



Portage Park District

2015-2020 Progress Report

Mission Statement

The mission of the Portage Park District is to conserve Portage County's natural heritage and provide opportunities for its appreciation and enjoyment.

Vision Statement

The Portage Park District conserves important natural areas and is a leader in promoting sustainable use of land and resources for current and future generations. By creating and managing a countywide system of parks and interconnected trails, the Park District protects native plants, wildlife, water quality and scenic landscapes. It provides opportunities for public use, education and enjoyment, improving quality of life; and yielding health, economic and social benefits that the public values and supports.

Background

The Portage Park District is an independent agency governed by an unpaid 5-member Board of Park Commissioners appointed by the County Probate Judge. It was established in 1991 and took over management of the only county park, Towner's Woods. With a small operating budget, it received grants and donations to grow the park district's parks and trails until in 2014 when voters approved a ½ mill, 10-year property tax levy (costing the owner of a \$100,000 property \$17/year). Tax revenues of approximately \$1.7 million/year started in 2015 and were used to hire staff, purchase equipment, make park improvements and match grant funds for new parkland acquisition and development projects.

In 2016 a 10-year Master Plan was adopted after significant public input and expert consultation that built upon previous plans and opportunities.

Key 2016 Master Plan goals inclusive of levy campaign promises

- Maintain and improve existing parks and trails with additional amenities, signage and structures
- Open over 800 acres of parklands that the Park District already owns
- Resurface existing hike and bike trails
- Provide a range of educational programs and community engagement opportunities
- Acquire and restore 1,500 acres of additional parkland for conservation and parks over 10 years
- Extend and connect multipurpose trails
- Provide camping opportunities
- Improve paddling opportunities by developing water trails
- Ensure natural areas stewardship
- Develop an operations center and programming center
- Implement best management practices and policies
- Enhance the volunteer program and Park District partnerships

Progress from 2015 through 2020

The Park District has made great progress towards the Master Plan goals, thanks to the levy funds, park commissioners, staff and volunteers, Portage Park District Foundation, many public and private partnerships. \$10.26 million in taxes leveraged over \$5.29 million in grant funding and cash donations.

Acquired additional 1,043 acres of land and 1.2 miles of trail right-of-way

- Shaw Woods donation ~145 acres Ravenna Township
- Kent Bog Expansion ~215 acres Brimfield Township/City of Kent
- Towner's Woods additions ~7.5 acres Franklin Township; ~12.7 acres Ravenna Township
- HWT 1.2 miles + 17 acres Mantua Township, Hiram Township, Garrettsville Village
- Tinkers Creek Greenway I & II ~280 acres City of Streetsboro
- Eagle Creek Greenway I: ~326 acres Hiram Township
- Morgan Park addition: ~40 acres Shalersville Township

Improved, developed and restored parkland

- 3524 trees and plants planted; 25 acres restored; invasive species managed on 1348 acres; ongoing biological inventories including 1254 species observed on iNaturalist
- Amenities added throughout the parks including signage, animal proof waste receptacles, information kiosks, benches
- Vault Restrooms installed at four parks
- PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail paved with asphalt from Kent to Ravenna
- Franklin Connector Trail pavement repairs
- Headwaters Trail resurfaced with limestone; new parking lot trailhead in Garrettsville; trailhead and parking improvements in Hiram Township
- Seneca Ponds trails resurfacing and improvements
- Towner's Woods new gazebo; Brady Interlocking Railroad Switch Tower improvements
- Red Fox Boat Access to Cuyahoga River developed and opened in 2014, Shalersville
- Shaw Woods Park developed and opened in 2016
- Morgan Park developed and opened in 2016 with handicapped accessible trail, natural surface trails, butterfly garden and pergola
- The ~100-mile Cuyahoga River was officially designated a State Water Trail in 2019
- Trail Lake Park developed and opened (anticipated October 2020)

Enhanced organizational capacity to meet needs and opportunities

- Purchased necessary vehicles and equipment
- Expanded staff from 1.75 to 11 Full Time Equivalent positions
- Renovation of agricultural buildings into PPD Operations Center at Morgan Park

Public Engagement & Education

- Wild Hikes Challenge growth over 183%
- Volunteer program expanded now with 90 active volunteers. Trail Ambassadors work to monitor park needs and expand the reach of staff
- Owlbert mascot introduced in 2017
- Education Program Plan launched in July 2019; Nearly 1,300 participants attended 78 educational programs at park properties

- Remote Education Plan introduced in March 2020 to include virtual video programs, Portage Park District Podcast, expanded educational resources on website, and increased social media content
- Over 2,800 viewers engaged with 40 virtual educational videos on Portage Park District Youtube channel (videos, guided walks, activities)
- Parks Rx program – prescription for time in nature to improve health. Partnership with several local health organizations