



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS



DOGWOOD POND

By Milly Hubler

A necklace of green is Dayton's boast,
With MetroParks as its energetic host.

A surprising sanctuary is Dogwood Pond,
Uniting man and nature in a bucolic bond.

Several babbling brooks feed the pond each day,
Busy toddlers feed pebbles to the fish in play.

Flowers: Dutchman's Breeches and Goldenrod
so bright
Frame Dogwood seasonally, day and night.

Turtles and ducks find homes on a log,
Regardless of weather, sunshine or fog.

Monet-like reflections, especially in fall,
For hikers of all ages continue to enthrall.

Canines and canes vie for sound and space,
All are welcome in this very special place.

Dogwood Pond has a serenity all its own,
Regardless of where one is destined to roam.



Dayton resident Milly Hubler sent MetroParks this beautiful poem about Dogwood Pond in Hills & Dales MetroPark. She writes, "My friend Linda Kramer and I are senior citizens who walk around Dogwood Pond at least twice daily. We both have canes and are known as the 'cane sisters.' Our walks inspired me to write this poem."

Milly Hubler served as the first president of the Cox Arboretum Associate Board from 1966 until 1969, overseeing the writing of its constitution and by-laws. She also worked with the Junior League of Dayton to raise money in support of Cox Arboretum in the early 1960s.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Financials	2
Five Rivers MetroParks Overview	3
Organizational Successes	5
Research and Restoration	14
Planning	15
Community Support	17
Support Your MetroParks	18
Volunteers	19
Leadership	20

MISSION

To protect the region's natural heritage and provide outdoor experiences that inspire a personal connection with nature.

VISION

To be the conservation leader of a vital, active, nature-based community.

PURPOSE

To protect natural areas, parks and river corridors and promote the conservation and use of these lands and waterways for the ongoing benefit of the people in the region.

VALUES

- Excellence
- Community
- Innovation
- Fun
- Integrity
- Commitment
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Professional Growth
- Diversity
- Sustainability



KEEPING NATURE OPEN ALL YEAR: THANK YOU!

The year 2020 was truly different. All of us experienced change after change, new information coming at a speed we haven't seen before – and all the while you kept visiting your MetroParks. You helped us keep your parks and trails open to provide safe, healthy outdoor experiences. Thank you!

Two themes stand out to me about 2020. The first was the continued resiliency of our community, staff and volunteers during another challenging year. The issues we collectively faced in 2019 had barely, if at all, retreated from sight when COVID-19 hit. The landscape was still scarred from the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes, and the Oregon District residents, businesses and patrons were still showing their strength. And yet, we dug deep and again turned to the healing power of nature.

Which leads me to the second theme: Our natural areas help heal our community during hard times. Your MetroParks team members were in your 30 clean, safe parks and conservation areas throughout the year. We heard your stories about participating in the MetroParks Trails Challenge and walking the new Heart Healthy Trails to continue your recovery from the physical and mental impacts of COVID-19. We also heard how you purchased fishing and other program kits, which allowed you to participate in nature-based activities with your families at home. We heard how simply being outside, away from home in a safe environment, is now part of your daily routine. Whatever brought you to one of your MetroParks, we are glad you were there.

Thanks to your willingness to adopt new habits, such as wearing a face covering on crowded trails, exploring a new park or by staying with your household members while exploring your hundreds of miles of trails, your actions helped keep every MetroPark open in 2020. Despite not being able to offer various events, festivals and programs at your MetroParks, attendance grew from 3.4 million in 2019 to 3.8 million in 2020 – an 8% increase. We are grateful for every visit.

Your MetroParks continues to work diligently every day to meet our mission to protect the region's natural heritage and provide outdoor experiences that inspire a personal connection with nature. Now, it's more important than ever for MetroParks to serve as the region's conservation leader, ensuring everyone has access to nature and the many benefits it provides people, wildlife, our local economy and quality of life, and so much more.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca A. Benná". The script is fluid and cursive.

Rebecca A. Benná
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FINANCIALS

APPROXIMATELY 80 PERCENT OF FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS' FUNDING COMES FROM A PROPERTY TAX LEVY SUPPORTED BY MONTGOMERY COUNTY TAXPAYERS.

In November 2018, voters overwhelmingly passed a 10-year replacement levy that allows Five Rivers MetroParks to continue to protect the region's natural heritage and provide outdoor experiences that inspire a personal connection to nature.

Five Rivers MetroParks takes its responsibility as a steward of the public's funds very seriously and is committed to providing quality and value for the community.

For the past several years, MetroParks has diversified its revenue streams to help fill the gap created by the permanent elimination of state funding, as well as identify efficiencies and cost savings. Support from individuals and families, businesses, organizations, foundations and other community entities helps MetroParks provide special projects and programs that it otherwise would not be able to offer the public.

MetroParks also is focused on supplementing taxpayer funding so the agency can continue to protect the region's natural heritage and provide the high-quality parks and programs the community expects and deserves. MetroParks also continues to develop new partnerships that maximize levy dollars and create more balanced and sustainable finances.

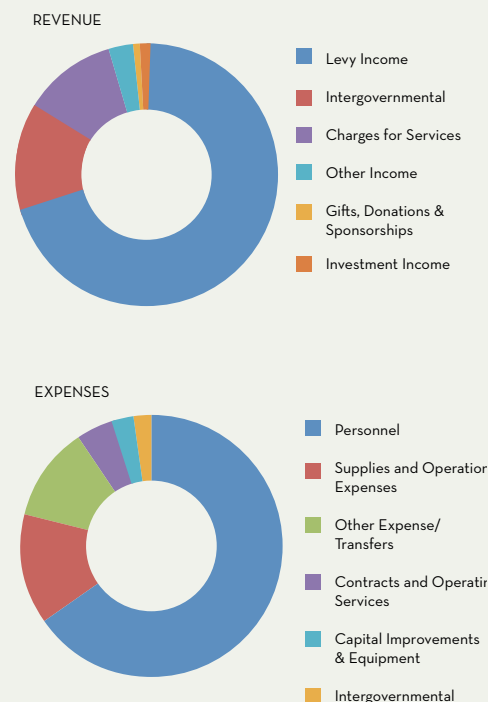
At the same time, Five Rivers MetroParks is diligent about regularly checking in with Montgomery County residents to ensure the agency's goals match those of the community. MetroParks has a 10-year comprehensive master plan to ensure its funding is focused on community priorities.

2020 REVENUE

Levy Income:	\$18,648,320
Intergovernmental:	\$2,265,564
Charges for Services:	\$734,941
Investment Income:	\$81,042
Gifts, Donations & Sponsorships:	\$89,425
Other Income:	\$387,069
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT:	\$22,206,361

2020 EXPENSES

Personnel:	\$14,504,492
Supplies and Operating Expenses:	\$2,276,583
Contracts and Operating Services:	\$1,800,294
Intergovernmental:	\$294,780
Capital Improvements & Equipment:	\$1,076,791
Other Expenses/Transfers:	\$2,094,880
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$22,047,820



For more on the agency's funding, visit metroparks.org/funding.

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS OVERVIEW



3.8 MILLION VISITORS

The Dayton Business Journal again named Five Rivers MetroParks the region's No. 1 most visited attraction in 2020.

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS SEES RECORD VISITATION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many things to light – including how much Montgomery County residents value their MetroParks. Park attendance increased from 3.4 million in 2019 to 3.8 million in 2020 – an 8% increase. This increase came even as cancellations related to COVID-19:

- reduced the number of program and event participants from 337,024 in 2019 to 5,980 in 2020.
- reduced the number of special events in MetroParks' locations from 174 in 2019 to three in 2020.
 - Special events include all those hosted by MetroParks, such as the summer music series at RiverScape MetroPark, and special permits hosted by other organizations, such as the Celtic Festival and 5K runs. Participants in those events decreased from 324,510 in 2019 to 3,090 in 2020.
- led the 2nd Street Market to only be open on a much smaller scale for most of the year.

If the impact of the cancelled special events and downsized Market hours are removed from the calculation, park attendance climbs to a 25% increase in 2020.

In the areas where usage is measured on the paved recreation trails, MetroParks measured an average 55% increase in traffic in 2020 vs. 2019.

As the pandemic closed so many indoor facilities, the community turned to their MetroParks to stay active, destress and more. Many of those were first-time visitors who hadn't used their MetroParks before. With the health and safety of all in mind, MetroParks educated visitors about how to safely utilize their MetroParks, such as in-park and online messaging about visiting only with those in their immediate household, wearing a face covering and maintaining social distancing. MetroParks is so thankful visitors took actions to keep themselves, their families, MetroParks employees and volunteers, and their community safe – allowing all MetroParks locations to remain open throughout the pandemic.



VOLUNTEERS
DON'T JUST MAKE
A DIFFERENCE, THEY
ARE THE DIFFERENCE

Here's what they do:

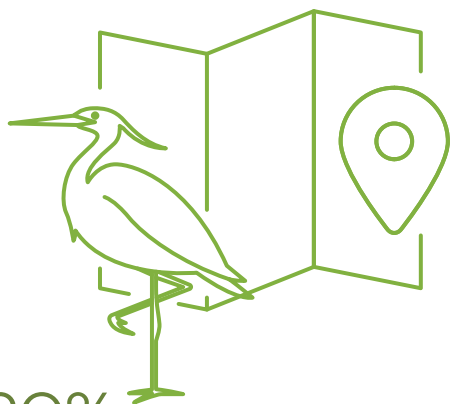
955
VOLUNTEERS
contributed **375** service hours

\$233,243
BENEFIT to Five Rivers MetroParks

9,482
VOLUNTEER HOURS SERVED
COVID-safe opportunities



For more information, visit metroparks.org/volunteer



16,367

ACRES OF
PROTECTED
LAND

90% of the land is maintained in its natural state, managed so habitat for plants and wildlife is a priority. Doing so preserves clean water and air, supports plant and wildlife biodiversity, and provides beautiful places where people can connect with nature.

3,018 acres are in conservation easements. This land is protected by a legal agreement between a landowner and government agency that permanently limits uses of the land to protect its conservation values.

Conservation areas are significant tracts of land primarily in a natural state with minimal infrastructure and lands protected by MetroParks.

30



LOCATIONS, including 18 parks, the 2nd Street Market and 11 conservation areas.

163



**MILES OF
MANAGED
TRAILS**

for hiking, biking, mountain biking and horseback riding.

270

MILES OF RIVER CORRIDOR, 42 of which Five Rivers MetroParks maintains.



9⁺

**EDUCATIONAL
FEATURES** INCLUDING:



the Barbara Cox Center
for Sustainable
Horticulture



Inventors
Walk



Butterfly
House



Tree
Tower



Historical
Farm



Twin Valley
Welcome Center



Possum Creek
Farm



Children's
Discovery
Garden



Zorniger
Education
Campus

40⁺

**NATURAL
FEATURES**

including Osage Orange Tunnel,
Three Sisters, Bob Siebenthaler
Natural Area and others



8⁺

**OUTDOOR RECREATION
FACILITIES** INCLUDING:



MetroParks
Mountain Biking
Area (MoMBA),



Carriage Hill
Riding Center



Twin Valley
Trail



Blue Heron
Disc Golf
Course



Mad River
River Run

RiverScape
River Run



RiverScape
Ice Rink



RiverScape
Bike Hub

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

COVID-19
Outdoor Guidelines
FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS


HELP KEEP YOUR PARKS & TRAILS OPEN
De-stress, stay active, and improve your mental and physical health by connecting with nature – whether in your favorite green space or back yard. Here's your guide for safely using your MetroParks' outdoor spaces. **#natureisopen**



METROPARKS.ORG/NATUREISOPEN

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS RESPONDS TO COVID-19

With the health and safety of MetroParks' staff, volunteers and the public top-of-mind, the agency adjusted in numerous ways to address the needs of Montgomery County residents while also fulfilling its mission during the global pandemic. Five Rivers MetroParks followed directives and information from the Ohio Department of Health, Public Health Dayton and Montgomery County and Centers for Disease Control, adjusting precautions as necessary.

Throughout the year, MetroParks kept its parks and trails open to the public – especially as the outdoors was one of the few safe places where the community could improve their physical and mental health. Indeed, an increase in park visitation showed MetroParks how important its natural spaces were to the health and wellness of the community during a very challenging time.

Five Rivers MetroParks' response included adding safety precautions, adjusting program offerings, communicating with the public about how

to safely use their parks and trails, closing or limiting access to facilities and amenities, and much more:

• Working with the community to ensure safety:

Five Rivers MetroParks used a variety of communication channels to let the public know how to safely use their parks and trails. Messages include:

- Always follow the CDC's recommendations, particularly for social distancing, wearing face coverings, and limiting group size to 10 or less, when spending time outdoors.
- Maintain a distance of at least six feet from people not part of your household, including when passing others on trails. Signage was placed throughout parks asking the public to maintain social distancing.
- Limit public gatherings to 10 people or less. Picnic tables, benches and swings were removed from key locations to encourage social distancing and limits on gatherings. Signage also was placed at key locations asking the public not to touch or use communal surfaces, such as picnic tables, benches and handrails.
- Explore less frequently used parks and trails, the region's more

than 340 miles of paved recreation trails, and a more private outdoor location, such as local greenspace or back yard.

• **Select closures and limitations:**

Visitors were asked to plan ahead because some amenities were not available.

- Trash and recycling cans were limited, so visitors were asked to prepare to carry out everything carried in, including dog waste.
- Restrooms and portable toilets also were limited, although at least one was available in every park.
- Drinking fountains were turned off per Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County.
- Select campsites were open, although reservations were required and subject to cancellation depending on the state's order on mass gatherings.
- Most playgrounds and nature play areas were open, although the play area within the Children's Discovery Garden at Wegerzyn MetroPark was closed.
- All indoor facilities, including MetroParks' visitor centers, were closed, as well as the indoor facilities at the Carriage Hill Historical Farm and Possum Creek Farm.

• **Monitored parking:**

To help visitors maintain social distancing, Five Rivers MetroParks Rangers monitored parking lots at locations that are typically busy, including Cox Arboretum, Aullwood Garden, Englewood East Park and Sugarcreek MetroParks. Lots were periodically closed or parking was limited during busy times.

• **Program cancellations:**

Most Five Rivers MetroParks in-person programs and events were cancelled. Staff and volunteers were unable to effectively host most programs while maintaining safe social distancing. Many others required the use of shared equipment that was not easily sanitized between uses.



• **Masks made for staff:**

During the initial shutdown when masks were scarce – even for frontline healthcare providers – MetroParks' staff who had sewing skills crafted hundreds of masks for their co-workers. Multiple masks were distributed to each staff member, allowing them to continue working in the parks under CDC guidelines.

• **Hand-made hand sanitizer boxes:**

MetroParks' staff designed and constructed 130 hand sanitizer boxes for less than \$1,200. These boxes were distributed throughout MetroParks' facilities to help slow the spread of COVID-19.



• **One-way trail adjustments:**

To help facilitate safe social distancing in MetroParks, trails that experience seasonally high traffic or are particularly narrow were adjusted to a one-way flow. These include the mountain biking trails at MoMBA, Aullwood

Garden MetroPark's trails and the entrance/exit to the trailhead at Sugarcreek MetroPark.

• **Nature Is Open campaign:**

The agency's marketing team created this campaign to educate the public about how to safely use their parks and trails while encouraging the community to explore the outdoors to maintain overall wellness. The campaign included advertising, social media posts and featured the new Nature Is Open blog, a digital home for content that encourages people to use nature as a resource for mental and physical health, family fun, education, and more. With many new park users, the blog also included content that guided them to enjoy the parks.

• **ParkWays magazine:**

The agency's tri-annual publication, which is mailed to every Montgomery County household, was restructured to address the significant changes and safety implications caused by the pandemic. Large public events and programs – which account for a substantial portion of *ParkWays* – were cancelled starting in March 2020. The magazine was reduced to 24 pages while content continued to provide mission-driven stories, important safety information, and ideas for how to improve physical and mental health outdoors.

• **Bow-hunting program:**

An annual conservation effort, the bow-hunting program continued in 2020 with necessary adjustments. The program's capacity was reduced, with registration and orientation moved online. Additionally, qualifications were redesigned, which included COVID-19 protocols, enabling this important wildlife management tool to continue. In addition, MetroParks donated 2,000 pounds of venison to The Foodbank in 2020.

Nature Is Open

De-stress, stay active, and improve your mental and physical health by connecting with nature – whether in your favorite greenspace or backyard.

#natureisopen

Always follow the CDC's recommendations, such as social distancing, when spending time outdoors.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

METROPARKS LAUNCHES VIRTUAL OFFERINGS

With nearly all in-person programs cancelled due to the pandemic, MetroParks' staff quickly pivoted to offer virtual programs, as well as nature-based activities that could safely be done at home. The intention was to keep residents connected to the outdoors and to MetroParks' mission during this stressful time. Virtual engagement was a compilation of skill-building programs, orientations to parks, open space and trails, physical and mental health support, and general engagement. Throughout the year, 258 virtual engagement opportunities reached more than 206,000 people. Those included:

- **Community partnerships:**

By collaborating with community partners to provide virtual offerings, MetroParks was able to keep the public engaged, reach new audiences and create unique content that highlights the agency and its mission.

- During the Dayton Downtown Partnership's Virtual Art in the City on Aug. 8, 2020, MetroParks joined dozens of artists, performers and musicians for virtual celebrations of arts and culture in Dayton. MetroParks took visitors on a tour of RiverScape MetroPark and the 2nd Street Market, explored colors and shapes at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark, and "met" MetroParks animal ambassadors.



- The following week, MetroParks and local PBS affiliate, ThinkTV, began airing six days of a virtual Explore the Outdoors Summer Camp with PBS Kids favorite, Nature Cat. These camps were developed to address the needs of children in underserved areas and in response to the cancellation of outdoor programs for children due to the pandemic. MetroParks' subject matter experts created videos that covered such topics as nature education, gardening, outdoor recreation and more. ThinkTV used the footage to create 30-minute camps hosted by a kid-counselor and included relevant clips featuring Nature Cat and his curious cartoon friends. These episodes were aired on MetroParks and ThinkTV's respective Facebook pages. Additionally, PBS leveraged



regional affiliate to promote the content further, resulting in nearly 58,000 views of the virtual summer camps. Explore the Outdoors received a first-place statewide award from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (see page 12 for more).



- **Take-home program kits:**

To help facilitate safe, engaging experiences in nature, MetroParks' education and recreation staff created take-home program kits for families. Kits included self-guided activities with nature, outdoor recreation, gardening and historical farming themes. New kits were issued monthly throughout December for contactless pick up. A total of 461 kits were sold in 2020.

- **Virtual programming:**

In the absence of on-site programming, many staff recorded informational and instructional videos posted on social media and to MetroParks' YouTube channel on topics ranging from horticulture to horseback riding, making a bird feeder using recycled materials to building a campfire. The RiverScape MetroPark team produced free Virtual Fitness in the Park programs, accessed on the RiverScape Facebook page and supported by Kettering Health Network, for yoga, cardio dance and bootcamp fitness. Those programs served more than 550 people during the live event and reached many more via the on demand option.



• Virtual Bike Month:

Due to the pandemic, MetroParks' annual Bike to Work Day pancake breakfast held in mid-May had to be cancelled. Staff quickly transitioned the event to a month-long virtual engagement. Staff engaged the public via educational and safety videos, as well as such content as Bike Bingo, Rides of the Week and Bicycle Friendly Community highlights. Staff also created a Virtual Bike Month Facebook group, which has 337 members.



• Virtual engagement for classroom teachers:

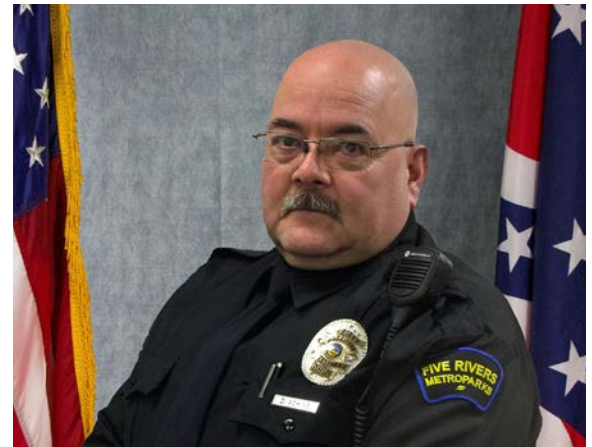
Staff surveyed teachers and schools to learn how MetroParks could support them during the pandemic and extend their classrooms to the outdoors (all connected to curriculum standards). Staff created 10 virtual field trips on such topics as fossils, butterflies and bees, stream studies, life in the 1880s, and more. In addition, staff hosted training for more than 200 teachers within Dayton Public Schools.

• Virtual programs at Adventure Central:

While Adventure Central was closed, staff completed virtual learning through STEM and teen engagements during the summer, and added science, cooking, reading, and arts and crafts, along with additional teen programs in the fall. The cooking programs were particularly popular, as students are looking forward to using Adventure Central's newly remodeled kitchen in 2021.

• Park Ambassadors:

MetroParks staff were stationed at key locations in parks to answer visitors' questions and orient new visitors to parks — all while wearing face coverings and maintaining a safe social distance.



METROPARKS RANGERS KEEP THE COMMUNITY SAFE

- In 2020, Community Resource Officer Adam Gaby distributed 238 child car and booster seats to families in need as part of the Ohio Buckles Buckeyes program.
- Rangers participated in "No-Shave November" (female Rangers were allowed to paint their fingernails), raising \$2,000 for Dayton Children's Hospital.
- MetroParks' Ranger division is working to obtain certification from the Ohio Collaborative, which establishes best practices for performance and accountability for Ohio police departments. Standards include:
 - Recruitment and Hiring
 - Use of Force Standards
 - Community Engagement
 - Body Worn Cameras
 - Bias-Free Policing
 - Investigation of Employee Misconduct
 - Motor Vehicle Pursuit

David Adkins was named the 2020 Ranger of the Year, an award given to the ranger who consistently exemplifies professional park law enforcement, understands and follows Five Rivers MetroParks' mission, and who consistently shows a willingness to work as a team member with fellow Rangers, other MetroParks staff members and with local law enforcement.

Ranger Adkins has 30-plus years' experience in police work and more than three years with Five Rivers MetroParks. He consistently conducts highly professional and thorough on-scene investigations and does so with sensitivity and compassion. He has a highly developed skill set when it comes to suspicious activity and suspicious people, and his investigative skills and report-writing are exemplary. In addition, Ranger Adkins is very self-motivated with a strong work ethic, remains excited about doing good police work, is a strong supporter of Five Rivers MetroParks and its mission and cares deeply about the safety of park visitors.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

METROPARKS PROVIDES ACCESS TO FRESH, HEALTHY FOOD

Even before the pandemic, many of the neighborhoods in Montgomery County were considered food deserts, meaning residents have limited access to fresh, healthy food. Job losses during the pandemic meant more households were also food insecure, often unsure how to feed their families. Five Rivers MetroParks stepped in to assist those in need of fresh produce and other healthy food.



• 2nd Street Market opens outdoor market and drive-thru:

Understanding that access to fresh food – especially those that could be purchased with SNAP/EBT and Produce Perks – is limited, the 2nd Street Market reopened in June after temporarily closing in March. The Market was open on Saturdays with a new outdoor format in which produce and farm vendors sold healthy food and other offerings. With additional precautions – such as a face covering requirement, the establishment of a one-way flow, instructional signage, hand sanitizing stations and more – the Market was able to maintain operations on a smaller scale in a safe way. In November and December, outdoor sales ended but the Market offered a drive-thru pick up option. Vendors were able to take orders during the week and then drop off their products at the Market to be distributed by staff and volunteers. This option was offered through the holiday season, with growers, prepared food vendors, farmers and artisans participating.



• Garden to Go Bags:

Thanks to generous funds provided by the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association and Whole Foods, MetroParks was able to assemble gardening bags to pass out to the public to help families grow their own fresh, healthy food. Bags included seeds and seedlings, instructions, and other tools needed to start planting. MetroParks partnered with local organizations that serve affected communities to help distribute bags to their constituents. These organizations included the Children's Hunger Alliance, Dayton Metro Library, East End Community Center, ADAMHS, Kaiser Elementary and The Foodbank Dayton. A total of 365 Garden to Go Bags were given out, along with 200 tomato plants.



• Produce donations:

MetroParks also partnered with local nonprofit Access to Excess to distribute produce from gardens at MetroParks' locations to those in need. MetroParks invited community and home gardeners to donate their extra produce for distribution during the growing season. Produce collected from the gardens at Possum Creek, Wegerzyn Gardens, Carriage Hill and Cox Arboretum MetroParks totaled 5,755, with an additional 2,195 pounds donated by the public. This total pounds donation of 7,950 pounds of fresh produce more than doubled MetroParks' previous year's donations to the community.



NEW TRAILS CHALLENGE A COMMUNITY FAVORITE

Introduced in June 2020, the MetroParks Trails Challenge offered a fun way for people to hike, jog, run, paddle, cycle and mountain bike the region's trails. MetroParks' outdoor recreation professionals selected 25 trails that ranged in mileage in difficulty, providing a variety available to all skill levels and allowing people to work up to more difficult trails.

Because participants could complete trails independently on their own time and at their own pace, it was easy for them to social distance and build the stamina and confidence to tackle longer trails. Participants who registered had through Oct. 4 to hand in their trails log – provided in *ParkWays* and available online – for a chance to win prizes.

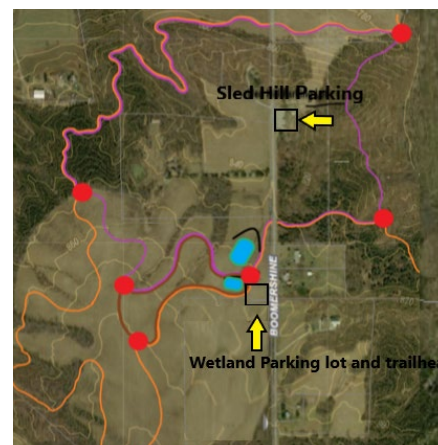
In total, 921 participants traveled 4,383 miles – which is longer than the Amazon River. Already in 2021, many more people have registered for the MetroPark Trails Challenge than did so in all of 2020, proving this new independent use option to be very popular with the community.



TRAILS FOR HEART HEALTH DESIGNATED

Also introduced in summer 2020, MetroParks' Heart Healthy Trails initiative encourages the public to use the parks as a resource for low-impact, physical wellness.

Heart Healthy Trails are easy to traverse, short in length and walkable at a brisk pace. Trails are marked every quarter mile so users can track their speed to ensure they are reaching the American Heart Association's recommended pace of 2.5 miles per hour. A combination of paved and natural surface trails, the Heart Healthy Trails introduced in 2020 are in Island and Germantown MetroParks and on the Wolf Creek Trail. New trails are being added in 2021.



NEW TRAILS OPEN AT GERMANTOWN METROPARK

In late summer 2020, a five-year conservation project at Germantown MetroPark culminated with the opening of two new trails and the extension of the existing orange trail. The trails are located on land previously used for farmland, purchased with help from a Clean Ohio Fund grant. The land includes nearly 1,000 acres of prairie that MetroParks restored during a five-year period, with the addition of wetlands to support native pollinators, wildlife and soil.

The new 2-mile purple trail and 0.7-mile brown trail loop around wetlands built by MetroParks staff and sweeping prairie that was planted as part of this multifaceted conservation project. Two miles were added to orange trail, creating a 9.3-mile trail, the longest and most challenging trail at Germantown MetroPark. The two new trails are incorporated into the Heart Healthy Trails initiative and the addition of mileage to the orange trail extends the Twin Valley Backpacking Trail to nearly 30 miles. The trails traverse through several habitats, allowing hikers to experience Montgomery County's rich biodiversity.

GERMANTOWN METROPARK



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES



METROPARKS LAUNCHES MOBILE APP

To make it easier and more convenient for people to visit their parks and trails, MetroParks launched a new mobile app in August 2020.

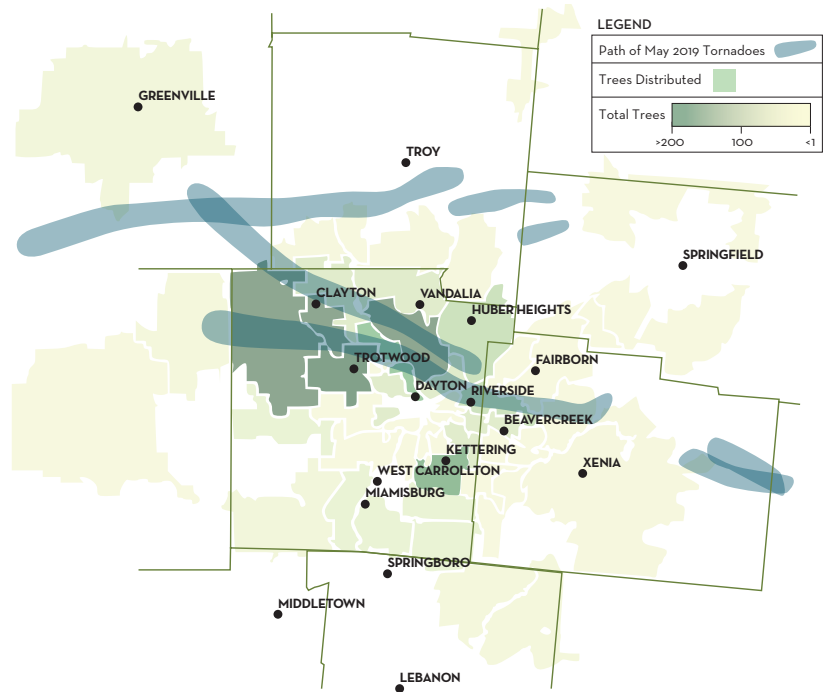
MetroParks' new mobile app, powered by OuterSpatial, is free and available for both iPhone and Android devices. It includes offline mapping and navigation – and access continues even without a cell phone signal. The app allows users to:

- plan a visit to a park or trail and make the most of a visit once there
- navigate while on trails
- discover new places
- locate parking, restrooms, picnic areas and other park amenities
- follow outings selected by MetroParks' staff

The app is a one-stop tool for accurate, up-to-date information on trails and recreation information throughout MetroParks – including info related to COVID-19 – the regional paved trail network and river access points.

The mobile app uses the OuterSpatial platform. MetroParks chose to work with OuterSpatial because it would take much less time and expense than creating a custom mobile application and ongoing maintenance is provided as part of the partnership. Since the data comes directly from MetroParks, the maps and content that users access are more current, complete and accurate than the user-generated data in the popular crowdsourcing trails apps.

MetroParks exceeded its goal of 1,000 downloads in the first two days of launch. The app has been downloaded by more than 5,000 users and continues to grow. MetroParks' mobile app received a first-place statewide award from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association.



NATIVE TREE-SEEDLING GIVEAWAY SUPPORTS CONSERVATION, TORNADO RECOVERY

In fall 2020, Five Rivers MetroParks gave away 2,781 native tree seedlings at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark and the 2nd Street Market as part of MetroParks' reforestation initiative, Healing Nature. The initiative is designed to assist property owners and communities in Montgomery County that were impacted by the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes. MetroParks also distributed tree seedlings to municipalities affected by the tornadoes, for a total of approximately 4,000 native tree seedlings being planted in support of reforestation efforts.

The trees given away were propagated by MetroParks staff and volunteers at the Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture.

This map illustrates the 75 ZIP codes of the people and communities who picked up trees, and where these locations are in proximity to the paths of the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes.



BIENNIAL ADVENTURE SUMMIT PROVIDES INSPIRATION

Held in mid-February before the pandemic led to many event cancellations, The Adventure Summit welcomed 1,667 visitors to the Wright State University Student Union for a weekend of

outdoor inspiration. Proving adventure knows no age or ability, the 2020 Adventure Summit's speakers included Brad Ryan and his Grandma Joy, who embarked on an excursion to visit all 62 National Parks. Additionally, Maureen Beck shared her stories of adaptive climbing, personal growth and challenges. Ryan Richardson and Heather Anderson shared their experiences on the trails and mountains, in addition to more than 30 local and regional speakers. More than 40 local vendors, clubs and organizations were on-site to help connect attendees to outdoor recreation resources and help facilitate year-round adventures.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

METROPARKS WINS LOCAL, STATE & NATIONAL AWARDS

• National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials (NACPRO) Awards

- Homefull (nominated by Five Rivers MetroParks) won the NACPRO Award for Outstanding Support Organization in 2020. This national award is presented to an organization that has responded in an exceptional manner by making major contributions to benefit parks and recreation programs or facilities.
- Homefull partners with Five Rivers MetroParks to operate the SNAP/EBT and Produce Perks exchange at the 2nd Street Market. People who utilize SNAP/EBT benefits can visit Homefull's booth at the Market to receive tokens that participating Market vendors accept in lieu of cash or cards. Additionally, Homefull allows the Market to offer Produce Perks, a state-wide program available to those who use EBT/SNAP benefits. An incentive program that matches benefits spent on produce purchases, Produce Perks encourages people to make healthy choices when grocery shopping and allows broader access to nutritious foods.
- This unique partnership between Five Rivers MetroParks and Homefull helps both organizations fulfill their missions while addressing hunger-related issues, which affect 17% of those living in Dayton. These programs provide better access to fresh food, encourage people to eat healthier, broaden local farmers' customer base and create a more inclusive shopping space at the Market.



• Dayton Business Journal's 2020 Outstanding Diversity Champion Organization

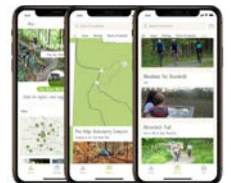
- Five Rivers MetroParks was recognized as an Outstanding Diversity Champion Organization by the Dayton Business Journal thanks to the strides it has taken to improve access and diversity across its communities and organizations.
- Efforts to bolster diversity and inclusion are:
 - The formation of a 20-member employee committee focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. This group works with the National Center for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton to develop goals around intentionality.
 - Research and focus groups that examine the needs of working and single-family households in terms of outdoor education programming.
 - A partnership with Five Rivers MetroParks and Homefull that allows the 2nd Street Market to provide EBT/SNAP and Produce Perks benefits to qualifying shoppers. This partnership makes the Market a more inclusive shopping destination and helps provide equitable access to fresh food, which is a challenge for those who reside in multiple ZIP codes surrounding the Market. (See above for more info.)

- An afterschool and summer youth development program for children in west Dayton, Adventure Central offers free nature-based programming, meals and tutoring to its students. Additionally, Adventure Central, located at Wesleyan MetroPark, received funds from Five Rivers MetroParks and donors to renovate its kitchen. This new kitchen will be a space where meals are created for students and Adventure Central's teachers will engage youth with programs that focus on cooking and nutrition.
- MetroParks' JET program is for teens ages 12-18 who are potentially interested in a career in parks and recreation. Teens are interviewed and matched with a MetroParks staff member, whom they job shadow and learn practical skills from throughout the summer.



• First-place awards from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association

- A partnership between MetroParks and local PBS affiliate, ThinkTV, to create a virtual Explore the Outdoor Summer Camp series won first place in the Environmental & Interpretive category.
 - MetroParks' educators collaborated on a program to best serve the community during the pandemic. MetroParks understood that creative partnerships and sharing resources were critical to successfully serving the public – especially underserved audiences. ThinkTV and MetroParks provided a week of nature-based virtual summer camps. MetroParks staff filmed lessons that covered such topics as life, natural and physical science, and environmental education. ThinkTV paired MetroParks' virtual lessons with content from popular PBS Kid's show, Nature Cat, a cartoon in which a cat and his friends explore the outdoors. (See page 7 for more.)
- In the category of Marketing Innovation, MetroParks' new mobile app, powered by OuterSpatial, also won a first-place award.
 - A new way to enhance visitors' parks and trails experiences using a mobile device, MetroParks chose to work with OuterSpatial because it would take much less time and expense than creating a custom mobile application and ongoing maintenance is provided as part of the partnership. Since the data comes directly from MetroParks, the maps and content that users access are more current, complete and accurate than the user-generated data in the popular crowdsourcing trails apps. MetroParks' mobile app allows users to plan their visits, navigate while on the trails and receive important updates – including information related to COVID-19 – and much more. (See page 11 for more.)



RESEARCH & RESTORATION



ACOUSTIC BAT SURVEY INDICATES HIGH-QUALITY HABITAT

MetroParks staff worked with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to conduct an acoustic bat survey during summer 2020 in the Twin Valley, which includes Germantown and Twin Creek MetroParks and the Upper Twin Conservation Area.

When bats forage for insects, they use ultrasonic echolocation calls to locate food and navigate their surroundings – and each bat species' call sounds different. The acoustic bat survey collected those calls at six field locations then, using specialized software that can interpret bats' vocalizations, MetroParks and ODNR staff identified 10 out of the 11 possible bat species for the area – including federally threatened species Indiana bat as well as 11 species of northern long eared bats.

Bats are an indicator species: Since bats are very sensitive to changes in habitat, a healthy bat community means the habitat is good for other wildlife, too. Therefore, the study results indicate western Montgomery County has lots of high-quality habitat for wildlife.

Other research in 2020 included a partnership with the University of Dayton to test how to accelerate agricultural land to forest transition. The research showed invasive Callery pear trees alter soil in a way that can facilitate further invasion and suppress native plants and species. Mowing and burning support the re-sprouting behavior of the Callery pear, which is the opposite of what we want to happen. MetroParks' parks and conservation staff will use the results to inform invasive species management efforts.



RESTORATION PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2020

- Invasive honeysuckle was removed at Wesleyan MetroPark. MetroParks staff spent more than 300 hours removing 111 acres of invasive species encroachment and 334 hours to eradicate invasive honeysuckle, a 71% increase from 2019.
- Thousands of native species were planted and propagated:
 - 1,875 shrubs were planted at the Great Miami Mitigation Bank.
 - 5,277 trees and shrubs and almost 3,000 wildflowers and grasses were grown at the Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture at Cox Arboretum MetroPark.
- With support from the Garden Club of Dayton and philanthropic donations, MetroParks received a \$10,000 grant to remove debris and plant 175 trees at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark to support reforestation after devastation from the 2019 tornado.
- A tree restoration project at Island MetroPark, supported by Vectren, was completed in December 2020.

PLANNING

PLAN WILL STRENGTHEN DAYTON'S RIVERFRONT

The partners in the Dayton Riverfront Plan (Five Rivers MetroParks, City of Dayton, the Miami Conservancy District and six other local agencies) were able to continue much of the work on the plan despite the pandemic. Schematic design continued on Sunrise MetroPark, Sunset Park, its proposed sister park on the opposite bank of the Great Miami River, and the Unity Bridge that will connect them. MetroParks also has made significant progress in the community corridor along Wolf Creek, acquiring land to create the open space corridor called for in the plan, and to expand Wesleyan MetroPark. These ambitious plans to create significant recreational amenities in traditionally underserved neighborhoods are core to the Dayton Riverfront Plan's vision.

The 20-year Dayton Riverfront Plan is based on community input and stakeholder feedback. It harnesses the 12 miles of greater downtown Dayton river corridor as a catalyst for placemaking, economic development and more. For more information, visit daytonriverfrontplan.org.

PLANNING EFFORTS WILL GUIDE METROPARKS' FUTURE

Despite the pandemic, planning efforts continued in 2020. These plans will inform MetroParks' future for decades to come, helping the agency meet its mission and better serve the community. Efforts included:

- Park master plans were completed for Wesleyan and Cox Arboretum MetroParks. Based on feedback collected during public open houses and surveys, the park master plans will guide the management and development of the parks for the next 10 to 20 years. View the park master plans and learn about planning efforts now underway at metroparks.org/plan.
- Progress was made on a district-wide Trail Master Plan that will include both paved bikeways and water trails. An inventory of trail gaps, access points, and trailhead amenities was developed. The Trail Master Plan will identify future regional bikeway connections and locations for bikeway trailheads and river access points to make using the trails convenient for a variety of users. The plan will also identify construction and maintenance budgets to aid in responsible financial planning.
- Staff collected extensive geographic information system (GIS) data throughout the MetroParks as a key step toward creating a long-term repair and replacement plan. This plan will ensure Five Rivers MetroParks is able to maintain its amenities for future generations, a top priority identified by the public in MetroParks' 10-year Comprehensive Master Plan. Staff catalogued data about all MetroParks' built assets from shelters to drinking fountains, from maintenance buildings to cultural and historical resources.
- MetroParks also made progress on a GIS Strategic Plan that will allow the agency to provide accessible, accurate information about the MetroParks to the public. The strategic plan will guide future initiatives to ensure MetroParks is making data-driven decisions that use taxpayer funds most effectively. Staff will use the data to further improve operational effectiveness and enhance the public's visits to their parks and trails.

IMPROVEMENTS AND PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2020

The bank above the River Run at RiverScape MetroPark was improved with a new terraced seating area, limestone boulders, and pull-offs along the river's edge for food trucks and kayak livery trailers. These elements on the River Run project provide new ways for the public to enjoy the Great Miami River downtown at RiverScape, Dayton's front porch. Additional improvements will be made in 2021.

- Several paving projects were completed:
 - The main roadway at Englewood MetroPark, one of MetroParks' most popular destinations, was repaved.
 - As part of a federal Surface Transportation Block Grant, MetroParks resurfaced portions of paved trails, including four miles of the Creekside Trail, two miles of the Iron Horse Trail, seven miles of the Great Miami Trail and one mile of the Wolf Creek Trail.
 - As part of its annual pavement maintenance program, MetroParks repaved the Possum Creek Reservable Area main entrance drive and both parking lots, resurfaced 1,000 feet of the main park road at Germantown MetroPark, and repaired the Wolf Creek Trail at Wesleyan MetroPark.
- Construction began on the replacement of the Deeds Point Pedestrian Bridge, an iconic downtown structure. Off-site construction of the new bridge began in summer 2020, and on-site construction began in fall 2020. New bridge spans have been put in place and, while the construction schedule is highly dependent on weather, river conditions and water levels, plans call for the new bridge to open in summer 2021.





COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Five Rivers MetroParks partners with a variety of community organizations to advocate for and achieve shared goals. Those include protecting the region's natural heritage; helping people enjoy healthy, active lifestyles; improving regional economic development and quality of life; and promoting youth development. Working together, our resources go further toward the larger goal of making the Dayton region a better place to live, work and play for everyone in our community.

Five Rivers MetroParks is especially grateful for the support it received during the challenging year of 2020.

FOUNDATIONS, FRIENDS AND SPONSORS

Five Rivers MetroParks' mission and vision also are supported by the hard work of the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; the Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation; and by the Friends of Carriage Hill Farm. Led by volunteer boards, all are passionate about funding mission-driven projects, programs and services, and all are exemplary stewards of donors' funds.

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FOUNDATION

A 501(c)3 non-profit organization, the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation secures philanthropic funding for special projects, programming and an endowment. The foundation provides a way for donors to support Five Rivers MetroParks with charitable contributions that can be designated to all parks or a specific park. Donations also can be directed to support education and recreation programs, as well as conservation initiatives.

FUNDING IN 2020 INCLUDED:

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FOUNDATION

- Access to Nature program scholarships
- Adventure Central kitchen renovation
- Emergency trauma kits for Rangers
- Marie Aull Trail clearing and plantings
- Park benches
- Preschool to Kindergarten program support
- Technology equipment for virtual programs
- Virtual Victory Garden program support

THE JAMES M. COX, JR. ARBORETUM FOUNDATION

- ADA picnic tables
 - Conservation Kids program support
 - Fifth Third Room ceiling fans
 - Park benches
 - Plant material
 - Public WiFi
 - Putting Learning and Nature Together program support
 - Terrace pavers
 - Drinking fountain upgrades
 - World of Gardening event sponsor
-

WEGERZYN GARDENS FOUNDATION

- Arbor Garden painting and staining
- Auditorium projector
- Children's Discovery Garden sand table covers
- Children's Discovery Garden wildlife garden material
- English Garden irrigation system installation
- Taxus pruning
- World of Gardening event sponsor

LEAD DONORS & SPONSORS

- AARP
- Anthem
- Srinivas Appalaneni
- BBB Seed
- Steven and Jo Beinlich
- Burpee
- Charles S. Allyn Jr. Foundation Fund of The Dayton Foundation
- Cohen Recycling
- John and Terry Combs
- Dayton Office Properties
- The Garden Club of America
- Jim Gross
- Cindi and Mat Heck
- Horan Associates
- Huffy Corporation
- Denise Ingersoll
- The Jack W. and Sally D. Eichelberger Foundation
- Julian G. Lange Family Foundation
- Keep Montgomery County Beautiful
- Kettering Health Network
- Marianne Kuzujanakis
- LexisNexis
- Vince McKelvey and Noreen Willhelm
- Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Sheryl Mohr
- Ohio Bicycle Federation
- Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
- Ohio Parks & Recreation Association Foundation
- The Ohio River Road Runners Club
- Old Scratch Pizza
- PNC Bank
- PNC Foundation
- Richard and Carol Pohl
- Donna Recktenwalt
- Renee's Garden Seeds & Cornucopia
- Reynolds and Reynolds Associate Foundation
- David and Cynthia Saelens
- Rachel Samson
- Richard Sapphire
- Saunders Seed Co.
- Sawdey Solution Services
- Sisters of the Precious Blood
- John Staten
- Subaru of America
- Derek Terrillion
- Jamie and Christina Tobe
- Kenneth and Michell Tyre
- USI Midwest
- Vectren Foundation
- Wagner Subaru
- Whole Foods Market
- Coleen Wooten
- Sally Zaluski

Visit metroparks.org/donate or contact Beth Redden, Five Rivers MetroParks chief of philanthropy, at 937-277-4369 or beth.redden@metroparks.org for more information.



SUPPORT YOUR METROPARKS

FOUNDATIONS

- Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation
- Friends of Carriage Hill Farm
- The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation
- Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation

BECOME A CHAMPION

The Champions Program is the easiest way to support the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation. Your gift continues automatically from month-to-month with an online recurring donation.

PARTNER WITH US

Along with individual donors who support MetroParks, many area organizations and businesses partner with us to provide financial support, sponsorships and in-kind services.

TRIBUTE PROGRAM WITH COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES

Honor a loved one or celebrate a holiday, birthday or other special occasion with a unique, lasting gift located at your favorite MetroPark. We offer a range of options that include benches, trees, swings and natural surface trails and shelters.

GENERAL HONOR AND TRIBUTE GIFTS

Honor someone special and commemorate a special event by making a general donation to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation.

MEMORIAL FUNDS

Establish a memorial fund in honor of a loved one to which others can contribute. We are happy to provide contribution envelopes that you can distribute at a memorial service or other commemorative event.

LEAVE A LEGACY

Planned gifts ensure Five Rivers MetroParks remains a treasure in the community for generations to come. By including Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation in your will or estate plan, your commitment to MetroParks will continue in perpetuity.

DONATE

Support our mission and your favorite MetroPark by making a donation to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation. Your tax deductible gift will be used to support programs and special projects. Donations (made payable to Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation) can be mailed to: Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation 409 E. Monument Ave., third floor Dayton, OH 45402

Visit metroparks.org/donate to make a donation to your Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation online and to learn how you can support the Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; and Friends of Carriage Hill Farm.

To learn more about how your company or organization can get involved, contact the Five Rivers MetroParks philanthropy department at 937-275-PARK (7275).

VOLUNTEERS

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS ARE A CRITICAL PART OF THE METROPARKS TEAM



Working with staff, volunteers help Five Rivers MetroParks meet its mission and vision, and they extend tax dollars and other resources. MetroParks is honored so many people from all walks of life choose to give back by volunteering — especially during a very difficult year. The time and dedication of many volunteers allowed MetroParks to serve as a healing respite for the community during the pandemic.

In 2020, many long-term volunteers had to pause their service due to the pandemic. These volunteers generously share their skills and expertise with MetroParks' staff and the community it serves on a regular basis.

However, **246 long-term volunteers** were able to safely continue their

service since it didn't require close contact with other people, such as:

- Animal Ambassador Caretakers
- Members of MetroParks' Volunteer Patrol
- Barn aides at the Carriage Hill Riding Center
- Pond Patrol
- Conservation Caretakers
- Nestbox Monitors
- Support for the 2nd Street Market

These long-term volunteers contributed **9,099.20 volunteer hours** in 2020. MetroParks is especially grateful that long-term volunteers who had to put their service on hold are ready and eager to return once conditions allow for them to safely do so.

Most episodic and short-term volunteers also were sidelined in 2020 due to the pandemic. These volunteers support Five Rivers MetroParks' events and programs, most of which were cancelled. However, **129 episodic and short-term volunteers** were able to contribute **382.20 volunteer hours** in 2020.

In addition, **15 volunteers** contributed **45 volunteer hours** during episodic workdays, and **114 volunteers** at Adventure Central contributed **337.20 volunteer hours**.

Even with numerous changes to volunteer service to ensure everyone's safety, **955 volunteers** remained on board with MetroParks. And **375 active volunteers** served **9,481.40 hours** — for a benefit to Five Rivers MetroParks of **\$233,242.44** (benefit calculated based on 2019 value of volunteer time).

2020 also showed the long-lasting impact volunteers have on MetroParks' mission to protect our region's natural heritage. In September 2020, Five Rivers MetroParks distributed 2,781 free native tree seedlings to help reforest areas damaged during the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes. The trees were propagated at the Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture — with assistance from long-term

volunteers during previous years. This native tree seedling giveaway, Healing Nature, would not have been possible without volunteer support.

MetroParks' volunteer services department is working with staff to implement a plan for safe volunteer re-engagement. It's a phased approach based on the State of Ohio's Public Health Advisory System, using the degree of virus spread in Montgomery County to determine the level of volunteer re-engagement. This approach will remain in place until the public emergency status is lifted for the state of Ohio.

For more information about volunteering for your Five Rivers MetroParks, visit metroparks.org/volunteer.

LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

By Ohio law, Five Rivers MetroParks is governed by a three-member volunteer Board of Park Commissioners, who are appointed by the probate judge of Montgomery County. The board establishes all policies and rules, approves developments and land acquisitions, and controls all funds. Each commissioner serves without pay for a three-year term, with one member's term expiring each year. Commissioners can be reappointed for successive terms.

Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. Email BPC@metroparks.org or call (937) 275-PARK (7275) for information about how to attend.



2020 PRESIDENT

Karen Davis is a health care professional, community volunteer and family advocate.



2020 VICE PRESIDENT

Jessica Saunders is director of the office of community health and engagement programs at Dayton Children's Hospital.



2020 COMMISSIONER AT LARGE

Bear Monita is a partner of LWC and has been instrumental in the passage of bond issues for local school districts and libraries.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM



Becky Benná,
Executive Director



Karen Hesser,
Chief of Operations



Carrie Scarff,
Chief of Planning
& Projects



Mark Hess,
Chief of Public Safety



Beth Redden,
Chief of Philanthropy



Bill Tschirhart,
Chief of
Administration

**FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS**



409 E. Monument Avenue, third floor,
Dayton, Ohio 45402
937-275-PARK

metroparks.org