

TOGETHER

WE ARE



A DIFFERENT KIND OF YEAR

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



STARK PARKS

TOGETHER WE ARE A PARK



It was a pleasure to serve the residents of Stark County as the president of the Board of Commissioners for the past 5 years. I end my term on a bittersweet note. 2020 was a year no one will forget and while it kept us apart, it also connected us. For some, it brought fear, instability, and chaos. For others, it brought more time for reflection and family. For all of us, it brought separation and limited ways to stay connected to each other. Because of this, more people used parks and trails and Stark Parks has never felt MORE connected to our communities. Park staff had to get creative to find ways to make sure everyone in Stark County still had an opportunity to enjoy Stark Parks. It was more important than ever - especially with those who couldn't get out. FeLeap made appearances on trails and from parking lots, our animal ambassadors went to nursing and assisted living facilities for window visits, and of course Zoom helped us get into homes throughout the county. So even though we all felt separated, together we are (and stayed) a park!

Thank you Stark County!
Andrew Hayden, Chair

2020 Board of Commissioners

Denise Freeland, Vice Chair
William Bryan ● Patricia Quick ● Ralph Dublikar

2021 Board of Commissioners

Denise Freeland, Chair ● William Bryan, Vice Chair
Ralph Dublikar ● Patricia Quick ● David Regula



Legend



Trails



Parks

1-14 Towpath Trailheads

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Canal Bend | 10. Crystal Springs |
| 2. Craig Pittman | 11. Butterbridge Rd. |
| 3. Wooster St. | 12. Lock 4 |
| 4. John Glenn Grove | 13. St. Helena Heritage Park |
| 5. Massillon Rec. Center | 14. Lake Lucerne |
| 6. Lake Ave | |
| 7. Towpath Court | |
| 8. Bridgeport Quarry | |

Trail & Greenway System

(as of 1.23.2020)

Leased Acreage: 6,458.48

Owned Acreage: 1,885.54

Conservation Easements: 224.12

.....
129.39 miles of shared trail

41.41 miles of equestrian trails



Map is not to scale.

'20 HIGHLIGHTS & ENHANCEMENTS

In 2020, a spike in park users only increased the need for continued maintenance and improvements. Trail usage saw an increase of 215% (as of May 2020) and trails and parks were busier than ever. The park was able to partner with various community organizations to complete notable projects to improve parks and trails across the county.

Together with the [City of Massillon](#), [Massillon Parks and Recreation](#), and [Massillon Area Greenways Inc. \(MAGI\)](#), we were able to [blacktop a high maintenance portion of the Towpath Trail](#) in Massillon, improving the trail for years to come!

The parks partnered with [Cleveland Area Mountain Bike Association \(CAMBA\)](#) to build a bridge on the [mountain bike trail at Quail Hollow](#), improving the trail for riders as well as making it easier for maintenance equipment to access the trail.

The parks partnered with a generous donor to build a [boardwalk across a wet area on the trail at Quail Hollow](#) improving access to the trail.

With cooperation from the [City of Alliance](#) and the [University of Mount Union](#), we completed the final connection of [the Iron Horse Trail](#) between the campus and Earley's Hill Park to the Mahoning Valley Trail for a continuous system.

With a generous donation from a private donor, Stark Parks was able to [blacktop a portion of the Sippo Lake Trail](#) by the Exploration Gateway at the north entrance.

Partnering with the [City of Canal Fulton](#), we were able to remove debris from the canal, allowing [improved canal boat travel](#).



(CONTINUED) HIGHLIGHTS & ENHANCEMENTS

Working with **Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD)**, we were able to remove debris from the **Aqueduct Bridge** allowing free flow of water and reducing additional debris collecting under the bridge.

Year-round, crews installed benches, trees, memorial bricks, bridges, boardwalks, and bike fix-it stations that celebrate people and life events they cherish.

We acquired the 200-acre **nature preserve**, which includes category 3 wetlands. Public access is prohibited to protect this land and species.

Moving into 2021!

We received the occupancy permit for the Fry Family Park Visitor Center.

We're moving toward the tour group circulation and exhibit design for the Magnolia Flouring Mills with to a State Capital Grant.

We entered into a design contract for the Fulton Road Tunnel, in partnership with **Jackson Township** and the **Jackson Local School District**. Construction is slated for early 2022.

Accomplishments by Numbers

Crews worked to hard-surface (blacktop or chip and seal) 5 miles of trail on 8 different trails AND resurfaced 9 miles of limestone on several trails throughout the county.



HEALTH (MENTAL & PHYSICAL)

Limiting personal contact and self-isolating took a major toll on so many people, pushing mental health to the forefront of many conversations. Despite stay-at-home orders and 6-ft separations, parks and trails were able to remain open and were a great source for physical AND mental release. Even though staff weren't able to provide our typical year of hikes and fitness-focused programming, park usage was up over 200%! More people were hitting the trails than ever. And we, as a park system, were able to get out to many who couldn't come to the parks, bringing smiles to local senior residents with our animal ambassadors.

The **Mindfulness Trail at Petros Lake Park** was created for trying times in a person's life and we encouraged people to use it during the pandemic. This trail is inspired specifically to create mental relief with stations designed by health experts. Each station allows for a different way to connect and release stress and tension. Stark Parks encourages anyone to take advantage of the peacefulness of this trail.

Stark Parks ended the year (and began the winter season) with a **Hygge campaign**. This campaign was a reminder to focus on things that make you happy. We know with colder weather coming, fewer people will be getting outside and the winter blahs will be creeping in. To help combat cabin fever, we highlighted ways people can bring in warmth and coziness into their lives without leaving their homes, including **giving away a few Stark Parks custom scene puzzles and mugs for warm beverages.**



CUSTOMER SERVICES



If 2020 goals could be summed up in one word, that word would be “service.” Rather than the focus being on dollars and cents, the Enterprises Department strove to serve park patrons in a more personal way. By taking the concept of SERVICE to heart, we were able to accommodate Stark County residents’ needs in new and unique ways.

Marinas were opened on a limited basis, and though the staff was unable to rent equipment due to restrictions with person-to-person contact, we were available to offer snacks, drinks, and bait. More importantly, the staff was available to offer a friendly face and an ear to listen. Despite limitations, Walborn Reservoir and Sippo Lake Marinas were still able to bring in over \$7,175 during the season.

Rental facilities were also in a state of flux, yet we were able to continue to meet many guests’ needs. It was our ultimate goal to help make that special day even more memorable for each of our parties. Wedding arrangements were often altered, scaling a large wedding into a smaller one or swapping an indoor setting for an outdoor ceremony with a view. Overall, facilities and shelter rentals continued to make over \$16,775 with alternative planning and can-do attitudes.



CUSTOMER SERVICES



The Lily Pad Gift Shop located within Exploration Gateway remained closed a large portion of the year. With our commitment to customer service, some out-of-the-box thinking, and advertising on the Stark Parks web-page, Facebook postings and mentions in our quarterly newsletter, the gift shop was able to take in nearly \$8,500. To meet physical distancing requirements and minimize person-to-person contact, a curbside pickup system was adopted to meet guests safely while remaining in their vehicle.



2020 was certainly a challenging year, but the Enterprises Department rose to the occasion and continued to provide Stark County residents and all park patrons with a safe, quality experience.



PUBLIC SAFETY

Parks and trails flourished with a surge in usage and the Stark Parks Public Safety Department continued to patrol, as usual, through a variety of methods, including ATVs, bikes, and boats. The rangers also hosted several successful (contactless) annual events including “Catfish with a Cop” in July and “Ranger for a Day” in September.

2020 was a year of focusing on safety and etiquette with a year-long radio, print, and signage campaign with reminders to trail and park users to follow rules and regulations to make everyone’s visit safe and enjoyable.

Patrol hours in 2020 totaled 19,060 hours. This is a slight 0.01% decrease from 2019.

2020 arrests totaled 157, an increase of 302% from 2019. The majority of these arrests being criminal trespassing.

2020 written warnings totaled 157, a decrease of 29% from 2019.

2020 verbal warnings totaled 404, a decrease of 56% from 2019.



COVID COMMUNICATION



The COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing has limited our ability to speak person-to-person as well as in larger group settings. But with the increase in usage and the continued changes of many services, communication was (and continues to be) more important than ever. Signage and preemptive social media communication was key to helping users prepare for their visit, remain comfortable using the park system, and keep us connected to our users. We received record-number of photos and messages that showed how our visitors were enjoying their adventures. On-trail signage was used to remind people of physical distancing and closures, as well as simple reminders on personal hygiene recommendations. Media, such as newsletters, news releases, and special radio campaigns with these reminders was implemented throughout the spring. The summer reminders transitioned into two print and radio campaigns, "Hidden Gems" and "Your Adventure Awaits," highlighting lesser-used parks and trails to help minimize congestion at more popular trails.



SAFETY & ETIQUETTE

The increase in park users created a hurdle for Stark Parks to provide a quality experience for everyone. New park visitors with limited knowledge of trail safety and etiquette began to cause a small rumble among regular trail users. Stark Parks jumped on this quickly. While safety and etiquette reminders are standard in spring media as warm weather often brings out excitement with our users, this year was different. To help educate new users, the spring and summer COVID media campaigns were transitioned into safety and etiquette in parks and trails. Using similar formatting, printed pieces (such as brochures and signs) reinforced some of the more common regulations, such as litter and pooch control and include personal safety messages with reminders to be aware of your surroundings. Ranger contact information was also added to encourage users to add the information into their phones before hitting the trails. Social media reminders were scheduled and the fall radio campaign also highlighted these tips to help make everyone's visit enjoyable. In the fall, an on-trail signage campaign was implemented to get straight to the user. Overall, most comments were favorable and volunteer Trailblazers made several notes, seeing a noticeable increase in trail and park courtesy.



COMMUNICATION

Community outreach took a backseat in 2020, as person-to-person opportunities were all but eliminated. Park staff had to find new ways to get information to our users and new patrons. A combination of signage and social media proved to be successful, especially with a surge of new park users hitting trails. Safety messages, along with ways to spread usage to lesser known and used parks, were major focuses throughout the entire year, which led to several seasonal campaigns in 2020. Furthermore, with the help of news releases, an estimated \$78,802.23 was received in “free” media in 2020.

Social media outreach flourished in 2020, far exceeding expectations and goals. Facebook saw a 45% increase in likes and a 423% increase in engagement, while Instagram had an 113% increase in followers - with an abundance of breathtaking photography to share - and a 52% increase in engagement. In August, Stark Parks reached an unforeseen record of over 1 million “likes” on Facebook with an educational PSA about turtles. It was truly a year for new records.

The Aug. 5, 2020 post about a box turtle with a hand-painted shell (the turtle did eventually pass away) was a little more matter of fact than usual, but we certainly didn't expect a viral post with comments and shares from across the country! In fact, when we checked the post about an hour after posting the engagement (likes, comments, and shares) were underwhelming. That changed quickly and the post had a two week run of constant shares - 84,655 total. Facebook also records the number of unique users who clicked upon particular elements of the post. The number of users who clicked a portion of the post was 343,678 with it entering the screen of 1,859,127 users.



Stark Parks
August 5, 2020 · 40

The turtle recently came to our Wildlife Conservation Center. Despite its looks like it was a painted turtle, but rather a Common Box Turtle (aka Eastern Box Turtle), young male. Its shell has been clearly marked. It was found wandering around a neighborhood very disturbed, with a shell painted with yellow and red colors. (What is wrong with that?)

1. Painting a turtle's shell is very unhealthy for the turtle! Turtle shells are a large part of their body that have soft growth. Their shell is also very important in their absorption of vitamins that they get from the sun. Covering them in paint blocks their ability to absorb vitamin D leading to bone and growth issues, and in extreme cases metabolic bone disease when in a painful and debilitating condition.
2. These adorable painted (and naturally beautiful) shells are important for camouflage to keep them hidden from predators.
3. The fact that the turtle was painted on the street that it was found in indicates the turtle was tied in captivity as a pet for an unaware person of law. (Shouldn't box turtles be a species of concern in Ohio due to their overpopulation outside of their natural life, and the pet trade and keeping them in captivity without an education permit is currently illegal.)



COMMUNICATION

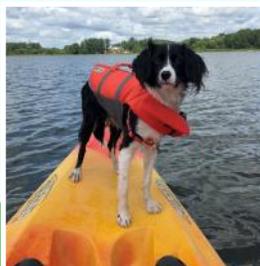
HIDDEN GEMS & ADVENTURE AWAITS CAMPAIGNS

“Adventure Awaits” was a summer radio campaign on Q92 and Stark Parks was a major contributor. The idea to get people out and try new things was a perfect mesh of our many parks and trails. We used this opportunity to highlight lesser-known parks with fewer users. Many of these parks, like Cooks Lagoon, provide options for spending a day outside, like fishing and hiking. Several were small community parks, but there were also larger parks with breathtaking backdrops for new adventures.

In conjunction with Adventure Awaits, Stark Parks also launched our own “Hidden Gems” campaign to spend time focusing on these parks and trails, each getting it’s own time to shine on social media and in newsletters too. This summer-long campaign showed photos and listed what you could do at these parks. Not all of these parks were small gems, like Fichtner Park in Hartville (a quaint little park with a small pond and loop trail - ideal for families). Some, such as Fry Family Park in East Sparta and Deer Creek Reservoir just north of Alliance, are larger parks with substantial bodies of water that could provide an entire day of adventures. We highlighted parks all over the county to give folks options no matter where they live or how far they’d like to travel.



We asked our patrons to send us pictures of what they enjoyed in Stark Parks this year. Here are a handful of images we received from our visitors. For more, follow us on Instagram @StarkParks.



WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION CENTER

The wildlife, both permanent ambassadors and temporary patients, at the Wildlife Conservation Center were not exempt to the challenges of 2020. Even with limited hours due to the COVID-19 precautions, the Center cared for over 1,250 animals which is more than half of the record setting amount from 2019, which was 2,079 orphaned or injured animals.

NATIVE WILDLIFE TIDBITS

While we faced unprecedented challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, Ohio's native animals were also facing multiple wildlife pandemics including West Nile Virus, RHDV2, Viral pneumonia, and Hepatitis.

WILDLIFE CENTER TIDBITS

We had a successful 66% release rate for the 1,250 animals cared for in 2020! That's an increase from the impressive 63% from last year.

NEW EDUCATION AMBASSADORS

Decoy the Call Duck

Fury the Flying Squirrel

Hiccup and Toothless the Big Brown Bats

Barren the Baltimore Oriole

Barney the Barred Owl

Kai the Mourning Dove



PROGRAMMING

While the year started out “normal,” no one could foresee that in just months, the way we provided services would cease, be re-examined, and redesigned. Beginning in March, in-person program was halted and park staff created “On Your Own Experiences,” including “Trail Tails,” an on-trail story time and “Who’s Out Here Hikes,” providing facts on what you may see while walking that trail. Several staff members decided to spread a little cheer and took a few of our wildlife ambassadors out to say hello - through windows of retirement homes! Eventually, like so many others, Zoom entered into our daily lives and allowed us to resume some form of educational programming, particularly wildlife focused.



As summer and fall saw a decrease in COVID cases, select programs with groups of 8 or less that could safely adhere to the physical distancing requirements were re-introduced into the schedule to supplement Zoom programming. Unfortunately, as the colder months hit, COVID cases began to rise again and self-guided programming and Zoom took over. Staff wanted to bring cheer to trail goers and brainstormed a fun, easy-to-do “Gnomevember” month-long celebration of the tiny and elusive creatures. Activities included a scavenger hunt, a craft day for the kiddos, and a Gnome Run. With the successful smiles of Gnomevember, staff wanted to keep the cheer going and “Decked the Hollow” with a lighted walk at Quail Hollow Park during the holiday season.



Programs (In-person & Zoom)
261 Programs with 12,455 Attendees

Requested Programs (Distance Learning & Wildlife Window Visits)
170 Programs with 12,321 Attendees



VOLUNTEERS FOLLOW THE TRAIL & MAKE A VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO STARK PARKS



VOLUNTEERING

Stark Parks' devoted volunteers continued to support the mission of the park district by providing their many talents and skills in 2020 in any way they could, sometimes in new ways. In 2020, **276** individual volunteers and **25** organizations and community groups graciously donated a total of **11,022 hours** in Stark Parks. The challenges of 2020 made it more difficult to volunteer, but they found a way to help while staying healthy and socially distant. In fact, our **trailblazer hours GREW by 31%!**

Trailblazer/TAIlblazer Hours:

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
995	1,419.25	1,763.45	1,963.25	2,014.65	2,642.25

31.15%
INCREASE!

Volunteer of the Year! Marianne E.



Since the start of the pandemic, Marianne has sewn and gifted over 300 masks to Stark Parks employees and 100+ masks to various volunteers. In her "free" time she gave more hours by trailblazing, helping out with FeLeap appearances (even making FeLeap his own mask), the Healthy Adventures program, and filling kiosks with park and trail maps. She also came up with an idea to distribute absentee ballot applications in kiosks to encourage park visitors during the election. Thank you, Marianne!



In Memoriam



Harry Medley was a person who looked to serve others and make their day better. A Purple Heart recipient and retired Postal Service employee, he began volunteering with Stark Parks in 2011. He served as FeLeap the Frog hundreds of times, led pontoon boat rides at Sippo Lake and Walborn Reservoir for retirement homes, assisted with fishing, woodcarving, clean-ups, campfires, and many other programs. His wife and brother also became part of the volunteer program over the years.



Alan Dolan brought a spirit of positive energy and volunteerism to any project or committee he was involved with. Together with his wife, they were "count me in" volunteers and ready to share their experiences and adventures from birding, biking, wildlife photography, and hiking around Stark Parks and the United States. We remember and thank Alan for his friendship, kindness, leadership, and activism as a board member for Friends of Stark Parks and so many other groups. His impact on people, places, and wildlife will continue to make our community, and our world, better.

ADOPT-A-TRAIL VOLUNTEERS

- People First of Whippledale Centre
- South Stark Career Academy: Small Animal Science & Care
- Boy Scout Troop #939
- Cleveland Area Mountain Bike Association (CAMBA)
- Girl Scout Troop #60584
- Boy Scout Troop #157
- Louisville Rotary
- Boy Scout Troop #177
- Malone University ENACTUS
- Girl Scout Troop #60078
- Silo Arts & Meadow Studio
- University of Mount Union Regula Center
- University of Mount Union Green Raiders
- Jackson High School: National Honor Society
- Northwest High School: National Honor Society
- William H. Hoover Lodge #770
- Massillon Animal Hospital
- Marathon Petroleum

SCOUT PROJECTS

Ben Weaver, Find Me FeLeap



2020 REVENUES

Park Levy.....	7,203,264	[57.05%]
Note Sale Proceeds.....	2,300,000	[18.22%]
Intergovernmental Reimbursements.....	50,000	[0.40%]
State Government Shared Revenue.....	9,833	[0.08%]
Carryover from 2019		
Assigned.....	958,049	[7.59%]
Unassigned.....	225,183	[1.78%]
Restricted.....	119,273	[0.94%]
Grants		
Federal Emergency Management Agency-SRL	228,156	[1.81%]
Federal Ohio Department of Transportation-Hoover Trail	37,526	[0.30%]
State Natural Resources Advisory Council-Clean Ohio Fund/Tam O'Shanter	181,262	[1.44%]
State Ohio Attorney General-Law Enforcement Body Armor Program	1,446	[0.01%]
State (Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Iron Horse Trail)	174,398	[1.38%]
State (Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Magnolia Mill)	537,437	[4.26%]
State Ohio Dept. of Transportation/Hoover Trail	6,381	[0.05%]
State Ohio Public Works Com./Nimisila Creek Nature Preserve Phase II	20,000	[0.16%]
Local City of North Canton-Zimber Ditch	54,095	[0.43%]
Local Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District-Zimber Ditch	17,910	[0.14%]
Local Stark County Commissioners-Zimber Ditch.....	24,805	[0.20%]
Marinas	7,140	[0.06%]
Lily Pad	9,055	[0.07%]
Rentals and User Fees.....	63,018	[0.50%]
Rentals and User Fees-Exploration Gateway	9,812	[0.08%]
Fines and Forfeitures	360	[0.00%]
Gifts and Donations	153,813	[1.22%]
Investment Income	14,229	[0.11%]
Jury Duty	60	[0.00%]
Miscellaneous.....	148,652	[1.18%]
Reimbursements	62,276	[0.49%]
Royalties	2,926	[0.02%]
Sale of Fixed Assets	3,900	[0.03%]

2020 Revenues \$12,624,259 [100%]

2020 FINANCIAL REPORT

2020 EXPENDITURES

Personnel & Fringes/Operating	4,347,887	[34.44%]
Capital Projects		
Equipment & Machinery	268,416	[2.13%]
Exploration Gateway (EG)	22,868	[0.18%]
Fry Family Park	354,888	[2.81%]
Fulton Road Tunnel	72,854	[0.58%]
Land/Land Related Exp.....	6,739	[0.05%]
Magnolia Mill.....	13,000	[0.10%]
Nimisila Creek Nature Preserve Phase II.....	20,609	[0.16%]
Quail Hollow Park.....	19,281	[0.15%]
Tam O'Shanter.....	49,491	[0.39%]
Trails & Maintenance.....	414,383	[3.28%]
Vehicles.....	34,089	[0.27%]
Wildlife Conservation Center	19,140	[0.15%]
Zimber Ditch	314,248	[2.49%]
Supplies & Materials.....	302,783	[2.40%]
Utilities.....	339,598	[2.69%]
Purchased Services.....	689,282	[5.46%]
Payment on Note.....	2,900,000	[22.97%]
Interest on Note.....	52,819	[0.42%]
Sales Tax.....	1,045	[0.01%]
Property Tax & Assessments	61,628	[0.49%]
Miscellaneous.....	1,040	[0.01%]
Reimbursements.....	21,241	[0.17%]
Special Events/Projects.....	70,068	[0.56%]
Carryover into 2021		
Assigned.....	690,111	[5.47%]
Unassigned.....	1,397,509	[11.07%]
Restricted.....	139,242	[1.10%]

2020 Expenditures \$12,624,260 [100%]