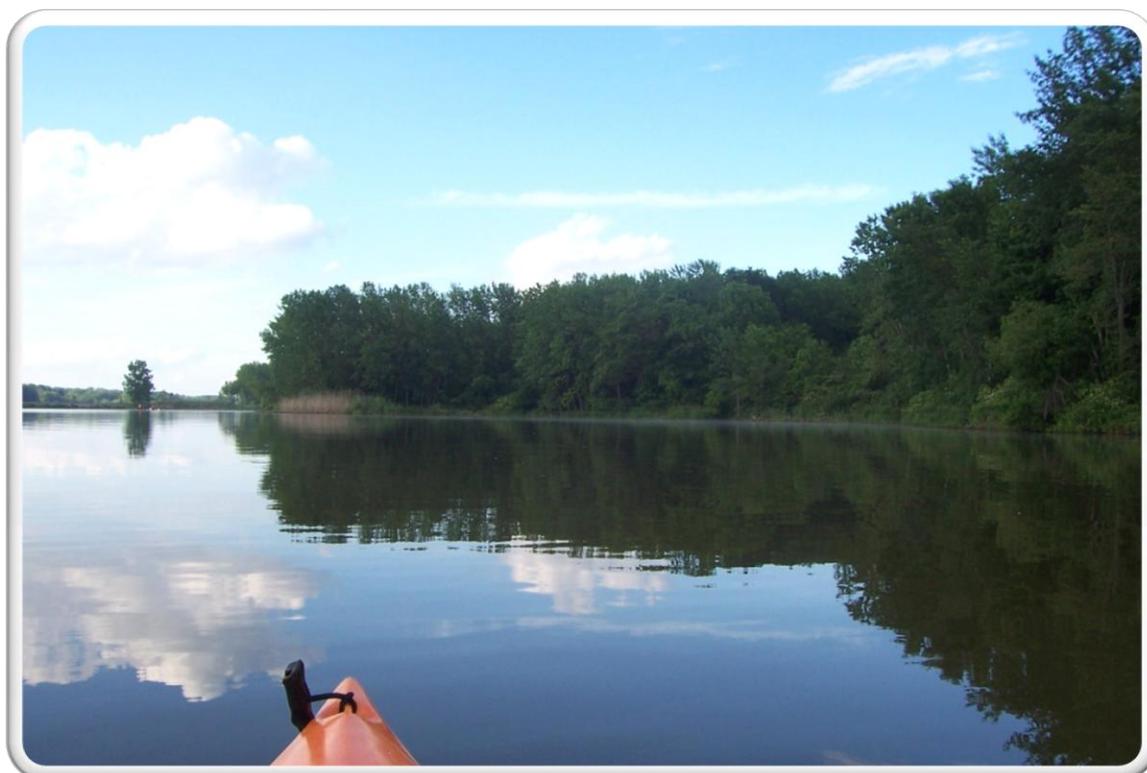


Stark County Park District's
Five-Year Plan, 2014-2018



Creating Quality Spaces and Destination Places

February 2014



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“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”
-William Shakespeare

Cover Photo: Walborn Reservoir

Executive Summary

The 2014-2018 Five-Year Plan for the Stark County Park District is a three-chapter report prepared by the Stark County Regional Planning Commission. This report is an update to the Stark County Park District 2006 - 2010 Five-Year Plan, which was completed in 2006. This plan seeks to give an update of progress made on projects listed in the previous plan, incorporate suggestions from park staff and the public, and describe and prioritize projects for the next five years. The three major sections and general findings in them are as follows:

Part 1 discusses baseline data about the park district and Stark County, as in the previous plans, and includes an analysis comparing Stark County's park system to other counties. In general:

- The residents of Stark County are aging, more educated, more affluent, and are composed of smaller families than in the past, all indicators that participation rates in passive outdoor activities will increase
- Non-participants of outdoor recreation in the US tend to be those whom are older, female, less affluent, and often of minority ethnicities; this creates a possible market to provide additional opportunities or public awareness efforts
- Trends in outdoor recreation participation show that teens and young adults tend to prefer more active outdoor activities such as biking and mountain climbing; both of which are emerging in popularity across the country
- Recreational activities that are the most popular in Ohio are currently passive activities such as trail activities, wildlife observation/photography, picnicking, and boating/canoeing
- Based on comparisons between Stark Parks and other park districts in Ohio, Stark County has and will continue to surpass some districts as projects are completed

Part 2, Resources and Development Options, briefly examines the "mission" and organization of the Park District, development opportunities, and its revenue sources. In general:

- The role of the Park District has expanded as additional resources have become available, including involvement in the preservation of historic resources, expanded interpretative programming, and floodplain protection
- The organizational structure is briefly discussed, as well as Park District success in forming partnerships with the public and other governmental entities, and success in attracting grants and funding for projects
- Various revenue sources and development options are highlighted, as well as the use of support building strategies and technology advancements

Part 3, Five-Year Plan Options, discusses and prioritizes recommendations for improvements to the Park District over the next five years. In general:

- Existing plans will utilize most park resources for the next several years, resulting in substantial growth in interpretive opportunities and visitation. The importance of this plan is in prioritizing projects to meet the greatest need
- Recommendations are made for projects and planning which will complement current projects and plans, including the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan*, individual park and community plans, and countywide land use and transportation plans
- Recommendations are made to complete development in a manner that produces stable growth and quality park systems that can be maintained over time, and focus on building connections that create “destination” experiences for users
- Common requests made by park users include additional programming options pertaining to wildlife observation, more intermediate/advanced programs, and dog and horse-related activities
- Increased efforts should be made to improve the accessibility and sustainability of the Park District. This includes installing ADA amenities, partnering with the local transit authority and promoting “green” initiatives both internally and throughout the park district
- The Park District is encouraged to further study using brownfields for parklands and recreation. This is an appropriate method of land reutilization; when a site is unable to be built on, it can be turned into valuable parkland
- Open space benefits the public in terms of recreation, conservation, livability and property value enhancement. The Park District should increase its efforts towards open space preservation for these reasons, as well as for protection of water quality and supply

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Introduction

The Stark County Park District (Park District) and the Stark County Regional Planning Commission (SCRPC) have had a long relationship in developing park planning documents. These include the *Stark County Park District: Past Achievements - Future Alternatives* completed in 1987; the *Stark County Park and Open Space Five Year Plan: 1995-1999* completed in 1994; the *Stark County Park District Five-Year Plan: Visions for the Future 2000 – 2005*, completed in 2001; and the *Stark County Park District's Park and Open Space Plan, 2006-2010: Keep Stark Green and Growing*, completed in 2006.

Past Achievements - Future Alternatives (1987) contained a short history of the Park District and an analysis of levy attempts and failures. It compared several successful park districts to Stark County's efforts and provided alternative frameworks for the park district, as well as recommendations for garnering public support for the district.

In 1994, the *Five-Year Plan* built upon the success of the 0.2 mill levy passed in 1987. It discussed the changing role of the Park District and needs of the community and identified maintenance and improvements needed for the existing parks as well as suggestions for locating future parks. It also listed goals and strategies for the five-year period of 1995-1999.

Visions for the Future (2000-2005) built upon the achievements of the past five years, as all of the recommendations of the previous documents had been fulfilled. The successes included: renovation of existing facilities; acquisition of new park lands accessible to the residents of eastern Stark County; improvement of working relationships and the coordination of recreational services with local governments; and participation in the development of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Canalway, as well as other linear corridors.

Keep Stark Green and Growing analyzed baseline data on the existing park district and Stark County, and reviewed comparisons made between Stark County's park system and several other counties. This plan also examined the "vision" of the district, its organization and revenue sources, and reviewed progress made since the previous five-year plan and made recommendations on future park and trail projects.

These accomplishments are documented not only in plans but also by ongoing construction. The *Stark County Canal Corridor Master Plan*, prepared by Environmental Design Group and Schmidt, Copeland, Parker, Stevens (EDG, et al.) in 1996, the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* by EDG, et al. in 1999 and updated by EDG in 2013, the *Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs Master Plan*, by EDG, et al, completed in 1999, and the *Fry Family Park Plan*, created in 2011, are among the other documents created to assist in the development and success of the Park District.

This current document builds upon the previous plans, and is in three sections: Part 1, Background, provides baseline data on the existing park district and Stark County and reviews the comparison between Stark County's park system and several other counties; Part 2, Park Resources and Development Options, examines the "mission" of the district, its organization and revenue sources; and Part 3, Five-Year Plan Options, identifies recommendations for park and trail resources and programming, and prioritizes development for a five-year period.

The goal of this study is to assist the Park District in completing development in a manner that will maximize public use and support, and plan in a manner that produces a quality park system that can be sustained over time.

Part I – Background

The Stark County Park District was formed in 1967 after regional planning studies demonstrated a need and strong community support for countywide park and recreational facilities. A three member Park Board was appointed by the Stark County Probate Court to administer and operate the Park District and organize initial efforts to pass a levy in November 1967 for the purpose of "acquisition, development, operation and maintenance of a park system in Stark County, Ohio." This three member Park Board was the first in Ohio to increase to five members in January 2006.

After voter rejections over nearly two decades, the Board was successful in passing a 0.2 mill park levy in May of 1988. This levy generated approximately \$700,000 annually over a five-year period. The 0.2 mill levy was renewed in May 1993 and raised about \$750,000 per year. A replacement levy, for 0.5 mills, was approved in May of 1997 and generated about \$2,500,000 annually. In 2002, another replacement levy was approved, which resulted in an increase to approximately \$3,200,000 per year in income. In 2012, voters approved a 1.0 mill levy, which will generate approximately \$6.4 million per year for the Park District. The new levy will help offset the loss of funds from the phasing out of the personal property tax and the reduction in local government funds, while also expanding the Park District's ability to service more of the county.



A Variety of Trail Users

The Park District currently operates thirteen parks and oversees approximately 7,200 acres of land, including 1,200 acres of lakes, ponds and reservoirs. These facilities include Cook's

Lagoon, the Stark County Trail and Greenway System (including the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail) with more than 80 miles of trail, Deer Creek Reservoir, Devonshire Park, Petros Lake Park, Sippo Lake Park, the Fry Family Park, David Fichtner Outdoor Education Center, Esmont Park, the Magnolia Flouring Mills, Molly Stark Park, Walborn Reservoir, and Whitacre Greer Park.

Several parks, such as the trail and greenway network to be established under the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan*, are a mix of ownership, which includes various public and private entities. The District's three largest facilities, Deer Creek and Walborn reservoirs (2,800 acres combined), and Canal Lands (342 acres which includes 25 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canalway) have undergone major improvements. Whitacre Greer Park, which opened in 2006 through a lease with the Whitacre Greer Company, contains over 2,000 acres with a six mile equestrian-only trail.

The Park District has acquired a number of smaller properties through donations and purchase. These tracts will either complement existing parks, will be used as part of the trail and greenway system, or will be developed for other uses. The Fichtner property has been developed as a small outdoor education center.

Voter approval of park operating levies has been crucial in enabling the Park District to grow and implement needed improvements. Increased financing has transformed the Park District from a "caretaker" role, struggling to meet minimal maintenance needs, to a District able to implement major projects and facility improvements. At the end of 2012, the Park District had approximately fifty-seven full and part-time employees and an annual operating budget of almost 10,000,000.

Projects have included a \$1.2 million new aqueduct bridge over the Tuscarawas River, purchase of the 350-acre Fry Family Park, Sandy and Beaver Canal upgrades, construction of portions of the multi-use trail and associated trailheads along the Hoover Trail, Middlebranch Trail, and other trails, and the construction of the Exploration Gateway. Increased funding has allowed for facility planning and created the momentum for implementing park growth plans, especially where related to the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan*.

The initial increase in income from the 1997 levy approval occurred at a critical time as the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor was established in 1996. The Heritage Corridor has provided a source of federal funding for projects in Stark County and also fostered cooperation between the Park District and local governments, brought attention to District activities, and generated other assistance to the Park District.

Since 2001, the Park District has significantly increased its income from grants and maintained cooperative agreements with numerous political subdivisions, public agencies, and private groups. It has supported a volunteer corps of more than 200 persons to assist with trail monitoring, special events, wildlife rehabilitation services, gift shop assistance, pontoon boat captains, and park cleanup.

Between 2009 and 2012, the Park District received nearly \$4.2 million in grants from agencies such as ODNR (Ohio Department of Natural Resources), Ohio Department of Transportation, and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) for park projects. Increased staffing and planning efforts made possible with the increased levy millage have also had other benefits. These include greatly expanded outreach to the general public and schools, the continued use of the Park District mascot which assists in outreach, improved signage for park entrances, and the partnership with Friends of Stark Parks, a nonprofit charitable organization, under Internal Revenue Service tax exemption code 501(c)(3). The availability of levy funds constituted almost 38% of revenue sources in 2012.

The Changing Role of the Park District

The early regional open space plans for Stark County as developed in the 1960s envisioned a countywide metropolitan park organization which would provide recreational facilities at a hierarchical level between the smaller community parks of the municipalities and the larger state parks. Essentially the proposed system would be built around one or more multi-use parks of approximately 500-1,000 acres. The original concept of regional parks included a strong natural resource component (preferably water focused), which would be situated in undeveloped rural areas where the needed acreage could be readily obtained.

The original regional plan concept became blurred over time for many reasons but primarily due to the lack of funds. Without funding, the Park District could not acquire significant amounts of open space. Hence, the District in its initial years was forced to develop smaller, suburban-area facilities on county-owned property or on donated or inexpensively acquired lands.

Lack of funding in the early years affected the Park District role in other indirect ways. The growing recreational demands and open space preservation desires of county residents were met through a variety of other efforts. Quail Hollow was developed as a State Park for day-use and reflects a facility based on regional park standards. The Wilderness Center is a privately funded 400-acre nature center providing many of the passive recreational opportunities proposed for a publicly owned regional park system. What would the Park District provide that wasn't already available in our own community?

The designation of the Ohio & Erie Canalway and the lease of the Deer Creek and Walborn reservoirs have provided part of the answer to that question. The successful development of portions of the Towpath Trail led to the creation of the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* and *Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs Master Plan*. These are projects with a scope large enough that only the Park District can sufficiently oversee their development. The question has become one of how best can the District implement developments in a manner to maximize the use of these resources and provide the most benefit to the greatest number of users, all the while in a manner that can sustain the growth over time.

Demographics

For meaningful planning to be done and to achieve anticipated goals, it is imperative to consider the demographic characteristics of the target population whose lives the plan seeks to improve. To optimize the use of available natural resources and recreational services, both the users and resources must be understood. Again, the key to this is demographics, including not only changing socio-economic characteristics, but also spatial shifts in where and how people live. The demographic changes documented in this plan are derived from Years' 2000 and 2010 Census data.

Aging: Trends highlighted in previous park studies included an aging population and changing family composition. Both of these trends have continued; additionally, smaller households are a notable development. The median age of Ohio's population has steadily increased with the aging of the baby boomer generation. In Stark County, the median age has steadily increased from 30.8 years in 1980 to 39.7 years in 2010. While total population has decreased slightly between 1980 and 2010, the number and percentage of persons aged 65 and over, and persons classed as minorities, has grown each decade. It can be assumed that the trends now occurring are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, and plans need to be adjusted accordingly.

The aging issue is one to be carefully considered. The Scripps Gerontology Center of Miami University estimates that the number of persons 60 and over will increase from 84,654 in 2010 to 116,152 in the year 2030 in Stark County, a 37% increase in this population. Planning issues relative to this group include not only housing, transportation and care, but also recreation and accessibility. The passive nature of Stark Parks is a positive factor in planning to meet the lifestyle needs of an aging community.

Figure 1: Stark County's Aging Population

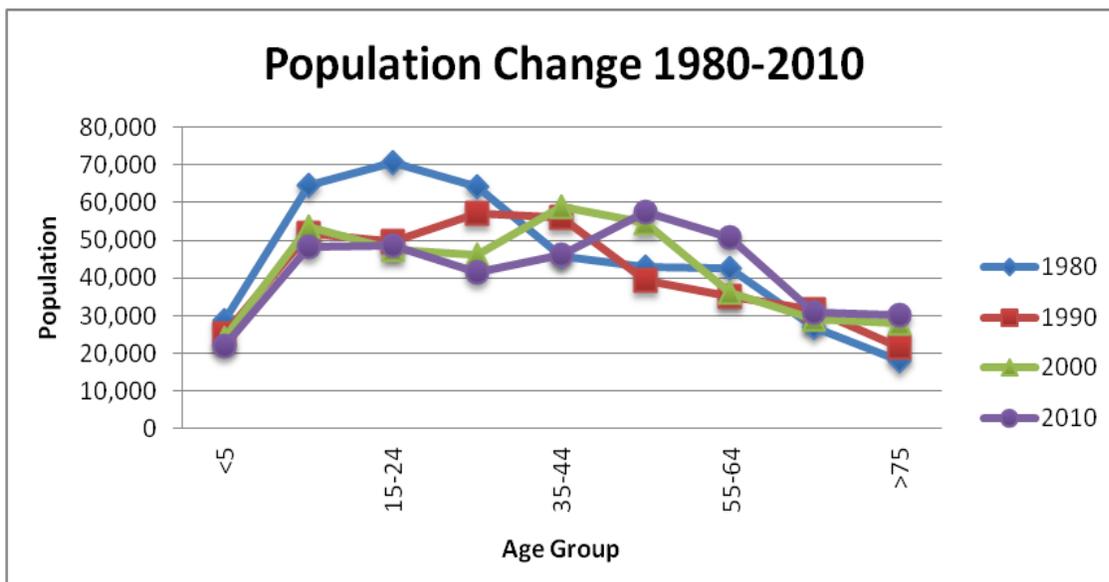


Figure 1: The shift to an older population as the "baby boom" population ages appears as a crest in a wave as it shifts to the right of the chart. Source: 1980-2010 U.S. Censuses

Smaller household size: The decline in average household size can be related to more single-parent families, fewer children per family, a reduction in traditional nuclear two-parent families relative to other family types including single households, stepfamilies, and non-family households, many with different activity schedules and recreation needs. The older population plays a role here as well, as increased life spans allow more years as empty-nesters, creating more childless and single-person households than in the past.

An analysis of average household size shows that between 1970 and 2010 the number of persons per household has steadily declined from 3.18 persons in 1970 to 2.42 people in 2010, and 28% of Stark County households are only one person. This decline is expected to continue, but at a slower rate. Family size impacts participation in outdoor recreation as well. As family size increases from one member up to four, participation increases. It then drops as size increases with five or more members. Households of 1-4 persons numbered 126,555 in 1990, and increased to 138,327 in 2010. This growth in smaller households parallels increased participation in outdoor recreation.

Figure 2: Household Size

Persons per Household	Units in 1980	Units in 1990	Units in 2000	Units in 2010
1	27,754	33,407	38,711	42,453
2	42,517	46,358	51,469	53,410
3	24,213	24,790	24,369	23,851
4	22,035	22,000	20,655	18,613
5	11,042	8,973	9,044	8,210
6 or more	6,533	4,045	4,068	4,552
Total Occupied Units	134,094	139,573	148,316	151,089
Total Population	378,823	367,585	378,098	375,586

Source: 1980-2010 U.S. Censuses

Educational attainment: Other pertinent data includes educational attainment, occupation, income, and the number of housing units. In 2000, the percentage of persons with at least a high school diploma (or equivalent) was 83% and the percent with at least a bachelor's degree was 18%. In 2010, the percentage of persons with at least a high school diploma (or equivalent) had increased to 89.6% and those with at least a bachelor's degree had increased to 20.5%. This growth in educational attainment also parallels the growth in outdoor recreation, as studies have found that higher education tends to correlate with increased participation in outdoor recreation.

Household income: Median household income has grown considerably from 2000 to 2010. Median household income was \$39,824 in 2000 in Stark County. This figure increased to \$44,941 in 2010, representing an increase of over 13% during this ten year period. During this time period, Stark County's rank went from 43rd to 42nd in the state for median income.

Vehicles per Household: Interestingly, while the average household size has declined, the number of households with multiple vehicles has increased. This is important because having access to a vehicle is cited as a factor that increases participation in many outdoor activities. The implications for these changing characteristics will be discussed more fully after examining trends in outdoor recreation as, in a number of cases, specific demographic characteristics can be tied to a likelihood of participating in certain activities.

Figure 3: Vehicles per Household

Vehicles Available	1980	1990	2000	2010
None	11,705	11,806	10,473	10,095
1	46,482	44,948	47,329	47,638
2	52,617	56,288	61,272	59,222
3 or more	23,290	26,531	29,242	32,167

Source: 1980-2010 U.S. Censuses

Suburbanization: Knowing where people live is important not only when deciding how to serve them but also in determining how best to preserve resources. The suburbanization of Stark County is one of the more significant trends seen with census figures, contributing to an accelerating loss of farmland and open space.

While the County population decreased .07% between 2000 and 2010 (after growing about 2.9% between 1990 and 2000), the number of housing units grew by 5.2% from 157,024 to 165,125 units in 2010. Without an increase in population, this increase in housing units can be directly correlated to a redistribution of population to previously undeveloped areas.

The cities of Alliance and Canton lost housing units while Massillon and North Canton experienced slight gains. The most significant growth in housing units was in the unincorporated suburban and rural areas of Stark County. The city of Canton has experienced a loss of more than 36,000 residents between 1970 and 2010 (7,800 since 2000), while Alliance has lost approximately 4,200 residents (almost 1,000 since 2000). According to the U.S. Census, Massillon actually gained 824 people in 2010, equaling a cumulative loss of only 376 people since 1970. It is likely however that some of this population gain was actually due to annexations. North Canton also experienced a gain over the last ten years of approximately 1,119 people. Most other incorporated communities experienced slight gains or remained nearly the same size.

Jackson Township and Lake Township experienced extensive growth between 1970 and 2010, from 18,506 to 40,152 persons in Jackson Township and 11,301 to 27,017 persons in Lake Township. Plain Township had also experienced growth between 1970 and 2000, but in 2010 their population showed a decrease from 35,543 to 34,900 persons. Approximately 67% of the County's population is located in the cities of Canton, Massillon, and North Canton, and the townships of Jackson, Lake, Perry, and Plain. The general growth in these townships reflects the population movement from concentrated urban areas into formerly rural settings, especially

into the north and central areas of the County. One national trend that should be noted here however is the decrease in this suburbanization trend for certain population groups that desire to live downtown. Studies have shown that a large percentage of the population within these groups, which include young, urban professionals and childless families, prefer to live closer to urban areas where they can live, work and play within a walkable area. As this trend is forecasted to continue, the Park District should continue to collaborate with the urban areas of the County to ensure that these groups also have access to the park system.

As trends continue towards an aging and more suburbanized population overall, alternative modes of transportation will need to be factored into future planning efforts. Certain population groups such as children, elderly adults, and disabled persons, who may not have access to personal vehicles, are oftentimes left without easy access to outdoor recreation. Amenities such as public transportation, bikeways, or pedestrian paths are all vital transportation elements in creating equitable and healthy communities.

Recreational Activity Trends

A number of studies provide information on changing recreational trends. The 2008 *Ohio State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) outlined basic population and recreational activity trends and remains the most current plan regarding Ohio specifically. Nationally, the 2005-2009 *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment* (NSRE) is the most current study regarding recreational trends. This study examined participation by persons 16 years of age and older and is one of the most comprehensive reviews on this topic, as it is part of a series begun in 1960.

SCORP 2008 found trail activities as the most favored outdoor activity in the State of Ohio, followed by wildlife observation/photography, picnicking and outdoor swimming/beach activities. Even though they are highly popular activities, beach and lake swimming, picnicking, and tennis all appear to be declining somewhat in outdoor recreation popularity in recent years. According to SCORP, some of the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the northeast region of Ohio are boating/canoeing, motorized recreation, and multi-purpose trail usage (including bicycling, walking, hiking, and cross-country skiing). Outdoor activities that are becoming *increasingly* popular in this region include bicycling, bird-watching, boating, camping, cross-country skiing, dog park use, trail use, and geocaching.

Figure 4: Top 10 Outdoor Recreational Activity Trends (2006)

Rank	Recreation Activity	Percentage of Households Participating
1	Trail Activities	68.2%
2	Wildlife Observation/Photography	61.1%
3	Picnicking	59.7%
4	Outdoor Swimming and Beach	55.1%
5	Playground	52.9%
6	Scenic Automobile Drives	52.0%
7	Golf	45.8%
8	Field and Court Sports	45.7%
9	Camping	34.6%
10	Winter Sports	33.1%

Source: SCORP 2008

The National Survey on Recreation and Environment (NSRE) found that from 1999-2008, the total number of Americans who participated in some type of outdoor recreational activity grew 4.4%. The survey also identified the five most popular recreational activities in United States as walking for pleasure, visiting nature centers, attending outdoor sports events, picnicking and sightseeing as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Most Popular Recreational Activities and Percent of U.S. Population Participating in Them (2005-2009)

Activity	Percentage (%)
Walk for pleasure	84.1
Visiting nature centers	55.1
Attending outdoor sports events	52.4
Picnicking	50.9
Sightseeing	50.5

Source: 2005-2009 National Survey on Recreation and Environment (NSRE)

In examining trends in recreational activities, the NSRE found that participation in outdoor activities has generally recorded a substantial increase. The study also found that some activities have seen significant growth in the number of participants over the last 30 years. These include bird viewing/photographing, day hiking, backpacking, walking for pleasure and off-road driving. Since 1982, outdoor tennis has experienced a continual decrease in participants of almost 25 percent. Figure 6 shows the growth and decline of some selected activities.

Figure 6: National Participation (in Millions) for Selected Outdoor Activities

Activity	Total Participants (in millions)				Percent Change in Participants
	1982-1983	1994-1995	1999-2001	2005-2009	1982-2009
Walk for pleasure	91.9	138.5	176.4	194.2	111.3%
Viewing/photographing birds	20.8	54.3	68	80.5	287.0%
Day hiking	24.3	53.6	69.3	75.3	209.0%
Backpacking	8.7	17	22.2	22.7	160.9%
Drive off-road	19.1	35.9	37.3	46.2	141.9%
Canoeing/kayaking	13.9	19.2	24.6	28.6	105.8%
Outdoor concert/play	43.4	70.9	87.6	84.3	94.2%
Camping (developed area)	29.5	46.5	56.5	55.7	88.8%
Camping (primitive area)	17.3	31.4	34	32.8	89.6%
Tennis outdoors	29.5	28.2	22.5	22.3	-24.4%

Source: National Survey on Recreation and Environment (NSRE), 1982-2009

A 2011 study by the Outdoor Industry Foundation entitled “Outdoor Recreation Participation Report” examined the demographics of those participating in outdoor recreational activities. It found that in 2011 outdoor recreation had reached its highest level than it had in the last five years. Almost half of the U.S. population had enjoyed outdoor recreation in various forms, representing over 141 million people. The report also showed that the gender imbalance of participants also seems to be diminishing. In 2004, the report showed only 36 percent of participants were female, whereas in 2011 the figure had risen to 45 percent. The report continues to confirm that Caucasians make up a large majority of outdoor recreation participants at 78 percent. African-Americans made up only 6 percent of participants, as did Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders respectively.

The U.S. Forest Service’s 2010 Resources Planning Act Assessment found that young to middle-aged people with college educations and higher incomes were more likely to participate in outdoor activities. The report also noted that common constraints for non-participants varied based on gender and ethnicity. Male non-participants felt most constrained by time, whereas women felt constrained by family obligations, money, transportation and safety concerns. Language barriers were a common constraint identified by Hispanics and immigrants. Given the growing diversity among the U.S. population, the overwhelmingly low participation levels of non-Caucasians should be an important consideration in future park planning and programming.

NSRE found that several characteristics were good indicators of higher participation rates. Generally, participation rates increased with education, family size, and the number of cars per household. The study found that, land based activities constitute the largest category of outdoor recreational participation in the nation. Out of this, the single most popular activity in the United States is walking outdoors. An estimated 194 million people, or 84 percent of the population, in the United States walk outdoors for fun or exercise one or more times per year. The next most popular trail, street, and road activity is biking, with more than 90 million participants.



Cross Country Skiing on Stark Parks trail

The NSRE study also found that of water based activities including boating, fishing and swimming, the most popular activity is swimming in an outdoor pool with 99.5 million participants, or 43.1 percent of the population 16 and older. One important change to note under water based activities is that over the last 30 years, canoeing or kayaking has seen a participation increase of 105.8 percent. As of 2009, participants in this activity totaled 28.6 million people.

In terms of national long-range projections, The Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures 2012 Report (a Technical Document supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment) found that over the next 50 years, the five activities projected to grow the fastest in per capita participation are developed skiing, undeveloped skiing, challenge activities, equestrian activities, and motorized water activities. The five activities projected to decline include visiting primitive areas, motorized off-road activities, motorized snow activities, hunting, fishing, and floating activities.

Today, park and recreation systems are being viewed in a new light. In addition to the tremendous impact they have on a county or city's economic vibrancy and quality of life, park systems represent a significant investment and asset for communities across America. Formulating policies to handle new challenges in this industry will therefore require ongoing trend analysis.

Physical Activity in Teens: In 2010, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese. Obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents over the last thirty years. Regular physical activity, including walking, hiking and biking, along with a healthful diet, is vital in preventing obesity and many chronic health conditions. Not surprisingly, ignoring activity

and a healthy diet are associated with greatly increased costs for medical care and lost productivity.

Access to safe parks has an effect on whether teens meet recommendations for physical activity and whether they get any activity at all. The prevalence of regular physical activity is lower among teens that live in urban areas than among those who live in rural areas. Teens from low-income homes have fewer options for physical activity, so they are more dependent on nearby parks; however many of the parks located in disadvantaged neighborhoods are less likely to be considered safe, therefore resulting in an even less likelihood for those teens to be physically active than teens living in more advantaged neighborhoods. Increasing availability of and access to safe spaces for physical activity is a particularly promising strategy for encouraging physical activity among all adolescents¹.

According to the Outdoor Foundation's 2012 Recreation Participation Report, one encouraging fact to note is that outdoor participation among youth ages 6-17 appears to have been slightly increasing overall since 2006. Stark Parks, with its extensive trail system and programming options, is in an excellent position to assist in engaging non-active teens to further continue this trend. One of the activities they may want to look closer at in particular is biking, which according to the 2011 Outdoor Industry Foundation study, was reported as the most popular outdoor activity among youth ages 6-17.

A 2012 report titled "National Trends in Parks and Outdoor Recreation Activity," created by the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel, highlighted several national trends based on findings from the NSRE surveys and the Outdoor Foundation Report, including trends pertaining to "emerging adults"-generally defined as 18-30 year olds. This report found that while traditional activities were still popular with this age group, other increasingly popular activities among them include speed- and competition-based activities such as speed climbing. They also tend to prefer "park and play" activities such as roadside climbing versus hike-in, where they can focus more time on the actual activity itself. In other words, young adults lean towards short and/or intense activities, and those involving speed and some measure of risk.

Demographics Summary

Locally, the implication of the trend analysis can be summarized as the following. The 2010 U.S. Census data shows that almost 42 percent of Ohio's population is aged 45 or older. This has an effect on the outdoor recreation habits of residents of Ohio in that they are more likely to pursue lifelong and less strenuous activities such as walking, gardening, bird watching or golf. SCORP found that residents will continue to have a need for traditional outdoor recreation areas and facilities and indicated that those activities they will most likely participate in are fishing, picnicking, camping, wildlife observing, and hiking.

What does this mean for Stark County as a whole? Available data indicate that participation in outdoor recreational activities has evolved over the last 50 years. What people choose to

participate in now is vastly different from what previous generations did, due to both changing preferences and the variety of opportunities now offered to them. Studies also continue to point out that participation in outdoor recreational activities has continued to grow for the past decade. It therefore implies that in the near future, facilities must be expanded to accommodate the growing demand for such outdoor recreational activities. Although the "baby boomers" are aging, the median age of residents in Stark County remains low enough that even strenuous outdoor pursuits are not hampered by age. It is clear that the growing popularity of some outdoor activities in Stark County cannot be over emphasized. Residents of Stark County would be likely to participate in a number of activities, most of which are the passive type recreation that the Park District encourages, such as trail usage and nature viewing/photography. Activities that are increasing in popularity for this region include biking and cross-country skiing. Local interest has also been expressed in paddle activities along the waterways, geocaching, and mountain biking. Parks and/or programs for these activities may need to be expanded to encourage growing participation. A focus on attracting those who tend to be non-participants (older, female, less affluent, non-Caucasian, teens) is also highly recommended.

Trends Toward Linear Trails and Greenways

The move to revitalize aging city centers, the need to preserve natural areas and a national commitment to fitness has increased the number of people out on trails. New concepts in mobility are bringing greenways into the mainstream of transportation. Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding or other forms of recreational activities or transportation. Greenways on the other hand, are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreational purposes.



Recumbent Bicycles

Source: Huffington Post

In recent times, the variety of trail users has increased, so has the diversity of activities on trails. The mountain bicycle is now more common in many areas than traditional hikers and equestrians. New technological innovations have also changed the dynamic of the trail system, including "racing strollers" pushed by a jogging adult, recumbent bicycles for people with disabilities, and the sturdier design of the mountain bike itself.

Greenways and urban trails have become part of major corridor planning efforts and the catalyst for far-reaching programs of open space and habitat preservation. But beyond the rivers and parklands are several other kinds of corridors (such as rail lines and other transportation right-of-ways, utility corridors, and irrigation and flood control waterways) in which trails and recreation can be included. Trails and greenways are also

ways of mixing uses and bringing together unrelated developments. Cities and states struggling to fund their crumbling infrastructure are now including trails in utility and transportation projects to provide more services at less cost in one corridor.

Of late, greenways and linear trails have taken on a new importance in the face of growing development pressure on lands and recreation trends. The current concept of greenways is a vision beyond the parks, plants, and visual aspects of the past. Creating new greenways means understanding the dynamics of many types of corridors, and learning to take advantage of opportunity. Trails and greenways positively impact individuals and improve communities by providing not only recreational and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development.

Integrated trail systems help to create more livable communities where the garage-door opener is not the only physical link to the outside world. Because trails and greenways connect diverse and incompatible land uses, they bridge the isolation of car-based planning and architectural monuments. They can bring people to population centers and create linkages to destination points, while also reducing the dependency on an automobile. Yet, the difficulty of trail projects comes from their most attractive feature: linearity. Gaining ownership or access to land and working with multiple political subdivisions and agencies will always be a challenge associated with trail projects, however, by developing relationships and partnerships, it can be a benefit as well.

Future Open Space Needs

While regulation is a staple of shaping growth, land conservation is an attractive complement because it is non-prescriptive, market-based, and generally enthusiastically supported by the public. In 2012, voters supported a 0.5 mill increase which raised the total park millage to 1.0 mill. The passage of this levy, which came during a heavy economic recession period, showcases the general public's support for the Park District and their mission to "acquire, develop and preserve natural areas." Even fiscally conservative voters will invest in greenspace when they see park measures linked to outcomes such as youth development, water quality, habitat protection and neighborhood revitalization.ⁱⁱ

Greenspace can serve as a leveraging tool for planning and zoning, and parks and natural areas can make higher density palatable. The Trust for Public Land calls the linking of parks to other social and land use goals "greenprinting." A comprehensive vision for redevelopment based on which public spaces should be preserved for ecological or lifestyle reasons is vital.ⁱⁱⁱ

In assessing future open space needs, it is critical to review the existing open space to understand how much is available and the use to which it is put. This is important in determining adequacy and setting future goals. Also vital are the types of parks available and

their accessibility to the population. For example, community parks should be within walking distance of developed residential areas.

Adequacy of open space in the past was commonly based on a broad standard of 10 acres per 1,000 residents within the developed urban area and an additional 10 acres per 1,000 residents adjacent to urban areas in rural settings. These standards were developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and were intended to be a minimum standard. The most recent NRPA methodology to determine adequacy of open space suggests conducting a systematic community-wide study to determine needs instead of using a routine standard alone.

While the old “standard” commonly remains in use as a general measurement, it would be beneficial for the community to also carry out a study using current methodologies to determine overall needs. Instead of counting inputs of land and dollars, there is a need to analyze outcomes, or the benefits, received by residents in terms of recreation, conservation, livability and property value enhancement. This study should also take into consideration the need to accommodate different cultures, citizens’ opinions and the wellness/physical fitness movement.

The previous plan shows that Stark County meets the basic standard for the gross amount of open space; however, there are gaps in the types and placement of facilities. These gaps exist mostly in access to community and large urban parks, and natural resource areas in many of the developing townships. It should also be noted that in many areas a large percentage of the available open space is dependent upon private and semi-private ownership in the form of golf courses or nonprofit groups preserving wildlife and natural areas. While privately owned facilities can fulfill needs usually met by public parks, they can be less permanent and provide limited access to the public.

How well do parks meet needs within our communities? Stark County has a diverse selection of parks and open space areas, especially within its municipalities. There are more than 100 municipal parks and playgrounds in the Cities of Alliance, Canal Fulton, Canton, Louisville, Massillon, and North Canton; 32 parks in the villages and townships; two state owned areas, Quail Hollow State Park near Hartville and the Jackson Bog Nature Preserve in Jackson Township; and 13 parks in the Park District, one of which is part of the Ohio and Erie National Heritage Canalway. There are also numerous private and semi-public parks and open spaces including campgrounds, golf courses, swim clubs, sportsman’s clubs, nonprofit nature preserves, and other facilities, providing many additional acres of park and open space for county residents.

Planning for Long Term Conservation

Setting up a proper framework for the long-term conservation of open space is vital if the effort is to be successful. Problems with preserving open space within Stark County include questions related to funding issues, determining responsible entities, obtaining consensus on the type and location of facilities and preserved areas to be acquired, and garnering sufficient public support to implement projects. Deciding how to accomplish the planning process can follow existing methodologies that have been used successfully in many areas of the country, including standards and methods adopted by the NRPA for determining a community's needs. Information derived from common



Couple Enjoying View of Lake

planning methods would include: a complete inventory of all open spaces, including land use types, habitat, ownership, spatial relationships to the population, maintenance and improvement needs, determination of public expectations regarding open space, including possible funding sources, expected lead agencies and evaluating public interest in fiscally supporting these efforts. These answers can be invaluable in helping set priorities for land acquisition. Once these information types are inventoried, the creation of a land use management plan could be developed that identifies target properties for acquisition. This list would assist the Park District in achieving maximum conservation values for parkland while also balancing development opportunities.

Within Stark County there are large acreages where minimal development should be allowed for reasons of public health and safety, especially water quality. These areas include flood plains, wetlands, flood control dam easement areas, water well fields and aquifer recharge areas, mined/reclaimed areas and landfills. Some of these areas, such as mined/reclaimed lands, have poor value due to disturbed soils and vegetation and destroyed aquifers. Others, such as flood plains, flood easement areas, and well fields, can support limited activities such as farming, hunting, biking, hiking, and fishing.

Many of these areas are already in public ownership or have easements that greatly restrict development. Others should be set aside and preserved through public acquisition or clearly demarcated to prevent their development. To accomplish this, subdivision and zoning regulations could strictly regulate them and assist in their identification by showing them on zoning and land use maps. Zoning regulations should prohibit construction in wetland and flood easement areas, provide for riparian corridor setbacks and limit development in prime aquifer recharge areas.

The principal undeveloped open space areas are the major reservoirs of Walborn and Deer Creek, utilized by the City of Alliance as a municipal water supply and leased by the Park District for recreation. Purchasing adjoining properties to protect this resource has been and continues to be an important step in open space preservation for the Park District. Other undeveloped open space areas include the Berlin, Beach City and Bolivar reservoirs, operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers for flood control purposes; flood easement zones under the jurisdiction of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD); flood plains related to the Tuscarawas and Mahoning Rivers and their tributaries; and the airport protection zone around the Akron-Canton Regional Airport. Currently the Park District oversees 7,200 acres of park lands, including four lakes. As the MWCD collects funds to carry out needed maintenance and improvements of their facilities, the Park District could play a valuable role in assisting with the open space preservation anticipated to go along with the MWCD's efforts.

Suburban and metropolitan areas increasingly struggle with problems of water supply and purity. It is helpful to use parks as buffers to protect streams, canals, rivers and lakes. All over the United States, hydrologists and park planners are designing systems that serve multiple objectives of water management, water quality improvement and recreation.^{iv}

Brownfields: Brownfields exist nationwide, and funding opportunities are available to reclaim these properties. Some brownfields that can't be built on can be rehabbed into valuable park land. Virginia and New York have both converted landfills and former industrial sites into parklands. Many brownfields sit vacant as officials and developers argue over issues of legal liability and cost.^v Brownfield redevelopment plays a key role in smarter growth and these opportunities need further exploration in Stark County. The Park District, as a frontrunner in growing open space in the County, may have a key opportunity in this realm. In fact, Stark Parks has acquired the 35-acre former Molly Stark Hospital site, a former tuberculosis sanitarium that is now a designated brownfield site. Plans are currently underway to determine how best to redevelop this site, which will include picnic areas with tables, hiking and biking trails, and possibly other amenities such as a memorial garden and/or interpretive history programming.

Existing Facilities

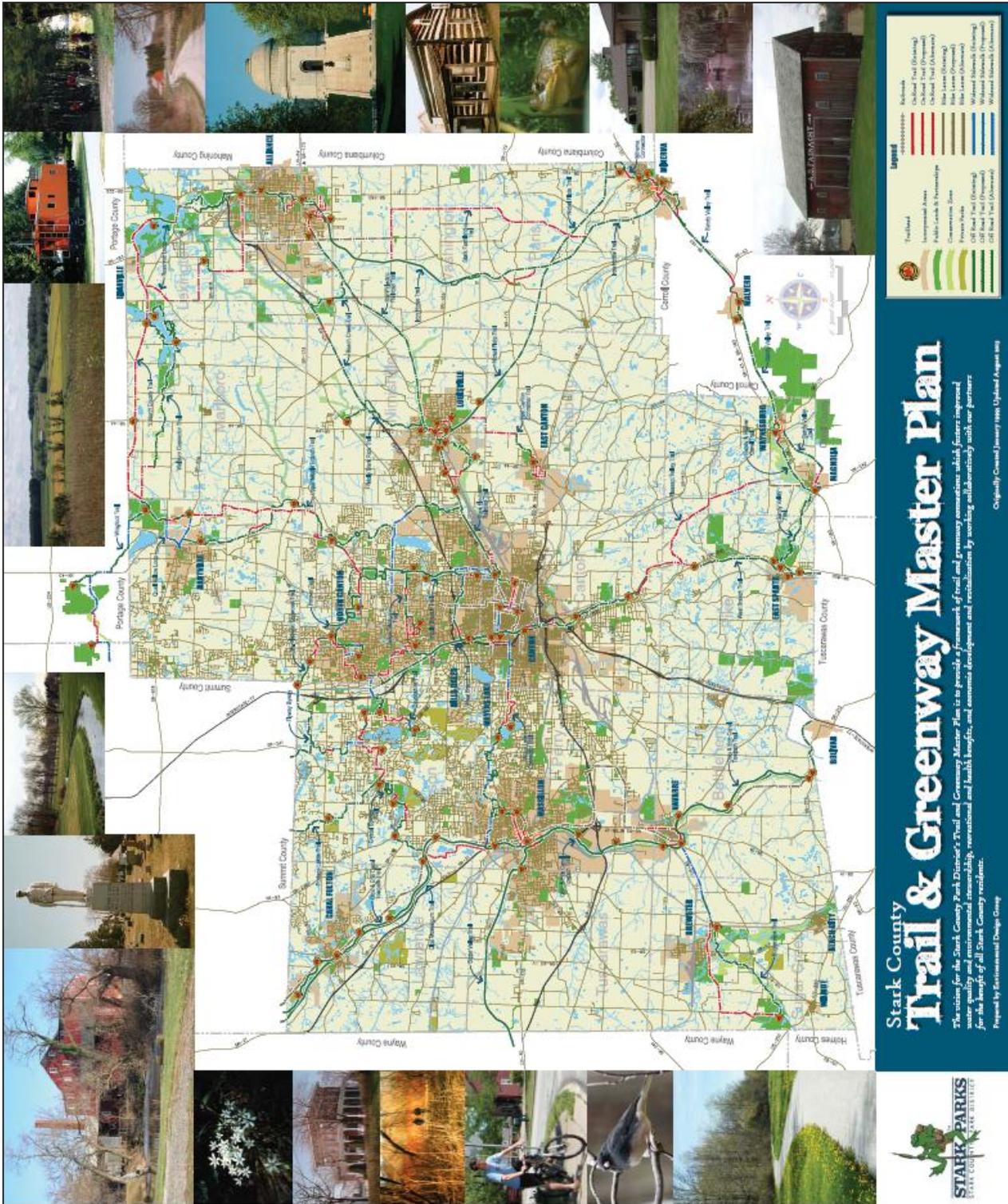
In examining the present facilities, we will describe their origins, ownership, how they fit into the Park District's mission, and other attributes.

Stark County's Trails and Greenways System

Currently Stark Parks consists of more than 80 miles of equestrian, walking and bicycling trails. Future plans identify a 300 mile network of trails, portions of which are fully developed and others under construction. These include the Canal Towpath, Middlebranch Trail, Hoover Trail, Sippo Valley Trail, Olde Muskingum Trail, Nickel Plate Trail and the Stark Electric Railway Trail. The goal of the Park District is to ensure that trails and greenway systems provide connections or access to parks, open space, historic and cultural sites, and other facilities to preserve the resources they pass through, and to expand the recreational and the educational resources available throughout the County. An example of this can be seen in the "Emerald Necklace" of the Cleveland Metroparks. The concept of greenways tying park elements together has been in use since the inception of landscape architecture. In the United States it dates to the designs by Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm for Central Park in New York City, the Boston city parks, Cleveland Metroparks, and Metroparks Serving Summit County.

This goal of integrating the trails and the greenways into the general park and open space system was consciously articulated in the County's *Trail and Greenway Master Plan* and also pursued vigorously throughout the last two decades. The Park District has received awards for its growth from both the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association and the American Society of Landscape Architects. Open sections of the system include several miles of the Sippo Valley Trail operated by the city of Massillon, portions of the Nickel Plate Trail operated by the city of Louisville, parts of the Stark Electric Railway Trail, operated by the City of Canton, and portions of the Canalway Towpath Trail, overseen by the Park District. Some trail sections are under construction, have had their right-of-way purchased or donated, or easements given, or are in public ownership. Other sections have yet to be obtained.

Map 1: Stark County Trail & Greenway Master Plan



Two of the Park District's most recent trail developments include a 5-mile portion of the Hoover Trail in North Canton and a 7-mile portion of the Middlebranch Trail in Plain Township. Even though these two trail systems are new developments, their fast-spreading popularity can be seen in the reported mileage of the Park District's Hike-A-Hundred club. Members of this club, whose goal is to hike 100 miles on the Park District's trails, reportedly hiked approximately 800 miles on both of these trails from January to May of 2013. Reported mileage for the Towpath Trail, which held the next highest mileage totals, amounted to less than 600 miles over that same time period. The high popularity of the Hoover and Middle Branch trails can be attributed to several factors, including the urban setting of the trails, the central location of them, and the fact that they contain several destination points along them, such as the North Canton YMCA, several parks including a dog park, a high school, winery, coffee shop, and restaurants. As the Park District looks to building or expanding future trails, incorporating destination points such as these should be a key consideration for future trail locations.

In the eastern section of the County, however, there is much to be done. The Canton City Loop Trail is yet to be built and most of the Stark Electric Railway Trail remains undeveloped. There is the need to complete these trail networks and eventually link them to the Nickel Plate Trail to form an integrated network of trails in the eastern section of the County to provide access to the parks and other locations of importance in that part of the County.

The *Stark County Trail & Greenway Master Plan* is used as the bicycle and pedestrian facilities plan for the *Stark County Area Transportation Study Year 2040 Transportation Plan*. The importance of this is two-fold: (1) projects must be included in this plan in order to qualify for federal transportation funds, and (2) trail connections are taken into consideration when other roadway improvements are undertaken. Thus, possible impediments to completing the trail are lessened as pedestrian and bicycle access needs are taken into account where bridges are being improved or planned, and pedestrian/bicycle underpasses can be incorporated into other projects where possible. The Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, under the Park District's jurisdiction, is part of the Ohio & Erie Canalway and will be discussed next.

Canal Lands

The Canal Lands are remnants of the Ohio & Erie Canal that were transferred by Ohio to the Board of Stark County Commissioners in the 1960s and 1970s and are currently leased to the Park District. The lands total about 342 acres and include physical remnants of the canal such as the canal prism (both watered and un-watered), portions of feeder systems, locks, spillways, and other features. This park stretches from the northwest corner of Stark County to its southern boundary and is the north/south linkage in the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* on the west side of the County. Major features of the Canal Lands include the Lock 4 trailhead and the Towpath Trail, both of which will be discussed in greater detail below. The District is actively pursuing the acquisition of lands that are necessary to complement the development of the Canal Lands.

Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the National Heritage Canalway

As a major recreational resource within the County, the Ohio & Erie Canalway has attracted a great deal of support and recognition for the Park District. The value of this is incalculable as it generates funding, donations, and opens needed doors and lines of communication. Out of the 110-mile Canalway stretching from Cleveland to New Philadelphia, approximately 25 miles pass through Stark County. The role of the Canalway is to preserve the historic, natural and cultural resources significant to the interpretation of the canal era, as well as the pre- and post-canal eras, throughout the region that it shaped.

The administrative organization formed to direct the management of the corridor is the Ohio & Erie Canal Association (OECA). The OECA oversees development of the Canalway Management Plan and disburses federal funds as grant monies to various projects throughout the Canalway. The Management Plan portrays "journeys" as the primary means by which the public shall experience the corridor. A "journey" begins at a "gateway" center where the public learns the history of the area, and then experiences it as they walk, bike, drive, or ride along the corridor. Planned components of the journeys in the Management plan include the Towpath Trail as mentioned above, portions of watered canal available for boats/boating, a scenic byway, and also a scenic/commuter rail line connecting Cleveland, Akron, and Canton.

OECA grants have been awarded to the Park District for work on the canal trail and other projects. The Stark County Canal Corridor Master Plan is the planning document for the canal in Stark County and was completed in 1996 through the cooperation and participation of the three cities, and villages and four townships through which it passes. About 24 miles of the 25 mile long trail have been completed. This year the Park District received funding to construct a bridge over the Tuscarawas River to close one of the two gaps left in the trail. The remaining gap is under final design.

The trail features a crushed limestone surface for the use of residents. Support facilities include a number of small trailheads with limited parking and temporary sanitary facilities, and several larger trailheads that include more substantial facilities for picnicking, etc. One of the most notable trailheads along the Ohio & Erie Canal in this area is Lock 4. This trailhead, which is located on Erie Avenue just south of the city of Canal Fulton, includes an operational canal lock, a reproduction of the lock tender's house and associated structures, and is the southern terminus of the St. Helena III canal boat ride operated by the Canal Fulton Heritage Society from May to September. Other facilities at this trailhead include a small fishing pier, picnic tables, grills, and portable restrooms. Proposed improvements include repairs to the lock, a wharf for the canal boat to dock, restrooms, playground equipment and trail extensions to adjoining neighborhoods.

The Scenic Railroad should also be mentioned as the third leg of the transportation system that makes up the Ohio & Erie Canal Byway, designated by Ohio in 1996 and by the federal

government as an American Byway in 2000. This Byway primarily follows Erie Avenue and State Route 21 and Riverland Avenue as it passes through the County.

The Byway complements the Canalway by providing a specific driving route which assists in the interpretation of additional features. Possible improvements that can be added to the Byway include scenic overlooks, rest areas, streetscape improvements, view-shed improvements, and preservation, some of which could tie into the trail and greenway plan.

Cook's Lagoon

This four-acre park is part of a county-owned tract of land located in the city of Canton on the north side of Mahoning Road NE, along the east bank of the middle branch of the Nimishillen Creek. The major feature of this park is a small fishing pond, dredged in the summer of 2012, which hosts an annual fishing derby every summer. This park will eventually be a trailhead for the Stark Electric Railroad Trail. Currently the park features a .25-mile trail suitable for school and public uses. Restrooms and a picnic shelter are planned when the trail connections are completed.

Cook's Lagoon Park is north of Canton's Nimisilla Park, which includes restrooms, playground apparatus and more extensive picnicking facilities, shelters, and ball fields which could serve as shared resources to avoid duplicating services.

Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs

These two parks include about 2,800 acres of open space and water and were leased from the city of Alliance by the District in 1998. Ownership of the reservoirs and surrounding publicly owned lands is divided between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the city of Alliance.

Deer Creek Reservoir is located in Lexington Township in Stark County. It is accessed from Price Street. Current facilities include a primitive boat ramp, picnic facilities, and an ADA accessible fishing pier, temporary sanitary facilities, and a section of the Mahoning Valley Trail. Access to the Mahoning Valley Trail was made possible due to a new pedestrian bridge recently constructed across the reservoir. Future projects for Deer Creek include new parking areas, additional trail development, marina and an upgraded boat ramp.



Deer Creek Pedestrian Bridge

Walborn Reservoir is located in Lexington and Marlboro Townships in Stark County. Its facilities consist of a marina, fishing pier, 2-lane boat launch and docks, a picnic shelter, as well as seven miles of trails including hiking and equestrian access. Planned facilities include additional trails, picnic shelters, wildlife viewing areas and picnic areas. Current programming includes hikes and paddling programs. These parks are examples of regional parks as described in previous studies.

Over the last several years, Stark Parks has used several Clean Ohio Fund grants to acquire over 225 acres around Walborn Reservoir to protect water quality, functioning flood plains, stream-side forests, viable wildlife habitats, and the area's agricultural heritage.

Much of the land is currently being maintained as a working farm and will remain so until the current lease runs out. Management of existing vegetation will contribute to preventing shoreline erosion as well as reducing turbidity of the water and enhancing water quality of the reservoir. A 15-acre parcel includes a house and several out-buildings. The house will be maintained as a rental property until such time as the Park District has the funds to convert it to an education/conference center.

David A. Fichtner Outdoor Education Center

This 13-acre property, which was donated to the Park District by the family of the late David Fichtner, includes a wetland, wooded tract, 0.5-mile hiking trail, barn, and home near Hartville. The site has been developed as a pond/wetland studies outdoor education center, and also hosts adventure and archery camps. Further development of the site to expand its use will be dependent upon the needs of the community and the feasibility of site repairs. The current condition of the home on the site is considerably deteriorated, and should be considered in future plans for the property, including possibly either rehabilitation or demolition of the building. There are also septic system issues at the park, which will need to be addressed should the Park District decide to utilize the property for additional activities or programs.

Devonshire Park

The Park District manages this 75 acre park, located in Jackson Township. Devonshire Park serves as a headwater to Sippo Creek and features a small wetland and fishing pond, in addition to a 4.5-mile nature trail.

Frank S. Esmont Park

This 15.5-acre property, donated to the Park District by the family of the late Frank S. Esmont, will serve as a trailhead for the proposed Lower Middlebranch Trail along the Nimishillen Creek, near Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium in Canton Township. It features a small loop trail, a small memorial garden and a picnic table. There are plans to connect the trail

across the Mill Street Bridge once Canton Township completes that project. Currently, there is no park programming offered at this park.

Magnolia Flouring Mills

This historic mill in Magnolia was purchased by the Park District in October, 2005. It includes water rights to the Sandy & Beaver Canal, dam #6 behind the mill, and the guard lock at the connection between the Sandy & Beaver Canal and Sandy Creek and consists of approximately 13 acres. Interpretive programs and guided tours are offered at the mill, and there is also a store on site that sells corn meal and animal feed. The site will eventually serve as a trailhead for the Sandy Valley Loop Trail and the Pleasant Valley Trail. Planned renovations, including ADA features, will increase accessibility and preserve the Sandy & Beaver Canal structures. The Park District also has an option to purchase the historic home adjacent to the mill, and is currently having the property and contents appraised and reviewing how the property can be incorporated into the site development plans.

Petros Lake Park

Petros Lake Park is located in Perry Township just west of the Timken Faircrest Steel Mill on Perry Drive SW north of its intersection with Faircrest Avenue. Its 127 acres include a 12-acre lake stocked for fishing, a 1.2-mile limestone surfaced trail along its shore suitable for walking and jogging, and three short natural surface trails (the Hickory Trail, Grassland Trail and the Bluebird Trail). Other facilities include two picnic shelters, a horseshoe court, a volleyball court and three combination baseball/soccer fields. The park also includes an undeveloped outdoor amphitheater.

A number of trees and other special plantings, including a wildflower/butterfly area, have been undertaken. Park District programs currently held at the park include an annual fall festival and a catfish derby, and wildlife hikes. Several adjoining tracts of land remain mostly undeveloped and should be reviewed for acquisition before incompatible uses arise.

Sippo Lake Park

Sippo Lake Park contains approximately 400 acres with 107 acres of that being water and wetland areas. This park is located in Perry Township between Genoa Avenue, 12th Street NW, and Perry Drive NW, with entrances off those three streets. Although mostly leased from the County Commissioners, the District does own several acres of the park, which has enabled them to complete a trail connecting the eastern, western and northern sections of Sippo Lake Park and to provide the site for the Exploration Gateway Center. Eventually the District would like to create a loop trail around the entire park. This park is divided into three sections and is the most extensively developed park of the District.

Sippo Lake East: is accessed off Tyner Street from Perry Drive NW and includes the park administration office, clubhouse, marina, fishing piers, and picnic shelters. In 1997-98 the lake underwent a \$2 million dredging project. The marina includes an air-conditioned and heated building with restrooms, dining space, boat rentals, bait and tackle sales, snack and beverage sales, and fishing and hunting license sales.

The clubhouse is an air-conditioned and heated room with a 55-person capacity that includes restrooms and kitchen facilities. An outdoor covered deck complements the view of the lake from inside. Shelters include a small shelter and a larger shelter with an attached kitchen. Other facilities include several fishing piers (most notably the 216-foot Sherban fishing pier) and a boat ramp.

Sippo Lake West: can be accessed from Genoa Avenue and includes the Public Safety and Operations Compound, trails, a picnic area, and the Sanders Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. The Sanders Wildlife Center is a fully dedicated wildlife rehabilitation center which cares for over 2,000 injured or orphaned animals each year. Non-releasable live wildlife are also housed at the center as educational program ambassadors.

Sippo Lake North: is accessed from 12th street NW and includes the Exploration Gateway, outdoor picnic shelters, and hiking and biking trails around the lake. The 46,896 square foot Exploration Gateway (EG) was built in 2007 as part of a partnership between Stark Parks and the Stark County District Library. The EG contains the Perry Library Branch, the Congressman Ralph Regula Canalway Center interactive exhibit hall, a gift shop, banquet/meetings rooms, a video conference center, science classroom, and indoor bird-viewing windows. The Exploration Gateway features field trips, workshops and lectures, and is also the headquarters for the Park District's Education Department. A trail links the Exploration Gateway to the administrative offices and facilities on the west and east sides of Sippo Lake.



Exploration Gateway Center

Whitacre Greer Park

Whitacre Greer Park, located between Waynesburg and Magnolia, encompasses six miles of equestrian trails throughout a 2,000-acre tract of land. The Park District currently leases the property, including a railway line spanning through the park, from the Whitacre Greer Brick Paving Company. At this time the park is reserved for equestrian users only, but the future master plan for the park is expected to eventually incorporate trails for hiking and bicycling.

Planned Parks: In-Progress and Recent Acquisitions

This section discusses parks that are in progress and those areas that the Stark County Park District has recently acquired.

Bingham Property

The Bingham property, located in Marlboro Township, currently consists of an estimated 142 acres of farming area. This park is still in the early planning stages, but future considerations for the property include potential surface trails and possibly a cooperative farming agreement to incorporate innovative farming.

Boettler Property

The Boettler property, located in Plain Township, will serve as a trailhead for the Upper Middlebranch Trail. The barn was recently demolished, but the District plans to still utilize the site for trail connections once the realignment of Werner Church Road is complete.

Fry Family Park

The 322-acre Fry Family Park was recently purchased by the Park District in the interest of outdoor recreation and to honor the service of the late Richard Fry, the Park District's first director, and his family. Richard Fry donated 25% of the value of the property toward the purchase. The Fry Family Park, which is located in Pike Township, is a beautiful property consisting of rolling hills, hardwood forests, a pond, wetlands, and a riparian corridor. There is also a main residence and barn still located on the site. A Master Plan was created for the park in November 2011, which calls for the conversion of the residence into a nature education center, and other features such as: a winter sports center, 4-acre fishing/canoeing pond, park shelters, and hiking and biking trails. The majority of the park will be devoted to retaining and/or restoring some of its natural features, including forest lands, wetlands and meadows.

Molly Stark Park

Molly Stark Park, located in Nimishillen Township, is the site of a former 1930s tuberculosis hospital. In 2009, the Stark County Commissioners transferred ownership of the property to the Park District, which has been working to develop it into a 35-acre park. Picnic tables, hiking trails and open areas are short-term goals for the property. The current building condition of the hospital is extremely poor, and brownfield remediation feasibility studies conducted at the site present an extremely cost-prohibitive remediation action plan. Planning is underway to determine long-term goals for the property including other projects for the park. The public has expressed interest in projects such as a small memorial garden and preserving portions of the building. Current programs offered at the park include night hikes and historical site tours.

White Property

The White Property is located adjacent to Walborn Reservoir. It has been acquired for the purposes of preservation of open space and watershed protection through the use of Clean Ohio Funds. Various plans will be evaluated for use of the structures on the property for the time period when the Park District takes over full ownership of the property in 2015; however, limited development can occur due to restrictions with using Clean Ohio Funds.

Comparison to Other Park Districts

The purpose of this section is three-fold:

1. To provide a basis for understanding park standards and how resources are categorized
2. To compare Park District resources with those of other similar districts
3. To suggest opportunities for types of facilities and programs which other communities utilize

Much of the previous five-year plan's discussion for park standards and methodologies was obtained from *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines (PROSGG)* as published in 1997 by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the American Academy for Park and Resource Administration. *PROSGG* is part of a series of publications by the NRPA and others that seek to assist in planning and research for parks and park standards and reflect a comprehensive re-evaluation in park standards, evaluation methodology, and planning processes. While a re-capsulation of *PROSGG* is beyond the scope of this report, substantive changes in methodology and recommendations will be described so that the Park District will have an understanding of the changes. Furthermore, as data and a better understanding of park users has become more available, other standards have also been developed as alternative considerations in future park planning. These additional standards will also be briefly discussed below. The growing modification in standards represents an increased awareness of park participants and resources, and should be taken into consideration for future studies.

One of the first characteristics usually observed in comparing districts is their size. This comparison can be done on several levels, including raw acreage, the number of parks, types of parks, and available facilities. Part of analyzing the size of parks is understanding how to categorize them for specific purposes. Early plans and recommendations for the Park District described the hierarchy of parks (neighborhood, community, regional, etc.) and discussed how it should establish a series of large regional parks. This was based upon early park standards (1960s and older) which noted that regional parks were anticipated to be areas of 1,000 acres or larger. The more recent former five year plans recognized the difficulty in securing such large areas and recommended that the Park District should, realistically, look at smaller areas of 100-200 acres or larger, if possible. The difficulty in acquiring land is reflected in the revised

hierarchy in *PROSGG*, shown in the following table, where the rapid suburbanization of rural areas has "out-competed" park districts seeking to acquire land.

The table reflects vastly different recommendations for the size of parks over past recommendations, and ties size to the availability of resources, more than to set standards. The primary goal of the Park District is to "acquire, preserve, and develop natural areas for passive recreation, conservation, education, and nature appreciation." These parks were seen to be "regional" in nature and would complement municipal and township parks, where more active recreational activities typically occur (team sports, for instance), and national and/or state parks, where long term passive/active recreation (other than day trips) occur. In evaluating where the Park District's parks "fit" into the hierarchy, the importance of size has diminished in value. Whereas in past studies, raw size was seen as attractive to visitors (for lack of specific scenic attractions); more current methodologies emphasize site specificity in determining uses and/or programming that occur.

The following section discusses the availability of open space areas and how standards have changed in judging the need for them. Thus, changes in park standards cause us to alter the way we evaluate individual park size and the overall availability of resources.

The previous five-year plan evaluated data provided by the *2003 Ohio Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. This study ranked outdoor recreation acreage for Ohio as a whole against other states and county-by-county. The acreage comparison was in gross acres of open space and ranked Stark County 75th in the state in outdoor recreation acreage per 1,000 residents. The 2008 SCORP shows that Stark County has dropped in the rankings and is now 77th. While most urban areas tended to rank poorly, Stark County was well below most of its neighboring counties. Results for neighboring counties were: Carroll 23rd, Portage 35th, Columbia 45th, Tuscarawas 67th, Mahoning 64th, Summit 65th, and Wayne 51st. While this comparison is important, it should also be noted that out of the percent of total acreage devoted to outdoor recreation, Stark County ranked 31st. This indicates that while less populated areas may have more outdoor land per capita, Stark County ranks in the top thirty-five percent (35%) of total acreage devoted to outdoor recreation.

The *PROSGG* discusses whether to analyze open space by set standards. Past standards established by the National Recreation and Park Association were based on ratios of population to open space areas. It recommended that 10 acres of parklands and recreational open space be available per 1,000 people within the developed urban area and also 10 acres adjacent to the urban area in a rural setting, thus 20 acres per 1,000 people in total. These standards were an outgrowth of recommendations for playground and play-field standards that set recommended sizes for specified purposes. Standards in the most recent *PROSGG* discuss that, while the 10-acre per 1,000-person standard wasn't an arbitrary number, it was intended to be a measure of minimum open space that should be available. The current *PROSGG* proposes using a "systems approach" in determining the need for and the amount of open space that should exist.

Figure 7: Parks, Open Space and Classifications Table

Classification	General Description	Local Criteria	Size	LOS*
Mini-Park	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs	< .25 mile from residential setting	2500 sq. ft. to 1 acre	Yes
Neighborhood Park	Basic unit for parks, serves local area	.25-.5 mile distant, interrupted by non-residential roads and barriers	5-10 acres	Yes
School Park	Combine parks with school areas to meet need for other park types	Determined by location of school property	Dependent upon function	Yes, consider park area only
Community Park	Focus on community-based needs and preserving unique landscapes and open spaces	Determined by quality and suitability of site. Serves several neighborhoods	30-50 acres to accommodate desired uses	Yes
Large Urban Park	Broad purpose, serves community-based needs and preserves unique landscapes and open spaces	Determined by quality and suitability of site, serves entire community	Minimum 50 acres, 75+ desirable	Yes
Natural Resource Area	Preservation of natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space, and visual aesthetics/buffering	Resource availability and opportunity to acquire	Variable	No
Greenways	Tie park system together, forms continuous environment	Resource availability and opportunity to acquire	Variable	No
Sports Complex	Consolidate heavily programmed athletic fields, etc. at fewer sites strategically located	Strategically located for community-wide use	Use determines size, min 25, 40-80 acres optimal	Yes
Special Use	Broad range of parks and facilities oriented toward single-purpose use	Variable-dependent on specific use	Variable, use determines size	Depends on type of use
Private Park/Recreational Facility	Privately owned facilities that complement public parks	Variable-dependent on specific use	Variable, use determines size	Depends on type of use
Park Trail	Multi-purpose trails located within parks. Focus on recreation and harmony with natural environment	Type I: separate/single purpose hard surface for pedestrian, bike, skates; Type II: hard surface shared; Type III: nature trail for pedestrians hard or soft		N/A
Connector Trail	Safe travel to and from parks and around community. Focus on transportation and recreation	Type I: Separate/single hard surface in own right-of-way; Type II: Separate/single hard surface located in road right-of-way		N/A
On-Street Bikeway	Means to safely separate bicyclists and vehicular traffic	Bike Route: part of road for preferential or exclusive use; Bike Lane: shared road but separated from cars		N/A
All-Terrain Bike	Off-road trail for mountain bikes	Single-purpose loop in larger park or natural area		N/A
Cross-County Ski	Skiing	Loop in larger park or natural area		N/A
Equestrian Trail	Horseback	Loop in park or natural area, may be multi-purpose		N/A

*Adapted from PROSGG: *LOS refers to Level of Service, which assists in determining size, capacity needed to meet expected / desired use of the facility*

The systems approach to planning closely resembles part of the process that was followed in creating the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan*. The process begins by identifying the customers, obtaining their involvement in determining their needs, developing a strategic plan, and evaluating its overall effectiveness once the plan is instituted. The strategic plan would incorporate a “system framework and plan,” recreation service delivery plan, maintenance and operations plan, and implementation plan.

To assist in completing a number of these steps the *PROSGG* provides guidelines for design standards for facilities and recommendations for calculating the number needed to meet desired levels of service (LOS). By taking into account the existing recreational facilities, observing participation rates and frequencies, distance to facilities from populations, and a number of other factors, the need for facilities can be determined that will meet desired levels of service.

In addition to the acres per population and levels of service standards, other available methodologies include acres per dwelling unit and percentage of gross acreage. A cross-comparison of these studies would be greatly beneficial in maximizing the Park District’s long-range park and open space planning efforts. This planning process is beyond the scope of this plan, but would be useful if the Park District desired to create an overall countywide master plan for outdoor recreation and the preservation of natural areas. This would allow a plan on a scale that would incorporate all available resources including state, county, municipal, township, and private facilities.

In terms of growth, as the Park District looks to the future they will also want to make sure that any new growth is quality growth. In other words, while increased park acreage and general open space preservation is important, these acquisitions should be of such a quality that it will further enhance the mission of the Park District.

District to District Comparison

Comparison with peers is a useful tool in planning. In the previous plan, *Keep Stark Green and Growing*, several park districts answered a short survey that provided data to compare the districts. A review of the data generated in 2006 remains helpful. The revised comparisons incorporate progress that Stark Parks and the other park districts have made since the last comparison and include data available from reviewing the respondent’s websites. As noted in the previous plan, the original intent was to compare Districts from similarly sized counties based on population; however, a county population range of 150,000 to 550,000 residents was selected to increase the sample size. In this plan, these same park districts were surveyed in an effort to maintain a broad-range, multi-year comparison among the different agencies.

Responses were received from: Metroparks of Butler County, Clermont County Park District, Lake Metroparks, Lorain County Metroparks, Medina County Park District, Portage County Park District, Metroparks Serving Summit County, Metroparks Toledo Area (Lucas County) and Warren County Park District. The previous plan also mentioned survey results from Mill Creek

Metropolitan Park District and Greene County Park District; however, at the time of this plan's completion, responses to the latest survey had not been received yet from those two districts. A review of their updated mission statements is still included in Part II of this plan.

Data compared between the districts included their establishment dates, number of parks, acreage, number and types of facilities, types and miles of trails, programming, staffing levels, and funding sources. A brief review of mission statements was also conducted.

It was generally found that the age of a district was the most influential factor impacting park districts. Older districts tend to have more acreage, more fiscal support (higher levies), more facilities, and larger staffs. For this reason, comparison tables are oriented from the oldest to the youngest district.

Figure 8: Park Districts by Year Established, based on 2012 data (*2010 Census)

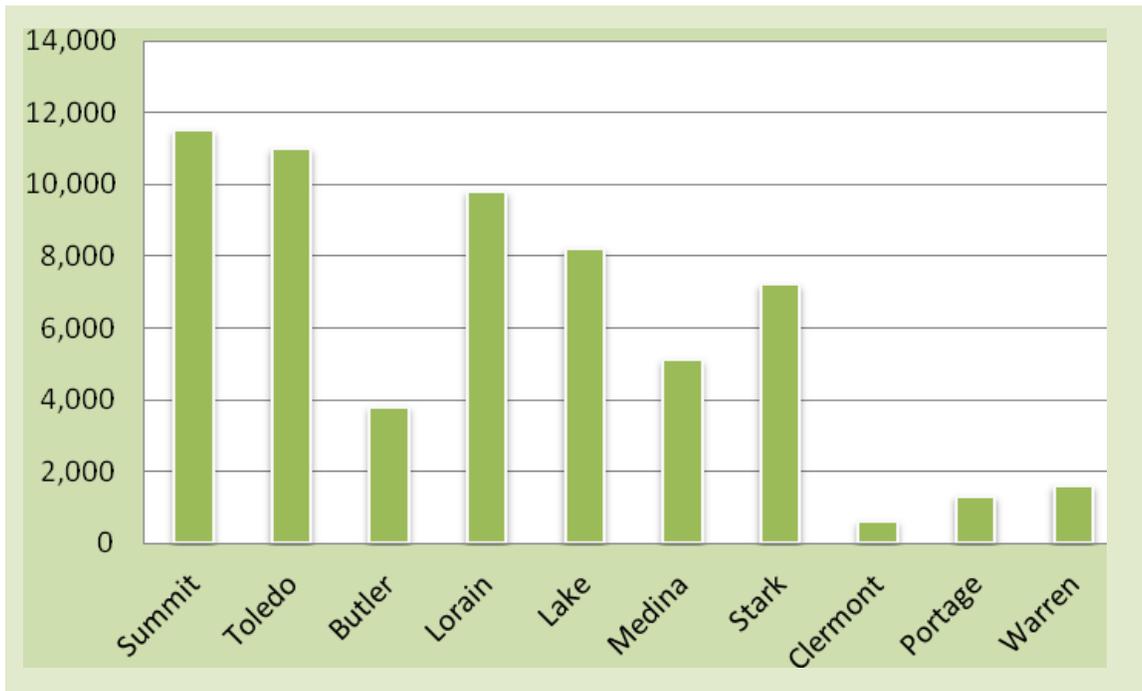
District	Year Established	District Acres	County Population*	Acres/1000 Residents	Levy Millage
Summit	1921	11,500	541,781	21.23	1.46
Toledo	1928	11,000	441,815	24.90	2.34
Butler	1955	3,800	368,130	10.32	0.5
Lorain	1957	9,800	301,356	32.52	1.3
Lake	1958	8,200	230,041	35.65	2.8
Medina	1965	5,100	172,332	29.59	0.5
Stark	1967	7,200	375,586	19.17	1.0
Clermont	1970	600	197,363	3.04	0.1
Portage	1992	1300	161,419	8.05	0.0
Warren	2000	1600	212,693	7.52	0.0

Sources: Park District Surveys and 2010 U.S. Census

Acreege and Population of Districts

As the following tables and graphs show, older districts generally have more acreage in parkland, higher ratios of acreage per 1,000 residents, and are more likely to be supported by tax levies. In comparison to the other districts surveyed, Stark Parks ranks near average in terms of total acreage and has experienced a considerable gain since the last five-year plan in terms of acres per residents (approx. 10 acres/1000 residents in 2006 to almost 20 acres/1000 residents in 2013), bringing it up to near average in comparison to the other districts surveyed.

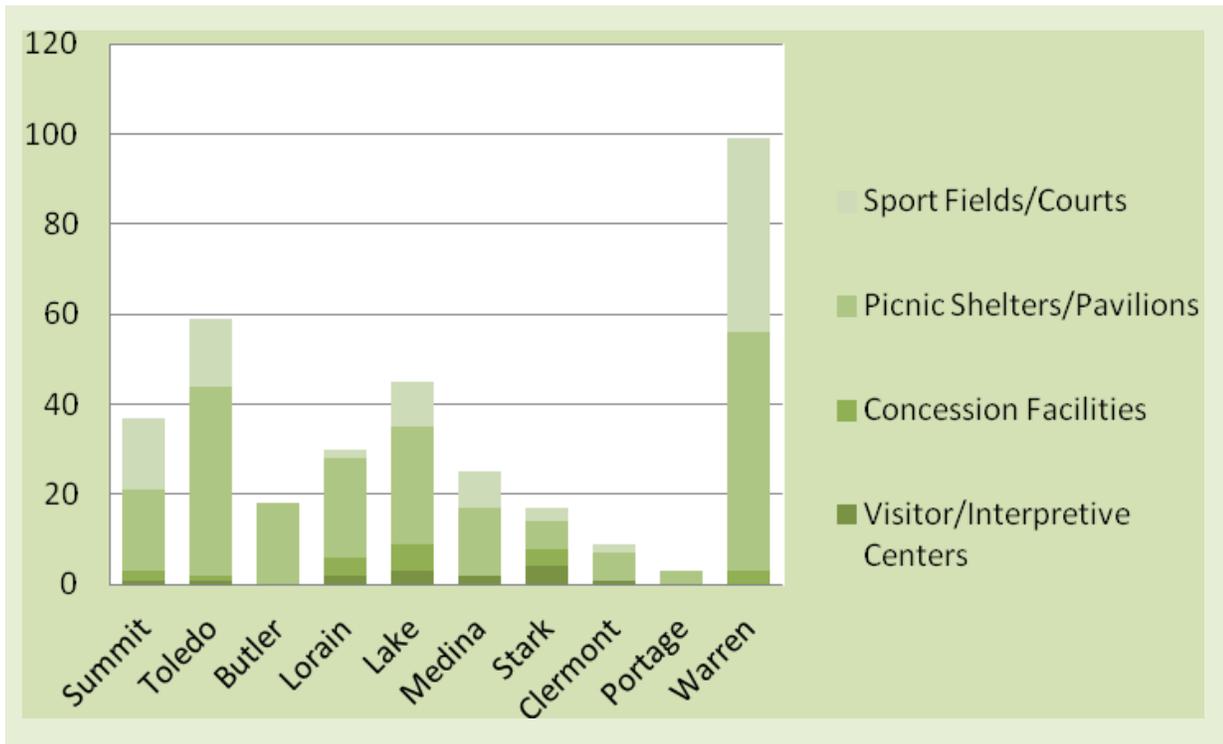
Figure 9: Acres of Parkland for Comparative Districts



Types and Number of Facilities

The number and type of facilities that each district operates and/or owns is also related to the age of the district. Older districts have had time to accumulate a wealth of infrastructure that cannot be duplicated quickly. The survey requested that each district list the number and type of visitor/interpretive centers, concession facilities, picnic shelters/pavilions, sport fields/courts, and other facilities.

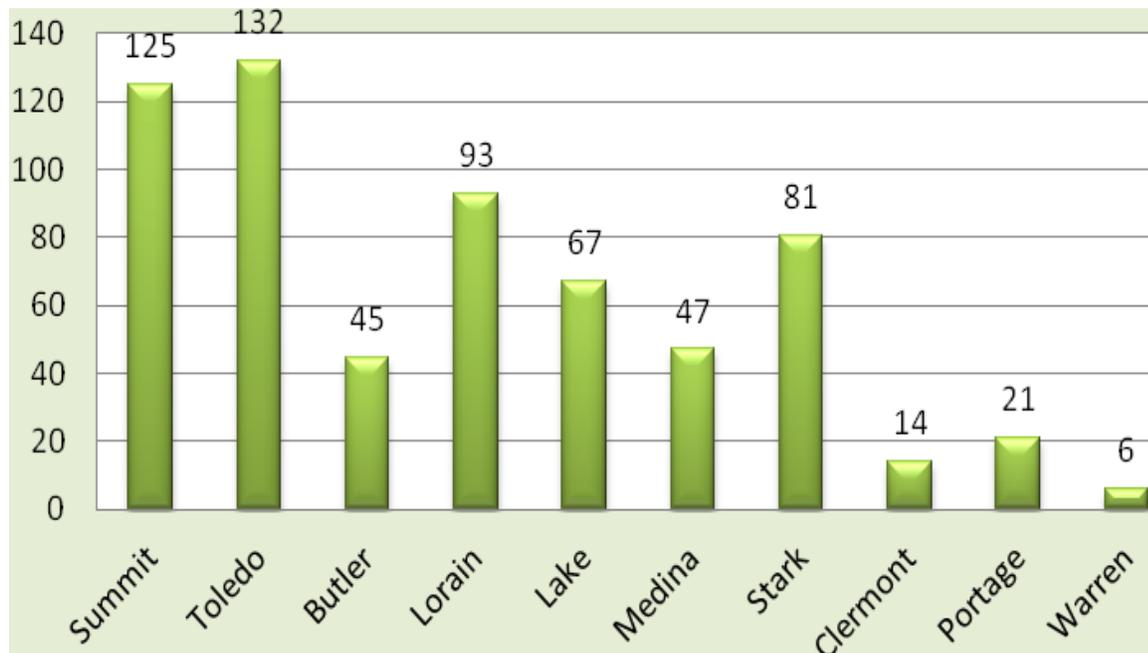
Differing answers to the "other" category make comparisons between districts difficult for that category. Some of these figures, even where they cannot be compared between park districts, show significant investments in resources. The "other" category varies widely between districts, and includes facilities such as playgrounds, a golf course, water park, historic log house, lodge and fishing areas.

Figure 10: Number of Facilities

The following websites provide more detail concerning facilities and programming in each district: <http://butlercountymetroparks.org/>, <http://www.clermontparks.org>, www.lakemetroparks.com, www.loraincountymetroparks.com, <http://www.medinacountyparks.com/>, <http://www.portageparkdistrict.org/>, <http://www.starkparks.com/>, <http://www.summitmetroparks.org/>, <http://www.metroparkstoledo.com/metroparks/>, and <http://www.co.warren.oh.us/parks/>.

Trail Types and Lengths

The types and lengths of trails were also compared. The survey requested information on the total miles of trails and miles that were considered multi-purpose, hiking only, horse only, and handicap accessible. It should be noted that, dependent upon the district, only portions of some of the multi-purpose trails may be considered ADA accessible and/or open to horses or other uses beyond hiking and biking.

Figure 11: Total Miles of Trails

In the table above, the total Stark County trail mileage has been updated from the previous plan, reflecting the tremendous growth over the past 5 years, from 50 miles of trails in 2006 to over 80 miles in 2013. Further changes will be seen as additional portions of the countywide trail and greenway system are completed. Also, equestrian-only trails should increase when the Towpath network is expanded and as the Park District looks for other areas to develop equestrian-only trails. As of 2013, 38 miles were devoted to equestrian usage. As the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* is implemented, Stark County is becoming a leader in trail mileage.

Programming and Facilities

A wide variety of activities and facilities are available throughout the metropolitan park districts that responded to the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate the types of programs that they conduct and how many, if any, facilities are provided for them. The surveys showed that most of the districts have programs and/or facilities for hiking, bird-watching, fishing, boating/canoeing, and crafts. Other facilities and activities that are available in significant numbers include bicycling, picnicking, and camping. Fitting with the general concepts of regional, open space, and primarily passive recreation, while some districts may provide resources for more "active" sports such as baseball, soccer, volleyball, and rollerblading, they likely do not conduct programs for them. It is also interesting to note that while several outdoor recreation studies have shown an increased interest in more "extreme" sports such as rock

climbing and mountain biking, only one park district indicated that they provided a mountain bike facility and no park districts reported having any facilities for climbing.

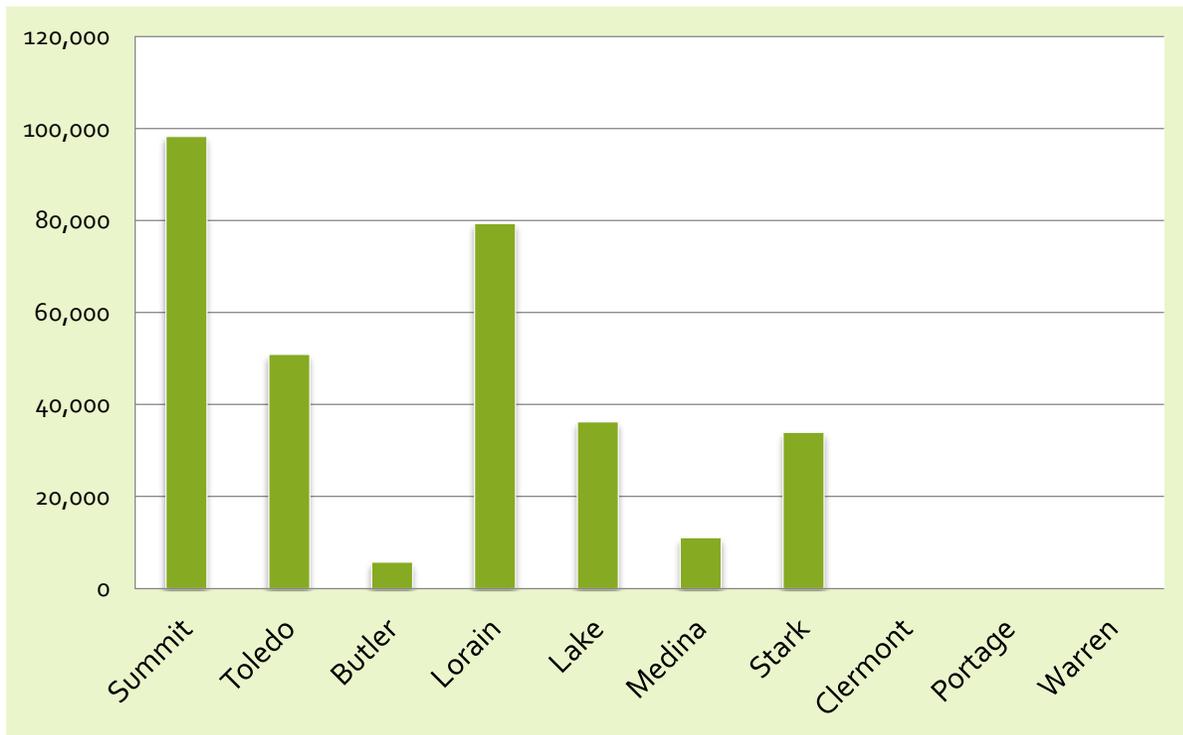
Outdoor educational programming was also compared in the survey. Most districts participate in educational programming on the natural biological environment. These are followed by programs on the physical environment and cultural past, both historic and prehistoric. Programs most frequently offered include animal identification and habitats, stream/pond monitoring and plant identification. Other programs offered by many of the districts include geology, endangered species, cultural history and stewardship.

Programs Offered and Attendance

The frequency with which programs are conducted and their attendance can show investments in resources for interpretive and educational programs. Several districts, however, did not indicate the number of programs and/or attendance.

The high numbers in some districts for both programs given and attendance at programs reflect daily educational activities that occur at their respective education centers. Since the last five-year plan update, annual attendance for Stark Parks programs has tripled from approximately 11,500 to over 34,000. This significant increase is in large part due to the completion of the Exploration Gateway.

Figure 12: Program Attendance



As well as recreational and educational programming, a number of districts conduct special activities that are beyond the scope of the individual recreational and educational programming noted above. Special events include harvest festivals, craft shows, summer concerts, fishing tournaments, marathons, and other events centered on holidays, significant community dates, or seasonal changes. These events serve to attract large numbers of people and are excellent opportunities for increasing public awareness of the respective districts. Events such as these usually require an area to accommodate large numbers of people and their transportation. While permanent infrastructure is helpful for this type of event, it is not required.

Staff

Information concerning the number and types of staff employed by the districts was also requested in the survey. It included categories for administrative staff, enforcement rangers, interpretive staff, and maintenance staff, and the numbers of each considered full-time, part-time or seasonal.

Figure 13: Full-Time Staff by Park District

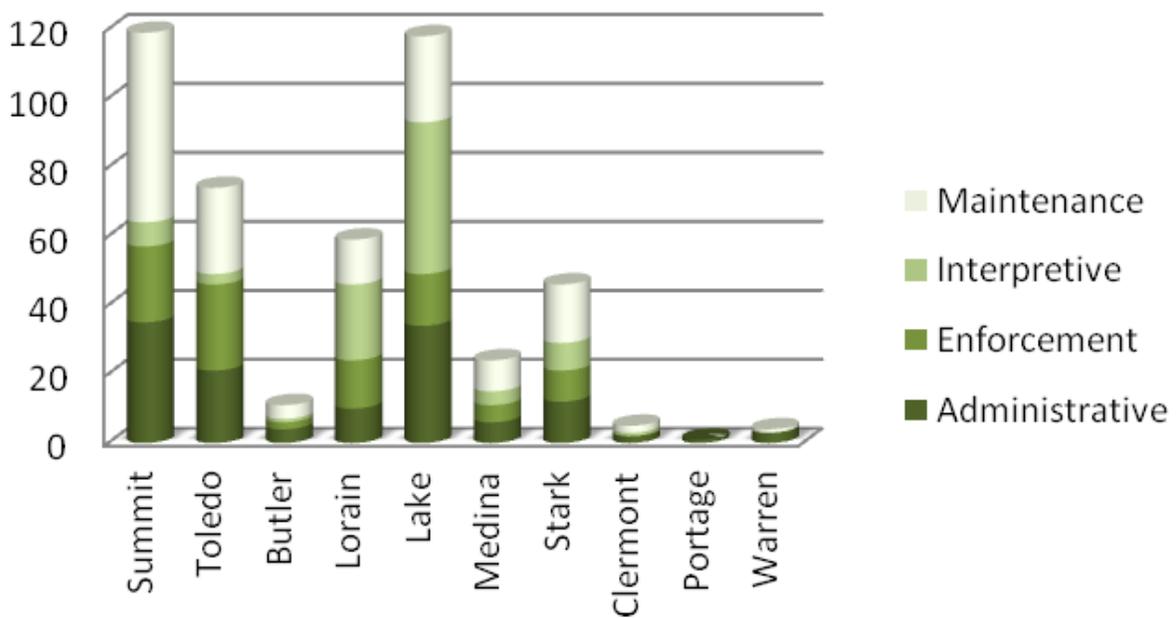
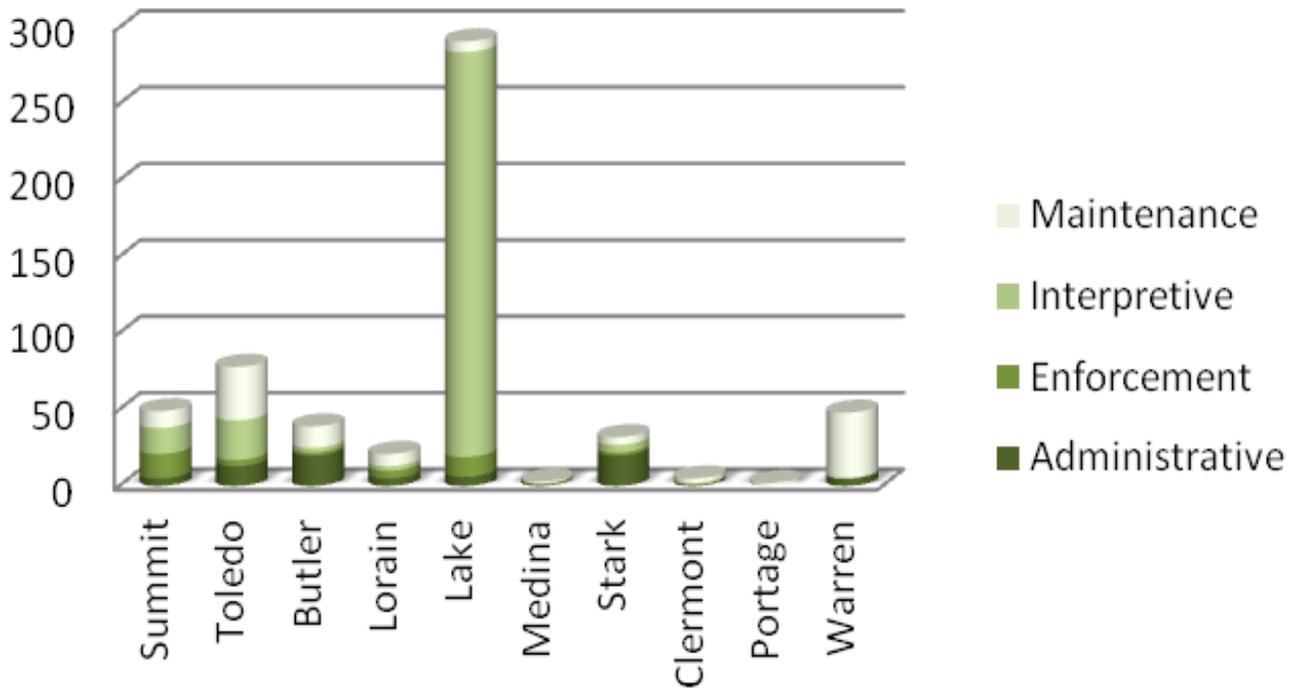
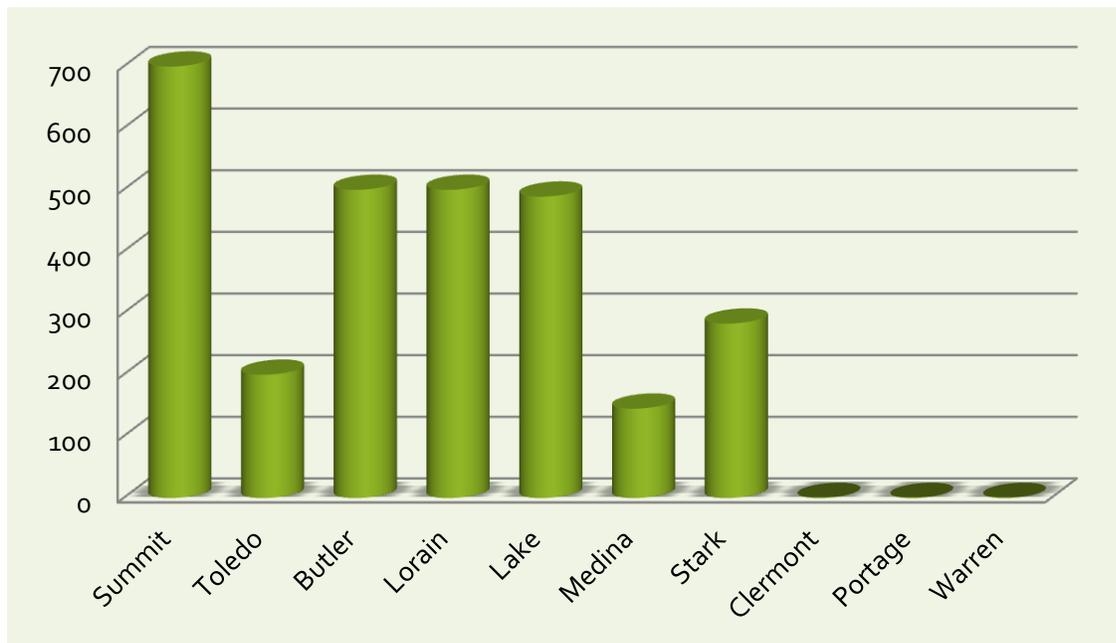


Figure 14: Part-Time/Seasonal Staff by Park District



The number of volunteers in many park districts can be greater than paid staff, as is true for Stark Parks, which had 283 volunteers in 2012, not including periodic support provided by community organizations.

Figure 15: Volunteers by Park District



(The above figure for Toledo Metroparks represents only the total for trail patrol volunteers, as reported in their 2011 Annual Report)

Staffing, of course, is directly related to the number of facilities and types of programs offered. Lake County, which strongly emphasizes educational activities, has almost as many full time interpretive/programming staff than all of the other districts combined and almost as many part-time interpretive/programming staff as all other categories of part-time employees combined.

In Stark County, many of the volunteers serve as "Trailblazers," the volunteer corps that assists in monitoring the trails on foot and on bicycle. As representatives and ambassadors for the Park District, they undergo certification training in civilian CPR and first aid, and learn general information on the history and resources, both natural and commercial, of the area that they patrol. Volunteers maintain their own equipment packs for patrolling including a cell phone and first aid kits.

Another popular volunteer program offered through Stark Parks is the new "TAILblazers" pet patrol program, which is similar to the "Trailblazers" program. Geared towards canines and

their owners, the TAILblazers demonstrate how pet friendly Stark Parks trails are. As growing requests for dog-friendly programs continue, this is likely to become an increasingly popular volunteer program.

In 2012, 283 active volunteers provided 21,945 hours of service in various capacities, including trailblazers, wildlife rehab volunteers, landscaping, events, and more. This total is a significant increase from previous years, and as the Park District continues to grow, so will the number of volunteer opportunities. It is, and will continue to be, critical to realize the invaluable support received from this group.

District Revenue Sources

Districts were requested to indicate current levy millage (if applicable) and estimated annual revenue/income. When analyzing income from all sources for the districts, the most significant source was property tax levies, followed by categories including local government and general funds, grants, fees and sales, donations and interest. Oil and gas royalties and leases are sources of income that may see a significant increase in certain locations as the oil and gas industry expands in Ohio.

Generally speaking, income levels tend to correspond to the age of a district. Older, more established districts usually have greater incomes and larger millage levies. However, that is not always the case as some districts have no tax levy and instead rely primarily on funding from grants and county and local government assistance funds.

Figure 16: Total District Income and Percent Change Since Previous Plan (2006)

District	2012 Revenue/Income	2005 Revenue/Income	% Change Since 2005
Summit	\$17,209,993	\$8,037,075	114.1%
Toledo	\$17,400,000	\$10,774,400	61.5%
Butler	\$4,388,883	\$1,172,105	274.4%
Lorain	\$10,000,000	\$5,664,455	76.5%
Lake	\$26,387,256	\$13,008,869	102.8%
Medina	\$3,914,900	\$1,800,005	117.5%
Stark	\$9,929,902	\$4,414,081	125.0%
Clermont	\$550,000	\$405,040	35.8%
Portage	\$125,000	\$92,000	35.9%
Warren	\$1,301,383	\$430,000	202.6%

While total revenue for Stark Parks has increased significantly since 2005, it should be noted that the actual budget is substantially less as other sources of “in and out” income are included in total figures. “In and out” income are those funds that the Park District never has full possession of as actual cash but which must be included for accounting purposes, including

note sales (loans) that must be repaid and grants paid on behalf of the Park District by other entities.

For Stark County, income from the park levy is the most significant source of income for the Park District, which can be seen in the following table outlining revenue sources for the last four years. In addition to the levy income and those sources discussed in the previous paragraph, other substantial sources of income include grants at the federal, state and local level. In November of 2012, the Park District successfully passed an additional 0.5 mill levy (equaling 1.0 total millage), which is anticipated to generate an additional \$2.7 million in income for the Park District. This addition will help offset the phase-out of the tangible personal property tax and reduced state and federal funding.

Figure 17: Stark County Park District Revenue Sources

REVENUES	2009	2010	2011	2012*
Park Levy	3,995,866	3,864,843	3,773,273	3,743,443
Note Sale Proceeds	2,300,000	2,200,000	2,100,000	2,600,000
Intergovernmental Reimbursements	221,683	109,142	163,562	160,651
State Government Shared Revenue	16,119	16,080	16,038	11,243
Carryover	651,528	708,691	489,305	247,308
Public Utility Tax	43,932	40,176	17,472	
Grants	711,156	413,157	245,007	2,803,338
Marinas & Magnolia Flouring Mills	207,263	133,387	108,486	171,835
Lily Pad Gift Shop	21,755	16,258	10,429	57,257
Rentals & User Fees	58,830	41,501	60,913	60,765
Rentals/User Fees (EG)	18,428	17,782	14,780	30,334
Fines & Forfeitures	466	89	315	37
Gifts & Donations	14,770	14,069	812	2,410
Investment Income	3,422	865	395	556
Reimbursements				13,561
Recycling				3,088
Royalties	12,475	20,982	13,352	4,260
Surplus Items				19,001
Special Projects	4,840	330	4,136	
Miscellaneous	20,556	17,141	12,976	815
Total Revenues	8,303,089	7,614,494	7,031,248	9,929,902

*Note: 2012 figures only include renewal park levy amounts, not the additional millage that was passed by voters in November 2012. See discussion above for breakdown of operating budget versus total revenue. Source: Stark Parks, 2013

Distribution of Funds

An analysis of how the Park District appropriates their funds shows that a majority of the funds are devoted to administration/operating costs, capital projects and payment on notes (see following table). Capital projects include activities such as trails, facility improvements and land/related expenditures. Expenses for capital improvements jumped from between 12-14% in 2009-2011 to over 25% of total expenditures in 2012. Land and related expenditures made up over 15.5% of that total. While acquiring land for park-related uses is a necessary component of park district growth, it is crucial to ensure that the maintenance and improvements of existing parkland is continued to create a high quality park and trail experience.

Figure 18: Stark County Park District Expenditures

EXPENDITURES	2009	2010	2011	2012
Personnel & Fringes/Operating	2,840,064	2,775,660	2,790,337	2,471,069
Capital Projects	1,199,546	966,698	886,210	2,561,108
Supplies	299,059	246,033	237,845	232,691
Utilities	274,557	277,235	313,861	297,602
Purchased Services	352,258	353,413	361,699	352,913
Payment on Note	2,500,000	2,400,000	2,100,000	2,100,000
Interest on Note	65,731	41,811	42,077	36,750
Sales Tax		8,518	8,269	7,796
Special Events/Projects	63,128	55,823	43,644	56,870
Miscellaneous	54			
Carryover into next year	708,691	489,305	247,308	1,813,104
Total Expenditures	8,303,089	7,614,494	7,031,248	9,929,902

**Note: 2012 Carryover includes \$1.15 million grant for purchase of the Pathway Project bldg., which was not closed on until 2013. Source: Stark Parks, 2013*

Part II –Resource and Development Options

“Acquire, preserve, and develop natural areas for passive recreation, conservation, education, and nature appreciation. ”

-Stark Parks Mission Statement

The mission statement or "vision" of the District should instill a sense of purpose to those who work and live to fulfill it. With almost limitless options in how the Park District can see itself and organize and plan for meeting its mission, what choices have been made, and what alternatives are available? The first part of this section will examine some of these options by reviewing the mission statement and vision of the Park District, as well as comparing it to those of other districts. The last part of the section looks at the Park District's organizational structure, current and potential revenue sources, and local development strategies.

Mission/Vision Statement

The mission statement of the Stark County Park District is similar to most of the other districts surveyed in 2013. All of the districts include a common theme of preserving open space and/or natural areas for their residents. As seen on the following table, a number of districts include additional factors, such as acquiring and developing land, and conserving areas of cultural or historic significance. Please refer to the Appendix for the complete mission statements of various Ohio park districts. While mission statements do not preclude particular actions or activities, it is interesting to note some of the intentions that receive emphasis. Some districts include providing recreational activities or programs, improving the overall quality of life for their respective communities, and offering educational opportunities.

Figure 19: Common Elements and Goals in Mission Statements

Elements	# of districts reviewed (12 total) that include this element
Open space/natural areas preservation, conservation	12
Land acquisition/ development	5
Conserve, promote cultural/historic values	4
Provide recreational activities/programs	8
Passive recreation emphasized	2
Enhance quality of life	5
Education	6
Regional system emphasis	3

Passive Recreation

The Stark County Park District's mission statement is one of two districts that emphasize passive recreation. Strictly speaking, passive recreation means recreation without the use of mechanical devices or activities requiring high levels of physical exertion. In practical terms, it refers to recreational activities that are natural resource based and non-intrusive to the environment, need no formal organization to undertake, and require few, if any, developed resources, such as ball fields. Passive recreation activities include hiking, walking, picnicking, bird watching, wildlife observation, fishing, and canoeing.

Active recreation is primarily seen as encompassing organized sports or activities requiring substantial or specific facilities, and/or a great deal of physical exertion such as refrigerated ice skating rinks, swimming pools, baseball and other sports leagues, and downhill skiing. There are, however, a number of areas open to interpretation. Bicycles and fishing boats with electric trolling motors or small gasoline engines are not passive in nature, but the active components of these types of activities are done as a means to an end. For example, while riding a bicycle or motor boating is active in nature, the goal may be to enjoy the scenery along the trail or to reach a distant fishing area. The Park District has historically sought to minimize its involvement with active recreation. This includes limiting the construction of ball fields and play courts and the installation of playground equipment.

Expansion Areas

In what areas could the District expand? In the previous plan, cultural and historic resources, such as the Ohio & Erie Canal and the Magnolia Flouring Mill, were given as examples of how preserving historic structures and resources goes hand-in-hand with the preservation and development of natural areas, as well as promoting educational opportunities- both of which are goals of the Park District's mission statement. Therefore, the Park District should continue to assist in the preservation of these elements, especially when they demonstrate how humans have shaped the natural environment to meet their needs.

Many of the mission statements of other park districts emphasize providing recreational activities or programs. While Stark Parks has experienced a significant increase in programming opportunities, increasingly requested programs by the community include dog-friendly activities, overnight/excursion trips, and biking programs. Also, while Stark Parks has traditionally focused on limiting active recreation opportunities, they may want to further analyze the increasing trend in some of the more challenging activities such as rock-climbing and mountain biking. As pointed out in Part I, these activities are becoming increasingly popular to the younger generations, and while these are more physical activities by nature, they maintain a natural area component to them and should require minimally-invasive alteration to the land. Requests have also been made by park users for more playgrounds to accommodate patrons with young children. Even though playgrounds are not a passive recreation activity,

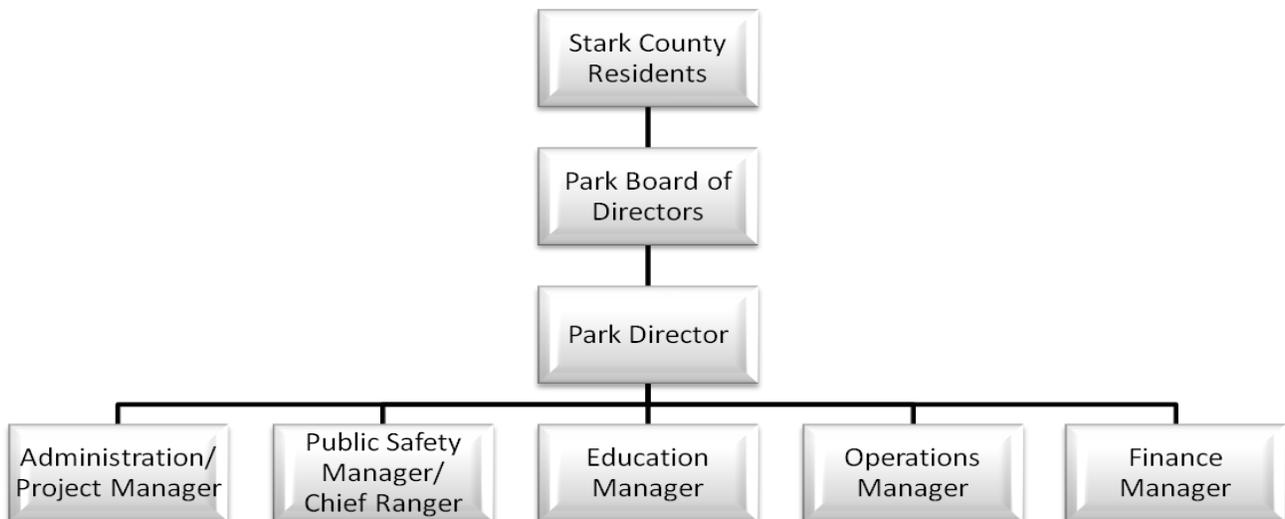
they would require minimal oversight and could even be designed to incorporate some of the unique features of the land.

Organizational Chart

The Park District's organizational chart begins, as all public agency charts should, with the general public as the primary head of the organization. This emphasizes that the Park District must respond to the public's desires and concerns in order to maintain its support.

The Park District is an independent political subdivision governed by a five-member Park Board. The Park Director, who reports directly to the Park Board, oversees the Park District staff. The current internal configuration of the Park District consists of five departments: Administration, Public Safety, Education, Operations, and Finance.

Figure 20: Stark Parks District Organization



Revenue Sources and Development Strategies

A number of funding sources are available to meet the Park District's goals. While a tax levy pays for the operation of the parks, the support of the public and others help to shape the vision of the District, determining the how, why, and what it does. Therefore, this section includes not only discussion concerning fiscal sources but also methods of building public support. Several of the recommendations of the last five-year plan have already been instituted, especially in the area of expanding public relations activities.

Federal and state programs, local funding, foundations, non-profit organizations, private individuals, and corporate assistance are some of the fiscal resources. This section will provide a background to some of the programs currently relevant to the Park District.

Levy Millage

As seen previously, levy income is by far the most significant source of funding for the Park District. The new levy approved in 2012 is scheduled to generate approximately \$6.8 million dollars at 1.0 mill.

Grants

The Park District has done an outstanding job of applying for and receiving grants. Matching these grants with local dollars and in-kind services has maximized every dollar. Below is a brief synopsis of some of the funding sources available, most of which the District has already tapped into.

Directories with detailed information about program and funding opportunities are available at the Stark County District Library and other sources, including the internet. The *Foundation Directory Online* is an online tool available through the library that lists resources for locating nonprofit funding. Other resources include: *The Foundation Center*, *the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*, *Grants.gov*, and the *National Center for Charitable Statistics*, which lists private foundations within Stark County.

Federal and State Programs

The State of Ohio provides both program and revenue support, which can supplement federal and local funds for District planning and development. The principal state agency involved in recreational and open space planning is the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Within ODNR are a number of divisions that offer specific support services and access to federal and state funds. Several programs are described below.

One of these, The Office of Real Estate, oversees several programs including the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). It has provided up to 50% reimbursement

assistance for state and local government subdivisions for outdoor recreation projects. Funding is issued to the state which plays an active role in distributing it. Details can be found at <http://www2.ohiodnr.gov/>.

The Office of Real Estate also oversees Nature Works, a state program approved by voters in 1993. The District can apply for up to 75% reimbursement grants for the acquisition, development, or rehabilitation of public parks and recreation areas. These funds are granted on a competitive basis, with each county being awarded a certain amount to be divided among eligible agencies after state review.

The Recreational Trails Program is also managed by The Office of Real Estate and provides up to an 80% matching federal reimbursement for the development of urban trail linkages, trail heads and trailside facilities, maintenance of existing trails, and purchase of easements or property. The Park District has also utilized these funds in the past.

The Clean Ohio Trails Fund provides up to 75% of the project costs for eligible trail acquisition and development costs. The local match for this grant can be in-kind contributions or other interests in land, labor or materials. The Park District received \$456,000 in 2010 from this funding source to develop 4.5 miles of the Plain Center Trail, which included limestone trails and two pedestrian crossings. Other divisions of ODNR that Stark Parks may be able to utilize for potential grant opportunities include the divisions of Watercraft, Wildlife, and Soil and Water Resources. These divisions offer a variety of grant programs pertaining to boating safety education, watershed coordination, and other outdoor activities.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) and the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) both manage various programs related to community brownfield assistance, including the EPA's Voluntary Action Program (VAP) and the ODSA's Clean Ohio Assistance Fund (COAF). These programs are designed to assist in the cleanup and reuse of contaminated lands or brownfields. As the Park District plans connections in municipalities, these programs might provide assistance where trails pass through areas formerly used by heavy industry, including funds for both cleanup and acquisition of land. These funds may also be useful for any work undertaken at the former Molly Stark Hospital, which is a brownfield site now owned by Stark Parks. Further information regarding these programs can be found at: <http://www.epa.state.oh.us/> -and- <http://clean.ohio.gov/BrownfieldRevitalization/>.

Recently, Stark Parks has taken on several projects pertaining to floodplain management, including acquiring a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (OEMA) to assist with tearing down the former Pathway for Caring building that was located in a frequently flooded area. By removing these types of structures, the Park District is able to restore areas to natural floodplains, which improves stormwater runoff control and water quality. These sites can then potentially be utilized for activities that have low-to-no impact on the environment, such as parks and trail development.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency also offers grants for similar water quality improvements, including stream bank restoration.

More information about state and federal emergency management grants can be found at: <http://ohiosharpp.ema.state.oh.us/ohiosharpp/> -and- www.fema.gov.

The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) is a local program that provides grants for projects focused on watershed protection through flood control and water conservation. In 2012, the Park District received \$250,000 to assist with the purchase of the remaining portion of the Fry Family Park where environmental educational outreach programming will be held, also through the assistance of MWCD grant monies.

Transportation Alternatives

On July 6, 2012, President Barack Obama signed into law the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act. MAP-21 authorizes the federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety, and transit. This act includes a Transportation Alternatives Program similar to previous highway bills, which assists in funding facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. Proposals for projects using these funds are reviewed and receive recommendations from/by the local metropolitan planning organization (MPO). In Stark County this is the Stark County Area Transportation Study (SCATS), a part of the SCRPC, and their Policy Committee.

SCATS also works closely with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) on projects involving state or federal funds. In 2010, ODOT was the authority for the construction of the \$1.7 million Deer Creek Bridge in Lexington Township. This project, which now connects the Mahoning Valley Trail over the Deer Creek Reservoir, received over \$610,000 in federal funds via the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Planning

The Stark County Park District recently completed the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* earlier this year. This plan forms the backbone of pedestrian and bicycle facility planning in the SCATS 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan, which makes the projects eligible for federal funding. The following table shows projects that were identified in this plan.

A total of 33 bicycle-pedestrian projects are planned for completion by the year 2040 and involve more than 152 miles of trails (SCATS estimate) with project costs totaling just over \$24 million dollars. These projects are as follows:

Figure 21: SCATS Planned Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects, 2013-2040**To be completed by 2017:**

TRAIL	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	COST	LENGTH (MILES)	YEAR
Sandy Valley Trail	Gerdanville Ave	Greer Ave	Trail	\$40,000	1	2013
Ohio & Erie Canal Trail	SR212	Tuscarawas River	Bridge/Trail	\$1,000,000	1.2	2013
Ohio & Erie Canal Trail	Lincoln Way	Walnut	Ramp/Trail	\$1,500,000	0.8	2014
Jackson Connector Ph 1	KSU	Stark State	Trail	\$200,000	1.5	2014
Iron Horse Trail Ph 1	First Christian Church	SR 153	Trail	\$500,000	5	2015
Nickel Plate Trail Ph 1	Swallen	Stucky	ROW	\$500,000	1	2015
Hoover Park Connector Ph 4	HOF Bridge	N. Canton YMCA	Trail	\$800,000	0.8	2016
Mahoning Valley Trail	Early Hill Park	Iron Horse Trail	Trail	\$1,000,000	3	2016-18
Nickel Plate Trail Ph 2	Swallen	SR 183	Trail	\$1,000,000	8	2017
Stark Electric RR Trail	Cook Lagoon	Louisville	Trail	\$500,000	4	2017

To be completed by 2020:

TRAIL	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	COST	LENGTH (MILES)	YEAR
Iron Horse Trail	Alliance	Alliance	Trail	Listed in 2016	3	2017
Iron Horse Trail	Alliance	Alliance	Trail	Listed in 2016	3	2018
Sippo Lake Connector Ph 2	O & E Canal Trail	Sippo Lake	Trail	\$1,000,000	3.2	2018
Iron Horse Trail Ph 2	SR 153	Nickel Plate Trail	Trail	\$500,000	4	2019
Sippo Lake Connector Ph 3	Sippo Lake	West Branch Trail	Trail	\$1,500,000	2.5	2020
Upper Middlebranch Trail	Glenoak High School	Quail Hollow State Park	Trail	\$8,000,000	8	2020

To be completed by 2030:

TRAIL	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	COST	LENGTH (MILES)	YEAR
Sandy Valley Trail	Greer Ave	Minerva	Trail	\$2,500,000	9	2021
Stark Electric Railway	Canton	Louisville	Trail	\$450,000	3	2030
Stark Electric Railway	Louisville	Alliance	Trail	\$750,000	7	2030
Covered Bridge Trail	Covered Bridge Park	Middle Branch Trail	Trail/On Road	\$275,000	3	2030
West Branch	Arboretum Park	Price Park	Trail	\$320,000	4	2030
East Canton Connector	Louisville	East Canton	On Road	\$40,000	4	2030
Wilderness Center Trail	Navarre	Wilmot	Trail on berm	\$86,000	8.6	2030
Pontius/Price Connector	Quail Hollow	Walborn/Deercreek Reservoirs	On Road	\$105,000	10.5	2030
Sandy Valley Trail	East Sparta	Magnolia/Waynesburg	Trail/on Road	\$250,000	3	2030

To be completed by 2040:

TRAIL	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	COST	LENGTH (MILES)	YEAR
Jackson Connector	Crystal Springs	Lake Cable	On Road	\$45,000	4.5	2040
Jackson Connector	Lake Cable	Devonshire Park/KSU	On Road	\$45,000	4.5	2040
Mount Pleasant/Dogwood	Lake Cable	Dogwood Park	Trail	\$105,000	11.5	2040
Lower Middlebranch	West Park	East Sparta	Trail	\$235,000	9.5	2040
North Country Loop	Deer Creek	Alliance	Trail	\$400,000	5	2040
Iron Horse Trail	Nickel Plate Trail	Minerva	Trail	\$350,000	3	2040
Pleasant Valley	Howenstine	Waynesburg	Trail	\$35,000	3.5	2040
Stark Farmland Trail	Alliance	Minerva	On Road	\$75,000	9	2040

Source: SCATS 2040 Transportation Plan

Note: This schedule for proposed trail construction will be greatly impacted by the level of political support in the area a trail is planned as well as the availability of land and funds for acquisition and construction. Strong partnerships are necessary, for the presence of these three components- political support, land, and cash- dramatically affect the order and location of trail development.

The City of Canton has also recently completed a long-range bike and trail plan within the corporation limits. In September 2013, bike lanes on Walnut Avenue, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets were officially dedicated as part of Canton's Downtown Bike Loop. The City aims to coordinate local routes, including those identified in the Park District's Trail and Greenway Master Plan, with the state- and federally-designated routes (most of which have already been constructed as off-road trails). Collaboration with the City of Canton on future Park District projects affecting this area will be a great asset in ensuring the highest success of future trail development.

The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (Rivers & Trails) program of the National Park Service offers local groups two kinds of assistance with locally-led conservation projects: staff assistance and consultations. A field office is located at the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area and has provided continued assistance in the development of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Area and related trail work.

Another source which passes federal funds through a local decision making body is the Ohio & Erie Canal Association (OECA), the management association for the Ohio & Erie Canalway. From 2001 to 2005, the Park District received a total of \$458,600 (\$335,000 from Park District applications for projects and \$123,000 from grants awarded to other communities and passed to the District in the form of construction contracts). The future for the OECA is unclear at this point as their funding officially expired in September 2012. The organization did receive a 1-year extension for 2013, but at the time of this report it was not known whether they would receive a full reauthorization or possibly be incorporated in some manner into the Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition. More details regarding National Heritage Areas and the Ohio and Erie Canalway can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/heritageareas/> and www.ohioanderiecanalway.com.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development have also assisted the Park District. These funds are available for projects that primarily benefit low and moderate-income persons, eliminate slum and blighting conditions, or address an urgent community development need. Projects that have received CDBG funds in the past include the purchase of Sippo Lake Park and ADA improvements at Sippo Lake Park and Walborn Reservoir. Although recreational projects are generally a low priority for CDBG funding (even when being used to meet ADA accessibility requirements), the Park District grant application for ADA access work at Walborn Reservoir for FY2000 was funded for \$133,000, and ADA work at the Exploration Gateway was funded for \$365,000.

The Ohio Arts Council is another State source, providing grants limited to a maximum of \$40,000 per applicant annually. Other major limitations include the prohibition on funding capital projects and limiting equipment purchases to \$500. However, this is a potential source of funding to assist in programming at the Petros Lake Amphitheater (when completed) or assisting in other arts related projects. Details for grant applications can be found at www.oac.state.oh.us.

The Park District is now in their seventh year of partnering with the Massillon Museum on their "Big Read" program, which is a program of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) designed to increase literacy in communities. As part of the partnership with the NEA, the museum chooses a single book for people to read, and then they offer discussions and community events based on the subject or time period of the book. The Park District has offered lectures and hikes focused around the time period of the book. The NEA is the largest national annual funder of the arts in the United States, and so as the Park District looks to expand future programming opportunities, this agency may have excellent grant potential. More information about the NEA can be found at <http://arts.gov/>.

Many agencies and societies offer smaller grants, that when combined with other funds can greatly assist in funding larger-scale projects. Some of these groups include historical societies, ArtsInStark (the local arts council), and preservation or rehabilitation societies such as the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) or the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM).

Other Sources of Income and Assistance

As noted previously, foundations and corporations can be a major source of either funds or resources to assist the Park District. Volunteer labor can also contribute significant value. *Friends of Stark Parks* is a local non-profit volunteer organization founded in 1997 dedicated to preserving and developing the Park District's trails and parks. This group assists with promoting the park uses and services, sponsoring programs and fundraising activities, and assisting with projects and events.

The Park District also has various volunteer programs to assist with trail cleanup and maintenance, education program assistance and special events. The "Trailblazers" program uses trained volunteers for trail patrol, and the "TAILblazers" program is a similar volunteer program utilizing trained dogs and their owners for pet-related patrol matters.

Private gifts of cash, land, materials, and donated services are also sources the Park District has used and can expand upon. The Park District has recently received several substantial donations of land, including the Fry Family Park, Frank S. Esmont (Memorial) Park and David Fichtner Outdoor Education Center. Private individuals, as well as real estate developers, have donated easements and/or land for the countywide trail. These types of donations are critical to the development of the trail network as it simplifies routing the trail and making connections.

Funding from local and regional governmental agencies can also be significant. Agencies that have provided funding in the past include the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District, the Stark County Regional Planning Commission, and the Stark-Tuscarawas-Wayne Joint Solid Waste Management District. Others have assisted in construction projects by supplying materials and/or labor. These partnerships broaden the network of support for the Park District and make it more likely that there is a resource, or contact who may know of a resource, available to meet almost any need.

Formalized partnerships provide support by distributing costs between those participating in projects, assisting in defining roles, clarifying agency commitments and responsibilities (which lessens potential conflicts in jurisdictional matters), and pave the way for future working relationships. The Park District completed a groundbreaking cooperative agreement with ODNR in the management of Deer Creek and Walborn reservoirs, and has numerous cooperative agreements with communities participating in the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* (including the Canal Towpath).

Throughout Ohio, fines from littering and other petty crimes provide a small amount of funding; however, substantial penalties for the violation of environmental laws have resulted in the creation and/or rehabilitation of parks when these fines were ordered paid to park districts. ODNR uses fines to fund its environmental education grants.

Other agencies and nonprofit organizations are able to assist by contributing in-kind services as well as technical assistance to various park and recreation programs and/or planning efforts. These include federal and state agencies such as the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Ohio Development Services Agency, the Ohio Historical Society, ODOT, and the Ohio EPA. Local governmental agencies include the Canton/Stark County Convention and Visitors' Bureau, the Stark Soil and Water Conservation District, the Stark County Engineer's Office, the Stark County Health Department, the SCRPC, and others. Local organizations include the Navarre-Bethlehem Township Historical Society, the Jackson Township Historical Society, the Stark Community Foundation, the Canal Fulton Heritage Society, the Ohio Horseman's Council, the Massillon Area Greenways Inc., the Stark County Federation of Conservation Clubs and The Wilderness Center, among others. National organizations include the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public lands, the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, the Association of National Heritage Areas, the American Farmland Trust, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Most of these organizations have state chapters that can assist in local projects.

Support-Building Activities

Creating a common place that will draw visitors of all ages and ethnicities from within the county and beyond depends upon getting as many people involved in the process as possible. The most important factor is making sure the communities are well informed and involved for they are the ultimate users of the park facilities. Gaining the support of the public is also critical in continuing the successful passage of levies, as well as for improving communication between the Park District and those it serves.

Public relations and constituency building activities are important components of public involvement. In the past, public relations efforts that created awareness about Park activities included brochures, the newsletter, radio and newspaper advertising, social media, the Stark Parks website, special events, the activities of Friends of Stark Parks, and volunteers. In the past five years, these communication methods have helped promote Stark Parks as a great destination for outdoor recreation, and new brochures, increased media coverage, and Exploration Gateway awareness events have also been effective in creating and sustaining the momentum of public attention. Updating the marketing strategy to ensure that existing elements are cohesive and support a strong overall brand is desirable.



FeLeap the Frog, Stark Parks Mascot

Adopting the mascot (FeLeap the Frog) and incorporating it into the Park District logo in January 1997 was a significant event that is gradually making Stark Parks a household name in Stark County and beyond. Not only does the logo and "full size" mascot evoke a "warm and cuddly" feeling, but it is instantly recognizable and attention getting, as well as memorable. Teaching youth about the relationship between parks and nature and helping them remember what they learned as they mature is invaluable in building a future constituency that cares.

Formal and informal groups are fast becoming important partners in the development of parks in United States. The Friends of Stark Parks, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, is supporting the Park District in various ways, including promoting outdoor recreational activities in the parks, organizing fundraisers, and supporting volunteer recognition. Friends of Stark Parks also serves as a vehicle for receiving donations and for recruiting volunteer labor additional to the core Trailblazers and program/event volunteers.

The bi-monthly Stark Parks newsletter serves as an important public relations tool by informing the public of Park District events and activities, and encouraging them to participate. In 2012, over 85,000 households received the paper mailing and 3,000 people received the electronic version. As mailing costs continue to rise and the list of recipients continues to grow, the Park District should continue to monitor its electronic media users to move toward paper and cost savings while maintaining a growing readership.

The Park District's website (www.starkparks.com) serves as an important public relations tool by providing information about Stark Parks and encouraging participation in Park District events. Recognizing the importance of web-based communication tools, the Park District's website has been evolving into a "web system" for managing public comments, documents, volunteer services, facility reservations, and purchases. Future plans for the website include improved maps, ability to search by activity and a user interface that better supports the Park District's overall brand.

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Since the previous plan, social media has quickly become a powerhouse for information gathering and sharing. The virtual interaction among people and networks allows individuals to view, discuss and share information via mobile and web-based technologies. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter are two popular online social networking devices that the Park District is currently utilizing to reach out to their audience, especially the younger generations. The Park District has also recently created a mobile device application that users can download to have instant access to park and trail information and maps. Other mobile application features that the Park District may want to consider employing include speed monitoring, distance, calorie burning, activity log, and GPS-tracking to allow users to track their location and routes virtually. Also, the location and distance to points of interest including rest stops and other amenities may be another popular feature of a mobile application as this information for park maps has been highly requested by the public in general. As web-based services continue to expand and advance, the Park District should continue taking steps to ensure that they are up-to-date with new technology as this method of communication is rapidly growing in popularity across all age groups.

Hosting special events, especially at recently completed project sites, attracts publicity and new users within and beyond the Park District. Since people organize around issues and events rather than institutions, the Park District should involve the public in event planning and, perhaps, look not only toward acquiring a site where large events could be held, but also toward partnering with other organizations to sponsor major events. The benefits of these support-building activities recommended by the last plan have already become more useful not only to the Park District, but to its partners. The continued growth and expansion of these strategies and the implementation of the new ones is vital to meeting the needs of the Park District as it continues to expand its areas of operations.

Public Expenditure

Leisure is often considered to be discretionary or free time, away from work and other responsibilities, where participants choose and control their activities. Outdoor recreation is a major component of leisure, usually included in leisure spending figures unless reported otherwise. Outdoor recreation and leisure expenditures can account for a substantial part of the public's discretionary spending.

Understanding how the public spends money when participating in recreational activities is important to park planners making decisions about fund-generating activities in the parks. The findings presented in the following table show how respondents spent an average of \$1,775 for recreational participation during the 2006 recreation year, the most recent year data was available. The greatest portions of this expenditure were for boating equipment and motorized recreational vehicles and equipment, user fees, and hunting and shooting equipment. Two of the most notable differences between expenditures reported in this report versus the previous survey conducted in 1997 are user fees and observation equipment (such as cameras). As bird-

watching and photography have become the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the country, it is not altogether surprising that observation equipment expenditures have increased as well. Recreational information and guides and court sport equipment were very small components of the total expenditures for recreational purposes.

It is also important to know that recreation in Ohio has significant economic impacts and is a vital component of the economy. Numerous businesses benefit directly and indirectly from expenditures on recreational activities. Residents of Stark County must be educated on this matter for them to know the vital role recreational activities play in the economy. Multiply the average recreation expenditure by Ohio households (\$1775) by the total number of households (4.6+ million) and the result is an \$8.1 billion impact. For Stark County, which has 148,316 households, that translates into \$263.2 million annually.

Figure 22: Household Expenditures for Recreation Participation in 2006

Goods or Services Purchased	Expenditure Mean
Motorized recreation vehicles and equipment	\$1,866
Equine expenses	\$1,112
Boating equipment (boat, sails, etc.)	\$902
User fees (golf, camping, docking, etc)	\$522
Hunting and shooting equipment	\$485
Observation equipment (cameras, etc.)	\$394
Camping equipment	\$379
Trail equipment (bikes, backpacks, etc.)	\$350
Lodging (cabin, campsite, etc.)	\$347
Golf equipment	\$343
Meals	\$319
Winter sports equipment	\$287
Guide, charter and outfitter fees	\$275
Transportation	\$241
Fitness equipment	\$235
Fishing equipment	\$214
Field sport equipment (bats, balls, etc.)	\$189
Swimming/beach equipment (suits, towels, etc.)	\$164
Court sport equipment (rackets, balls, etc.)	\$101
Information (charts, field guides, etc.)	\$61
Average Household Recreation Expenditure	\$1,775*

**figure adjusted for unusually high expenses reported by few respondents*

Source: 2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Future Financial Needs

Across the nation, park districts are broadening their funding bases beyond the traditional allocations they receive from tax money. This new approach has been necessitated by the dwindling sources of funding of counties, cities and townships.

Even in the economically strong counties where tax-based funding is still growing, the needs and demands are growing even faster. The financial difficulties of counties and cities notwithstanding, citizens of America love their parks and if counties' budgets fall short, other funding mechanisms should be found to sustain park programs and activities. The future sustainability of district parks lies in the ability of park managers to generate funding from private sources such as user fees, donations and corporate promotions. Funding from these sources can accomplish everything from building new facilities or providing new services to simply continuing previous levels of maintenance that would otherwise slip.

The next section shows scheduled Park District projects with additional recommendations for projects generated by this study. Funding needs for these projects depend upon the continued availability of a levy, government grants and private sources of funding. Without these funds, the Park District would be unable to complete projects as scheduled and would need to increase the time frame for scheduling projects or possibly eliminate some projects altogether.

Part III - Five-Year Plan Recommendations

This section discusses recommendations to the Stark County Park District for improvements to existing and planned parks and trails, ideas for new programs and educational activities, marketing suggestions, and recommendations for future land development and/or protection measures.

General Recommendations for Parks and Trails

Quality Places

One of the most recurring themes noted throughout this planning process is quality over quantity. Both staff members and the general public have expressed concerns about the need to focus more on creating quality spaces versus acquiring additional land. Signage is an important element in creating quality parks. In addition to updating signs and markers that denote accurate information such as mileage, having enough signs to easily guide users to their destinations is a vital component, especially on the trail network. These were two of the major concerns received by trail users during this planning process.

In addition to installing enough trash and/or recycling bins, grounds maintenance at the parks and on the trails is key to ensuring a quality experience for visitors. Park staffing levels should be analyzed to determine whether additional maintenance staff is needed to keep up with the increasing Park District coverage. Also, maintenance agreements with neighboring park districts may need to be developed and/or revised regarding maintenance oversight and responsibilities at certain parks or trails.

Additional rest stops that feature bathrooms, water fountains, and trash or recycling bins have also been highly requested by park and trail patrons, especially along the trails and at programming events. Ideally, these rest stops should also be noted on maps with the distance calculated between each one as many trail users need to rely on this information.



Meandering Trail

Healthy Communities

The Park District is leading a coalition, which involves the hospitals, county health department and higher education institutions to improve the health of Stark County. In 2012, the coalition completed the Stark County Community Health Improvement Plan, which identified priority areas for public health improvement, based on the findings of the Community Findings Needs Assessment. One of the priority areas identified was obesity and healthy lifestyle choices, an area where the Park District can be very beneficial.

As part of one of its core goals to promote community wellness, the Park District is considering making some of its parks “smoke-free”. Many communities throughout the country are currently pursuing this route for a variety of different reasons in addition to promoting healthy lifestyles, including: secondhand smoke is harmful, cigarette litter is dangerous, other public facilities such as schools are already tobacco-free, and litter and associated maintenance costs would be reduced. Before proceeding with this option, a survey to determine public support of this initiative would be highly desirable. Also, the Park District should research the different public policies other tobacco-free communities have enacted for their outdoor areas. Initially, this type of policy may be best pursued in only a few parks at first to not only better gauge public support for this type of endeavor, but also to slowly acclimate the community to such a change.

Destinations

Over the last several years, the Park District has greatly expanded their trail network from one mile of trail in the 1990s to over eighty miles of trails in 2012. While the popularity of these trails can be directly seen in the steady increase in users over the last decade, common requests for these trails is that they link to destination points. Having a short loop trail around a park or natural area is an excellent way to spend a leisurely afternoon, but having places of interest along the way or at the end of a trail transform the route into more of a multi-purpose and/or productive experience. These stops could include more essential locations such as grocery stores and libraries, places that you may need to stop at anyway, but would otherwise rely on an automobile to get to. Destination points can also consist of more recreational venues such as ice cream parlors, coffee shops, small stores, restaurants and bike shops. They can also incorporate other modes of transportation to create a round-trip experience such as the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad’s bike and ride program or a pedal/paddle option utilizing bikes and waterways. With destination trail routes, the actual trail can become more of a mode of transportation rather than just the destination itself, which with peoples’ busy schedules helps combine the acts of daily living and healthy lifestyles into one.

Education

The Park District's Education Department provides the public with both experiential and curriculum based educational opportunities to explore the abundance of natural and cultural heritage resources within Stark County and the surrounding region. The Education Department provides programming to a wide and demographically diverse audience through the presentation of public programming, requested programming, special events, and wildlife rehabilitation. Education Programmers and Wildlife Rehabilitation staff work hand-in-hand to present these experiences to the public and foster an appreciation and understanding of Stark County's resources.

In an effort to meet the growing needs of the general public, the Park District has greatly expanded the number and type of public programs offered, including the Sensational Senior series, Fit Fridays', High Mileage Hikes, and the Hike-A-Hundred club. In addition to these popular activities and other recreation-based programs available, Stark Parks also offers a variety of other programs focused on topics pertaining to the natural environment and our cultural heritage. As the Park District looks forward, they should continue to develop the variety of programs offered.

Requested programs are those programs offered to school groups, senior groups, and civic groups on an as requested basis. With the opening of the Exploration Gateway, structured, classroom-based programming has increased dramatically. Stark Parks has won the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration's (CILC) Pinnacle Award four times for its Distance Learning program. The videoconferencing technology in this program allows Stark Parks to connect and interact remotely with classrooms and park enthusiasts around the world.

The Park District also hosts special events throughout the year, which attract large audiences and help foster the Park District's interaction with the general public. Some of these events include Fall Fest, Summer Splash, and various retreats and fishing derbies. To further improve outdoor programming variety and attendance from the underserved areas of the County, the Park District may consider adding fireside lecture areas or other amphitheater-type facilities where none currently exist. These areas would require few resources to create and would provide more flexibility in programming locations. If warranted, the sites could gradually be upgraded to include electric service and lighting.

Many residents have also made requests for self-guided programs that would require very minimal resources beyond creating a map or brochure. These guides could cover activities such as a walking tour of a historic area like Minerva, or a native tree/wildflower identification program.

Several requests have been made by members of the public to take many of the "introductory/beginner" programs offered to the next level with intermediate or advanced programs for the more experienced individuals. There has been interest expressed in

establishing camping sites throughout the County, and also to have longer group excursion trips that last either all day or overnight. The Park District could look at partnering with places such as the Wilderness Center or neighboring counties that have different outdoor recreation amenities from what Stark Parks currently has to help co-host these events. As many of the current programs are already at maximum capacity, the Park District may need to analyze existing staffing levels to determine if additional staff may be needed to meet these requests.

One of the goals of the Park District is to maximize outreach to underserved areas of the County. By expanding programming opportunities into new park and trail areas, the Park District would be able to amplify its exposure in previously underutilized areas and encourage participation from residents of those neighborhoods.

Viewing/Photographing Wildlife

These are two of the fastest growing and most popular forms of outdoor recreation in not only Ohio, but in the U.S. as a whole. As the Park District continues to offer programs on these activities, it is recommended that additional viewing areas and programs be considered as these activities continue to become increasingly popular. The previous plan recommended that the Park District create observation areas where appropriate. Such areas could be as simple as several benches with an orientation sign or as complex as an elevated platform. While not all parks boast ideal habitats, the observation areas could be placed in conjunction with bluebird trails and other nesting box projects in order to afford some opportunities for observation. The combination of observation areas with nesting boxes would also provide opportunities for observers to contribute data by monitoring the nesting boxes. Placing monitoring forms and a reporting box at each location, as well as a peg-board denoting each box and type of activity taking place could assist this participation. Successful fledglings and other data could be included in newsletters and on the website. The sites would also provide convenient locations to begin bird-watching walks.

If particularly successful viewing areas are developed, it may be possible to add them to the state Watchable Wildlife program. This program, designed to assist wildlife-associated recreation, economic development, education, and conservation, is a nationwide program overseen by the ODNR's Division of Wildlife. More information on this program can be found on ODNR's Watchable Wildlife Viewing Sites website.

In addition to observation/viewing areas, other similar projects that have been requested by the public include programs pertaining to observation activities involving migrating amphibians, astronomy, and tree/wildflower identification. Several requests have been made to either host current programs more often or increase the capacity limit as the activities are oftentimes full. As the Park District continues to expand throughout the County, consideration should be given to hosting these activities at additional locations to better reach the entire population.

Animal Companions

The seemingly increasing popularity of dogs as park and trail companions can be directly witnessed in the upsurge of “dog park” facilities, the new “TAILblazers” pet patrol program, and the recent requests for dog-friendly park programs. While pet training programs are beyond the scope of the Park District, other types of dog-friendly programs that would likely be popular include dog-and-owner group hikes, dogs-allowed park events, or possibly even dog agility events. A special hiking club, similar to the Hike-A-Hundred Mileage Club, could also be established by the Park District specifically for owners and their dogs as a way to encourage participation while also allowing members to track their mileage.



Walkers with Dog

Horses are another animal that have received increased attention throughout this planning process, primarily through requests for additional equestrian trails and improved facilities to accommodate horses and horse trailers. The Park District currently maintains approximately 31 miles of equestrian trails, located at Walborn Reservoir, Whitacre Greer Park and as part of the Olde Muskingum Trail. Most of these are shared trails with other groups such as bicyclists and joggers, but the Park District is working to create separate trails for horses as shared trails can create dangerous situations when horses sometimes become spooked. Practicing trail etiquette helps to improve this situation; however many users are unaware of the proper etiquette in these circumstances.

The Park District is working on developing a long-term master plan in partnership with the Whitacre Greer Company for their park, which currently is for equestrian riders only. As the Park District looks to expand trails and trail connections, Whitacre Greer Park would be an ideal location for additional horse-only trails. Trailer parking and other horse-related amenities would be available to accommodate these users, and having horse-riders at one location would better provide the Park District an opportunity to develop equestrian-related programming.

Biking

According to various studies, one of the most increasingly popular outdoor recreation activities in this region is bicycling. This includes on-road biking, mountain biking and trail/leisure biking. While on-road biking is generally a mode of transportation handled through the local transportation authorities, the Park District should work towards adding signage and mileage markers to those on-road routes where possible that coincide with their *Trail and Greenway Master Plan*. Also, partnerships with places of interest along destination routes

should be established to promote bike-friendly amenities such as bike racks or tire inflation systems.

As mentioned in Part I, more active recreation activities, such as mountain biking, are becoming increasingly popular, especially with younger generations. To accommodate the growing interest in this activity, the Park District should consider developing more rugged trails for this type of activity.

The more leisurely bicycle enthusiasts are generally those who prefer the more family-friendly routes that are wider and less hilly. These can be either trails or roads, but typically those that receive less traffic and can be taken at a more leisurely pace. One common request made by trail users is for the Park District to establish high-mileage bicycling clubs similar to the Hike-A-Hundred Club, which would allow bicyclists to track their mileage. While likely beyond the time period of this plan, eventually the Park District should analyze partnering with groups such as the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, local bike shops or possibly the Amish population to initiate bike and ride programs similar to what the Cuyahoga Valley National Park does now. These types of round-trip activities would help create that overall “destination” experience as mentioned above.

Accessibility

One of the Park District’s priorities is to reach out to underserved populations within the County. While certain programming, such as the special needs fishing derby, is being offered to include these groups, methods for physically getting these individuals to the program itself could be improved. This includes making parks and facilities more accessible by installing ADA-compliant features such as ramps, ADA-accessible portable toilets, picnic tables, and pavement markings; anything to create a safer and more accessible environment for all patrons.

The Park District should also work towards establishing a partnership with SARTA, the local transit authority, to help reach out to those individuals who otherwise may not have access to the parks and trails. Overlapping bus routes and trail routes onto a single map would be a great way to show bus riders where they can best access certain parks and trails. Also, adding bus service to the Exploration Gateway would allow residents to not only access the public library, but it would also provide them the opportunity to experience park programming and outdoor education activities that would not otherwise be available to them. Accessibility improvements such as these mentioned above would benefit not only disabled persons, but older adults and young children as well. In order to truly maximize the Park District’s total user group, accommodations need to be made where possible.

Public Safety

The Public Safety Department at the Park District is responsible for keeping the parks secure through the patrols of the Stark County Park Rangers. The Rangers patrol the parks, and in addition to being on the look-out for offenses, focus on the education of the public so that they can more safely enjoy the parks. The Rangers host classes such as Hunters Education and youth hunt programs and are present at all of the Park District's special events. In addition to patrolling and education, the Park Rangers have used innovative technology to help keep the parks safe. Security cameras have been installed in and outside of facilities in areas that could attract criminal activity. In 2013 the Rangers implemented "body cam" systems which allow the Rangers to wear a shoulder mounted camera for greater accountability in confrontational situations. Evaluation of these tools for effectiveness should be a goal of the Public Safety Department with a subsequent plan to continue using these tools where appropriate.

With additional land being acquired by the Park District in all parts of the county, the Ranger staff may consider decentralizing and implementing additional bases for starting their shifts to reduce mileage on vehicles and to improve response times. Diversifying the modes that the Rangers engage with visitors in the park would also be helpful: motorcycle, bike, ATV and boat patrol would increase the types of areas Rangers could access to increase their presence.

"Green" Initiatives

As environmental stewards, a long-term goal of the Park District is to continually improve and promote environmental, or "green," practices both internally and as a district. "Green" initiatives include utilizing renewable energy and eco-friendly technology and products where possible, installing recycling stations along trails and at park facilities, and offering sustainability-based programs on topics such as composting/gardening, rain garden installation, and sustainable farming.

Existing Park Recommendations

This section discusses recommendations for parks that are currently in the Stark County Park District inventory.

Cook's Lagoon

The Park District recently upgraded parking and other improvements in preparation for its use as a trailhead for the Stark Electric Railroad. Five-year plan recommendations include adding a new entry sign and interpretive signage, as well as an accessible fishing area and security cameras.

The proximity of the nearby city park provides opportunities for cooperative and creative programming. While Cook's Lagoon Park itself is too small for hosting large events, a cooperative event with the city would provide a large enough area. Staff has indicated that this park was traditionally used for fishing derbies, an event that continues at this park. The derby could be scheduled in cooperation with the city so that events at the adjoining city parks could occur as well. Any new trail development should also be coordinated with the city where possible to help ensure a well-designed and connected system. Educational programming includes partnering with the J.R. Coleman services. The need for restroom facilities at Cook's park is another shared resource opportunity as the Canton Park system currently has restrooms.

Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs

Both of these parks are included in the same planning document, the *Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs Master Plan*, therefore projects related to both of them will be described in this section.

Deer Creek: With the newly constructed Deer Creek Pedestrian Bridge over the reservoir, the Mahoning Valley Trail at Deer Creek now extends 4.6 miles from Price Street south to the Gaskill Trailhead in Alliance. This park features an ADA accessible fishing pier, paved parking and multiple picnic tables. The area is largely undeveloped and conserved as open space to help in the protection of the main water supply for the City of Alliance. In addition Deer Creek Park serves as important flood control area for the Army Corps of Engineers.

Future improvements at Deer Creek include two new parking areas, bank stabilization efforts, and either on-road signs or stenciled-on paint delineating the Mahoning Valley Trail route. Also planned are an expanded and upgraded boat ramp, concession building and restrooms, and a boat rental dock.

Recommendations for Deer Creek include improved picnic areas with more tables and grills to accommodate additional users resulting from the planned concession area and boat ramp upgrades. The boat ramp upgrade and a new boat rental have both been highly requested by the general public and staff as a high priority for this park. Other suggestions for future improvements include a programming campfire area, additional trails and a reservable shelter. With the boating facility improvements, increased recreational paddling opportunities may need to be considered. Also, the rugged terrain of much of the park may lend itself to more advanced-level hiking trails or mountain biking opportunities, both of which have been frequently requested by the public. Signage improvements are also recommended for this park.

Walborn: Opened in the spring of 2001 at Walborn Reservoir were the improved boat ramp, concession building, restrooms, an ADA accessible fishing dock/boardwalk, ADA accessible duck blinds, a boat rental dock, a picnic area, and parking. In 2012, a shelter and expanded asphalt parking for the shelter and equestrians were added. Almost seven miles of

trail, including a horse trail, have also been completed. This has quickly become a very popular spot, especially for fishing. This park is the site of the Park District's annual and popular "Summer Splash", which educates participants on water safety and activities available such as kayaking, canoeing, and power boating.

Recommendations for Walborn Reservoir include adding signage (both directional and interpretive), eagle observation areas, a canoe/kayak launch as well as an ADA accessible dock. Recommendations for the Reeder Avenue area include expanding the parking area, constructing a picnic shelter, and adding a restroom facility for year round use (due to the ice fishermen during the winter). Other recommendations include adding a fireside/lecture area, building Reeder Avenue birding areas and parking opportunities, and expanding water-related outdoor programming. The large amount of undisturbed land at Walborn may also provide an attractive location for additional mountain biking opportunities as well.



Kayakers at Walborn Reservoir

Unscheduled amenities include wildlife- and bird-watching stations on or near Reeder Avenue, a nature center/lodge, several picnic areas with shelters, and the interpretation of several historic structures and farmsteads.

Lock 4 Area

While Lock 4 is technically a trailhead on the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail (mentioned under Existing Facilities in Part I), this spot is also the location of canal lock 4 of the Ohio & Erie Canal, and an historic 1930s brick building that is commonly, but incorrectly, referred to as the "Lock Tender's House." The Park District has improved the parking and signage at Lock 4 and held public meetings to plan other improvements (permanent restrooms, connecting trails, and a small playground). Included in the plans is the restoration of the brick building to use as a volunteer station and interpretive/programming outpost, and the repair of the lock gates to make them fully functional. These improvements would allow their use for demonstrations and possibly for the locking of a canal boat, something that would be truly historical.

The renovation of the brick building began in 2006 with the volunteer efforts of the Canal Fulton Rotary Club. The installation of an automated weather monitoring station, as well as flow recording devices for the sluice and lock, would be an excellent idea to include in the renovation so that data is available to assist in the study. This will permit calculating the frequency at which the lock can be operated in varying weather conditions without impairing the quality of water in the canal. Additional programming could be offered out of the brick

building, such as guided hikes or historical programming about the canalway. The building could also serve as a concession area during parks events or as a safety station for park rangers and volunteers. The Park District should also monitor the parking capacity at this location and plan for its expansion if needed.

Other recommendations include using technology and apps such as “iBird” and “eBird” to share data about wildlife and in particular birds that have been spotted by visitors, increasing visitorship and participation in wildlife viewing. The Park District should consider adding bird-watching and fireside areas and also a canoe/kayak dock on the river that is easily accessible from the parking lot. A canoe landing would provide an extra attraction for those renting canoes in Canal Fulton. The birding area could adjoin the brick building and overlook the field, where a bluebird trail could be placed between the canal and the Tuscarawas River.

The canoe landing would allow an opportunity for those traveling on the river to access the facilities at the park, and create an interpretive opportunity for living history and guided tours. Requests for interpretive and road-crossing signage and better access to the trail from the main parking area have also been made to help improve this area, as well as more primitive campsites at this site and along the Towpath Trail in general. Other recommendations include security cameras at the brick building.

David A. Fichtner Outdoor Education Center

The Park District acquired this property through donation, including a home and barn, which is being used as an outdoor education center. Improvements at this location will depend upon needs expressed by the community, but requests have been made for a reserveable outdoor shelter/pavilion and improved parking. A study should be conducted to analyze the long-term needs for the house and barn to see whether restoration efforts would further the mission of the Park District or whether the building should be removed. Sanitary facility upgrades are also needed at the site. A fireside and birding area would be great additions for the park which would require minimal upgrading, but would provide excellent areas for outdoor programming on topics related to the site and/or surrounding area. The Center is a great site for family fishing and would be well suited for self-guided tours around the pond as well as wetland trails. A portable restroom is needed in the near term with consideration for permanent restrooms in the future.

Frank S. Esmont Park

This is a 15.5-acre property adjacent to the proposed Lower Middlebranch Trail near the Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium in Canton Township. It too was acquired by donation and will eventually become a trailhead for the Lower Middlebranch Trail. Construction of a .5 mile loop trail and butterfly garden has been accomplished by the Park District. Currently no programming is offered at this park; however, its close proximity to several well-developed residential neighborhoods creates an opportunity to reach out to a number of residents within

a close distance. Being adjacent to the Nimishillen Creek, water-based programs such as fishing or even sustainability-focused programs covering topics such as water pollution control may be good options for this park. Also, while likely beyond the time frame for this five-year plan, once the Lower Middlebranch Trail is developed, the Nimishillen Creek access at this park may provide a great location for canoes/kayaks to access the water at this future trailhead. This site could also be considered for a “natural play” area where children can interact with natural elements and engage in unstructured play.

Petros Lake Park

The need for additional parking exists at this park and should be addressed during this five year planning period. Recent improvements include the 0.8-mile walking trail and parking improvements.

Recommendations from the previous five-year plan included studying the installation of an amphitheater at this park by establishing a temporary stage for special “test events” in cooperation with local arts groups. Holding “test events” at this site should help determine whether the surrounding demographics would support this type of venue. “Test event” ideas may include movie night using inflatable projection screens, already popular at Sippo Lake. Driveway repairs and redesign efforts are also planned at this site, which if the amphitheater is taken into consideration, may help alleviate potential congestion generated from the associated events. There also appears to be a need for the installation of a few benches along the waterfront for fishermen to utilize as they are currently moving the heavy picnic tables off their pads and taking them down towards the water. The Park District should continue to analyze adjoining properties for future land acquisitions.

Sippo Lake Park



Family Fishing on Lake

In 2007, Stark Parks completed construction of the Exploration Gateway (EG) in partnership with the Stark County District Library (SCDL). The EG now serves as a visitor center/gateway to the Ohio & Erie Canalway. The EG provides innovative programming, an exhibit hall with interactive displays, a distance learning lab, and houses the Perry Branch Library of the SCDL. There is currently no public transportation service to this site; however due to the large constituent base of the EG and the Park District as a whole, the Park District should consider partnering with SARTA, the local transit authority, to reach out to the underserved populations in the County to better provide

park and trail access opportunities for all. Also, as programs and reservations have greatly increased at this park, the need for an ADA ramp at the marina has become more important than ever. Programs are being offered for target groups, but the park doesn't have the means for them to adequately access the program.

In 2013, the Park District awarded a contract to design a new wildlife rehabilitation center, to replace the Sanders Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, also located at Sippo Lake Park. New cages were also constructed at the wildlife center, which will now allow visitors to walk through and view the non-rehabilitation animals anytime the park is open, fulfilling a common request of many park patrons over the last few years. As the design of the new wildlife center gets underway, consideration should be given to making this a center where visitors can also spend time at their leisure, either watching animals at feeder stations, relaxing at a table, or learning about wildlife.

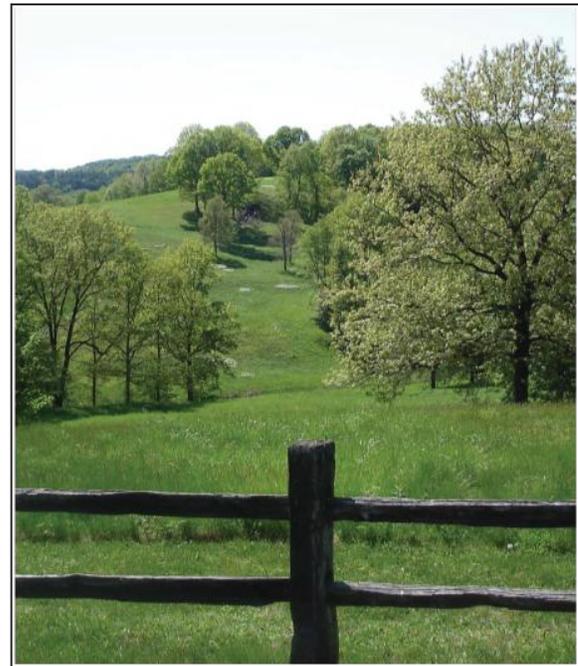
The Park District should review remaining tracts of vacant land adjacent to Sippo Lake Park for possible acquisition if they would complement current developments or would serve to facilitate development of *the Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* connections to Sippo Lake or protect the water quality of Sippo Lake. There would be a great benefit to re-watering the Cottonwood Wetland by directing problematic storm-water drainage from the neighborhoods to the west. A loop trail around the entire park itself would also be a great feature to allow visitors to explore the full park without having to drive from one location to another. If even a more formal route from the Exploration Gateway to the wildlife center could be completed, this would be a great complement to school field trips.

A new Canalway Explorers program is planned for sometime in 2013, which is designed to educate and engage members. In conjunction with this transition, the Park District should also consider offering more programs pertaining to sustainability-focused topics such as gardening, environmental protection, or healthier living. Also, college-level environmental education courses could be held at Sippo Lake Park through the development of a partnership with the universities or even high schools that offer dual-credit courses. The space and resources currently available at Sippo Lake Park make this location an ideal setting for these types of programs.

Other requests for this park received by both the general public and staff, a natural play area between the Exploration Gateway and the Marina parking lot off of Tyner Drive, additional interpretive signage at the park and along the trail, and speedier repair of paddle boats, especially during peak seasons. These requests further confirm a general comment often repeated throughout this planning process that in addition to acquiring land, Stark Parks also needs to now adjust their focus to maintaining and improving their existing facilities and amenities.

Fry Family Park

A Master Plan was created for this 327-acre farm in November 2011 which proposes several different activities for this park, including: winter sports, fishing, hiking and biking trails, and a nature education center at the former property residence. The majority of the park will be devoted to retaining and/or restoring some of its natural features, including forest lands, wetlands and meadows. Camping is an often-requested activity by park patrons, and due to the location and size of this park, it may make it a good location for this type of activity. Currently camping is allowed as part of programs offered by the education department. Careful consideration would need to be given though as to whether this would be part of a permanent activity or not. The Park District should look into the feasibility of acquiring adjacent land to allow for a one-way access drive to the property rather than be forced to widen the existing driveway.



Fry Family Park

Source: Fry Park Master Plan

Magnolia Flouring Mills

As the Park District looks to the future, long-term goals for this property should be carefully decided. The creation of a master plan is recommended for this site as several features on the property provide opportunities to take this site in a number of different directions. Currently, there is no public access to the upper-story of the mill as the layout does not meet ADA requirements. The Park District should decide whether they want this floor to be viewable by patrons, and if so, then funding will need to be identified to purchase and install some type of lift system. There are also several other features on the property that have the potential for utilization by the Park District, including a pond, canal, barn and outbuildings. The Park District has an option to purchase the former residence, which would open up the opportunity for a possible museum/visitors' center at the site, or potentially a bed & breakfast venue. Until the creation of a master plan can be completed, recommendations for this site include adding interpretive signage and creating walking brochures for visitors to follow as they tour the Village of Magnolia. This guide would help further one of the Park District's overall goals of creating "destination experiences" for park and trail users. The mill site lends itself to multiple community events and the Park District could host farmers markets, a fall festival, serve as a stage venue, host movie nights and become a major program provider for the community's annual Sandy & Beaver Canal Days.

Molly Stark Park

The current condition of the hospital is extremely poor, and brownfield remediation feasibility studies conducted at the site present an extremely cost-prohibitive remediation action plan. As mentioned in Part I, planning is underway to determine long-term goals for the property. Picnic tables, hiking trails and open areas are short-term goals for the property, and current programs offered at the park include night hikes and historical site tours. The public has expressed interest in projects such as a small memorial garden and preserving features of the building where possible, such as arches and bricks, to possibly reuse in the garden. Another suggestion was to retain the building footprint and install interpretative plaques throughout that would allow visitors to read about the hospital's history as they walked around the former rooms. Programs that have been suggested for this park include amateur astronomy-viewing, wildlife observation and cultural programming that tells the stories of the people who were connected with the hospital. Requests have also been made to create more trails for longer hikes at the park, connecting it to the County-wide trail network, install a shelter and more picnic tables, add restroom facilities, and consider developing a Frisbee golf course on the site. The building continues to attract vandals and thieves. In the short-term, the Park District should increase signage, security cameras and/or fencing to deter crime. In the long term, the Park District should explore partnership opportunities that would help preserve the structure.

Whitacre Greer Park

Stark Parks currently leases this 2,000 acre property, which has six miles of trail reserved for horseback riding only. Future recommendations for this site include either extending the easement coverage area or purchasing lands to construct connector trails throughout the park. Additional equestrian trails have been heavily requested by both horse-riding groups and private individuals, and the large amount of acreage at this site in addition to the equestrian facilities already located here make this park a prime setting for that type of expansion. If the Park District is successful in obtaining additional lands, separate trails for hikers and bicyclists may also be appropriate for this location in the future.

White Property

This site, which is in close proximity to the Walborn Reservoir, consists of a house and hangar, and an eagle observation viewing area. Original plans call for the house and hangar to become an education center. This recommendation, if combined with increased nature programming and related activities such as camping programs and additional observation areas, would make a good use of the property. Another suggestion received for this site is to convert the hangar into an indoor rock-climbing facility, similar to the one at Kendall Cliffs in Peninsula. If other suggestions for the Deer Creek and Walborn Reservoirs are implemented, including mountain biking trails and updated boat launches, converting this property into an outfitter-type or retreat setting may attract a variety of new patrons to this area, especially younger generations looking for more active recreation opportunities (see previous section).

Trails and Greenways

The first major Park District sponsored plan for trails and greenways was the *Stark County Canal Corridor Master Plan* which was quickly followed by the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* in 1999. In 2013, the Park District completed an update to the *Trail and Greenway Master Plan*.

The *Stark County Canal Corridor Master Plan* recommended developing a number of visitor centers, trailheads with restroom facilities, and other amenities such as nature and equestrian trails, and repairs and improvement to the canal and feeder system. Almost \$20 million in



Bicyclists on Mahoning Valley Trail

proposed projects were listed, and although all portions may not be completed as envisioned, the total investment in the corridor project will likely exceed this. Completed portions of this project include trail sections discussed in the previous sections, the John Glenn Grove Trailhead at Warmington Road, several secondary trailheads, and other features.

The success in developing the *Stark County Canal Corridor Master Plan* and subsequent construction facilitated the development of the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan (TGMP)*. This plan, as described previously, is a long-range plan

that spreads the benefits of multipurpose trails throughout the County, in addition to providing a framework for park development and preservation of natural areas. As with all plans, the *TGMP* is not meant to be a static document, but instead one that provides a general framework for future park planning that can be modified to accommodate growth and change over time.

The *TGMP* comprises a number of major trails and connector trails that would tie parks and a number of community assets into a comprehensive network. Proposed trails include: the Sippo Lake Connector, the Airport Trail, the Portage Lakes Trail, the Jackson Connector, the Mount Pleasant/Dogwood Park Trail, the Hoover Trail, the West Branch Trail, the Covered Bridge Trail, the Upper Middlebranch Trail, the Hartville/Quail Hollow Loop, the North County Trail, the Walborn Connector Trail, the Canton Downtown Connector, the Stark Electric Railroad Trail, the Nickel Plate Trail, the Molly Stark Park Trail, the Beech Creek Trail, the East Canton Connector, the Pleasant Valley Trail, the Sandy Valley Trail, the Minerva Connector, the Iron Horse Trail, the Stark Farmland Trail, the Sandy and Beaver Canal Trail, and the Sugarcreek Trail. These 25 trails (including the Canal Towpath Trail and the Sippo Valley Trail) represent an enormous opportunity for the Stark County community that would bring incalculable benefits in recreation, education, resource preservation, tourism and other economic development.

Made up of on-road trails, off-road trails, and trails on sidewalks and greenways, the more than 400 miles would represent one of the most comprehensive multi-use trail networks ever built in the U.S. Park staff estimate 150 miles could be completed within ten years, dependent upon the availability of resources. Although no complete cost estimates for the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* have been tabulated, a number of projects related to the trail and greenway plan have recently been completed and provide an idea of the general cost for trailheads and trail construction.

Trails receive priority for development based on a number of factors, including those in high population areas likely to generate maximum usage, sections in areas with scenery or attractions likely to draw users, and in areas receiving development support. Some of the proposed high priority trails include the Minerva Connector Trail, Sandy Valley Trail and Sandy and Beaver Canal Trail, Ironhorse Trail, Nickelplate and Hoover Trail Phase IV.

Federal and state appropriations for projects will also drive the order in which projects are completed. One goal of the County is to complete the Congressman Ralph Regula Towpath Trail from county line to county line. The completion of the Massillon railroad crossing is the remaining piece missing in the full connection as the aqueduct bridge over the Tuscarawas River is now under construction.

The Park District currently utilizes a trail mileage tracking program for its Hike-A-Hundred Club, which has been used recently to showcase the extremely high popularity of the recently opened Middlebranch Trail and the Hoover Trail. In addition to this program, trail traffic counts and/or mobile applications for all users to track trail mileage would be extremely useful in analyzing usage patterns. Related to the development of the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* is the identification of areas adjoining the trails that need protection either through acquisition, easements, or farmland preservation. This will be discussed in the following land development section.

Recommended Future Park and Land Development

The following section discusses suggestions for the Park District to consider and explore as it acquires new land to create parks and develops methods to protect existing ones.

Open Space Conservation

The Stark County Regional Planning Commission carried out a land use survey in 2003, which identified loss of natural areas, including prime agricultural lands, as the most pressing issue. Within Stark County there are large acreages where minimal development should be allowed for reasons of public health and safety. These areas include flood plains, wetlands, flood control dam easement areas, water well fields and aquifer recharge areas, mined/reclaimed areas and landfills. Some of these areas, such as mined/reclaimed lands, have poor value due to disturbed soils and destroyed aquifers. Others, such as flood plains, flood easement areas, and well fields, can support limited activities such as farming, hunting and fishing.

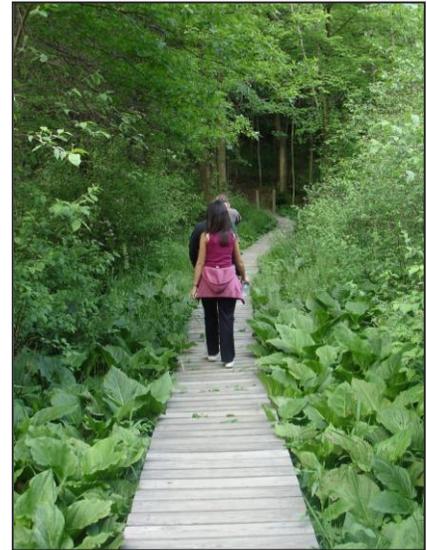
Many of these areas are already in public ownership or have easements that greatly restrict development. Others should be set aside and preserved through public acquisition or clearly demarcated to prevent their development. To accomplish this, subdivision and zoning regulations could strictly regulate them and assist in their identification by showing them on zoning and land use maps. Zoning regulations should prohibit construction in wetland and flood easement areas, provide for riparian corridor setbacks, and limit development in prime aquifer recharge areas. In addition to working with local land trusts to identify target areas for conservation, the Park District should coordinate with local jurisdictions to help facilitate these efforts. Many communities already have critical areas within their boundaries identified, which could be incorporated into a county-wide sensitive habitat inventory that the Park District could utilize as part of a land acquisition plan.

As suburban and metropolitan areas increasingly struggle with problems of water supply and purity, it is critical to have buffers to protect streams, canals, rivers and lakes. The Park District's recent award of a state Emergency Management Act grant allowed them to acquire and demolish a property that flooded frequently and return that land to its natural floodplain. Parks are a wonderful method of serving multiple objectives of water management, water quality improvement and recreation.

Designating riparian corridor protection zones is another important tool because vegetation along streams and reservoirs provide important buffers. These buffers decrease the amount of pollution entering the water system. Trees and shrub roots hold stream banks in place, preventing erosion. Organic matter and grasses reduce the rate of runoff, giving the sediment time to settle. This process gives water time to percolate, filter through the soil and recharge underlying groundwater.^{vi}

Wetlands need to be preserved in accordance with the Clean Water Act, and wetland restoration is a tool that is very important in dealing with waters that are already impaired. Wetlands that have already been filled and drained preserve their characteristic soil and hydrology, allowing their natural functions to be reclaimed. Restoration requires much planning and involves renewing natural and historical wetlands that have been lost or degraded and then regaining their functions as vital ecosystems.^{vii} Partnerships with The Wilderness Center, Ducks Unlimited, nature trusts and others are encouraged, in order to identify high quality wetlands and coordinate funding for their preservation and enhancement.

While there is concern regarding the continued loss of open space throughout Stark County, it is encouraging to see the amount of progress that has been made over the last five years. Partnerships with the Wilderness Center and others have been effective in preserving open space. The Park District has worked to stabilize and improve parks and facilities that were in need of renewal. Community and county-wide support has grown as work on the Trail and Greenway Master Plan is implemented. Because environmental awareness has grown among the general public, many communities have taken active roles in protecting natural areas.^{viii} The importance of Stark Parks' land preservation work in Stark County cannot be over-emphasized.



People Walking on Boardwalk

Adjoining Land Acquisitions

The Park District should consider undertaking the expansion of certain parks in order to protect them from incompatible adjoining uses. These parks include Sippo Lake, Petros, and Deer Creek and Walborn reservoirs. All of these will require reviews to prioritize purchases and/or other protection measures.

Tracts north and south of Warmington Street in Perry Township should be acquired to provide a buffer area between the Towpath Trail and the commercial development and mining areas to the east. South of Warmington Street, acquisitions should extend to include the upper reaches of the adjoining plateau to the east, and west to the former rail line. This area could extend to include unfarmed tracts and wetland areas, including the possible protection of Pigeon Creek. Agricultural easements could be sought for the area east of Warmont Road and should extend to Navarre in order to protect the view shed.

Protecting portions of this area from development is the Dover Dam Easement Area, which extends from Warmington Street south to the Dover Dam. The easement area prohibits new construction in areas where floodwaters would extend if the Dover Dam were to be closed.

While only slightly larger than the flood plain north of Navarre, the easement area widens to include significant areas east of Riverland Road in Bethlehem Township.

Additional canal corridor areas that should be acquired include areas between the canal and the Tuscarawas River and undeveloped tracts between the canal and Erie Avenue in both Jackson Township and Lawrence Township. Large wetland areas south and southeast of the Northwest Youth Sports Association ball fields in Lawrence Township and undeveloped areas between the Tuscarawas River and Navarre are several areas that should be studied for acquisition.

Another important canal resource, formerly owned by the County but now privately held with a maintenance easement for the Park District, is the Nimisilla Feeder. The Nimisilla Feeder is the source for watering the section of canal through Canal Fulton to Lock 4, and is imperative for operation of the St. Helena canal boat and for maintaining water quality throughout the city. The Park District completed the restoration of the feeder canal levee in 2013 with a grant from the Ohio and Erie Canal Association and should continue to maintain the feeder, and review ownership issues, especially for the feeder as it extends east of Leaver Avenue to the diversion dam. These issues, and a lack of control for diverting water between the feeder and Nimisilla Creek, should be addressed in the hydrologic study for operating the canal lock at Lock 4.

The purchase of land requires significant resources, therefore the Park District should continue to partner with agencies such as land trusts to assist in facilitating larger land acquisition projects. Park District-owned land that is currently under-utilized or too small to provide meaningful results could potentially be traded or sold in exchange for more purposeful lands, especially those adjacent to existing parks. Examples of this type of land acquisition measure can be found in neighboring counties.

Land Protection Measures

Conservation easements are another method of protecting land from intrusive changes that detract from parks. These legal agreements between landowners and either land trusts or government agencies set certain limits on the use of the land to protect it, while still affording the property owner some use of their property and the ability to sell or transfer it with the restrictions still in place.

Donations to the Park District point to another method of obtaining and protecting land. Donations include trail rights-of-ways and land from interested families and businesses. The Park District has created a Legacy Fund as a vehicle to channel these donations which can lessen the hesitancy of possible donors and would be able to promote the benefits of donations to the District for estate planning, bequests, and other donations.

Possible New Parks

A variety of facilities are provided throughout the state within local park districts. Several different types of parks would provide opportunities not readily available to Stark County residents, such as: historically- significant/archaeologically-sensitive areas; rougher-terrain parks for horses and mountain bikes; or winter sports areas for activities such as sled riding or ice skating. The Park District does not currently own or operate an arboretum or botanical garden, but could partner with the Beach Creek Botanical Gardens for mutual benefit.

Other Park Acquisitions and Planning Efforts

The previous five-year plans have discussed the possibility of acquiring parks operated by other entities. While this recommendation would be based on those entities wanting to divest themselves of these resources, the economic recession has created financial hardships for many communities that may now be willing to explore this opportunity. Another possibility is developing partnerships with other entities to manage their facilities. For example, there are partnerships in other parts of Ohio where a local park district manages a state park for ODNR. Opportunities for acquiring private sportsmen's clubs and other similar facilities if they were planning to dissolve would also be realistic possibilities.

Information is vital to successfully plan and gain support for projects. There are a number of data gathering activities and plans that could further assist the Park District in meeting its mission. These include surveys, long-range plans, and targeted studies to meet specific needs.

In order to understand the public's perceptions and desires in relationship to the Park District, some surveying by the District has taken place. This should continue and possibly expand into a wider variety of surveys of Stark County residents and facility users. Surveys can identify desires and expectations, usage patterns, additional program opportunities, the public's knowledge of Stark Parks, and a multitude of other facts. Recommended surveys include: user surveys at events and facilities, including attendance counts; mail, email and social media surveys; usage surveys such as trail traffic counts, license plate surveys, and parking lot counts.

Other ongoing data acquisition activities which should be continued include: tours by staff of other parks; conferences and retreats; periodicals and other publications; and ongoing public involvement. This data can be used for decision-making and for contributing towards additional plans such as those following.

Projects Defined by the Stark County Trail & Greenway Master Plan

Many trails and trailhead projects are defined in the *Stark County Trail & Greenway Master Plan*. The Park District should look at this plan when considering additional park acquisitions and improvements, to ensure the cohesiveness of the two plans.

Other Plans and Studies

In addition to the *Trail and Greenway Master Plan* and the *Five-Year Plan*, other plans that may assist the Park District in ensuring the best possible use of resources throughout the County park system include:

- A countywide comprehensive park plan
- Individual park master plans
- Stark County 2040 Comprehensive/Transportation Plan
- SARTA maps and plans
- Local plans

Countywide Comprehensive Park Plan: Stark Parks, in discussing future plans for parks, has emphasized that the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* is the framework upon which future county parks will be located and developed. However, while the *Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan* can provide this framework, it does not provide sufficient detail for prioritizing or analyzing specific needs for the individual communities, nor detail local plans in order to prioritize connections between parks, nor prioritize construction of the different trails themselves. For that reason a Countywide Comprehensive Park Plan would be very beneficial. A comprehensive plan would include data regarding existing and proposed park facilities throughout all Stark County communities, many of which already have local plans identifying and prioritizing future growth opportunities and improvement areas for their park systems (see sections below). A comprehensive park plan would also identify gaps in the various types of parks based on the hierarchical model in *PROSGG*. The comprehensive plan should contain individual park maps showcasing the unique features of each park, and it could also include a sensitive habitat areas inventory useful for identifying target areas for future acquisition/conservation consideration. Its scope for development would extend ten, fifteen, or twenty years and would allow for the orderly development of all types of parks and trails, and therefore also helping to limit duplicative efforts and conserving resources.

Individual Park Master Plans: Individual master plans either currently exist or are in the works for several parks within the District including: Walborn and Deer Creek Reservoirs, Fry Family Park, and Molly Stark Park. These individual plans are very detail-oriented and provide specific project recommendations at those parks. These are usually high-profile parks that require careful planning beyond the scope of the five-year plan. The Park District should continue to review the existing plans to ensure their current validity.

Stark County 2040 Comprehensive/Transportation Plan: In 2005, the Stark County Regional Planning Commission created a long range plan for the County which highlighted trends pertaining to the County as a whole, including: population, employment, land use, housing, economy, and transportation. Based on the trends discovered, the plan provides various recommendations regarding issues, projects and strategies to improve life in Stark County while simultaneously being sensitive to the social, economic and environmental concerns of the citizens of the region. The transportation portion of the plan has been updated out to 2040, and the remainder of the plan is scheduled to be updated in 2014. As the Park District continues to move forward, they should periodically review this plan to verify that any new projects complement county plans overall.

SARTA Maps and Plans: The Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) provides over two million passenger trips per year in Stark County. This public bus service is available to all residents, including those with disabilities. In June 2012, SARTA completed a draft of the updated master route map, which highlights all fixed routes within the County. Overlaying these routes on existing park and trail locations will better allow bus users to more easily locate these facilities and determine how best to access them. As part of Stark Parks efforts to reach out to underserved populations across the County, partnering with SARTA will provide an excellent opportunity to help meet this goal.

Local Plans: Several communities throughout the County currently have some type of long-range plan(s) for their area. Examples include the City of Canton's Bike and Trail Plan, North Canton's Master Plan, Plain Township's Mini-Master Plan, the City of Canal Fulton's Comprehensive Plan, and Jackson Township's Comprehensive Plan. Coordinating with the various plans for each community will help create a better connected and more efficient system through collaboration and shared resources. The positive outcomes may also encourage other non-participating communities to consider partnering with the Park District on plans for their area as well.

Oil and Gas Leasing

With the recent upsurge in the requests for oil and gas leases on both private and public lands, should the Park District decide to explore this route, they should take steps to ensure that any leases granted establish very-specific standards that require the highest possible natural resource conservation and protection measures. The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) is one agency that recently negotiated an oil and gas lease agreement with very strong environmental safeguards for water usage at one of their reservoirs.

While the economic benefits associated with these oil and gas leases may help measurably boost park district revenue, environmental protection measures such as those incorporated by the MWCD cannot be overlooked or de-emphasized in any agreements made. As stewards of

the land, the Park District is at the forefront of determining how to best balance economic growth and ecological protection.

Prioritized Projects

Proposed projects listed in Figure 23 were provided by the Park District and are listed in order of priority. Most of the projects involve either trail creation or addressing infrastructure needs at existing parks/trails.

Figure 23: Stark Parks Prioritized Projects for 2014-2018

	Capital Projects Priority	New Annual Funding	Total
1	7 miles trail/year (R-O-W, etc.)	\$1.4 million/year	\$7,000,000
2	Interpretive/Directional/Entrance Signage	\$50,000/year	\$250,000
3	New Picnic Shelters/Restrooms	\$140,000/year	\$700,000
4	Picnic Tables/Benches/Lighting	\$20,000/year	\$100,000
5	Boat Ramps/Docks/Marinas	\$100,000/year	\$500,000
6	Wildlife Center	\$300,000/year	\$1,500,000
7	New Parking Areas	\$1,500/space	\$100,000
8	Fry Park development	\$100,000/year	\$500,000
	TOTAL		\$10,650,000

In summary, the completion of projects prioritized by the Park District would complement the existing system by providing needed infrastructure and assisting in the provision of basic services. It would also further expand the trail system to create additional connections and routes for users.

Whether the goal is to preserve open space, reduce flooding by protecting stream corridors, provide wildlife rehabilitation and education programs, or to create a tranquil place for contemplation, Stark Parks can be the means to accomplish this throughout Stark County.

One of the most important facets of the plan is that it should be a working document that changes as new programs are added, feedback is analyzed, and resources are added. Each change in the plan will influence other sections such as creating new possibilities in recruiting volunteers or expanding interpretive opportunities. As Stark Parks continues to grow and change, this plan will help guide the Park District in developing in such a manner that maximizes public use and support while also producing a quality park system that can be sustained over time.

Appendix: Mission Statements

Mission/Vision Statements of Various Park Districts	
Butler	“...to provide a superior park system that maximizes the community’s quality of life through conservation, education and recreation.”
Clermont	“...to acquire, plan, develop, program, and maintain park property in the county for residents and nonresidents alike. To secure the preservation of open space and places of scenic or historic value.”
Greene	“...to conserve and promote Greene County’s natural and cultural treasures as an exceptional destination for outdoor experience while enhancing the quality of life for citizens and visitors.”
Lake	“...to conserve and preserve the natural resources of Lake County while providing a variety of safe, affordable and enjoyable educational and recreational programs and activities that enhance the quality of life in Lake County now and for the generations to follow.”
Lorain	“The Lorain County Metropolitan Park District was established for the responsible use, enjoyment, and accessibility of every citizen of Lorain County. The Park District acquires land to promote and demonstrate the wise use of our natural resources. The Park District strives to preserve and create a diversity of ecosystems while providing educational and recreational opportunities which are compatible with and promote conservation of these resources.”
Medina	“...to enhance the quality of all life through education, conservation and the protection of natural resources.”
Mill Creek	“...to provide park, recreational, and open space facilities of regional significance.”
Portage	“...to conserve Portage County’s natural and cultural heritage.”
Stark	“To acquire, preserve, and develop natural areas for passive recreation, conservation, education, and nature appreciation.”
Summit	“...to acquire, conserve and sustainably manage natural resources to provide the public with passive outdoor recreational and educational opportunities through a regional system of natural-area parks.”
Toledo	“...to enhance quality of life and inspire preservation efforts in this and future generations by providing a regional system of premier natural, historical and cultural parklands maintained and operated to the highest professional standards.”
Warren	“The Warren County Park District is dedicated to the acquisition, development, protection, and preservation of quality parks and natural areas throughout Warren County, Ohio to achieve and maintain a balance of programs, operations and facilities for public use and enjoyment by residents, guests and visitors.”

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