

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 & 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.

There are pond study programs 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.

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](#)" link that can be found on our website's main page.



Pond Study Program

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 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 which can be linked to from our website's main page under "Getting Involved".

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.

Pre-Settlement Land Project: This project is attempting to gather enough data to determine the pre-settlement condition of Royal Oak. This involves researching the old river and stream courses, glacial beaches, and a survey of every old growth forest tree in the city. This information along with property

lines, old river and stream beds, springs, etc, from old 1800's survey maps will be combined in new maps. These new maps will give us a better understanding of the land of Royal Oak.

Tenhave Woods and Cummington Park History Project: The "[History of a Piece of Land in Northern Royal Oak: Tenhave Woods](#)" report tells the story that begins with the Goodwin family who first settled the land in the 1820's that now includes Tenhave Woods. The "[History of a Piece of Land in Northern Royal Oak: Cummington](#)" report begins with Josiah Alger purchasing land in Troy Township in the 1820's that now includes Cummington Park.

If you know of anyone who might have historical information about the land that contains Cummington Park or Tenhave Woods, please have them contact us.



Volney Goodwin's Family in the 1880's

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 (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.

TENHAVE WOODS and CUMMINGSTON PARK

Royal Oak's two nature preserves, Tenhave Woods and Cummington Park, are the "natural jewels" of Royal Oak and surrounding communities. They are both heavily wooded, have lined trails and contain over 300 species of flora between them. These natural areas are open to the public during the daytime, seven days a week. Dogs are not allowed inside the preserves because they disturb the wildlife. During the winter and spring, boots are recommended to be worn while in the parks. Because of mosquitoes, insect repellent and dressing appropriately is advised from late spring through the end of summer. Location of these two parks can be found at "[Park Locations](#)" located on our website's main page. While you are on the "Parks Location" page, link on to "Park Trail Locations" for trail maps of Tenhave and Cummington.

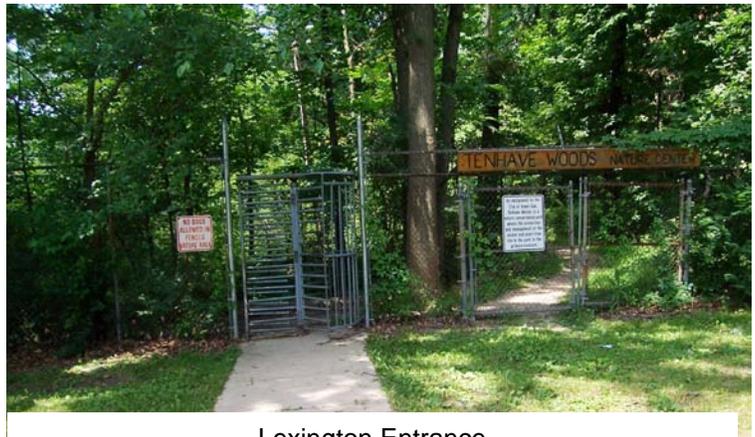
Tenhave Woods:

Tenhave Woods, which is just east of Royal Oak High School, is in a fenced-in area located within the boundaries of Quickstad Park. Tenhave Woods was once part of a Royal Oak settler's (the Goodwin family) woodlot and was probably kept that way because of their need for firewood.

Tenhave was dedicated as a city park in 1955. After an incident in the middle 1960's, it was fenced in by the city. The only way that anyone could get into the woods was by going to the city and getting the key to unlock the gate. After two turnstiles were installed in 1986, the park was re-opened.

Tenhave Woods encompasses about 22 acres and was named in 1999 after Hessel Tenhave, a Dondero High School biology teacher. He taught in Royal Oak for 34 years and often utilized the woods to impress the importance and beauty of the environment on his students. Walter Nickel, former naturalist for Cranbrook institutions, said, "This is one of the finest acreages of hard woods that I have ever seen in this area".

The park's entrances and exits are through turnstiles that are never locked. Presently, the main entrance can be found along the south fence, facing Lexington Blvd. A second entrance is at the northeast corner of the park, just off of Normandy. Exit-only turnstiles are located on the west edge of the park next to the soccer fields and northwest corner (facing Normandy). Lexington entrance parking is available at a lot adjacent to the intersection of Lexington and Marais and at the Senior/Community Center.



Lexington Entrance

Tenhave Woods has several assets. One is Dragonfly Pond which after being rebuilt in 2005, has helped to reduce the number of mosquitoes in part of the park by small animals that eat mosquitoes. Other features include the park having three different types of forests (swamp, oak/hickory and beech/maple), a good trail system that is continually being improved, and entrances that were installed in 2007 and 2008 that now provide a dry entryway into the park during the spring when the west end of the park is usually quite wet. The old entrances were very wet during the spring.

The following are completed Tenhave Woods projects:

- October 2002: Built Sassafras Trail (Eagle Scout project lead by Andrew Mast from Boy Scout Troop #1629)
- November 2003: Swamp and Scout Trails were built (Eagle Scout project from Chris McFadden of Boy Scout Troop #1629))
- Spring 2004: Began the ongoing project of removing Garlic Mustard (Nature Society Project)
- October 2005: Tenhave Woods Vernal Pond completed (Nature Society Project) Checkout the article in the [Spring 2006](#) edition of our newsletter which can be found on our website)
- October 2007: Moved soccer field "entrance/exit" turnstile to Lexington side of park. It became a new entrance to the park. A new "exit only" turnstile was installed to replace the turnstile that was moved to Lexington. (Nature Society Project)

- February 2008: Trail extension from Sandbar Trail to where new Normandy entrance/exit turnstile is going to be installed (Eagle Scout Project lead by Josh Eggart from Boy Scout Troop #1085)
- April 2008: Two benches were installed at Dragonfly Pond and Wood Duck houses put up at Dragonfly Pond (Eagle Scout Project lead by Nikolas Hoyer from Troop #1629)
- June 2008: Built Fern Trail (Eagle Scout Project lead by Matt Lewan from Boy Scout Troop #1627)
- August 2008: Sassafras Trail widened (Eagle Scout Project lead by Tyler Jelonek from Boy Scout Troop #1601)
- November 2008: -Relined and widened both Swamp and east half of Scout Trail (Eagle Scout Project lead by Mike Henning from Boy Scout Troop #1085-Berkley)
- December 2008: Rerouted Pond Trail (Eagle Scout Project lead by Ed Getts from Boy Scout Troop # 1085)
- December 2008: The Normandy “entrance/exit” turnstile that was located at the west end of the park off of Normandy was moved to the east end of the park (Normandy side). It became a new entrance to the park. A new “exit only” turnstile was installed to replace the turnstile that was moved to the east end of the park off of Normandy. (Nature Society Project)
- October 2009: Used dirt to raise Pond Trail near the Goodwin Trail and the Fern Trail in order to keep those trails dry in the spring. Also rerouted part of the Sassafras Trail (Eagle Scout Project lead by Stephen Kaurala from Boy Scout Troop #1610).
- November 2009: Installed trail identification signs at all trail intersections at Tenhave and installed Tenhave trail maps at both entrances (Eagle Scout project lead by Eric Manidok from Boy Scout Troop #1610)
- November, 2009: Brian and Chris Cooley from Community Arborist cut down about 12 trees from the area north of Dragonfly Pond. Then Perry Gentner from Machine Works came in with machinery and removed those trees and their tree stumps. Then he removed over a foot of dirt from that area.
- April 2010: Scout Trail relined and tree ID tags were attached to some trees (Eagle Scout project lead by Jimmy Kipps from Troop 1627)
- November 2010: Realigned some trails, added a bench to the peninsula jutting into Dragonfly Pond and removed invasive species around Dragonfly Pond. (Eagle Scout project lead by Steve Claucherty from Troop 1601)
- October 2011: Added sand to trails that had a clay base (became very soggy when it rained) that was added to them several years ago (Eagle Scout project lead by Bryan Wiley from Troop 1629)
- October 2012: Deer Fence Project that increased the height of 6 foot fence behind neighboring homes to over 8 feet. (Eagle Scout Project lead by George Patterson of Troop 1085)
- February 2013: Had over 100 people form a line and walk through the park to make sure that there were no longer any deer in the park
- September and October 2014: Nature Society work crew filled fence gaps along the ground with logs
- January 2016: Tenhave Eagle Scout Project was lead by Dylan Mortimer of Berkley Troop 1085. The Scout trail from Goodwin to the Swamp Trail and the Swamp Trail back to Goodwin and a little of Goodwin between these 2 trails was been relined with logs. The Scout Trail now goes by the only Pin Oak in Tenhave.

Cummingston is located on Royal Oak's northern border, just east of Meijers. The 32-acre park is mostly wooded, except for an open field and play structure at the east end. The west and middle sections of the park are fenced, but unlike Tenhave Woods, the main entrance does not have a gate or turnstile. That entrance is located at the intersection of Torquay and Leafdale, where on-street parking is available. .

In 1925, five acres what is presently Cummingston Park, was dedicated as a park. It was bounded by Leafdale, Langley Court, Mansfield and Torquay. The balance of it was purchased by the city in the early 60's and dedicated in 1963. It was used extensively from the mid 50's through the 60's for nature study classes. The Michigan State Botany Department said, "Cummingston Park contains the richest wild area in this part of Michigan". As recently as the late 1960's, run-off water from the park drained into the north branch of the Red Run, which flowed along what is presently known as Parmenter Road. When an apartment complex south of the park and Meijer Drive, north of the park, were built in the early to mid 70's, excess water from the park had no where to go. This caused a good portion of the park to flood from March to July, every year. This in turn reduced tree growth, killed off tree saplings, and initiated a decline of wildflowers in the park. In 1975 there were over 3,500 red trilliums; in 1999 there were only 50!

In 2002, at least 1/3 of Cummingston Park was underwater during the spring. In late spring, the city put in an experimental drain to see how much water could be drained from the park. The results were inconclusive in 2003, because the park was relatively dry. In the spring of 2004, the northern part of the park was underwater again. At that point, further planning was necessary in order to get the park to properly drain in the spring. Check out "[A History of the Water Conditions in Cummingston Park](#)" for more information about excessive water in Cummingston.

Cummingston Park's assets include Crawfish Pond built in 2008 and a fairly good trail system on the eastern side of the park. A lot of work is still required to improve the quality of this nature area. Hopefully, Crawfish Pond will be a source of insects that prey on mosquitoes.

Due to drainage improvements made in late 2006, the north side of the park no longer has excessive water buildup in the spring. Drain tiles were installed in the southwestern section of the park in February of 2010 and were connected to the City sewer system.



Leafdale Entrance

Cummingston is going to need a lot of work, to get it back to the way it was 50 years ago. The process to restore it will probably take several generations. "

The following are completed Cummingston Park projects:

- Summer 2002: Removed honeysuckle from the front part of the park (Nature Society Project)
- Early Fall 2002: Removed grapevines from the front part of the park (Nature Society Project)
- November 2002: Built Meadow and Eagle Scout Trails along with rebuilding the Gentian Trail (Eagle Scout project lead by Jim Hutton from Boy Scout Troop #1610)

- October 2004: Built the Shagbark and Arkona Trails (Eagle Scout project lead by Keegan Springfield from Boy Scout Troop #1707)
- November 2004: Bird feeder was moved to the meadow area that is just east and inside of the main entrance at Torquay and Leafdale (Nature Society Project).
- November 2006: Deepened drainage ditch running alongside Leafdale Trail (Nature Society Project)
- December 2008: Completed building Crawfish Pond (Eagle Scout Project lead by Jacob Verten from Boy Scout Troop #1610)
- February 2010: The City of Royal Oak installed a drain tile in the southwest corner of Cummington Park. They dug about a four foot deep ditch, laid the drain tile and connected it to a street sewer located at the corner of Delemere and Torquay.
- June 2010: Put park sign back up; moved gate way; used log piles by pond to line Leafdale trail; and installed tree ID tags (Eagle Scout Project lead by Lewis Jacques from Troop 1444 of Centerline)
- September 2011: Relined Gentian trail from Leafdale to gate, the Eagle Scout Trail and the Chinquapin Trail from the intersection at the Eagle Scout Trail, west to the intersection with Arkona Beach Trail. (Eagle Scout Project leader was Will Patterson from Troop 1085).
- November 2011: The slopes at the edges of Cummington's Crawfish Pond were lessened in order to increase the size of the breeding ground for amphibians.
- April 2016: A culvert was built under a section of Leafdale Trail necessary to direct excess water to the north/south drainage ditch along Leafdale Trail.