

Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District

# METRO PARKS



*photo by Kim Graham*

## Annual Report 2011

# Director's Report

Metro Parks is making good progress on keeping the promises that we made to the community in concert with our 2009 park levy. Here's a quick review of the status of our major levy commitments and an acknowledgement of the challenges ahead. We are now in our third year of the 10-year levy period.

## We promised to create three new Metro Parks in Franklin County

### • Walnut Woods Metro Park

This new park between Canal Winchester and Groveport is nearing completion. Trails in the Tall Pines area of the park are open and more of the park will be open in 2012.

### • Rocky Fork Metro Park

We have acquired 649 acres for this park in northeast Franklin County and more is anticipated this year. The City of Columbus and the Village of New Albany have contributed funds for continued land acquisition efforts. The community planning process is complete. A parking area and some trails will be installed in 2012 to provide initial access to the property. Additional park improvements will be added in future years.

### • Scioto River near Grove City

So far, 432 acres have been acquired for this park with almost half of the acreage donated by Grove City. Planning for this park will commence after additional acreage is acquired.

## Other major commitments

### • Greenways

We have assumed management of the Greenways trail system in Columbus and have made numerous improvements. We have completed the bridge over US 33 and have constructed 10 miles of new trails, primarily along Blacklick Creek and the Ohio to Erie Trail corridors.

### • Scioto Audubon Metro Park

We have added new facilities at this new park near downtown

Columbus. We have acquired the former city impound lot and will complete remediation of the site in early 2012. New trails and park amenities will be added later in the year.

### • Education

We have instituted a significant increase in our programs for senior citizens. We now provide educational programs for every elementary school in Columbus Schools. The promised new nature center is under construction in Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park.

### • Wildlife habitat

We have restored almost 1,000 acres of wildlife habitat in the last two years. In 2011, numerous rare and endangered species nested on land in our parks that had been unsuitable habitat only a few years earlier. A wetland and forest restoration project will be completed in 2012 in the Morgan Run area of Prairie Oaks Metro Park.

## The challenges ahead

When we planned our goals for the 10-year levy period we anticipated funds from several sources that have since been reduced or eliminated. The State Legislature has passed legislation to eliminate half of our Local Government Funds, which will reduce our income by more than \$2 million per year. They also voted to undo a previous commitment to reimburse us for lost Tangible Personal Property taxes, which will cost us an additional \$1.2 million per year. Property values dropped an average of 6.5 percent in Franklin County, which is further reducing our income. The State has also stopped appropriating funds in the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, significantly reducing the amount of grant funds that would be available. These cuts will total over \$30 million in reduced income in the remaining years of our levy.

We understand that lots of people and organizations are suffering in these current economic conditions and that we all have



to make do with less income. With this loss of income we have to responsibly reduce expectations on what we will be able to accomplish in the next several years. This loss of \$30 million in previously anticipated income will affect the services that we provide to the community. We will not be able to complete the new parks as quickly as expected and the level of park improvements will be significantly reduced. We will need to consider other changes in order to balance our budget in future years.

We are making good progress on keeping our promises to the community and we intend to fulfill all of our commitments. However, we will need to scale back on planned improvements and make other adjustments in order to balance our budget in light of very significant funding cuts. We are working hard to maintain the high quality park experience that you have come to expect in the Metro Parks.

See you in the Metro Parks!

**John O'Meara**

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# Design & Visitor Services

## Battelle Darby Creek

- Brought six bison from The Wilds to their new permanent home in two enclosures at the park. More than 40,000 people came to see the herd
- Restored more than 400 acres of prairies and wetlands
- Began construction of a 14,000-sq-foot nature center
- Paved a 1.7-mile segment of the Camp Chase Trail between Wilson Road and Lilly Chapel

## Blacklick Woods and Golf Courses

- Made improvements on walkways, trails, the Ash Grove restroom and the Beech Maple Lodge
- Signed an agreement with The Morton Foundation to make Blacklick Woods Golf Courses the new home of Morty's Kids
- Transformed the back nine of the Green Course to become a full-length driving range, with a 30,000-square-foot practice green, three greenside practice bunkers, one fairway bunker and other practice facilities

## Blendon Woods

- Constructed "The Creek," a 50-foot-long artificial stream behind the Nature Center
- Identified more than 1,000 ash trees killed by the emerald ash borer and began to remove them

## Chestnut Ridge

- Opened a 7.5-mile mountain bike trail built by The Central Ohio Mountain Bike Organization (COMBO)
- Rebuilt two fishing docks with help from school students participating in the Columbus City Schools Intern Initiative.

## Clear Creek

- An Upper Arlington Boy Scout Troop constructed a bridge on the Creekside Meadows Trail
- The Division of Wildlife released 3,500 brown trout in Clear Creek

## Glacier Ridge

- Around 6,000 people participated in running, walking and bicycling events
- Two endangered species, Virginia rails and king rails, nested at the Glacier Ridge wetlands
- More than 3,100 people played the disc golf course and 360 riders used the bridle trail

## Heritage Park and Trail

- Signage was completed for display at the Amity Pike crossing and the Cemetery Pike trail head

## Highbanks

- Two eaglets fledged at the nest alongside the Olentangy River and more than 2,000 people attended nine Eagle Watch programs
- Partnered with Orange Township to build a 1.25-mile trail and a bridge
- An Eagle Boy Scout completed a project to renovate bird feeders and the viewing area at the Nature Center

## Inniswood

- Planted trees, repaired water features and installed new stone paths at The Secret Garden
- Repaired greenhouse and main line irrigation leaks

- Installed 8,850 spring bulbs, more than 4,000 annuals for summer display and 2,650 mums for the fall

## Pickerington Ponds

- Completed a bridge over US Route 33 to allow users to walk/run/bike from Three Creeks to Pickerington Ponds on the Blacklick Creek Greenway Trail
- An osprey pair fledged two young
- Bald eagles and sandhill cranes were seen at the park

## Prairie Oaks

- Installed benches along trails, sealed fencing and removed vegetation off property line fencing as part of coordinated Eagle Scout and community service projects
- Installed more than 400 Christmas trees as fish habitat in the Darby Bend Lakes area
- Acquired 100 acres of land to expand the button bush wetland habitat as part of the Morgan Run restoration project
- Stocked Darby Bend Lakes and Beaver Lake with 4,400 bass, 3,850 bluegill, 20 musky and over 20,000 minnows

## Scioto Audubon

- Removed invasive honeysuckle in the Boat Ramp area
- Cleaned up the old city impound lot with help from Rotary Club and community service groups
- More than 14,000 people attended the park to see the Red, White and Boom celebration
- Resurfaced the 1.2-mile stretch of The Scioto River Greenway Trail that runs through the park

## Sharon Woods

- Planted more than 200 trees in areas affected by emerald ash borer
- Students from The Ohio State University conducted several studies involving the collection of emerald ash borer larvae and the release of specialized parasitic wasps to feed on the larvae
- Installed three frost-free water fountains and leveled one of the fishing docks at Shcrock Lake

## Slate Run

- Organized a two-day invitation deer hunt to help manage overpopulation
- Hosted the Pelotonia finish line party and acted as a rest stop

## Three Creeks

- Treated Heron Pond for a toxic blue-green algae bloom in September
- Painted the shelter house and restrooms in the Confluence Trails Area

## Walnut Woods

- Renovated the park office and maintenance shop
- Built a parking lot and installed a program board and signage in the Tall Pines Area
- Constructed a restroom in the Buckeye Area and began construction of a roadway and two parking lots
- Trails for Fun volunteer kids assisted staff in removing weeds

## Greenways

- Opened a 2-mile extension of the Alum Creek Greenway Trail and a 2-mile extension of the Scioto River Greenway Trail

- Eighteen volunteers signed up for the Greenways volunteer program
- Mileage marker icons were installed every half-mile on a 4-mile section of the Alum Creek Trail and 13 miles of the Olentangy Trail
- Information signs were installed on all Greenway Trails

## Park Operations

- Rebanded all Metro Parks' 800-Mhz radios
- Issued 57 special event permits
- Held in-service training for maintenance staff to help improve their effectiveness in serving the public
- Focused on self-defense, incident command management, interviewing and legal updates for in-service training for ranger staff
- Entered into a collective bargaining agreement with the Fraternal Order of Police, Ohio Labor Council, Inc. (FOP/OLC). The FOP/OLC represents full-time ranger staff

## Resource Management

- Completed repairs and final grading to the 500-acre Darby Plains wetland built in 2010. The wet prairies have attracted 30 new species of birds to the Darby Creek area
- Restored five vernal pool wetlands and reforested 120 acres through a grant by the Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Controlled invasive plant species on approximately 300 acres of park land
- Planted over 350 trees in reforestation management and public use areas
- Established a monitoring protocol for primary headwater streams

- Several state endangered species used Metro Parks as breeding grounds including two pairs of nesting bald eagles, sandhill cranes, American bitterns and king rails
- Completed over 900 acres of controlled succession mowing
- Completed annual plant and animal surveys and continued to monitor rare species

## Design

- Began construction of a bridge across Blacklick Creek and an extension of the Blacklick Creek Greenway Trail which will complete the trail between Three Creeks and Blacklick Woods Metro Parks
- Completed most of the construction to widen the Alkire Road bridge over Big Darby Creek, which will connect the Camp Chase Trail from Georgesville to Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park

## Ranger Program

- Two rangers graduated from the Ohio Basic Police Academy
- Full-time rangers completed about 90 hours of law enforcement training
- Rangers wrote 225 incident reports, issued 54 court citations and 87 written warnings

## Columbus City Schools Intern Initiative

- Twenty-two interns from Columbus City Schools worked at 10 parks
- The total cost of the program was \$70,000, including salaries, transportation and uniforms. Interns worked on ground and facility maintenance, renovation projects, staining and painting, removal of invasive species, trail maintenance and clearing of fence lines. They also assisted staff during the summer nature adventure camps

# Finance

## Funding

The majority of the money used to operate Metro Parks comes from property tax levied on Franklin County residents. The 10-year, 0.75-mill levy, passed by voters in Franklin County in 2009, provides income for capital and operating expenses as well as land acquisition.

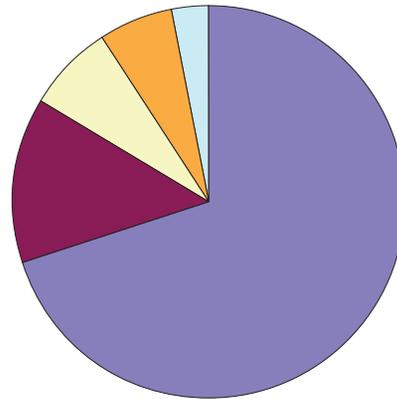
Additional funding is derived from grants, donations, investments, state and local government funds, and from receipts of park operations.

## 2011 Reserved Facility Use

	# of Reservations	# of people
Shelters	1,396	85,036
Lodges	709	31,487
Camps	226	16,343
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,331</b>	<b>132,866</b>
Cash Receipts		\$38,371.50
Credit Card Receipts		\$160,437.50
Total Receipts		\$198,809.00

## Revenues — 2011

Property Tax Levy	\$21,219,412
Local Government Funds	\$4,167,491
Government Grants	\$2,204,155
Government Partnerships	\$1,801,874
Income from Operations	\$531,960
Miscellaneous	\$301,775
Investment Income	\$45,103
Donations, Sponsors, Bequests	\$29,237
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$30,301,007</b>

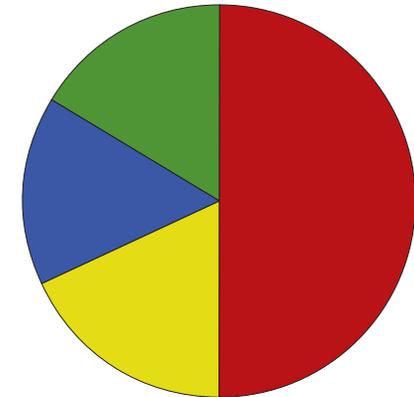


## 2011 Revenues

- Property Tax Levy (70.05%)
- Local Government Funds (13.75%)
- Government Grants (7.25%)
- Government Partnerships (5.95%)
- Other (3%)

## Expenditures — 2011

Personnel	\$11,291,941
Operating Expenditures	\$4,049,712
Capital Improvements	\$3,543,468
Land Acquisition	\$3,639,581
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$22,524,702</b>



## 2011 Expenses

- Personnel (50.1%)
- Operating Expenses (18%)
- Capital Improvements (15.75%)
- Land Acquisition (16.15%)

## Blacklick Woods Golf Courses

Revenues	736,305
Operating Expenditures	1,215,488
<b>Net Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>(479,183)</b>

# Education & Outreach

## 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.

## Students Exploring Ecosystems Dynamics (SEED)

More than 6,500 5th-grade students from all the Columbus City schools and the Groveport Madison schools, nine Westerville City schools, and one South-Western City school attended SEED. A new spring season of SEED allowed an additional 400 students to participate in the program.



Allison Shaw

## Metro Five-0

Launched a new initiative aiming programs at seniors, under the programming title Metro Five-0. All programs are labeled as level one through level four, indicating the degree of physical activity. The Metro Five-0 initiative and the levels system were explained in the Spring 2011 Parkscope.

## Community Outreach

- Presented 3,359 programs to groups of all ages, with more than 182,000 participants
- More than 97,500 school age students came out to Metro Parks for 1,600 school programs
- More than 18,200 preschoolers attended 460 public programs, with another 19,900 preschoolers attending 317 requested programs
- Around 470 pileated woodpecker patches were awarded to participants in the Metro Parks Explorer program
- Seven parks offered a total of 142 tram programs attended by 5,000 people
- Naturalists conducted 18 public programs at the Heritage Nature Center in Groveport, attracting 539 participants
- Naturalists and volunteers interacted with 16,875 people in picnic areas or on trails as part of the roving interpretation initiative

## Of special note

- Twenty bison programs were held at Battelle Darby Creek, attended by 2,238 people. At Blendon Woods, 3,392 people participated in 60 monarch programs

## Special Events

- **Winter Hike Series:** More than 11,300 visitors participated in 13 hikes in January and February
- **Commit To Be Fit Hikes:** Ten autumn hikes were attended by more than 2,500 hikers
- **Central Ohio Folk Festival** - Battelle Darby Creek (2,822 visitors)
- **Darby Creek Day** - Battelle Darby Creek (1,811 visitors)
- **Blacklick Creek Celebration** - Blacklick Woods (175 visitors)
- **WAG Fest** - Prairie Oaks (12,000 people & 7,000 dogs)
- **Monarch Day** - Blendon Woods (600 visitors)
- **Spooky Stories** - Blendon Woods (65 visitors)
- **Children's Garden Day** - Inniswood (189 visitors)
- **The Halloween Party** - Inniswood (433 visitors)
- **Music in the Garden Series** - Inniswood (782 visitors)
- **Wellness in the Garden Series** - Inniswood (725 visitors)
- **Fall Fest** - Slate Run (1,603 visitors)
- **Hayrides and Hoedown** - Slate Run (489 visitors)
- **Three Creeks Fest** - (497 visitors)
- **Plein Air (Outdoor Artist)** - Highbanks (Over 1,000 visitors)

## Summer Nature Adventure Camps

Six Metro Parks hosted 31 week-long nature adventure camps, with 689 participants ranging in age from pre-school through 9th grade.

## Seniors

More than 3,700 people participated in programs for senior citizens.

### OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Understanding that not all seniors can travel to our parks, we bring the parks to them. Outreach naturalists provided programs for 142 groups, attended by 3,127 seniors, including seniors in long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, senior centers and other locations.

### SENIOR CAMP

More than 700 senior citizens attended one of the 13 days of camp at Blacklick Woods in 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.

## Nature Centers

Blacklick Woods nature center received 43,145 visitors, with 26,191 visitors at Blendon Woods nature center and 46,979 visitors at Highbanks nature center.

## Volunteers

### NATURALIST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

More than 25,798 hours of time were worked by 365 naturalist volunteers throughout the park system.

### INNISWOOD

Inniswood's 300 volunteers worked 11,801 hours. Twenty-eight volunteers worked more than 100 hours each.

### SLATE RUN FARM

The Farm's 40 dedicated, hardworking volunteers, often with their families helping, logged 2,781 hours. Six worked more than 100 hours.

# Park Attendance

Park	2011	2010	+/-	%
Battelle Darby Creek	723,742	742,539	-18,797	-3%
Blacklick Woods	818,705	918,485	-99,780	-11%
Blacklick Woods Golf Courses	37,801	44,159	-6,358	-14%
Blendon Woods	437,839	460,361	-22,522	-5%
Blendon Woods Camp	8,032	7,865	167	+2%
Chestnut Ridge	162,597	168,602	-6,005	-4%
Clear Creek	12,700	0	12,700	n/a
Glacier Ridge	239,669	249,705	-10,036	-2%
Heritage Park & Trail	39,093	88,320	-49,227	-56%
Highbanks	954,404	963,467	-9,063	-1%
Highbanks Camp	13,873	18,249	-4,376	-24%
Inniswood	504,128	560,637	-56,509	-10%
Pickerington Ponds	264,131	270,152	-6,021	-2%
Prairie Oaks	405,994	433,511	-27,517	-6%
Scioto Audubon	531,622	n/a	531,622	n/a
Sharon Woods	711,158	841,095	-129,937	-15%
Slate Run	217,434	244,938	-27,504	-11%
Slate Run Camp	3,417	4,255	-838	-20%
Slate Run Farm	52,970	59,339	-6,369	-11%
Three Creeks	699,541	779,173	-79,632	-10%
Walnut Woods	4,895	0	4,895	n/a
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6,843,745</b>	<b>6,854,852</b>	<b>-11,107</b>	<b>+4%</b>

\* Attendance records were not available for Clear Creek and Scioto Audubon in previous years

# The 2011 figure for Clear Creek includes only the last five months of the year

## Human Resources

The Metro Parks team is comprised of a highly talented and dedicated staff of 164 full-time, 117 part-time and approximately 50 interns/seasonal employees. Metro Parks' employees are equipped with a variety of skills and expertise that provide visitors with a clean, safe and well-maintained environment. Employees are highly trained and play an important role in educating the public of the need to preserve and conserve, providing the best customer service to visitors, as well as serving as good financial stewards of public funds.

In 2011, Human Resources invested significant time in enhancing its operations with programs such as HR in the Parks, team-based interviewing, and the employee recognition system. Community outreach was also part of the year's agenda and Metro Parks and the Columbus City Schools continued their collaborative effort in providing job opportunities and training through internships and job shadowing programs for high school children.

## Information Technology

- Investigated the question of migrating our e-mail and intra-net services for employees to Google Apps for Business. We ran a month-long trial, with 15 employees, representing a cross-section of the Metro Parks staff, working in the Google Apps environment. The overwhelmingly positive response, and the cost considerations, led us to decide to migrate all Metro Parks users to Google Apps at the beginning of 2012.
- Completed installation of some form of high-speed internet at all of our locations where staff use computers. Some of these involved linking buildings within a park so that users in several offices could share a single high-speed link to the internet. In several cases, we were able to eliminate extra phone lines used for dialup internet access, offsetting much or all of the costs of the new high-speed internet service.
- Maintained our computer hardware well enough to get more than six years' use out of many workstations and servers. We have one server over 10 years old in a minor role, and quite a few computers older than six years doing light duty for staff members who increasingly use computers to maintain records, prepare reports, access the internet to do research, or to make cost comparisons before making purchases of supplies and equipment.

## Geographic Information System (GIS)

In 2011 Metro Parks GIS developed an implementation plan outlining long-term movement toward web map services for public use, park dispatch, resource management, planning, etc. New trail, facility, roadway, signage and other park data, collected with GPS technology, was generated for Pickerington Ponds, Chestnut Ridge and Scioto Audubon, while existing data for other parks was refined in preparation for future web service launch.

GIS played a pivotal role in the community advisory process and development of a concept master plan for the new Rocky Fork Metro Park. The technology was also used to create materials for educational exhibits at the Battelle Darby Creek Nature Center.

In 2011, a group of Columbus State Community College interns and skilled volunteers donated a total of 1,228 hours to Metro Parks GIS, working to help refine data, perform census studies and update GIS resources from external agencies. GIS generated maps were used for natural resource restoration and study, grant funding, land acquisition, capital improvement, asset management, public planning meetings, board meetings, educational displays and press releases.

## Public Information

- This past year social media played an increasingly significant role in the way we communicate. The various social media platforms, particularly Facebook, allowed Metro Parks to interact with a wider community, listen more carefully to our visitors, and have a more instantaneous communication that could not be conveyed with traditional print publications that have tight deadlines.

 7,978 Fans  1,402 Followers  8,055 Video Views

- Produced 800,000 copies of Parkscope in four issues, distributed in parks, in a Wednesday edition of The Columbus Dispatch and through a Metro Parks mailing list.
- Issued monthly Electronic Newsletters to more than 2,500 registered readers.
- Coordinated a Metro Parks presence on WBNS-10TV, including a half-hour Metro Parks program broadcast in prime time.
- Updated park brochures for eight of the parks (240,000 copies), plus 50,000 All Parks brochures.

# Donors

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Inniswood Volunteers  
Major Taylor Cycling Club  
McGraw Hill Community Partners Employee Camp.  
Norton Rd. Veterinary Hospital  
OCVN Hocking Hills  
Ohio Cheviot Breeders Assn.  
Photo Nuts  
Rotary Club of Columbus  
Stewards of Metro Parks  
Schwab Charitable Fund  
Wild Ones - Columbus Chapter

## **The Columbus Foundation Funds**

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Doug Kridler Fund  
The Morton Foundation Fund  
David B. Owens - Metropolitan Park Fund  
Arthur E. Shepard Family Fund  
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# About Metro Parks

Attracting almost seven-million visitors in 2011, 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 more than 26,000 acres—operating 16 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.

## Metro Parks Headquarters

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Westerville, OH 43081

E-mail: [info@metroparks.net](mailto:info@metroparks.net)

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Reservations: 614.508.8111

InfoLine: 614.508.8000

TTY: 614.895.6240

**WEB:** [www.metroparks.net](http://www.metroparks.net)

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 [twitter.com/CbusMetroParks](http://twitter.com/CbusMetroParks)

 [www.youtube.com/  
CbusMetroParks](http://www.youtube.com/CbusMetroParks)

## 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.

For more information about the Stewards visit [stewardsofmetroparks.org](http://stewardsofmetroparks.org)

## 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.