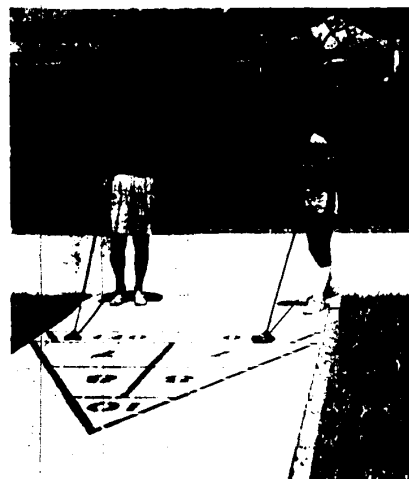


Olympic-sized pool is the biggest feature of Willow Metropark. It can accommodate 900 persons from beginners to expert divers.



Shuffleboard courts are free at Willow Metropark and are enjoyed by Canton residents Mrs. John Sterling and daughter Victoria, 12.

Quietly, 3 Metroparks appear in our backyard

By LEM NESSEE
Outdoors writer

"Gon up north to the lake," asked the neighborhood slouch as he watched us pack the car with picnic gear.

"Nope. South," I said as I wedged the cooler into the trunk between the towels and the golf clubs and the rest.

"South?" "Nothin' but Toledo down that way." He was stumped and I was glad.

THERE ARE THREE Huron-Clinton Metroparks to the south of us, and it turns out they're a lot closer than the proverbial "up north" lakes.

HCMA, the authority which runs them, is sinking good money into them, and so the civilized portions of the facilities are new and first-class.

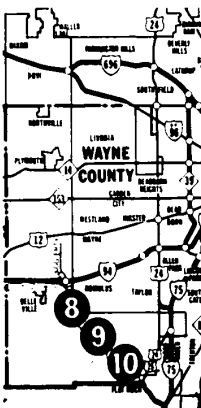
WILLOW METROPARK, six miles directly south of Metropolitan Airport, has a new (olympic size) swimming pool and games area.

The pool facility has a bathroom with heated showers and coin-operated lockers for clothes checking, a food service building and patio, and central plant.

They charge you 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for kids under 12 to use the pool another quarter if you want to check a batch of clothes in a coin-operated locker. Weekday hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with longer hours on weekends.

We pack a lunch, as a matter of principle, but you can buy hamburgers or hot dogs if you want.

The games area has four basketball courts, 10 shuffleboard courts and two tennis courts. Shuffleboard and basketball areas are free, and they'll even give you



Three Metroparks in our collective backyard are (8) Lower Huron, (9) the new Willow and (10) Oakwoods.

equipment. Tennis courts rent for \$1.50 an hour and you bring your own equipment.

A NEW feature for metroparks is the tot lot, with a village of child-sized homes, a factory, supermarket, gas station and a red schoolhouse.

A bicycle highway rolls across gentle hills. The kids can also use swings, a spiral slide and bench.

If you haven't been there, the park entrance is on Willow Road just west of Huron River Drive. Park admission is \$1 a car, but we always get a \$5 season pass that lets us in all 10 metroparks.

Dave Landaw, HCMA director, and Willow Metropark cost more than \$4.5 million, with \$1.9 million coming from that state recreation bond issue we passed a few years ago and \$400,000 from a federal open space grant.

Willow isn't the only metropark down that way.

LOWER HURON Metropark just east of Belleville is one of the most scenic spots in southern Michigan.

It too has a pool, dressing room, showers and food bar at the same prices as Willow.

Naturalists can take your group on the Paw Paw and Bob White trails or you can hike the trail yourself.

The 18-hole golf course is a par 3, which means the distance between holes is 50 to 110 yards.

There's no family camping, but groups such as scouts and Camp Fire girls may camp there. Lower Huron has been a popular spot for scout winter Klondike expeditions.

FURTHER SOUTH is Oakwoods Metropark, with 1,700 acres just west of Flat Rock.

Its chief asset is the year-old Nature Center, a \$240,000 project. There are an indoor turtle pond, a small auditorium for study groups, and a raft of exhibits.

The nature study area has several bays and woods populated by frogs, muskrats, turtles, fish, ducks and several uncommon wildflowers.

The entire spot is rich in history because it was once part of the Wyandot (Huron) Indian reservation in the 1880s.

Four hiking trails in the nature area vary from 700 feet to two miles in length. Bring your camera.



Tot lot with child-sized schoolhouse drew Mary Jo Comb (left), 10, of Plymouth and friends to the new Willow Metropark.



Keith Talladay and Melanie Crockett try the "par 3" golf course at Lower Huron Metropark.



Scenic Lower Huron Metropark draws picnickers from the Belleville area.



Nature Center is main feature of downriver Oakwoods Metropark. (Photos from Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority)