



2022 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

A Letter from Our CEO.....	4
Park System Map.....	5
Five Rivers MetroParks by the Numbers	6
Financials	8
2022 Philanthropic Support.....	10
About the Foundations	11
Thank You for Your Support!	13
Access to Nature Testimonial.....	14
Ways to Give: Corporate Champions.....	15
Ways to Give: Sponsorships.....	16
Ways to Give: Business Partnerships.....	17
Ways to Give: Planned Giving.....	18
Ways to Give: Tribute Gifts	19
Give to the Foundation	20
Benefits of Time In Nature.....	21
2022 Volunteer Support	22
Volunteer Projects and Impact.....	22
Youth Volunteers.....	23
How to Volunteer.....	24
Gardening Volunteers.....	25
2022 Year in Review	26
2022 Organizational Successes	28
Protecting Land for Conservation.....	28
Funding Supports Conservation Work.....	29
Nature Play is a Priority.....	30
Conservation Leaders Program Launched.....	31
Salamander Pond and Prairie Restoration.....	32
Bat Blitz.....	33
Seed Nursery Improvements.....	34
Argonne Forest Interpretive Project	35
Explorers to Rangers Program	36
Dayton Riverfront Plan	37
Thank you for your service, Becky Benná!	38
Your MetroParks Leadership Team	39
Five Rivers MetroParks Testimonial	40

A Letter from Our 2022 CEO

 SPENDING TIME IN NATURE CONTINUES TO BENEFIT MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH YEAR-ROUND



What started during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be a rallying cry in 2022: Our community values spending time outside in nature and finding opportunities to create ongoing healthy habits. Multiple scientific studies from throughout the world, as well as feedback from our community, indicate getting outside in nature improves our physical and mental wellbeing. Gatherings were held outside, including weddings, graduation parties, baby showers and birthday parties. Friends safely gathered for social connection and play dates. Many folks sought solace in the miles of trails, tranquil waterfalls and waterways. Your MetroParks is proud to be a trusted and reliable source to continue to promote and enhance physical and mental wellness.

In addition, 2022 heralded the return of programs and events. The Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience was back for the first time since 2019 and welcomed more than 15,000 people to Eastwood MetroPark. Passport to MetroParks returned in early June, signaling the start of summer at RiverScape MetroPark, welcoming attendees with live music, food trucks and games. Re-engagement of volunteers provided outstanding support to MetroParks' various services, programs and events.

Your MetroParks remained committed to ensuring that everyone felt safe, welcome and included in nature. The agency's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan was finalized, and many initiatives are underway. This is not a new concept to Five Rivers MetroParks. Values such as community, diversity, respect and collaboration have been some of our core values for years, and we continued to elevate this throughout our work. Our employee DEI Council has done a tremendous job leading the efforts. We are excited to roll out the plan to all staff and volunteers so they can continue to focus on providing a safe, welcoming, inclusive experience for every employee, volunteer and visitor to our parks and facilities.

On a personal note, this will be my last annual report message. While I will be retiring from my role with Five Rivers MetroParks in 2023, I know the continued stewardship of more than 16,000 acres of protected land, sensitive habitats and waterways will be in the very capable hands of MetroParks employees and volunteers, residents, and community partners. Thank you so much for the privilege to serve you during the past 12 years, providing that personal connection to nature that can - and does - transform lives.

All my best,

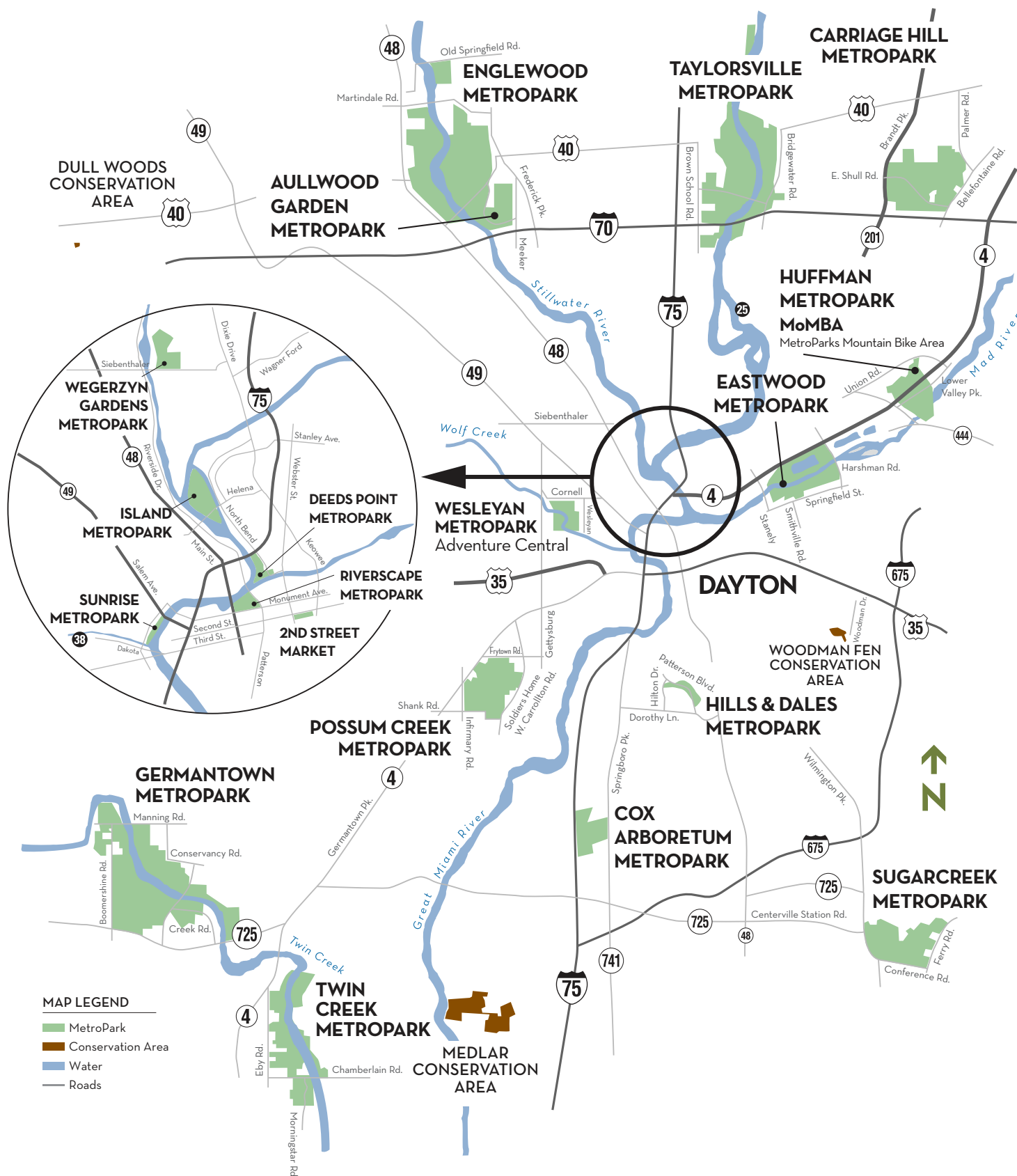
Rebecca A. Benná

Rebecca A. Benná
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Read about new MetroParks CEO Karen Hesser at metroparks.org/ParkWaysOnline.

Park System Map

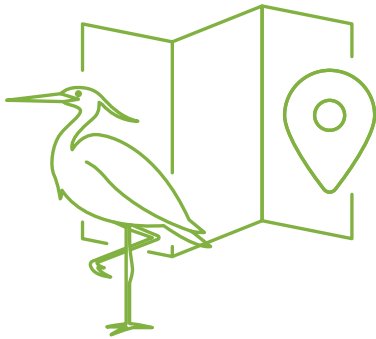
MAP OF YOUR FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS



Five Rivers MetroParks by the Numbers

HOW FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS MEETS
ITS MISSION AND SERVES OUR COMMUNITY

MISSION: PROTECT THE REGION'S NATURAL HERITAGE



16,676

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.

EXAMPLES OF HABITATS METROPARKS MANAGES:



WETLANDS

196 ACRES



PRAIRIE

2,629 ACRES



EDGE/THICKET

355 ACRES



FOREST

8,520 ACRES

HOW METROPARKS' WORK SUPPORTS CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION:

- During an average year, the natural habitats in MetroParks filter an estimated 11 billion gallons of water – enough to fill 16,853 Olympic swimming pools.
- Trees in forests managed by MetroParks remove an estimated 7,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year – about the same weight as 70 semi-trucks.
- MetroParks forests remove an estimated 155,000 pounds of small particles per year and more than 157,000 pounds of ozone per year – slightly less than the 160,000-pound Space Shuttle and about the same as 13 African elephants.

** Data taken from estimates developed in 2016. Five Rivers MetroParks currently is conducting a study that will produce much more accurate data.*

3.46

MILLION VISITORS

The Dayton Business Journal again named Five Rivers MetroParks the region's No. 1 most visited attraction in 2022. In addition, the 2nd Street Market was No. 14 on the list.



98%

Montgomery County residents live within a 10-minute drive or bike ride from a MetroPark.



207,142

PARTICIPANTS
in Five Rivers MetroParks
programs and events.



10,548

PARTICIPANTS
at 523 public programs.



2,251

SHELTER AND
CAMPING PERMITS

35



LOCATIONS, including 18
MetroParks, the 2nd Street Market,
8 conservation areas, and 8 portions
of the region's paved trail network

163



MILES OF
MANAGED
TRAIL

for hiking, biking, mountain
biking and horseback riding

270



MILES OF RIVER
CORRIDOR,

42 of which Five Rivers
MetroParks maintains

8⁺

EDUCATIONAL
FEATURES

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:



Barbara Cox Center
for Sustainable
Horticulture



Inventors
Riverwalk



Possum Creek
Edible 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
FEATURES

INCLUDING:



MoMBA
MetroParks
Mountain Biking Area



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

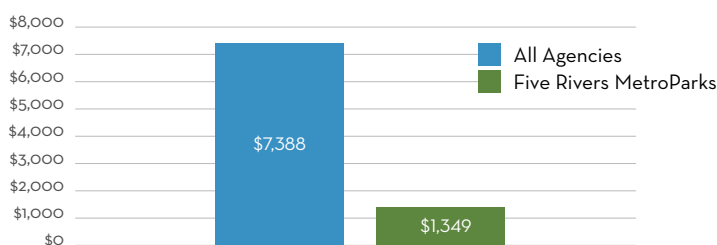
Financials

HOW YOUR FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS IS FUNDED

Five Rivers MetroParks is grateful for the support of Montgomery County voters who, in November 2018, passed a 10-year replacement levy. Levy funds allow MetroParks to maintain what it already manages – which the community identified as a top priority in the agency’s comprehensive master plan. The plan also guarantees MetroParks’ funding is focused on other community priorities, such as providing trails.

While levy funding is crucial to Five Rivers MetroParks’ ongoing operation, MetroParks’ is committed to being good stewards of taxpayer funds. The agency’s spending is typically lower than that of most agencies, as measured by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), which supplied the data below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER ACRE OF PARK LAND



Your Five Rivers MetroParks focuses on creativity and teamwork in keeping its expenses as low as possible and making the best use of its resources. Just a few of the ways MetroParks extends its resources include:

- Proactive planning that allows the agency to quickly respond to grant and other opportunities
- Training volunteers to work with staff and independently
- Establishing partnerships with community organizations and businesses

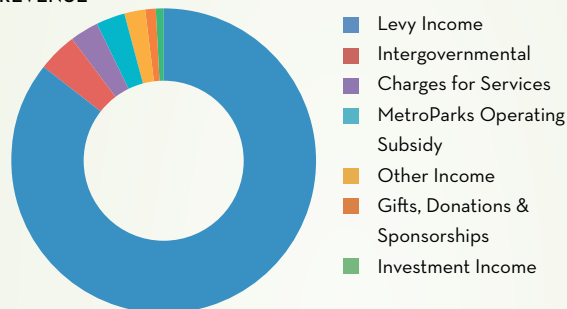
This levy support and resourcefulness have allowed your MetroParks to keep admission to its parks free for everyone in the community. That included during the pandemic, when MetroParks was able to safely keep all its parks and trails open – when the community needed them even more and used them more than usual.

- A. 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.
- B. 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.
- C. Other income includes such items as auction proceeds, law enforcement fines, employee surcharges, reimbursements, refunds and rebates.
- D. As part of its levy funding cycle, Five Rivers MetroParks budgeted to supplement revenues with reserves.
- E. 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.

2022 REVENUE

Levy Income:	\$19,145,493
Intergovernmental (A):	\$941,956
Charges for Services (B):	\$866,243
Investment Income:	\$181,893
Gifts, Donations & Sponsorships:	\$195,435
Other Income (C):	\$552,047
MetroParks Operating Subsidy (D):	\$646,645
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT:	\$22,529,712

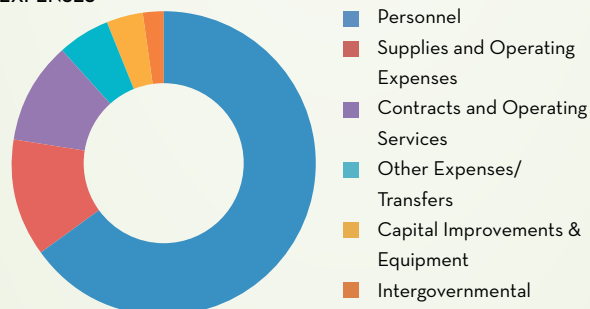
REVENUE



2022 EXPENSES

Personnel:	\$14,645,731
Supplies and Operating Expenses:	\$2,822,054
Contracts and Operating Services:	\$2,444,138
Intergovernmental (A):	\$470,217
Capital Improvements & Equipment (E):	\$854,912
Other Expenses/Transfers:	\$1,262,480
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$22,499,532

EXPENSES



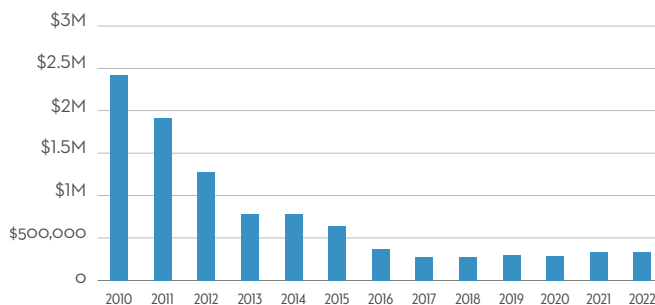
EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE REVENUE

Approximately 87 percent of Five Rivers MetroParks' funding comes from a property tax levy supported by Montgomery County voters.

This 13% funding gap exists even though Five Rivers MetroParks received additional funding in its most recent levy, which passed with more than two-thirds of the vote and funds the agency from 2019-2029. That increase didn't result in significant per-year funding increases due to **approximately \$2.75 million in annual losses.**

This figure doesn't take inflation into consideration. MetroParks is seeing significant increases in project costs. For example, the boardwalk at Woodman Fen Conservation Area, home to the region's only fen habitat, cost approximately \$50,000 to build but will cost more than \$500,000 to replace.

CHANGES IN STATE FUNDING



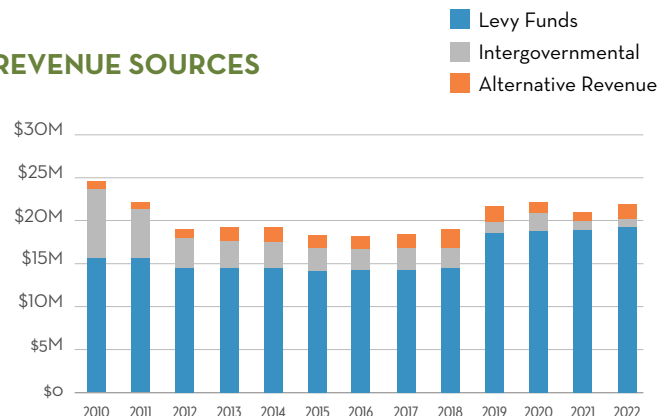
These changes in state funding include:

- The state of Ohio phased out the tangible personal property tax. In 2001, MetroParks received nearly \$3.1 million from this revenue stream, which was completely phased out by 2017.
- In 2010, MetroParks received more than \$480,000 in local government funds. In 2021, the agency received approximately \$330,000.

In addition, the Great Recession changed the financial picture for Five Rivers MetroParks and other agencies as it led to lower home values – and lower property taxes.

In response to these pressures, Five Rivers MetroParks looks at and plans its finances and budget in a new way, which has included an increased reliance on alternative revenues.

REVENUE SOURCES



With the significant decreases in intergovernmental funds, your MetroParks has been working hard to diversify its revenue streams. This generates revenue that supplements tax dollars and helps fill the 13% funding gap. Alternative revenue sources include:

- User fees for shelter and campsite rentals, permits, and some programs
- Philanthropic gifts to the foundations
- Grants and sponsorships for programs and events

Increasingly, these efforts make an impact. For example, in 2010, user fees made up less than \$370,000 in MetroParks' revenue. In 2019, this figure exceeded \$1.2 million. Likewise, gifts from philanthropic sources—such as the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation, The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation and Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation—topped \$1 million in 2022. Since 2018, MetroParks has received nearly \$5.6 million from these generous philanthropic sources.

Yet more financial support is needed.

Your Five Rivers MetroParks is dedicated to remaining resilient and ensuring it continues to be a valuable community resource that makes Montgomery County a better place to live, work, learn and play. Everyone in our community deserves to have access to nature and the improved quality of life such access provides. **See pages 10-20 to learn about the many ways you can help.**



Scan the code or visit metroparks.org/funding to learn more.



For every \$100,000 of property value, owners pay approximately **\$70/yr.** – or

\$5.83/mo.



Foundation: 2022 Fundraising

Five Rivers 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 60 years, your 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.

MetroParks' mission is more important than ever. Since the pandemic, more and more people are spending time in parks and natural areas to improve their physical and mental health. Protecting natural areas provides clean air and water – and is a critical part of addressing the effects of climate change.



2022 Philanthropy in your MetroParks

THREE FOUNDATIONS

- 23 board members
- 31 projects/programs funded with support totaling \$958,860 at seven MetroParks locations

12 PROGRAMS FUNDED

- 5,535 people participated in programs funded by the foundations

\$1,051,606 CASH DONATIONS RECEIVED THROUGH FOUNDATIONS AND SPONSORSHIPS

- \$74,018 in-kind donations received through foundations and sponsorships

ACCESS TO NATURE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- 545 individuals/families supported
- \$4,942 in financial assistance provided

162 METROPARKS CHAMPIONS

1,006 DONORS ACROSS ALL FOUNDATIONS

However, funding challenges do exist. This is where philanthropy comes in.

Five Rivers MetroParks sees this as an opportunity to further engage our community in supporting their MetroParks, such as becoming a Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation Champion or volunteering to ensure MetroParks' success.

You have the opportunity to contribute your time or treasure to support your MetroParks and our community. Read on to learn more.

About the Foundations

Five Rivers MetroParks is extremely grateful for the philanthropic support of three foundations, as well as individuals, organizations and businesses. Together, these supporters provide critical funding that helps the agency bridge its 13% funding gap.



Scan the code or visit
metroparks.org/foundation
to learn more.

2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS LEADERSHIP FOR THE FOUNDATIONS THAT SUPPORT YOUR METROPARKS

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FOUNDATION

PRESIDENT:	Tom Immen , Real Art Design Group creative director
VICE PRESIDENT:	Vince McKelvey , community volunteer
TREASURER:	Angela Clements , Wright State University assistant vice president for advancement, Boonshoft School of Medicine
SECRETARY:	Michelle Kaye , PNC Financial Services Group vice president, director of client and community relations
MEMBERS-AT-LARGE	Deb Hunt , community volunteer Jamie Schade , UBS Financial Services, senior vice president - wealth management

THE JAMES M. COX, JR. ARBORETUM FOUNDATION:

PRESIDENT:	Alan Brown , community volunteer
VICE PRESIDENT:	Jason Eckert , University of Dayton executive director of career services
TREASURER:	Kathy Sperry , Fifth Third Securities vice president
SECRETARY:	Melinda Moore , West Carrollton YMCA executive director
MEMBERS-AT-LARGE	Paul Schlottman , community volunteer Katie Wahl , Pickrel Schaefer & Ebeling attorney Valerie White , Great Miami Veterinary Care veterinarian

WEGERZYN GARDENS METROPARK FOUNDATION:

PRESIDENT:	Jessica Wagner , Shriners Children's Ohio marketing and communications coordinator
VICE PRESIDENT:	Mary Gordon , Evergreen Children's Center Inc. assistant director
TREASURER:	Loretta Hill , Guidehouse cost analyst
SECRETARY:	Libby Freeze , East End Community Services FARE (Food Access Resiliency Enterprise) coordinator
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Lisa Brown - Gift & Garden Shop chair, Peerless Technologies Inc. tax accountant Jackie McArdle - Membership Council co- chair and historian, community volunteer Richard Wilson - Youth Education Council chair, community volunteer Donna Zobirst - Adult Education Council chair, community volunteer

2022 Projects Supported by the Foundations



FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS FOUNDATION

- Mini excavator
- Flair mower
- Kids in Parks trails
- Growing for Good program support
- Adopt-a-Park and Make a Difference Day support
- Centennial Overlook project
- Paint-a-Park program kit support
- Access to Nature financial assistance program
- ADA hunting blind
- Passport to Kindergarten program support
- Land conservation maintenance
- Adventure Central camp shirts
- Park benches and swings

THE JAMES M. COX, JR. ARBORETUM FOUNDATION

- Zorniger education campus building stain/repairs
- Paver maintenance
- Putting Learning and Nature Together tours
- Conservation Kids
- Conservation Leaders
- Public Wi-Fi
- Grounds maintenance
- Plantings
- Park benches

WEGERZYN GARDENS FOUNDATION

- Formal gardens taxus pruning
- Paver maintenance
- Straw bale house maintenance
- Water feature project funding
- Fall Family Adventure program support

Thank You for Your Support!

2022 LEAD DONORS AND SPONSORS

- AARP Ohio
- Altafiber
- Altria
- Arbor Day Foundation
- Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds
- BBB Seed
- Becky Benná
- Louise and Ronald Bennett
- Brian BenVenuto
- Best Breed Pet Food
- Joshua Bett
- Tracy Bieser
- Bonbright Distributors
- Mary Boosalis and Tom Olsen
- Karen Brethauer
- Mike and Frieda Brigner
- Bruce Buerk
- Butler Heating & Air Conditioning
- Butt Construction Company
- Terry and Harry Calcutt
- CareSource Foundation
- CenterPoint Energy Foundation
- Dr. and Mrs. Atindra Chatterji
- City of Dayton Water Department
- John and India Clarke
- Ann Clutter
- Amy Code
- CODE Credit Union
- Cohen Recycling
- Jana Collier
- Combined Federal Campaign
- Rebecca Combs
- Terry Comer
- Community Blood Center
- Cones for a Cause - Old Scratch Pizza
- Marcia and Vincent Corrado
- Larry and Rebecca Corson
- Cox Media
- Cyclotherapy Bike Shop
- Karen Davis
- Dayton Children's
- Dayton Cycling Club
- Dayton Hikers
- Dayton Pedal Wagon
- Dayton Rowing Foundation
- Downtown Dayton Partnership
- Edible Ohio Valley
- Ed Smith Flowers & Gifts
- Lisa Eifert
- Carol and Don Erwine
- Andrew Evans
- Carla Fox
- Carlton Fox
- Freund, Freeze & Arnold
- Stephen and Rose Fryburg
- Nick and Allison Galford
- The Garden Club of Dayton
- GBU Life District 815
- Sonja Gegel
- Dr. and Mrs. James Graham
- Janet Graul
- Barb Greer
- H2O Art and Stone
- Mathias H. Heck Jr. and Judge Cindi Heck
- Mark and Rita Hess
- High Mowing Organic Seeds
- Cindi and Patrick Hillier
- Elizabeth Horner
- House Asphalt & Concrete
- Sue and Bruce Howorth
- David Huber
- Huffy
- Deb and Gary Hunt
- Tom Immen
- Denise Ingersoll
- Jack W. and Sally D. Eichelberger Foundation
- Rob Jacks
- Jane B. & Horace M. Huffman Jr. Trees for the River Fund of The Dayton Foundation
- Jesse & Caryl Philips Foundations
- Jessup Wealth Management
- Joshua Tree Skin Care
- The Joyce Foundation
- Julian G. Lange Family Foundation
- Kayak Coffee
- Key Ads
- Thomas and Dorothy Kemp
- Kettering Health
- Margaret Klein
- Knollwood Garden Center and Landscaping
- Peter Kossoudji
- Kroger Community Rewards
- Ann Laderman
- Jessica Latchem
- Christopher Lemon
- LexisNexis
- Mr. and Mrs. Michael R. Light
- LJB
- Linda Lombard
- William MacMillan Jr.
- Laura Martin
- Steven and Lou Mason
- Ken and Darrell May
- Jack and Gay Mayl
- Jackie and Lyn McArdle
- McGohan Brabender
- Vince McKelvey
- Ruth Mead
- Meadowlark Enterprises - Wheat Penny Oven and Bar
- Mechanical Services & Design (MSD)
- Mark Meunier
- Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Mike's Bike Park
- Miller-Valentine Construction
- Bear Monita and Barbra Stonerock
- Vasso Monta
- Montgomery County Environmental Services/Keep Montgomery County Beautiful
- Pamela Murn
- National Wild Turkey Federation - Ohio Chapter
- Tess Newkold
- Damon and Sharon Newman
- Nourish Salon
- Barbara O'Hara
- Oregon Printing Communications
- Judith Payne
- Raymond Perlee
- Jeannine Phlipot
- Alan and Marsha Pippenger
- Natalie Pippins
- PNC Foundation
- Carol Pohl
- Don and Joyce Porter
- Cynthia Poulos
- Premier Health
- QEI Engineers
- R. A. Foundation
- Mary Jane Raymond
- Renee's Garden Seeds & Cornucopia
- Frances Repperger
- Reynolds and Reynolds Associate Foundation
- The Roberts Foundation
- Alita and Richard Rogers
- Rubi Girls
- Jim and Jan Runkle
- Runners Plus (Soccer Plus)
- David A. Saelens
- Safari Club International Southwest Ohio Chapter
- Saunders Seed Co.
- Sawdey Solution Services
- Jamie and Agata Schade
- Richard and Jane Schwartz
- Mike Scianamblo
- Amanda Sheidler
- Dave Shively
- The Siebenthaler Company
- Tom Jonak and Sandi Simmons
- Sinclair Broadcasting Group
- Barbara Smith
- Chuck and Susan Snavely
- Snyder Brick & Block
- Mark Stabler
- Douglas Grewe and Donald Stephan
- Carole Stephens
- Stockslager's Greenhouse and Garden Center
- John and Martie Szelog
- Theda & Tamblin Clark Smith Family Foundation
- Thrivent
- Nancy Sue Upton
- USI Midwest
- Wilfred and Christine VanBreukelen
- Virginia W. Kettering Foundation
- Wagner Subaru
- Larry and Linda Welin
- Steve Wentworth
- Whitetails Unlimited
- Michele Wilson
- WINANS Chocolates + Coffee + Wine
- Susan Witherspoon
- Dwight and Georgie Woessner
- Lisa Woolf
- Wright State University
- WYSO 91.3-FM
- Debby Yowell
- Everett C. and Margie Mack Yowell Endowment of The Dayton Foundation
- Nancy Zeller
- Zorniger Family Fund of The Dayton Foundation

Access to Nature Testimonial

 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SUPPORTS EQUITY ON THE WATER AND BEYOND

Because access to nature and outdoor experiences is critical to people's health and wellbeing, the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation began its Access to Nature financial assistance program in 2017.



This program, which is funded through donations to the Foundation, helps alleviate financial barriers for those who wish to take MetroParks' outdoor programs, rent shelters and more.

As of December 2022, the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation had provided funding for nearly 850 financial assistance awards through the program. In 2022, Aryel Newman and her mother, Tracy Lawlah, used the assistance to fish, paddle and camp. For example, Lawlah took MetroParks' paddling safety program, followed by a program in which she and Newman paddled for the first time in moving water. The duo was eager to paddle in a safe environment with professionals.

"We had been wanting to paddle the river for some time but were worried about what could happen," said Newman, adding that the idea of attending a program eased those worries since an instructor and other attendees would be present. "It was very informative – we learned how to maneuver in whitewater."

MetroParks outdoor recreation coordinator Derrick Keating is no stranger to paddling instruction. However, growing up in the Midwest, Keating is aware of the considerable cost of the sport.

"The cost of paddling equipment can rule it out as an available hobby for many people who may otherwise find that they really enjoy the activity," said Keating. "As someone who was born in the Midwest but didn't start kayaking until I was in my twenties, I know there are a lot of people here who don't even know what they're missing."

As longtime Daytonians, Newman and Lawlah are well aware of Dayton's reputation as the Adventure Capital of the Midwest. The two spend quality time together enjoying the outdoors

by hiking and gardening when able. Newman, who also has attended MetroParks' fishing programs, is excited to get back on her bike to enjoy the routes she's grown to love at Eastwood MetroPark. The two agree this is their favorite MetroPark and remember attending GearFest – now called the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience.

While Newman understands the Dayton region is home to more than 350 miles of paved trails – the nation's largest paved trail network – extensive hiking trails and river corridors, she also is acutely aware that limitations exist for those who want to enjoy the outdoors independently.

"You can go to Walmart and pick up a ball for \$10 and go but with paddling, there are many barriers," said Newman. "Can you swim? Can you use whatever watercraft you have? The cost of kayaks is prohibitive. There are so many reasons that could stop someone from enjoying water sports. Making it accessible in a safe fashion should be a priority – even if it's not the gear, just getting the information."

The same can be said for many outdoor activities that require both gear and expertise to take on adventures in nature, from backpacking to maintaining a garden. For Keating, the option is also a priority.

"Everyone should have the same opportunity to find their passion and pursue it if they choose to," he said. "For many, outdoor recreation may not be their favorite hobby, but if barriers exist due to cost, location, ability, race and more, then people will miss out on their opportunity to feel fulfilled."

As far as Newman and Lawlah are concerned, they will continue to recreate on water with a newfound confidence and set of skills.

"My mom wants to try stand up paddleboarding," said Newman. "The Greater Dayton Rowing Association hosted a camp I attended a long time ago, and I think rowing casually is something I would want to explore again."



How to apply for Access to Nature financial assistance:

Access to Nature financial assistance is available for qualifying Montgomery County residents. Families can qualify for up to \$500 per calendar year by completing

an application online or by calling (937) 275-PARK. Access to Nature financial aid covers many programs, equipment rentals, campsite and shelter rentals, community gardening plots and more. Aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Apply and learn more at metroparks.org/access.

Ways to Give: Corporate Champions

 OREGON PRINTING STEPS UP AS FIRST CORPORATE CHAMPION



Throughout the year, you can find owner and president/CEO of Oregon Printing, Judd Plattenburg, canoeing on the river, cycling the paved trails or simply meeting with his team at Deeds Point MetroPark. It's no surprise Oregon Printing has partnered with the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation to help protect the region's greenspaces.

Plattenburg and his small, diligent team pride themselves on telling the meaningful stories of their clients, which they have been doing in downtown Dayton since 1979.

"Although we are printers by profession, we understand storytelling is the conduit to communicate and connect our community," Plattenburg said. "MetroParks has a huge story to tell so it's imperative to share this information to help others become knowledgeable and to be partners."

Indeed, Five Rivers MetroParks' story is vast. It began with a handful of conservation-minded individuals who saw the need to preserve greenspace. Sixty years later, Five Rivers MetroParks protects nearly 16,500 acres of land – 90% of which is in its natural state.

"While our mission remains, the way we think about and receive funding has changed over the years," said MetroParks Chief of Philanthropy Alexis Larsen. "Now, 87% of MetroParks' funding is covered by its levy, which is just one reason why it's so important we work with the community through the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation to ensure there's greenspace for future generations."

In 2022, Larsen and Plattenburg worked together on various projects for the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation. Oregon Printing Communications donated time, expertise and services to support the Foundation's fundraising efforts.

The business' dedication to supporting the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation with a \$5,000 gift of in-kind services led to the company being the first of the Foundation's Corporate Champions.

This program highlights the Foundation's existing Champions sustained giving program, comprised of MetroParks' strongest individual supporters. The new Corporate Champions program allows businesses to show their support as an organization.

"When local businesses, such as Oregon Printing, support the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation, it helps our fundraising dollars go further," Larsen said. "This means more funding for special projects, conservation efforts and programs that create more equitable access to outdoor experiences."

Plattenburg hopes other local businesses will commit to becoming Corporate Champions.

"A great MetroParks system is vital to a thriving community – especially today as we strive to stay connected and use nature as an essential touchstone for centering and stabilizing and for decluttering mentally and emotionally," he said. "This is an opportunity for small businesses like ours to do our part to step up and become Champions. I encourage others to join us."



BECOME A METROPARKS CHAMPION

To learn more about becoming a Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation Corporate Champion, email Chief of Philanthropy Alexis Larsen at alexis.larsen@metroparks.org or call (937) 275-PARK.

Ways to Give: Sponsorships

 DAYTON CHILDREN'S HELPS METROPARKS TAKE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS FURTHER

Dayton Children's is on a mission to provide optimal health for every child within its reach, and its reach is far. Through unique relationships with many community-based organizations in the region – such as Five Rivers MetroParks -- Dayton Children's is able provide expertise and resources that allow organizations to find creative, engaging ways to better address both physical and mental health.

"Life is hard right now – for kids and parents," said Julie Cannon, Dayton Children's brand engagement manager. "There is a great demand for mental health services, and one key way to help our mental health is spending time outdoors. We know fresh air has a sort of unquantifiable healing property to it. Most studies agree that kids who play outside are happier and less anxious than kids who spend more time indoors. Nature helps improve the mental health of kids and creates meaningful time together for families as well."

Indeed, nature is just one of many tools people can use to improve their mental and physical health. Many discovered this during the pandemic, as the world felt the effects of isolation and took to the outdoors in record numbers.

During this time, Dayton Children's professionals worked with MetroParks staff to identify trails for Mindfulness Walks in four parks. These trails encourage people to follow cues that help them decompress in nature using their senses. Mindfulness Walks are accessible to the public on MetroParks mobile app and its website: www.metroparks.org/mindful.

Five Rivers MetroParks also is proud to team up with Dayton Children's to engage people in an open dialogue about the importance of children's mental health through its On Our Sleeves campaign.

"On Our Sleeves is a wonderful resource for parents, teachers, coaches and other involved adults to learn how to support kids' mental health," said Cannon. "The goal is to remove the stigma around mental health and give adults tools they can use to start the conversation with the children in their lives."

Another considerable concern in the Dayton region is equitable access to fresh, healthy food.



Dayton Children's saw the opportunity to support MetroParks with critical funding that helped it provide Garden to Go Kits for those affected by food insecurity in the region.

"People receive seeds, plant starts, comprehensive instructions and a container if they don't have access to greenspace," said Kate Lowry, MetroParks education coordinator. "It's an incredible way to learn a new skill and pad your pantry with fresh produce and herbs. There's an incredible pride you get growing your own food, and the benefit of the extra nutrition is great as well. We're so grateful to be able to share this with the community."

In 2022, MetroParks education coordinators distributed 750 Garden to Go Kits during the summer growing season, with 100 more distributed for fall planting at the annual African American Cultural Festival at Island MetroPark. Other distribution sites included The Foodbank and Gem City Market.

"In Montgomery County alone, more than 25,000 children experience food insecurity every year," said Cannon. "Thirty percent of kids ages 0-11 are identified as overweight or obese. Giving families a way to provide food, especially fresh healthy food they grew themselves, is a powerful way to address these sobering numbers."



Discover which parks the staff at Dayton Children's love and more about its projects with MetroParks by visiting metroparks.org/blog.

Ways to Give: Business Partnerships

 PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES HELP BOTH MEET THEIR MISSIONS

For the last four years, Five Rivers MetroParks has partnered with Cohen Recycling to help the community become more sustainable during one of the most festive – and waste generating – times of the year by keeping unwanted holiday lights out of landfills.

Extra waste generated during the holidays – including decorations, food and paper waste – amounts to 25 million tons of garbage, according to Use Less Stuff and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Providing an opportunity for the public to recycle holiday lights reduces waste while supporting both MetroParks' and Cohen Recycling's mission.

"We give our neighboring communities, and the residents and businesses within them, the opportunity to recycle safely, conveniently and responsibly," said Adam Dumes, executive vice president of Cohen Recycling. "As a family-owned company for four generations, we put people at the center of our recycling operation by valuing safety, community and service in everything we do."

A conservation agency, Five Rivers MetroParks is dedicated to serving people and the environment by protecting the region's natural heritage and providing experiences that inspire a personal connection to nature.

"We like to invite the public to incorporate MetroParks' mission to protect the region's natural heritage into their lives, too," said Tim Pritchard, MetroParks sustainability manager. "It takes a village of sustainably minded people, businesses and organizations to affect change."

Each December, MetroParks and Cohen Recycling set up bins to collect lights in six MetroParks locations across Montgomery County. This includes a bin outside the 2nd Street Market that's accessible to the public at all hours.

Lights are collected by MetroParks for pick up by Cohen Recycling, which then salvages reusable materials from unwanted lights and ensures the remainder is recycled properly. Because the copper inside the strings of lights is of value, Cohen Recycling provides a donation to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation based on how many pounds of lights are collected throughout the season.

In 2022, MetroParks collected 5,900 pounds of lights. During the past three years, Cohen has donated a cumulative \$5,280 to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation, including \$1,165 for the 2022/2023 season.



Cohen Recycling's idea for the Holiday Lights Recycling program was formed after a Green Umbrella Waste Reduction Team meeting several years ago. The program was launched with park systems in communities where Cohen Recycling has facilities.

Because of its success, the family-owned business was confident the program could be scaled to include communities where Cohen Recycling does not currently have recycling centers. Partnering with Five Rivers MetroParks gave Cohen the opportunity to truly turn Holiday Lights Recycling into a regional event.

"We are working hard to influence people to change their behavior and think about waste reduction," Dumes said. "The more support we have from community agencies with shared values, the greater the chance to connect with people who are open to our message."

Indeed, Five Rivers MetroParks shares Cohen Recycling's waste-reduction vision and is able to use funds donated to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation to help protect natural spaces for future generations to enjoy.

Learn more about Cohen Recycling at www.cohenusa.com. To learn more about MetroParks' at-home sustainability resources, visit metroparks.org/at-home.

Ways to Give: Planned Giving

 PLANTING AND PLANNING FOR A FUTURE THAT SUPPORTS METROPARKS — AND OUR EARTH



Sue Howorth worked in various areas of software her entire career, but she's always loved to spend her free time unplugged and outdoors. Now, she wants to ensure a future where families get outside as well.

Howorth and her husband, Bruce, have set up a planned gift through The Dayton Foundation, which will ensure funds from their estate go to the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation. Funds also will go to the Wegerzyn Gardens Foundation and The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation to support her favorite MetroParks.

"It's an important legacy," Sue Howorth said. "One of the key things that makes Dayton special is MetroParks."

One of the most meaningful ways to help MetroParks protect the region's natural heritage for generations to come is through planned giving.

For Howorth, the need to protect greenspaces goes far beyond the greater Dayton region.

"For the future of the Earth, people need to understand that we're not isolated: What we do and how we treat the Earth comes back to us in the long term," she said. "It's just so important to preserve these places. People have a sense of calm while visiting greenspaces, especially when they don't have a yard. It helps keep them going."

Howorth is planning long term in many regards. She's not just planning to leave a legacy — she's also planning to inspire the next generation of the Earth's stewards.

She had volunteered with MetroParks throughout the years, but when she retired from NCR in 2010, Howorth started volunteering with Five Rivers MetroParks more often. Among her favorite opportunities are those that allow her to connect children to nature, from the Fall Family Festival at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark to chatting with families at Cox Arboretum MetroPark.

"I grew up being outside," said Howorth. "In fact, I met my husband in the Sierra Club. I was a backpacker and camper so I think it's important people learn about the outdoors so they care about it."

Howorth is all about continuing to learn, too. She took an Ohio Certified Naturalist Course, in addition to becoming a master gardener.

While she's always been interested in gardening, Howorth's schedule didn't allow her to take it on as a hobby until after she retired. After taking a master gardening class in 2011, she and other master gardeners spent 50 volunteer hours adding native plants to Dogwood Pond at Hills & Dales MetroPark and at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark.

Since then, her love of native plants has only grown. She attends the Midwest Native Plant Conference every year and has enjoyed spending time planting natives at her home.

Much like some of Dayton's most prominent conservationists, such as Jean Woodhull and Marie Aull, Howorth also is involved in the Garden Club of Dayton.

The Garden Club's projects have worked to restore the VA's grotto gardens, to which MetroParks provided some plants. Additionally, Howorth is excited about the club's involvement in Dayton Riverfront Plan projects, which will improve greenspaces along the downtown river corridor and make the river more accessible.

When asked how Howorth felt to be a part of the group of women who were integral in starting Five Rivers MetroParks, she said, "There are a lot of people still doing great things for the MetroParks."

Indeed, Sue Howorth is one of them.



To learn more about planned giving, contact Alexis Larsen, MetroParks chief of philanthropy, at alexis.larsen@metroparks.org.

Ways to Give: Tribute Gifts

 HONOR YOUR LOVED ONES IN THEIR FAVORITE NATURAL PLACES AND SPACES



A favorite destination for the Pierce family is Englewood MetroPark, home to childhood memories and a special place for Ernie and Barb Pierce during their final years. The Pierces' adult children – Linda Pierce, Donna Smith and David Pierce – memorialized their parents' special relationship by selecting a tribute bench located at the Meandering Meadow Overlook at Englewood MetroPark.

When people get out and explore the natural world in their favorite MetroParks, they create special moments and memories. The Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation wants to help families honor those memories in a special way.

The foundation's Tribute Program allows people to honor their loved ones with a commemorative plaque located at various points of interest in the MetroParks, including benches, swings, trees, trails and shelters.

"Together, they would pack up a camp stove and cook Sunday breakfast in the park overlooking the water or meadows," Linda Pierce said of her parents. "After our dad passed, we would often take mom on rides,

always ending with a drive to Dairy Queen and a trip to Englewood MetroPark for a pause while enjoying ice cream. When mom joined dad, we automatically thought of a memorial bench for their souls to continue to be together in a place they loved dearly."

While many people choose to memorialize those who've passed with a tribute gift, these special sentiments also are perfect to honor someone's birthday, graduation, wedding, retirement or anniversary.

Long-time Miami Township residents and Cox Arboretum MetroPark visitors, Bob and Marge Mott, decided to support their favorite MetroPark by sponsoring a bench of their own to enjoy during their visits to Cox.

The plaque on their bench reads: "Sit a spell, inhale beauty, renew spirit" – something visitors can do at all 18 clean, safe MetroParks.



Is there someone you would like to honor with a tribute gift? Scan the code or visit metroparks.org/tribute.

Give to the Foundation

 **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 are essential to make up gaps in levy funding. These gifts also extend MetroParks' resources — and allow Five Rivers MetroParks to provide outdoor experiences that otherwise would not be available to our community.

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

- Provide education and recreation programs
- Support conservation and sustainability initiatives
- Provide new outdoor facilities and resources
- Help beautify your MetroParks and support wildlife
- Promote and support youth development
- Make outdoor experiences accessible to everyone in our community

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.

And the easiest way to support the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation is to join its Champions program by establishing a monthly recurring gift in a minimum of just \$10.

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 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 to come.

Won't you join us on this awesome adventure?



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

Become a Champion:
[METROPARKS.ORG/CHAMPION](https://metroparks.org/champion)

Support your MetroParks:
[METROPARKS.ORG/DONATE](https://metroparks.org/donate)

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 cells.
- 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.

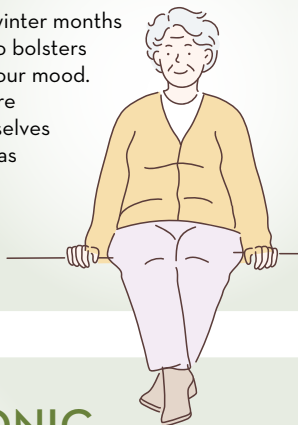
- Being active outdoors leads to more productive workouts and a better, longer night's sleep.
- Your eyes need enough daylight to regulate your internal clock, which keeps your sleep cycle regular.
- Being in nature is a mood-booster, which quells negative thoughts that distract us from falling asleep.



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 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.



Volunteer Projects and Impact

YOUTH GIVING BACK IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS ALSO HAVE A LOT TO GAIN



Dedicated volunteers are an integral part of the Five Rivers MetroParks family. Working side-by-side with staff, Five Rivers MetroParks volunteers improve quality of life in Montgomery County.

In 2022, many long-term volunteers were able to safely resume their service after a pause due to the pandemic. 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.

18,038
VOLUNTEER
SERVICE HOURS

\$488,285
Estimated **BENEFIT** of volunteer service

1,510
NEW VOLUNTEERS

1,410
ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS
6,384 registered volunteers

530
VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES
More than 6,000 volunteer shifts

289 Adopt-A-Park volunteers
contributed 861 hours diverting 1,845 pounds
of trash from the landfill collected 1,820
pounds of material to be recycled

30 GROUPS VOLUNTEERED

Youth Volunteers

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

Starting at a young age, children often express an interest in being involved in just about everything adults are doing. Fostering the idea of being a helper is a great way to cultivate a sense of community in children — especially when they can make a difference doing something they enjoy.

Five Rivers MetroParks has many ways for school-age children and teens to volunteer their time in the great outdoors with their families, community groups and schools.

SERVICE SATURDAYS:

Perfect for students who have limited time during the week, Service Saturdays are held every third Saturday of the month May through September from 9 a.m. to noon. New volunteer projects are added each month and include a variety of tasks, such as prairie seed collection and garden bed maintenance. Many opportunities are suited for older children and tweens/teens. Children younger than age 14 must be accompanied by a parent/guardian.

GROUP PROJECTS:

Giving back is more fun with friends, which is why community groups — such as Scouts, church and neighborhood groups, and clubs — can be assigned short-term volunteer opportunities in one of many MetroParks locations. These opportunities often focus on completing a specific task in one of the parks.

VOLUNTEERING AS A FAMILY:

Those who wish to volunteer as a family have multiple opportunities to do so throughout the year. Volunteer during an annual service day, such as Adopt-A-Park and Make a Difference Day, or during monthly Service Saturdays to spend a morning volunteering with the community. Families also can inquire about short-term projects or ongoing opportunities that can be done together, such as gardening and projects for the parks and conservation department.

FULFILLING SERVICE HOURS:

For many high school students, volunteer service hours are required. Students can volunteer during the year as individuals, a group or a class to help fulfill these hours. Summer is a great time for teens to get ahead on required service hours!



Benefits of Youth Volunteering

- Kids who volunteer tend to be more successful in school, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning at Tufts University.
- According to KidsRKids.com, volunteering sharpens children's social skills and builds empathy and civic responsibility.
- Teens who volunteer show increased self-esteem and their experiences can be appealing to potential colleges and employers, according to the United Way.



How to Volunteer

IT'S EASY, FUN AND EDUCATIONAL TO VOLUNTEER WITH FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

MetroParks is honored so many people from all walks of life choose to give back by volunteering. Now, it's easier than ever to join them. Volunteers are needed throughout MetroParks to support staff and help the agency extend its resources, especially in the areas of gardening, trail maintenance, animal care and with large events, including the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience.

Volunteers 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 you need 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.

Benefits of volunteering with Five Rivers MetroParks:

- 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

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

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

It's Easy to Get Started!

MetroParks' online volunteer site, Get Connected, makes it easy and convenient to become a volunteer. Launched in January 2022, volunteers can search for available opportunities, create a profile, participate in virtual training and more.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

Scan the code or visit metroparks.org/volunteer
volunteer.services@metroparks.org
(937) 275-PARK (7275)



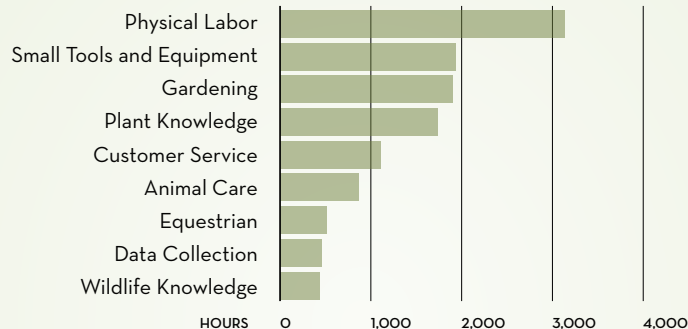
SUPPORT METROPARKS AND ITS VOLUNTEERS

Align your brand with Five Rivers MetroParks and its 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.

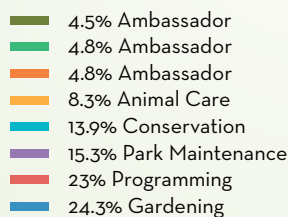
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, CONTACT:

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

VOLUNTEER HOURS BY POSITION



VOLUNTEER HOURS BY PRIMARY SKILL



Gardening Volunteers

 GARDENING AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS WORK WITH — AND LEARN FROM — METROPARKS' EXPERTS

People begin volunteering at Five Rivers MetroParks for many reasons. One of the best experiences volunteers have is working alongside MetroParks' experts. This allows volunteers to learn new things and build skills they can apply at home or in their neighborhood.

Horticulturalist Allison Bush (below left) works with gardening volunteers in MetroParks' urban parks, such as RiverScape and Wegerzyn Gardens MetroParks. Bush treats her volunteers as teammates and wants them to continuously get as much from their experiences at MetroParks as they give.

"I always include an educational aspect when I do a talk, even if it's something simple like weeding," Bush said. With degrees focused in horticulture and natural resources, plus years of experience as a landscape designer and arborist, Bush brings a lot to the gardening plot. However, her efforts alone couldn't sustain the daily maintenance needed to keep these parks looking beautiful and healthy, which is why the assistance from

volunteers is so important and valued.

Volunteers join Bush on Tuesdays and Thursdays (and during Service Saturdays, held monthly from May through September) to perform such tasks as planting bulbs, tree pruning, planting, mulching and more. They even join in on the fun to create seasonal elements, such as winter gnomes.

"My favorite thing is when volunteers learn something new," Bush said. "I enjoy seeing them take home what they've learned to share with friends and family."

Because volunteers learn so much from MetroParks' experts, you don't need to have any gardening experience to start. If you have an interest in becoming a better gardener at home, volunteering is a great way to hone your skills. As an added bonus, you get to see your hard work in bloom.

"It's always a good feeling to see the patrons in the park enjoying the landscape," Bush said.



Volunteer gardening opportunities are available:

- year-round
- indoors and outdoors
- for youth, adults, families and groups
- on weekdays and weekends



2022 Year in Review



The Adventure Summit (FEB. 12)

Five Rivers MetroParks welcomed the return of this weekend event, a partnership with Wright State University, that included dozens of inspiring talks, an outdoor recreation expo and competitions



MetroParks Trails Challenge (FEB. - OCT.)

In its third year, 547 participants completed 5,348 trails and covered 8,497 miles – longer than the distance from Antarctica to the United States. The youngest participant was 2 years old, the oldest participant was 77.



Bike to Work Day (MAY 20)

For the first in-person event since the pandemic, 175 cyclists rode 2,885 miles to RiverScape MetroPark for a pancake breakfast. This event celebrated cycling as a mode of transportation, and 260 people attended.



Summer at RiverScape (MAY-LABOR DAY)

Hundreds attended live music concerts during the Summer Music Series. New in 2022, Community Fitness programs joined existing Fitness in the Park programs, broadening free access to fitness opportunities. Paddling rentals at RiverScape were offered on Thursday evenings in partnership with Taiter's Kayak Solutions.

MetroParks Ice Rink (JAN.-FEB.) AND (NOV.-DEC.)

New in 2022, the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation funded half-price admission and skate rental for those using EBT/SNAP benefits.



Adopt-A-Park (APRIL 23)

Adopt-A-Park was hosted in-person for the first time since the pandemic. Nearly 300 volunteers completed 860 hours on projects in MetroParks, and 105 service kits were distributed to groups for waste pick-up projects.



Outdoor Market at the 2nd Street Market (MAY - OCT.)

During the 2022 growing season, the Market welcomed an additional 15 to 20 weekend vendors outdoors and in the pavilion offering fresh produce, prepared foods and more.





Twin Valley Trail Challenge (JUNE 4)

This event returned to its summer date after being hosted in early fall 2021. A record-breaking number of hikers participated, with 400-plus hiking the 28.7-mile trail that connects Germantown and Twin Creek MetroParks.

Small Farm & Food Fest (AUG. 6)

Held for the second time since its launch in 2019, this festival welcomed about 3,000 attendees for a day of healthy eating, history and sustainability at Carriage Hill MetroPark. Visitors enjoyed nearly a dozen speakers, a pop-up farmers market, historical demonstrations and more.

Make a Difference Day (OCT. 22)

On MetroParks' fall annual day of service, 190 volunteers assisted with projects at 18 sites for a collective 555 hours.

Stock Up Wednesday + Artisan Night (NOV. - DEC.)

Open additional hours before Thanksgiving and Christmas, the 2nd Street Market offered a chance for shoppers to buy holiday meal essentials, craft their own DIY presents and more. Both events had high visitation, with Artisan Night setting record attendance.

Passport to MetroParks (JUNE 3)

A preview of MetroParks' offerings, this festival returned to RiverScape MetroPark after it was first held in 2019. Nearly 1,200 people enjoyed a taste of the cultural festivals hosted at RiverScape, MetroParks' programs, live music, food trucks and more.

Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience (OCT. 1-2)

The community was excited about the return of this outdoor adventure festival. More than 15,000 people enjoyed a weekend of trying outdoor activities, live demos, skills clinics, live music, food and exhibitors. MetroParks continued its waste-free initiative, partnering with The Foodbank to collect compostable waste used to grow food at its facilities.

Luminary Walk (DEC. 3)

This annual winter holiday walk features a candlelit stroll along the paths of Aullwood Garden MetroPark. This year, the Luminary Walk experienced record attendance, with more than 1,000 visitors.

Christmas on the Farm (DEC. 10)

Carriage Hill MetroPark's historical farm welcomed record numbers to this program, a celebration of Victorian-era holidays on an 1800s farm that included historical demonstrations, visits with Santa in the barn and more.



Protecting Land for Conservation

 STRATEGIC LAND ACQUISITIONS ALLOW METROPARKS TO PROTECT MORE OF THE REGION'S NATURAL HERITAGE

Expanding parks is only one reason MetroParks acquires land, an ongoing process that started with the creation of the park district in 1963. MetroParks' origin story rooted in land protection still plays out today. The agency has land protection goals that are strategic and visionary, focused on MetroParks' mission to protect the region's natural heritage.

Some of those strategic land acquisitions may one day expand an existing MetroPark or conservation area – or become a new one. In some cases, a conservation area – land MetroParks owns and manages that may not have developed public access – is planned to become a MetroPark, as is the case with Spring Run Conservation Area in Trotwood.

Two of MetroParks' 2022 land acquisitions illustrate the agency's plans to ensure these properties make Montgomery County's environment healthier now and for generations to come.

The city of Dayton approached Five Rivers MetroParks about purchasing the 10-acre property once home to Foxton Court Apartments, severely damaged in the 2019 tornadoes, and the adjacent 58-acre city-owned property. Grants from Clean Ohio and the Greater Dayton Disaster Relief Fund supported the acquisition of the land along Shoup Mill Road. MetroParks has demolished the remaining apartment structures, utilities and pavement – removing blight and a reminder of the tornadoes along a very busy road.

Because the apartments were located in a floodplain, built prior to legislation prohibiting this, they could not have been rebuilt. Instead, MetroParks will restore the property to a natural area, seeded with a restorative prairie mix that will regenerate soils. This restoration also will add greenspace to the neighborhood and to Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark.

The 63-acre Whitesell Property, former farmland located near Frederick Pike and Needmore Road, expanded the Stillwater Conservation Area. To date, restoration work includes transitioning the land from its prior agricultural use to a natural area with native grasses and wildflowers. Eventually, in decades to come, it will be a woodland.

This land acquisition also created a new way for the public to support MetroParks' conservation mission to protect the region's natural heritage: the Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation's Land Conservation Endowment Fund. Now, donors can financially support MetroParks' conservation efforts while also funding an endowment.

These properties join other strategic acquisitions, such as 46-acre property tucked in a west Dayton neighborhood that MetroParks acquired thanks to Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, the land's previous owner, and a Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Program grant. MetroParks acquired two additional properties totaling about 12 acres located along Wolf Creek just north of the Calvary land. All three properties will soon connect to Wesleyan MetroPark – and fulfill long-term plans for it to expand that MetroPark in west Dayton to 100 acres.



Scan the code or visit metroparks.org/foundation to support the new Land Conservation Endowment Fund.

Five Rivers MetroParks Land Protection Goals

- Protect significant natural areas, particularly those adjacent to existing MetroParks and river corridors
- Protect and connect significant tracts of land
- Link forests and park lands along river corridors
- Establish buffer areas where needed to maintain open space and protect watersheds



Funding Supports Conservation Work

 H2OHIO GRANT ALLOWS METROPARKS TO RESTORE WETLANDS AT SPRING RUN CONSERVATION AREA

Land once slated to become a landfill is one step further toward a long-term vision of becoming a new MetroPark thanks to a state grant awarded in August 2022.



The Spring Run Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project in Trotwood was fully funded by a \$499,500 grant, just \$500 short of the maximum amount available, from Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative to ensure safe and clean water in Ohio. Project partners are the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Pheasants Forever.

The 550-acre Spring Run Conservation Area is comprised of two land parcels: the 190-acre former Larch Tree Golf Course and the 360-acre Great Miami Wetland Mitigation Bank, a property once planned to become a landfill. Spring Run is adjacent to the 2,384-acre Sycamore State Park – creating a nearly 3,000-acre natural area for wildlife habitat and open space protection west of Dayton in Montgomery County.

The Wetlands Restoration Project is creating approximately 22 acres of wetlands on the former golf course property. Once complete, the project will improve water and air quality by filtering pollutants from groundwater. Other benefits include:

- reducing flooding and erosion
- creating public access to a large natural area for an underserved community near Dayton
- improving biodiversity by removing invasive plants and introducing native ones
- providing additional scientific research opportunities

Wetlands act as the kidneys of our ecosystem, and the new ones at Spring Run will store approximately 33 million gallons of water. Spring Run has a high concentration of hydric soils, which are permanently or seasonally saturated by water – making the transition from golf course to wetlands more successful.

Spring Run is located in the Wolf Creek Watershed, part of the Great Miami Watershed – the largest in Ohio, which provides water to more than 2.3 million people. Five Rivers MetroParks purchased the Great Miami Wetland Mitigation Bank in 2008 and has since been converting the former farmland to a natural area.



The Mitigation Bank now includes 25 acres of wetlands, as well as prairie, forest and grassland habitats. Already, the area has become a significant birding site, with visitors spotting more than 200 species of birds, some of them rare.

The Mitigation Bank also is a regional economic development tool: If an existing wetland is damaged, qualified developers can purchase required credits from the Great Miami Mitigation Bank. The funds are used to restore wetlands at the Mitigation Bank, which is on a large tract of land and permanently protected – meaning this mitigation is more effective at replacing lost wetlands.

Five Rivers MetroParks purchased the former Larch Tree Golf Course in 2014 with a Clean Ohio grant. MetroParks has since demolished dilapidated structures, but the Spring Run Conservation Area Wetlands Restoration Project marks the first significant work done on the former golf course property.

Spring Run is located near the Wolf Creek Trail, and several of the former golf cart paved paths are still intact. Long term, both are part of Five Rivers MetroParks' vision to transition Spring Run from a conservation area to a MetroPark designed to provide visitors with an introductory experience with nature.

Nature Play is a Priority

 FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS CONTINUES TO UPGRADE AND BUILD NEW NATURE PLAY AREAS

Research shows children who spend time outdoors are healthier, happier and smarter.

Benefits include improved:

- social, problem-solving, communication and collaborative skills;
- concentration, cognitive functioning and creativity;
- academic performance and enthusiasm for learning;
- fine and gross motor skills, coordination, vision, and balance; and
- self-esteem, impulse control and stress reduction.

Such benefits as these are why MetroParks continues to invest in its nature play areas. Indeed, these benefits are so numerous and important that, in 2022, MetroParks upgraded its nature play areas at Possum Creek and Hills & Dales MetroParks, and MetroParks began construction on a new one at Cox Arboretum MetroPark. Funding is being sought to upgrade and build even more.

Upgrades in 2022 include:

- The nature play area at Possum Creek MetroPark was significantly expanded and upgraded. It now includes a prairie play area, dry creek bed with a water source, large sand pits, balance log crossing, climbing boulders and more.
- The nature play area at Hills & Dales MetroPark was upgraded to include many of these same features, thanks to a grant from the Mark A. Kreusch Memorial Fund of The Dayton Foundation.
- Construction began on a brand new nature play area at Cox Arboretum MetroPark, which will join such kid-friendly features as the Bell Children's Maze (funded by The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation) and Tree Tower.

Unlike traditional playgrounds, nature play areas feature branches, boulders and other natural objects, also known as loose parts, that serve as outdoor playscapes and toys. These areas entice kids to explore the outdoors in a more unstructured yet safe way – and make it fun and easy for kids to experience the numerous benefits time in nature offers.

Nature play areas also provide benefits traditional playgrounds do not because they allow for unstructured time outdoors. For example, manipulating branches to build a fort with other kids is how social skills and creativity are enhanced. Balancing on logs fine-tunes gross motor skills while helping children learn to take calculated risks.

Regardless of the playscape, one thing is critical: Children need to spend more time outdoors. Nature play areas are a free, convenient way for families and caregivers to provide that.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, kids ages 8 to 18 spend nearly eight hours each day using screens, including time playing video games and watching TV and mobile devices. Meanwhile, most kids spend approximately 10 minutes outdoors each day. However, according to the Children & Nature Network, regular time in nature is essential for children's healthy development. A growing body of research shows spending more time in nature improves some of today's most pressing problems related to children, including obesity, ADHD, low self-esteem, poor mental health and low academic performance. MetroParks' nature play areas improve these problems – all while enhancing children's physical, social and emotional well-being, as well as fostering their love of nature and desire to protect it.



Conservation Leaders Program Launched

CONSERVATION LEADERS PROGRAM HELPS YOUTH LEARN TO APPRECIATE — AND PROTECT — NATURE

Inspiring today's youth to become good stewards of the natural world is critical to MetroParks' mission to protect the region's natural heritage.

Beginning in summer 2022, MetroParks' outdoor education, parks and conservation, and volunteer staff — with support from The James M. Cox, Jr. Arboretum Foundation — collaborated to provide a new series of programs, Conservation Leaders.

These programs build on Conservation Kids programs, which focus on children ages 3 through 13. Conservation Leaders programs, focused on youth ages 10 through 17, allow tweens/teens to take their education, advocacy and service to the next level. Both invite youth to explore nature through hands-on, educational experiences.

"It can be difficult for youth to find ... a place to start when they care so much about the significant environmental issues of the world. This program helps teens recognize their influence, power and voice in standing up for conservation."

— Erin Rowekamp

"We continued to see that older youth were close to or aging out of Conservation Kids programming but still wanted to be engaged," said Erin Rowekamp, MetroParks education specialist. "At the time, we didn't have many opportunities we could direct them to so they could continue to grow as conservationists. We also heard from parents that there were not many volunteer opportunities for teens in the greater Dayton area."

Conservation Leaders addresses those concerns:

- It offers multifaceted programs that allow youth ages 10 through 17 to deepen their connection with nature in many ways.

- Participants in Conservation Leaders programs explore Dayton's local ecology and help with various conservation projects.
- These programs are paired with Conservation Leaders in Action volunteer opportunities, in which participants help with conservation projects that support the improvement of biodiversity in MetroParks.

Already, Conservation Leaders participants have planted native plugs around Sugarcreek MetroPark's improved salamander habitat and removed trash that had washed into Woodman Fen Conservation Area. (Read more about the salamander habitat project on page 32.)

Conservation Leaders also will use the skills they build to inspire younger peers during Conservation Kids programs. Teens will assist staff, share their knowledge and experiences in the field, and engage more reserved participants who may open up to someone closer to their age.

"It can be difficult for youth to find their voice, and perhaps even harder to find a place to start, when they care so much about the significant environmental issues of the world," Rowekamp said. "This program helps teens recognize their influence, power and voice in standing up for conservation. As an added benefit, these participants develop confidence and leadership skills that will stay with them forever."

Salamander Pond and Prairie Restoration

 CONSERVATION PROJECT PROTECTS HABITAT FOR RARE SALAMANDER



As a conservation agency, Five Rivers MetroParks' mission is to protect the region's natural heritage. Yet climate change, along with commercial and home construction, have impacted sensitive habitats, trails and other natural assets.

One such habitat -- a vernal pool at Sugarcreek MetroPark -- is critical to the lifecycle of a rare species of spotted salamander. Vernal pools provide the perfect conditions for these amphibians to lay their eggs and produce young.

These salamanders used an existing vernal pool to lay eggs in late winter/early spring. However, due to increased storm intensities and water velocity, many of their larvae were routinely washed away.

This site is also a popular destination for MetroParks educators. They hold youth programs here to help families understand the importance of local wildlife and the lifecycle of these amphibians, while also helping them develop an appreciation of the natural world.

MetroParks' staff developed a plan to mitigate the negative impact of high-intensity storms on this habitat and to bolster native flora and fauna by installing prairie plantings and additional vernal pools. Plans also were made to reduce erosion and enhance the trails adjacent to this habitat.

Construction began in 2021 and culminated in 2022 with the first full season of robust growth in the planted prairie.

The original pool's water level was raised, allowing MetroParks' parks and conservation staff to maintain pool depths to protect the salamanders from predators. Two new pools were created, nearly doubling the salamanders' habitat.

Existing trails were enhanced and are no longer in a low-lying, wet area. The additional elevation also provides an attractive overlook of the prairie and wetlands and allows water to flow underneath the trails instead of over them. The trail enhancements also reduce erosion and create a more sustainable trail with less need for maintenance, which saves MetroParks' staff time and other resources.

Tree and shrub species were planted around the edge of the new pools, along with wetland wildflowers and sedges that will become perches for dragonflies and damselflies and attract pollinators. Prairie seed was planted on the earth left over from the excavation.

These trees, shrubs and plugs were planted by MetroParks staff and a team of Conservation Leaders, youth volunteers interested in conservation. (Read more about Conservation Leaders on page 31.)

Because this project was completed by MetroParks staff and 90% of the materials were found on-site, it saved considerable resources. Trees and shrubs were grown at the Barbara Cox Center for Sustainable Horticulture, located at Cox Arboretum MetroPark. The cost of prairie seeds was supported by a generous donation from a MetroParks volunteer.

"Although climate change threatens species across the globe, we have the tools and responsibility to protect nature," MetroParks educator Joshua York said. "These salamanders will now thrive for many years to come, and this project will serve as a monument to what we can do to protect local biodiversity in this changing world."



Bat Blitz



FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS HOSTED OHIO'S FIRST BAT BLITZ
AT GERMANTOWN METROPARK

Five Rivers MetroParks welcomes a variety of university students, professors and partner organizations to conduct research in its habitats as part of its conservation mission. With more than 16,000 acres -- 90% of which is in its natural state -- researchers have much to glean from studying the flora and fauna at MetroParks.

Bat populations are an important indicator of the ecological health of MetroParks' natural spaces. However, these populations have been under-researched in southwest Ohio, according to the Ohio Bat Working Group (OBWG). In previous years, MetroParks conducted surveys with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish the Twin Valley (Germantown and Twin Creek MetroParks and the Upper Twin Conservation Area) as the ideal location to hold Ohio's first-ever Bat Blitz, an intensive ecological survey of bat species held during a short period of time.

The OBWG began working with MetroParks in December 2021 to plan the Bat Blitz after it had been delayed for two years due to the pandemic.

By March 2022, subcommittees had been formed comprised of more than 50 volunteer researchers, bat biologists, educators, and employees of state and federal agencies.

On Aug. 19, 2022, volunteers set up 25 fine mesh mist nets at nine stations across the Twin Valley for the state's first Bat Blitz.

Because mist nets are hard to detect, bats fly into them. This allows researchers to view specimens and collect data regarding species, size, age, weight, health, reproductive status and more.

In just the first few hours of the Bat Blitz, a federally endangered Indiana bat was discovered. This bat, and ultimately two more, were outfitted with transmitters and tracked via radio telemetry to two dead trees at Germantown MetroPark. There, staff and volunteers discovered nearly 200 Indiana bats roosting.

Outstanding findings during the second evening of the Bat Blitz included a potential new state record: a Seminole bat.



A total of 100 bats were captured, representing seven species.

In addition, one station was an educational area for public programming the first night of the Bat Blitz. Beginning at dusk, families were able to visit three education stations, starting at the Twin Valley Welcome Center, one of which included a net site where bats were being caught. MetroParks educators also worked with volunteers to film the event and provide a virtual educational experience on Aug. 20.

Because of the support provided by sponsors, collaboration among organizations and commitment of volunteer researchers, the Bat Blitz was conducted at a considerable savings.

Ongoing research continued, as MetroParks conservation staff and volunteers continued surveys of the Indiana bats through Sept. 27.

Learn more about flora and fauna in your MetroParks at metroparks.org/nature-appreciation.

Seed Nursery Improvements

 SEED NURSERY IMPROVEMENTS HELP GROW CONSERVATION EFFORTS



Native shrubs were planted and wrapped in metal fencing to prevent deer, rabbits and other wildlife from eating the buds and new growth on the stems. This project was funded by the Huffman grant.

BELOW:

Rows of native grasses and wildflowers are in their first year of establishment at the Germantown MetroPark seed nursery.



MetroParks staff spread seeds in the improved beds during winter 2022.

MetroParks' seed nursery at Germantown MetroPark has helped grow native plants to restore habitats on the land MetroParks protects for decades. Upgrades to the seed nursery made in 2022 gave it the potential to make an even more significant impact on MetroParks' conservation efforts.

In 1988, Five Rivers MetroParks partnered with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to create a nursery to collect native seeds to plant along Ohio's highways and in Five Rivers MetroParks. After 15 years, MetroParks took over operation of the facility. In 2021, after nearly 40 years, the facility was in dire need of upgrades.

Thanks to generous funding from the CenterPoint Energy Foundation, MetroParks' parks and conservation team was able to essentially start from scratch.

"The plants that were growing in the seed nursery beds had been displaced by invasive plants," horticulturalist Meredith Cobb said. "We spent summer 2021 removing and killing all the invasive species, which had taken over everything in the seed nursery. In August 2021, we tilled and prepared 54 beds for seeds and shrubs."

Staff then started seeds in the newly prepped beds during winter so they could naturally go through stratification, a process in which seeds spend a few

months in a cold, moist environment. Because seeds are darker than the snow, MetroParks' conservation staff spread seeds over snow-covered beds so they could see seeds were being evenly distributed.

Now, native grasses and wildflowers are in the first year of establishment at the seed nursery.

Storage also is critical to native plant propagation. Before, staff and volunteers spent many hours collecting prairie seed, which was placed in a small seed room that animals could easily get to for an impromptu snack. Now, the seed nursery is outfitted with stainless steel shelves and restaurant-grade storage containers that protect the collected seed with enough space to organize by plant species.

Because seeds also need to be stored in a cool, dry place, a dehumidifier and small air conditioner were added to keep seeds viable until they can be planted.

MetroParks' conservation team is particularly excited about mixing specific types of seeds tailored to the needs of certain habitats. This now will be easier thanks to a new scale that can measure weight more accurately.

"Increasing habitat for grassland birds and mammals and increasing diversity in already planted prairies is important," Cobb said. "The more species diversity you have in an area, the more resilient that habitat is to change, such as climate change."

Argonne Forest Interpretive Project

 **UPDATED SIGNAGE IN POSSUM CREEK'S ARGONNE FOREST HELPS VISITORS STEP BACK IN HISTORY**



Time has changed the landscape, as a mixed hardwood forest has grown around the remnants and into the space once filled with open fields and beech woods. While many amusement parks now are dominated by roller coasters and Ferris wheels, Argonne Forest Park was designed with amenities for people to play and enjoy the outdoors together.

In spring 2022, new interpretive signage telling the story of Argonne Forest Park was installed along the purple trail at Possum Creek MetroPark, adding a dose of history to visitors' hikes.

A century ago, a portion of Possum Creek MetroPark was home to the 200-acre Argonne Forest Park, a former amusement park. Null Hodapp founded the park, named after the World War I battle of Argonne Forest in France, where he served with the 322nd Field Artillery.

Fellow WWI veterans built Argonne Forest Park in honor of those who served during the Great War. Argonne Forest Park, dedicated in July 1927, served as a reunion grounds for veterans and their families. Local businesses, clubs and associations also rented the park for private picnics. It was home to such amenities as a clubhouse, midway, swimming pool and baseball field, where parades and sham battles were held.

Now, you can explore remnants of Argonne Forest Park by hiking the 1.4-mile purple loop trail, an easy, natural-surface trail without a lot of elevation change. Visitors can spot a dance floor, streetcars used as cabins and for concessions, and more. With less vegetation to block views, winter and spring are a great time to see these remnants.



Scan the code or visit metroparks.org/Argonne for more information, photos and historical documents.

Explorers to Rangers Program

 METROPARKS RANGERS HIRE FIRST GRADUATE OF EXPLORER PROGRAM



The ranger division of Five Rivers MetroParks provides 24-hour law enforcement to MetroParks visitors and staff. Rangers also are called upon to assist other law enforcement and first responders. From rescuing wildlife to responding to active crime scenes, MetroParks rangers have a passion for service to both the public and the natural world.

In summer 2022, one of the first graduates of the rangers' Explorer to Ranger Progression program, Victoria "Tori" Suhr, graduated from Sinclair College's Police Academy. As an Explorer grad, Five Rivers MetroParks funded her tuition. Suhr was sworn in as a MetroParks ranger in July and completed training in November 2022.

The core goals of the Explorer program are to:

- inspire the next generation of rangers
- support promising and committed candidates through their formal law enforcement training, and
- aim to hire Explorer graduates as Five Rivers MetroParks rangers.

MetroParks' community resource officer, Adam Gaby, leads the Explorer program. Youth ages 14 to 21 sign up as volunteers to learn from and support MetroParks rangers with a variety of hands-on law enforcement activities. The program can accommodate up to 12 youth per year.

Explorers start by learning the basics of law enforcement and the rangers' roles in protecting the public and MetroParks' physical and natural assets. Explorers ride along with rangers, learning from them on the job.

To cultivate a positive relationship among youth and law enforcement, Explorers also accompany rangers to community events and programs. This allows young adults to see their peers working side-by-side with law enforcement and encourages open dialogue. This is also an opportunity for youth to talk to their peers about the Explorers program, a tool for additional recruitment.



Ranger Suhr also expands the number of women among MetroParks rangers, which is more than 80% male.

"This program is of mutual benefit to the community and our rangers in so many ways," Gaby said. "As law enforcement, we all need community-to-community policing, and working with youth is a great way to do that. We are also committed to the protection of our region's natural heritage, so connecting the dots to help kids understand the importance of protecting the environment ensures a better future for everyone."

The Explorer to Ranger Progression program won a first place Award of Excellence in the law enforcement category from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association.

Learn more about this program at metroparks.org/safety.

Dayton Riverfront Plan Update

 DAYTON RIVERFRONT PLAN PROJECT CONNECTS THE COMMUNITY TO NATURE

The construction of Centennial Overlook began in summer 2022 thanks to a \$100,000 philanthropic gift from The Garden Club of Dayton to mark its 100th anniversary. Centennial Overlook in Sunrise MetroPark is part of Phase I of The Suns, a key project of the Dayton Riverfront Plan. The overlook is just west of downtown Dayton at the corner of Riverview and Monument avenues.

More than 100 bird species have been identified along the river in this area, and Centennial Overlook includes native plants that will support those species while also attracting pollinators. Interpretive signage educates visitors about nature in the area, and local artist Michael Bashaw created a sound sculpture that represents water flow in the river and the native pollinator plants that line its banks.

When planning its centennial, The Garden Club of Dayton specifically looked for a project that would mark its 100th year while also connecting the community to the wonders of nature through protection and education.

Through the years, The Garden Club of Dayton has been instrumental in the creation of some of the community's most valued MetroParks assets: RiverScape MetroPark and the RiverScape River Run, Adventure Central at Wesleyan MetroPark, the campus at Cox Arboretum MetroPark, and the Children's Discovery Garden at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark.

Dayton's west side is seeing a resurgence of commitment and investment. The Centennial Overlook project highlights and educates people about the high-quality river ecology that thrives in Dayton's downtown corridor.

"Research has shown there are physical and mental health benefits for those who live within 0.5 miles of a park, particularly children," Carrie Scarff, MetroParks chief of planning and projects, said. "Our rivers provide so much of our greenspace in Dayton and reach so deeply into neighborhoods that it's important we take advantage of those spaces to serve the surrounding residents. Through strong community partnerships, such as with The Garden Club of Dayton, the community can reap the many benefits of natural spaces."



Centennial Overlook is the first step toward The Suns, the Dayton Riverfront Plan's vision to create a park over the Great Miami River that would include greenspaces, benches, public art and other amenities. This pedestrian park would connect the existing Sunrise MetroPark to a new Sunset Park proposed to be located across the river.

Five Rivers MetroParks and its eight partners are implementing the Dayton Riverfront Plan at a pace that exceeds the Plan's projections. MetroParks made exciting strides in 2022 with a variety of projects.



Scan the code or visit daytonriverfrontplan.org to learn more.





THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE, BECKY BENNÁ!

After 11 years as executive director then chief executive officer at Five Rivers MetroParks, Becky Benná retired in spring 2023 after spending more than 40 years in the parks and recreation field.

Staff, volunteers, visitors and the Board of Park Commissioners aren't the only ones who will feel the void she leaves. In January 2023, the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association awarded Benná the Harvey Woods Lifetime Achievement Award. This high honor is only given annually to someone who has not only excelled in their day-to-day responsibilities during the course their career, but who also has mentored young professionals and served in leadership roles at the state and national levels.

Benná has done that and more. In addition to her decades of public service in the field, she served as president of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA) from 2002-2004 and twice as the

co-chairperson of OPRA's statewide conference. Benná also served in many roles with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), including as a member of NRPA's Board of Directors, chairperson of the National Professional Certification Board, and on the Board of Regents for the NRPA Revenue Development and Management School, among others.

"A wise person once said, 'You can't direct the wind, but you can adjust your sails.' During Becky's tenure, we were exposed to her vision and foresight," said Karen Davis, president of the Board of Park Commissioners and board member during Benná's entire tenure. "As she adjusted our sails, we systematically became an even more impressive organization than when she started. We are grateful to now have her as part of Five Rivers MetroParks' heritage and wish her all the best as she embarks on the next journey in her life. Congratulations and thank you!"

Read more about your new MetroParks CEO on page 39 or at metroparks.org/ParkWaysOnline.

Your MetroParks Leadership Team

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.



2022 PRESIDENT

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



2022 VICE PRESIDENT

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



2022 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.



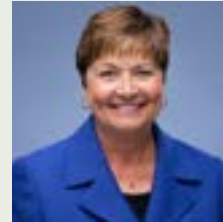
WELCOME TO METROPARKS' NEW CEO

In mid-April 2023, Five Rivers MetroParks' Board of Park Commissioners named Karen Hesser as the new chief executive officer of the agency. Hesser brings years of experience in the parks and recreation industry, including leadership roles with parks and recreation agencies in Arizona and Pennsylvania, as well as in national and state organizations. Previously MetroParks chief of operations, Hesser has served at MetroParks since May 2012 in leadership roles.

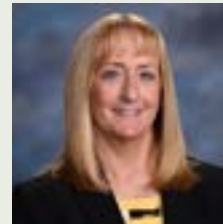
"MetroParks is a team of committed professionals and incredible volunteers at every level who serve the Montgomery County community," Hesser said. "I have two priorities: First, ensuring the community plan – the agency's comprehensive master plan – continues to be the driving force. Second, that MetroParks' three strategic plan priority focus areas – diversity, equity and inclusion; climate change mitigation; and sustained financial growth – remain front and center."

Read more about Karen Hesser at metroparks.org/ParkWaysOnline.

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

I have lived near Cox Arboretum for many years, even before it was a park. When I was very young, my parents drove past the park almost every week. When I married, we bought a house down the hill from the park. My husband and I visited the park sometimes twice a day. We certainly had many wonderful visits. I volunteered for a few years. My ability to get around has limited my visits, but not my enthusiasm for the park. I brought back of my grandchildren, and they still remember.

I have been a member of the Cox Arboretum Foundation for quite some time. This year, I am able to give an extra gift. I am so impressed with all the changes and work that is done every year. When I look back, my kids were not as fortunate as the kids of today because the park was just in the throes of being born.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Durig



Elizabeth Durig, 93, is a lifelong Daytonian and has been visiting Cox Arboretum MetroPark before it became a Five Rivers MetroParks facility. She refers to it as her “paradise” and has enjoyed sharing the beauty of the park with her family – especially her grandchildren.

We love hearing stories from visitors!

Tell us your story by emailing multi.media@metroparks.org or mailing a letter to the address below.

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

metroparks.org

FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS

