

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.

Lisa M. King Executive Director

EDITORS

Claire Merrick Marketing & Public Relations Manager

Victoria Putnam Community Engagement Manager

Lindsay Smith 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

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY:

Steve Ash • Rob Blair • Jackie Boesinger-Meredyk •
Shelby Cameron • Jerry Cannon • Christy Counterman •
Doug Dawes • Lauren Delgado • Debbie DiCarlo •
Denise Jenison • Ashley Mikulec • Scott Pease • JJ
Prekop Jr. • Robert Roach • Karl Simonson • Shelby
Smith • Sheila Stransky • Rob Vaughn • Rachel
Whinnery

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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.

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MAPLE LEAF GIFTS

A Gift for Everyone on Your List

'Tis the season to shop Maple Leaf Gifts! With Summit Metro Parks branded apparel and gear, along with nature-themed items for all ages, you can find something for everyone on your list. Shop local and enjoy a unique gift from Maple Leaf Gifts — conveniently located inside the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm VISITORS CENTER in Akron — or shop online and ship to anywhere in the US!

Visit bit.ly/MapleLeafGifts to learn more.

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

TINY CREATURES, BIG IMPACT

By Stephanie Rafferty, Interpretive Naturalist

Beneath the water's glimmering surface is a unique and fragile ecosystem. Large enough to be seen without a microscope, yet still very small, macroinvertebrates are aquatic creatures that can tell us a lot about the quality of the water without saying a single word. They tell us simply by their presence or absence in these water bodies.

Pollution degrades habitat, and some macroinvertebrates are more sensitive than others. Dragonflies, for example, begin life as an aquatic nymph, living in calm water close to the bottom where they prey on immature insects, such as caddisflies and mayflies. Dragonflies are sensitive to pollution, but their prey is

even more sensitive, meaning they both rely on clean water to survive and thrive. Not only do dragonflies indicate good water quality, but they are also at the center of the food web, feeding fish who then feed birds such as osprey.

[Beginning in November, join us at Summit Lake Nature Center each month for our Beyond the Summit speaker series, featuring environmental professionals discussing topics related to water in Northeast Ohio. From watershed health to fishing best practices, each talk offers community members the chance to learn from experts shaping the future of our water resources.]

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DREDGING IS NEXT STEP TO FREE THE FALLS

By Lindsay Smith, Chief of Marketing & Communications

Earlier this year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. E.P.A.) announced its plans to begin a critical portion of work necessary to eventually remove the Gorge Dam. The effort to "Free the Falls" is broken into four phases. The current work is considered Phase 2, which began in summer 2025, where dredged sediment is transported via temporary pipeline to be safely stored at a sediment placement site that has been prepared at the Chuckery Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park. Phase 3 will include the careful removal of the concrete dam structure and, as the final step, Phase 4 of the project will be to restore the river channel through Gorge Metro Park to assist the river and surrounding landscape in returning to its natural state. The three final phases are expected to take at least seven years to complete.

A CLOSER LOOK AT DREDGING

This year, Severson Environmental Services, Inc., a contractor for U.S. E.P.A., began the process of dredging and removing contaminated sediment from the

bottom of the Cuyahoga River dam pool. First, crews began at the Highbridge Area of Gorge Metro Park, where large temporary pipelines were constructed over several weeks to transport dredged sediment through the duration of the planned work. Then, specialized equipment went to work on the river itself where a floating scow barge was used as the platform for a machine (similar to an excavator) with a clam shell bucket to scoop sediment out of the dam pool. The dredged sediment is screened for debris and pumped via pipelines to a sediment processing area within Cascade Valley Metro Park. The dredged sediment is then mixed with Portland cement for stabilization before it is ready to be placed on location. Extensive planning has gone into the sediment placement area's design to avoid impacts to the area and create a final footprint that will be planted with native vegetation to blend in with the surrounding landscape.

Over the course of the project, approximately 865,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed from the river, laying the groundwork for safely removing the dam.

WHY REMOVE THE DAM?

Built more than 100 years ago, the Gorge Dam no longer serves any useful purpose and is one of the largest remaining unresolved water quality problems for the Cuyahoga River. In addition to restoring water quality, removing the dam and the sediment behind it will enhance wildlife habitat and improve human health in Northeast Ohio and beyond. It will restore the original grandeur of the Gorge, creating a vibrant future for the river, its watershed and its people. That future will provide clean water, natural beauty, potential recreational opportunities and economic development for all to enjoy.

WHAT'S NEXT?

While the timeline remains fluid as construction work can be complicated and have unexpected shifts, we are hopeful the dredging process will wrap up by the end of

2027. Next, partners will seek funding for the deconstruction of the dam itself.

[For additional project background and the latest updates, visit bit.ly/freethefalls and subscribe to the Free the Falls podcast, available on Apple podcasts and Spotify.]

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THE UNDERSTORY

By Jen M. Harvey, Chief of Philanthropy

Hidden beneath the easy-to-notice fall colors in our woodlands is an underappreciated layer of forest.

If you know what to look for, you'll find the trees that never reach canopy height, but provide an important forest layer, nonetheless. In many ways, graceful trees like witch hazel and spicebush are like the donors to the Summit Metro Parks Foundation — under-recognized, but essential.

Witch hazel is the only native tree that blooms exclusively in autumn. It's easy to walk past a witch hazel grove in full bloom and not know it! The light, clean scent of the blooms may tip you off, or the small-diameter twisted multi-trunk growth form and ripple-edged leaves. Look closely and you'll be rewarded with branches flowered with ribbony bright-yellow petals.

Spicebush's brilliant red berries are a valuable high-fat food source for fall-migrating wood thrushes, veeries and eastern kingbirds. It's better known as a host plant for spicebush swallowtail butterflies, which seek it out to lay their eggs on the leaves. The leaves smell distinctively like lemon furniture polish.

The understory of North American forests is a lifeline for bird populations and plays a key role in water availability and nutrient cycling. You can plant native to support our

wildlife and human health, too — find out more through the Wild Back Yards program.

These native plants, like the supporters of the Summit Metro Parks Foundation, have deep roots here in Summit County. They provide reliable, important food for wildlife, a critical role in our forest ecosystem and eye-level beauty as we walk the trails. Most of all, they are an important layer to the overall health of our parks.

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SUMMIT METRO PARKS FOUNDATION

The Summit Metro Parks Foundation connects, conserves and inspires as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1991 where donors can create a lasting legacy by supporting the park district. We are grateful to the many people, organizations, businesses and agencies who made gifts, grants and sponsorships January 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025. These donations and other forms of support create thriving parks that are a cornerstone of Summit County's quality of life.

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