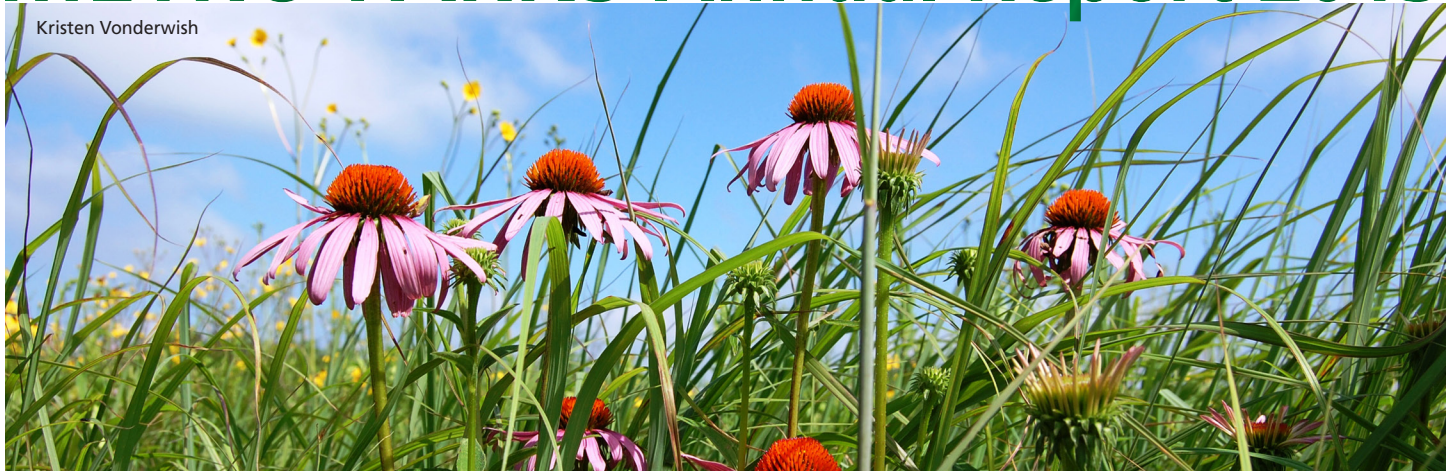


METRO PARKS Annual Report 2013

Kristen Vonderwish



Director's Report

The primary source of funding for Metro Parks is a 10-year tax levy that was approved by the voters of Franklin County in May 2009. Now, five years later, we have reached the halfway point in the levy cycle and it is time to evaluate our progress on the commitments we made in 2009.

The downturn in the economy and decisions by state political leaders contributed to slower progress towards the goals that we established. In 2014 we will have 21 percent less revenue than we did in 2010. The reduction in income forced us to streamline our operations and scale back planned improvements. Nonetheless, with the assistance of grants and funding from partners, we are still making significant progress towards our goals for the community. Here's a quick review of the status of our major levy commitments.

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

- **Walnut Woods Metro Park.** This new park opened in 2013 with a variety of facilities and a long trail system. Additional trails will be completed in early 2014. Extensive wildlife habitat and water quality improvements have been completed. Check out this beautiful new park.
- **Rocky Fork Metro Park.** Over 1,000 acres have been acquired for this park in northeast Franklin County. Funds for continued land acquisition efforts have been contributed by the City of Columbus and the Village of New Albany, while Plain Township is contributing funds for park facilities. The park will open in autumn 2014 after completion of the first phase of park improvements.
- **Scioto River near Grove City.** We have acquired 620 acres for this park that extends for two miles along the Scioto River. Planning will commence in 2014 with plans to complete initial park facilities in 2015.

Other major commitments:

- **Clean, Safe Parks.** Always our top priority, your Metro Parks set the standard for quality outdoor activities, beautiful natural areas, and safe, rewarding experiences. We remained focused on providing a safe and enjoyable system of parks, trails and conservation areas.
- **Greenways and Trails.** We are managing the Greenways trail system in Columbus and the rural portions of Franklin County and have made numerous improvements. We have constructed more than 15 miles of new trails, primarily along Blacklick Creek and the Ohio to Erie Trail corridors and in Walnut Woods Metro Park. By the end of 2014 avid bicyclists will be able to ride from western Columbus to the outskirts of Cincinnati on the Ohio to Erie Trail. Planning is underway to extend the Olentangy Greenway Trail up to Highbanks Metro Park.
- **Scioto Audubon Metro Park.** We have completed this park near downtown with support from Columbus and many partners. The Grange Insurance Audubon Center continues to draw a diverse audience, and challenging equipment has been added for outdoor activities. A former eyesore near downtown has been transformed into a fabulous asset for our city.
- **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. A new nature center was opened in Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park overlooking the bison herd.
- **Wildlife Habitat.** We have restored 1,800 acres of wildlife habitat in these five years. Rare and endangered species are nesting on land in our parks that had been unsuitable habitat only a few years earlier. We have become the statewide leader in habitat restoration. These restored habitat areas provide great opportunities for visitors to observe wildlife in natural settings while improving water quality for everyone.

Many of our successes would be impossible without the dedication of our volunteers, the life blood of Metro Parks. More than 750 people contribute their time, energy and talents in a number of critical roles—monitoring trails and other public areas of parks for safety, assisting with nature programs and resource management tasks, helping with horticulture and interpreting the past for visitors to Slate Run Living Historical Farm.

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.

BOARD MEMBERS

Greg S. Lashutka

Jim McGregor

J. Jeffrey McNealey

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

John R. O'Meara

About the Parks

- The Columbus Rotary Obstacle Course and Running Track opened at Scioto Audubon, featuring nine challenging stations, along with shelters and restroom.
- Opened the Buckeye Area at Walnut Woods, which features a 4-acre dog park, picnic area, kids play area and two miles of trails.
- A four-year-old male bison from The Wilds joined the herd of six females at Battelle Darby Creek, with the hope that baby bison will become a new attraction in 2014.
- Around 7.5-million visitors came to the parks.
- Eighteen full-time rangers and 54 part-time rangers ensured visitor safety and helped protect park resources by patrolling on foot, bikes and vehicles.
- WiFi is now available at our four nature centers and three lodges, helping visitors to connect with social media and the internet.
- Opened the 4-acre Heritage Trail Dog Park in partnership with the City of Hilliard.
- Blacklick Woods Golf Courses became the home to the First Tee of Central Ohio, a national youth development program that teaches life skills and leadership through the game of golf.
- The parks hosted numerous special events, including Red, White & Boom, WAG Festival, Flying Feather 5K runs, Winter and Commit To Be Fit hikes.

Land acquisition

- Metro Parks added 109 acres of land, taking the total of its managed natural areas to 27,174 acres. A grant of more than \$800,000 from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund provided 55 percent of the purchase price for 94 acres at Rocky Fork Metro Park.

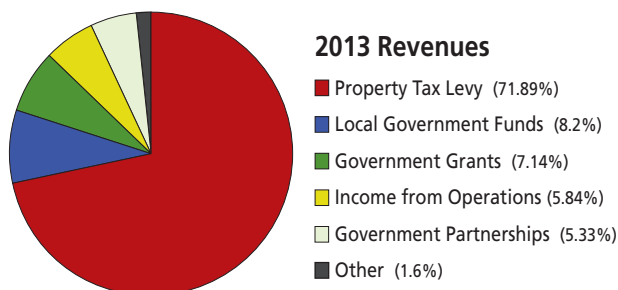
Education

- Park naturalists led 1,455 public programs and 2,309 school programs, with more than 187,000 participants.
- More than 7,000 kids from City of Columbus, Westerville, Groveport-Madison and South-western City schools participated in SEED (Students Exploring Ecosystems Dynamics).
- A total of 630 kids participated in our 30 Summer Nature Adventure Camps.
- Metro Parks' Columbus City Schools Intern Initiative provided work experience to 22 high school students on an 8-week training course.

Resource Management

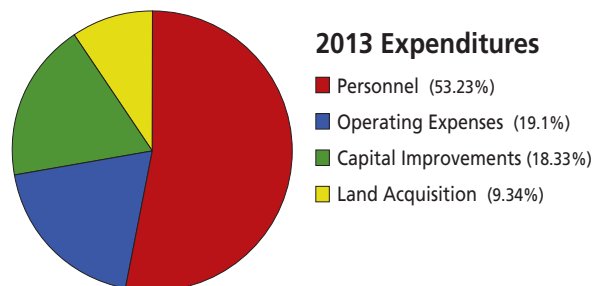
- Planted more than 220 acres of new prairie using seeds native to the Darby Plains.
- Conducted controlled burns on 120 acres of prairie to improve habitat for new growth and help curtail non-native plants.
- Planted 250 burr oaks at the Kuhlwein Road wetlands in Battelle Darby Creek.

Financial



Revenues — 2013

Property Tax Levy	\$19,331,920
Local Government Funds	\$2,202,874
Government Grants	\$1,919,858
Income from Operations	\$1,570,337
Government Partnerships	\$1,435,000
Miscellaneous	\$280,364
Donations, Sponsors, Bequests	\$132,181
Investment Income	\$17,952
Total Revenues	\$26,890,485



Expenditures — 2013

Personnel	\$12,304,913
Operating Expenses	\$4,413,828
Capital Improvements	\$4,237,599
Land Acquisition	\$2,158,644
Total Expenditures	\$23,114,984