

GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

ON THE INSIDE

page 4 DISCOVER

Completed Pond Brook Restoration

page 9 EXPLORE

Programs and Events

page 17 ENJOY

Citizen Scientists Bring Dragonfly Data up to Speed

Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

IN THIS ISSUE

Scarlet Cap Mushrooms

Completed Pond Brook Restoration

Community Spotlight: Grace Wakulchik

Programs & Events Guide

Citizen Scientist Dragonfly Data

Hampton and Friends

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The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

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page 2

Dear Reader,

This issue of Green Islands magazine was finalized in late March, during the initial public response to contain the effects of COVID-19, or coronavirus. We sincerely hope that when you receive this publication, it finds you and your family safe and healthy.

Please know that while the articles and information included in the magazine were written prior to this public health emergency, we hope they continue to provide our community with a connection to nature during this challenging situation.

At the time of this writing, our parks and trails remain open for your enjoyment, as well as for your physical and mental health. We encourage you to visit summitmetroparks.org for the latest information on our operating status, and to follow us on social media for “At Home in Nature,” a series of online, nature-themed videos, activities and information.

Be well,

Lisa M. King, Executive Director

page 3

DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

MORE THAN MORELS

By Dave Brumfield, Interpretive Naturalist

When people hear “spring mushrooms,” most will immediately think of morels. Yes, they may be the most well-known fungus this time of the year, but many other varieties begin to pop up alongside them after warm spring rains. Some of my favorites are scarlet cups.

As the name indicates, scarlet cups are bright red, making them one of the first splashes of color to be seen

in spring on the forest floor. They are nature’s recyclers, decomposing wood and adding nutrients back into the soil. They play an important role in the growth of spring wildflowers. With a careful eye, a walk in the woods can reveal one of these beautiful mushrooms. Please remember not to take mushrooms you find in the Metro Parks — don’t make assumptions about their identification and do not consume them.

If you would like to learn more about scarlet cups and other spring mushrooms, visit summitmetroparks.org to check out our downloadable spring mushrooms field guide.

pages 4 through 5

Completed Pond Brook restoration heralds return of nature

By Mike Johnson, Chief of Conservation

Twenty years ago, Summit Metro Parks teamed up with the City of Twinsburg and Village of Reminderville to create what is now Liberty Park. From the pristine sandstone ledges to the vast swamp forests, we knew we had found a biodiversity preserve worth protecting. With this wonderful property, we also inherited historical problems that needed some attention. The biggest concern was the predominant aquatic feature of the site: Pond Brook.

Despite its idyllic name, the feature was anything but a picturesque brook. Over the past century, Pond Brook had been ditched, drained and de-vegetated, and was nearly devoid of aquatic life. This was done in the name of agriculture, and back in those days, it was common to ditch and drain wetlands for what was called “land conservation.” Today, we know better. The value of healthy wetlands and free-flowing streams is being realized around the world. Our wetlands, streams and forests clean our air and provide the water we drink. They offer valuable habitat for plants and wildlife that

also provide ecosystem services (like medicines). And certainly, they deliver immeasurable moments of enjoyment for hikers and park patrons.

To restore the stream, we used grant funding to reshape it into a natural meandering pattern, installed rock riffle structures (which provide oxygen to aquatic wildlife) and installed underwater habitat structures made of wood. We also added in natural woody vegetation, sandy layers and deep pools. It takes a lot of work to undo historical damage, and over the course of many years we had to move vast acres of earth to literally sculpt a natural stream back onto the landscape. To manage the project, we broke it into three phases. With the completion of Phase 3 in 2019, we can now take a moment and reflect on what we have accomplished over 15 years. The project has restored more than five miles of stream and hundreds of acres of riparian wetlands and forested habitats. Fish and wildlife have returned and otters now swim along the entire corridor.

Although the return of otters is the most iconic measure of success, there are additional less visible parameters we monitor. We utilize a series of tools to measure the quality of habitats, vegetation, fish and wildlife. Termed “biocriteria,” these tools all point to an improved habitat. One of the most significant measures is a large decrease in DELT (Deformities, Eroded fins, Lesions and Tumors) anomalies on the fish of Pond Brook. Prior to our restoration, many of the fish in Pond Brook were covered in these anomalies, attesting to the stressed environment they were living in. Today, most of the DELT issues have subsided and we have a healthier aquatic community with cleaner water. Healthy fish means healthy water — not just for them, but for humans, too.

page 8

SMP Community Spotlight:

Grace Wakulchik

Akron Children’s Hospital President & CEO

By Lindsay Smith, Marketing & Public Relations Manager

This profile was written prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and today more than ever, we are immensely grateful to the first-class medical providers who serve Northeast Ohio.

Grace Wakulchik is just the third person to hold the title of president and CEO at Akron Children’s Hospital. What began as a nursing career transformed into teaching and administrative roles that brought her to Akron Children’s Hospital in 1992. From there, she held leadership development and administrative positions including chief nursing officer and chief operating officer before the board appointed her as CEO when long-time leader Bill Considine retired.

When it comes to spending time out-doors, Wakulchik said it’s an incredible tool for improving the wellbeing of kids and families. “Spending time outdoors as a family is so important for children’s mental and physical health. Especially as more families juggle how much is enough screen time, getting kids connected to the great outdoors is more important than ever,” she shared. “Research indicates that time spent enjoying nature can reduce stress levels, elevate moods, improve alertness and energy and even improve sleep. I especially love that Summit Metro Parks has programs like the Fall Hiking Spree and Spree for All, encouraging families to get out often and take advantage of our beautiful parks.”

When asked if she has a favorite Metro Park, Wakulchik said, “Picking a favorite Metro Park is like trying to select your favorite child! There are so many unique and fun attributes about each and every park.” She added that

as a past Master Gardener, “I enjoy hiking and trying to identify all the wildflowers, trees, shrubs, butterflies and birds. I used to volunteer at the phenology garden at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm.”

Wakulchik feels the park district benefits the people of Summit County in many important ways. “From the pristine preservation and management of 14,000 acres to the sledding, ice skating, swimming, hiking and biking opportunities, Summit Metro Parks protects and promotes our most treasured outdoor spaces for generations to come. And, it’s so easily accessible, all right here in our own back yard.”

page 17

ENJOY Section

Citizen Scientists bring dragonfly data up to speed using global database

By Marlo Perdicas, Park Biologist

If you visit any Summit Metro Parks location in the warm months, you’ll likely encounter a dragonfly. An insect with six legs, fairy-like wings and compound eyes, dragonflies will dazzle you with their acrobatic flight and colorfully patterned bodies.

Dragonflies rely on streams or ponds for their life cycle and are important indicators of healthy water systems. They are ferocious predators of smaller insects, and whose ecosystem services we take for granted. For these reasons, it is important to understand what types of dragonflies we have in our area and where they are found.

The Ohio Division of Natural Resources and Ohio State University initiated a state-wide dragonfly survey in 2018

through iNaturalist, a global, web-based platform for collecting biodiversity data using photographs.

Volunteers collecting images of dragonflies throughout the state have contributed more than 49,000 records to the project in 2018 and 2019. The Ohio Dragonfly Survey aims to combine new observations with historical dragonfly records so state wildlife officials can conduct species assessments.

In Summit County alone, 90 species were recorded, including four state-endangered species and one state-threatened species. Summit Metro Parks volunteers were among those contributing a significant number of observations to this project. Based on survey results, some dragonflies may come off the endangered species list, like the lilypad forktail, which has been found in great numbers recently. Others will remain a concern, like the elfin skimmer — currently only found at two locations in Ohio.

The Ohio Dragonfly Survey on iNaturalist remains open for observations. Grab your camera and visit a Metro Park to document the wonder and beauty of these fantastical beasts. Your participation as a citizen scientist on iNaturalist is a great way to contribute to conservation and make a difference for wildlife and wild places like Summit Metro Parks!

For more information about iNaturalist, visit www.inaturalist.org.

Hampton & Friends

Activities for Adventurers of All Ages

Create a Dragonfly

Maple trees produce thousands of seeds, or “samaras,” each year. Once they have helicoptered down to the ground, you can repurpose them to be the wings of a dragonfly in this simple craft.

Look for fallen seeds that are already dried out. Be creative and decorate your dragonfly to look as magical as they are in nature. You can even add a small magnet to the back of the dragonfly for display!

Materials needed:

- Glue
- 4 maple tree seeds (“samaras”)
- 1 small twig (3 to 4 inches long)
- Acrylic paint & paint brushes
- Googly eyes
- Glitter glue (optional)
- Magnet (optional)

Directions for assembly:

1. Paint the twig and maple tree seeds
2. Glue on googly eyes and maple tree seeds for wings
3. Add more accents with glitter glue (optional)
4. Attach a magnet if desired

Enjoy your beautiful dragonfly!