

2021 Annual Report

Quail Hollow Park
Photo courtesy of Sam & Cody



Stark Parks' mission is to **preserve**, manage, and **connect** natural areas to **serve** the community through **recreation**, **conservation**, and **education**.

Vision: To be recognized as an essential community asset.

Values: Integrity/Trust • Teamwork • Customer Service • Environmental Stewardship • Work Ethic • Respect for Each Other • Community Partnerships • Have Fun!



Enjoying Petros Lake Park
Photo by Lacey M.

**"I go to nature to be soothed, healed, and have my senses put in order."
John Burroughs**

When our youngest son was small, he frequently requested that the whole family go "night walking." He loved being outdoors, and a walk in the dark seemed all the more special, no matter the weather. We went night walking on warm summer evenings and on cold snowy ones. We shouldn't have ever let that habit go, but the kids grew up, lives got busier, and we did. During the pandemic, however, my husband and I found being outside to be one of the best ways of coping with all the uncertainty around us. With a little more free time, we made an effort to visit as many Stark Parks' parks and trails as we could, and even resumed night walking.

Time spent out in nature made life feel normal and made us feel better, and there are good reasons for that. Research has shown that being outdoors reduces the stress hormone cortisol, as well as boosting Vitamin D, improving concentration and creativity, and lowering blood pressure and heart rate, among other benefits. I'd like to give a shout out to the 100 people who completed the Stark Parks 300 Hours Outdoors Challenge. That's a lot of hours of people improving their mental and physical wellbeing! I know the actual total hours spent outside by Stark Parks patrons is even higher than the 3,000 represented by the heroes completing the challenge, due to people like me who happily filled in the bubbles on my chart but didn't quite make it to 300 hours. We are fortunate, here in Stark County, to have a park district that offers so many options and opportunities for us all to get outside, and, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I thank the citizens of Stark County for their continuing support of Stark Parks.

Denise Freeland, Chairperson Park Board of Commissioners

2021 Board of Commissioners

William Bryan ● Ralph Dublikar ● Patricia Quick ● David Regula

2022 Board of Commissioners

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



STARK PARKS



Trail & Greenway System (as of 1.2021)

Leased:
6,458.48 acres

Owned:
1,885.54 acres

Conservation
Easements:
224.12 acres

Total Trails:
130.76 miles

Equestrian Trails:
41.41 miles

Stark Parks

Legend



Trail Park

1-14

Towpath Trailheads

- 1 Canal Bend
- 2 Craig Pittman
- 3 Wooster St.
- 4 John Glenn Grove
- 5 Massillon Rec. Center
- 6 Lake Ave
- 7 Towpath Court
- 8 Bridgeport Quarry
- 9 40 Corners
- 10 Crystal Springs
- 11 Butterbridge Rd
- 12 Lock 4
- 13 St. Helena Heritage Park
- 14 Lake Lucerne



Map is not to scale



Hours:

6 a.m. to 11 p.m. unless noted otherwise

Administration Offices: 5300 Tyner St. NW, Canton, OH 44708 Phone: 330.477.3552
On-Duty Park Ranger: 330.353.2377 Rental Information: 330.409.8096



2021 HIGHLIGHTS & ENHANCEMENTS

2021 was a year of enhancements and improvements, including services and amenities that will make visits more enjoyable!

Awards: Stark Parks Recognized for Excellence

Stark Parks was awarded the **Large Business of the Year** award by the Alliance Chamber of Commerce as a result of our dedication to improving the city's recreational areas. Stark Parks' formal relationship with Alliance began in 1998 when we assumed management of activities at Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs. Stark Parks recently completed the Iron Horse Trail system which connects the city to the Mount Union campus.

Wildlife programmers found an award-winning way to connect with senior homes and retirement facilities with the help of wildlife and walkie-talkies. Wildlife Window Visits allowed them to walk around the outside of the building and show owls, hawks, and kestrels through doors and windows at the facilities, and answer questions through the screen, or use a walkie-talkie with the facility staff on the inside. We are honored to earn recognition for the **Class 1-Park and Recreation Programs category for NACPRO** (National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials) and we are thankful to have found a unique way to stay connected to our senior population.



Benches

Teams installed a record number of benches along many trails throughout the county. These benches are donations made in honor of loved ones and are a tremendous asset to the county park system.

Fichtner Park (Hartville)

Stark Parks demolished the aging building and surrounding barns to allow for more green space at this quaint park. Visitors can now focus on the pond and many wildflowers and wildlife that reside in this park.

Fry Family Park (East Sparta)

2021 included the design of a new accessible fishing dock, work on two natural bioswales using native plants to filter out parking lot contaminants, and construction of a bridge over the creek bed.

Summer brought the opening of the Harold S. Fry Visitor Center. This former Fry family homestead offers stunning views of the 323-acre property. The fully renovated Visitor Center's rooms and outdoor spaces are now available for rentals.



The park also received **Urban Night Sky Place Certification** from the International Dark Sky Association, making it the first park in Ohio to achieve this designation. Light fixtures that emit a dark-sky-friendly light were installed. These low color-temperature lights produce less light pollution and preserve natural nighttime darkness.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS & ENHANCEMENTS

Iron Horse Trail

The Iron Horse Trail was awarded a Creating Healthy Communities grant for eco-trackers which count park users.

Jackson Connector Trail Tunnel

A design and utility relocations were completed in 2021 in preparation for construction in 2022.

Magnolia Flouring Mills

The comprehensive master plan was completed and can now be found at StarkParks.com. Future plans include seeking funds to implement the plan, and create opportunities for guests to experience three levels of the mill, and be accessible to all.

Nimisilla Creek Preserve

Over 2,000 trees were planted throughout 35 acres. The trees are specific to bird and bat species and will help restore forest and support habitats for migratory birds and bat species. There is no public access at this park at this time.

Petros

Thanks to a generous donation from a park user, a new bridge was installed and dedicated on the southern end of the loop trail. Additionally, Petros was awarded 3 different grants for new, flushable restrooms, a new parking lot off Navarre Rd., and a prairie restoration project.

Quail Hollow Park

Lighting was added to the walk from the parking area by the pond back to the manor house, as well the park entrance. In addition, the Carriage House roof was replaced.

A new bridge was added on the mountain bike trail in partnership with the Cleveland Area Mountain Bike Association (CAMBA), making for a better ride and a fun addition to your next Quail mountain bike ride. This bridge covered an area that was prone to washouts and unsafe muddy conditions.

Tam O'Shanter Park

Tam O'Shanter park recently benefited from the assistance of Stark Parks volunteers, Marathon Petroleum, and community volunteers, who along with our Natural Resources department were able to get more than 3,000 wetland plants into the ground in just two days! All of these wetland plants are native to Ohio and will help further the progression of the wetland restoration efforts at Tam O'Shanter to increase the quality of wildlife habitat, provide food sources, and help restore it to a functioning wetland. Once this project is complete, over 40,000 wetland plants will have been added to the area.

The park was also able to replace the former clubhouse roof and dormers, as well as a patio awning.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS & ENHANCEMENTS

Towpath

Stark Parks received grants and community support to pave frequent washout areas along the Towpath. The first section connected existing blacktop at Lake Lucerne to Market Street in Canal Fulton. A second section of trail was paved behind the Massillon sewer plant in partnership with Massillon Area Greenways, Inc. (MAGI), the City of Massillon, and Massillon Parks. Stark Parks crews also re-surfaced 7 miles of limestone trail on the Southern Towpath from the Tuscarawas county line north to Navarre.

The Stark County Horse Council created a program in 2020 called "Get Out and Ride" to showcase the park district's Bridle Trails and gather feedback from riders. These riders logged a total of 1,227 miles on Stark Parks Trails, with the Sandy Valley Trail being the most popular!

Water Trails

With support of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District, we designated a new Tuscarawas Water Trail at Craig Pittman Trailhead in Navarre with a grand opening scheduled for Summer 2022.

Zimber Ditch

Stark Parks continued to work with homeowners to remove 3 additional homes from hazardous floodplain along the Zimber Ditch in North Canton, and started the process to acquire and remove 2 more in 2022.

Citizen Scientist & Sightings

A special thank you to our bluebird box and Walborn Eagle monitors who have helped Stark Parks protect these birds from invasive species and also enable our native bird species to raise healthy young. The data collected provides us with valuable information about bird populations, species diversity, and the health of our habitats. This year, their hard work removed 119 invasive house sparrow nests from bluebird boxes throughout Stark Parks.

Eastern Bluebirds

13 successful nests
50 fledglings

Tree Swallow

9 successful nests
42 fledglings

House Wren

51 successful nests
265 fledglings

Bald Eagles

Nest at Walborn Reservoir
3 fledglings



Eagle Observation at Walborn

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

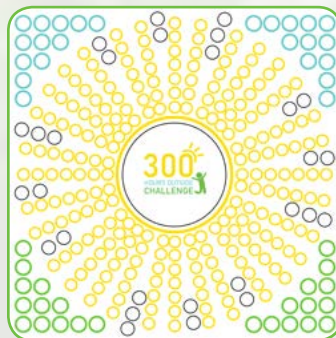


Healthy Adventures continues into its 6th year. Membership has grown to 259 with 148,754 collective miles logged in 2021! The purpose of the program is to connect people in Stark County with healthy hikes, bikes, and runs- either together or solo with incentives to complete a goal.



The focus of mental health is at the forefront of concerns. The Mindfulness Walk located inside Petros Lake Park is an option for anyone who needs tranquility, and gives the opportunity to refresh. Thanks to our partner, StarkMHAR, it also offers resource for those suffering from depression and anxiety.

The focus of 2021 was to challenge people to spend more time outside to take advantage of the health benefits of fresh air and Vitamin D- a much needed vitamin. The 300 Hours Outside Challenge was modeled after the national 1,000 hours campaign as a template to help



people prioritize time outside as opposed to the perpetual screen time that seems to plague us all. We created the shortened challenge, utilizing existing park programs and suggesting easy outdoor activities people could do from their own homes. After completing the 300 hours by filling in the provided form, individuals could submit an online form to be entered into a drawing to win fun outdoor games for the entire family. Three lucky winners were drawn from 100 participants who completed this lofty goal!

CUSTOMER SERVICES

2021 kicked off the year with greater snow accumulation than recent years, enabling us to offer ski services at Quail Hollow Park. Through the month of February, the required snow accumulation and temperatures permitted 12 days of cross-country skiing opportunities. During that time, nearly 200 patrons participated in open skiing and snowshoeing programs. Winter activities programs brought in enough funding to purchase some much-needed replacement equipment!

2021 also brought the reopening of both the Walborn Reservoir and Sippo Lake Marinas with the full complement of rentals. This included 2 new pedal boats at Sippo Marina, as well as 3 new tandem kayaks to be shared between the locations. Now with a total of 6 pedal boats in its fleet, those vessels accounted for 40% of all rentals at the Sippo facility. During the summer's peak month of July the marinas combined to eclipse past revenue records by 10%. Marina patrons spent a total of 5,100 hours enjoying themselves on the water!

The Lily Pad Gift Shop reopened midway through the year on a limited basis, as well as fulfilling online and phone orders for our guests. Lily Pad sales for the year were up nearly 10%. Rental facilities were also limited for the first half of the year with decreased occupancy limits. The rental of park facilities increased by 12% over the previous year.

Stark Parks was able to offer our largest celebration of the year, Deck the Hollow, located at Quail Hollow Park, the first 3 weekends in December. The lighted walk incorporated Manor House tours, in partnership with the Quail Hollow Volunteer Association, and was able to share holiday cheer with 2,200 folks!

Stark Parks Public Safety Department continues to patrol the trails through a variety of methods, including ATVs, bikes, and boats. The rangers continued to host their annual events including “Catfish with a Cop” in July and “Ranger for a Day” in September. They extended the Safe Parks campaign, providing safety stops at several park trails in the summer. Bike bells and small litter bags are still available.

The department also held a series of bass tournaments from spring through fall with proceeds benefiting the Stark Parks Cadet program. This initiative mentors young adults from 14 - 18 in areas of law enforcement.

Patrol hours in **2021 totaled 20,326 hours**. This is a **5% increase** from 2020's 19,296.

2021 arrests totaled 60, a decrease of 62% from 2020.

2021 written warnings totaled 36, a decrease of 39% from 2020.

2021 verbal warnings totaled 317, a decrease of 22% from 2020.

COMMUNICATION

2021 was a year of renewed energy, but still from a distance. While outreach opportunities slowly began to reemerge, an abundance of caution was still used. Stark Parks made 26 community appearances from general "What Does Stark Parks offer" to community trunk or treat events, making over 4,000 quality interactions. FeLeap got more high-fives than hugs this year.

In 2021, the marketing team began developing trial e-group mailings to measure the logistics, frequency, and success of targeted e-blasts. We're happy to say the first year went well and more lists have been, and will continue to be, developed. The Park has consistently averaged a successful 25-30% open rate - far exceeding industry standards of 2-17%. Most recently e-blast open rates have trended as far up as 50%+!

Stark Parks sent out 46 news releases and targeted articles to local community publications. These releases focused on improving awareness of the return of larger events, achievements of Stark Parks such as the Urban Night Sky designation and ongoing restoration and park improvements, as well as promoting unique programs such as the deer hunting at Quail Hollow Park.

With 117 published articles, and 1 radio interview the free media estimated total is \$53,474.48, down 38% from 2020.



Our social media outreach continues to grow and attract more followers. While we didn't have a viral video like last year (remember the turtle?) we still continue to grow every day! Facebook saw a 7% increase in page likes with a 69% decrease in engagement over the previous year, while Instagram had a 29% increase in followers and a 27% decrease in engagement.

2021 Facebook

Total Followers as of Dec. 31 - 19,641

New Followers in 2021 - 832

Engagements - 45,042

Organic Reach - 1,440,887

2021 Instagram

Total Followers as of Dec. 31 - 6,200

New Followers in 2021 - 1,277

Engagements Total - 37,167

WILDLIFE & CONSERVATION



New Spotted Turtle Display


Spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) are a species of small semi-aquatic turtles that are listed as Threatened in Ohio by ODNR, and Globally Endangered by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). Our spotted turtles are now on display at the Wildlife Conservation Center to educate the public on the plight of Spotted Turtles in Ohio. DNA testing showed them to be from Ohio and that they carry a valuable diversity of genes!

The Spotted Turtle Project is a coalition of organizations that aim to establish and protect suitable habitats, monitor the health and genetic diversity of established and reintroduced populations, and give hatchlings a head-start to mitigate the high mortality of young turtles. These turtles' offspring will be hatched and raised to be reintroduced into the wild to bolster existing populations, add genetic diversity, restore historical habitats, or reintroduce turtles to new, more appropriate habitats. In addition, Stark Parks is monitoring suitable areas within the parks to determine if spotted turtle populations exist, or if the areas would be suitable to establish new viable populations. Through our efforts and those of our partners, we hope to preserve Spotted Turtles for generations to come!

The Wildlife Conservation Center

2021 brought a slight increase in patients over 2020, which was an unusually low amount of patients. In 2021, we treated 1,274 wildlife cases. In 2020, the case count was 1,207.

The volunteers and staff worked hard to rehabilitate and release 69% of those wildlife.

A composite background image featuring a close-up of a butterfly on a white flower on the left and a profile of a young child's face on the right, looking towards the butterfly.

Stark Parks offers a wide variety of opportunities for visitors to explore - either on their own or with a guided, educational experience. Programs range from nature hikes, make-it and take-its, and recreational classes, to larger open houses for kiddos to keenagers.

In 2021, Stark Parks offered:

582 Public Programs

Attendance: 12,053

Some daily programs include: Fit Friday Hikes, Stark Parks Kids Adventures, Date Nights, and Family Fall Fest

23 On-Your-Own Self-Guided Programs (FREE)

(Attendance not tracked)

Some own-your-own adventures include: Scavenger Hunts and Trail Tales/Who's Here Hikes

94 Virtual Programs (FREE)

Attendance: 1,653

Some zoom opportunities include: Where the Wild Things Are, Mammal March Madness, Ohio Hall of Fame Species, Animal Olympics

82 Virtual Yoga Programs (FREE & PAID)

of Programs: 82

Attendance: 406*

*Attendance only tracked for paid courses

Stark Parks' programmers work closely with School Districts, as well as other organized civic groups across the county, offering supplemental nature education. The team also coordinates with local senior facilities to provide up-close interactions (most recently through Wildlife Window Visits) and some much-needed outside interaction.

In 2021, Stark Parks provided:

186 Requested Programs

Attendance: 10,074

OUR PEOPLE ARE OUR SUCCESS!

We celebrated our 2021 volunteers with a bash fit for a superhero - because that's what they are to us!

Congratulations to the winners of the 2021 Annual Volunteer Appreciation Awards (below). Stark County is lucky to have each and every one of you!

2021 Volunteer Hours:

Individual Hours: 11,193.66

Adopt A Trail/Group Hours: 1,661.8

Totaling 12,855.46

Stark Parks Currently has:

246 Long-Term Volunteers

28 Group VolunteerS (not including Adopt-A-Trail)

17 Adopt-A-Trail Groups

Based on an hourly rate equivalent of \$28.54 per hour (valued by independentsector.org) **volunteers have contributed the equivalent of almost 7 full-time employees!**

STAFF KUDOS FOR A JOB WELL-DONE!



Employee of the Year
Linda Kuhn, Financial Assistant

Employee of First Quarter
Bonnie Hunt, Sales Specialist

Employee of Second Quarter
Marina Seasonal Staff

Employee of Third Quarter
Natalie Shingler

Employee of Fourth Quarter
Linda Kuhn



OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE SUPERHEROES

2021 Adopt-a-Trail Groups

Mahoning Valley Trail
University of Mount Union Green Raiders
X-Excel

Iron Horse Trail
Boy Scout Troop 177
University of Mount Union Regula Center

Pioneer Trail
Malone University ENACTUS

Towpath Trail
Northwest High School: National Honor Society
Massillon Animal Hospital
Jackson High School: National Honor Society
Nicholas McCracken (individual)

Hoover Trail
William H Hoover Lodge #770

Sippo Lake Park
Siffrin
Boy Scout Troop 939

Molly Stark Park
Annabella Kovach (individual)

Quail Hollow Mountain Bike Trails
Cleveland Area Mountain Bike Association (CAMBA)

Sandy Valley Trail
Boy Scout Troop 157

Petros Lake Park Loop Trail
Marathon Petroleum

Nickel Plate Trail
Rotary Club of Louisville

2021 New Programs

iCount was created as an all-inclusive opportunity to help Stark Parks naturalists identify and track birds at the Wildlife Conservation Center using field guides, an iPad, and amplification services for those who may have hearing impairments. The information collected is put into iNaturalist and used as baseline survey data, which can be helpful during restoration projects. The Siffrin group is the first group to participate!

Naturalists at Stark Parks worked with volunteers to collect hundreds of native seeds at various parks. These seeds will be cleaned and used to repopulate more native trees throughout the county.

Our Volunteer Spotlight features a new volunteer monthly on Facebook, highlighting their work and success in Stark Parks.

Mason Knepper, an Eagle Scout, constructed approximately 15 squirrel and owl boxes for the WCC that would give the animals a place to stay when they get released!



In Memoriam

Denny Williams was a long-time volunteer of Stark Parks. His services included outreach ambassador, trail blazer, and bluebird monitor. Denny and his wife, Mary, spent countless hours together in the parks volunteering and capturing the beauty they found in the park in his photography.

Financial Report

Park Levy	7,284,624	63.83%
Note Sale Proceeds	750,000	6.57%
Intergovernmental Reimbursements	184,448	1.62%
State Government Shared Revenue	11,109	0.10%
Carryover from 2020		
Assigned	690,111	6.05%
Unassigned	1,397,509	12.25%
Restricted	139,242	1.22%
Grants		
Federal (Emergency Management Agency - SRL)	143,190	1.25%
State (Ohio Department of Natural Resources - Iron Horse Trail)	102,891	0.90%
State (Ohio Public Works Commission - Nimisila Creek Nature Preserve Phase II)	36,841	0.32%
Local (City of North Canton - Zimmer Ditch)	75,595	0.66%
Local (Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District - Zimmer Ditch)	44,024	0.39%
Local (Stark County Commissioners - Zimmer Ditch)	34,656	0.30%
Marinas	116,879	1.02%
Lily Pad	11,969	0.10%
Rentals and User Fees	96,281	0.84%
Rentals and User Fees-Exploration Gateway	14,345	0.13%
Fines and Forfeitures	26	0.00%
Gifts and Donations	18,684	0.16%
Investment Income	1,574	0.01%
Jury Duty	20	0.00%
Miscellaneous	24,204	0.21%
Reimbursements	230,097	2.02%
Royalties	4,493	0.04%

2021 Revenues

11,412,811 100.00%

Personnel & Fringes/Operating	4,593,562	40.25%
Capital Projects		
Equipment & Machinery	143,884	1.26%
Exploration Gateway (EG)	41,628	0.36%
Fry Family Park	22,771	0.20%
Fulton Road Tunnel	387,141	3.39%
Land/Land Related Exp	284,709	2.49%
Law Enforcement Equipment	21,246	0.19%
Nimisila Creek Nature Preserve Phase II	9,116	0.08%
Quail Hollow Park	16,365	0.14%
Tam O'Shanter	19,550	0.17%
Trails & Maintenance	61,775	0.54%
Vehicles	159,445	1.40%
Wildlife Conservation Center	13,805	0.12%
Zimmer Ditch	187,270	1.64%
Supplies & Materials	439,906	3.85%
Utilities	393,581	3.45%
Purchased Services	698,830	6.12%
Payment on Note	1,000,000	8.76%
Interest on Note	9,773	0.09%
Sales Tax	57,529	0.50%
Property Tax & Assessments	1,793	0.02%
Miscellaneous	120	0.00%
Reimbursements	8,299	0.07%
Special Events/Projects	85,672	0.75%
Carryover into 2022		
Assigned	1,073,302	9.40%
Unassigned	1,399,748	12.26%
Restricted	281,991	2.47%

2021 Expenditures

11,412,811 100.00%