



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS





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
- Diversity
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Professional Growth
- Sustainability

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from Chief Executive Officer	4
Map of Your Five Rivers MetroParks	5
Your MetroParks by the Numbers	6
Financials	8
Access to Nature Testimonial	9
Projects Supported by the Foundations	10
Lead MetroParks Donors and Sponsors	11
Donor Profile	12
Support Your Five Rivers MetroParks	13
Volunteer Projects and Impact	14
Volunteer Profile	15
Volunteer for Your Five Rivers MetroParks	16
Volunteer Profile	17
Benefits of Time in Nature	18
Organizational Successes	19
Leadership	31

A LETTER FROM OUR CEO



SUPPORTING A HEALTHY, ACTIVE LIFESTYLE WHILE SPENDING TIME IN NATURE

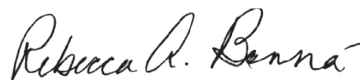


Access to nature was a central theme of 2021. The year showed, once again, the resiliency of our community. Continued changes in COVID-19 meant that we were all repeatedly adapting to new practices both indoors and out. One thing that remained the same through the year was the importance of spending time outside. The benefits, aside from it being one of the safest places to gather, include lowered stress hormones and increased vitamin D. Your Five Rivers MetroParks staff and volunteers worked hard throughout the year to provide those outdoor spaces, whether for a playdate at a nature play area, a chance to unwind and cast your line, or a place to get your blood pumping on a trail. Your MetroParks is proud to be a trusted source and option to promote physical and mental wellness.

In line with accessing nature was the effort to be sure everyone had (and has) the same opportunities to find that personal connection with nature. Started in 2020, MetroParks' Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Employee Council spent the year learning and looking inward at our agency and outward at our community. They continued to be guided by facilitators with the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton. I personally look forward to sharing more about their efforts and plans to strengthen Five Rivers MetroParks' commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in 2022.

An additional bright spot in 2021 was receiving reaccreditation through the Commission for the Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) in September. The significance of being reaccredited means your MetroParks is committed to ensuring best management practices and providing the world-class natural areas, parks, facilities and programs our community deserves. The agency believes in continual improvement and education, which has been fused into our culture. MetroParks is one of 10 park and recreation agencies in Ohio and 192 in the United States to be CAPRA accredited. (See page 30 for more about CAPRA.)

In 2022, I hope to see you out in the parks, enjoying a healthy, active lifestyle while spending time in nature.



Rebecca A. Benná
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

PARK SYSTEM MAP

MAP OF YOUR FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

ONLINE: **METROPARKS.ORG/MAP**

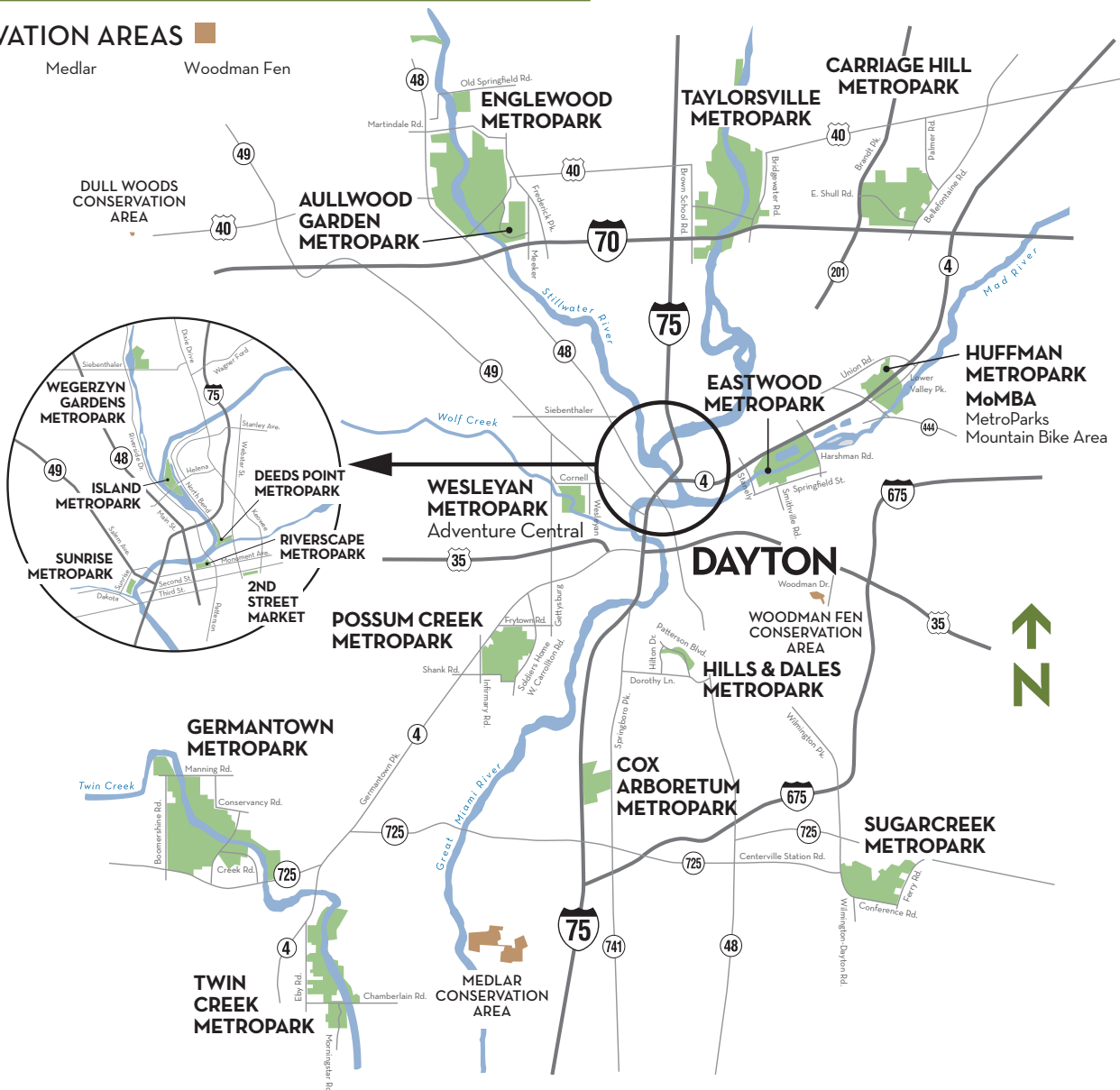
Five Rivers MetroParks operates 30 locations. Founded in 1963 to serve the greater Dayton area, MetroParks protects more than 16,000 acres of open space and provides year-round recreation, education and conservation opportunities. Facilities are available to the public free of charge – made possible by Montgomery County citizen support of a property tax levy.

METROPARKS

2nd Street Market	Deeds Point	Hills & Dales	RiverScape	Twin Creek
Aullwood Garden	Eastwood	Huffman	Sugarcreek	Wegerzyn Gardens
Carriage Hill	Englewood	Island	Sunrise	Wesleyan
Cox Arboretum	Germantown	Possum Creek	Taylorville	

CONSERVATION AREAS

Dull Woods	Medlar	Woodman Fen
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Interactive map also available in the
Five Rivers MetroParks

MOBILE APP

APP: **METROPARKS.ORG/MOBILE**

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS OVERVIEW

YOUR METROPARKS BY THE NUMBERS



3.57

MILLION VISITORS

The Dayton Business Journal again named Five Rivers MetroParks the region's No. 1 most visited attraction in 2021. In addition, the 2nd Street Market was No. 8 on the list.

COMMUNITY CONTINUED TO SEEK SOLACE AT THEIR FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS DURING THE PANDEMIC

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued into 2021, Montgomery County residents continued to visit their MetroParks as places where they could safely improve their physical and mental health.

After a significant spike in visits in 2020, park visitation did decrease 5% from 2020 to 2021. However, park attendance is still higher than pre-pandemic levels despite:

- a reduction in large events, such as the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience and Celtic Festival
- offering public programs for only six months of the year
- only partial operation of the 2nd Street Market

When we remove this impact and look at others, park visitation trends look a bit different. For example:

- Some of the gains from 2020 have sustained into 2021, particularly in spring and fall.
- Visits increased 3% over 2019.
- Park attendance also was impacted by the appearance of cicadas in June and the huge numbers of park visitors seen in April and May 2020 at the onset of the pandemic.

In 2021, Five Rivers MetroParks increased its offerings that allow visitors to use its 18 parks independently, on their own time and in

their own way — making it easy to maintain social distancing. New offerings included:

- Four short, easy **Mindfulness Walks** featuring signage that invited visitors to stop and engage in a variety of simple breathing and meditation activities. (See page 26 for more.)
- New **Let's Explore** family adventures featuring a series of guided activities to engage children's natural curiosity and sense of adventure in nature. (See page 25 for more.)

In addition, MetroParks continued offerings launched in 2020 that encourage safe, independent park visits:

- Five Rivers MetroParks' **mobile app**, powered by OuterSpatial, helps visitors navigate the trails, find amenities, plan a visit and more.
- The **MetroParks Trails Challenge** includes 28 trails participants can complete on their own time and at their own pace for a chance to win prizes. (See page 24 for more.)
- More **Heart Healthy Trails**, designed to help people improve their heart health while exercising outdoors, were added. (See page 24 for more.)

Research shows spending just 20 minutes in nature strengthens immunity; improves sleep, mood and focus; and reduces chronic illness and stress. (See page 18 for more.) Throughout the pandemic, Five Rivers MetroParks' locations have become more than places where our community can connect with nature: They have become places where everyone can improve their physical and mental health, which is more important than ever in these challenging times.

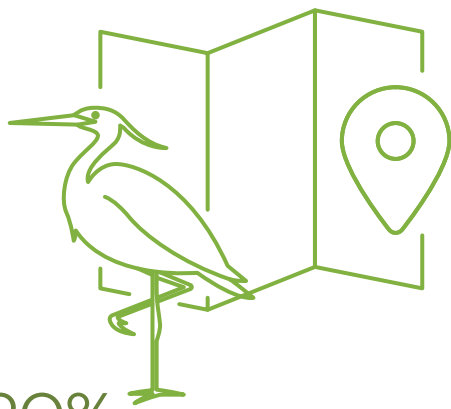


99,738

PARTICIPANTS
in Five Rivers MetroParks
programs and events

4,361

PARTICIPANTS
in 284 public programs



16,446

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.

3,021 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 value.

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



8⁺

EDUCATIONAL FEATURES INCLUDING:



the Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture



Inventors Walk



Possum Creek Farm



Tree Tower



Historical Farm



Twin Valley Welcome Center



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



MetroParks Ice Rink



RiverScape Bike Hub

2,201

SHELTER AND CAMPING PERMITS



FINANCIALS

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FUNDING

Approximately 80 percent of Five Rivers MetroParks' funding comes from a property tax levy supported by Montgomery County taxpayers.

Your Five Rivers MetroParks is extremely grateful for the support of Montgomery County voters who, in November 2018, overwhelmingly passed a 10-year replacement levy.

Levy funds allow Five Rivers MetroParks to maintain what it already manages – which the community identified as a top priority in the agency's 10-year comprehensive master plan finalized in 2016. MetroParks takes its responsibility as a steward of the public's funds very seriously, and the comprehensive master plan ensures MetroParks' funding is focused on community priorities.

Indeed, levy funding is crucial to Five Rivers MetroParks' ongoing operation. It allows the agency to protect and maintain local greenspaces and waterways, as well as provide clean, safe parks and opportunities for residents of all ages to enjoy the outdoors and have healthy, active lifestyles. However, in recent years, the elimination of and a reduction in state funding sources have created funding gaps for the agency.

This is why MetroParks is focused on diversifying its revenue streams while also identifying efficiencies and cost savings. For example, MetroParks continues to develop new partnerships that maximize levy dollars and create more balanced and sustainable finances. In addition, MetroParks receives support from three foundations: the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; and Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation. These foundations seek support from generous individuals and families, businesses, organizations, other foundations, and other community entities. The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation helps MetroParks provide special projects, programs and services it otherwise would not be able to offer, while the other two foundations typically support projects, programs and services focused on the specific parks after which they're named. (See pages 10-13 for more.)

Your Five Rivers MetroParks is committed to providing quality and value for the community, regardless of funding challenges. Our community expects – and deserves – high-quality, world-class parks and programs. Everyone in our community also deserves to have access to nature and the improved quality of life such access provides.

* Intergovernmental revenue is from other federal, state, local and other government agencies. It includes such funding as local government funds and grants. Intergovernmental expenses are for payments MetroParks makes to other government agencies, the majority of which are fees MetroParks is obligated to pay Montgomery County to collect property taxes on the agency's behalf.

** Charges for services includes such income as shelter, campsite, ice rink and other rentals, as well as program, permit and event fees and related charges.

*** Other income includes such items as auction proceeds, law enforcement fines, employee surcharges, reimbursements, refunds and rebates.

**** Other expenses/transfers primarily includes expenses that are transfers to other funds, such as local matches for grants and funds to be used specifically for capital improvements that may span multiple years.

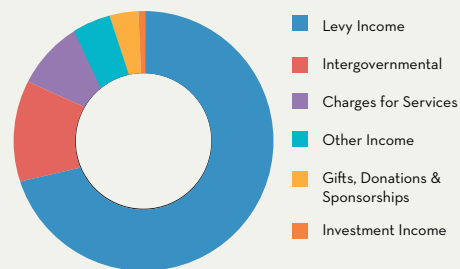
2021 REVENUE

Levy Income:	\$18,780,694
*Intergovernmental:	\$1,023,459
**Charges for Services:	\$572,149
Investment Income:	\$10,068
***Gifts, Donations & Sponsorships:	\$151,303
Other Income:	\$392,220
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT:	\$20,929,893

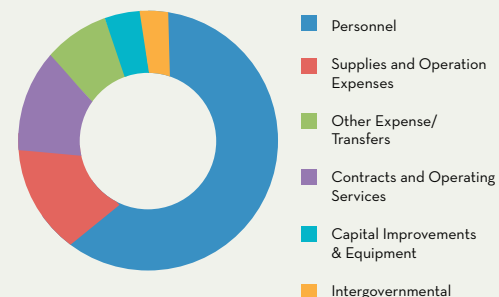
2021 EXPENSES

Personnel:	\$13,740,760
Supplies and Operating Expenses:	\$2,585,147
Contracts and Operating Services:	\$2,069,779
*Intergovernmental:	\$401,264
Capital Improvements & Equipment:	\$559,827
***Other Expenses/Transfers:	\$1,333,798
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$20,690,575

REVENUE



EXPENSES



ACCESS TO NATURE TESTIMONIAL

 **ENSURING EVERYONE IN OUR COMMUNITY CAN EXPERIENCE THE OUTDOORS**

The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation helps fill funding gaps – and supports programs MetroParks would not otherwise be able to provide. One of these is the Access to Nature financial assistance program, which helps everyone in our community experience the outdoors. Qualifying Montgomery County residents can receive up to a 75% discount based on financial need. Families can qualify for up to \$500 per calendar year to help remove financial barriers of participating in programs and camps, as well as campsite and shelter rentals.

The Duncan family of Huber Heights has experienced the significant impact of this program firsthand.

The entire family enjoys horseback riding, especially daughter Julie, 11, who wanted to start horse camps at the Carriage Hill MetroPark Riding Center a few summers ago. Julie's parents took advantage of the Access to Nature financial assistance program to help alleviate the cost associated with the camps.

Julie's experiences during horse camps have given her both confidence and a new-found respect for larger animals. Her dad appreciates the opportunities being in the parks and around horses provide in fostering a life-long love of the natural world.

"Kids play video games all day," Bob Duncan said. "We try to teach our children to be outside, be more social, get exercise – something educational is very important to us."

Indeed, access to nature – for both children and adults – is essential. According to Common Sense Media, a nonprofit that tracks children's tech usage, American youth spend 4 to 7 hours using screens each day – not including school and homework. Adults often overuse screens as well, with 20% of smartphone users spending more than 4.5 hours on their phones during weekdays.

Swapping screen time for sunshine and fresh air can have positive impacts on both physical and mental health. Moving your body outdoors can help reduce stress, improve heart health and increase vitamin D. These benefits apply to both children and adults, which is just one reason why the Access to Nature financial assistance program can be enjoyed by the entire family.



PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE FOUNDATIONS



MetroParks is a nationally accredited park agency that serves as our community's conservation leader by protecting, preserving and maintaining local greenspaces and waterways. For nearly 60 years, your Five Rivers MetroParks has been proud to serve Montgomery County's residents and visitors while making the Dayton region a better place to live, work, learn and play. Regardless of your age, ability or interest, MetroParks provides outdoor experiences that allow you and your family to enjoy a healthy, active lifestyle that inspires a personal connection with nature.

Five Rivers MetroParks is extremely grateful for the residents of Montgomery County, who support the park agency with a property tax levy that provides

80% of the funds needed to maintain and operate its 30 locations. MetroParks also is extremely grateful for the philanthropy of the many individuals, corporations and foundations that provide much-needed support and help bridge the gap between levy funding and the ever-growing needs of MetroParks – and the community it serves.

Join us in thanking the financial supporters of the three foundations that helped fund year-round conservation, education and recreation programs and projects. We are so grateful for the support of our 2021 donors, sponsors and supporters. Their generosity and commitment to MetroParks' mission allowed the agency to complete projects and offer programs that otherwise would not have happened.

Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation

- Access to Nature financial assistance program support
- Community gardens program support
- Decoding Nature series sponsor
- Germantown Seed Nursery supplies
- Nature play areas

- Outdoor Connections take-home program kits
- Park benches and swings
- Plant material
- Preschool to Kindergarten program support
- RiverScape River Run Terrace project support for seating and tables
- Salamander pond seeds



PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE FOUNDATIONS



The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation

- Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture tree shading
- BiPolar ionization system for indoor spaces
- Conservation Kids program support
- Decoding Nature series sponsor
- Edible Landscape Garden pavilion bird netting
- Nature play area
- Park benches
- Plant material and supplies
- Public WiFi
- Putting Learning and Nature Together (PLANT) program support
- Zorniger Visitor Center tile flooring



Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation

- Children's Discovery Garden wildlife garden
- Decoding Nature series sponsor
- Fall Family Adventure program support
- Formal Gardens taxus pruning
- Garden urn
- John Deere UTV



LEAD METROPARKS DONORS AND SPONSORS

- Charles and Irene Allbery
- Altar'd State
- Arbor Day Foundation
- Roger Baldrige
- Shelly Becker
- Pat Bethel
- Bonbright Distributors
- Mike and Frieda Brigner
- Bruce Buerk
- Rob and Kate Cantlon
- CenterPoint Energy Foundation
- Ann Clutter
- Cox Media Group Ohio (Cox First Media)
- Dayton Children's
- Elizabeth England
- Friends of Carriage Hill Farm
- Haley Gray
- Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co./Gardens Alive
- Steve Harlamert
- Cindi and Mat Heck
- Ruey Hodapp
- Huffy Corp.
- Deb and Gary Hunt
- Denise Ingersoll
- Jack W. and Sally D. Eichelberger Foundation
- Julian G. Lange Family Foundation
- Kettering Health
- Paul and Carol Lamberger
- LexisNexis
- Mark A. Kreusch Memorial Fund of The Dayton Foundation
- Meadow View Growers
- Mechanical Services & Design (MSD)
- Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Bear Monita and Barbra Stonerock
- Montgomery County Environmental Services/Keep Montgomery County Beautiful
- Frances Nelson
- Robert Ofzky
- Brent Patterson
- PNC Foundation
- Alita Rogers
- Connie and Jeff Sawdey Solution Services
- Jamie and Agata Schade
- Sherry Schaffer
- Sinclair Broadcasting WKEF/WRGT
- Mr. and Mrs. Dan Stack and Family
- Carole Stephens
- Mr. and Mrs. Bradley Stork
- Subaru of America
- USI Midwest
- Jamie Votaw
- Wagner Subaru
- Katie and Matthew Walters
- Estate of Donald Wenner
- Abby Whitesell and Bill Whitesell
- Vic and Debby Yowell

DONOR PROFILE

MEET CINDI AND MAT HECK

Like so many MetroParks supporters, Cindi and Mat Heck are passionate about nature.

Their love of outdoor spaces and community was ingrained in them at a young age by family, so giving back to the parks they loved just made good sense.

"Experiencing the changes of season at the parks is so special — seeing the buds come out in spring and enjoying the smell of fresh grass and plants in summer and taking in the changes of color in the fall and a fresh snowfall in winter is so special," Cindi Heck said. "We've always loved the MetroParks and the opportunities it offers to connect us to nature."

The Hecks were not only inspired by their shared passion for the outdoors, but by seeing how many community amenities they enjoy were born of past gifts from other Daytonians. The Hecks were inspired by those who gave back to the community and created something that would remain strong, vital, relevant and accessible now and for the future.

To that end, the couple made a generous gift to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation to fund the RiverScape River Run Terrace project. Their support allowed for the purchase and installation of new shade sails, seating and furniture along the south bank of the Great Miami River. The new amenities were installed at the end of

2021 and created an even more comfortable and inviting gathering place for the community.

"When I decided I wanted to make a donation, it was important to look for a project that everyone could use — from every age and every walk of life. We felt it was going to be a project where the greatest number of people could benefit from it," Cindi said. "With all of the development downtown, it's important there's a comfortable place to sit and relax. Water has such a calming effect and can have such a positive impact on people's lives. It can help relieve stress and is so peaceful. I think if you can make a gift, you should try because it's what makes Dayton a better place to live for all of us."

Levy funding provides about 80% of the dollars required to keep your MetroParks open, clean and safe. Grants, sponsorships and donations are critical in helping fund capital improvement projects and programming.

"Our taxpayer money can't do everything. Tax dollars just aren't enough," Cindi said. "If we care about our parks, we have to give back to the parks and our community. Seeing how others have given back to help enhance our community and other people's lives is so inspirational. Where I grew up in Chicago, we didn't have MetroParks like this. We're so lucky to have the outdoor spaces that we do. We are hoping the new RiverScape Terrace inspires others to come to downtown Dayton, have lunch there and enjoy the river."

"Our taxpayer money can't do everything. ... If we care about our parks, we have to give back to the parks and our community."

— Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation donor Cindi Heck



SUPPORT YOUR FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS



The agency today known as Five Rivers MetroParks was created in 1963 by a group of committed citizens who gave of their time and treasure to protect our region's natural areas from development. They left a lasting impact by establishing open spaces across the Dayton region for the enjoyment of all.

Now, you can join this legacy of generous and visionary nature lovers.

The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation secures funding for special projects, programming and an endowment while serving as an exemplary steward of donors' funds.

Philanthropic gifts to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; and Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation are essential to helping make up gaps in levy funding. These gifts also extend MetroParks' resources — and allow Five Rivers MetroParks to provide outdoor experiences and community resources that otherwise would not be available to our community.

Here are just some of the ways your charitable contributions can improve local quality of life:

- Provide education and recreation programs
- Support conservation and sustainability initiatives
- Provide new outdoor facilities and resources
- Promote and support youth development
- Make outdoor experiences accessible to everyone in our community
- Provide critical financial support to help MetroParks bridge funding gaps

Supporting the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation is the best way for local nature lovers to invest in the outdoors and ensure everyone has access to the natural wonders in their MetroParks, along with ways to experience nature in their own back yards.

At Five Rivers MetroParks, philanthropy isn't just about helping MetroParks meet its mission and vision today. It's about helping our community develop new habits for decades to come: improving their physical and mental health outdoors, seeking outdoor experiences and education that help them more fully appreciate nature, taking action to preserve and protect our region's environment. It's about ensuring your Five Rivers MetroParks remain vital, relevant and accessible — now and for all the generations that follow.

Won't you join us on this awesome adventure?

WAYS TO GIVE

The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation is a 501(c)3 tax-deductible nonprofit organization. With so many ways to give, supporting the Foundation has never been easier!

Become a Champion

The Champions Program is the easiest way to support the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation. MetroParks Champions establish a monthly recurring gift.

Partner with Us

Organizations and businesses can support MetroParks by providing financial support, sponsorships and in-kind services.

Tribute Program

Honor a loved one or celebrate a special occasion with a unique, lasting gift — such as benches and trees — at your favorite MetroPark.

Memorial Funds

Another way to honor a loved one is by establishing a memorial fund to which others can contribute. We are happy to provide contribution envelopes you can distribute at a memorial service or other commemorative event.

Individual Giving

Donations can be made securely online in any amount.

Planned Giving

Leave a lasting legacy with a gift in your will or estate plan to ensure future generations enjoy great parks.

Shop for a Cause

Support Five Rivers MetroParks via Amazon Smile and at Kroger and Dorothy Lane Market.

LEARN MORE & SUPPORT

MetroParks' philanthropy staff will work with you and your family, business or organization to create a gift that supports your passion, as well as MetroParks' — and our community's — needs.

Contact the Five Rivers MetroParks philanthropy staff at champions@metroparks.org or (937) 275-PARK (7275).

Contact MetroParks' philanthropy staff:

- Alexis Larsen, chief of philanthropy
- alexis.larsen@metroparks.org
- (937) 274-4381
- Brenda Cox, philanthropy manager
- brenda.cox@metroparks.org
- (937) 277-4839
- Sharon Smith, corporate giving and grants manager
- sharon.smith@metroparks.org
- (937) 277-4139

Visit metroparks.org/donate to make a donation online to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; and Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation.

VOLUNTEER PROJECTS & IMPACT

 **METROPARKS VOLUNTEERS NOT ONLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE — THEY ARE THE DIFFERENCE**

Dedicated volunteers are an integral part of the Five Rivers MetroParks family. Working side-by-side with staff, Five Rivers MetroParks volunteers make Montgomery County a better place to live, work, learn and play. Volunteers also:

- inspire, educate and engage park visitors in the protection and stewardship of the natural heritage and cultural history of Montgomery County
- share their passion for nature with future generations
- make a positive difference in our community and for the environment
- extend the agency's resources, including tax dollars
- generously share their skills and expertise with MetroParks' staff and the community it serves
- help MetroParks accomplish its mission to protect our region's natural heritage and provide outdoor experiences that inspire a personal connection with nature

In 2021, many long-term volunteers were able to safely resume their service after a pause due to the pandemic. MetroParks is honored so many people from all walks of life choose to give back by volunteering — especially during what have been some challenging years.

Indeed, increased visitation since the pandemic began shows how strongly the community values their Five Rivers MetroParks as places where they can improve their physical and mental health. Volunteers' time and dedication has helped MetroParks remain open throughout the pandemic — and to serve as a healing respite for our community.



11,807
VOLUNTEER SERVICE HOURS

\$290,452

Estimated **BENEFIT** of
volunteer service

250 Adopt-A-Park
service kits distributed

363 Adopt-A-Park
public volunteers

576
ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

includes **193** long-term volunteers
and **383** short-term and
public volunteers

12 GROUPS THAT VOLUNTEERED

- AES Ohio
- AmeriCorps
- Bauer Elementary School
- Chaminade Julianne High School
- Heapy Engineering
- Holy Angels Catholic School

- Kettering College
- Miami Valley Career Technology Center
- State Farm
- University of Dayton
- U.S. Bank
- Wright-Patterson Air Force Base



VOLUNTEER PROFILE

MEET JACEY CAMPBELL

Dayton resident and veteran Jacey Campbell is no stranger to different terrain. From the mountains of Colorado to the dry, hot landscapes of Somalia, she grew up experiencing the outdoors in different ways. Eventually, her commitment to serve her country took her overseas.

Campbell's service didn't end when she left the military. After moving back to her hometown of Dayton, she's continued to serve the community as a Five Rivers MetroParks volunteer. This role enables her to connect with people and find respite in the natural world.

Like many veterans, Campbell struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition triggered either by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms often include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety. Additionally, Campbell suffered the loss of her brother, who was on active duty in Afghanistan.

While Campbell is addressing her PTSD by regularly seeing a counselor, she also finds disconnecting from the world to spend time in nature is an effective way to quell her anxiety.

"Just being out there and away from everything lets all that stress just flow away," Campbell said. "When you return to daily life, that stress of last week isn't there anymore. It's hitting that refresh during the weekend."

An excellent opportunity for quality time, Campbell also retreats to nature with her family. In fact, after a peaceful paddling moment with her son, Zachary, during the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience in 2016, Campbell decided that volunteering was a great way to give back, de-stress and spend more time outdoors with her loved ones.

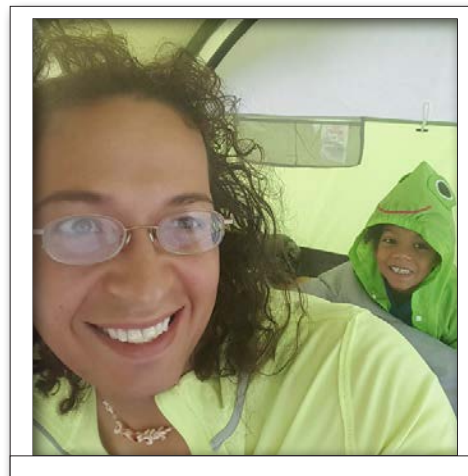
With a love for the tranquility of being on the water, Campbell enjoys volunteering to help MetroParks with paddling-related activities. Of course, her entire family enjoys the excitement of volunteering during the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience, a weekend filled with activities, music and demos that highlight Dayton as the Outdoor Adventure Capital of the Midwest.

Campbell, a trans woman, also appreciates natural spaces as a venue to simply be herself.

"Nature doesn't care," she said. "It just doesn't."

She also appreciates MetroParks' staff for being open, accepting and fun to work with.

"Nature is open for everyone, regardless of your socioeconomic status, level of education, body shape, race, gender identity, ethnicity, or the state of your physical and mental wellbeing," said Jenny Hymans, human resources and volunteer services manager. "Our volunteers are a reflection of that, and we work hard to encourage the public to make the outdoors an inclusive space where everyone can enjoy the beauty of the natural world."



VOLUNTEER

BECOME A FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS VOLUNTEER

Learn new skills, care for the environment and make new friends — while providing an important community service. No experience is required, and people of all ages and abilities are MetroParks volunteers. All anyone needs is enthusiasm for our region's natural heritage or cultural history, a willingness to learn, and a desire to share with others.

MetroParks has a wide variety of volunteer opportunities so everyone can find something fun and rewarding that also meets their passion — and schedule. Individuals, groups, youth, families and others will find ways to make a difference at MetroParks.

Volunteers enjoy the following benefits:

- using your skills and learning new ones
- sharing your interests with people of all ages
- improving the quality of life for Montgomery County residents
- professional training on a variety of topics
- learning more about the natural world
- making new friendships while connecting with nature
- interacting with park visitors
- exercise and improved mental and physical health

It's Easier than Ever to Get Started!

MetroParks' new online volunteer site, Get Connected, makes it easy and convenient to become a volunteer. Developed throughout 2021 and launched in January 2022, volunteers can search for available opportunities, create a profile, participate in virtual trainings and more.



SUPPORT METROPARKS AND ITS VOLUNTEERS

Align your brand with Five Rivers MetroParks, our region's conservation leader, and with supporters who have a love for their community, care about the environment and want to give back by sponsoring MetroParks' large, annual public service days, Adopt-A-Park and Make A Difference Day, as well as Service Saturdays. For more information about sponsorship opportunities, contact:

- Sharon Smith, corporate giving and grants manager
- sharon.smith@metroparks.org
- (937) 275-PARK (7275)

Five Rivers MetroParks offers variety of volunteer positions in nine categories:

- Administration
- Animal care
- Gardening
- Programming
- Special events
- Ambassador
- Conservation
- Park maintenance
- Skilled trades



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

- volunteer.services@metroparks.org
- (937) 275-PARK (7275)
- [METROPARKS.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://www.mtmetroparks.org/volunteer)

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

MEET THE STEELE FAMILY

As the saying goes, “it takes a village,” but in the case of Adventure Central, its village is built from generations of service-minded families with one goal: to see children thriving outdoors and in the classroom.

Take the Steele family, for example. Father, Sheldon Steele, and his young adult and teenage daughters – Mariah, Asja and Keira – have all been involved with Adventure Central throughout the years as participants or volunteers.

Adventure Central, a youth development program that focuses on education and leadership skills using an environmental foundation, welcomes school-aged children in west Dayton to participate in free afterschool and summer programming. Children receive help with homework, daily snacks and meals, and participate in fun, educational programs.

Located at Wesleyan MetroPark, Adventure Central is a partnership between Five Rivers MetroParks, The Ohio State University Extension and 4-H Youth Development. Parents and community volunteers support the program’s educational programming, outings, special events and more.

Sheldon Steele became familiar with the program when Mariah, then 10, was a student at Adventure Central. He began volunteering in the classroom, helping kids with homework and doing overnight camps and helping with the boys youth group. Sheldon, an avid outdoorsman from a small town in Wisconsin, still volunteers and often gets as much from the experience as the students do.

“Once the kids start knowing you, how can you not come around?” Sheldon asked. “They treat you like family.”

This sentiment is also felt by Sheldon’s daughters, who all look forward to volunteering.

“Adventure Central really is our family,” said Mariah. “They’ve seen us all grow up.”

Mariah, now a prevention specialist with a degree in social work, returned to Adventure Central as a volunteer during high school to fulfill credit hours. She’s been volunteering in some capacity ever since, whether it’s helping with overnights or teaching kids fractions while baking pizza. She’s even taken the tools she’s learned while being a student-volunteer into the workforce.

“Using the foundation Adventure Central taught me has shaped how I use my lesson plans,” Mariah said.

Asja and Keira have both volunteered at Adventure Central and have been members of MetroParks’ JET work-based learning program, which allows students interested in the outdoors to job shadow and work alongside MetroParks’ professional staff during the summer. These experiences build leadership and practical workplace skills.

While Asja is attending the University of Dayton on a full scholarship for criminal justice, her experiences at Adventure Central

inspired her to consider a career working with at-risk youth. Keira is thinking about becoming a pediatric nurse or zoologist.

As for Sheldon, he’s committed to spending time in nature, volunteering at Adventure Central and watching his daughters thrive.

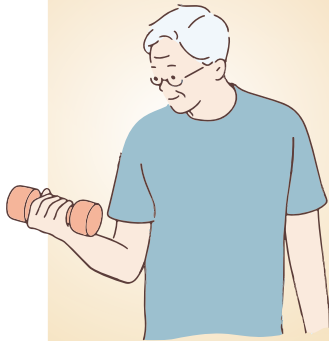
“It’s great when the kids [from Adventure Central] see you or when I’m out with the girls and the kids call their names,” Sheldon said. “It’s the great relationships you build with kids, and sometimes you don’t realize how important that is.”



BENEFITS OF TIME IN NATURE

 **RESEARCH SHOWS TIME OUTDOORS IMPROVES PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, MAKING ACCESS TO NATURE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT**

STRENGTHENS IMMUNITY



Your immune system fights infections and diseases, and nature gives it a boost.

- Sun provides vitamin D, essential for bone and muscle health. (Remember sunscreen!)
- Breathing phytoncides, airborne chemicals produced by plants, increases white blood cell count.
- Growing up in nature helps children develop more balanced immune systems.

BETTER SLEEP

Regular, quality sleep is linked to better concentration, healthier weight, and reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.

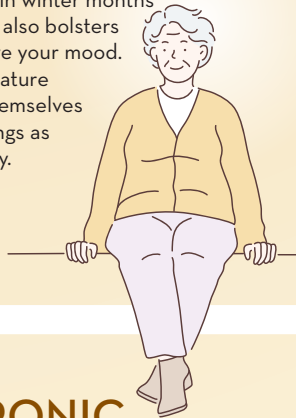
- Being active outdoors leads to more productive workouts and a better, longer night's sleep.
- Your eyes need enough daylight to regulate your internal clock, which keeps your sleep cycle regular.
- Being in nature is a mood-booster, which quells negative thoughts that distract us from falling asleep.



ENHANCES MOOD

Physical and mental health are directly linked, and nature improves both.

- Time outdoors can lower depression and anxiety.
- Time outdoors – especially in winter months when there's less daylight – also bolsters vitamin D, which can improve your mood.
- People who spend time in nature tend to feel better about themselves and place value on such things as relationships and community.



BETTER FOCUS

People's attention spans are decreasing due to many factors – especially excessive screen time.

- Taking a break in nature enhances cognitive abilities, such as memory and problem solving.
- Studies show children with ADHD concentrate better on a task after time spent in a natural setting.
- Spending time outdoors helps overcome mental blocks and boosts creativity.



REDUCE CHRONIC ILLNESS



Time in nature reduces your risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions.

- It's easy to engage in physical activity outdoors, which helps maintain a healthy BMI.
- Regular exposure to nature can reduce the risk of type II diabetes and heart disease.
- Just 30 minutes a day outdoors can help lower blood pressure.

STRESS REDUCTION

Stress affects mental health and contributes to inflammation, weight gain and other factors that lead to chronic illness.

- Stopping to smell natural aromas can make you feel more relaxed.
- Just 20 minutes a day immersed in nature significantly lowers stress hormone levels.
- Research shows being active outdoors is more impactful than exercising in a gym.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS' CONTINUING RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With the health and safety of MetroParks' staff, volunteers and the public top-of-mind, the agency continued to address the ongoing needs of Montgomery County residents while also fulfilling its mission during the ongoing pandemic.

Following directives and information from the Ohio Department of Health, Public Health Dayton-Montgomery County and Centers for Disease Control, Five Rivers MetroParks adjusted its operations, public engagement and access to indoor facilities and outdoor amenities accordingly.



2021 Virtual Adventure Speaker Series

Five Rivers MetroParks and Wright State University partnered to offer nine virtual talks that inspired a sense of adventure among outdoor enthusiasts of all experience levels during its biennial Adventure Speaker Series. Starting in March, the virtual series also included two panels that discussed working remotely while adventuring and how to improve diversity in the outdoor recreation industry. Nearly 800 people viewed the live or recorded versions of the Adventure Speaker Series talks.

Virtual Bike Month

MetroParks' annual Bike to Work Day/Bike Month celebration was again hosted during Virtual Bike Month. Staff engaged the public via educational videos, virtual field trips accessible by local paved trails, and videos from partners and presenting sponsor, the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission. Independent activities, such as Bike Bingo and suggested rides, also were available. All these materials were posted on MetroParks' Virtual Bike Month Facebook group.

Additional sponsorship for Virtual Bike Month was provided by City of Dayton Water, Dayton Cycling Club, Woolpert and LJB Inc.



Adopt-A-Park Service Kits

Annual Earth Day celebration, Adopt-A-Park, returned in 2021 – but in a different way. The public was invited to help protect the region's natural heritage by registering for and picking up a free Adopt-a-Park service kit, which included all the materials necessary for a family of four to clean an area of a MetroPark or local greenspace.



A safe alternative to hosting a large one-day, in-person event, participants were able to pick up their service kit on one of two designated days and clean up outdoor spaces on their own time throughout the month of April. Participants were asked to report back what they were able to clean up, recycle and divert from the landfill.

Additionally, MetroParks offered a smaller, in-person service day on April 17 for long-term volunteers to do high-priority projects within certain parks.

The results:

- 250 Adopt-A-Park service kits were distributed
- 8,782 pounds of trash were collected
- 4,774 pounds of recyclable materials were diverted from the landfill

Adopt-A-Park was sponsored by Montgomery County Environmental Services and Keep Montgomery County Beautiful with additional support from LexisNexis and QEI Engineers.

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, and 252 kits were sold in 2021.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS' CONTINUING RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Outdoor Equipment Rentals and Programs

MetroParks launched weekend equipment rentals for those who wanted to embark on outdoor adventures but didn't have the experience or necessary gear. In addition to equipment, each set includes tutorials, how-to videos and web links to information that aids people in using the equipment. Available rentals include backyard camping gear, backpacking gear and bike maintenance tools.

In addition, MetroParks' outdoor recreation staff developed in-person mountain biking, paddling, camping and fishing programs that could be safely and effectively delivered with limited contact. The outdoor recreation team also delivered dozens of virtual programs, which were supported by Subaru of America.



Nature Is Open Blog

MetroParks' Nature Is Open blog is home to stories, articles and resources that offer readers insights on self-guided adventures in the parks. Nature Is Open also includes expanded content from *ParkWays* magazine, allowing readers to take a deeper dive into their favorite articles.

With topics ranging from Leave No Trace to composting for beginners, the Nature Is Open blog connects readers with nature at home and in the parks on their own time and guided by their own interests.



Passport to MetroParks at Home

A way to challenge families to participate in nature education, conservation and outdoor recreation activities throughout the summer, Passport to MetroParks was a game introduced in the summer 2021 issue of *ParkWays*. Families were able to earn stamps

to fill out their *ParkWays* passports by completing suggested independent-use activities

in *ParkWays* and on the Passport to MetroParks web page. Participants were able to photograph and share their progress using the hashtag #Passport2MetroParks.



The game was a take on the Passport to MetroParks event, hosted for the first time at RiverScape MetroPark in 2019. The in-person event highlighted summertime events, programs and activities, but was cancelled in 2021 due to the pandemic. The at-home Passport to MetroParks, sponsored by Homelight, allowed the community to safely complete activities on their own time and at their own pace.

Rediscover Downtown Dayton

RiverScape MetroPark is often referred to as "Dayton's front porch." As such, it was integral this facility and MetroParks were part of the collaborative efforts to create and promote safe opportunities to patronize businesses and events downtown. The Downtown Dayton Partnership launched its "Rediscover Downtown Dayton" campaign in early summer, and MetroParks used this campaign to promote the downtown area in general, along with happenings at RiverScape MetroPark and the 2nd Street Market.

In early September, the Downtown Dayton Partnership and RiverScape MetroPark hosted a "co-working day," during which local professionals gathered with their co-workers to enjoy the outdoors and safely see each other. MetroParks and the Downtown Dayton Partnership provided yard games, coffee, free Wi-Fi and more for the 100 people in attendance throughout the day.





Garden to Go Kits and Produce Donations

To address the ongoing challenge of food insecurity and inequitable access to fresh, healthy produce, MetroParks' education coordinators assembled hundreds of Garden to Go kits that included seeds, seed starts, instructions and garden bags. Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co./Gardens Alive donated seeds, Stockslagers Greenhouse and Garden Center donated seedlings, Meadow View Growers donated small grow bags, and the Reynolds and Reynolds Associate Foundation funded supplies.

These kits allowed recipients to spark an interest in gardening while starting their own gardens at home, in addition to enjoying the benefits of their harvest.

More than 500 kits were distributed thanks to help from community partners who serve food-insecure constituencies and at establishments located in food deserts, such as the Gem City Market.

Also helping to alleviate the challenges caused by food insecurity in the Dayton region, MetroParks partnered with local food rescue and nonprofit Access to Excess to get fresh MetroParks-grown and donated produce to those who need it most. Produce grown at Possum Creek, Wegerzyn Gardens, Cox Arboretum and Carriage Hill MetroParks, as well as at Adventure Central, was donated to Access to Excess throughout the growing season. Additionally, MetroParks reached out to local gardeners asking them to donate their gardens' extras.

Access to Excess used the donated bounty to arrange free produce stands in areas considered food deserts. In total, more than 6,000 pounds of fresh produce was donated to those who struggle with food insecurity and accessing fresh, affordable produce.

MetroParks won an Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA) first place Award of Excellence in the health and wellness category for its Growing for Good program. (See page 27 for more about MetroParks' OPRA award.)

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

REOPENING & RESUMING

Summer at RiverScape MetroPark

With a number of COVID-19 precautions, free summertime activities returned to RiverScape MetroPark. They included:

- **Fitness in the Park:** Free Fitness in the Park classes resumed with Zumba and yoga on select Saturdays throughout the summer. Decals were placed on the ground under the pavilion to ensure safe social distancing and pre-registration was required until COVID-19 protocols were eased by the CDC and Public Health Dayton-Montgomery County. Fitness in the Park was sponsored by Kettering Health and Anthem.
- **Summer Music Series:** Ten free concerts were offered starting July 8 and ending Sept. 3. They included Big Band Nights, Pickin' in the Park (bluegrass) and R&B Hot Summer Nights. The Summer Music Series was sponsored by the Jack W. & Sally D. Eichelberger Foundation.
- **Music @ Lunch:** Live music during lunch returned Tuesdays through Fridays. Local musicians played, and the RiverScape Café was open to provide a variety of lunch, snack, dessert and beverage items.
- **Bike Rentals:** Bike rentals resumed and were available during the week by appointment. On the weekends, walk-up rentals were available.
- **Events & Festivals:** Some partner events returned to RiverScape MetroPark, including the Hispanic Heritage Festival, YMCA Healthy Kids Day and city of Dayton fireworks.
- **Amenities:** Summer favorites were back, including the interactive fountains, Five Rivers MetroParks Fountain of Lights and the Fountain Snack Bar.



2nd Street Market

Five Rivers MetroParks' 2nd Street Market worked with staff and vendors to gradually resume operations of the indoor space at the Market. Starting July 17, the indoor space at the Market reopened on Saturdays and resumed its pre-pandemic hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The following month, the Market reintroduced Sunday hours from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with Friday hours resuming during the holiday season.



During the initial reopening of the Market, face coverings were optional, but strongly encouraged. Due to multiple, highly transmissible COVID-19 variants, face coverings were required indoors at the Market from late-August until early 2022.

MetroParks Ice Rink

The MetroParks Ice Rink opened as usual on the Friday after Thanksgiving for the season after remaining closed during the 2020-2021 skating season due to COVID-19. Presented by Huff, the MetroParks Ice Rink offered daily skating opportunities, special theme nights, holiday skates, skating lessons and more.

New for the 2021-2022 season, those who utilize SNAP/EBT benefits were offered half off the price of admission and skate rentals thanks to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation's Access to Nature financial assistance program.

Introduced in 2019, the Kettering Health Comfort Tent and Mechanical Services & Design Warming Zone allowed those at the rink who were not actively skating places to warm up. Other supporters of the 2021-2022 MetroParks Ice Rink include media sponsor Dayton 24/7 Now, as well as USI Midwest, City Barbeque, CODE Credit Union, Ed Smith Flowers & Gifts, Local Cantina, and Winans.

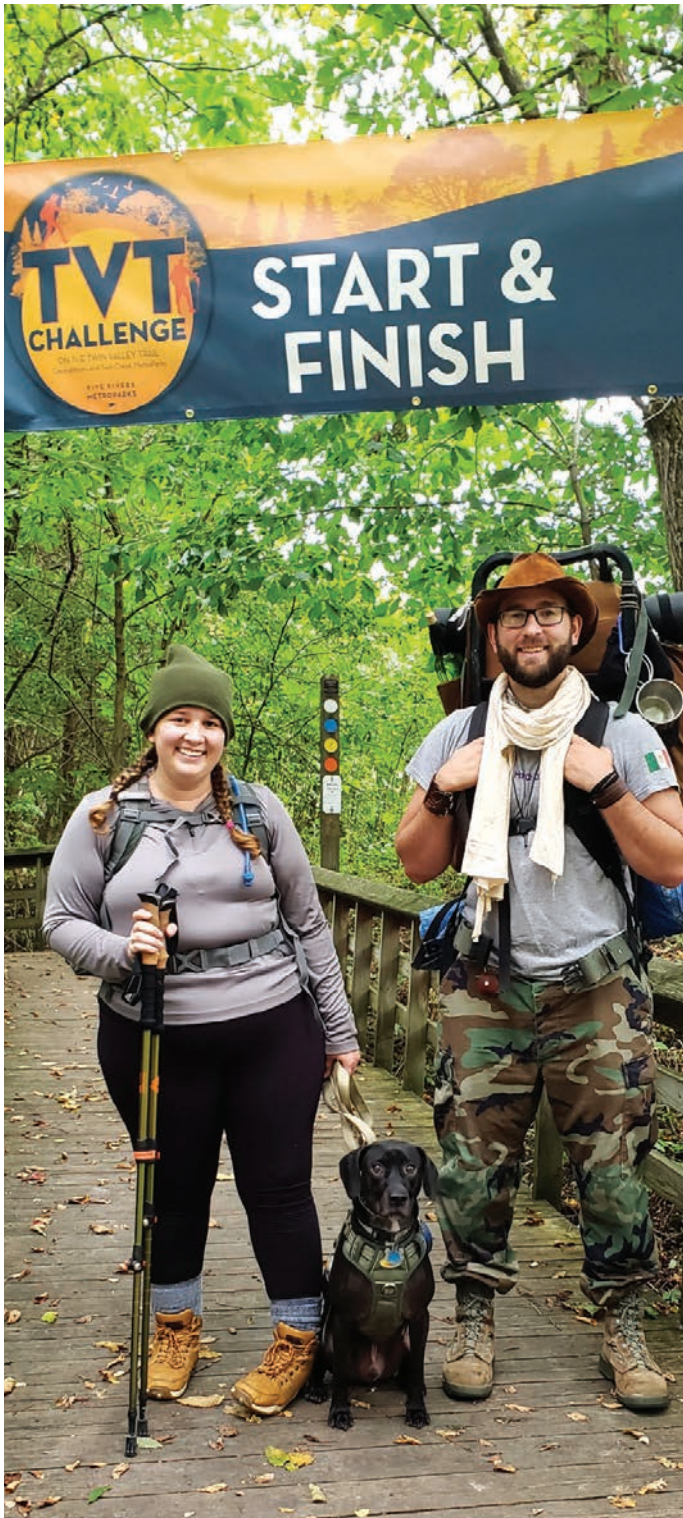


ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

SUSTAINABILITY & CONSERVATION

TVT Challenge

The Twin Valley Trail Challenge, presented by Dayton Hikers, was rescheduled for Sept. 25 with new COVID-19 safety protocols. Typically held in June, 235 people participated in the fall event, hiking nearly 4,000 miles on the Twin Valley Backpacking Trail, which connects and is located in Germantown and Twin Creek MetroParks.



Holiday Recycling Opportunities

Thanks to a partnership with Cohen Recycling, Five Rivers MetroParks was able to recycle broken or unwanted holiday lights at six Five Rivers MetroParks locations. In addition to supporting MetroParks' conservation mission, Cohen made a donation of \$1,000 to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation based on the 3,400 pounds of lights recycled.

In addition to recycling holiday lights, Five Rivers MetroParks worked with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) to collect natural holiday trees to sink in lakes at Ohio state parks. Sinking natural trees bolsters aquatic life and creates better fishing opportunities for recreationalists. The public dropped off more than 1,000 trees at Eastwood MetroPark for ODNR.



Arbor Day Foundation Tree Planting

In late October, a tree planting was held at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark, which was significantly impacted by the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes. Employees from State Farm and students from Chaminade Julianne High School volunteered to help MetroParks staff plant 100 trees in the park along the Stillwater River.



The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation is a proud partner of the Arbor Day Foundation. The project was made possible by a partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation and State Farm Insurance.

MetroParks Seed Nursery

A grant from the CenterPoint Energy Foundation supported the Seed Nursery Improvement Project. The MetroParks seed nursery is located at Germantown MetroPark and allows MetroParks parks and conservation staff to propagate and grow seeds and plugs for native wildflowers, shrubs and other plants.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

HITTING THE TRAILS



2021 MetroParks Trails Challenge

The MetroParks Trails Challenge returned in 2021 with 28 new trails for participants to explore for the chance to win prizes. Presented by Huffu with additional support from Dayton Children's, the MetroParks Trails Challenge diversified trail options, adding equestrian trails in 2021. Additionally, new prizes were offered, including a Huffu mountain bike and Kids Adventure Pack.

The community recognized the Trails Challenge as a safe, independent way to explore the outdoors and support their physical and mental health, resulting in 6,000 registrations — more than quadruple that of 2020. Other results:

- Participants completed more than 12,731.6 miles of human-powered transportation, which is four times as long as I-80.
- The youngest participant was six months old and completed 18 trails, and the oldest participant was 81.
- In addition, 180 people completed 18 or more trails and seven participants completed all 28 trails.

Heart Healthy Trails

In January 2021, MetroParks expanded its Heart Healthy Trails initiative to include trails at Wegerzyn Gardens and Englewood MetroParks. In spring 2021, a Heart Healthy Trail was introduced at Carriage Hill MetroPark. With these additions, parkgoers had seven

different Heart Healthy Trails to visit to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

This outdoor experience, launched in 2020, features natural surface and paved trails that are short and easy to traverse. The Heart Healthy Trails initiative is designed to help people improve their heart health while exercising outdoors. The trails are marked every quarter mile so trail users can keep the American Heart Association's recommended walking pace of 24 minutes per mile, at least 2.5 miles per hour.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

NEW IN 2021

Decoding Nature

MetroParks worked with local production company Indigo Life Media to create *Decoding Nature*, a seven-part series that looked at the past, present and future of Five Rivers MetroParks, and the role access to nature has played in the Dayton region's development.

One episode was released per month on local streaming service Nearu TV. From traveling the trails to searching for wildlife, viewers got a behind-the-scenes look at what makes Dayton, Ohio, the Outdoor Adventure Capital of the Midwest.

The *Decoding Nature* series was available to the public for free thanks to sponsors Wagner Subaru; the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation; The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation; and the Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation.



Let's Explore and Nature Play Area Upgrades

Geared toward younger children, Let's Explore is a program that provides fun, guided nature experiences that make it easier for families to spend time with kids outdoors. Children are invited to use their imaginations during unstructured outdoor play in nature play areas at Englewood, Hills & Dales, Sugarcreek, and Possum Creek MetroParks.

Families also are invited to hike along a nearby trail suitable for kids and follow the Let's Explore activity prompts. Games such as hike and



seek, wildlife warmup, and wildflower hunt allow children to have fun while connecting with nature. Seasonal activities also are available on the Let's Explore web page.

Also facilitating outdoor play, the nature play area at Hills & Dales MetroPark received a number of improvements, such as a dry creek bed with stepping stones and large logs for climbing. These upgrades at Hills & Dales were supported by a grant from the Mark A. Kreusch Memorial Fund of The Dayton Foundation. In addition, MetroParks parks and conservation staff began upgrades to the nature play area at Possum Creek MetroPark, with a planned opening in spring 2022.

Trailside Camping

Introduced to the public as the summer season began, MetroParks offered new trailside camping options that filled a niche for those traveling through Montgomery County on the paved trail network, water trails, and long-distance hiking and bicycle-touring routes.

Trailside camping sites at Island, Eastwood and Taylorsville MetroParks are located along seven-long distance touring routes that run through Montgomery County, such as the:

- Buckeye Trail
- North Country National Scenic Trail
- Great American Rail-Trail
- Chicago to New York City Bicycle Route
- Great Miami Riverway Alternate to the Underground Railroad Bicycle Route
- U.S. Bicycle Route 50
- Great Miami River Watershed National Water Trail

The sites also support Dayton's growing reputation as the Outdoor Adventure Capital of the Midwest. Additionally, trailside camping supports MetroParks' 10-year comprehensive master plan and master park plans.



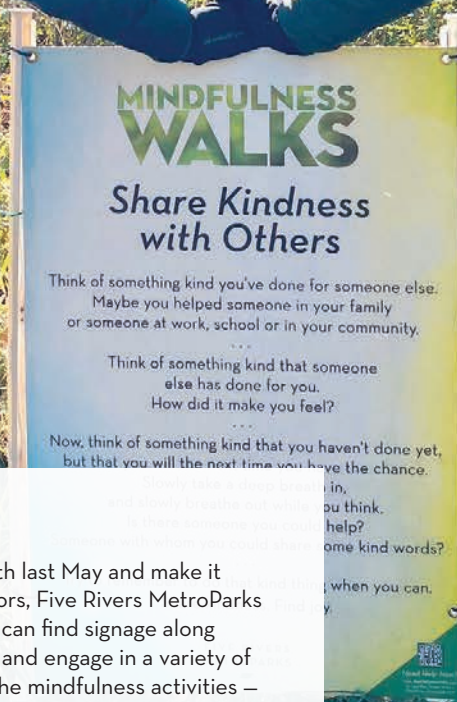
ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

 NEW IN 2021

Mindfulness Walks

To recognize Mental Health Awareness Month last May and make it easier for the community to de-stress outdoors, Five Rivers MetroParks established four Mindfulness Walks. Visitors can find signage along these short, easy walks inviting them to stop and engage in a variety of simple breathing and meditation activities. The mindfulness activities – developed with input from Dayton Children’s and Montgomery County Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services – can be done not only in the designated MetroParks but in any outdoor space.

Mindfulness Walks are located in Eastwood, Possum Creek, Sunrise and Huffman MetroParks, and users can access the prompts on MetroParks’ mobile app, powered by OuterSpatial, as well as its website.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

AWARDS

Growing for Good Wins Top Statewide Award

MetroParks won an Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA) first place Award of Excellence in the health and wellness category for its Growing for Good program. OPRA Awards are given to organizations that transcend everyday standards to make a difference and improve the quality of life in Ohio communities.

Many Daytonians are challenged with food insecurity, which has only increased during the pandemic. MetroParks' community partners and local gardeners decided to help.

MetroParks staff, volunteers and community partners assembled 500 Garden to Go kits, which allowed people to start their own gardens. Additionally, MetroParks grew more than 3,000 pounds of fresh produce in its gardens and local gardeners matched that, donating an additional 3,000 pounds.

This produce was donated to Access to Excess, a local nonprofit food rescue that sets up free produce stands in food deserts, areas where fresh, local food is not easily accessible or affordable. (See page 21 for more about MetroParks' Growing for Good program.)



Nature Cat Wins Public Media Award

During summer 2020, Five Rivers MetroParks partnered with local PBS affiliate ThinkTV to create a week-long virtual nature camp, Explore the Outdoors Summer Camp. Five Rivers MetroParks' educators filmed segments that covered such topics as color in nature, animals and urban gardening. These segments were paired with footage from popular PBS Kids cartoon, *Nature Cat*. This virtual camp aired in multiple markets and is still available to educators via ThinkTV's website.

In 2021, ThinkTV and Cincinnati Educational Television and their partners – Five Rivers MetroParks, Dayton Metro Library and the Dayton International Peace Museum – were recognized with the National Educational Telecommunications Association's Community Engagement Award for COVID-19 Community Engagement. This award recognizes the content, outreach and impact of ThinkTV's 2020 virtual camp program, which included Explore the Outdoors Summer Camp.

Nature Is Open Wins National Marketing Award

In 2021, the National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials awarded MetroParks with the 2020 marketing award for its Nature Is Open campaign. This national recognition is awarded to parks and recreation agencies for demonstrating unique, significant or exceptional outcomes thanks to their marketing efforts.

During the pandemic, MetroParks' worked to find creative ways to promote nature as a safe place and encourage the use of outdoor spaces to improve physical and mental health. The public responded by visiting MetroParks in record numbers, from 3.4 million in 2019 to 3.8 million in 2020 – an 8% increase.



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

PLANNING & PROJECTS

Deeds Point MetroPark Pedestrian Bridge Reopened

A popular downtown pedestrian bridge reopened on June 18, 2021, after the old bridge was removed and a new and improved structure was installed. The new pedestrian bridge has an estimated lifespan of 75 years.

The Deeds Point Pedestrian Bridge is located between Deeds Point MetroPark and RiverScape MetroPark. It connects such paved trails as the northern portion of the Great Miami River Trail and the Stillwater River Trail to the southern portion of the Great Miami River Trail and the Mad River Trail.

Many organizations were integral in the reconstruction process, including Five Rivers MetroParks, Montgomery County, the city of Dayton, the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, the Miami Conservancy District, Montgomery County Transportation Improvement District and the Ohio Department of Transportation.

The Deeds Point Pedestrian Bridge is a key connection located at the nexus of the Dayton region's more than 350 miles of connected trails – the nation's largest paved trail network. Connections such as the bridge are critical to maintaining that paved trail network, which make it fun and easy for Dayton-area residents and visitors to enjoy a healthy, active outdoor lifestyle.

Terrace Project at RiverScape River Run

The River Run Terrace provides new amenities on RiverScape MetroPark's south shore that complement the whitewater feature. The \$163,000 project was funded by local philanthropist Cindi Heck and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Padding Enhancement Grant.

Terraced limestone seating, which allows visitors to relax while watching people surf and paddle in the RiverScape River Run whitewater feature, was completed in spring 2021. Additionally, MetroParks, the Downtown Dayton Partnership and local arts organization The Contemporary Dayton put out a call for an artist to complete a mural that would transform an unsightly concrete manhole cover into a vibrant piece of public art. The selection committee chose local artist Gae Helton's design, which



incorporated nature and river elements. Helton completed the mural near RiverScape River Run in late spring.

Later in the year, shade sails and comfortable seating were added to the terrace, along with gear racks for kayakers and stand up paddleboarders. The space can host a bevy of activities, with seating for about 200 people and room for food trucks and other amenities. (See page 12 for more about this project.)

Dayton Riverfront Plan

The Dayton Riverfront Plan's 2021 progress report offers information on projects completed, in progress and those currently funded. The RiverScape River Run Terrace Project, expansion of Wesleyan MetroPark and the reopening of the Deeds Point Pedestrian Bridge are completed projects of note, along with the addition of more Link Bike Share stations downtown and in the Carillon neighborhood, as well as the construction of the Bike Yard at Welcome Park.

Five Rivers MetroParks manages the Dayton Riverfront Plan website, which received an upgrade in 2021. MetroParks worked with Dayton Riverfront Plan partners to send regular updates and gather feedback from the community. Learn more about the Dayton Riverfront Plan at daytonriverfrontplan.org.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

PLANNING & PROJECTS

Master Plans Guide the Future of Parks

Five Rivers MetroParks completed master plans for two parks in 2021: Cox Arboretum MetroPark and Huffman MetroPark. Creating these park master plans is the next step in implementing MetroParks' 10-year comprehensive master plan; all plans are guided by the community's input. Staff from across MetroParks worked with volunteers and the public to identify the parks' basic needs, propose incremental changes to ensure continuous improvement, and imagine bold new opportunities. Responding to public priorities expressed in surveys and input meetings, these plans focused on taking care of the park's existing assets, providing basic amenities, and increasing trail and play opportunities. Recommendations include:

Cox Arboretum MetroPark

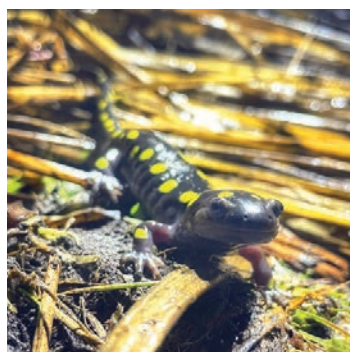
- develop a new nature play area south of Conservation Corner so that children can improve their physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing through their strong connection with the outdoors and nature
- connect Cox Arboretum to the regional trail network by creating a new multi-use paved pathway along the Great Miami River Trail through the neighborhoods of West Carrollton
- create soft-surface trail connections to the neighbors on the north and south sides of Cox Arboretum MetroPark to allow easy pedestrian access into the park
- add new restroom facilities at the Kettering Learning Lab and in the Arboretum grounds

Huffman MetroPark

- establish a new entrance opposite Kauffman Road for better park access for populations south of the park, including Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Wright State University
- provide picnic shelters, trails and other amenities
- improve MetroParks Mountain Biking Area (MoMBA) with the addition of a multipurpose shelter to support special events, camping and skills development
- add a pump track and make improvements to the tot track
- modify the trail system in the main park area to ensure easy navigation by park users
- add restrooms near Huffman Lake

Salamander Pond Habitat Restoration

In 2021, Five Rivers MetroParks completed a habitat restoration project of the salamander pond near the green trail at Sugarcreek MetroPark. Due to years of increased storm activity, the pond was under threat. Increased moving water is detrimental to the rare



species of spotted salamanders that use this area as a vernal pool, which is a seasonal depressional wetland, to lay eggs in late winter.

To mitigate effects of heavy storm water, a dam was added along with a dry creek bed that will retain and slow down rushing waters, protecting the eggs in the pool. Space adjacent to the existing salamander pond

was cleared for another vernal pool, creating a larger footprint for potential salamander populations.

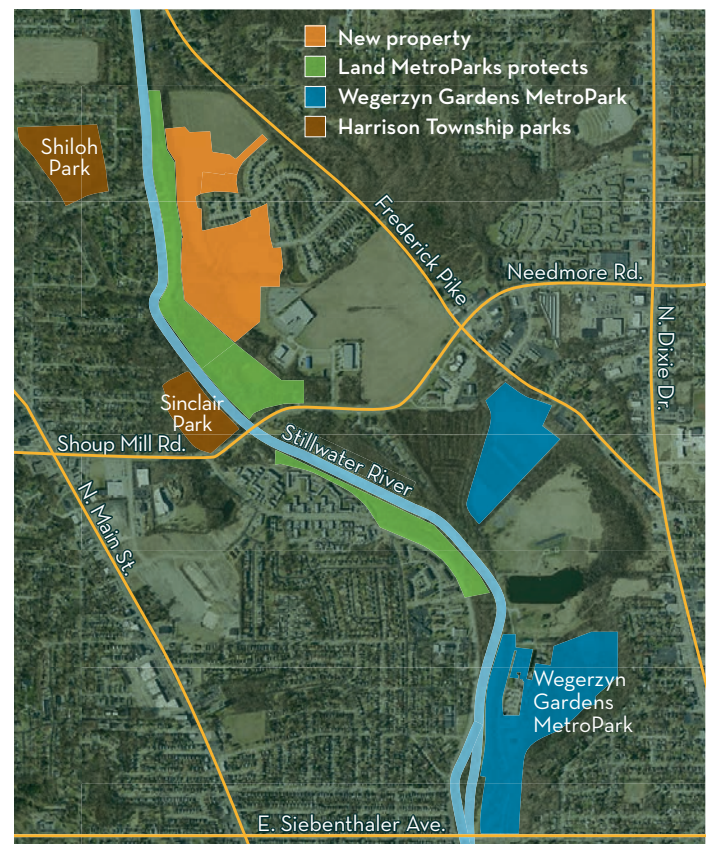
Space also was cleared for MetroParks conservation staff to plant a prairie, another critical habitat to the pollinators, grassland birds and other wildlife at Sugarcreek MetroPark.

Property Acquisition Creates New Way to Support MetroParks

Five Rivers MetroParks made a strategic acquisition of a property near the Stillwater River in 2021. Abby Whitesell and her son, Bill Whitesell, owned the 62.4-acre property, located near Frederick Pike and Needmore Road. When they wanted to sell the property, they contacted Five Rivers MetroParks.

Because the Whitesell property met two of MetroParks' land protection goals – protect natural areas adjacent to river corridors and establish buffer areas to maintain open space – the agency moved forward with the purchase. The family was able to donate a balance of the property's value to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation.

Because of this generous donation, the Foundation was able to establish a permanently endowed fund called the Land Conservation Endowment Fund. This fund allows donors to directly support MetroParks' conservation efforts. Funds will be used to maintain existing land and acquire properties that protect and connect natural areas.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

MORE 2021 NEWS OF NOTE

CAPRA Reaccreditation

The Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) awarded reaccreditation to Five Rivers MetroParks in September. Reaccreditation is based on an agency's compliance with 154 standards. Five Rivers MetroParks complied with 100% of the standards, exceeding the required compliance rate of 95% for reaccreditation. Five Rivers MetroParks is one of only 10 park and recreation agencies in Ohio and 192 in the United States to be CAPRA accredited.

CAPRA is the only national accreditation for park and recreation agencies and is a measure of an agency's overall quality of operation, management and service to the community. This mark of distinction indicates an agency has met rigorous standards related to the management and administration of lands, facilities, resources, programs, safety and services.

Preparing for CAPRA reaccreditation is an ongoing process following the initial accreditation, and standards must be met every five years to maintain accreditation.

Ohio Collaborative Police Advisory Board Certification

Five Rivers MetroParks Rangers received final certification with the Ohio Collaborative Police Advisory Board (Ohio Collaborative) in November 2021. A 12-person panel of law enforcement and community leaders from throughout the state, the Ohio Collaborative establishes standards and best practices to help guide law enforcement agencies in Ohio. The Collaborative also provides model policies to law enforcement agencies, with a goal to improve the level of service and accountability by law enforcement agencies in Ohio and improve citizen confidence in law enforcement.

All law enforcement agencies are expected to meet or exceed new standards developed by the Ohio Collaborative as the agencies develop policies and procedures. These include standards in the use of force, recruitment and hiring, community engagement, body-worn cameras (also implemented in 2021), bias-free policing, investigation of employee misconduct, and vehicle pursuits.



MetroParks' Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Five Rivers MetroParks formed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Employee Committee with 16 members providing representation from across the agency's functional areas. In 2021, MetroParks partnered with the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton to offer guidance to complete a draft of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, which will be shared with the agency in 2022.



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.



2021 PRESIDENT

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



2021 VICE PRESIDENT

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



2021 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.

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.

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS LEADERSHIP FOR THE FOUNDATIONS THAT SUPPORT YOUR METROPARKS

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FOUNDATION

- PRESIDENT: Tom Immen, Real Art Design Group
- VICE PRESIDENT: Vince McKelvey, community volunteer
- TREASURER: Angela Clements, Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine assistant vice president for advancement
- SECRETARY: Michelle Kaye, PNC Financial Services Group vice president, director of client and community relations

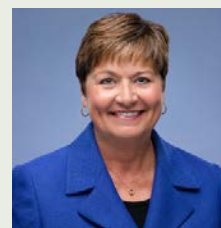
THE JAMES M. COX, JR. ARBORETUM FOUNDATION:

- PRESIDENT: Alan Brown, community volunteer
- VICE PRESIDENT: Jason Eckert, University of Dayton director of career services
- TREASURER: Kathy Sperry, Fifth Third Securities vice president
- Secretary: Melinda Moore, West Carrollton YMCA executive director

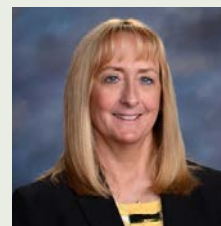
WEGERZYN GARDENS METROPARK FOUNDATION:

- PRESIDENT: Matt Garrett, community volunteer
- VICE PRESIDENT: Jessica Wagner, Shriners Children's Ohio marketing and communications coordinator
- TREASURER: Dwight Woessner, community volunteer
- SECRETARY: Libby Freeze, East End Community Services FARE (Food Access Resiliency Enterprise) coordinator

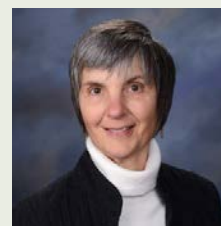
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM



Becky Benná,
Chief Executive
Officer



Karen Hesser,
Chief of
Operations



Carrie Scarff,
Chief of Planning
& Projects



Mark Hess,
Chief of Public
Safety



Alexis Larsen,
Chief of
Philanthropy



Bill Tschirhart,
Chief of
Administration



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metroparks.org

**FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS**

