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# GEAUGA PARK D I S T R I C T

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2025-2030 Strategic Plan



Executive Director

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Prepared By

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# Introduction



## Geauga Park District History

Geauga Park District was established in 1961 to conserve and protect the natural features of Geauga County and provide open space for the residents of the county to enjoy. Since that time, the Park District has steadily grown and now manages approximately 10,500 acres across Geauga County.

Throughout its 63-year history, the Park District has remained committed to its mission “to preserve, conserve, and protect the natural features of Geauga County and to provide outdoor recreational experiences to our residents of every age, every ability, and at all times of the year.” Areas of emphasis have shifted and evolved over the years and will continue to evolve to meet the challenges of the future.

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## Strategic Plan

In a continuing effort to meet the needs of the County and its residents, Geauga Park District over the past year has worked to develop a Strategic Plan to address current issues and guide the approach to meet these needs now and into the next five years. This plan will help guide decision-making on policy, operations, maintenance, programming, acquisition of land and capital improvements within the Park District.

In the past 20 years, through strategic planning and the development of Park Master Plans and programming, Geauga Park District met its mission and maintained and improved parks, preserves, services, education, facilities and recreation opportunities. These plans outlined the guiding principles and the strategy for achieving these goals. The principles and commitments identified in previous plans represented the Park District’s response to community needs, interest and trends identified through a process led by Park District staff, and community engagement.

Park Master Plans, such as those for Welton’s Gorge, Veteran’s Legacy Woods, Holbrook Hollows, Claridon Woodlands, Headwater’s Park and Frohring Meadows and others, have guided the development and upgrade of infrastructure and new park development that was appropriate and consistent with the conservation of natural resources and the Park District’s mission. Facilities and existing infrastructure were also improved and updated during this time. These Master Plans have formed the basis for capital improvements and natural resource protection since 2006. A significant accomplishment of these previous planning efforts has been the development of nine new parks and the construction of improved facilities at numerous existing parks and preserves.



## Geauga Park District Today

With the growth in open parks and access over the past 15 years, revisiting and updating current Master Plans for the Parks will be important in the coming years to help identify future priority capital improvements and ongoing maintenance needs of existing facilities. Through public input, surveying and park staff engagement, these Master Plan updates will represent the Park District's response to community needs, interests and trends to identify priorities and goals in the future.

## Mission & Core Values

Through the mission of Geauga Park District to preserve, conserve and protect the natural features of Geauga County and to provide outdoor recreational experiences to our residents of every age, every ability and at all times of the year, the Park District will continue to be a leader in Geauga County in the conservation and preservation of natural resources and high quality ecosystems.

Identified during the planning process, the following Core Values inform and reinforce the Park District's annual objectives and strategies. They also support the high caliber of park management and accessibility that Geauga County taxpayers expect and rightfully deserve for their support.

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### Core Values

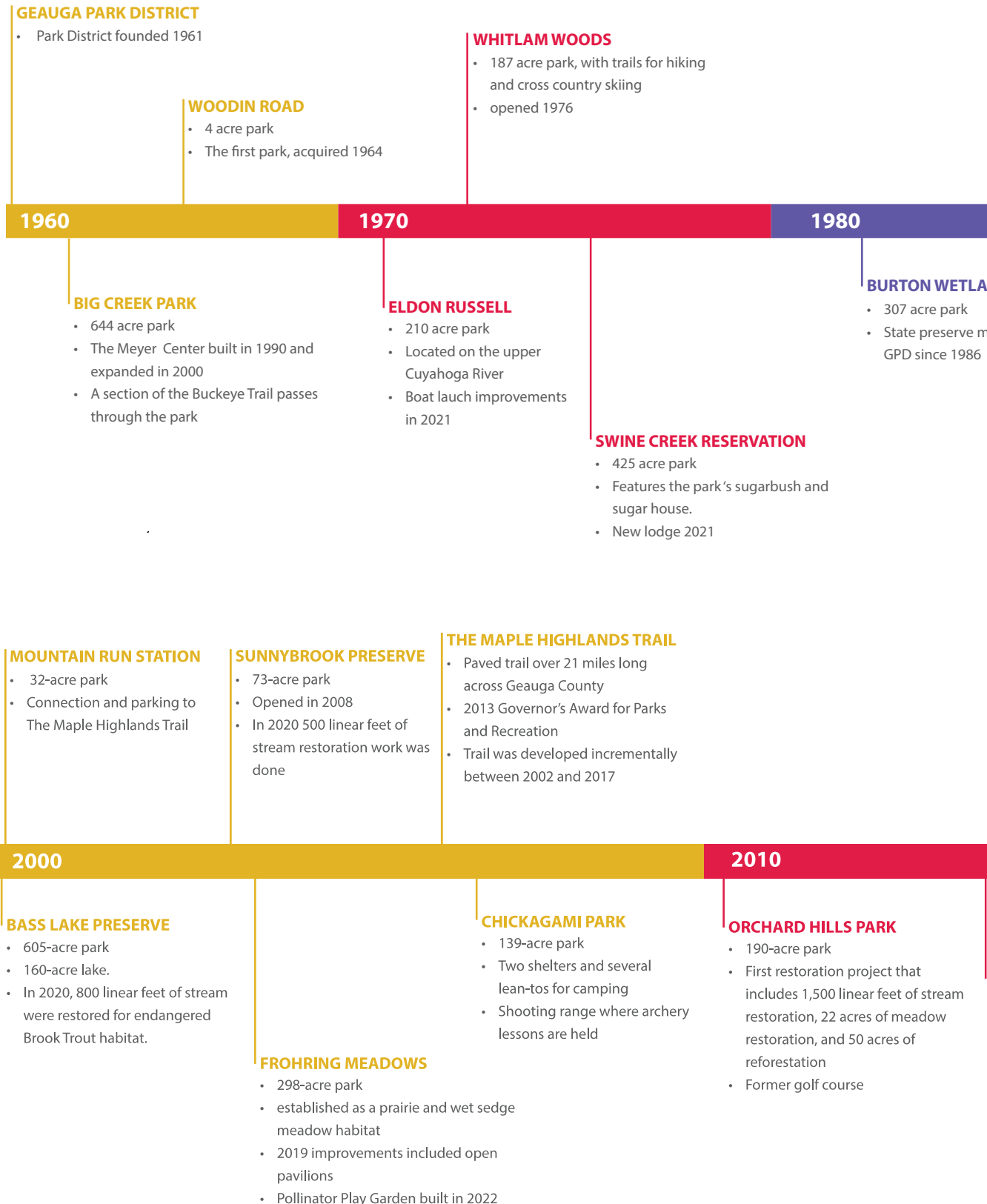
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- **INTEGRITY** - Committing to serving the public in a professional manner.
- **STEWARDSHIP** - Maintaining a sustainable balance between environmental efforts and commitments to provide resilient open spaces within Geauga County.
- **QUALITY** - Continuing to focus on the mission to provide quality parks, education and programs, facilities, and recreational opportunities for residents while maintaining the highest quality natural resource areas throughout the Geauga County.
- **COMMUNITY** - Providing opportunities for people to engage in activities that allow them to connect with the environment, community, and their own health and well being while enhancing the quality of life in the Geauga County.



THE MISSION OF GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT IS TO PRESERVE, CONSERVE AND PROTECT THE NATURAL FEATURES OF GEAUGA COUNTY AND TO PROVIDE OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES TO OUR RESIDENTS OF EVERY AGE, EVERY ABILITY AND AT ALL TIMES OF THE YEAR.

THROUGH GRANTS, LAND ACQUISITIONS AND DONATIONS, GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT HAS CONTINUED TO PROSPER. THE PARK DISTRICT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR 10,550 ACRES OF LAND IN 28 PARKS AND PRESERVES WITH MORE THAN 92 MILES OF TRAILS.



### WALTER C. BEST NATURE PRESERVE

- 101-acre park
- 30-acre lake and a rich diversity of plant and animal life

### BESSIE BENNER METZENBAUM PARK

- 68 -acre
- Stream restoration 2018
- New playground opened 2022

### BEARTOWN LAKES RESERVATION

- 149 acre park
- 22 acres of open water and mature beech-maple forests

### THE ROOKERY

- 632 acre park
- Features wetland meadow and forest habitat, and is a nesting site for migrating birds

## 1990

### MAPLE HIGHLANDS NATURE PRESERVE

Managed and maintained by

### HEADWATERS PARK

- 926 acre park
- Leased from the City of Akron
- Connection to The Maple Highlands Trail
- New lodge 2016

### THE WEST WOODS

- 956 acre park
- Nature Center built in 2002 hosts events and exhibits
- The Affelder House opened to the public in 2006

### CLARIDON WOODLANDS

- 136-acre park
- Action-adventure themed park, with activities like a bouldering wall, pump track and ropes course
- Parking and access to The Maple Highlands Trail

### MODROO PRESERVE

- 53-acre park
- Leased from Russell Township Park District.

### RUSSELL UPLANDS PRESERVE

- 123-acre park
- Leased from Russell Township Park District.

### VETERANS LEGACY WOODS

- 180-acre park
- Features designed to honor the legacy of anyone who has served in our Armed Forces
- Former clubhouse was updated in 2023 as Tribute Lodge

## 2020

## 2030 & Beyond

### OBSERVATORY PARK

- 1,266-acre park
- Designated as a Dark Sky Park in 2011, and is the first Dark Sky Park east of the Mississippi River.
- Nassau Astronomical Station renovation in 2018 with one of the largest telescopes used for public viewing in Ohio

### HOLBROOK HOLLOWES

- 130-acre park
- Nature-based playground
- 3.3 miles of multi-purpose trail for hiking and equestrian
- Connection to Cleveland Metroparks trail

### Troy Wetlands

- 60-acre park
- Predominantly wetland park with over 500 ft of boardwalk

### WELTON'S GORGE

- 87-acre park
- Home to a 45-foot tall sandstone gorge



# Open Parks

# Conservation Properties

Park	Year Est.	Acres
Bass Lake Preserve	1998	617.5
Beartown Lakes	1992	149.02
Bessie Benner	1990	67.65
Big Creek Park	1969	646.7
Burton Wetlands	1986	290.8
Chickagami Park	2003	140.62
Claridon Woodlands	2017	128
Eldon Russell Park	1969	132
Frohring Meadows	2007	298
Headwaters Park	1995	926
Holbrook Hollows	2018	128.96
Maple Highlands Trail	2002	210
Modroo Preserve	2018	61.6
Mountain Run Station	2003	32
Observatory Park	2008	1266
Orchard Hills Park	2007	234.6
Russell Uplands	2018	128.3
Sunnybrook Preserve	2008	73
Swine Creek Reservation	1979	462.4
The Rookery	1998	635.2
The West Woods	2001	974
Troy Wetlands	2023	60.2
Veterans Legacy Woods	2021	180.6
Walter C. Best	1990	108
Welton's Gorge	2020	86.9
Whitlam Woods	1972	211.66
Woodin Road Park	1963	4

Preserves	Acres
Abela Property	67.65
Artim Property	70.72
Beaver Creek Preserve	119.21
Becvar Property	68.3
Buffchard Property	16.56
Clause Property	21.97
Farley Property	97.91
Fifth Avenue	10.09
Hambden Hills	182.5
Hehmeyer Property	27.81
Husted Woods	22.78
Krehlik Property	18
Mayer Preserve	109.7
Meyer Nature Preserve	10.11
Middlefield Wetlands	195.66
Oakton Property	223.8
Pinebrook Property	783.2
Raider Property	16.75
Stafford Property	37.62
Staples Meadows	197.9
Upper Chagrin	106.8
West Wood Land Lab	23.83
Woodiebrook	8.59
Worrell Road	44.4

**Total:** 8,253.71 Acres

**Total:** 2,481.86



GEAUGA PARK  
DISTRICT

## -CORE VALUES-

*Condensed from resident and staff feedback, guiding decisions and empowering impactful actions each day.*



INTEGRITY



STEWARDSHIP



QUALITY



COMMUNITY



How well we work as a team and with our partners will determine the services, improvements and sources of pride Geauga Park District provides to the community.



# Integrity



## Integrity

As an organization, Geauga Park District will strive to do its best each day and follow through on its commitments and promises, striving for continual improvement while celebrating successes and learning from challenges.

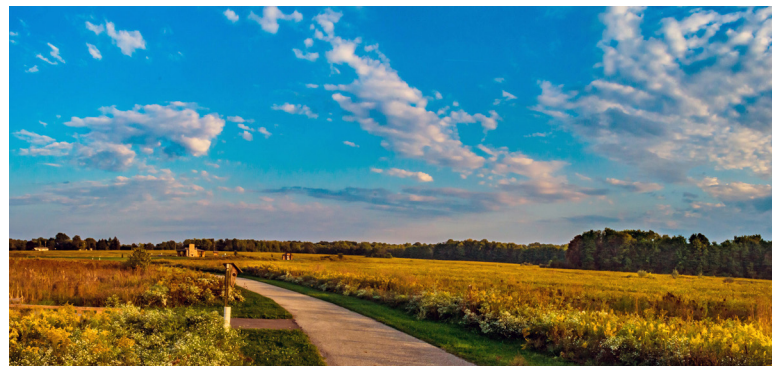
## Priorities

- Be good stewards of the land.
- Maintain a sound fiscal approach to the management of the Park District.
- Collaborate and work with partners in the community to maximize efficiency and impact in Parks & Conservation.
- Uphold the expectations of Geauga County taxpayers as a responsibility to the public.
- Efficiently communicate the evolving range of offerings and benefits available to residents of all ages and abilities, informing their support.

## Action Items

Our ability as individuals, as well as a team, to show up ready to work each day with a positive attitude and have open and honest communication while being respectful and practicing accountability will be the foundation of professionalism day in and day out.

- Consistency - Align actions with our values & mission.
- Professionalism - Conduct ourselves in a manner that reflects well on Geauga Park District.
- Ethical Practices - Making decisions that prioritize sound decision-making on behalf of our residents.
- Responsibility - Committing to practices that benefit society and environment.
- Adherence to regulations - Following laws and industry standards to maintain trust and credibility.



# Stewardship



## Stewardship

Geauga Park District's mission ensures that its parks and properties be conserved, preserved and maintained, balancing access and use with ecological integrity for future generations to enjoy. The Park District should be a leader in the community in promoting and maintaining biodiversity and healthy ecosystems for Geauga residents.

Another priority is the development of programming and infrastructure to connect the public with the parks' natural resources and their value. Improvements and investments made by Geauga Park District must be able to be sustained and maintained, ensuring continuous safety, usability and stability.

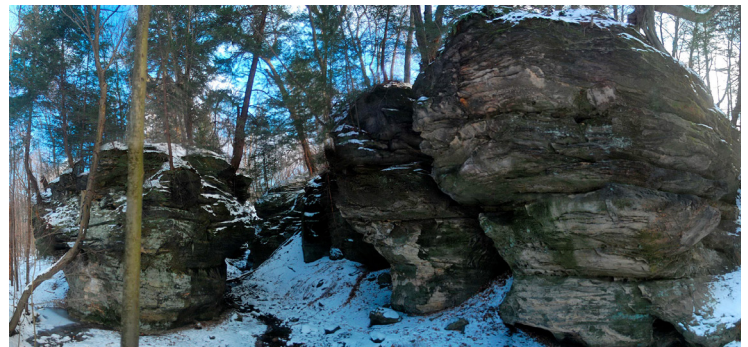
## Priorities

- Support our Planning and Natural Resource Management teams, capitalizing on their knowledge base, skill and regional networking.
- Protect habitat for rare and threatened or endangered species.
- Manage local habitat to balance wildlife welfare and sustainability.
- Manage fiscal resources responsibly.
- Steward all park holdings through Master Planning updates and continuous evaluation.
- Balance the needs of all users with those of wildlife and the environment.

## Action Items

Through the expertise of staff, with accountability to the residents of Geauga County and the natural resources we're entrusted to steward, our goals and actions should be forward-thinking and sustainable.

- Resource Conservation - Develop sustainable policies and procedures.
- Maintenance - Set and maintain goals for park maintenance and upkeep.
- Partnerships - Engage stakeholders to expand results without expanding costs.
- Continuous Improvement - Be innovative to improve and enhance the execution of our mission.
- Restoration- Seek out and pursue restoration projects and initiatives.
- Alternative Funding - Maximize our ability to achieve restoration of habitats.
- Master Planning - Sustain parks in the short and long term while developing management plans for the park.



# Quality



## Quality

The Park District continually improves upon its overall management to provide the highest quality parks and open spaces to the public, as well as access to trails, clean and safe facilities, and amenities that allow for the enjoyment of the outdoors through hiking, biking, fishing, wildlife viewing, picnicking or just experiencing Nature.

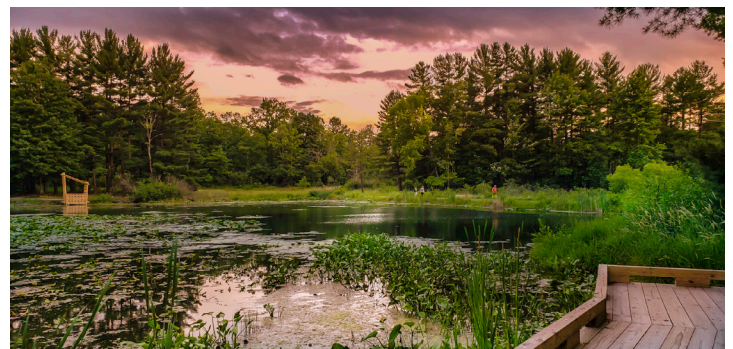
## Priorities

- Offer diverse program offerings mindful of evolving community interest and trends.
- Tailor quality facilities to various uses that create a “sense of place” for all who visit and a sense of pride for Geauga County residents.
- Create diverse outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Develop innovative sustainable solutions for infrastructure that impacts the region.
- Conserve and protect the highest quality ecosystems within Geauga County.
- Feature special events enriching the Geauga County way of life.

## Action Items

Initiatives to provide something for everyone should never come at the cost of high-quality offerings for those supporting them, the Geauga County taxpayers, who rightfully hold their parks to increasingly high standards. The way a park serves its purpose long-term and delivers on Park District promises should never be compromised.

- Review and evaluate programs, and update and enhance them to reach new audiences and increase attendance.
- Engage the public and partners on expanding existing or offering new programs.
- Maintain, renovate and improve existing trails.
- Maintain existing facilities and infrastructure
- Host seasonal special events that are unique and bring people out to enjoy and appreciate their parks.



# Community



## Community

Geauga Park District is undeniably a part of the communities it serves, always striving to connect more families, individuals, civic groups, and the business community with their parks.

Through aspirational; short-term and long-term projects and improvements, the Park District will identify priorities that adhere to its mission and build upon the foundation laid during the previous six-plus decades.

## Priorities

- Expand trails and access to parks.
- Acquire park land in underserved areas of the County.
- Create a system of interconnected trails and open space throughout the county and region to increase ease of park access for all residents.
- Provide facilities and programs that allow the public to connect, appreciate and enjoy the outdoors.
- Connect with and build relationships within the local community, maximizing efforts for the common good.
- Plan for the future to meet new challenges and opportunities that will impact Geauga Park District over the next five years.

## Action Items

These action items will foster important work within Geauga County in the field of parks, open spaces and natural resource management.

- Develop a variety of trails that serve hikers, cyclists, equestrians and paddlers.
- Identify and pursue partners and funding for multi-purpose trails within the County and region.
- Communicate with and engage the public and communities we serve “where they are.”
- Work with regional parks to develop all possible trail connections as opportunities present.



# Implementation



## Strategies

In 64 years, Geauga Park District has grown from one 4-acre park at Woodin Road to 28 parks and now manages more than 10,500 acres. With this growth and access, which has increased steadily, Geauga residents are served by a diverse staff including naturalist, land stewards, grounds and maintenance, planners, biologist, rangers, communicators and administrative staff that operate and meet the day-to-day responsibilities of their Park District.

Through capital improvements, the Park District has developed more than 92 miles of trails, nine lodges, 18 shelters and numerous restrooms. Moving forward over the next five years, after a period of growth in both land and access, the focus now shifts to maintaining the quality of these parks and facilities, updating these spaces as necessary, and creating connections between open spaces and parks throughout the county and region. Connections to The Maple Highland Trail in particular will allow more residents to access the parks and other places within their communities through more convenient and accessible trail networks.

## Application

- Evaluation of park properties and facilities, guided by staff and resident feedback reflecting the Geauga County culture, and in comparison to regional and statewide benchmarks and standards.
- Revisiting of Master Plans with the intention to align with newly identified Core Values.
- Attentiveness to public input through patron feedback, surveying and public input meetings.
- Continuous striving to adapt and provide the very best parks and natural areas for Geauga residents.
- Balancing the fiscal needs and day-to-day operational requirements of a successful park district.

# Conclusion



## Conclusion

This 2025 Strategic Plan will help guide Geauga Park District's Board of Park Commissioners, leadership and staff in decision-making and identifying needs, priorities and required resources to meet challenges and fulfill its mission through 2030.

Through engagement of the public in the form of a countywide survey and a series of public input meetings, as well as a series of Park District staff meetings, core values were identified to help guide day-to-day operations and long-term priorities and goals.

In the countywide survey, 97% of respondents said they feel it is important to preserve the natural features of Geauga County, and nearly 100% said they feel it is important to maintain a strong Park District. The overwhelming majority of respondents enjoy the Park District's offerings of more than 92 miles of trails and would like to see the continued maintenance and expansion of its trail network. Overall, the survey reinforced residents' pride in Geauga Park District and a desire for it to continue to fulfill its mission by maintaining high-quality parks, programs and amenities while looking to protect the natural features and diverse habitats of the county for generations to come.

As Geauga Park District embarks on the next five years, it must continue to uphold the expectations of the people of Geauga County while enriching their lives and communities.

To do this, the Park District will look to meet the challenges of the future by developing and updating Master Plans for all its parks that will prioritize facility maintenance needs, capital improvements, best practices for natural resource management, and restoration priorities and opportunities. In addition, it will look to provide residents increased connections to existing parks and their communities through trails while prioritizing the growth of existing parks and identifying future opportunities to preserve natural resources within the county. Staff will also continue to engage the public to evaluate existing programs and identify opportunities for new offerings.



With continued support from the public, our partners, and our talented staff, Geauga Park District is prepared to rise to the challenges of the next five years and provide Geauga County residents with continuously excellent parks and a variety of engaging opportunities to connect with Nature.

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## Acknowledgments

Geauga Park District's Planning & Natural Resource Management, Administrative, Naturalist, Marketing, IT, Grounds & Facilities, and Ranger Departments

Geauga Park District's Board Of Park Commissioners - Ray Guarino, Howard Bates, Jolene Carnabuci, Les LaGatta, Frank Stein

Geauga Park District Executive Director John Oros