

# GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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## BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

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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

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## RECYCLE YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Since 1975, 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

### PLANNING YOUR WILD BACK YARD SPRING GARDEN

By Janean Kazimir, Interpretive Naturalist

Snowy winter days are the perfect time to daydream of beautiful, beneficial native plants and design your next planting project! Whether creating a small pollinator garden or revamping an entire landscape, here are some helpful tips.

Take notice of the sunlight, moisture and soil type of your future garden and plan accordingly. Choose woodland species for a shady spot or prairie species to withstand full sun and dense clay soils. Next, consider the height, bloom time and wildlife benefit of the plants you are choosing. Include some spring and fall bloomers to create nature's "slow motion fireworks display" where one flower blooms as others begin to fade, giving you a beautiful aesthetic while providing consistent food for pollinators. Group multiple individuals of the same variety for greater visual "wow" and to benefit bees that prefer to visit one flower species at a time.

Ready to plan? Start by drawing a simple outline of your space on gridded paper, set a scale (e.g., one square = one square foot) and sketch circles the width of your plants. Planting densely can help outcompete weeds, but be sure to account for full-grown size, allowing your landscape to flourish without looking sparse or overcrowded. Be creative and enjoy dreaming of spring! To learn more about going native and sourcing appropriate plants, visit [bit.ly/WildBackYards](http://bit.ly/WildBackYards).

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## DISCOVER THE BENEFITS OF A WILD BACK YARD

By Lindsay Smith, Brand Manager

For more than 100 years, park district staff have cared for the greenspace that makes up Summit Metro Parks, which today totals more than 15,000 acres in Summit County.

While our work to conserve and sustainably manage land is in fact limited to the properties within our district, nature of course knows no bounds. The reality is that what happens outside of our parks also affects plants and animals within them, since we are all part of the same ecosystem here in Northeast Ohio. Why should we care what happens inside or outside park boundaries, for that matter? Humans are a part of nature, too. When the plant and animal communities around us are healthy, it helps us thrive as well.

For that reason, last year Summit Metro Parks launched a new initiative called Wild Back Yards. Some may already be familiar with the effort, which is an educational campaign to encourage our community to work together in providing habitat for our wildlife by using native plants to counteract the effects of habitat loss and habitat fragmentation.

### WHAT IS WILD BACK YARDS?

Wild Back Yards is the overarching theme for a collection of activities and materials we've developed for you to discover. Experts from the park district's conservation department — a team of local biologists and ecologists — have thoughtfully curated the top ways you can make a difference for wildlife at home, while naturalists will offer educational programs throughout 2023 to help visitors get started.

## WHAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE

Plant and animal communities are in big trouble in our country. The introduction of exotic plants from other continents has begun to crowd out the native plants that our local bugs, birds and other wildlife need in order to survive. Human development and impacts have also harmed natural habitats in a way that has measurably reduced living species populations. Together, Summit Metro Parks and Wild Back Yards participants can:

- Reduce non-native species coverage and invasive seed pressure
- Increase presence and diversity of native plants and habitat
- Reduce ecological footprint of residential landscaping
- Improve understanding of sustainable landscaping practices.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

While habitat and species loss are discouraging to think about, it's not all bad news, because there are steps we can take to help! Each of us can make a difference by making small changes at home. Whether your outdoor space is a sprawling yard, a concrete front porch or something in between, we will share ways to help the environment around you thrive.

Start your journey at [bit.ly/WildBackYards](https://bit.ly/WildBackYards). On this webpage, you'll find many resources, including ways to check if your plants are native or invasive, places where you can purchase native plants, a listing of relevant naturalist-led programs and more! You can also choose to sign up for Wild Back Yards information and tips to be sent straight to your inbox.

Coming soon, residents will have the chance to participate in a recognition program through Wild Back

Yards. The recognition program will outline a checklist of actions to take at home — for people of all levels and on different types of properties — with special rewards as an incentive!

With informational plant guides that you can keep at home, our second Native Plant Festival in May 2023, special tips online and in our publications, educational programs and even some cool new merchandise at Maple Leaf Gifts, Summit Metro Parks is wild about Wild Back Yards in 2023 — and we hope you'll join us!

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## RESOLVE TO VOLUNTEER WITH SMP

By J Katelyn Freil, Marketing Specialist

Is your New Year's resolution to spend more time outside, learn something new or make new friends? Do all this and more with Summit Metro Parks! As you make your resolutions for the new year, consider adding volunteering with your local park district to the list.

The mission of the Summit Metro Parks volunteer program is two-fold:

1. To encourage and promote community involvement and support for Summit Metro Parks, and
2. To instill a sense of pride and stewardship among residents of our community

Most opportunities are available for volunteers ages 16 and older, and range from citizen science projects to program support.

As a volunteer, you decide your time commitment. One-time volunteers include groups, like scout troops or company volunteers, as well as individuals. Occasional volunteers participate on a casual basis, while steady

volunteers regularly participate in volunteer opportunities for the park district.

Become a volunteer and you'll join an active, excited group of community members ready to make a difference in Summit Metro Parks. You'll also join the new manager of volunteer programs, Lisa Meranti. With a background in conservation, education and volunteer management, Lisa is excited to connect people to nature and empower them to be stewards of our natural resources.

Lisa is working with volunteers like Audri Cochrane, who became a volunteer when she moved back to Ohio in 2020. "Volunteering with Summit Metro Parks was truly a bright spot during the pandemic and remains one of my favorite activities," says Cochrane. "I would encourage anyone to get involved!"

Ready to start? Visit [summitmetroparks.org/volunteer.aspx](https://summitmetroparks.org/volunteer.aspx) to join our Volunteer Registry, apply to be an ongoing volunteer and more.

"We never imagined, when we first volunteered back in 1999, the world of new friends, new adventures learning about birds, snakes, bats, coyotes, owls, and astronomy and fun that [would open] up to us! It seems there is always something new every day. Volunteering for the parks brings smiles to our hearts!"

Alan & Deb Casanova

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## THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND ... OF THE METRO PARKS

What do the Golden Girls have in common with Summit Metro Parks? Friends, of course!

By Victoria Putnam, Community Engagement Manager

Friends of Metro Parks (FOMP) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, founded in 1991, that supports and encourages public enjoyment of Summit Metro Parks through membership, outreach and advocacy.

### HISTORY

Friends groups are commonplace among national, state, county and local park systems. They allow for citizen-led support for public lands and provide a way for citizens to channel their passion for the parks.

The request to create a Friends group for Summit Metro Parks was initiated by local chapters of the League of Women Voters and the Junior League in 1976.

Throughout the years, the group has been a major conduit for connecting children with the parks. FOMP has sponsored field trips and provided transportation funding for schools to visit all three of SMP's centers (F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center, Liberty Park Nature Center and Summit Lake Nature Center), making environmental education accessible to students across the county.

### 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

Last year, FOMP supported SMP's new Career Exploration Program. FOMP president Jonathan Houk says, "We are thrilled to be part of this program that seeks to introduce middle school and high school students from diverse backgrounds to careers in the parks and environmental sector. In all of the programming that we support, we hope to inspire the next generation of park-goers and cultivate an

appreciation for nature and our Metro Parks. We believe this program has the capability to improve lives and our community in the coming decades and look forward to supporting this program in the years to come."

Also in 2022, FOMP supported the design and purchase of overnight camping kits allowing Summit County residents to try camping without a costly upfront investment. These kits were used in an award-winning series of programs held at Munroe Falls Metro Park over the summer months.

### 2023 OUTLOOK

As the COVID-19 resources provided to local schools and organizations end, there remains an opportunity to support the increased demand of nature-based learning. FOMP is exploring the next evolution of its long-running Pathways to Parks program to include community grants. These would assist local institutions that seek to offer environmental education experiences to both students and Summit County residents.

### BE A FRIEND!

Friends of Metro Parks is supported through membership and annual fundraising initiatives. Memberships start at \$25 and include exclusive benefits such as discounts at Maple Leaf Gifts and annual behind-the-scenes events. Another way to support FOMP is to eat, drink and dance at the annual Party for the Parks fundraising event! In 2022, it raised nearly \$20,000 which will be used for community advocacy and outreach efforts.

"We continue to grow our membership base at community events throughout the year," says Houk. "By growing our membership base, we increase the collective voice and influence of those in our community in support of nature-based programs, natural park lands and our Summit Metro Parks lands at the local, state and federal level."

Thank you to all our Friends through the years! If you're interested in joining or learning more, visit <https://www.friendsofmetroparks.org/>.

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

As we turn the calendar page on 2022, I want to thank our visitors and supporters for yet another successful year in the parks. With your assistance, Summit Metro Parks marked its 101st year of effectively protecting natural and cultural resources and connecting people to nature. Our conservation-based mission drives everything we do, and 2022 was no exception.

This year marked the final phase of a multi-year restoration effort in Sand Run Metro Park, which utilized funding totaling \$4.6 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Clean Ohio. Since 2020, we have completed erosion control and habitat enhancement projects vital to the long-term sustainability of our oldest and most-visited park. In a related effort, the park district permanently closed a section of Sand Run Parkway in order to protect sensitive species and extend the Jogging Trail to the Towpath Trail at Big Bend.

We also celebrated the incredible restoration of a one-mile stretch of the Cuyahoga River through the Valley View Area. With grants totaling more than \$3 million from the Great Lakes Commission and National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, this stretch of the river is now home to triple the number of fish that were present just a few short years ago. Not only are there more fish overall, but there is more species variety and a higher population of pollution-sensitive species — all indicators of significantly improved water quality.

As we look to the year ahead, we are excited to continue development of the Valley View property to improve

recreational opportunities for hikers and paddlers alike. We also look forward to implementing your feedback with new and improved amenities at Munroe Falls and Silver Creek Metro Parks. Finally, I'd like to invite your participation in two upcoming initiatives: the effort to remove the Gorge Dam and restore a free-flowing Cuyahoga River, as well as a strategic planning process to refine the park district's long-term goals. Look for more information on both in the coming months.

It's an honor to be "your back yard." Thank you once again for your unwavering support. Here's to 2023!

Lisa M. King, Executive Director

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## 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 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.