

# The "Big One"

By Tom Adair, Natural Resource Manager

What began the night of Thursday, July 27, 2006 and peaked through the early hours of July 28 became one of Lake County's most sustained 48-hour rain events and one of the biggest floods in the county's recorded history. The flood's impact became apparent almost immediately as news, photos and video spread throughout the region and the nation. Whole homes, vehicles and roads washed away in the pre-dawn hours and by morning we had a stunning view of the damage left behind by Lake County's own "big one."

The damage left immediate as well as long-term impact on individuals, businesses, municipalities and local government without discrimination. Lake Metroparks was not immune and could not escape the flood's power. As staff set out to survey the damage left behind, it quickly became evident that this was the single largest damaging event that Lake Metroparks has ever faced.

Along with county residents, park operations crews quickly realized that many roads had been obliterated by the flood and were impassible. Simply finding ways into some of the parks had become difficult if not unlikely for days to follow. Areas that were accessible were surveyed and prioritized so that work could begin as soon as safely possible. Considerations had to be made for safely negotiating access into still-flooded parks and for accumulated river silt that may have been permeated with sewer and septic effluent.

As restoration efforts began throughout the parks, more impacts were unmasked that revealed the true scale of damage wrought by the flooding. Signs had been heaved from concrete bases. Benches, gates and portable restrooms were ripped out of the ground and floated down temporary flood channels. Most of the trash receptacles and picnic tables at heavily affected parks were washed into nearby woods, out into stream channels and out into Lake Erie. Once grassy landscapes had become silt covered, barren "moonscapes." Pavilions and water fountains were submerged during the flooding and buried in silt after the waters receded.

The damage to structures was obvious with each visit to affected parks. What was less obvious at first would become one of the most impacted



*Repair of a damaged bridge at Girdled Road Reservation*



*A displaced picnic table at Hidden Valley Park*



*Inspection of eroded trail at Hogback Ridge Park*

park attributes: the well traveled and widely used trail system. Miles of trail were washed away, cut down and in some places dug completely out. It became discouragingly apparent that the loss of tons of gravel and stone would be among the most flood-damaged park amenities. Some sections of trail had become temporary flood channels acting as overflows for swollen creeks and streams. Other trail areas had been washed over by the Grand River and left buried with almost no sign they had ever even been there. Major rain events and minor flooding had impacted sections of trails before this storm but never on this scale.

Restoration of heavily damaged parks began within days of floodwater recession and persisted for months – and these recovery efforts will continue for the foreseeable future. Hard work and financial assistance have resulted in reopened parks, repaired tables, benches and trash containers and newly sodded play fields. Many hours of power washing, silt removal, structure repair and construction, soil grading and seeding, hazardous tree removal, trail repair, and bridge and culvert replacement mark the start of a rebound from the devastating effects of the “big one.”

Lake Metroparks continues to work hard to restore flood-ravaged park areas to the safe, clean and fun places they once were. In coming years, the damage inflicted by the flood will be increasingly harder to notice as repairs are made, memories of the flood fade and park goes continue to picnic, hike, play and enjoy the many parks in Lake County.



*Aylworth Creek at  
Girdled Road Reservation*



*Seeley Road at  
Indian Point Park*



*Hidden Valley Park parking lot*