

DAILY GATHERER

The Importance of Ojibway



Photo by Amos Johnson

Jennifer Nantais at the Ojibway Park Nature Center waiting to assist people around the area. Windsor Ontario.

Story by Amos Johnson and Jamal Hamadani

Ojibway Park, a large public greenspace existing for many centuries, has become an important landmark for people in the city of Windsor.

There is little known about the history of Ojibway, besides old notes from explorers who discovered the area centuries ago. According to history, the first person to officially discover the Ojibway area was Father Louis Hennepin in 1679.

In August of 1679, Father Louis Hennepin discovered the Detroit River shoreline to be a prairie (large open area of grassland) type of parkland with elk, deer, bear, wild turkey and swans.

In 1749 the French had obtained sections of land along the Ontario side of the Detroit River. Known as Petite Cote, these farmsteads became a unique historical resource as this was the first major European farming community in Southern Ontario.

John Macoun was a biologist that specialized in the study of plants in Canada and discovered the Ojibway area on Aug. 4, 1892. He found many new plants for Canada during his journey and declared Ojibway a garden of rare plant species.

Ojibway became known as a town in 1913, the same year the United States Steel Corporation purchased a large amount of land (1400 acres) for their steel plant. The development was put on hold due to World War I but Ojibway was preparing to become a company town with plans for major residential growth and devel-

opment.

During the Great Depression, the project was shut down and the town's population never became greater than 100. To this day, some may still find evidence of sidewalks from that time in the woods at Brunet Park in the town of LaSalle and Oakwood Park in the city of Windsor.

In 1937 the Dominion Steel and Coal Company purchased the property and produced steel. During World War II Ojibway was used as a testing ground for military vehicles.

When the Dominion Steel and Coal Company was shut down, the Canadian Salt Company purchased the property for mining salt in 1957. The interference for developing Ojibway for industry and residential use allowed for large areas of the prairie and woodland to survive.

By 1955, only 11,021 acres of forest remained in Essex County.

Ojibway park was claimed by the City of Windsor in 1957 from the Canadian Salt Company in exchange for mineral rights under the Malden landfill site. The by-law for creating the park was eventually passed on Dec. 19, 1957.

The park was claimed by the City of Windsor in 1957 and the decision was made to leave it as a natural park and woodland area. The park became official in 1961 and the town of Ojibway was added to the city of Windsor in 1966.

Mark Winterton, 53, is the city engineer for the City of Windsor and explained how the city helps out Ojibway.

"We have a full time staff at

Ojibway, we have the new interpretive centre, we have ongoing rec programs so it is to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars in terms of ongoing operating expenses in a given year," Winterton said.

"There is actual dollars running the park, much more than any other one park."

By 1965 a large area of the park was used in developing Windsor Raceway. Their opening night had 5,136 customers gambling enough on horses to raise \$194,204.

An old 20 ton tugboat called Maudie was placed next to the creek in Ojibway Park to be used as a play structure for children in 1968. The boat was built in Windsor in 1921 and remained in the park until 1990.

Dr. Paul Maycock visited the prairie next to Ojibway Park in 1969 and found the prairie to be unforgettable. Over the next two years many individuals and organizations in Ontario and Michigan felt this way and petitioned the provincial government to protect the site.

Development for the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve began in 1973 with the purchase of more space from the Morton Salt Company of Canada. Some space was claimed under the Provincial Parks Act on Aug. 30, 1977.

Construction for the original Ojibway Nature Centre began in 1974. Two portable classrooms were transported from St. Clair College to the park and the building was officially opened in 1976.

In 1991, Ojibway Park was expanded to include the oak woodland habitat that was originally covered by the Windsor Raceway.

In 1999 the City of Windsor announced a plan to obtain Spring Garden ANSI (Area of Natural and Scientific Interest) which is the largest unprotected portion of the Ojibway Prairie Remnants. The last of the remaining space for the Spring Garden Natural Area was obtained by the city with the help of funding from the federal Habitat Stewardship Program.

A new nature centre was built to replace the original one and opened in the spring of 2011.

Jennifer Nantais, 37, is a staff member at the Ojibway Nature Centre and said the purpose of the nature centre is to provide

Mosquitoes and Chiggers

By Jamal Hamadani & Amos Johnson

Chiggers are a fearful animal of the prairie. Each year from mid-June into September, hikers hesitate before stepping off a trail, knowing these tiny beasts are lurking around.

Chiggers are found in open grassy areas such as marshes, prairies and old fields. They wait patiently for weeks if needed, for a host to brush past. Chiggers do not burrow under the skin but simply insert straw-like mouthparts for a long meal of lymph fluids and digested cells. The mite then drops off never again to feed

on a human. They are too small to see or feel but many people have a delayed allergic reaction to the bite. This causes an intensely itchy bump that may persist up to two weeks.

Bites are concentrated around the top of socks, backs of the knees, waist line and areas where clothing is tight. Insect repellent is effective in discouraging chiggers. Powdered sulphur is also effective but treated clothing must be washed separately. This is prevention from mosquitoes and Chiggers.

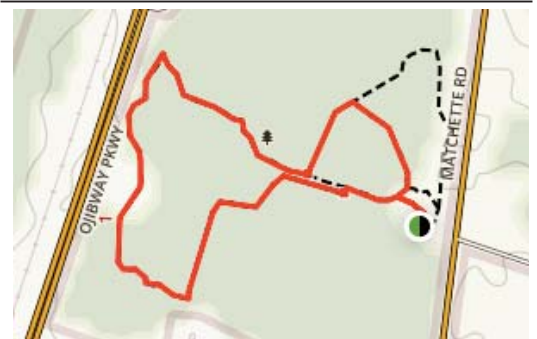


Photo courtesy of alltrails.com

Massasauga Rattlesnake

By Jamal Hamadani and Amos Johnson

The Massasauga Rattlesnake is the only venomous snake still found in Ontario. This snake's small size makes it a small risk to humans. They can be found on the Bruce Peninsula and the eastern shoreline of Georgian Bay. Small populations are supported by Ojibway and the Wainfleet Bog near Port Colborne.

The Massasauga Rattlesnake can be identified by having oblong and loosely divided rattles at the tip of its tail, a pit

between the eye and nostril and the vertical cat-like pupils. Adult length is about 75 centimeters (30 inches). The head is noticeably wider than the neck. Many other rattlesnakes' heads are triangular shaped.

With the population decreasing, it has been officially stated as threatened and is protected from harassment or killing under Ontario's Wildlife Conservation Act and the new Ontario Endangered Species Act.



Photo courtesy of Ojibway.ca

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a source for education and restoration.

“A lot of the work that we do is with species at risk of becoming extinct. A lot of people have to live near these species at risk, so it is bringing nature and people together. So we want to make sure that we can have safe interactions and preserve the nature into the future,” said Natais.

Natais started working at the nature centre as a volunteer while attending the University of Windsor for environmental studies and is satisfied with her position at the nature centre.

“I’m able to work outdoors as well as with people toward a future that best meets the needs of wildlife and humans to ensure a healthy, sustainable future for all,”

- Jennifer Natais

Natais’s involvement in the nature centre is with education, along with special events with the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

ERCA works towards identifying important features in the landscape and informing the government whether or not these features need protecting.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is one of the most significant natural core areas for ERCA. This is because of the amount of prairie species and threatening species that are there.

“As well as the very unique tallgrass prairies and the oak savannah which are very unusual in Ontario,” said Dan Lebedyk, 53, a biologist with ERCA.

“What we do is promote to the local municipalities like the



Ojibway Nature Centre.

Photo by Amos Johnson

City of Windsor and the Town of LaSalle that they should be protecting these features through their planning document. There is what is called the provincial policy statement, which came out from the province of Ontario that basically says that they can’t develop natural features that have significant features to them without demonstrating any negative impact.”

His role with ERCA is to make sure supporters of development follow their policy and provide advice to local municipalities. This occurs when a development application may have a negative impact which will cause a review of the study.

“The influencers on Ojibway such as urbanization and development are really close to Ojibway and we really have to pay attention to what we do in and around Ojibway Prairie to keep it intact and not be degraded,” said Lebedyk

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is a collection of five positioned natural areas in

Windsor, which includes the Detroit River.

The Department of Parks & Recreation’s Ojibway Nature Centre manages four of these areas. These areas are Ojibway Park, Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park, Black Oak Heritage Park and Spring Garden Natural Area.

“I also sit as a board of director member for tallgrass Ontario, which is kind of a non-profit organization in Ontario that promotes the protection and restoration of Tallgrass Prairie,” said Lebedyk.

The Tallgrass Ontario organization works with local landowners and government agencies to make sure features like Ojibway are recognized. It is about restoring the landscape, which they do by planting species in that area to create a prairie.

“Prairies by themselves are actually quite significant even though they don’t have a lot of trees going for them. The species that we plant in the landscape that make a prairie actually have a lot of benefits going for them, as far as habitats for wildlife and biodiversity,” said Lebedyk.

The organization plans to expand the area to create and return more prairies on the landscape and also work with the City of Windsor’s Ojibway Nature Centre.

Lebedyk said, “The influencers on Ojibway such as urbanization and development are really close to Ojibway and we really have to pay attention to what we do in and around Ojibway Prairie to keep it in intact and not be degraded.”

Tallgrass Ontario helped with the review and design of the Herb Gray Parkway Highway Project that occurred in and around the Ojibway Park Com-

plex. This was to make sure it did not have a negative impact.

At the start of the Herb Gray Parkway Highway Project, many people were concerned that the city had destroyed Ojibway’s complex.

“In the end it actually restored a lot of lands along the highway footprint which is actually more of an unnaturalized landscaping rather than the mowed green grass that people usually have along highways,”

volunteers,” Watt said.

“We are concerned about our environment across Essex County. We are involved in several committees in Windsor and the County.”

In 2013 the port authority made a plan to cut down trees and level land on Ojibway Shores to use for development. They want to do this by using a large area of the land for development, while leaving a quarter of the land to the wildlife.

Ojibway Shores is the last surviving trace of natural habitat and is almost the size of three football fields, in Windsor’s West End.

Ojibway Shores acts as a wildlife linkage to the Detroit River and important sites in Ojibway. These include Black Oak Woods, Ojibway Park, Ojibway Prairie and Spring Garden Area of Natural Scientific Interest.

A public meeting was held on July 3, 2013 by the Field Naturalists’ Club to discuss the situation and over 500 people showed up to express their opinions on the matter. They



OJIBWAY SHORES

Photo courtesy of essexcountynature.com

Lebedyk said.

“This is going to be let go and actually has quite a few different species planted along the highway which actually creates habitat and links all these features in Ojibway.”

Another friend to Ojibway is the Essex County Field Naturalists’ Club, which is a volunteer organization that focuses on promoting the protection of the natural habitat in Essex County and nearby regions.

Linda Menard-Watt is on the board of directors for the Field Naturalists’ Club and is retired from being social director of IT services at the University of Windsor.

“Everyone is a volunteer, we do not have any paid person in the field naturalists’ they are all

are trying to convince the city and the port authority of the federal organization to do something so they can save that land and build a link to Ojibway park.

The area is important because the Field Naturalists’ Club performed an evaluation of Ojibway Shores to find that it is pretty rich in species, including species at risk. Ojibway has a list containing of over 160 species at risk which are rare plants and animals.

This list of species at risk is recorded from the Ojibway Prairie Complex, the City of Windsor and town of LaSalle. According to Ojibway, no other site in Ontario provides such a concentration for rare species.

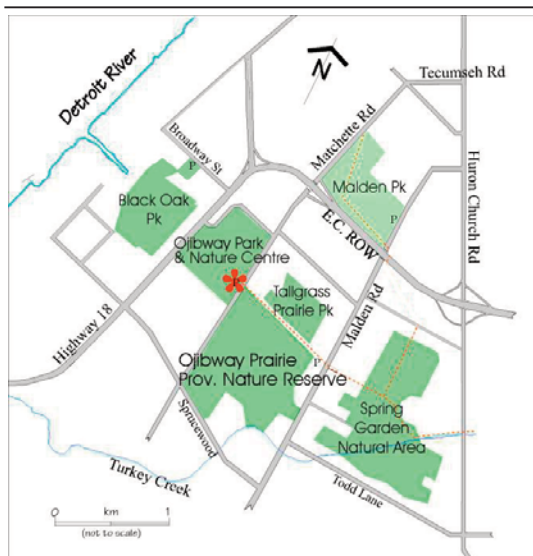


Photo courtesy of ojibway.ca

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There are many species at Ojibway that are at risk of becoming extinct, but this has been an ongoing issue for centuries. The eastern race of elk had already become extinct in Ojibway by 1828.

In 1884 Passenger Pigeons were on their way to extinction with much of the larger wildlife being gone already. It did not benefit their chances when the last local Trumpeter Swan was shot on Lake St. Clair in the same year.

The last record for the greater prairie chicken (bird) was a female bird shot on Fighting Island on April 29, 1987. There are some animals at risk that are considered to be endangered, threatened or even of special concern.

Ojibway's endangered species consist of the little brown bat, yellow-breasted chat (bird), five-lined skink (reptile), acadian flycatcher (bird), butler's garter snake, fox snake and Northern Bobwhite (bird). Ojibway's threatened species consist of many birds, the spiny softshell turtle, blanding's turtle and the grey fox. Animals that are considered to be of special concern include the monarch butterfly, milk snake, snapping turtle, eastern wood pewee bird, sternerus odoratus (turtle), northern map turtle and bald eagle.

Virginia Opossums quickly became common and seen throughout the Windsor region in 1996. Opossums had been very rare in Essex County until 1990 and are now active all year round.

An exotic beetle from Asia known as the emerald ash borer also became common when it was spotted for the first time in Canada on the west

side of Windsor in 2002. This beetle affected over 6,000 ash trees in the area.

By 2007, a calculated 20 million ash trees died along the city streets and in many more parks and private properties. Fortunately for Ojibway, ash trees are not an important component when it comes to the Ojibway Prairie Complex.

Jesse Gardner Costa, 31, is president of the Field Naturalists' Club and a researcher at the University of Windsor.

As president, Costa's job is to set up events, monthly speakers and meetings, as well as lead his executive committee. The Ojibway Nature Centre offers rooms for meetings or family gatherings that hold at least 35 people, along with kitchens and presentation equipment available.

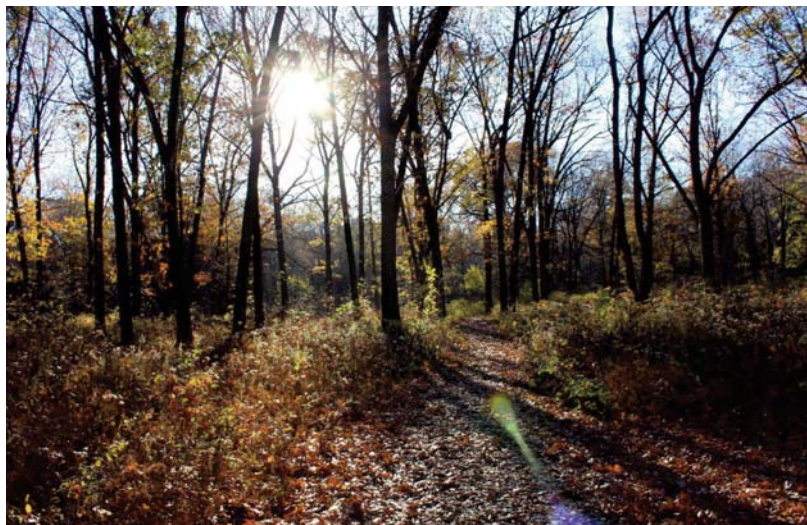
"Our club has a close connection with the park and the people that work there. Ojibway is the largest public greenspace and a symbol of what we work towards as a club," Costa said.

Costa enjoys his role in the club because of his enjoyment of the outdoors and relevant work experience to benefit his organization.

"The Essex County Field Naturalists' Club has monthly meetings at the Ojibway Nature Centre. Many of our events, such as the BioBlitz (a 24-hour species identifying event) take place at Ojibway," said Costa.

The Field Naturalists' Club also provides fundraisers, one of them being at the Blue Castle Café at the Hawk Festival for selling food and other items to raise money.

Samantha Westlake, 21, is studying music at Wayne State University and makes it a priority to visit Ojibway at least once a year.



Nature path at Ojibway Park Photo by Jamal Hamadani

"I am drawn to Ojibway because of its vastness which allows one to escape the world for a little while and enjoy the nature and seclusion," said Westlake.

"I am not familiar with any particular species of wildlife but I think protecting any species that call Ojibway home is important."

- Samantha Westlake

Another visitor at Ojibway is Glen Bacarro who is studying public relations at St. Clair and said Ojibway is beneficial to the city of Windsor.

Bacarra says taking nature walks through Ojibway is very calming and also enjoys the fact that you can experience different types of animals such as deer, snakes and birds can be fascinating for anyone that is interested in nature.

"It is a great escape from Windsor's automotive city," said Bacarra.

Bugs of Ojibway

By Jamal Hamadani & Amos Johnson

A big part of Ojibway is not only the scenes and walkways but the bugs that live there. To most people, all insects are of terrestrial and aquatic species, plant feeders and predators.

Attention is brought to Ojibway from these true bugs. Some are rare/unique inhabitants of the prairie and savanna, others are brightly colored or have fascinating habitats and few of them regularly enter households.

Some bugs have powerful chemical defenses. Stink bugs, when threatened will produce a strong foul smelling chemical to discourage predators. Milkweed bugs have bright colors of orange and black, warning predators they contain milkweed toxins and is poisonous. They keep themselves out of harm's way by displaying their bright colors. The small Milkweed Bug is known at Ojibway while the larger one is not often seen.

The majority of bugs use their hypodermic needle-like mouthparts to extract fluids from plant foliage or seeds. Since Ojibway has such a diverse plant life, it supports a wide range of bugs including few species rarely found anywhere else unlike Ontario.

Household bugs are typically found in homes and other man-made structures where they feed on other insects. They can

inflict a painful bite so handle them with care.

Aquatic bugs, unlike many other aquatic insects, do not have gills. Water scorpions breathe through a long tube while others carry an air supply on the underside of their bodies when they dive below the surface.

The best locations to observe dragonflies in the Ojibway area include the pond in front of the Nature Centre and the ponds at Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park. Stream species can be found at the mouth of Turkey Creek at the Detroit River. Dragon flies are a sight to see when you're passing these locations. People tend to enjoy what they see when they come across them. Many types of dragonflies wander far from water and can be found in open areas and along trails.

Underwing moths are named after their brightly colored and boldly patterned hindwings which contrast the bark-like pattern of the forewings. When they visit the trees and enjoy this snack that was laid out, you can observe them and their different colors around their bodies. There is one brood (family) per year with the adult moths appearing between mid-July and October. During the mid to late August, in Essex County, they reach their peak of diversity.

