

ELKHART COUNTY PARKS

FALL / WINTER '23/24

# COMPASS

GUIDE



RIVER  
PRESERVE

BOOT  
LAKE

OX  
BOW

COBUS  
CREEK

CORSON  
RIVERWOODS

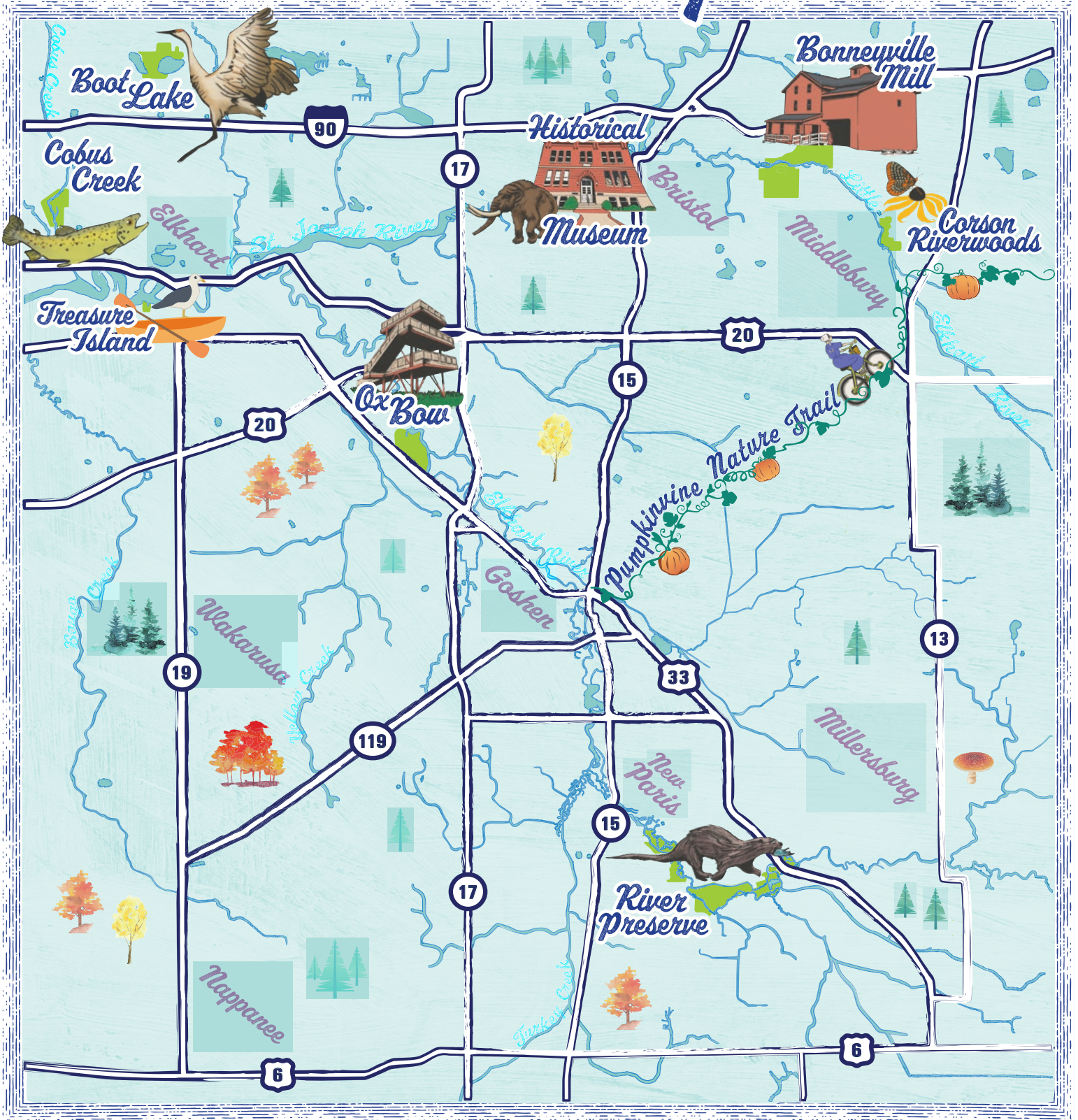
BONNEYVILLE  
MILL

PUMPKINVINE  
NATURE TRAIL

HISTORICAL  
MUSEUM



# EXPLORE THE *Elkhart County Parks*







## Ox Bow

23033 C.R.45 • GOSHEN, IN

ACRES: 200



PLAN  
YOUR  
VISIT



## HOURS

[ SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE ]

NOTE: BOOT LAKE NATURE PRESERVE  
CLOSES 1 HR BEFORE ALL OTHER PARKS

### JAN / FEB / NOV / DEC

9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### MAR / OCT

9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

### APR / SEPT

9 a.m. – 8 p.m.

### MAY / JUN / JUL / AUG

9 a.m. – 9 p.m.



## OFFICE

[ CLOSED WEEKENDS + COUNTY HOLIDAYS ]



### MON-FRI

8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.



### LOCATION

211 W. Lincoln Avenue  
Goshen, IN 46526-3280



### PHONE

574-535-6458



## TRAIL INFO

ELKHART  
COUNTY  
PARKS  
.ORG



## Bonneyville Mill

53373 C.R. 131 • BRISTOL, IN

ACRES: 222



## River Preserve

17477 C.R. 46 • NEW PARIS, IN

ACRES: 358



## Boot Lake

51430 C.R. 3 • ELKHART, IN

ACRES: 300



## Cobus Creek

30680 C.R. 8 • ELKHART, IN

ACRES: 84



## Pumpkinvine Nature Trail

COUNTY-WIDE • SEE WEBSITE FOR ACCESS POINTS

MILES: 16.5



## Elkhart County Historical Museum

304 W. VISTULA ST. • BRISTOL, IN

🕒 TUES-SAT • 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.



## Treasure Island

56226 ARMOUR AVE. • ELKHART, IN

ACRES: 4



## Corson Riverwoods

MIDDLEBURY, IN

ACRES: 81.5





# Our Mission

INSPIRING CONNECTIONS with **CULTURE** and **NATURE**

## ELKHART COUNTY PARKS

211 W. Lincoln Ave.  
Goshen, IN 46526-3280

**PHONE** / 574-535-6458

**FAX** / 574-535-6616

**TDD** / 574-535-6420

**WEBSITE** / [elkhartcountyparks.org](http://elkhartcountyparks.org)

**EMAIL** / [parksinfo@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:parksinfo@elkhartcounty.com)

**DIRECTOR** / Ronda DeCaire

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PARK**

**OPERATIONS** / Bernard J. Cunningham IV

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF INTERPRETIVE SERVICES** / Donny Aleo

## ELKHART COUNTY PARK BOARD

**PRESIDENT** / Klaus Mueller

**VICE PRESIDENT** / Karin Frey

**SECRETARY** / Karen Mackowiak

**MEMBERS** / Robert Kelly, Larry Andrews, John Hardy, & Will Wilson

## ELKHART COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBERS

**DISTRICT 1** / Douglas S. Graham

**DISTRICT 2** / Randall D. Yohn

**DISTRICT 3** / Darryl J. Riegsecker

**DISTRICT 4** / David L. Hess

**AT LARGE** / Adam Bujalski

**AT LARGE** / Thomas Stump

**AT LARGE** / Steven Clark

## ELKHART COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

**PRESIDENT** / Brad Rogers

**VICE PRESIDENT** / Suzie Weirick

**MEMBER** / Bob Barnes

## FRIENDS OF THE ELKHART COUNTY PARKS

**MEMBERS** / Judy Ferrell, Larry Ford, Patricia Frank, Kay Bontrager-Singer

## ELKHART COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**PRESIDENT** / Lloyd Miller

**VICE PRESIDENT** / Wayne Stubbs

**TREASURER** / Kim Clarke

**SECRETARY** / David Bird

## CONNECT WITH US!

[elkhartcountyparks.org](http://elkhartcountyparks.org)

[f](#) [i](#) [@elkhartcountyparks](#)

## PRODUCTION TEAM

**EDITORS** / Donny Aleo, Annie Aguirre, Krista Daniels, Marlene Lantzer, Julie Parke

**CONTRIBUTORS** / Ronda DeCaire & Andy Langdon

**CREATIVE DESIGN** / Annie Aguirre

THE COMPASS NEWSLETTER IS A BIENNIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ELKHART COUNTY PARKS.



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ON THE COVER / SANDHILL CRANES / PHOTO BY DANIEL WAUGH



Greetings  
from the

# ELKHART COUNTY PARKS

The end of the year is a good time to reminisce about positive happenings in 2023. At the Elkhart County Parks we are most thankful for all of the partnerships that help us through the seasons by sponsoring projects, supporting our cause, and revitalizing some of the many loved public spaces.



Some of our long-term partners have been our 'friends' for decades and include the Friends of the Pumpkinvine, Friends of the Elkhart County Parks, Elkhart County Historical Society, Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association as well as various other Elkhart County Departments, Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Community Foundation of Elkhart County.

Some of our partners prefer to 'get their hands dirty' and those include the Indiana Master Naturalists and Michiana Master Gardeners who help volunteer in our parks in various ways. We have other partners too numerous to mention who help with projects, programs, and special events as we support each other. We thank each and every one of you who make the Elkhart County Parks and facilities a better place for our community.

In this issue, we will highlight some of the major projects accomplished at Ox Bow County Park this past year with the help of a few of our partners!

Sincerely, *Ronda*  
RONDA DECAIRE  
DIRECTOR OF PARKS



## Post Card



### Boardwalk for Wetland Education

The Elkhart County Parks replaced its decades-old wooden wetland education boardwalk with a new floating system at Ox Bow County Park. Each year, thousands of visitors use the area behind Cottonwood Shelter to experience wetlands first hand. School children, birders, photographers, and hikers immerse themselves in the natural beauty of Cattails, Blue Flag Iris, and Red-osier Dogwoods.

Supporters of this project included a major grant from the Community Foundation of Elkhart County, and donations in memory of Catherine Metzger and Andrew Drolet. With the completion of this project we can ensure that visitors will be able to experience the wonders of wetlands for years to come with the sounds of Common Yellowthroat, Spring Peepers, and trickling water.



# FALL COLOR COLLECTION

As summer winds down, fall forests move into party mode with a kaleidoscope of colors. Catch the color show for yourself with this creative outdoor activity.

## What you'll need:



Leaves



Extra Large Freezer Bag

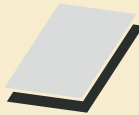


Craft Glue (Gloss Type)



Contact Paper (aka Shelf Liner)

—or—



Large Sheet of Paper (Poster Size)



Foam Brush (to spread glue)



Wax Paper + Iron



## Step 1: Gather Your Leaves

- ➔ At your leafy location, gather a large mix of leaves in as many colors and shapes as you can find. The more variety, the better!

## Step 2: Arrange Your Leaves

- ➔ Set the poster paper on the ground (weighed down, in case it gets windy), and arrange the leaves for your collage.

## Fun Collage Ideas:



Make a Rainbow or Color Gradient

### Sort by Size or Shape



Alternate Light & Dark Colors



## Bonus Challenges: (as you find leaves)

### For the Color Coordinator



Match the Paint Palettes

See how many colors in nature you can match using a mix of different paint palettes (free at local hardware stores).

## Step 3: Snap Pics & Pack Up

- ➔ Once the leaves are arranged to your liking, snap a few photos for reference (and memories), then gently place the leaves in a large freezer bag for transport home.

## Step 4: Prep Your Collection

- ➔ Spread the leaves onto a sheet of wax paper. If any are wet, dab dry with a paper towel to prevent them from wrinkling.
- ➔ Brush craft glue onto one side and allow leaves to dry.
- ➔ Flip the leaves over and brush a coat onto the backside. Let dry.

### For the Aspiring Arborist



I.D. the Tree

Bring a tree field guide along (or use a plant I.D. app like iNaturalist or PlantSnap) and label your leaves with the type of tree they came from.

## How to Preserve

### Option 1

#### [ Wax Paper + Iron ]

- ➔ 1) Arrange the dried leaves on wax paper the same way you did out in the field (this is where your phone pics come in handy).
- ➔ 2) Set another sheet of wax paper over the leaves.
- ➔ 3) Place a piece of newsprint or thick paper under and over the wax paper-leaf sandwich.
- ➔ 4) Iron on high to melt the wax and fuse the wax paper and leaves together.
- ➔ 5) Hang to dry and enjoy!

### Option 2

#### [ Contact Paper ]

- ➔ 1) Cut off a rectangular piece of contact paper. Fold it in half, then pull the paper covering off to the fold, exposing half of the sticky plastic.
- ➔ 2) Using your phone pic as reference, gently place leaves in the same arrangement as before onto the sticky contact paper and press to adhere.
- ➔ 3) Once the leaves are all added, remove the rest of the paper backing from the contact paper.
- ➔ 4) Carefully fold it over the leaves, sandwiching them in-between the two layers of plastic, and press down, avoiding air bubbles, if possible.
- ➔ 5) Hang in a sunny window and enjoy!



# ACTOBER

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**WORLD MUSHROOM DAY**  
GO SEE WHAT FUNGY FUNGI YOU CAN FIND OUT IN YOUR LOCAL WOODS.

**WORLD HABITAT DAY**  
WHAT THINGS IN YOUR HABITAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR TODAY?

**NATURE NUTS: PUMPKINS**

**WED. BIRD WALK**

**WORLD TEACHERS DAY**  
MUCH LOVE TO ALL OUR HARD-WORKING EDUCATORS!

**PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

**FALL PLANT EXCHANGE**

8

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**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY**  
DISCOVER OUR CROSS-CULTURAL HISTORY AT THE MUSEUM.

**WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY**  
LIFE'S MESSY. REMEMBER TO GO EASY ON YOURSELF AND OTHERS.

**OPEN HOUSE AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE**

**HISTORY DETECTIVES**

**DOG WALK**

**OWL PROWL**

**FAMILY FUN WITH SCIENCE**

15

16

17

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21

**NATIONAL MUSHROOM DAY**  
GO SEE WHAT FUNGY FUNGI YOU CAN FIND OUT IN YOUR LOCAL WOODS.

**TRAIL TREKKERS: BEAVERS**

**HIKING CLUB**

**INTERNATIONAL ARTIST DAY**  
SUPPORT NATURE ARTISTS AND FIND SOMETHING THAT INSPIRES YOU.

**OWL PROWL**

**VOLUNTEER DAY**

**FAMILY FUN WITH SCIENCE**

22

23

24

25

26

28

29

**NATIONAL COLOR DAY**  
MAKE COLORFUL ART OR FIND YOUR FAVORITE COLOR ON A NATURE WALK.

**INTERNATIONAL ARTIST DAY**  
SUPPORT NATURE ARTISTS AND FIND SOMETHING THAT INSPIRES YOU.

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**INTERNATIONAL ARTIST DAY**  
SUPPORT NATURE ARTISTS AND FIND SOMETHING THAT INSPIRES YOU.

**HALLOWEEN CAMPFIRE & HAYRIDE**

**HALLOWEEN CAMPFIRE & HAYRIDE**

29

30

31

HALLOWEEN

REGISTER ONLINE





# NOVEMBER

sun

mon

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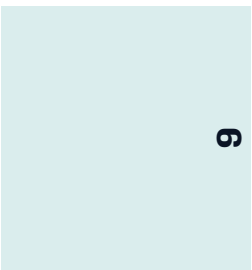
REGISTER  
ONLINE



5

DAYLIGHT  
SAVINGS  
ENDS  
ENJOY 1 HOUR  
OF EXTRA SLEEP  
(BEGINS AT 2 A.M.)

6



7



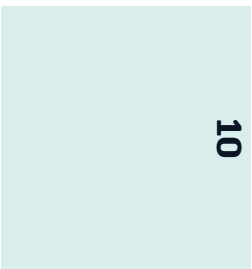
8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15

STEVE  
IRWIN DAY  
WATCH AN EPISODE  
OF CROCODILE  
HUNTER TO HONOR  
THE BELOVED  
NATURALIST.

16



17

NATIONAL  
TAKE A  
HIKE DAY  
KICK YOUR CABIN  
FEVER WITH A BRISK  
HIKE OUTDOORS.

18



19

NATIONAL  
CAMP DAY  
THE HOLIDAYS ARE A  
PERFECT EXCUSE FOR  
A END-OF-SEASON  
CAMPING TRIP!

20



21



22



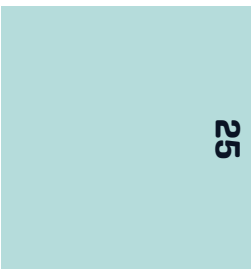
23

THANKSGIVING  
DAY

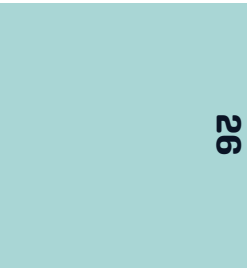
24



25



26



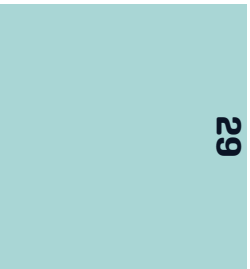
27

FULL  
MOON  
BEAVER MOON

28



29



30



Blank space for event information on Friday.

Blank space for event information on Saturday.



# DECEMBER

sun

mon

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**REGISTER  
ONLINE**



**3**  
**HOMEMADE  
CINNAMON ROLLS**

**4**  
WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION DAY  
VISIT THE DNR  
WEBSITE TO SEE A  
LIST OF PROTECTED  
SPECIES FOR INDIANA.



**5**  
**NATURE NUTS:  
OWLS**



**6**  
**WED. BIRD  
WALK**

**NATURE  
NUTS**

**7**



**1**  
**SANDHILL  
CRANE HIKE**



**8**  
**BEAVERS**

**HISTORY  
DETECTIVES**

**10**



**11**  
**BACKYARD  
MAMMALS**

**12**  
NEW  
MOON  
(6:32 PM)

**13**  
NATIONAL  
COCOA DAY  
WARM UP BY  
THE FIRE WITH  
A COZY CUP OF  
COCOA. YUM!

**14**  
GEMINID  
METEOR  
SHOWER  
PEAKS THE 14<sup>TH</sup>  
THRU TONIGHT.

**15**

**16**

**17**



**18**  
**TRAILTREKKERS:  
FEEDER BIRDS**



**19**  
**ILLUMINATED  
TRAILHIKE**

**20**

**21**

**22**

**23**  
WINTER  
SOLSTICE  
ENJOY THE  
SHORTEST DAY OF  
THE YEAR AND THE  
START OF WINTER.

**24**

**25**  
MERRY  
CHRISTMAS!

**26**  
FULL  
MOON  
COLD MOON

**27**

**28**

**29**



**30**  
**CHRISTMAS  
BIRD COUNT**

**31**



# JANUARY

sun

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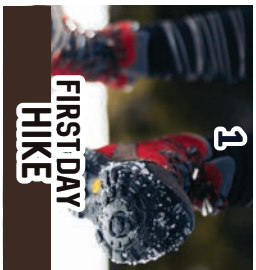
wed

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7  
**OLD ROCK DAY**  
CELEBRATE THE EARTH'S INCREDIBLE GEOLOGICAL HISTORY BY FINDING A COOL OLD ROCK TO ADD TO YOUR NATURE COLLECTION.



1  
**FIRST DAY HIKE**

2



3  
**WEDNESDAY BIRD WALK**

4  
**QUADRANTID METEOR SHOWER**  
PEAKS THE 3<sup>rd</sup> THROUGH THE 4<sup>th</sup>

5



6  
**CROSSROADS GUIDED TOUR**

7  
**OLD ROCK DAY**  
CELEBRATE THE EARTH'S INCREDIBLE GEOLOGICAL HISTORY BY FINDING A COOL OLD ROCK TO ADD TO YOUR NATURE COLLECTION.

8



9  
**NATURE NUTS: WOODPECKERS**



10  
**NATURE NUTS: WOODPECKERS**

11



12  
**PHOTO CONTEST**



13  
**GUIDED TOUR WINTER ASTRONOMY**

14  
**INTERNATIONAL KITE DAY**  
BRING SOME FUN COLOR TO THE SKY AND GO FLY A KITE. OX BOW'S OPEN FIELDS ARE PERFECT FOR IT!

15  
**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY**

16

17  
**MUSEUM SELFIE DAY**  
WHY NOT SWING BY THE MUSEUM AND SNAP A FEW SELFIE SHOTS?

18

19



20  
**RECIPE SHARE DAY GUIDED TOUR**

21  
**NATIONAL SQUIRREL APPRECIATION DAY**  
GO NUTS AND LEAVE SOME SNACKS BY THE FEEDERS FOR OUR BUSHY-TAILED FRIENDS.



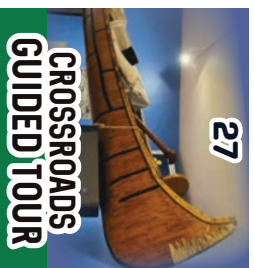
22  
**TRAIL TREKKERS: SCAT**

23

24  
**OBSERVE THE WEATHER DAY**  
CHECK OUT A WEATHER-WATCHING FIELD GUIDE TO GAIN SOME INSIGHT ON OUR SKIES.

25  
**FULL MOON WOLF MOON**

26



27  
**CROSSROADS GUIDED TOUR**

28



29  
**BIRD BEAKS 101**

30

31



**REGISTER ONLINE**





# FEBRUARY

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**REGISTER  
ONLINE**



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ABRAHAM  
LINCOLN'S  
BIRTHDAY

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MARDI GRAS

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VALENTINE'S  
DAY

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<p>1</p> <p>NATIONAL SERPENT DAY</p> <p>THEY'RE SLINKY, SLIPPERY, SURPRISING, AND IN SPEEDY DECLINE. BE KIND IF YOU CROSS PATHS WITH A SNAKE.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>OWL NESTBOX WORKSHOP</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>CROSSCOUNTRY SKIING</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>NATURE NUTS: HIBERNATION</p>
<p>11</p> <p>ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13</p> <p>MARDI GRAS</p>
<p>18</p>	<p>19</p>  <p>TRAIL TREKKERS: WINTER WALK</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27</p>
<p>1</p> <p>NATIONAL SERPENT DAY</p> <p>THEY'RE SLINKY, SLIPPERY, SURPRISING, AND IN SPEEDY DECLINE. BE KIND IF YOU CROSS PATHS WITH A SNAKE.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>OWL NESTBOX WORKSHOP</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>CROSSCOUNTRY SKIING</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>9</p>  <p>PHOTOGRAPHS &amp; LOCAL HISTORY</p>	<p>10</p>  <p>SURVIVAL: FIRE MAKING</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>16</p>  <p>OWL NESTBOX WORKSHOP</p>	<p>17</p>
<p>22</p>  <p>D.I.Y. BIRD SUET</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>  <p>MAPLE SYRUP MAKING</p>
<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31</p>



# MARCH

sun

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sat



## REGISTER ONLINE



1



2

3  
**WORLD WILDLIFE DAY**  
SPEND SOME TIME OUTSIDE FINDING SOME OF YOUR LOCAL WILDLIFE.

4



7  
**WORLD BOOK DAY**  
RELAX AND CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK BY THE FIRE.

8  
**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**  
FROM THE STUDIES OF JANE GOODALL TO THE LITERATURE OF GENE STRATTON-PORTER, CELEBRATE WOMEN FROM PAST AND PRESENT.



9

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12  
**PLANT A FLOWER DAY**  
WITH SPRING AROUND THE CORNER, TODAY IS THE DAY TO START PLANTING.

13

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# ASK A NATURALIST

( WINTER WILDLIFE )

• BY KRISTA DANIELS, INTERPRETIVE NATURALIST •

## **Q** Why is there a bluebird at my feeder? Don't they fly south for the winter?

**A** There are many species of birds that migrate or fly south for the winter, but the Eastern Bluebird is not always one of them. Many of our bluebirds in Indiana are permanent residents and will stick around even in the winter. There are some bluebirds that come north to Indiana for the spring and summer and return south for the winter, but our resident bluebirds typically stick around all winter long. They switch their diet from insects to seeds and berries, unless they happen upon a backyard feeder full of tasty mealworms.

## **Q** Where do the turtles go in the winter?

**A** Turtles will bury themselves deep in the mud at the bottom of a pond, where their body function and metabolism drastically slow down, and where they won't freeze. Amazingly, even underwater, they are able to get just enough oxygen through gas exchange near their throat and tail. Another amazing thing is that they don't actually hibernate – they are awake and conscious of everything around them in this state – just very, very slow. When the temperatures rise, they warm up and can sometimes be seen basking in the winter sun before retreating back into the mud as the sun goes down.

## **Q** Do groundhogs actually come out on Groundhog's Day?

**A** In early February, groundhogs in Indiana are still in hibernation. However, if the weather is mild, it is possible to see a male groundhog out and active on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. He is not looking for his shadow, however. He is looking for females, so he is preparing for mating season, which typically begins in late February or March.

## **Q** I have a hornet's nest in a tree in my backyard. When is it safe to remove it?

**A** The best time to remove an old hive is after a good, hard freeze or just wait until winter is over, then take it down. The queen hornet will vacate the hive in the fall and no remaining hornets will survive through the winter. The hornets will not reuse an old hive – the queen will begin a new hive the following spring.



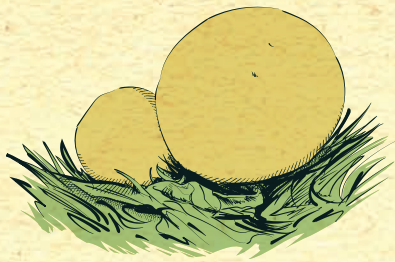
### HAVE A NATURE QUESTION?

SHOOT US AN EMAIL AT  
[PARKSINFO@ELKHARTCOUNTY.COM](mailto:PARKSINFO@ELKHARTCOUNTY.COM)



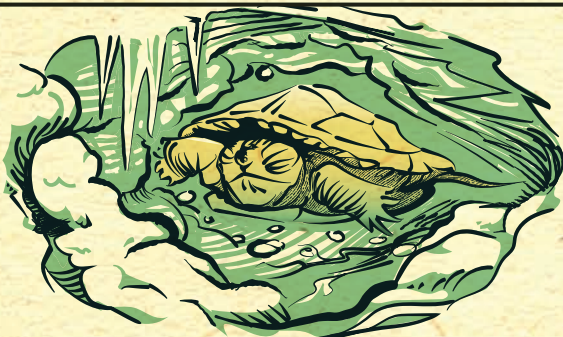
# NATURALIST'S CHALLENGE

BY ANDY LANGDON  
INTERPRETIVE NATURALIST



## OCTOBER

This month, look for **PUFFBALLS!** These mushrooms may be small as a marble or as large as a basketball. Puffballs expel their spores like a puff of smoke with a gentle squeeze. Puffballs may contain seven trillion spores, so many in fact that if every spore survived to be an adult it would only take two generations to produce a mass equal to 800 times that of the earth.



## DECEMBER

**PAINTED TURTLE HATCHLINGS** may spend the winter in the ground where they freeze but will emerge the following spring as their body cells are encased with ice but the cells themselves don't freeze. They have no heartbeat, blood flow and very little brain activity. Believe it or not, they emerge the following spring!



## JANUARY

January is a fun time to view the **CONSTELLATIONS.** The stars appear brighter in winter than any other time of year. How many constellations can you count? Can you find Orion the Hunter? Taurus the Bull? The Pleiades, Cassiopeia, Ursa Major, Canis Major, Sirius the dog star? Hint: It's the brightest star in the sky!

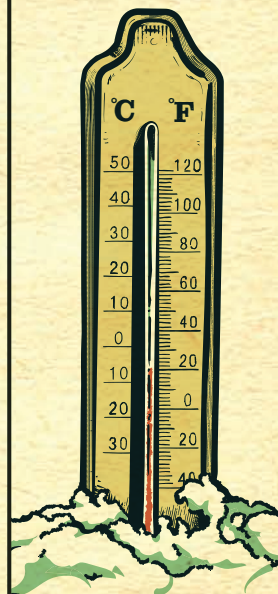


## NOVEMBER

Now that the leaves have fallen, look for the **PILEATED WOODPECKER** or old dead trees that he/she have excavated! Their main diet is Carpenter ants, wood boring beetles, termites, and caterpillars. The 10 to 24-inch holes they make in trees make excellent homes for many animals including: insects, birds, squirrels, and bats.

## FEBRUARY

A fun educational activity to do on a cold winter's day is to measure the **SNOW TEMPERATURE.** Find out how cold the air is outside, then measure the snow one inch from the surface. One study showed the outside air at 9° F., but the snow surface temperature measured 11° F., and 8 inches further down was 25° F. Two feet under the snow was 34° F. Keep in mind this is a dry powdery snow and is 90% air.







## RECIPE

### A PERFECT WINTER HIKE

[ SERVES 1 ]

- 1 Portion of River Preserve County Park
- 1-2 Trails to Explore
- 1 Set of Directions to Hiking Spot (See GPS Coordinates on Left)
- 45-60+ Minutes (2 Hours Before Sunset)
- A Pinch of Spare Time (It Never Hurts, Right?)
- A Dash of Knowledge of Park Hours (See Pg. 3)
- 5-10 Cool Things to Spot (See Ideas on Left)
- 3 Winter-Ready Layers
- 1 Pair of Hiking Boots & Socks (Pre-Combined)
- 1 Pair of Gloves or Mittens (Optional: Touchscreen-Capable for Taking Pics of Cool Finds)
- 1 Cozy Winter Hat
- 1 Scarf or Neck Gaiter
- 2 Hand Warmers (Pre-warmed)
- 1 Outdoor-Ready Self (Also Pre-warmed)
- Optional:
  - › Hiking Buddy
  - › Appreciation for Nature
  - › Sense of Adventure
  - › Room for Memories
  - › 5-10+ Moments of Inner-Peace to Experience on Hike

[ DIRECTIONS ]

- ▶ On a cool winter's day, visit your chosen location at River Preserve County Park.
- ▶ Combine all ingredients and enjoy your perfect winter hike!



# WINTER WALKS AT RIVER PRESERVE

*Winter is upon us, and with dark days and colder temps, it's tempting to hunker down and hibernate. But winter offers its own kind of wonder. From hidden ruins to adorable otters, here are some unique experiences at River Preserve that will have you ready to bundle up and head out the door.*

BY ANNIE AGUIRRE, MARKETING COORDINATOR

## DEFRIES GARDENS



While spring and summer bring hundreds of visitors, the quiet solitude of DeFries has its own kind of magic. Dig a little deeper into the tranquil beauty of the gardens exploring the hidden sights and sounds found within.

GPS: 41.5008, -85.7979

- ➔ In the prairie, pick apart a few flowerheads and breathe in their aromatic scents. Wild Bergamot smells and tastes nearly identical to Oregano, and Gray Coneflower gives off a spicy citrus scent.
- ➔ At the Dam, look along the bank for eye-catching stones. Bright jasper, small geodes, flintstone, and fossilized coral are all treasures waiting to be found for the slow-and-steady rockhoulder.
- ➔ If time, explore the wetland trail tucked in the NE corner of the woods beyond the dam. In these quiet waters hidden amongst the reeds, you may spot secretive waterbirds, such as cranes, herons, and a variety of wintering ducks.

## BANTERTOWN DAM



A quick jaunt off C.R. 142, Baintertown Dam and adjacent prairie wetland make for a peaceful walk. Combine the 0.25-mile out-and-back canal trail and 0.75-mile loop around the wetland ponds for the best chances of glimpsing wildlife.

GPS: 41.5175, -85.8131

- ➔ By the parking lot, observe birds at the feeder station. The colder the day, the more activity you're likely to see. Arrive early for a chance to see Wild Turkeys.
- ➔ Listen for the soft hoots and nasally barks of Great Horned Owls near the river. They are most vocal this time of year as pairs form bonds and begin to nest.
- ➔ Enter the Calendar Garden. As you walk around the circular path, pause at the brick marking the date of your visit. Notice the subtle changes in the seasons reflected in the plants that surround you.

## BENTON DAM

Changing riverside landscapes deliver a hefty dose of Vitamin D along this 1.3-mile loop. Park at the Spillway lot across the street, grab a map, then cross over to the prairie trailhead.



GPS: 41.5012, -85.7694

- ➔ Pick up a map at the parking lot kiosk to help guide your way, then start along the canal trail. As you walk, notice the diversity of wetland plants and seedpods, and all the curious forms they take.
- ➔ As you near the dam, look to the ground for belly slides, tail drags, and footprints from playful and active River Otter who call the park home.
- ➔ Cross C.R. 142 to continue on to the prairie/wetland trail loop. Watch the edges of the ponds for signs of Beavers, and their own version of the Baintertown Dam.





# RVIA MAKES IMPRESSION

BY RONDA DECAIRE, DIRECTOR

## OX BOW COUNTY PARK

This past May, the RV Industry Associations' Emerging Leaders Coalition worked with the Elkhart County Parks staff to coordinate the Second Annual All-Industry Volunteer Day. In 2023, they chose Ox Bow County Park to make vast improvements.

More than 400 volunteers dedicated their time and effort to assist with a diverse range of projects involving every skill from painting to engineering. Large projects ranged from refurbishing the tower, a new metal roof on the chapel, siding replaced on the restrooms, and the building of boardwalks and stairwells. Hands-on projects included painting shelter pillars, pouring concrete for disc golf tee pads, mulching playgrounds, building picnic tables, litter pickup, and invasive species removal.







The volunteers from across the RV industry worked harmoniously to uplift the community and improve the park's natural beauty. Their impact on the park in one day was an amazing show of hard work and dedication to give back to a local greenspace. With more than 250,000 visitors per year, Ox Bow County Park is well-loved. These much needed improvements were appreciated by not only the staff, but the many visitors.

We especially thank the leaders from Lippert, Forest River, and Patrick Industries for sharing their skills and expertise with these projects as well as the many donations and sponsorships of materials to accomplish each task. Local parks connect people to the outdoors, creating the next generation of RV builders and buyers!





# THE JACK COOPER STORY

BY MUSEUM STAFF

FROM time to time, an object in a Museum's collection is so much more than the artifact itself. Jack Cooper's wallet is just such an object. Every time it is discussed, it moves the museum staff. The wallet, a simple rectangle of leather, metal, and plastic, conveys the heroism of war, the fears of a young soldier, the desperation of survival at sea, the love for family and a fiancée at home, and, finally, the heartbreaking acceptance that the end is near, that rescue isn't coming.

Jack H.W. Cooper was born in Detroit in 1921. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Elkhart. He graduated from Elkhart High School in 1940. Cooper enlisted in the US Navy Reserves in 1942 and was trained as an Aviation Radio Airmen & Gunner. He served aboard the *U.S.S. Hornet* and later the *U.S.S. Essex*, joining the Naval Task Force 58 in the Pacific Theater.

On June 20, 1944, while participating in a dangerous strike against a heavily defended airfield on Iwo Jima, Cooper's torpedo plane, the *TBF Avenger*, was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The three-man crew continued their bombing and strafing runs, but they ultimately were forced down in the heavy seas near the Japanese-held island. Other squadron aircraft observed all three men leave the plane and enter the emergency life raft. The high winds and very rough seas made any rescue operations impossible. We know what happened to Jack Cooper while in that life raft, because we have his



own thoughts and words. With a safety pin, Cooper etched a diary into the leather and plastic sleeves of his wallet.

THOSE ENTRIES INCLUDE:

[ July 6 (Inferred) ] Piece Of Shrapnel In Compass Case Hit Our Plane

[ Undated ] No Rain for Two Weeks

[ July 13 ] Very Weak - Loss Of Blood - No Land In Sight

On July 21, 1944, the *U.S.S. Tinosa*, a submarine, picked Jack Cooper up on the life raft, nearly a month after the plane went down. They estimated he died four or five days earlier. The crew wrapped his body in a sheet and had a short ceremony before letting his body sink into the ocean for a burial at sea. One of the crew recovered his wallet and held on to it to after the war. Spaulding Settle, who participated in Cooper's burial, came to Elkhart in 1945 to return the wallet, as well as the prayer book he used in the ceremony.

Jack Cooper posthumously received several awards including the Purple Heart and the Indiana Distinguished Medal. His story was featured in major media outlets including the *Washington Post*, *New York Daily News*, and *Time Magazine*. His family even received letters from people across the world letting them know how Cooper's story touched them. In 2014, the family donated the wallet and related materials to protect in the museum's collection.

*Adapted in part from a letter written to the Military Department of Indiana by Cooper's half-brother, Robert E. Anderson.*

[ July 8 ]

- Weak - Git & Sterling Nearly Gone - Cant Catch Fish - No Rain - Love To Big Eyes [ Fiancée Helen ]

[ July 12 ]

- Little Cloudy - No Planes - No Land - Headed N - Pm Jap Nell [ Japanese Type Aircraft ] Saw Me - Strafed - Hit Me In Both Legs - Bandaged Them - Drifting E

[ July 13 ]

- Very Weak - Loss Of Blood - No Land In Sight - No Food Since 4th - 6 Ounces Of Water Left - Going East

[ July 14 ]

- Caught One Small Fish Last Pm - Very Weak - Wont Last Over Today - Plenty Fish But Cant Sit Up - Very Light Breeze Se - If This Is My Last On - Tell My Big Eyes To Be Happy With Some One Else - Ive Always Loved Her - Love Kisses - Same For You Mom And And All - Im Back On Salt Water - God Bless You All



# PHOTO CONTEST

## BEST OF SHOW

JARED PIERCE  
*"ISOLATION,  
 CYCLES OF LIFE"*

Our 43<sup>rd</sup> annual photo contest received a total of 129 entries. We had some incredibly talented photographers share their work, including Jared Pierce, who won *Best of Show* with his aerial view of a tree canopy ablaze in bright autumn colors. Big thanks to everyone who participated! Keep an eye on our website for announcements on the 2024 contest.



## 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE WINNERS

**NATURE OF THE PHOTO**  
 JOSHUA PETRILLO  
 "SUNSET OVER  
 THE SOYBEANS"

**EMPLOYEE**  
 DALA BRUMMER  
 "MONARCH  
 BLOOM"

◀ **ACTIVITIES  
 IN THE PARK**  
 ANDREW  
 WOHLFORD  
 "ON DAD'S  
 SHOULDERS"



**YOUTH**  
 JOHN RENNER  
 "UNTITLED"



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# LIFE OF A MILLER

## PRISCILLA HILE

**P**RICILLA HILE began volunteering under previous Miller, John Jenney, almost 13 years ago after a visit to the former gift shop during the Bonneyville Celebration. Priscilla soon moved from volunteer to seasonal employee because of her hard work and dedication. She lives in Millersburg, and is semi-retired and raising two grandchildren. Her son Jeff lives with her also. Priscilla has had jobs dealing with the public but this has been her favorite because of her co-workers and the people she meets from all around the world. She enjoys telling the story of Edward Bonney and his entertaining life, from milling, counterfeiting, to bounty hunting. Her triple great grandfather Benedict Miller was one of the many previous owners of Bonneyville Mill.

From Holmes County Ohio, Benedict improved the turbine after he bought the mill in 1864. A model of the turbine is somewhere in the family. In 1869 from bankruptcy or non-payment, the mill

was sold and he left for Oregon where he ran another mill. A barrel labeler made from wood with his and his son's initials is in the display case in the mill. A few of his descendants have visited the mill through the years.

One of Priscilla's most memorable group of visitors was from Sweden. She thinks she may now be famous in Sweden after a group of delightful Swedes visited the mill several years ago. Through an interpreter, Priscilla told and showed how the mill works and they even enjoyed cookies she had made from the mill flour. They took pictures of her (many of them) with the entire group saying everyone will be seeing her and the mill in their photos in Sweden. A good time was had by all, even Priscilla.

If you are a historical buff, Priscilla can point out the "historical wall" no one sees. It has a self-portrait of one of the past millers and happenings of the day written on it. Come visit the mill and enjoy the demonstration, history and perhaps a sample.

---

### Address

53373 C.R.131  
BRISTOL, IN

### Mill Hours

TUESDAY-SUNDAY  
10 A.M.-5 P.M.

APRIL 18  
-THRU-  
NOVEMBER 12

### Phone

574.825.9324

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**PRISCILLA HILE**



**THE MURAL PORTRAIT OF CORNELIUS**



# NEW STAFF SPOTLIGHT

WE HAVE SOME NEW FACES HERE AT THE PARKS! RECENTLY, WE CAUGHT UP WITH TWO OF OUR NEWEST STAFF TO GET TO KNOW THEM A LITTLE BETTER.



• JAKE METZLER •  
Public Safety Coordinator

## Name & Job Title:

Jake Metzler – Public Safety Coordinator

## Where are you from?

I grew up in Elkhart County in the Wakarusa area

## What do you enjoy most about your job?

There is so much to enjoy about working in the Elkhart County Parks system. The variety of day-to-day tasks makes me feel like there is never a dull moment. Whether it's patrolling park properties, interacting with the public, working on projects with other staff, or working events, there is always something new going on.

## What's your favorite park?

While there is much to love about each of our properties and each is unique in its own way, Bonneyville Mill is my current favorite. Bonneyville shows a unique blend of cultural and natural history which isn't found in many parks in this area. Our department is very fortunate to have the mill as a resource and a piece of living history, along with the surrounding property that provides so many recreation opportunities for the public.



• DENNIS A. RUSSELL •  
Park Services II

## Name & Job Title:

Dennis A. Russell – River Preserve Manager

## Where are you from?

I was born near Jackson Michigan and grew up in the Goshen area.

## What do you enjoy most about your job?

I like being close to nature and observing the four seasons.

## What's your favorite park?

I do love the county parks and this is actually a tough question for me, because each park is unique. If I had to pick one I would say Boot Lake is my favorite park because it has more native species and is less disturbed.

# 2 WAYS TO GIVE BACK



## FOR OUR FUTURE WITH THE PARKS



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# Reserve

 **Book Your Cozy Spot**  
[ELKHARTCOUNTYPARKS.ORG/RESERVE](http://ELKHARTCOUNTYPARKS.ORG/RESERVE)

## OX BOW

	TYPE	CAPACITY	OUTLETS	DEPOSIT	RATE
*OX BOW HAUS	ENCLOSED	50	✓	\$100	\$165
FISHERMAN'S CAMP	COVERED	75	✓		\$120
COFFEE TREE	COVERED	50			\$75
HONEY LOCUST	COVERED	75			\$95
BLACK MAPLE	COVERED	50			\$75
COTTONWOOD	COVERED	75	✓		\$125
STABLE	COVERED	110			\$125
RED PINES CAMPFIRE	OPEN AIR	50			\$25
HICKORY HILL CHAPEL	OPEN AIR	50			\$75

## COBUS CREEK

COBUS SHELTER	PARTIALLY ENCLOSED	100	✓	\$100	\$200
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## MUSEUM

AUDITORIUM	ENCLOSED	300	✓	\$250	\$350
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## BONNEYVILLE MILL

	TYPE	CAPACITY	OUTLETS	DEPOSIT	RATE
BALDWIN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE	ENCLOSED	35	✓	\$100	\$150
*BRIAR PATCH	PARTIALLY ENCLOSED	150	✓	\$100	\$120
FEEDLOT	COVERED	150	✓		\$150
MEADOW	COVERED	50			\$60
LOOKOUT	COVERED	50			\$60
KUM MOL RIE	COVERED	100			\$85

## RIVER PRESERVE

BAINERTOWN	COVERED	50			\$50
BENTON	COVERED	25			\$30
DEFRIES GARDENS [ WEDDING CEREMONIES ]	OPEN AIR	50		\$250	\$225

*FOR PARK INFORMATION AND HOURS, SEE PAGE 3*

*\* UNAVAILABLE DEC.1-MARCH 14*





**ELKHART COUNTY PARKS**  
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GOSHEN, IN 46526-3280  
✉️ [PARKSINFO@ELKHARTCOUNTY.COM](mailto:PARKSINFO@ELKHARTCOUNTY.COM)

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