

Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District

METRO PARKS



Wetlands restored at Scioto Audubon Metro Park
photo courtesy of Kinzelman Kline Gossman

Annual Report 2009

Director's Report

2009 – the year in review

The defining moment of 2009 for Metro Parks occurred with the passage of the park levy in May. The 10-year levy provides a basic level of funding that assures financial stability for Metro Parks through 2019. Commitments were made as part of the levy campaign that establish the primary goals that we will pursue over the coming decade.

There were several other noteworthy accomplishments in 2009. An important highlight was the opening of Scioto Audubon Metro Park near downtown Columbus. This new park, which includes the Grange Insurance Audubon Center that is operated by the National Audubon Society, will serve the central city and will be an important asset for Central Ohio as we work to attract businesses and residents. This new Metro Park also helps to conserve an Important Bird Area and provides needed green space along the Scioto River in the heart of the city.

Attendance in the Metro Parks was up nine percent in 2009 over 2008. With more than 6.6 million visitors, people of our community rely on the Metro Parks for their close to home opportunities for conservation, recreation and outdoor education. We are delighted to be able to serve more people while maintaining clean, safe parks and conserving important natural features.

We provided educational programs for more than 70 percent of the fifth graders in Columbus City Schools in addition to working with more than 20 other school districts in Central Ohio. Demand for our school programs is great because it adds significantly to the student's ability to comprehend many science topics that can be better understood with hands-on learning experiences in the natural environment.

Metro Parks continued to improve the regional Greenway Trails system. New trails were opened in both eastern and western Franklin County. Working along with our partners in the Greenways program, the planned 160-mile Greenways Trail system is now more than half complete.

Big strides were also made in restoring wildlife habitat and improving water quality. A stream restoration project was completed that should greatly improve the quality of Hellbranch Run as it enters Big Darby Creek. Over 100 acres of wetlands were restored in Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park. This restored habitat is already attracting large flocks of waterfowl and uncommon species such as sandhill cranes and bald eagles. Additional habitat restoration projects were completed along Big Darby Creek and Blacklick Creek.

Your support for Metro Parks is greatly appreciated.

John O'Meara



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Design & Visitor Services

URBAN YOUTH PROGRAM

A total of 21 interns from Columbus City Schools were assigned to one of six parks in the 2009 Urban Youth Program—Battelle Darby Creek, Blacklick and Blendon Woods, Highbanks, Inniswood and Sharon Woods. Total cost of the program was \$64,000, including salaries and uniforms. Interns worked on ground and facility maintenance, renovation projects, including staining and painting projects, removal of invasive species, trail maintenance and clearing of fence lines. In addition, interns assisted staff during the summer nature adventure camps.

RANGER PROGRAM

Metro Parks' 97 rangers wrote 198 incident reports in 2009, issued 29 court citations and 113 written warnings as they patrolled the parks to keep them safe for 6.6 million annual visitors. One ranger graduated from the Ohio Basic Police Academy in 2009 and three more continued their studies and will graduate in 2010. All full-time rangers undertook at least 90 hours of law enforcement training.

Battelle Darby Creek

- Four miles of the Darby Creek Greenway trail were opened.
- Interpretive signs were installed at the Darby Dan Indoor Riding Arena and the indoor arena exterior was painted.
- Almost 27,000 people participated in naturalist-led public programs at the park and volunteer naturalists donated almost 2,300 hours of service working on moth surveys, group programs, special events, bluebird monitoring and a host of other activities.

Blacklick Woods

- Park enjoyed largest attendance since 2002, attracting more than 935,000 visitors.
- A section of the new Blacklick Creek Greenway Trail was opened to the public from the park to Tussing Road near Turnberry Golf Course.
- Several buildings had new roofs, including the ranger station, restrooms and one of the Adirondack shelters.
- A new animal display was built in the nature center featuring five aquariums. Another new display discusses the geothermal heating system for the nature center and other green initiatives undertaken at Blacklick Woods and throughout the Metro Parks. Blacklick Woods has reduced gasoline consumption by 20 percent and nature center electric consumption by 20 percent with the introduction of the geothermal system.

Blacklick Woods Golf Courses

- A new on-line tee time reservation system was introduced,

producing an annual savings of approximately \$3,000.

- Introduced a special golf cart for use by people with disabilities.
- Planted 35 bur oak trees.
- Upgraded golf course signage and introduced security upgrades in customer parking area, snack bar and the activities building entrance.

Blendon Woods

- Completed conversion of all lighting to compact fluorescent or other energy-efficient light bulbs and the community recycling program continues. Bio-diesel fuel is used in all equipment.
- Completed nature center roof replacement project.
- Almost 30,000 people visited the nature center and almost 850 people participated in the annual Monarch Butterfly Day.

Chestnut Ridge

- Park rangers and naturalist presented programs to about 1,000 students for the Ohio Department of Public Safety's "Safety Day" at Indian Trail Elementary School.
- Urban Youth interns assisted in clearing fallen trees and renovating the Springhouse Program Area.

Clear Creek

- Energy-efficient windows were installed at the park office. Barn, garage and summer kitchen roofs were repainted.
- A new cedar shake roof was installed on the Mathias Cabin.

- All gravel parking lots and trails were resurfaced.
- During the controlled deer hunt 121 deer were harvested and twenty-two deer were donated to the Mid-Ohio Food Bank by hunters.
- Division of Wildlife stocked 3,500 brown trout in Clear Creek.
- Partnered with Camp Wyandot to offer a family overnight camp for 50 campers.
- Backcountry hikes led by naturalists continue to be the most popular programs offered at the park.

Glacier Ridge

- Partnered with others in the Flying Feather Four Miler, the Columbus Half Marathon and the Union County United Way 5K events.
- Worked to eliminate invasive species such as Canada thistle, autumn olive and honey-suckle throughout the park.

Heritage Trail

- Trail usage increased by over 215 percent during the year with over 86,000 visitors using Metro Parks' portion of the trail.

Highbanks

- Sledding hill and cross-country ski trails were open for 28 days for the year.
- Over one mile of nature trails were resurfaced and culverts and wood chips were used to improve wet areas.
- During 2009, two valued volunteers (Ron Trick and Mark Bundenson) lost their lives in tragic accidents. Installed memorial benches and trees in their memory.
- Hosted an Envirothon for 450 high school students.
- Gypsy moths defoliated about 14 acres of a wooded area.
- Hosted special events including running events, large gatherings and picnics.

Inniswood

- Conducted programs for over 10,000 children and adults with over 4,500 children participating in summer programs—an increase of 12.5 percent over 2008.

- Volunteers donated almost 12,300 hours of service and 36 new volunteers were trained in March. Thirty participants were involved in the Junior Volunteer Program for kids 12 to 17.
- New walkway and parking lot lights were installed.
- Inniswood became a location for the 10TV Weather Bug.
- A new electrical line between the Innis House and maintenance complex was installed by Westerville Electric Utility.
- The fence border was planted and mulched and edging was installed.
- Design work was completed on a pavilion that will be located on the west side of the gardens and will support education and special event programs—pavilion will be constructed in 2010.

Pickerington Ponds

- Staff continued to work on controlled succession mowing and removal of invasive species such as Canada thistle, phragmites and reed canary grass.
- Several log jams were removed from Georges Creek South.
- Invasive species were removed and trees were planted along Blacklick Creek.
- A campfire program area was constructed for naturalist programs.

Prairie Oaks

- Paved the entrance to Darby Bend Lakes and several parking lots.
- A trail was constructed crossing newly acquired land and connecting the Darby Bend Lakes and Sycamore Fields areas.
- Over 3,000 people visited a display developed for the Farm Science Review.
- Over 10,700 human and 6,000 canine visitors enjoyed the 3rd Annual WAG Festival in August.

Scioto Audubon

- 388 people attended the first winter hike.
- Grange Insurance Audubon Center opened in August.
- Constructed the largest outdoor climbing wall in America.

- Constructed an environmentally-friendly parking lot with bioswales, pervious pavement and other features to support the center.
- Created an educational wetland and boardwalk and built an observation deck overlooking the Scioto River. Observation decks were also constructed on the newly refurbished water tower.
- Initial phase of signage was installed and park personnel presence greatly increased.

- Seventy new trees were planted in picnic areas and other parts of the park.
- Petzinger Road trail crossing was completed.

Sharon Woods

- Attendance increased by 11 percent over 2008.
- Began using all green, environmentally-friendly cleaning products, recycling fluorescent light bulbs and deployed recycling containers at each picnic shelter for public use.
- Became a host site for Metro Parks' successful SEED program with Columbus City Schools.
- Two volunteers cleaned Spring Creek each week to keep it in pristine condition.
- Rangers patrolled the park and vehicle break-ins went from six in 2008 to one in 2009 due to increased interaction with the public, signage and use of "Crime Prevention" notices when rangers observed unlocked vehicles or purses and wallets sitting in visible locations. Rangers logged over 4,000 positive visitor contacts.

Slate Run

- Park continued to offer very well-attended programs including the Annual Fall Fest and Hayride/Hoe Down program.
- Fifty-six deer were taken during a controlled deer hunt, which included the complete closing of the park for two days.
- Attendance was up by six percent over 2008 and naturalist programs drew almost 14,000 people.

Three Creeks

- Program attendance was up 26 percent compared to 2008 with over 13,700 participants. A new program called "Float the Pond" was developed drawing over 180 visitors to paddle in Heron Pond.
- Main roadway to the Confluence Area and maintenance center parking lot were paved.

Metro Parks Attendance

Park	2009	2008	+/-	%
Battelle Darby Creek	759,400	705,500	53,900	+8%
Blacklick Woods	935,100	830,000	105,100	+13%
Blacklick Woods Golf Courses	49,700	52,100	-2,400	-5%
Blendon Woods	458,300	471,300	-13,000	-3%
Blendon Woods Camp	7,300	8,400	-1,100	-13%
Chestnut Ridge	172,000	223,800	-51,800	-23%
Glacier Ridge	254,400	254,900	-500	0%
Heritage Bike Trail	86,100	27,100	59,000	218%
Highbanks	921,700	814,400	107,300	+13%
Highbanks Camp	7,600	0	7,600	--
Inniswood	441,400	470,400	-29,000	-6%
Pickerington Ponds	231,000	233,200	-2,200	-1%
Prairie Oaks	469,900	381,800	88,100	+23%
Sharon Woods	808,100	726,900	81,200	+11%
Slate Run	227,700	214,600	13,100	+6%
Slate Run Camp	5,900	4,800	1,100	+23%
Slate Run Farm	54,700	52,800	1,900	+4%
Three Creeks	719,200	575,200	144,000	+25%
TOTALS	6,609,500	6,047,200	562,300	+9%

Attendance records are not available for Clear Creek

Finance

Funding

The majority of the money used to operate Metro Parks comes from property tax levied on Franklin County residents. The new 10-year, 0.75-mill levy, passed by voters in Franklin County, will provide income for capital and operating expenses as well as land acquisition.

Additional funding is derived from grants, donations, investments, state and local government funds, and from receipts of park operations.

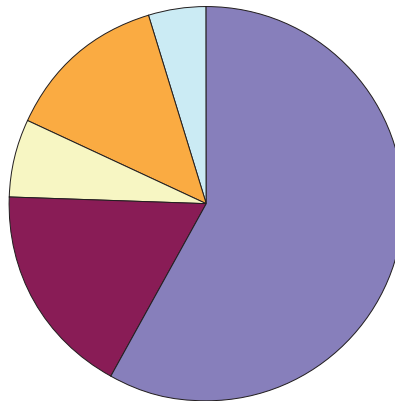
Blacklick Woods Golf Courses

Revenues	\$1,049,852
Personnel	\$810,145
Operating Expenditures	\$287,891
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	(\$48,184)

Revenues — 2009

Property Tax Levy	\$13,809,451
Land Government Funds	\$4,139,071
Local Acquisition Reimbursement	\$1,485,043
Government Grants	\$3,208,078
Income from Operations	\$601,066
Investment Income	\$67,119
Donations, Sponsors, Bequests	\$220,898
Miscellaneous	\$175,259

Total Revenues \$23,705,985



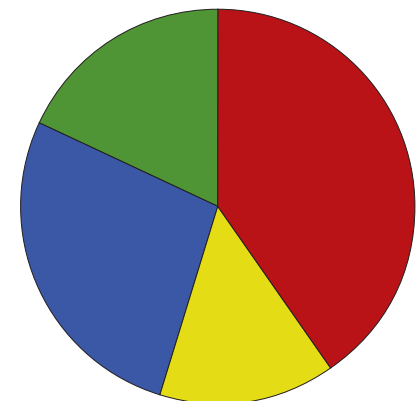
2009 Revenues

- Property Tax Levy (58.25%)
- Local Government Funds (17.5%)
- Land Acquisition Reimbursement (6.25%)
- Government Grants (13.5%)
- Other (4.5%)

Expenditures — 2009

Personnel	\$10,282,997
Operating Expenditures	\$3,680,166
Capital Improvements	\$6,985,034
Land Acquisition	\$4,536,699

Total Expenditures \$25,484,896



2009 Expenses

- Personnel (40.35%)
- Operating Expenses (14.45%)
- Capital Improvements (27.4%)
- Land Acquisition (17.8%)

Education & Outreach

Education Initiative

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide Central Ohio students with a positive, memorable environmental experience that supports the academic goals of school districts and provides teachers with resources to expand awareness of Metro Parks' natural and cultural resources.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Metro Parks offers a variety of one- to two-hour natural and cultural history pre-registered programs to students of all ages. Programs are available to classroom and youth group leaders for no charge. Metro Parks' staff work with groups at a park or at a school.

STUDENTS EXPLORING ECOSYSTEM DYNAMICS (SEED)

In 2009, Metro Parks served nearly 4,500 5th grade students from Columbus City, Westerville City, South-Western City and Groveport Madison school districts.

Community Outreach

- Conducted more than 4,000 programs attended by more than 200,000 people.
- **Metro Parks Explorer:** More than 850 patches were awarded.
- **Tram Tours:** Tram program attendance reached 6,829.
- **Heritage Nature Center:** Metro Parks naturalists conducted 37 public programs at the center in Groveport, attracting 842 participants.

Special Events

- **Winter Hike Series:** More than 8,000 visitors participated in 13 hikes through winter wonderlands in January and February.
- **Commit To Be Fit Hikes:** Ten autumn hikes were attended by more than 2,000 hikers.
- **WAG Fest:** A dog-friendly festival was held at the Darby Bend Lakes area of Prairie Oaks Metro Park on Saturday August 29. Attendance at this free event increased significantly on the previous year, to 10,700 visitors, with more than 6,000 of their doggy friends.
 - Central Ohio Folk Festival - Battelle Darby Creek (3,512 visitors)
 - Darby Creek Days - Battelle Darby Creek (1,032)
 - Blacklick Creek Celebration - Blacklick Woods (77 in a pouring rain)
 - Senior Shindig - Blacklick Woods (51)
 - Monarch Day - Blendon Woods (650)
 - Spooky Stories - Blendon Woods (85)
 - Bugstravaganza - Chestnut Ridge (431)
 - Green Family Fun - Glacier Ridge (171)

Ohio Solar Tour - Glacier Ridge (17)
Salamanders for Kids - Glacier Ridge (107)
Sunset Astronomy - Glacier Ridge (100)
Fall Fest - Slate Run (2,068)
Hayrides and Hoedown - Slate Run (510)
Three Creeks Fest - Three Creeks (491)
Children's Garden Day - Inniswood (175)
Halloween Party - Inniswood (321)
Birds of Prey - Pickerington Ponds (155)
25th Anniversary - Inniswood (132)
Sunday Solstice - Inniswood (100)

Summer Nature Adventure Camps

Metro Parks organized Nature Adventure Camps for the 13th year, offering 30 camps at seven Metro Parks. A total of 685 campers attended these one-week camps. Campers ranged in age from pre-school through 9th grade.

Passport to Metro Parks Program

Passport to Metro Parks was offered for the second time for the purposes of:

- a) Getting visitors to explore several Metro Parks at their own pace.
- b) Getting visitors to participate in many activities that Metro Parks offers in passive, active and educational forms.

A booklet of 30 questions and activities was developed and presented to the public in the form of a pocket-sized "passport." Distribution of the booklets began in June. The passport contained questions specific to every park (except Heritage Trail) and the rest of the questions

could be completed at nearly any park. In total, 2,900 passports and holders were handed out, 94 passports were turned in and 322 participants completed the program. Prizes were donated from a variety of agencies and from within the park system. Prizes included a Metro Parks lodge or shelter rental, a four-pack of COSI admission and extreme screen tickets, a membership to Franklin Park Conservatory, and two family admission packs to The Wilds. The program ran from June 1 through October 31.

Seniors

More than 3,770 seniors participated in a variety of programs for senior citizens.

IN-PARK PROGRAMS

More than 850 seniors enjoyed programs year-round in the parks. The first annual “Spring Fling” and “Senior Day at the Farm” programs were conducted. Metro Parks also hosted the first ever “Workshop for People Who Work With Seniors.” The Metro Parks Driving Tour program continued to be a success during its second year. Many other naturalist-led programs were held at various parks.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Understanding that not all seniors can travel to our parks, we bring the parks to them. Outreach naturalists provided programs for 130 groups during 2009, including seniors in long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, senior centers and other locations. Twenty-eight new senior facilities were visited this year.

SENIOR CAMP

More than 650 senior citizens attended a day of camp at Blacklick Woods in the fall. Seniors came from many of the LifeCare Alliance dining centers, Columbus Recreation and Parks senior centers, church groups and adult day care facilities. The campers enjoyed live animal programs, walks, fishing, crafts, nature bingo with prizes, tram rides around the park, lunch and meeting new friends.

BOO TO THE FLU

In partnership with LifeCare Alliance, Boo to the Flu programs were offered in two parks in October. More than 300 visitors of all ages came to the parks for their seasonal flu shot.

Nature Centers

- In 2009, Blacklick Woods nature center received 51,145 visitors, with 24,562 visitors at the Blendon Woods nature center and 43,706 visitors at the Highbanks nature center.

Volunteers

NATURALIST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

A total of 338 naturalist volunteers contributed more than 12,800 hours of time during the year at various parks.

INNISWOOD

Inniswood relies on its 300 volunteers for its day-to-day operations. Inniswood volunteers worked 12,000 hours in 2009. Twenty-eight volunteers recorded more than 100 hours each.

SLATE RUN FARM

In 2009, 41 dedicated, hardworking volunteers logged 2,788 hours.

Reserved Facility Use 2009

	# reservations	# people
Shelters	1,635	85,933
Lodges	1,116	40,450
Camps	265	11,137
TOTALS	3,016	137,520
Cash receipts	\$52,637	
Credit card receipts	\$149,759	
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$202,396	

Human Resources

We are very proud of the highly talented and dedicated team of employees at Metro Parks. In 2009, there were 151 full-time and 107 part-time employees engaged in providing park visitors with an educational, safe and enjoyable experience at the Metro Parks.

With a variety of skills and expertise, Metro Parks' employees play an important role in providing visitors with a better understanding of the need to preserve and conserve; creating a clean, safe and well-maintained environment; and providing the customer service and financial stewardship to offer the citizens of Central Ohio the best regional natural area park system possible.

Metro Parks continues to attract and retain highly skilled employees. Over 19 percent of Metro Parks' employees have been with the park district for more than 15 years and 11 percent have been employed over 20 years. Through professional development courses, recognition programs and health and wellness initiatives, employees are better able to develop and maintain skill levels, share ideas, perform in a team environment and enhance levels of service to park visitors.

Greenways

The Central Ohio Greenway trail system is an extensive network of recreational trails along our most valuable natural resources, connecting seven major stream corridors. In 2009 Metro Parks began discussions with the City of Columbus Parks and Recreation Department about the future of the Greenways system. These discussions will lead to an agreement in 2010 for Metro Parks to take over responsibility from the City for operations and maintenance of some portions of the Greenways network, including the Scioto and Olentangy River Trails, and parts of the Alum Creek Trail.

Also in 2009, Metro Parks completed construction of a 4.8-mile section of the Darby Creek Trail, from the Cedar Ridge area in Battelle Darby Creek, north to Broad Street (U.S. 40). This section of the trail was opened to the public in spring 2009. Metro Parks also completed a half-mile section of the Blacklick Creek Trail in 2009, connecting Blacklick Woods to Turnberry Golf Course. Construction of this short section of trail required the creation of underpasses beneath I-70 and Tussing Road.

Camp Chase Trail

In 2009, Metro Parks acquired 10 miles of easement along the active Camp Chase Railroad from Lilly Chapel in Madison County to Sullivant Avenue on the west side of Columbus. The easement will be utilized for construction of a 12-foot wide bike trail, to be called the Camp Chase Trail. Design and engineering plans were initiated in 2009 and construction of sections of the trail will begin in 2010. The Camp Chase Trail will become a segment of the Ohio to Erie Trail that will eventually link Cincinnati to Cleveland via a continuous off-road bikeway.

Resource Management

- Planted 125 trees in public use areas.
- Initiated reforestation efforts on approximately 165 acres.
- Controlled invasive plant species on approximately 300 acres.
- Completed a three-year Ohio EPA Habitat Restoration Project at Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park.
- Completed restoration projects related to WRRSP grants (Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program) at Battelle Darby Creek.
- Completed annual plant and animal surveys; continued to monitor a number of rare species including ospreys, barn owls, northern riffleshells and Indiana bats.
- Acquired two stimulus fund (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: ARRA) grants for habitat restoration at the new Walnut Woods Metro Park and along the Blacklick Creek Greenway.
- Completed prescribed burns on approximately 385 acres of park land.
- Completed over 900 acres of controlled succession mowing.

Donors

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Mr. & Mrs. Mark Benson
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Mr. & Mrs. Robert Berstler
Vivek Bettada & Friends
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Amy Witt
Mary Ann Wojton
Kath Wolfgangel
Devin Wyckoff, BSA Troop 0199

Alcott Elementary teachers
American Electric Power
BSA Troop 317
Buds to Bouquet
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Fayette County Master Gardeners
Anonymous through Fifth Third Bank
Five Star Quality Care, Inc
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National City Bank
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PNC Foundation
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David B. Owens Metropolitan Park Fund of
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Arthur E. Shepard Family of the Columbus
Foundation

Marian K. & Albert H. Thomas Fund of the
Columbus Foundation

Stewards of Metro Parks

The Stewards of Metro Parks, an all-volunteer organization working to enhance the programs and facilities of the Metro Parks, has grown to more than 40 members this year. They are working with staff on the introduction of bison at Battelle Darby Creek and hope to install an osprey platform near Scioto Audubon Metro Park.

For more information about this organization visit stewardsofmetroparks.org

About Metro Parks

Attracting over 6.6 million visitors in 2009, your Metro Parks are a vital asset to the social, cultural, environmental and economic health of Central Ohio. Metro Parks offer exceptional settings for renewal of the human spirit. Visitors can enjoy healthy, fun-filled interaction with the natural world at no cost every day of the year. Each year Metro Parks' naturalists offer over 4,000 free programs for individuals of all ages and abilities.

Established in 1945, under authority of Chapter 1545 of the Ohio Revised Code, Metro Parks has grown steadily. From woodlands to wetlands, prairies and streams, the park system has increased its holdings to 24,850 acres—operating 15 natural area parks.

In accordance with its mission, Metro Parks works to conserve and enhance habitat for the more than 2,300 species of animals and plants that thrive within the parks.

Funding for Metro Parks comes from a combination of real estate tax, local government funds, earned income, grants and partnerships.

For more information

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Information: 614.891.0700

Reservations: 614.508.8111 or www.metroparks.net

InfoLine: 614.508.8000

TTY: 614.895.6240

Metro Parks Headquarters

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Metro Parks Mission Statement

The Mission of Metro Parks is to conserve open spaces, while providing places and opportunities that encourage people to discover and experience nature.