



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Seven Lakes at Summer's End



For the last day of summer, I meandered around Seven Lakes State Park in Holly Township to bid goodbye to the season and prepare for the crispness of autumn. I believe the last time I wrote about Seven Lakes in detail was about nine years ago to celebrate the winter solstice. It felt great exploring again.

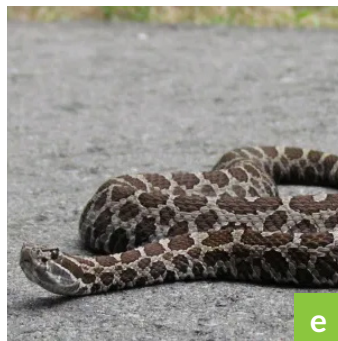
The park is open from 8 a.m.-10 p.m. for day visitors. The entrance is at 14390 Fish Lake Road. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources website has full details about activities, rules and amenities. Much to my surprise there were no mosquitoes and I saw no other people on the trail. Abundant songbirds were flitting about in shrubbery, waterfowl was on the lake and a Bald Eagle did a low flyby I witnessed.

Of interest there is a small island in the middle of the largest lake, and that's near where I saw the eagle. I wondered if perhaps that's where it nested or maybe the eagle uses the shallows around the island as a perfect fishing location. (a)

About an hour into my hike a red fox startled me by darting out about 40 feet in front of me when I paused to photograph butterflies and bees visiting a meadow of goldenrod. With the wind blowing towards me the fox apparently did not hear or smell my approach. Sadly for me I was much too slow to capture a photo but the encounter set the mood for a great hike. Although foxes are primarily nocturnal or crepuscular, which means active at dusk or dawn, this one clearly had plans it did not share. (b)

Preplanning an adventure is always good. If you are new to the park here's how the MDNR describes Seven Lakes: "Sparkling waters and rolling hills welcome you to the 1,434-acre Seven Lakes State Park. The park boasts over 230 acres of water spread across six lakes, offering ample opportunity for paddling, fishing and swimming. Visitors can also camp, hike or bike on scenic trails, have a picnic lunch in a picturesque spot and more. The park lives up to its name. Originally, seven smaller lakes dotted the landscape. Developers constructed a dam, creating the larger Big Seven Lake you see today."





I mostly followed the “Green Trail” on my hike and I think that’s the best one for first time visitors. It’s a fairly well-marked 2.1 mile loop trail that can be easily accessed adjacent to the Dickinson Shelter and is a good place to start the adventure. Adequate parking is on site and a few porta-potties are there too. There are numerous other access points to the trail as well which are easily found as you drive through this natural gem sculpted by glaciers and altered a bit by humans.

The Green Trail descends rapidly from the Dickinson Shelter to Dickinson Lake. The wooden steps are old; caution is needed and it is definitely not advisable for someone who is not sure-footed. Much to my pleasure I noted a variety of fungi growing along the trail. Some I could identify and some I could not. I think one I photographed is a Destroying Angel; a poisonous mushroom in the genus *Amanita*. (c)

Colorful pokeweed appeared in several locations along the lakeshore trail. It’s safe to touch and some birds feast on the berries, but the berries are poisonous to consume. (d)

The lakeshore is beautiful and pollinators of all sorts were visiting the asters and other wildflowers that thrive in sunny areas. There is minimal signage in the park but what is there is excellent. One of my favorites is a colorful one reminding visitors that the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is found in the park. I’ll add that you would be very luck to see one and once the frost of autumn arrives, they usually slither down old crayfish burrows to spend the winter. (e)

If you are new to the park pay attention to the interpretive signs, such as the rattlesnake sign and the rules sign. Excellent humor in a sign about off leash dogs. There is no room for debate when the sign states, “EVEN GOOD DOGS MUST BE ON A LEASH”.

Most of the trail junctions have detailed maps showing where you are and where the trails go. It’s important to pay attention to them; getting lost would be easy if you meander off trail and lose your bearings.

In some of the grassy areas above the lake and adjacent to the park road you will find benches; perfect places to sit and do nothing but listen to the music of nature’s way, in the final days of September. I wrapped up my hike by sitting on bench just listening to the rhythms of nature, the songs of birds and mentally planning a return trip picnic once the colors of autumn dominate the landscape. (f)

Oakland County Parks staffer Jonathan Schechter is an avid “nature-embracing” hiker who follows phenology - the study of natural cycles of nature’s way - to inspire his blogs.