

A Commitment to Conservation

Nearly half a century ago, citizens of Lake County – concerned with the rapid rate the county was developing – petitioned the Probate Court to create a park district. Lake Metroparks was established in 1958, under the authority of the Ohio Revised Code Chapter 1545 – the conservation chapter that provides guidelines for creating park districts. Across the state of Ohio there are over 30 park districts or metropark systems.

The park districts in Ohio represent a collection of new, developing, and mature park systems. The oldest park district is the Cleveland Metroparks, which was created in 1917. Where Cleveland Metroparks presently owns more than twenty thousand acres, several of the newer or fledgling park districts are just beginning to acquire lands and resources. And efforts are currently underway in other Ohio counties to create new park districts.

Whatever their age and developmental status, these park districts are all political subdivisions of the state and empowered by the Ohio Revised Code to acquire land for the conservation of Ohio's natural resources. Lake Metroparks' commitment to conservation is manifested in three major ways.

First – and foremost – is preservation of open space and natural areas. Since 1958, Lake Metroparks has been protecting acreage across Lake County. The first property acquired was a gift of land, which became Helen Hazen Wyman Park. Since that time, the park system has used the tools of land purchases, donations, and conservation easements and lease management agreements to grow to nearly six thousand acres of land and water.

Our second commitment to conservation is wise land use and facility development. Lake Metroparks has carefully developed areas within its parklands that provide for the public use of these areas through recreation and educational opportunities. These facilities are generally designed to accommodate low-impact recreation activities – such as hiking and picnicking – which are compatible with sound environmental conservation. Park improvements and facilities also support the extensive environmental education and recreational programming the park system provides. It is through these activities and accessibility that Lake County residents and visiting park patrons can enjoy the out-of-doors and Lake County's wonderful natural resources.

Park improvements are carefully made to enhance unique natural features and resources, or implemented in areas where environmental impacts are limited. Some facilities have been purchased specifically to meet recreational or educational objectives that are compatible with the agency's mission of open space preservation and the provision of recreation opportunities.

The third primary way Lake Metroparks fulfills its conservation mission is through conscientious natural resource management. More than eighty percent of Lake Metroparks properties are non-developed natural areas. Some of these areas are representative of Ohio's highest quality natural habitats.

Parklands are carefully inventoried, and biological, historical and geological features are recorded and mapped. Habitats are evaluated for quality and diversity. Management strategies

are developed and employed to protect existing conditions or to improve their biological value. These management strategies generally involve controlling succession or controlling non-native invasive plants. Mowing, cutting and planting techniques are most often used to control succession, and a variety of approaches are used to control non-native invasive plant species. Planting food, or cover crops, is a practice used to improve habitats. This technique can be effective in controlling invasive exotic plants as well.

In certain instances, wetlands have been created or enhanced in areas where this was both practical and cost effective. With great care, stream-scapes have modified through bioengineering techniques to control erosion or to improve aquatic habitats.

Lake Metroparks has a long history of installing and maintaining nesting structures for a number of animal species. Staff and park volunteers closely monitor the use and effectiveness of these structures. For nearly ten years, the agency has measured the presence and effects of certain animals within the parks. Gypsy moth traps, deer browse enclosures, and salamander traps have all been utilized and carefully evaluated to help provide an indication of the quality and environmental health of the Lake Metroparks. If you should happen upon any of these resource management practices while visiting a park, and are interested in additional information on the desired project outcome or objective, please don't hesitate to call (440) 639-7275. Staff will be happy to answer your questions, and perhaps even provide you with an opportunity to help fulfill the park system's conservation mission.

Through its commitment to natural resource management and stewardship, Lake Metroparks is working to demonstrate a successful balance of preserving natural areas and open space, while providing public access to – and fostering appreciation for – parklands. In addition to providing recreational and educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of visitors, the park district also provides and protects habitat for plant and animal species that are endangered, threatened, or potentially threatened in the state of Ohio. Unique approaches to public use, resource management, and conservation define and distinguish Lake Metroparks.