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2026
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Get to the Point - Tawas Point!

website: www.tawaslighthousefriends.com

Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse & State Park
P.O. Box 152, East Tawas, MI 48730

(989) 545-1421

Welcome to Tawas Point State Park!

On behalf of the park staff, I'd like to welcome you to the 183-acre park that provides family fun and recreation on Lake Huron and Tawas Bay. The shaded forest, and the clear waters that surround Tawas Point State Park are always welcoming and we hope that you enjoy your stay, whether you are here for two hours or two weeks.

Often referred to as the Cape Cod of the Midwest, the point's consistent winds, clear waters, and abundant sandy beaches make Tawas Point State Park an amazing destination. Tawas Point State Park offers a wide variety of activities from camping, biking, hiking, bird-watching, swimming, and kite-boarding. We encourage you to engage in as many activities as possible during your stay.

With 189 modern campsites, four cabins plus a yurt, and eight ADA sites, Tawas Point State Park is a high-demand and popular camping venue. Campers enjoy the experience of being surrounded by water and the rare opportunity to see the sunrise and sunset over Tawas Bay from one location. As you will come to find, photo opportunities abound.

One of the main attractions is the recently renovated Tawas

Micah Jordan
Park Supervisor

ments that took place last year and are now finally complete. The entire campground electrical service was upgraded with all new pedestals; a brand-new Lighthouse Pavilion was completed with funds provided by The Friends of Tawas Point State Park and with help from the volunteers from Michigan Cares for Tourism much of the Sandy hook trail system was upgraded with new boardwalks. So many amazing new blessings and much-needed improvements.

The State Dock in East Tawas is a busy, popular boating destination every summer. The Appledore makes several visits a year, offering rides in Tawas Bay! PC Chris Burk

Photo by Ken DeMar

Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Sunrise Side Lighthouses

The Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park is a part of a coalition of lighthouses on the Sunrise Side! All the lighthouses in our group are within a day’s drive of Tawas.

Founded in 2021, the group meets biannually (spring and fall) to share ideas and updates, plan events, and explore how we can support each other. In 2023, Friends member Vicki Seltz Barnes worked with all of the members to produce a brochure that each lighthouse group could provide to visitors with a goal of promoting our members.

Each of the lighthouses is owned and financed in different ways which shows how diverse lighthouse management can be! The best place to view information for each of the lighthouses in the coalition is at their individual websites.

Just north of Tawas Point Lighthouse is our “sister” lighthouse, Sturgeon Point which shares the same basic design but a different paint scheme. Located near Harrisville, Sturgeon Point Lighthouse is about 44 miles from Tawas. Website address

is alconahistoricalociety.com.

Presque Isle Township owns two lighthouses in Presque Isle – Old Presque Isle Lighthouse and New Presque Isle Lighthouse. Heading 86 miles north of Tawas you can find the older of the two; the newer lighthouse is a couple of miles north of that. Information on both is found presqueislelighthouses.org.

Continuing north to Rogers City, about 106 miles north of Tawas, you can find Forty Mile Point Lighthouse. Information for visitors is found at Fortymilelighthouse.org.

Our newest member is Thunder Bay Island Lighthouse Preservation Society that joined us in 2023. This dedicated group is in the process of renovating the lighthouse located on an island near Alpena. Check out their efforts at thunderbayislandlight.com. At this time the lighthouse is not open to visitors but you can check out their efforts via the webcam on their website.

Michigan has a rich maritime history – don’t miss a chance to check out the lights that guided ships safely along our coastline!



The Historic Tawas Point Fog Signal Building

According to the Annual Report of the U.S. Lighthouse Board of 1899, material for a steam-powered fog signal building and the fog signal apparatus were delivered to the Tawas, Michigan Light Station by the lighthouse tender Amaranth. Building of the structure began in June, 1899 and the fog signal, with its 10 inch steam whistle, was ready for operation by September, 1899. In 1927 the fog signal was converted from a steam-powered whistle to an air diaphone system.

Fast forward to 1969 when the Coast Guard made the decision to build a new, smaller, completely automatic fog horn and remove the old fog signal building. Mr. William Simon, Supervisor of the Tawas Point State Park wrote to his District Supervisor: “I am of the opinion that this building would be a valuable asset to this park’s interpretive program as our newly approved nature trail passes right by its door. It would, without a doubt, make an ideal interpretive center and observation point for our park visitors. The building is of brick and cement construction and is three levels in height. There is water, toilets,



and a heating system within this structure. The building appears to be of sound construction and the view from the upper levels is fantastic. If there is any possible way this building could be saved and obtained by the State of Michigan the efforts involved would be well worthwhile.”

The proposal was still under discussion in August, 1970 when the new fog horn was put into service. The Coast Guard advised that it was one of the largest Fog Horns in the 9th Coast Guard District and that

the safe decibel distance from the Fog Horn was at 60 feet away. The Coast Guard would not permit use of the old building due to the fact it was only 20 feet away. The DNR did not think it feasible to move the building to a different location. Mr. Simon’s proposal died. The historic fog signal building was razed. What is left at the end of the Point is the white Coast Guard foghorn structure of 1970.

Michigan Cares for Tourism

More than 141 hospitality and tourism leaders from across the state gathered in East Tawas on September 14-15, 2025 for the annual Michigan Cares for Tourism volunteer clean-up and preservation event at the Tawas Point State Park and Lighthouse. Owners, employees and volunteers from various hospitality, and tourism-related businesses and organizations throughout the state participated, in many improvements at our local State Park, including replacing or rebuilding bridges, and boardwalks, building birdhouses and bird watching platforms, Monarch butterfly and other signage, painting buildings and the lighthouse museum base, putting up fences, and much more. An important thing to know is there is a huge participation by Michigan DNR teams planning, organizing, and preparing for each event. Friends of Tawas Point would like to give special thanks to our whole Tawas Point State Park and Lighthouse team, led by Micah Jordan and Lee Martin of MI DNR, and Don LaBarre of Michigan History Center, which operates our Lighthouse and Gift Shop.



Events at Tawas Point State Park

This will be an eventful year at Tawas Point State Park – it’s the 150th anniversary of the lighthouse! Plans are in development for multiple events to celebrate. Please check the DNR website at www.michigan.gov/dnor, our website at www.tawaslighthousefriends.com/upcoming-events, our Facebook page, or email us at info@tawaslighthousefriends.com for the latest information. There may be changes in times so checking ahead is recommended.

Please note: A Recreation Passport is required for entry into Tawas State Park.

Saturday, May 16 - Native Plant Sale

The popular fundraising event for the Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park returns this spring! Our native plant sale was a huge success in past years, and we will have a great variety of plants again this year. All the native plants are from Wildtype Nursery and are Michigan genotypes. Plant information is available on the Native Plant Sale webpage of our website. Come and check out our great variety of native plant offerings with prices of \$4 and \$6 (price as marked). There will be some larger pots available as well. Our prices are less than you pay at any nursery!

The sale will be held at the State Park near the Lighthouse Pavilion or inside the pavilion depending on the weather. Sales begin at 9 a.m. and will continue until noon, while supplies last. THERE WILL BE NO EARLY SALES. Cash, checks, and credit/debit cards are accepted.

June, July, August, September – Tuesdays at the Lighthouse

The Friends welcome guests to visit the lighthouse every Tuesday from noon to 4p! We will be on hand to give short lectures at your request, answer questions, and share information on upcoming and ongoing projects. There is no charge for visiting although donations to the Friends are always welcome. Please note that shoes must be worn to enter the museum. To climb the tower: **no flip-flops or slip on shoes; sandals must have a backstrap.**

Free Tuesdays in September will be contingent on the availability of volunteers.

Friday, August 7 - National Lighthouse Day

To mark the 150th anniversary of the lighthouse, there will be a variety of family-

friendly activities on this special day and on Saturday as well! Planning is underway so check out our website for more details.

October 9 & 10 - Harvest Festival

This event, held the second weekend in October, is one of the most highly anticipated events by campers and visitors. The event is sponsored by Tawas Point State Park with support from the Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park.

On Friday evening, Between the hours of 5p and 8p come and see the family-friendly Halloween decorations at the lighthouse - there is no ticket required! Hayrides run from the Campground Host Site to the lighthouse; check our website for times.

On Saturday, take a hayride (check our website for times) from the Campground Host Site to the lighthouse grounds, enjoy games and activities, pick up a pumpkin, and check out the family-friendly decorations at the lighthouse. Between noon and 5p visit the lighthouse for free, courtesy of the Michigan History Center. Finally, end the day at the Monster Bash Dance at the Beach Pavilion!

November 28 - Christmas at the Lighthouse

To wind up the 2026 season, visit the lighthouse and enjoy the rooms decorated in Christmas splendor. Only at this event are visitors allowed on the second floor to tour the Keeper’s Quarters. In addition, on this one special night of the year, there are lights in the tower lantern room recalling the days when the light was functioning and guiding ships along the coastline.

The Friends welcome the public to tour the lighthouse and climb the tower from noon to 4:30p. As our gift to you, no ticket is required for this event! Come and enjoy the Christmas decorations and visit with the Friends, climb the tower, and look over Tawas Point in all its winter glory.

2027 Date TBD - Winter Lantern Hike

Dress warm and spend some time outdoors with a hike up the Sandy Hook trail! Lanterns will light the way and fire pits will warm you up as you enjoy hot chocolate and a tasty treat. The event runs from 6p to 9p. Check our website for updated details including the date. The event is sponsored by Tawas Point State Park with support from the Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park.



No, there are no cobras at the state park although it looks like Janney Marie might have captured a picture of one!

Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park



Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the wise use and conservation of this gem that is Tawas Point State Park.

Adhering to its mission statement, the Friends organization works to support and improve the park through funding of projects, recreational equipment, and interpretive programs and by volunteering to assist park staff with projects and events.

To stay informed about upcoming state park events and to view great photos, join us on Facebook at: facebook.com/groups/Tawaslighthousefriends or search Facebook for “Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park.” Note that one does not have to be a member of the Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park

nonprofit organization in order to join the Friends Facebook page.

Don’t use Facebook? Our website is regularly updated and contains links to fundraising opportunities and activities. Visit tawaslighthousefriends.com for lots of information on upcoming events.

All of the proceeds from our fundraising events go directly to the Friends nonprofit organization to support projects and activities at the park. When there is a funding need, Tawas State Park management meets with the Friends to request support. Funds are allocated after approval by Friends membership. **Note:** The state park gift shop is not affiliated with the Friends nonprofit and our unique merchandise is not available for purchase at the gift shop.

Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse & State Park Membership Application

(Circle One)

Keeper (\$20) Keeper’s Family (\$40) Keeper’s Family Plus (\$75) Lifetime (\$300)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Return this completed portion along with payment made out to Friends of Tawas Point State Park.

Friends of Tawas Point State Park
P.O. Box 152
East Tawas, MI 48730

You, too, can become a Friend!

We need you! Support the Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park by becoming a member. Your membership supports activities and programs that promote and improve the park.

The Friends organization began in 1986 as an informal volunteer group formed to assist Tawas State Park staff with improving the park. It was formally incorporated in 1992 with written by-laws and a mission statement. In 2024 a total of 29 of our members completed 1,460 hours working on various projects in the park and at the lighthouse.

New members are always welcome and encouraged to join in our volunteer activities year-round or whenever their time permits.

There are several levels of membership from which to select.

• **Keeper** - \$20/year which includes unlimited \$2 admission to the lighthouse for one person.

• **Keeper’s Family** - \$40/ year which includes unlimited \$2 admission to the lighthouse for two adults and their children.

• **Keeper’s Family Plus** - \$75/year which includes unlimited \$2 admission to the lighthouse for two adults and

their children plus two guests.

• **Guardian of the Light** - \$300 includes all of the above for the lifetime of the member and member’s family.

All memberships include a 10% discount at the state-managed gift shop in appreciation for the support of Tawas State Park given by Friends members. In addition, members receive minutes of the Friends meetings and regular newsletters.

Contact information
Email: info@tawaslighthousefriends.com
Phone: 989-545-1421

Michigan’s Recreation Passport: Benefiting Parks and Communities

Purchasing a Michigan Recreation Passport is a requirement that not only benefits the state park system, but it also helps Michigan’s local communities improve their recreation opportunities.

Most of the revenue from the passport sales goes directly toward the funding of Michigan’s state park and recreation areas that receive no Michigan General Fund tax dollar support.

A percentage of the passport revenue also goes toward

funding grants that can assist local governments in improving or developing public recreation. The Friends of Tawas Point Lighthouse and State Park group was granted funding for a shed to house the Trackchair and for landscaping/hardscaping for the new Lighthouse Pavilion; these funds are granted by a Partnership Match funded by the Recreation Passport Program and the Park Endowment fund.

Michigan residents can pur-

chase the passport for \$15 at the time of license plate renewal. There is a \$5 convenience fee for resident passes purchased at a park. Non-resident cost is \$42 for an annual pass or \$12 per day. Check out the DNR website for additional details.

To learn more about how the Recreation Passport Local Grant Program can help your community, visit <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/buy-and-apply/grants/rec/rec-pp>.

Biking at the State Park

At times it seems that there are more bikes than cars in the park. To have a safe and enjoyable biking experience, we ask that visitors:

• Avoid riding after dark. If you must, bike slowly and use a light.

• Yield to pedestrians. If approaching pedestrians from the rear, then slow down and let them know which side you will use to pass. Saying, “On your left” or “On your right” is the common method.

• Keep speeds down, especially on footpaths.

• Be alert for moving vehicles, especially in parking areas. Yield to all vehicles.

• Do not ride or leave bikes in front of doorways.

• Please use bike racks and lock up bikes when left alone.

• Stay on paved areas and do not ride in areas where bikes are prohibited.

• Biking is not allowed off road or on the Sandy Hook Trail.

Interested in riding outside of the park? The Tawas Bay Pedestrian and Bike Path is a paved, non-motorized trailway that extends some 13 miles along Michigan’s Lake Huron shoreline. It offers a safe and scenic, off-highway route that begins at Dyer Road just south of Alabaster and shadows US-23 through Tawas and East Tawas, ending at the lighthouse. It is also part of the Iron Belle Trail.

Enjoying Tawas Point State Park With Your Pet

Pets can be an important part of one’s family and they are welcome at Tawas Point State Park.

While visiting the park with your pet, be aware that there are rules in place for the safety and consideration of other park guests and pets.

For all pets visiting Tawas Point State Park, the following rules apply:

• Pets must be on a 6-foot leash at all times.

• Pet owners must clean up their pet’s waste.

• Pets cannot be left unattended anywhere in the park

• Pets cannot be allowed to bark excessively, exhibit aggressive behavior, or cause a disturbance.

• Pets are not allowed on park beaches with the exception of the Pet Friendly Beach. It is the responsibility of pet owners to follow the park rules regarding pets. Failure to comply with the rules may result in a warning, citation, or the eviction of the pet from the park.

• Pets are not allowed on any park trail.

• Pets are not allowed in the



lighthouse with the exception of ADA approved service dogs. Therapy, comfort, or emotional support animals do not qualify for entry.

Pet-friendly water access in the Park

Many pets love playing in the water. With so many miles of Lake Huron shoreline, it seems that Tawas Point State Park would have plenty of places for owners to take their pets swimming. Unfortunately, it isn’t as simple as letting pets swim anywhere along the shore.

Historically, endangered piping plovers have nested along parts of the shoreline and pets and plovers do not do well together!

Park beaches are closed to pets. Instead, check out the Pet Friendly Beach on the Tawas Bay side of the park. There are signs along the paths directing pet owners to this beach. Leash rules still apply and cleaning up after your pet is mandatory.

In addition to Tawas Point State Park, there is a pet-friendly beach at the East Tawas City Park.

Do Not Miss These Great Sites

There are several must-see places near Tawas Point State Park. Here are a few to get you started:

1. **Iosco County Historical Museum**, East Tawas: The museum is housed in a beautiful period house, over 100 years old, and preserves the history and culture of Iosco County within its two floors of interesting displays and memories. Check their website at ioscomuseum.com for hours of operation (varies per season).

2. **Lumberman’s Monument**, located along the River Road National Scenic Byway, Oscoda: View this 14-foot bronze statue dedicated to the pioneer spirit and efforts of Michigan lumbermen and the Northern Michigan logging industry, enjoy spectacular views of the AuSable River, and descend the 206 steps to

visit the wanigan – a logger’s floating kitchen.

3. **Iargo Springs**, Oscoda: Follow the River Road National Scenic Byway just past Lumberman’s Monument to visit beautiful Iargo Springs. Climb the 294 steps to experience the serenity and natural beauty of Iargo Springs and the AuSable River.

4. **Tuttle Marsh**, Old U.S. 23 and Tuttle Marsh Rd. in Oscoda Township: Tuttle Marsh is a 5,000-acre wetland renowned for its variety of birds and wildlife including deer, fox, muskrats, beavers, otters, turtles, and herons.

There are many events and attractions in the Tawas area for all ages. For information, details, or suggestions contact the Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce at 800-55-TAWAS or visit the website at tawas.com.

Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Welcome from Don LaBarre Historian, Michigan History Center

2026 is a big year for Tawas Point. Both the Tawas Point Lighthouse (TPL) and the Tawas Point Life Saving Station (TPLSS) were built in the Fall of 1876, giving us much to celebrate as they approach their 150th anniversary—two complementary institutions that worked together to guide ships and save lives along this stretch of Lake Huron. East Tawas Coastguard Station, originally the Tawas Point Life-Saving Station, is considered one of the oldest continuously operating stations in Lake Huron.

To aid in the celebrations, 12 teams of four volunteers will serve as lighthouse interpreters, greeting visitors and sharing the history of Tawas Point. These volunteers come from across the United States to experience the unique charm that those of us who frequent Tawas Point know so well.

Park staff, the Friends group, the Michigan History Center, and other partners are coming together to make this year, and the next, especially meaningful for both the community and visitors. I’m particularly excited about this year’s National Lighthouse Day and the activities we have planned to celebrate the start of the 150th year.

To better appreciate this milestone, it helps to look back at the broader forces that led to the construction of both the lighthouse and the life-saving station. By the mid-19th century, the Great Lakes had become one of the busiest inland transportation networks in the world, linking eastern markets with the rapidly growing Midwest. As lumber communities such as Tawas City, East Tawas, Bay City, and Alpena expanded after the 1840s, maritime trade along the western shores of Lake Huron increased dramatically. Schooners and steamers carried lumber, coal, iron, and immigrants across what sailors called the “sweet water seas”, making safe navigation more important than ever.

With this surge in traffic, lighthouses began to dot the coastline as part of a growing federal effort to make Great Lakes shipping safer and more reliable. In 1852, local communities successfully petitioned the federal government for a lighthouse at Tawas Point, recognizing its strategic importance along this busy route. The first lighthouse was completed and first exhibited in 1853 under the oversight of the U.S. Treasury Department, which

managed early lighthouse construction before later reforms improved the system.

However, like many early lights, the original structure had its shortcomings. By the mid-1860s, mariners and community leaders criticized its dim light, which was blamed for causing several shipwrecks. At the same time, the ever-changing shoreline, shaped by wind, waves, and shifting sands, pushed the lighthouse nearly a mile inland by the 1870s, reducing its effectiveness as a navigational aid.

These concerns coincided with a period of reform in federal lighthouse management. The establishment of the Lighthouse Board in 1852 brought a more professional, standardized approach to lighthouse design, placement, and technology across the country, including the Great Lakes.

As traffic increased in the Great Lakes, so did the dangers. Shipwrecks were a frequent and often deadly reality on the Great Lakes, prompting the development of the U.S. Life-Saving Service in 1876—an organization dedicated to rescuing shipwrecked sailors through trained crews, specialized equipment, and a network of coastal stations like the one

eventually established at Tawas Point.

After the wreck of the Dolphin in 1874 highlighted the ongoing dangers at Tawas Point, the Lighthouse Board approved a new lighthouse at a more effective location further south along the point, and Congress appropriated funds for both a new lighthouse and a life-saving station in 1875.

Construction began in 1876, with about 40 workers building both the lighthouse and the life-saving station. While the lighthouse helped prevent disasters by guiding vessels safely along the coast, the life-saving station stood ready to respond when those efforts failed, with crews trained to launch rescue boats into some of the most dangerous conditions on the Great Lakes. Crews at stations like Tawas Point drilled regularly, practiced surfboat launches, and maintained constant readiness during the shipping season, often risking their lives in storms to reach stranded sailors.

In the late Fall of 1876 both the lighthouse and life-saving station Tawas Point were completed. On November 16, 1876, the Iosco County Gazette unceremoniously reported that “the new Light House is completed”. Both facilities remained closed through the winter. On April 10, 1877, the new lighthouse was first exhibited, beginning its long service guiding mariners along Tawas Point, while the life-saving station began its equally important work standing watch for those in peril.

I look forward to sharing more of these stories as we enter this milestone year, helping connect our community and visitors to the rich history of both the lighthouse and the life-saving station—two closely linked efforts that together made Tawas Point a safer place for all who traveled the Great Lakes, and part of the larger story that shaped the region.

From Ottawa Point to Tawas Point

In 1850, Tawas Bay was a pretty peaceful place. There existed a few log cabins, a few hearty fishermen and farmers, and a tribe of Chippewa Indians led by Chief O-ta-was. Tawas Bay was a natural harbor of refuge and was bordered on the east by a sandy peninsula called O-ta-was Point. Map makers respelled the peninsula name, identifying it as Ottawa Point. In those early days, your present campsite would likely have been under water since Ottawa Point ended in the vicinity between today’s park contact station and the park headquarters building.

Throughout the 1850s, an increasing number of ships sailed Lake Huron and Tawas Bay was frequently used as a harbor of refuge for vessels escaping Lady Huron’s severe lake

storms. Recognizing this fact, the United States Government decided to establish a light station at the end of Ottawa Point. This light station was completed and ready for use in time for the 1853 shipping season and was situated near the back of what is now the grassy play area near the park contact station. At that time, the light station tower and keeper’s dwelling were the only permanent buildings on Tawas Bay. A local farmer named Sherman Wheeler became the lighthouse keeper. Local history states that Chief O-ta-was was a frequent visitor and dinner guest at the lighthouse.

Another frequent visitor was Gideon Whittemore, originally from Vermont, who served on the Board of Regents at the University of Michigan and as Michigan Secretary of

State from 1846-1848. When Whittemore eventually came north to Tawas Bay looking for timber land, he stayed at the lighthouse with the Wheelers. As is easy to imagine, Gideon Whittemore found vast acres of white pine forest. Whittemore soon established a settlement, a sawmill, and a lumber business that in 1854 became Tawas City. A rival sawmill built to the east became East Tawas (Hinsdale, 1906).

The names Ottawa Point and Tawas Point were used interchangeably until 1901 when the location was officially named Tawas Point. A picture of the old Ottawa Point Light can be seen at the kiosk near the current lighthouse and gift shop. Be sure to check out the new historical signage!

Trackchair Project

In an effort to make outdoor recreation in Michigan more accessible for everyone, the Michigan DNR launched a program to bring Trackchairs to our state parks and trails. Trackchairs are off-road, electronic chairs that can easily handle trails, snow, and sand allowing users to explore areas of the parks that traditional wheelchairs might not reach.

Thanks to generous donors and a grant from the Cooper Charitable Fund in 2024, the Friends were able to raise more than \$16,000 for the purchase of a Trackchair from Michigan Trackchairs. Since delivery of the original one, a second has been donated!

The chair has so many special features and will allow those with mobility issues to access all areas of the park! Once all policies and procedures are in place and a new building was erected to house them, it will be available free of charge to those who have not been able to enjoy the trails and beaches. The chairs have some amazing features including the ability for a companion to manage the controls if the user is unable to do so. It also has a dual-port

USB charger, tilt-on-the-fly mechanism, cushioned arm rests, fixed footrest (adjustable for height), rear stability wheels, lap seatbelt, and independent flip-up arms plus a shelf on the back for a cooler!

The Trackchair had a “soft launch” late in 2025 and both are now in service beginning May 1.

The park’s Trackchairs are

available to borrow in 4-hour slots, so there’s ample time to clean, maintain and recharge them between reservations. To make an advance reservation (24-hour notice is preferred), please call 989-362-5041. The chair will be available to borrow on a first-come, first-served basis. A short training session will be provided to ensure safe and comfortable operation.



Trackchair heart – PC Kari Heiple Vlaminc recorded her daughter drawing a heart in the sand using the new Trackchair.

Camping with Critters

When staying at Tawas Point State Park, you’ll be sharing the park with wildlife that makes this park their home. Raccoons and squirrels are often seen as well as skunks, fox, and deer.

To keep the wildlife wild and to avoid any conflict with the park’s critters, make sure to keep a clean campsite. Properly store your food and never feed wildlife.

- Never leave your food unattended, not even for a minute.
- Always store food, garbage, and scented items in critter-proof containers or in your vehicle with the windows and doors closed.
- Do not put food or trash in fire circles.
- Do not store food, garbage,



- or scented items in tents.
- Always keep a clean camp!
- Never feed wildlife, intentionally or by accident. Keep wildlife wild.



The Native plant sale is always a big hit. Even small additions of native plants improve the environment and benefit wildlife.

LAKE TO BAY GROCERY

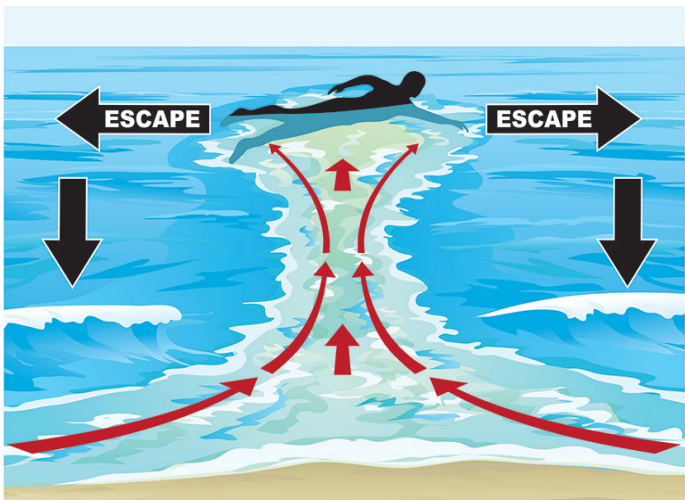
- beer, wine & spirits
- ice cream & candy
- bait & fishing tackle
- ice & firewood
- general groceries
- camping supplies
- pasties & perogies
- beach toys & kites
- gifts & apparel

525 Tawas Beach Road at Jerry's Marina, East Tawas

Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Dangerous Currents
Avoid Dangerous Areas:

- Stay in designated swim areas.
- Avoid swimming near piers and breakwalls. Many fatalities have occurred.



If trapped in a dangerous current:

- Swim to the side, out of the current, and then to shore.
- If in danger, call for someone to throw a life ring or anything that floats.

www.dangerouscurrents.org

Stay Safe
Flag Warning System

There are dangerous currents at this beach and fatalities have occurred.

Red

Double red flags = water access prohibited by law
\$500 fine for entering the water

Red

Red flag = high hazard
High surf and/or strong currents

Yellow

Yellow flag = medium hazard
Watch for dangerous currents and high waves

Green

Green flag = low hazard
Watch for changing conditions

Swim safe while
enjoying Lake Huron

Each year Tawas Point State Park’s visitors are drawn to the sandy beaches of Lake Huron. On a hot summer day there is nothing better than jumping into this wonderful, unsalted sea to cool off.

Lake Huron and its shores can also be dangerous. Conditions can and do change with little notice. Each day, throughout the summer, park staff continuously monitor lake conditions and post warning flags indicating any swimming danger. Be aware of these flags.

The warning flags are located at the park entrance (contact station) and in front of the Day Use Beach Pavilion.

The park’s beaches do not have lifeguards and all visitors swim at their own risk; however, rescue throw buoys are located on the beach near the Day Use Beach Pavilion in case of emergency. Thanks to MyMichigan Tawas Hospital’s partnering with Tawas Point State Park, a life jacket loaner station is located near the beach pavilion and holds

life jackets that swimmers may borrow for free. The life jackets are available in sizes ranging from infant to adult. If you have any new or like new lifejackets you would like to donate, just drop them off at the park office.

Days when waves are high are fun but they come with the possibility of longshore and rip currents. Again, be cautious and be aware of the warning flags.

Before entering the water, visitors should learn how to react if caught in one of these currents. To learn more about Great Lakes beach safety, visit greatlakeswatersafety.org. Have an enjoyable and safe beach season!

Please note that the lake near the Day Use parking lot (north-east of the Beach Pavilion) that was once the fishing pond gets deep very, very quickly. Swimming there is highly discouraged. Very windy days can increase the likelihood of rip currents due to the depth and location along the shoreline. Please swim ONLY in the designated buoyed swimming area!

Park Tips and FAQs

What and where are the nearest grocery stores?

There are several options in the Tawas: Lake to Bay at 542 Tawas Beach Road (just outside the park past Jerry’s Marina), Neiman’s Family Market at 220 W. Lake Street (US 23), Klenow’s Market at 201 Newman Street, East Tawas, and Freel’s Market at 1139 W. Lake Street, Tawas City, and Wal-Mart at 621 E. Lake Street (US 23).

Where can I get my propane tank filled?

Propane tanks can be filled at:

- Tawas Hardware Do-It Best at 108 W. Lake Street (US 23) in Tawas City
- Tractor Supply at 1698 N. Huron Road, in East Tawas
- Jay’s RV at 1554 N. US 23, in East Tawas
- Rose City RV of Tawas at 1229 US 23, in Tawas City

Is alcohol allowed in the park?

Yes. Michigan law requires that you must be over 21 to possess or consume alcoholic beverages. General state laws concerning the possession and consumption of alcohol apply in Tawas Point State Park.

Are drones allowed in the park?

Yes. Drones are allowed in the park with some restrictions. Drones cannot be flown over the beaches from mid-April through August because our beaches are nesting habitat for the endangered piping plover. Drones cannot be flown over people and the campground due to the park’s noise rule. Drones cannot be flown closer than 100 feet to the lighthouse. Due

to the proximity to the local airport, drone operators must hold a valid FAA Drone Pilot license. Please be courteous and respect the privacy of other campers and visitors. If you have questions about where you can or cannot fly a drone, contact the park office and speak with the supervisor.

Where is the sanitation station?

The sanitation station is located across the street from the contact station.

Are fireworks allowed in the park?

It is unlawful to use or ignite fireworks in Tawas Point State Park.

May we gather dead wood on the ground for a fire?

No. Dead wood provides food and homes for wildlife, helps prevent erosion, and creates valuable topsoil in the forest.

Can we collect snakes, frogs, or turtles?

No. It is illegal to capture or collect frogs, snakes, turtles, or any other wild creature in the state park. Many of these animals are dying and decreasing in numbers. You can help protect our wildlife by keeping them wild.

After I check out, can I leave my vehicle on the campsite while I visit the beach?

No. If you want to spend time at the beach after checking out, try to clear your site before 11 a.m. Doing so will give you a better chance of finding a parking space in the Day Use parking lot.

What should I do to my campsite before I leave?

To leave a clean and safe site for the next campers, put out your fire in the fire ring with water, pick up any litter on the site, and clean and wipe down the picnic table. Remember to always leave the site cleaner than when you arrived.

Are powered scooters, Segways, golf carts, or ORVs allowed to be operated in the park?

No. Electrical and/or internal combustion engine, motorized equipment that is not licensed by the State of Michigan cannot operate within Tawas Point State Park. An exception is made for children driving electrically powered toys on their campsites. Individuals with mobility impairment who use a personal assistive mobility device (PAMD) are also exempted. A PAMD is defined as a “single-user device operated as an extension of the individual and in a safe and responsible manner at pedestrian speeds for locomotion.” The Track Chair, provided by the park, is permitted on the beach and trails.



Life jacket loaner station is now located near the beach pavilion.

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Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Tawas Point Lighthouse

The lighthouse that stands today is the second lighthouse on Tawas Point, historically referred to as Ottawa Point. (See “From Ottawa Point to Tawas Point.”)

The original lighthouse of 1853, called the Ottawa Point Light, sat near what is now the entrance to Tawas Point State Park. Lake Huron’s prevailing northeast winds and resulting waves continuously deposited sand onto the end of the point. This natural reshaping and lengthening of the point eventually left the original Ottawa Point Light ¾ of a mile from the end of the point that it was supposed to mark. The old light was also dim and difficult to see making navigation dangerous.

By 1876, the United States Lighthouse Board had acquired land at the point’s new end and Congress approved funding for the construction of a new lighthouse consisting of a 67 foot high white tower and an attached 1½ story red brick keeper’s dwelling. In order to create a stable base on which these structures could be built, an area at the end of the point was shored up by means of a massive crib structure filled with timber pilings driven in the ground to provide a secure base for a circular foundation of cut limestone blocks.

The Fifth Order Fresnel lens was moved from the old lighthouse to the lantern room of the new lighthouse. Lard and sperm oil were used to fuel the lamp. In 1891, a new and larger Fourth Order Fresnel lens, made in Paris, was installed. Commonly used on the Great Lakes and in Michigan, the new Fourth Order Fresnel lens projected 16 miles and remains in place today.



When erected in 1876, the Tawas Point Lighthouse rested on a timber crib and was completely surrounded by water. By 1891, accretion (the movement of sand by wind and water) resulted in the lighthouse being completely surrounded by land.

Several other changes were evidenced over the next 40 years. After the new lighthouse and keeper’s dwelling were constructed, the unceasing movement of sand at Tawas Point continued and by 1890 sand was expanding the point and filling in around the lighthouse. Another change was the shift from lard and whale oil to kerosene as lamp fuel. Because kerosene is volatile, a brick storage building (since referred to as the oil house) was built in 1898 to store the fuel. In 1899, as part of a national network of lighthouse signal stations, a brick fog signal building housing a steam-powered fog signal was built at the point’s new end a mile from the lighthouse. Electricity was brought to the lighthouse and keeper’s dwelling in 1935 and full plumbing was installed in 1938.

By the 1950s, the lighthouse once again stood too far inland to serve as anything but a coast light. Mariners now relied more heavily on radio and radar for navigation. Because of

these changes, the lighthouse was recognized as a historical artifact and the tower was automated and closed in 1953. The keeper’s dwelling became Coast Guard family housing until 1993 when the dwelling was abandoned. Ownership of the Tawas Point Lighthouse was transferred to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 2001 and the Michigan Historical Center (MHC) and the State Historic Preservation Office began the work of restoration in 2002. The Tawas Point Keeper Program began in 2008.

After 140 years of faithfully projecting a light for the mariners of Tawas Bay and northern Lake Huron, the Coast Guard ceased lighting from the tower in September of 2016. In its place, a modern optic was established at the fog signal near the current end of the point. So, for the third time, a light to serve as an aid to navigation was established near the end of an ever-changing Tawas Point.

Charity Island Lighthouse

On clear days, it is possible to see Big Charity Island from the Tawas area. The island is about 16 miles south of the Tawas Point Lighthouse and is the largest island in Saginaw Bay. It lies at the entrance to Saginaw and both Big Charity Island and the neighboring Little Charity Island are considered to be a hazard to shipping due to the shallow shoals surrounding them for about two miles in all directions.

Big Charity Island played an important role in early Great Lakes shipping when a lighthouse was built on the northernmost point of the island in 1857. The island was formally acquired by the federal government with an executive order signed by Abraham Lincoln fifteen days before he was assassinated. This new lighthouse became a link in the chain of lighthouses that guided ships safely into Saginaw Bay.

The lighthouse is thirty-nine feet tall and, when built, contained a Fourth Order Fresnel lens. A separate Keepers dwelling was built in 1857.

On the night of December 4, 1885, the steamer Oconto was crossing Saginaw Bay in a blinding blizzard with twenty-two passengers and twenty-five crew aboard. As the seas increased, the Captain decided to turn his boat around and head for shelter in Tawas Bay. While bucking the waves, the starboard bulwarks were stove

in and all the light freight on the hurricane deck was washed away. To make matters worse, several frightened horses and cows broke from their stalls and stampeded. Around midnight, a light was spotted and the captain attempted to find the entrance to the bay. The light, however, proved to be Charity Island not Tawas Point, and the steamer was soon hard aground.

The boat remained intact through the remainder of the night, and the following morning, the steamer started blowing its whistles. Keeper McDonald and his assistant soon appeared on the south shore of Charity Island, and a lifeboat was launched to reach them. Everyone aboard was soon transferred to the island, where the men found shelter in two fish huts, and the two women and a child were taken to the lighthouse. Charles Brown, a cook who died of fright during the storm, was buried on Charity Island. When the weather improved, a detachment was sent ashore, and the lifesaving crew at Tawas was dispatched to bring the others to the mainland.

In 1942 the light was extinguished. The original lighthouse tower remains standing but is in disrepair while the old Keepers dwelling has been replaced by a modern home on the same foundation.

East Tawas State Harbor

East Tawas State Harbor provides a pleasant and quiet refuge for boat “camping.” The harbor is located adjacent to a public beach and is just blocks away from the downtown shopping and dining district of East Tawas.

Harbor amenities are many and include boat launch and day-use dockage, diesel and gasoline fuels, restrooms and showers, water, electricity (30 and 50 AMP), playground and public beach, ice, grills and picnic tables, fishing pier and

public beach, parking lot, luggage carts, and boat pump-outs. The Harbor has a new fully furnished boater lounge with Wi-Fi, seating, as well as a new washer and dryer.

Slip Information: East Tawas State Harbor provides 80 seasonal slips and 60 transient slips in sizes: 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, and 60 feet. Contact the Harbor for questions at 989-362-2731, or 989-362-5041 or go on michigan.gov/dnr.

Operates late May through late September.



What’s at the end of the rainbow? Tawas Point Lighthouse, of course! PC Shanone Bondie

Piping Plovers

Did you know that Tawas Point State Park has the unique habitat needed for piping plover nesting? One of the region’s largest open sandy beaches, stretching over 2 miles, is one of only two recent piping plover nesting sites along the Lake Huron shoreline.

Volunteers, including members of our Friends group, monitor nesting plover sites at the state park. In 2025, three plover nests were lost to predators, but quick action saved four eggs. These rescued eggs were brought to the University of Michigan Biological Station, where they hatched and were raised until ready for release. The four chicks were released at Tawas Point State Park alongside three other captive-reared birds. Thanks to 345 hours of volunteer monitoring, these endangered plovers have a fighting chance.

Monitoring and protecting these beautiful birds is a joint effort of several organizations

including Huron Pines, AuSable Valley Chapter of the Audubon Society, The Great Lakes Piping Plover Conservation Team, Michigan DNR Parks Division, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Friends of Tawas Point State Park.

When visiting the park, be aware of any signs or fencing indicating a restricted area. Plovers like their privacy and human disturbance can cause them to abandon their nest. Be respectful of this unusual and beautiful visitor!



Photo Credit - Kelly Willas

Trail Etiquette Tawas Point State Park

While outdoors enjoying Tawas Point State Park’s trail system, please follow these guidelines so the park remains enjoyable for all.

- **Pack out** what you pack in. Carry out and dispose of all your trash including cigarette butts and fruit peels.
- **Please leave** wildflowers, wildlife, and historic objects undisturbed so that all visitors may enjoy them.
- **Pets must** be leashed at all times. Please clean up after your pet. There are clean-up bags located near the Day Use Beach Pavilion, at the Pet Friendly Beach, the contact station, the campground host site, and at the beginning of the paved hiking trail to the lighthouse near campsite 132.
- **Bicycles** are only permitted on paved paths and are prohibited on the paver walkway approaching the gift shop
- **The soft,** sandy soils of Tawas Point State Park erode easily. Please stay on designated trails and avoid taking shortcuts across grassy fields or dunes.
- **Hike safely.** Check the weather forecast before heading out and dress appropriately.

“The Friends acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the state park staff to make Tawas Point State Park such a special place.”

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Sights and Sounds of Tawas Point

Ottawa Point Life-Saving Station Firewood Responsibility

Before rail lines crossed the state, ships were the primary method of moving goods in the late 1800's. Mariners depended on a series of lighthouses on all of the Great Lakes to guide them on their journeys. The lakes could turn treacherous without warning and there are plenty of stories of ships foundering in storms.

The United States Life-Saving Service was founded in 1848 for the purpose of rescuing shipwrecked sailors and passengers. Originally the U.S. government provided funding for equipment and buildings but the rescues were performed by volunteers. Stations struggled with maintaining equipment and poor training for the volunteers until 1871. Congress finally appropriated money for



full time personnel to man the stations.

Because of the treacherous coastline on Lake Huron, at the same time the second lighthouse was under construction in 1876, Ottawa Point Life-Saving Station was built nearby. It was expanded several times over the years and additional outbuildings were added. A portion of the building was recently renovated and stands proudly facing the lake as it has for 144 years.

Explorer Program

From June through mid-August, the Explorer Program offers a variety of fun and interactive talks, hikes, and outdoor learning experiences that connect participants with nature. Explorer Guides, with backgrounds in natural resources and education, are on hand each summer to provide these programs. Anyone, whether visiting or camping at the park can participate in Explorer Program activities at no cost.

Explorer activity schedules

can be found at the Tawas and Oscoda Chambers of Commerce, the Day Use Beach Pavilion, the campground host site, the bathhouses, the contact station, the gift shop, and the park office. On the day of an activity, participants will find an informational board posted at the activity location which can be found on the schedule.

The Explorer Program is a benefit of the Recreation Passport program.

There is something special about sitting around a campfire, enjoying the warmth and flickering light that it provides. Unfortunately, the same wood that provides us with such joy can also be home to non-native pests or diseases that harm our local forests.

With Oak Wilt, Hemlock Woolley Adelgid, and Asian long-horned beetles an issue, it is important to only use firewood that is certified as pest free. Safe wood is often kiln dried, which kills invasive pests or diseases, keeping these diseases and pests out of our forests. If purchasing wood outside the park, ask the vendor if the wood has been kiln dried. Wood brought from out of the park or from along the roadside cannot be guaranteed to be free of invasive species and pests. Do your part to save our forests and buy your wood at the contact station.

Don't move firewood. It bugs us!



Photo Credit - Linda Bartrum Filer

Campground Hosts: Tawas Point State Park's Ambassadors

The volunteer campground hosts at Tawas Point State Park are experienced campers who are eager to share their knowledge of camping, the park, and the local area. Campground hosts provide 30 hours of service per week, helping campers find their campsites, answering campers' questions, planning campground activities, and performing park maintenance duties. Visitors with questions about the weather, favorite eateries, rainy day activities, or area shopping opportunities would be well served to stop by the campground host site for a

chat. The host site also maintains a library of paperbacks for lending as well as games for rainy days.

Want to become a Tawas State Park Campground Host? Generally speaking, candidates are screened and interviewed by park managers and selected based on their availability, familiarity with camping in state parks, special skills, and knowledge of the area. If selected, candidates must participate in a two-day host training session within the first two years of being selected.

Individuals or couples may

apply for volunteer campground host positions that begin in April and last through October. Volunteer hosts must be 18 years of age or older and must provide their own camping equipment, food, and other personal items. Additional requirements include:

- Applicants must be able to work at least five days a week, including weekends and holidays (30 hours per week).
- Applicants must agree to a background check.
- Applicants may not be DNR employees.

Staying Tick-Free This Summer

As people head outdoors during the warmer months, we need to be cautious about the tiny ticks that share their outdoor home with us. The ticks in our area can carry Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, or Rocky Mountain spotted fever that can affect not only humans but also dogs. Caught early, these diseases are easily treatable.

To learn more about the symptoms and early detection of Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, or Rocky Mountain spotted fever, visit the Center for Disease Control's website at cdc.gov.

The presence of ticks is not new in Michigan but only recently has the black legged, or deer tick, become increasingly common in the Lower Peninsula. It is thought that the deer tick's range has expanded by attachment to animals and birds that move the ticks into new areas. It is this tick that can spread diseases.

Since ticks are present in this area, it is important that visitors be tick-aware.

- After coming back from a hike, give yourself a "tick inspection." Carefully examine yourself to make sure no ticks are on you or your clothing.

- Use a lint roller with adhesive layers to remove ticks from clothing. Take the roller with you when going outside and periodically roll your clothing, especially socks and pants. Once ticks are stuck on the adhesive layer, peel that layer off, insert it in a zipper type plastic bag, and dispose of the bag in a garbage container.

- Tuck your pants inside your socks to minimize access to your ankles and legs.

- Commercially, DEET or Permethrin are insecticides.

Educate yourself about ticks so you can enjoy the great outdoors and the park! Don't let ticks bug you so much that your outdoor time is ruined.



One of the most frequently asked question is "when will the monarchs arrive"? Only they know and they aren't telling! PC Kelly Willas



Tawas Point is world famous for viewing migrating birds. The beautiful Cedar waxwing stopped by for a visit. PC Kelly Willas

Memorial Walkway Paver Hunt

The Lighthouse Memorial Walkway, beginning at the gift shop, is comprised of brick pavers with interesting messages. Can you find:

- A paver for the first lighthouse in 1852? What was that lighthouse called?
- The five pavers celebrating anniversaries? What was the largest number of years?
- A paver with another name for a coyote (songdog)?
- A paver that shows the number of steps to the top of the tower? How many steps are there?
- Four pavers dedicated to dogs?
- A paver with the name of someone born and raised on Tawas Point?
- The name of the first Tawas Point State Park manager?
- Eight pavers celebrating volunteer keepers who have stayed at the lighthouse?
- A paver that celebrates a

marriage proposal? Did she say yes? (Hint: there are two but only one that has the answer to the big question.)

- A paver that shows the state furthest from Tawas Point State Park? (Hint: it's way out west!)

- Nine pavers that identify members of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)? The U.S. Lighthouse Service merged into the U.S. Coast Guard in 1939.

- The name of visitors from a Michigan City known for its chicken dinners?

- Who was a Puzzle Queen?
- Who camped here for 38 years?

If you would like help finding these pavers, head to the Visitor Information page on our website (www.tawaslighthousefriends.com). At the bottom you will find a map to help you find the answers!



The long-awaited dedication of the Lighthouse Pavilion took place on September 10, 2025. Years of planning and fundraising by the Friends plus funding from the DNR Partnership Match made this wonderful pavilion a reality.



The winter was a gold mine for aurora photographers. Nicole Foster caught this brilliant array of colors!

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The Friends thank the DNR staff at Tawas Point State Park for their hard work and dedication.



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