



Highland Oaks County Park

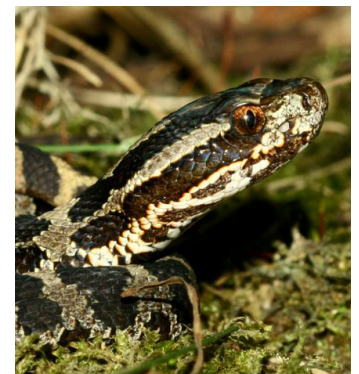
6555 Milford Road, Highland
Park Info: 248-858-0906



Park Information

Acquired in 2007, Highland Oaks County Park offers 302 acres of picturesque rolling hills, wetlands and old pastures. Highland Oaks County Park preserves sensitive habitat while providing recreational experiences in a natural setting.

Hikers, geocachers, equestrians, mountain bikers and cross-country skiers enjoy 2.5 miles of multi-purpose trails. The trails are primarily mowed grass with accessible boardwalks spanning wetland areas. Spring Lake, a five-acre kettle lake, features an accessible floating dock and is a popular fishing spot. The park also allows archery deer hunting in season.

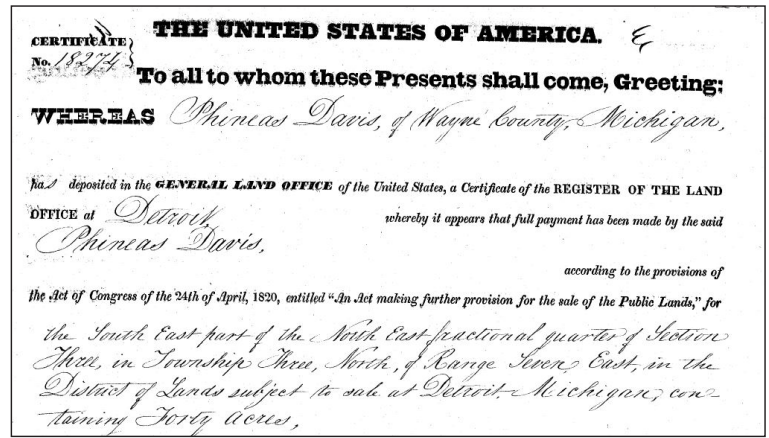


Natural Resources

- Highland Oaks is part of both the headwaters of the Shiawassee River Watershed and the Huron River Watershed
- Two creeks flow through the property along with a small lake, often called Spring Lake. An intermittently-flooded wetland is located downstream from the lake.
- The park was likely a combination of mixed conifer swamp, wet prairie and black oak barren prior to the 1800s.
- While most of the open areas of the park were historically converted for agricultural use there are remnant prairie plants that can still be found on site including big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, butterfly weed, smooth aster, round-headed bush clover, wild bergamot, northern dewberry and black-eyed Susan.
- Some of the natural community types that can currently be identified, and are being restored on the property, include southern wet meadow, wet mesic prairie and oak barren remnants.
- Robust beaver populations on the property result in dams and tree thinning around the lake and wetland.
- The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (EMR), a federally threatened species, utilize much of the park for their life cycle. EMR overwinter in wetlands and move to upland areas in the summer to give birth to live young (they hatch their eggs inside their bodies in a process called ovoviviparity).

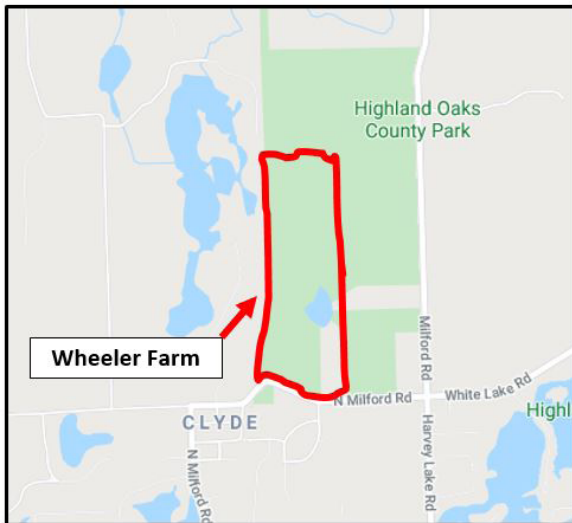
History

Phineas Davis Jr. settled in Detroit in the late 1820s where he quickly became involved in a variety of business ventures. He was on the Board of Directors of the Pontiac and Detroit Railroad Company. He also promoted the doomed Gibraltar & Flat Rock Canal; a scheme to construct a canal across the state to connect Lakes Erie and Michigan. Davis was also a major land speculator. Between May 1 and May 3, 1837, he purchased eight different parcels in Sections 3, 10 and 11 of Highland Township. The parcels purchased in Section 3 eventually became part of Highland Oaks County Park.

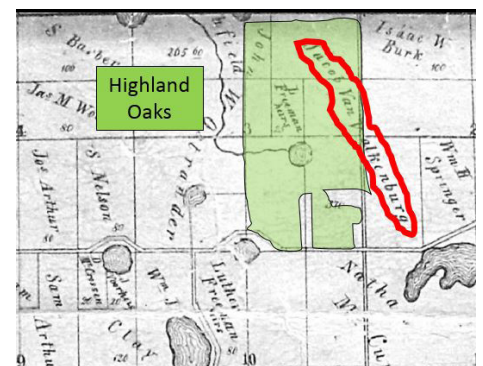


In 1841 Morris Wheeler, a native of New York, purchased land in Section 3 of Highland Township from Phineas Davis, Jr. He was soon joined by other settlers and a small community grew up around his land holdings. It came to be called "Wheeler" in his honor. Things changed, however, with the completion of the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad through Highland Township in 1871. The community grew more quickly and by 1872 a post office was established under the name "Clyde." It was decided the name Wheeler could not be used since there was already a Wheeler, Michigan, in Gratiot County.

The railroad tracks on the western border of Highland Oaks were originally owned by the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad. The growth of the town of Clyde, located just south of the park, was closely tied to this railroad. Train passengers led to the need for lodging and a hotel was built. A depot was also constructed. Near the depot was a grain elevator that stored grain waiting to be taken away by train.



Much of the western half of the land that became Highland Oaks was once owned by Morris Wheeler. He came to Highland Township from New York in 1841 and is considered the first settler in what became the community of Clyde. In 1883 Mr. Wheeler purchased a stock of goods and started a grocery business in Cheboygan County, Michigan. His son Cyrus, who had served in the 15th Michigan Infantry during the Civil War, took over the farm in Highland Township, running the farm until his death in 1916. The farm was then taken over by Cyrus Wheeler's sister, Eliza, who then ran the farm until her death in 1943.



In the late 1840s and early 1850s much of the northern part of the land that became Highland Oaks was owned by Jacob Van Valkenburg. He was a lawyer who had moved to Michigan from New York. In the late 1850s he moved to Pontiac where he again practiced law and later became a probate court judge. Four of his sons served in the Union army during the Civil War. In the 1870s he moved to Florida where he purchased a small plantation on the St. John's River. He died there in 1879.