

GREEN ISLANDS

Vol. 67 No. 1 / JAN-FEB '26

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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Joel D. Bailey

Herb Newman

Jill M. Stritch

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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This magazine is mailed free of charge to Summit County residents. To join the mailing list, send your name and mailing address to marketing@summitmetroparks.org or call 330-867-5511.

Green Islands can be downloaded online:
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RECYCLE 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

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

CAN COMPOSTING COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE?

By Julia Neal, Events Specialist

You probably have heard by now that compost has many benefits for your soil, but can composting combat climate change? That is a resounding yes! Recent studies show compost plays a larger role than just supporting soil health; it can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, decaying food waste in anaerobic conditions (those which lack free oxygen), like a landfill, produces methane, which is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Approximately 58% of methane emissions from landfills are due to food waste and 14.4% of all human-related methane comes from landfills. That makes landfills the third largest source of human-related methane. Composting is the final step in limiting food waste after source reduction, donating and upcycling.

Summit Metro Parks offers free composting through a partnership with Rubber City Reuse. Scan the QR code to learn more about SMP's sustainability efforts and find out how you can start composting in the parks.

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PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE

By Lisa King, Executive Director

MISSION

We conserve, sustainably manage and value natural resources for the health and enjoyment of our community, and inspire people to connect with nature through clean and safe parks.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

As we enter 2026, we are excited to share with you something that our team has thoughtfully developed over the past year: a strategic plan that will guide the park district's actions for the next five years, with goals intended to create impact as far as 25 years and beyond.

The strategic planning process included many voices — those of community members from all walks of life, local partner organizations, Summit Metro Parks staff, volunteers and the Board of Park Commissioners all had a chance to provide input before the development of six goals that ultimately will embody the work of Summit Metro Parks.

While we have developed this plan and a new 100-year vision statement for Summit Metro Parks, our mission remains the same. On the next two pages, you will find a high-level summary of the six goals of the strategic plan. Each goal has several strategies with measurable metrics to guide our success. We encourage you to explore the full strategic plan, available as a PDF on our website.

SUMMARY OF 25- & 5-YEAR GOALS

GOAL 1 Expand Conservation Impact

25-YEAR GOAL: Collaborate to increase conservation footprint in order to improve biodiversity, protect ecosystem services and preserve cultural heritage.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Increased support for biodiversity and cultural heritage throughout Summit County is achieved through creating a conservation plan that results in expanded property protection.

Summary of strategies:

1. Complete a collaborative, evidence-based conservation plan
2. Undertake meaningful land acquisition
3. Provide communications and conservation support

GOAL 2 Manage Assets & Natural Resources

25-YEAR GOAL: Responsibly manage amenities and resources to promote excellent park experiences and healthy ecosystems.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL 2A: Standards, aligned projects, and effective communications have created long-term operational, cultural, and natural sustainability.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL 2B: Targeted investment in and care for existing assets has resulted in sustainable and impactful ongoing maintenance.

Summary of strategies:

1. Maintain consistent standards
2. Conduct regular master planning
3. Share public updates regarding park projects
4. Develop maintenance prioritization
5. Accomplish green sustainability

GOAL 3 Connect People & Nature

25-YEAR GOAL: Foster nature-based programming and visitation that improves quality of life for all.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Improved accessibility has led to more participation, new park users, improved health and well-being, and safety and enjoyment for local communities.

Summary of strategies:

1. Conduct outreach to diverse audiences
2. Address barriers to accessing parks and programs
3. Enhance visibility of safety measures
4. Nurture and create new community partnerships

GOAL 4 Strengthen Community Support

25-YEAR GOAL: Relationships with the community have been fostered that engage, inform, and inspire the public to increase support for park district priorities.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Relationships with Summit County residents have been developed, nurtured and strengthened through intentional and inclusive interactions, resulting in increased public support and recognition of the park district's unique identity.

1. Summary of strategies:
2. Build Metro Parks capacity to engage more residents
3. Enhance brand awareness
4. Improve diversity and flexibility of communications

GOAL 5 Sustain Financial Security

25-YEAR GOAL: Sustain a diverse and reliable financial strategy to support organizational goals.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Financial risk is being managed, revenues have increased and been diversified, and a levy has successfully passed.

Summary of strategies:

1. Diversify financial strategy
2. Successful levy passage
3. Ensure successful levy passage

GOAL 6 Recruit & Retain Talent

25-YEAR GOAL: We have invested in a skilled, culturally diverse, cohesive workforce.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Recruit, engage and retain top talent, build a strong culture, drive employee engagement, and invest in their development paths.

Summary of strategies:

1. Recruit talent

2. Maintain competitive compensation and benefits
3. Continue to improve organizational culture

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IN THE HEART OF THE BEECH-MAPLE FOREST

By Joe Malmisur, Interpretive Naturalist

As you walk through the woods, look around: You are surrounded by more than a collection of trees; you're in a unique community! Ohio's forests form distinct "communities," each named for their dominant trees — beech-maple, oak-hickory and elm-ash swamp. The forests here in Northeast Ohio are dominated by two long-lived, shade-tolerant trees: the American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) and the sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*). These trees thrive on the moist, fertile soils common to the northeast. Because both beech and maple seedlings can germinate and grow in deep shade, they gradually outcompete less shade-tolerant species, creating dense stands with rich understories of spring wildflowers. These trees support wildlife year-round by providing early resources for pollinators and food for nearly 300 species of caterpillars. They are also an important source of seeds and nuts for birds and mammals in the fall.

Closely tied to this forest community is the Maple Belt, the geographic zone extending across the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, where maple trees are most abundant. Several species thrive here including sugar, black, red, silver and striped maples, and the closely related box elder. The region's cold winters and warm spring days create the perfect freeze-thaw cycle that makes maple sap flow. Thanks to these conditions and the high sugar content of sugar and black maples, the Maple Belt is the heart of the world's maple syrup industry.

This natural bounty gave rise to maple sugaring, which is the practice of tapping maples — especially sugar, black and red — and boiling their sap into sweet syrup.

Indigenous Peoples were the first to discover and develop methods for processing maple sap. They noticed sap trickling not only from broken twigs but also from the chew marks left by squirrels, which helped reveal the tree's hidden sweetness. European settlers later adopted and expanded the practice. Gustav Grimm from Hudson, Ohio revolutionized the sugaring industry with the invention of the commercial evaporator, which allowed for large-scale production. Today, sugaring remains both a cultural tradition and a thriving business enterprise here in Northeast Ohio.

Did you know Summit Metro Parks makes maple syrup? While hiking Liberty Park's beech-maple forest, watch for our maple sugaring site along Black Bear Trail.

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CREATURE FEATURE:

THE EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

NAME: Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

SIZE: Body Length of 9-12 inches

SIZE: Tail Length of 8-10 inches

DIET: Primary Foods: Acorns, hickory nuts, walnuts, beech nuts and maple seeds

WEIGHT: 1-1.5 lbs.

LIFESPAN: 6 years on average, though some may live up to 12

SEASONAL FOODS: fruits, berries, fungi, buds and flowers

Did you know? Introduced to the UK in the late 19th century, they have since displaced native red squirrels in many areas and are considered invasive.

The native population of gray squirrels was so large when European settlers arrived in Ohio, they were considered farm pests and were nearly eliminated.

COMMON IN: • woodlands • parks • back yards • urban areas

NATIVE RANGE: Eastern & Midwestern United States, Southern Canada

An 1807 Ohio law required taxpayers to turn in a quota of squirrel skins as tax payment.

Gray squirrels are native to Ohio and once again occupy a range throughout the state.

Black [melanistic] gray squirrel

They are the "unofficial" mascot at Kent State where a bronze statue was installed on campus.

Their tails communicate anger and agitation.

Strong flexible ankles & claws assist in making leaps up to 10 times their body length and allow them to descend trees head-first.

Good scent and spatial memory help them to remember the location of almost all food buried for winter — those nuts and seeds they overlook often sprout into new trees!

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KIDS CORNER

MAPLE SEED HELICOPTER

By Carol Vigorito, Interpretive Naturalist

Helicopters? Whirlybirds? Whirligigs? Spinning Jennies? Wingnuts? Maple 'copters? As a child, what name did you use to describe the spinning maple seeds known by scientists as samaras? Whatever you call them, these seeds are the way that maple trees travel. The winged shape of maple samaras allows the wind to carry them away to a place where they can sprout with less competition from the parent tree.

Make and fly your own maple seed helicopter!

All you need is a sheet of paper or use the template found on the Summit Metro Parks website in the JAN-FEB 2026 Green Islands PDF download.

1. Color the paper or template.
2. Cut along the solid lines.
3. Fold on the dotted lines.
4. Fold D toward you.
5. Fold E away from you.
6. Fold A and B over each other so they overlap.
7. Fold the bottom C up and crease it.
8. FLY YOUR SEED: Toss the helicopter in the air and watch it spin!

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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 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.