

# GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

## ON THE INSIDE

page 4 DISCOVER

GORGE DAM REMOVAL DRAWS NEAR

page 8 EXPLORE

Programs and Events

page 17 ENJOY

Happier Trails: Moms Find Comfort in Nature

Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

## IN THIS ISSUE

Befriend Nature: Choose Native Plants

Gorge Dam Removal Draws Near

Happier Trails: Moms Find Comfort in Nature

Celebrating 20 Years of Fitness & Fun

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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.

Lisa M. King Executive Director

## EDITORS

Claire Merrick Marketing & Public Relations Manager

Victoria Putnam Community Engagement Manager

Lindsay Smith Brand Manager

Stephanie Walton Chief of Marketing & Communications

## DESIGN & ART DIRECTION

Jennie Levy Graphic Designer

Karl Simonson Graphic Designer

Summit Metro Parks

975 Treaty Line Rd., Akron, OH 44313-5837

Administrative Offices: 330-867-5511

F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm: 330-865-8065

Liberty Park Nature Center: 330-487-0493

Summit Lake Nature Center: 330-864-8431

Seasonal Information: 330-865-8060

Volunteer Information: 330-865-8047

[summitmetroparks.org](http://summitmetroparks.org)

## PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY:

Rob Blair • Jerry Cannon • Jim Childs • Christy Counterman • Doug Dawes • JJ Prekop Jr. • Robert Roach

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page 2

### Did You Know?

The current maintenance center complex located along Sand Run Parkway has been in operation since the 1930s! As the park district has grown, the maintenance center has been unable to expand beyond its small footprint between Sand Run Parkway, Sand Run Stream and Riverview Rd. Due to its age and location, the building needs structural safety repairs that will prevent it from being used to maintain and repair park district equipment in the future. As a result, park staff are investigating how to best repurpose the building for other needs and moving central maintenance operations to another location.

We will continue to provide updates as additional information becomes available.

page 3

### DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

#### BEFRIEND NATURE: CHOOSE NATIVE PLANTS

By Karen Koch, Interpretive Naturalist

Want to support rapidly declining wildlife populations (including pollinators), conserve vanishing biodiversity and promote garden resilience? Use native plants to create pollinator gardens and support wildlife in your home landscapes!

With more than one million acres of urban and suburban habitat lost annually to development in the U.S., green space is necessary to help vital animal and insect populations, especially pollinators, thrive. Adding more natives annually and removing invasives will unleash a variety of benefits:

Provide a valuable food source. Having co-evolved with native insects, native plants support thousands of

species of pollinators and other invertebrates that in turn provide food for birds, animals and us!

Enjoy a lower-maintenance landscape. Many native plants require less watering and naturally improve soil health.

Promote biodiversity. Native plants will attract generalist and specialist species.

Protect water quality. Some native plants, such as big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), have deep root systems that help reduce storm runoff and flooding.

Enhance carbon storage. Native plants are highly efficient at absorbing carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and moving it deep into their roots. Those with bigger root systems, like leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), capture more carbon dioxide!

Appreciate a beautiful aesthetic. Native plants come in all sizes, colors and shapes!

Are you ready to reap the benefits of a Wild Back Yard? Visit [bit.ly/wildbackyards](http://bit.ly/wildbackyards) to get started. Be sure to attend the Native Plant Festival (see page 11) on May 20, 2023 for additional resources and fun!

pages 4 through 7

### GORGE DAM REMOVAL DRAWS NEAR

By Stephanie Walton, Chief of Marketing & Communications

Did you know that Akron was once the fastest-growing city in the United States? As the city's electrical needs grew to support local rubber companies and a booming population, a massive dam was constructed on the Cuyahoga River to generate hydropower in what is now Gorge Metro Park.

Unfortunately, the dam was never effective at generating electricity. But with its construction in 1911 came the submersion of an incredible natural area — including rock caves, hiking trails and even the “Big Falls” for which Cuyahoga Falls is named. Even more destructive was the effect the dam had on the river itself. In addition to preventing fish passage, dams negatively affect dissolved oxygen, flow and temperature in a river. They also reduce habitat, trap and concentrate sediments and toxins, and alter the food web.

The good news is, once a dam is removed, natural aquatic river communities can be restored. In fact, under the leadership of Ohio EPA, five other obsolete dams on the Cuyahoga have recently been removed or modified, resulting in full achievement of aquatic life standards over a total of 10 miles of the Cuyahoga River. These rivers also provide increased recreational opportunities, land and water trail connections and small business growth. In other words, these projects opened the door for quality-of-life improvements and economic development along the riverfront.

So, what does this mean for the Gorge Dam? In a project of national significance, Summit Metro Parks and a large coalition of community partners are working together with the State of Ohio and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to make it the next (and biggest) dam removal on the Cuyahoga. This project is more complex than previous Cuyahoga River dam removals, due in part to the sheer size of the Gorge Dam, but also because of the 100-plus years of sediment that has accumulated behind it. This sediment bears the markers of our industrial heritage, and while it is contaminated, it is not hazardous — meaning it can be safely removed and placed in an offsite containment area.

Momentum for the project is building rapidly. In December 2022, Governor Mike DeWine announced \$25 million in state funding, saying the project “will return the Cuyahoga River to a free-flowing river from Kent to the mouth of Lake Erie, will vastly improve water quality

in the Cuyahoga River and will pave the way for recreation, tourism and economic development opportunities in this area.” At the same time, project partners are nearing finalization of several key steps, including engineering and design of the sediment removal process. Tree clearing for the sediment disposal site is already underway at Cascade Valley Metro Park, and the tentative project schedule calls for additional work to begin in 2024 and continue for three to four years.

The Free the Falls stakeholder group is committed to creating an open and transparent process, including providing opportunities for public feedback via public meetings, social media, community presentations and more. Members of the public are encouraged to visit the project website to sign up for the e-newsletter and view a helpful project video: [bit.ly/freethefalls](https://bit.ly/freethefalls). Be sure to follow Summit Metro Parks on social media for periodic project updates.

Free the Falls Partners:

City of Akron

County of Summit

Cuyahoga Falls

First Energy

Great Lakes Restoration

Ilene Shapiro, County Executive

Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife

Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

Ohio Lake Erie Commission

Summit Metro Parks

The University of Akron

Do you have questions about this once-in-a-generation undertaking? We’ve got answers!

Is the Gorge Dam helping with flood control or some other important function?

The Gorge Dam no longer serves any useful purpose. A detailed hydrologic study demonstrated no meaningful

upstream or downstream changes in river flow as a result of the dam removal.

What's in the sediment behind the dam and where will it be placed?

U.S. EPA sediment scientists found that contaminants in the sediment reflect our area's industrial past, including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), heavy metals, oil and grease, and pesticides. This sediment will be removed and pumped through a temporary pipeline alongside Highbridge Trail to a sediment disposal area at the Chuckery Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park, about two miles away. It will then be mixed with cement for stabilization.

How can we be sure the sediment will be stored safely?

Placement of the stabilized sediment will be overseen by state and federal agencies and will include measures to prevent leaching. The area will be covered with soil to avoid impacts to human health, wildlife or water quality, and final use of the site could include trails and other forms of active and passive recreation. This area formerly served as an unregulated dump.

How much will the project cost and how will it be funded?

Construction costs are still being finalized and funding is being planned from multiple sources from federal, state and local entities, including U.S. EPA through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Property taxes related to the Summit Metro Parks levy will not be affected.

Is there a better use for these resources?

While the costs of removing the accumulated sediment and dam are significant, they are far outweighed by the benefits. The primary funding source (the Great Lakes Legacy Act Program) was created specifically to help pay the costs of addressing contaminated sediments.

Funding provided by the State of Ohio will be awarded from settlement money received as part of the state's PCB enforcement case against Monsanto.

What types of closures will be required for this project?

Dam removal will have some impacts on the public in the form of temporary park and road closures, construction activities and changes to the design and layout of Gorge and Cascade Valley Metro Parks. Project partners are working diligently to communicate closures and to complete this project in coordination with the City of Akron's federally mandated sewer project in order to minimize disruptions to the area.

What will the parks look like when they reopen?

At Cascade Valley Metro Park, the sediment disposal area will be seeded with grasses to control erosion and will later be fully restored with trees. Within about 10 years, the site will look much like the rest of the park. At Gorge Metro Park, the Cuyahoga River will look much as it does downstream — a free-flowing river with some rapids. The river will return to its historical flow patterns and the natural river habitat will be restored fairly quickly, making way for mink, bald eagles and river otters. Park planners will engage the public in a master planning effort to reimagine the design and layout of the park.

page 17 and 18

## HAPPIER TRAILS: MOMS FIND COMFORT IN NATURE

By Claire Merrick, Marketing & Public Relations Manager

Motherhood is a transformative experience that can bring incredible joy, love and fulfillment. But, even for the most resilient mothers, it can also be lonely, challenging and stressful, resulting in maternal mental health disorders like postpartum depression or anxiety. Fortunately, spending time outside can help! From

reducing stress and anxiety to boosting mood and improving overall wellbeing, time spent in nature can provide moms with a much-needed respite from the demands of parenthood, helping them feel more connected to themselves, their children and the world around them.

When Hannah Esworthy-Roe became a stay-at-home mom, visiting the Metro Parks and completing the Fall Hiking Spree became something her family enjoyed together.

By the time her children Norah (5) and Ezra (3) became confident hikers, Hannah was pregnant with her third baby. She grew anxious about continuing their frequent hikes with two young kids and a newborn. That fall, they began navigating spree trails with baby Gideon strapped to Hannah's chest. It wasn't until her husband offered to wear Gideon that Hannah realized how important these hikes were in reclaiming the mom she had been. She made it her personal mission to complete every hike while babywearing. And although it was physically challenging, it was also rewarding. "That first year, completing the spree with two kids and a baby on my chest gave me so much confidence," said Hannah, who struggled with postpartum anxiety. "Spending time outdoors gave me peace. Slowing down, taking deep breaths, and pausing to observe nature offered a break from the worry and anxiety of parenting."

Personal or family history of depression can increase the risk of postpartum depression, and for that reason, Paloma Newland was wary of maternal mental health disorders. As a new mom, Paloma found her struggles with postpartum anxiety could be eased by spending time outdoors. She's since made going outside daily with her 6-month-old daughter Emma a priority.

"Going for a walk helps reset my brain when I'm having a difficult moment," says Paloma. "It's the one thing I do to cope. I remind myself to look up at the trees and the sky and immediately, it feels like my whole chest just opens up."

While the Newlands live close to several Metro Parks trails, Paloma recognizes it can sometimes seem daunting to venture out with kids when you're struggling mentally. Her advice: "If 10 minutes outdoors feels like a lifetime, you can sit outside by your door for two minutes and go back in." She emphasizes that the aspect of stepping outside your four walls into the open air is something any mom can do, no matter what type of residence they live in. "That time will bring a new view and fresh, new air you can count on to redirect you," she says.

Amidst the challenges of motherhood, there is hope in the healing power of nature. Whether it's a stroll on a Spree for All trail or simply enjoying the sights and sounds of the natural world, spending time outdoors can be a powerful tool for mothers looking to maintain their mental health and find balance in a new phase of life.

May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month.

If you are struggling with a maternal mental health disorder, you are not alone. For support, visit [postpartum.net](http://postpartum.net) or call the Postpartum Support International Helpline at 1-800-944-4773.

page 19

CELEBRATE 20 YEARS OF FITNESS AND FUN FOR EVERYONE

By Katelyn Freil, Marketing Specialist

Twenty years ago, Summit Metro Parks set out on a partnership to provide Spree for All, an inclusive hiking series for people of all ages and abilities.

On May 1, 2004, the first Spree for All kicked off at Goodyear Heights Metro Park with a health fair, entertainment and an inaugural hike to Alder Pond. Community leaders, park commissioners and partners

such as United Disability Services joined the park district for this special occasion.

More than 40,000 awards have been earned in the 20 years since. Many people, including Iva Lehman, a seasoned Summit Metro Parks staff member, have completed the spree every year. Her son Adam was just 5 years old when the two began. “We have so many memories through the years, the most cherished being last year,” she says. “Adam, then 23 years old and on his own, said he will always hike with me as the time spent together and being in the parks means everything to him.”

Learn more about this year’s spree below and join us for another year of fitness and fun for everyone!