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## Ottawa County: Hiking challenge program starts Sept. 1

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By: Staff Writer

The Park District of Ottawa County and Ottawa County Health Department are offering an Outdoor Hiking Challenge program Sept. 1 through Nov. 30. The program highlights the outdoor recreation destinations throughout the county and invites participants to hike at least eight out of 12 locations to earn a logoed winter hat. The self-guided hikes are done on the honor system and feature 12 destinations throughout the county for participants to complete and record on a challenge form. Sites include East Harbor State Park in Marblehead, Meadowbrook Marsh in Danbury Township, Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve in Catawba Island Township, the North Coast Inland Trail in Elmore and Genoa, Veterans Park in Oak Harbor, Massie Cliffside Preserve in Put-in-Bay Township, and more locales that showcase autumn. Wicket signs with a QR Code to the Outdoor Hiking Challenge webpage will be set up at each of the 12 destination sites, and participants are encouraged to share their participation on social media using #outdoorhikingchallenge. As they complete each hike, participants are asked to record their activities on the forms, which will be made available at the park district office, 3979 E Knoll Crest Dr., Port Clinton, starting Sept. 1, and on the park district website, ottawacountyparksqh.org. Log sheets can also be found at additional locations from Sept. 1-Nov. 30: Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center, 14000 State Rt. 2, Oak Harbor; local libraries in Ottawa County, and senior centers in Ottawa County. Completed forms must be received by Dec. 8, to earn a hat. Hats will be distributed in December. Forms can be submitted by texting a photo to 419-707-4051, emailing a photo to [shill@ottawacountyparksqh.org](mailto:shill@ottawacountyparksqh.org), or returning completed forms to the park district office between the hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday. One entry per person. Guided walks, led by partnering agencies, are also scheduled and may be recorded on the hiking log sheet. Guided walks include:

- 1-2 p.m. Sept. 10, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Fox Unit. Meet at the Fox Unit across Route 2 from the Visitor Center. Access the Fox Unit off N. Lickert-Harder Rd for a guided, approximately one-mile hike on the storybook and prairie trails. This hike will be geared towards kids exploring the outdoors.
- 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sept. 16, Lakeside Daisy Glacial Grooves Hike, Lakeside Daisy State Nature Preserve, Marblehead. Enjoy a guided hike of the restricted-access area of Lakeside Daisy State Nature Preserve. ODNR staff will lead visitors to extensive glacial grooves and best preserved alvar habitat in northern Ohio.
- 1-2 p.m. Sept. 17 Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Main Unit. Meet at the Visitor Center for a guided, approximately 1.5-mile hike on the boardwalk and through the South Woods trails looking for birds and other wildlife. Binoculars can be checked out at the Visitor Center at no cost.
- 9-10 a.m. Sept. 27, Toussaint Creek Wildlife Area, 11087 W. Toussaint Portage Road, Oak Harbor. Kelly Schott of the Ohio Division of Wildlife will lead a walk along the dikes around Toussaint Creek Wildlife Area, talking about wetland restoration and management, wetland flora and fauna, and the history of the area.
- 10-11 a.m. Oct. 4, Great Egret Marsh Nature Preserve, Marblehead. Join the health department on a scenic walk along the Great Egret Marsh Preserve. This trail, a part of the West Harbor Basin, winds along a narrow pool of Lake Erie backwater that geologists believe was once the channel of the Portage River. Learn about mindfulness practices for your mental health as well as the many ways walking and time outdoors lead to healthier lives. This park was created in 2013 with help from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund.
- 9-10 a.m. Nov. 8, Depot Park, Elmore, on the North Coast Inland Trail. Park district director Jannah Wilson will lead a guided walk on the North Coast Inland Trail.

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### CONTACT US

The Press  
 1550 Woodville Road  
 Millbury, OH 43447

(419) 836-2221

Email Us



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The Press  
 1550 Woodville Road  
 Millbury, OH 43447

(419) 836-2221

Email Us



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