

# 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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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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## WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

March 21, 2026, at The Nightlight

The Summit Metro Parks Foundation is excited to bring the world-class Wild & Scenic Film Festival back to The Nightlight theater in Akron to celebrate the beauty of nature and the importance of conservation. In-person and virtual tickets are available for \$25. All proceeds benefit the Summit Metro Parks Foundation and its work in supporting the park district.

Learn more at [bit.ly/smp-wsff26](https://bit.ly/smp-wsff26)

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## DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

### TURN FOOD WASTE INTO SUPER SOIL

By Rachel Whinnery, Marketing Specialist

Why — and how — everyone should compost

Food makes up nearly 25 percent of solid waste sent from homes to landfills every year. By composting organic materials, you can help reduce the amount of methane landfills produce while improving soil quality.

To compost at home, you'll need a bin or tumbler with adequate airflow and access to water. Add a mix of green materials (vegetable scraps, coffee grounds) and brown materials (cardboard, wood chips) to create nutrient-dense compost.

But how do you compost meat, dairy or BPI-certified products that need composting bins to reach much higher temperatures? That's where commercial composting companies come in. We partnered with Rubber City Reuse to offer community composting bins. So, whether you don't have space in your back yard or

have items that can't be composted at home, you can still keep food scraps out of landfills.

To find community compost bin locations in your Metro Parks and a composting guide, visit [bit.ly/SMPGreenerFuture](https://bit.ly/SMPGreenerFuture).

[ Other local organizations may offer composting services. Let's Grow Akron offers community drop-off sites, plus pick-up services for local businesses. The compost is used in their gardens across the city or available for purchase. ]

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## LAKE STURGEON RECLAIM THE CUYAHOGA AS HOME

By Ramsey Langford, Park Biologist

The great river revival has a new chapter: The reintroduction of lake sturgeon in the Cuyahoga River is now underway, and it signals not only the return of a prehistoric species, but also the rebirth of a river once in flames.

Summit Metro Parks teamed up with Ohio Division of Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cleveland Metroparks, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, U.S. Geological Survey and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District to begin a Cuyahoga River Lake Sturgeon Reintroduction Plan.

Lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) once roamed freely in the Cuyahoga River and other tributaries feeding Lake Erie. But, by the 1900s, a combination of over-fishing, pollution, damming of rivers and habitat loss caused lake sturgeon to disappear from the system. Their numbers dwindled drastically across the Great Lakes region, making their comeback a conservation priority.

Several important habitat improvements have set the stage for this reintroduction. One of the biggest was the removal of the Brecksville Dam in 2020, which opened up roughly 45 miles of river from Lake Erie to the Gorge Dam within Gorge Metro Park. Biologists have also mapped the riverbed and found areas of suitable spawning habitat (gravel, cobble and flow rate) and nursery habitat for younger fish. Additionally, water quality has improved significantly over the decades, allowing formerly absent species to return. The restoration of the river through the Valley View Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park was also designed with habitat for this species in mind.

The sturgeon restoration effort will take time. The goal is to establish a self-sustaining, spawning stock of about 1,500 mature adult lake sturgeon in the Cuyahoga River by approximately 2049. The plan calls for annual stocking of around 2,000 fingerling lake sturgeon in the river over a 20-plus-year period. In 2024, a pilot release occurred with about 60 juveniles implanted with transmitters that were released to monitor movement, survival and habitat use. And last fall, over 2,000 fingerlings were released at three sites along the Cuyahoga River to inaugurate this broader rollout. Of those 2,000 fingerlings, more than 750 were released at the Valley View Area, the most upstream site.

Reintroducing lake sturgeon to the Cuyahoga River is significant for several reasons. Lake sturgeon are an ecological indicator because they are long-lived, slow to mature and require high-quality habitat to reproduce. Their presence signals a river that has made real water quality progress. The reintroduction of this historically present species provides more biodiversity. This helps re-balance ecosystems, supporting an even more sustainable native river fishery, along with invertebrates and other river life.

The effort to reintroduce lake sturgeon is a marathon, not a sprint. Lake sturgeon mature slowly; it takes 10 to 15 years before they can spawn and return to the same

river systems to reproduce, so results will not be visible overnight. The success of this reintroduction plan depends on not only stocking fish, but ensuring they survive, find suitable habitat, grow, display natural behavior and eventually reproduce. Monitoring the fish via tracking tags and transmitters is a key part of how local scientists will determine whether this has successfully occurred. Continued attention to water quality, sediment and habitat is a required component for the future generations to come.

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## DIVE DEEP INTO VERNAL POOLS

By Kasey Krok, Interpretive Naturalist

These small, yet vital habitats hide an underwater wonderland

Under the cover of warm rain on early spring nights, dozens of small and slimy creatures begin to crawl across the forest floor. Who are they and where are they headed? They're amphibians and they're making their annual "migrations" to vernal pools. Vernal — meaning spring — pools are small, shallow pockets of water that form on the forest floor each year as winter thaws into spring. Although they may resemble a puddle, these habitats are crucial to the health of woodland ecosystems and the wildlife relying on them.

Amphibians such as spotted salamanders, wood frogs and spring peepers are just some of the species that utilize these pools as breeding grounds, often returning to the very pool they were born in. Unlike other wetland habitats, vernal pools are free from strong currents and hungry fish, making them the perfect safe haven for soft, fragile amphibian eggs.

Once they hatch, a high diversity of insect larvae serve as an abundant food source as these amphibians grow, metamorphosize and prepare for life on land. Their

transformation is often a race against time as these pools fade away into the leafy landscape of the forest floor by midsummer. Why? They're shallow enough to fully dry out as sunlight and temperatures increase throughout the season. This is why you may hear vernal pools referred to as "ephemeral," meaning temporary.

Living among these amphibians and insects are other specialized species found only in vernal pool ecosystems. One is the fairy shrimp — a tiny, often-overlooked crustacean that can be found swimming on its back using 11 pairs of fluttering legs. If that doesn't sound enticing to you, it certainly would to a hungry salamander nymph, showcasing how vernal pools help form the basis of a forest's food chain.

But that isn't the only important role of vernal pools. To scientists, they serve as bioindicators or living representations of the health of an ecosystem. The presence or absence of any particular species in vernal pools (even ones as miniscule as bacteria or fungi) can clue us in to the health of a forest, as many of the species reliant on vernal pools are highly sensitive to disturbance and pollutants. Our continued monitoring, understanding and appreciation of these habitats can help ensure their longevity. Vernal pools are mysterious, underwater wonderlands that, as long as we take the time to look, remind us how fascinating the natural world can be.

[ Want to see more? Join us for upcoming amphibian programs to participate safely during this sensitive season. ]

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#### WOOD FROG *Lithobates sylvaticus*

Wood frogs live on Ohio's forest floors, blending in with striped legs and a brown mask. In the springtime, they gather in large, temporary ponds called vernal pools to

lay eggs. During this time, you can hear their raspy croaks calling "quack, quack, quack!"

DIET: • Insects • Spiders • Worms

SIZE: 1.5 to 3 inches long

LIFESPAN: 3 to 5 years

BEHAVIOR: Nocturnal (They are active at night.)

Male Wood Frogs have two inflatable pockets in their throat, allowing them to call loudly from the water's surface.

Did you know? Wood frogs are world-famous for their hibernation skills. They can survive freezing almost entirely solid in cold winter temperatures! This allows them to live as far north as the arctic circle.

Life Cycle of a Wood Frog: • Eggs • Tadpole • Tadpole with Two Legs • Tadpole with Four Legs • Froglet • Frog

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#### KIDS CORNER

##### VERNAL POOLS

By Kasey Krok, Interpretive Naturalist

What Lives in a Vernal Pool?

Did you know? The word "vernal" comes from another word for springtime, clueing us in to when these temporary habitats can be found on the forest floor.

Learn by reading the words listed below.

• Beetle • Branch • Eggs • Fairy Shrimp • Forest • Frog • Insect • Larva • Leaves • Log • Mosquito • Newt • Nymph • Peeper • Pool • Salamander • Spring • Tadpole • Vernal

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15<sup>th</sup> Annual

MOTHER'S DAY 5K

May 10, 2026

Start Time 8 a.m.

RUN, JOG OR WALK IN CELEBRATION OF MOM!

Munroe Falls Metro Park

Lake Area: 521 South River Road, Munroe Falls

Jogging strollers are welcome at this family-friendly course.

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

Proceeds benefit Summit Metro Parks Foundation