Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
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Rev. Dr. Curtis T. Walker Sr.

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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Your Metro Parks are funded by a small Summit County real-estate tax. This magazine is an example of your public dollars at work.
RECYCLING YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Since the early 1970s, tens of thousands of Christmas trees have been dropped off by local residents and chipped into mulch, used by crews to beautify Summit Metro Parks. You, too, can enjoy your Christmas tree well beyond the holiday season.

Live Christmas trees cleaned of all decorations, garland and tinsel can be dropped off at the following locations through January 31:

FIRESTONE METRO PARK
Little Turtle Pond | 2400 Harrington Rd., Akron

FURNACE RUN METRO PARK
Brushwood Area | 4955 Townsend Rd., Richfield

GOODYEAR HEIGHTS METRO PARK
Main Entrance (rear parking lot) | 2077 Newton St., Akron

NIMISILA RESERVOIR METRO PARK
South Main 2 Lot | 5531 S. Main St., Green

SAND RUN METRO PARK
Treaty Line Area | 995 Treaty Line Rd., Akron

SILVER CREEK METRO PARK
Big Oak Area | 5199 Medina Line Rd., Norton

DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

SLEEP TIGHT … SPRING IS COMING!

Joe Malmisur, Interpretive Naturalist

As the crisp embrace of winter takes over, a seemingly mundane aspect of the changing seasons takes center stage, revealing its crucial role in supporting the hidden world of overwintering wildlife: the decision to leave the fall leaves undisturbed. Thanks to those who left leaves and saved stems in their Wild Back Yards, many of our pollinator and insect friends are fast asleep inside or below these natural structures. Residents of dead stems include wasps, spiders, several species of insect eggs and especially our native bees. Leaf cutter bees prefer larger stems from species like cup plants, while the tiny yellow-faced bee calls bee balm home. The Baltimore checkerspot uses white turtlehead flower stems to overwinter their caterpillars, while many other butterflies including swallowtails, viceroy and red admirals attach their chrysalises to the stems of plants.

Beneath the leaves, many moth species such as leopard moths, Isabella tiger moths (aka woolly bear) and luna moths hide their cocoons. Bumble bee queens burrow under leaf litter for protection from the cold and snow. Remember as you patiently endure the cold, so too do the insects, awaiting their moment to once again grace the world with their presence when the season’s chill yields to the warmth of spring.

[ Once spring has sprung, be patient with your garden cleanup and allow these creatures to sleep in until nighttime temperatures rise to 50 degrees. ]

RIVER ACCEWS DAWNS AT VALLEY VIEW

By Claire Merrick, Marketing & Public Relations Manager

The transformation of the Valley View Area in Cascade Valley Metro Park heralds an exciting chapter in our community’s connection to nature. The park district has initiated a project that promises to create new outdoor experiences with construction of river access, poising Valley View to become an unforgettable hub for adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts alike.
Valley View has undergone a remarkable transformation since being acquired by the park district in 2016. This scenic spot along the Cuyahoga River now boasts one mile of restored river and 200 acres of pristine parkland, replete with hiking trails, scenic vistas and Himelright Lodge. This river access project will rejuvenate the land and kindle the community’s desire to experience and enjoy the river that flows through it.

The Cuyahoga River, once a symbol of environmental degradation, has experienced an incredible revival in recent decades and has earned state water trail designation. It is only fitting that the community be given the opportunity to revel in its renewed beauty. With this in mind, Summit Metro Parks has taken the lead in making this area of the Cuyahoga River more accessible to the public, promoting responsible recreation and fostering a deeper appreciation for the river’s ecological significance.

The Valley View riverfront project promises to be a game-changer for outdoor enthusiasts. Upon its completion, expected in summer 2024, visitors will have access to a range of amenities designed to enhance their experience. A kayak and canoe put-in will set the stage for inspiring water adventures, while walking paths will invite exploration of the surrounding natural beauty. A restroom farmhouse and gathering barn with a fireplace will provide modern comforts and shelter from the elements, while honoring the land’s agricultural past.

Funding has been secured through various sources, including a $450,000 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and $98,000 from Ohio Capital Improvement Community Park, Recreation and Conservation Project funds and up to $100,000 from the Akron Garden Club. Additional fundraising efforts are ongoing.

With its commitment to conservation, Summit Metro Parks and its partners have carefully implemented a master plan that prioritizes the preservation of nature’s delicate balance. The final result of this riverfront project will be a harmonious fusion of human enjoyment and environmental stewardship.

The park district does not anticipate any park closures during construction. While a portion of Celebration Trail may be temporarily rerouted and temporary closures could occur, the overall accessibility of the park will be maintained. Updates will be shared as necessary.

Valley View’s transformation into a premier riverfront destination is a testament to the power of community vision and dedication. The project reflects a growing desire to connect with nature and celebrate the treasures that our region’s natural landscapes have to offer. As Valley View evolves into a hub for unforgettable outdoor experiences and memories, let us celebrate the collaborative efforts that made this remarkable transformation possible.

[ Before ground is broken or a structure takes shape, Summit Metro Parks conducts extensive assessments and studies to ensure development that is required for recreational access does not impact sensitive ecological or cultural resources. ]

By Katelyn Freil, Marketing Specialist

In 1851, abolitionist and activist Sojourner Truth delivered her most-recognized speech during the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in Akron. Commonly referred to as “Ain’t I a Woman?,” the speech addressed the exclusion of women of color from the women’s rights movement. Now, more than 150 years since this iconic message was shared, local and national organizations have partnered to preserve Truth’s legacy through the Sojourner Truth Memorial Plaza in downtown Akron.
According to Lisa King, executive director of Summit Metro Parks and core team member of the Summit Suffrage Centennial Committee, the project is “a community effort through and through.” The committee worked in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation through their African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, Knight Foundation, Akron Community Foundation, United Way of Summit & Medina and several other local organizations to bring the plaza to life.

The plaza, which will open in May 2024, was thoughtfully designed by Dion Harris, landscape architect at Summit Metro Parks. Harris worked with artists, architects, historic preservationists and other leaders across the country to identify elements of Truth’s life to be represented in the space.

Four stone pillars on the plaza represent the four pillars of life, as well as the four pillars in front of the Universalist Old Stone Church where Truth gave her speech. The impala lily at the center of the plaza is the national flower of Ghana, Truth’s ancestral home. And at the center of the lily will sit a sculpture of Truth designed by Woodrow Nash, a Black Akron-native artist internationally known for his sculpture work.

Dion was introduced to the project by Lisa, who has volunteered on the committee since 2019. Dion’s background as a Black landscape architect, together with the committee’s input, brought authenticity to the project design, which honors not just the life of Sojourner Truth, but also Black history and the intersectionality of the civil rights and women’s rights movements.

Visitors are welcome at the plaza, located outside of United Way of Summit & Medina’s office building at 37 North High Street in Akron, and should stay tuned for an official opening this spring, when the sculpture will be installed.

Learn more about Truth’s legacy and ongoing efforts to preserve her history at summitsuffragecentennial.com.

GREEN LIGHT FOR GORGE DAM REMOVAL

Stephanie Walton, Chief of Marketing & Communications

On October 25, 2023, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) announced a project agreement to begin the removal of the 420-foot-wide, 60-foot-tall dam within Gorge Metro Park. The agreement means the plan to remove the dam has officially moved into reality. The dam is one of the largest unresolved impediments to restoring the water quality of the Cuyahoga River and its removal will improve river ecology, create recreational opportunities and drive economic benefits in our community.

Before the dam itself can be deconstructed, we must first remove nearly one million cubic yards of sediment that has accumulated behind it over the past century. The sediment contains contaminants consistent with our area’s industrial past, and it will be safely transported and placed at a permanent storage area within the Chuckery Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park. Tree clearing for that site is already complete, and sediment removal is expected to begin in 2024.

Project partners are coordinating closely to minimize disruptions to the public during sediment remediation and dam deconstruction, but park and trail closures will be unavoidable. Gorge Metro Park, Highbridge Trail and the Chuckery Area will be closed for public safety over the next several years.

The project agreement is signed by U.S. EPA, Ohio EPA, City of Akron, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and FirstEnergy. Now in its seventh year, the dam removal project is managed by a group of partners that also includes the City of Cuyahoga Falls, County of Summit, Summit County Council, Summit Metro Parks, The University of Akron and Ohio Lake Erie Commission.
To learn more about the project and sign up for email updates, visit bit.ly/freethefalls.

TENTATIVE PROJECT TIMELINE
(subject to change)

2023-24
Begin stabilization at the former power plant site and construction of the sediment disposal area.

2024
Award contract for sediment remediation project. Removal and disposal of sediment begins. Cascade Valley Metro Park (Chuckery Area) and Gorge Metro Park closed during operations.

2025-26
Stabilized dredged material sculpted into natural-appearing landform, seeded and planted with trees. Park closures continue.

2026 & beyond
Dam deconstruction; park and river restoration. Some park closures may continue.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Happy New Year! Our accomplishments in 2023 are a testament to the spirit and mission of our organization and the un-wavering dedication of our board, staff, partners, volunteers and the community. Against the backdrop of ongoing global challenges, we have continued to move Summit County toward a more sustainable and harmonious future.

Conservation work is a profoundly personal undertaking. It is an endeavor that weaves the aspirations of groups and individuals with the broader goals of community and ecological renewal. When the Valley View Area was featured internationally on CNN's Call to Earth, it allowed millions of people to learn about our efforts to restore a former golf course to a park rich in history, natural resources and recreational opportunity. We celebrated this along with many other accomplishments, including the completed restoration of Sand Run stream, implementing the Wild Back Yards program and installing two new trails.

With the new year comes more potential to make a difference as we continue to enhance our parks, protect our natural treasures and provide enriching experiences and connections to nature for all. I am grateful for the unyielding support and commitment of our community, which has been pivotal in shaping Summit Metro Parks into a place where nature flourishes and memories are made.

Here’s to a new year filled with boundless possibilities and the promise of a thriving park system for all to enjoy.

Lisa M. King
Executive Director

WINTER SPORTS

As conditions permit, several winter sports can be enjoyed in the Metro Parks, and some locations are lighted for after-sunset fun. Visitors must bring their own equipment.

To learn if winter sports areas are open, call 330-865-8060 or follow @metro_parks on X, formerly Twitter.

SLEDDING
The best conditions for sledding include frozen ground with at least two inches of snow cover. Walk up the side of sled hills, not in the center where you may be in the path of moving sleds. Sledding is prohibited on trails and wooded hills.
ICE SKATING
Never skate on a pond or lake unless signs indicate it is open for skating. Ice must be four inches thick and free of snow, and temperatures must remain several degrees below freezing for long periods of time. Wear properly fitted skates with sharpened blades for enhanced control and safety.

ICE FISHING
Ice fishing is possible in Liberty Park’s Tinkers Creek Area, Nimisila Reservoir Metro Park and the lake at Silver Creek Metro Park, dawn to dusk as conditions allow. Users may not light fires, take motorized vehicles onto the ice, or build/leave structures and shelters on park property. Temporary shanties may be moved only by hand from the parking lot to the lake, and must be removed daily.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING
Some areas are too steep to negotiate safely on skis. To help keep your skis from being damaged by sharp, uncovered stones, ski only when the trails have at least two inches of snow cover.

BORROW SNOWSHOES
You can borrow snowshoes – for free – at Liberty Park Nature Center.

Snowshoes may not leave the park, may only be used on Bluebird Trail, and must be returned by 4:45 p.m. on the date of the loan. A signed waiver is required.

Call the nature center for availability and inventory of sizes: 330-487-0493.