

The Royal Oak Nature Society

Protecting Our Nature Parks and Educating the Community



Why Is an Organization Needed to Protect Royal Oak's Two Nature Conservancy Parks (Cunnington Park and Tenhave Woods which is located inside Quickstad Park)?

The City of Royal Oak and its citizens are blessed with about 50 acres of nature preserves.

Unfortunately, many residents are not aware of their existence. The City, while doing a great job of maintaining the other 48 parks in Royal Oak, does not have the staff or resources to adequately maintain and promote recreational and educational opportunities within these two

conservancy parks. People who care about these natural areas in our community need to step up and take responsibility for them. In a landlocked community such as Royal Oak, these two pieces of vacant land are habitat for flora and fauna that are unlike our other parks and should not be considered as opportunities for development. Since these parks have never been developed, the landscape resembles the pre-settlement vegetation of Oakland County. They have been utilized for education and appreciation of nature for many years and need to remain so for many more years to come.

Who Are We? The Royal Oak Nature Society is a non-profit, volunteer citizens group working with the City to protect the management of Royal Oak's two nature preserves. Our mission is to foster the awareness and usage of these natural areas by maintaining and promoting recreational and educational opportunities within them. We are also in the process of developing an arboretum/wildflower garden behind the Senior/Community Center. This garden will become another area that can be utilized for education and the appreciation of nature. We are using "teams" to accomplish our mission. Go to our main website page for a [link](#) to "Teams" to find out information about them.

What Can You Do To Help? We need residents and non-residents to join our volunteer effort! You could become a Nature Society member, join one or more of our teams, or just be a strong Nature Society supporter who believes in the conservation of these parks. But most of all, we just want the public to spend time in these great nature areas. This could include looking for wildflowers in the spring, observing beautiful fall color or just enjoying a pleasant walk through the woods anytime of the year. By being actively involved, we can make sure that our two conservancy parks stay vibrant and remain as nature preserves for future generations to use and enjoy.

FORMATION OF THE ROYAL OAK NATURE SOCIETY

In June of 2000, the Royal Oak Nature Society began to take form. Back then, a group of citizens who wanted to keep Cunningham Park and Tenhave Woods as natural areas, came together to form what would eventually become the Royal Oak Nature Society. The actual impetus for its formation occurred during the writing of the 1999 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The consultants assembling the plan noted that both parks were under utilized and needed work. Based on this finding, the Royal Oak Parks and Recreation Advisory Board in February, 2000, made a recommendation to the Royal Oak City Commission that both parks become Conservancy Parks. Later that month, the City Commission approved the recommendation. This park status has "protection and management of the natural/cultural environment as the primary focus with recreational use as a secondary objective". With this new position, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board would assign an ad hoc committee to figure out how to best utilize these natural areas.

The Advisory Board specifically recruited volunteers to represent certain areas within the city. Gretchen Greenwood was the liaison from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and Greg Rassel, Superintendent of Public Works for the City of Royal Oak worked as the city government liaison. Neighborhood representatives were Jack Kerby from the Cummingston area and Todd Vince from the Tenhave Woods vicinity. Phil Townsend, principal of Starr Elementary, represented the Royal Oak School Board, and Bob Muller represented the community as a naturalist. This group first met in June, 2000. The group's charter as determined by the Advisory Board was "to work together to develop a program for the proper development of Tenhave Woods and Cummingston Park".

The early activity of the committee began with a walk-thru of both parks. That was followed by discussions regarding the history of these parks and brainstorming sessions on ways to increase positive traffic for them. Building trails, speaker and nature walk programs topped the improvement list. From June, 2000 to January, 2001, the group met monthly to hammer out a master plan for both nature areas. Mission and objective statements were made to permit proper focus for future activities.

The two major objectives that were agreed on were to preserve and enhance the natural attributes of these two parks and develop a curriculum for a broad range of audiences, including formal (classroom) and non-formal (signage) training to promote environmental education.

Then work began to develop ways to implement these objectives. High priority was placed on a formal kick-off for the organization and attracting new members. With these activities in mind, the committee decided to create a formal and on-going organization to provide structure to the future work. The committee recommended that its name become the Royal Oak Nature Society and that this organization would carry out the goals for the nature parks. The original ad hoc committee members became the steering committee of the Nature Society. The steering committee would provide leadership for five sub-committees that were needed to meet the Society's objectives. On January 17, 2001, the Royal Oak Nature Society was officially formed with a kick-off meeting at Starr Elementary. The response was overwhelming as over 70 people showed up! Several meetings took place after that at which committees were setup to handle communications, education, programs, beautification plus ways and means. Volunteers were then selected to chair them.

On March 7, 2001, the Nature Society had its first general membership meeting along with its' first speaker program, a slide show on wildflowers, presented by botanists Don and Joyce Drife. In January, 2002, the Nature Society presented its Master Plan for the two parks to the Royal Oak Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. After being approved, the Plan was presented at a public hearing in March. It then moved on to the Royal Oak City Commission who subsequently approved those plans in April 2002. At a general meeting in February, 2002, the Steering Committee was replaced by an elected board of directors. With the Master Plan being approved by the City, the framework had officially been set in place to guide the Royal Oak Nature Society towards reaching its goals and objectives.

ROYAL OAK NATURE SOCIETY PROGRAMS, PROJECTS and SURVEYS

Nature Walk Programs: Walks in Royal Oak's two nature areas, Cummingston Park and Tenhave Woods plus the Royal Oak Arboretum, are lead by Royal Oak Nature Society naturalists. There is at least one walk per month with more per month added during the spring wildflower and fall color seasons. An emphasis is put on understanding the different forest types found in these parks, individual plant and animal species found there, and the geology and human history of the area.

During the spring wildflower walks, Red & White Trillium, blue & yellow violets, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Bloodroot, Trout Lily, Wild Geranium, Spice Bush, Spring Beauty, Wood Poppy, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, & Wood Anemone can be found. These walks are usually held on a Saturday or Sunday.

There are also several nature walks that are held in the evening. They include “Full Moon” walks and “Owl Hoots”. At the Owl Hoots, we attempt to lure in or have the screech and great horned owls answer tape recordings of their calls. There are also evening arboretum walks held June thru September. At the June and September walks, we first meet inside the Senior Center, have a short meeting about what’s been going on with the Nature Society, then moving outside to the arboretum.

Pond study programs are scheduled in the spring at Tenhave’s Dragonfly Pond. This popular program attracts both adults and children. Water samples are taken from the pond to see what is living in it and viewing trays are available to examine what we find.



Pond Study Program

Mary Fredricks, the Nature Society’s mycologist, schedules fungi walks and programs throughout the year. For information about these walks and programs, go to [“Royal Oak Nature Society Friends of Fungi”](#).

Speaker Programs: Speaker programs are usually held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. from October to May at Royal Oak Middle School (709 N. Washington, between 11 Mile Rd and Catalpa). These programs are usually slide shows focusing on various natural history topics. If you watch nature programs on PBS or the Discovery channel, this is better, as you can meet afterwards and ask the speakers questions. The Nature Society’s general meeting is held prior to the talk and usually last about five minutes.

Dates and times for our nature walks and speaker programs can be found on our website, in our newsletter “The Chinquapin” and in the Royal Oak Insight magazine. There is no charge or pre-registration for the walks or speaker programs. To begin receiving our newsletter, please go to our [“Membership”](#) page and sign up to be an Associate, Supporting or Patron member.

Special Nature Park Programs: The Nature Society provides nature walk programs for school classes, scout troops, service clubs, neighborhood associations, etc. This can be a general nature walk or requests for a walk on special subjects can be arranged.

Surveys: There is an ongoing survey of plants and animals found in our nature study areas. Don and Joyce Drife (botanists) have taken our survey from the 1970’s and re-found most of the plants, as well as added many that had been missed before. The Clinton River Watershed Council did a freshwater Macro-Invertebrate survey in the spring of 2004 and Edi Sontag from the Detroit Zoo did one in the spring of 2005. Robert Lawshe (a Nature Society member) and his friend, Hugh Campbell, did an after dark insect survey ([Winter 2004/05 Newsletter](#)) in Tenhave during the summer of 2004. Bob Muller (Nature Society naturalist) periodically, does surveys of life found in the vernal ponds of Tenhave and Cummington Park. If you specialize in something and would like to do a survey in one of the nature parks, please contact us.