



# Olmsted County Parks Quarterly

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Campfires at Chester Woods 2
- Volunteer Spotlight 2
- Oxbow Bridge Work 3
- Critter Catch-Up 4

## Pandemic Adaptations

As I reflect on the past year, I cannot help but recognize all the change and adaptations that took place. I somehow feel that a lot of these changes (adaptations) could have been made previously, however as human beings we become comfortable with our day to day lives and set in how we do things and change can become a little scary. I feel this pandemic forced us to make some of these changes, and quickly at that! Looking back here are some of the changes that were made, schools were forced to go online, folks were forced to remote work, workouts went from gyms to living rooms, restaurants forced to sell only take-out... The list goes on and on.

Of course, the reason behind all this change (a world-wide pandemic) is nothing to be cheerful about, but if there is a silver lining at all it is that people have realized what is important - family. What we have seen during this time of tragedy are immediate families spending more quality time together, and a lot of this time has been outdoors!

Our parks have been busier this past year with families enjoying the outdoors hiking, fishing, boating, camping, etc. than in many years' past! The abundance of new outdoor park users is absolutely astounding! I believe the pandemic drove people outdoors, whether it was lack of other opportunities, fresh air, or just to get away from the house, people flocked to their local parks. It is no secret that outdoor recreation equipment sales were up exponentially (you could not find a bike, kayak, or a pair of rollerblades to purchase this summer anywhere!)

As we continue to navigate through this pandemic and work our way back to whatever normal is going to be, I hope that one thing remains the same, people continue to enjoy their parks and keep that love of the outdoors growing, no matter what activity that means for them.

—Celeste Lewis

### Outdoor Recreation Equipment Sales Jumped during COVID-19



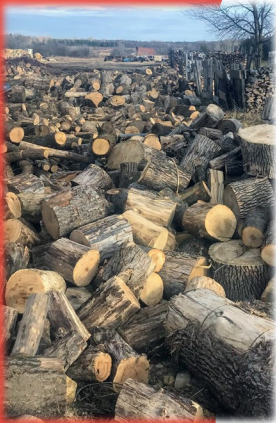
pennsylvania Percentage change in U.S. sales, March/April 2019 to March/April 2020. ©Pennsylvania M&D Growth Monitor Report

## FOX Update: Merchandise

We kept busy this fall providing opportunities for park patrons to support zoo projects through merchandise sales. Through our generous suppliers there were fair trade, hand-made, and local offerings at affordable prices. Animal hats from Peru and maple syrup made right at Oxbow Park were some of the most popular items. The success of our outdoor sales this fall allowed us to bolster funds for the new nature center. We weren't able to hold ZooDazzle this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but volunteers still made the annual medalion for collectors. As 2021 begins, we are hopeful and will be busy planning safe family-friendly events in the new year!

-Kris Nelson





*“more than 60  
cords of firewood  
were consumed  
[in 2019].”*

## What It Takes to Enjoy a Campfire at Chester Woods

Have you ever been told that the wood of a campfire heats you up more than once? Once when you burn it for fuel and many times when you prepare it for that purpose. So, what does it take to enjoy a campfire at Chester Woods? Staff and lots of volunteers!

The staff works hard at identifying fallen or dead trees that will be suitable. Certified operators for all the chainsaw work are needed so that the logs can be of suitable length for moving and then cut into firewood length.

The material storage site southwest of the office building is the location for firewood preparation. A team of volunteers work with staff to split and stack the firewood. You ask, how much firewood is needed for a season of camping at Chester Woods? Last camping season more than 60 cords of firewood were consumed. In 2019 a new wood shed was built for the campground. Metal crates were fabricated to hold about ½ cord of wood. These crates are filled by staff and volunteers at the materials storage site, transported to the woodshed, where campers will find a number of wagons to load the amount of firewood they will need and make their purchase. .

Finally the wood is used for its primary purpose of supplying all that is necessary for a great social gathering around the firepit. Just how many times has this wood needed the energy of man and machine to get in a state ready for its stored carbon to be combusted? Too many to count! No camping trip is complete without the warm memories of the gang around the campfire, children poking sticks in the embers, and lighting marshmallows ablaze so one can quickly blow it out and start over!  
-Ernie Freudenburg



*Volunteers cutting wood at CW Park*

## Volunteer Spotlight: Schalleen Nelson

The stress of 2020 has taken its toll on most everyone. But the healthcare professionals have truly been put to the test! One way to relieve this stress is by taking some time away and getting outside! That is just what brings us to one of our newest Chester Woods Park volunteers, Schalleen Nelson.

Schalleen (which is Gaelic for challenge) has been a Registered Hospital Nurse for 23 years. While not working this single mom of twins enjoys knitting, reading, and most importantly hiking with her canine companion! Schalleen first started coming to Chester Woods in 2002 to hike the beautiful trails. As time went on and she started hiking more with her dog, she found other parks with more trails that were “dog accessible.”

Fast forward to 2020 and a world-wide pandemic, bringing Schalleen to a position of a “Covid nurse” and Chester Woods once again would become a place of release, this time in the form of volunteering. Schalleen has taken part in many different activities and jobs while volunteering at Chester Woods, but some of her favorites are taking care of the turtle and snake (she is slowly learning how to handle the snake on her own!), assisting with nature projects and programs, feeding the birds, processing and spreading native seed, and getting to know the staff and other volunteers. She has also assisted with the removal of buck-thorn but openly admits, that although she knows this is a very important task, it is not her favorite!

Schalleen has been a great new addition to the team at Chester Woods and the staff are very grateful for all the time and energy that she brings. We look forward to continuing to work together and getting to know you more! Thanks for all you do!

-Celeste Lewis



## Bridge Work at Oxbow Park

Oxbow Park hosts almost 8 miles of trails that wind through a variety of landscapes throughout the 670-acre park. In the recent years the park has experienced major flooding and erosion that has left the trails in need of repair. Park staff recently replaced two bridges on the Zumbro Trail that had succumbed to bank erosion. The two bridges that were removed will get new decking and be reused at another part of trail that also needs bridge repair. With the help of volunteers, we plan on installing French drain systems to address the numerous seeps of water that often turn the trails into a muddy mess. This system involves a drainage pipe surrounded by gravel or rock, allowing water to flow more naturally helping prevent erosion. It will also help redirect the surface water to the drainage system helping alleviate seeping onto the trails. Oxbow park staff and volunteers will continue to work on improving the trails, making them safe for hikers and park guests.

-Ryan Waldee



*The new bridge on the Zumbro trail*



## Olmsted County

2122 Campus Drive SE  
Suite 200  
Rochester, MN 55904

Phone 507-328-7070  
Fax: 507-328-7090  
Email: [pwservice@co.olmsted.mn.us](mailto:pwservice@co.olmsted.mn.us)

The mission of Olmsted County Parks is to foster an appreciation of the natural world through environmental education, natural resource management, and public participation in the stewardship of our park lands.

If you would like more information, please visit our website at:  
[www.co.olmsted.mn.us/pw/parks](http://www.co.olmsted.mn.us/pw/parks)

**Learning life-long  
lessons in natural places**

# Critter Catch-Up: North American Porcupine

Minnesota is home to the North American porcupine which is one out of more than 20 different species of porcupines worldwide. These porcupines are well adapted for life in the wide range of weather conditions of northern Minnesota.

North American porcupines chose a habitat that is densely forested with coniferous trees and some deciduous trees. Their home range includes the north-eastern third of the state and extends down along the eastern border of Minnesota. This range provides many trees that are used not only for protection and shelter, but also as part of their diet. Porcupines eat leaves, nuts, and berries in summer; in winter the porcupines will switch to eating pine needles, tree buds, and bark. Porcupines can be destructive to trees by stripping the bark causing the tree to die. The white quills mixed with the long black guard hairs and dense black fur not only keep porcupines warm in the winter, but also act as camouflage and defense against predators. When a predator comes too close, porcupines can feel it brush against the long guard hairs. This alerts the porcupine, causing it to brandish its quills, meaning to raise up them straight up. If the predator continues to pursue the porcupine it will get a mouth or a paw full of quills. The porcupine may end up with fewer quills, but at least it wasn't food for a predator.

**Myth Buster: Porcupines can't shoot their quills. A predator must make contact with the quills for them to stick to the predator's mouth or paw. The predator will then pull the quills from the porcupine.**

Porcupines are fun to observe at the Zollman Zoo and they are excellent climbers; if they are not visible on the ground, don't forget to look up!

-Clarissa Schrooten

