosted by St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission, is held each Labor Day. The walk starts at the Wadhams to Avoca Trailhead on Avoca Rd. (M-136) in Avoca. As part of the event, participants cross the 640ft. Mill Creek trestle, the longest bridge of its kind in the state of Michigan. For more information about the Labor Day Trestle Walk, call (810) 989-6960 or visit St. Clair County Parks on the web at www.stclaircountyparks.org.



Woodsong County Park

Mountain Bike Trails Progress

If you're looking for a more adventurous ride Woodsong County Park trails are for you. In 2022 trails were improved adding more thrills to the unique 44.5-acre park. Advanced riders will experience breathtaking views as they travel through forested areas and steep valleys along the Black River. It's sure to be an exhilarating ride for the mountain biker enthusiast.

The Bluewater Trail Advocates (BTA) continue to be a great asset to St. Clair County Parks and the community, with their support in promoting dirt and paved trail access in St. Clair County. They have been a tremendous help, volunteering hundreds of hours building and maintaining new and existing trails, and expanding the local trail network. *Thank you BTA!*



Upcoming Events

**St. Clair County
4-H & Youth Fair**

July 17-22
Goodells County Park
stclaircounty4hfair.org

Blue Water Sand Fest

Aug 4-6
Fort Gratiot Light Station
County Park
www.bluewatersandfest.com

**St. Clair County Farm
Museum - Harvest Days**

Aug 25-27
Goodells County Park
stclaircountyfarmmuseum.org

**St. Clair Kennel Club
Dog Show**

Sept 15-17
Goodells County Park
www.stclairkc.org

**BlueChiliGrass Festival
Music & Food**

Sept 30
Goodells County Park
www.facebook.com/LakeBonisteelMusic



St. Clair County Parks & Recreation Commission
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 Goodells, MI 48027
 Telephone (810) 989-6960

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We've Gone Digital!

You can now get updates on news and events by signing up for St. Clair County Park's monthly E-Blast

Scan the QR code or visit the link to sign up!

<https://tinyurl.com/SCCParksNews>



SUMMER PARK HOURS

Fort Gratiot & Columbus County Park - Memorial Day through Labor Day from 8 am - 9 pm

Goodells County Park - April through October 8 am - 10 pm

Blue Water River Walk, Fort Gratiot Light Station & Woodsong County Parks are open dawn to dusk year round



Check Out St. Clair County Park's New Website!

www.stclaircountyparks.org

We are on Facebook & Instagram!

Search St. Clair County Parks

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commissioners

- John CooperChair
- Timothy LaLonde Vice-Chair
- Melissa Hanners Secretary
- William Foster Commissioner
- Mary Clark Commissioner
- Geoffry Kusch Commissioner
- Peter Leto Commissioner
- Cindy Babisz Commissioner
- Steve Simasko Commissioner
- Robert Wiley Commissioner

Parks and Recreation Staff

- Dennis C. Delor Director
- Brad Brenske Deputy Director - Projects
- Kelly Gardner Office Coordinator
- Debbie O'Neill Office Coordinator
- Jennifer Catanzaro ...Clerk II-Marketing Specialist
- Kirsten Lyons..... Park Naturalist - Invasive Species Specialist

A Progress Report is published by St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission

Questions? Email us at countyparks@stclaircounty.org