

# 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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## 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

### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "GREEN"

By Joe Malmisur, Interpretive Naturalist

Green with envy? Green thumb? Kermit the Frog? Well, in this instance we are talking about what we can do to augment existing efforts to help the natural world in a positive way by going "green."

Start with a mindset of doing things differently based on how they affect the environment. From using more energy-efficient transportation to planting a Wild Back Yard, there are many ways to become green. Going green can even save you money:

- Reducing or eliminating your lawn care service minimizes the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- Energy-efficient windows, doors and appliances reduce utility costs.
- Turning off lights inside your home and using motion detection lighting outside reduces electricity costs.
- Installing solar panels or small vertical wind turbines can offset energy costs.
- Utilize existing tax credits: [bit.ly/federaltaxcredits](http://bit.ly/federaltaxcredits).

So, no matter how small, how will you begin your journey of going green? Look for energy-saving opportunities and programs at Liberty Park throughout 2025 and keep an eye out for other ways to engage with the park district's sustainability initiatives.

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## THE FUTURE OF SILVER CREEK METRO PARK

By Mark Szeremet, Chief of Planning & Development

Summit Metro Parks is committed to growing and evolving with the community, and part of that commitment includes working to develop long-range

master plans and park amenities for current and future generations of visitors to enjoy.

When the park district creates a park master plan, it is considered a guide for the development, utilization and management of a park and its natural, cultural and historic resources. Developed in stages, each plan allows for public input and incorporates the following:

- Community demographics, ecological and cultural assessments
- Current and future facility and programming needs
- Local and national park and recreation trends
- Long term sustainability
- Maintenance
- Equity, inclusion and accessibility
- Community and staff feedback

Master plans also account for future projects along with development costs and the operational, maintenance, (natural and cultural) resource management, staffing and financial needs necessary for future development.

The land that is now Silver Creek Metro Park was once part of Harter Dairy Farm and made up of agricultural fields dating back to the Civil War. In the late 1800s there were mining operations on the property. The park district began acquiring land for Silver Creek Metro Park in the mid-1960s, opening the park in 1966. Today, Silver Creek Metro Park visitors can enjoy archery, hiking trails, bridle trails, boat rentals, cross-country skiing, disc golf, fishing, picnicking, a cross-country running course and playground. Recent park improvements include the addition of Miner's Trail, new boat docks and renovations to the Big Oak Area parking lot and restroom building.

Silver Creek Metro Park features an agricultural aesthetic as a nod to the property's past while preserving its natural beauty for visitors to enjoy. The current master plan builds on previous improvements to further enhance the park and improve visitor comfort and accessibility with updates to the Lake House and beach area, new restrooms and shelters, a new Nature Play space, trail expansion, more boating opportunities and expanded native habitats.

Proposed improvements identified in the master plan include the following:

- Naturalizing the sand beach by restoring the natural lake edge to support fish and other aquatic habitats
- Removing the fence, adding accessible connection to the water and replacing the existing playground with a Nature Play area
- Renovating and expanding the existing Lake House to accommodate year-round programming
- Adjusting Miner's Trail to provide a continuous and accessible loop
- Installing new restroom buildings and shelters
- Renovating existing shelters
- Creating additional boating access and enhancing boating opportunities
- Expanding overflow parking at the cross-country and disc golf course and considering connection opportunities between the park areas.

We look forward to sharing updates with the public as we near implementation for various aspects of the Silver Creek Metro Park Master Plan. For more information, visit [bit.ly/SMPPProjectUpdates](http://bit.ly/SMPPProjectUpdates)

## UNEARTHING BLACK HISTORY IN CASCADE VALLEY

By *Charlotte Gintert, Cultural Resources Specialist*

Since 2017, the park district's cultural resources staff have been investigating the site of the former Wheelock Cuyahoga Acres (WCA), a unique archaeological landscape within Cascade Valley Metro Park. From the 1940s to the 1970s, WCA existed in portions of the present-day Valley View and Schumacher areas and was a racially integrated neighborhood long before the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. Honeywell Drive, the main road of the neighborhood, is incorporated in portions of Prather Trail and the future Honeywell Link Trail. With assistance from WCA family members and The University of Akron Anthropology Department, cultural resources staff have investigated the Prather and Johnson sites, two of WCA's former Black-owned properties.

George "Conrad" and Willie Mae Prather, like thousands of Black people during the Great Migration, moved north seeking better employment and relief from the Jim Crow laws of the South. Conrad was employed at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company and Willie Mae worked as housekeeper in a private home. Documentary information about the house was limited to when the property was purchased in 1953 and the house being destroyed by an arsonist in 1975. Archaeological excavation in 2018 uncovered a portion of the foundation and thousands of artifacts that once belonged to the Prathers, but there was still more to learn. In 2022, the Prathers' descendants contacted the park district and provided those essential details. Their information included stories of the Prathers' lives, how they built their house and, most importantly, their motivation for building there. The Prathers intended to build a self-sufficient, mutual aid-based community in WCA. "Their vision was each family was going to build their dream house on Honeywell Drive," their niece Ethel remembered. The

Prathers worked on their house for many years, building it piece by piece as they could save their money. Tragically, the fire destroyed it before they could move in.

Victor and Esther Johnson lived west of the Prathers on Honeywell with their three children. In 2023 their daughter Victoria and their granddaughters reached out to share their family history. Their information was used to design an archaeological survey that investigated the property layout and the foundation remains. Victor was employed at Goodyear and as a private horse trainer for the owners of Yeager's department store in Akron. Esther was a prolific gardener and raised most of the family's food. "We had a huge garden. We were eating organic food before they were even knowing about organic food," said Victoria. Hundreds of pieces of Esther's flowerpots were recovered in the excavation. This was no surprise to Allison and Tracy when they joined the excavation for a day. The Johnsons lived on Honeywell from the early 1950s until they moved to Columbus in 1976.

Research continues into the histories of WCA. Visitors can learn more about the Prathers by visiting the wayside sign on Prather Trail. A 3D model of the Johnson foundation is available at <https://skfb.ly/p7EDp>.

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## ENJOY FROSTY FITNESS ON PARCOURS TRAILS

Whether stretching to touch their toes, hopping over rocks or testing their strength on the chin up bars, visitors have been delighted and challenged by Parcours trails at Goodyear Heights Metro Park and Sand Run Metro Park for years. Each trail features 18 exercise stations with recommended reps for beginner and experienced users alike, as well as prompts to walk or run between stations.

Over the past couple of years, these trails have received much-needed updates, including new signs crafted by Summit Metro Parks staff and equipment featuring exercises that visitors have come to know and love. The most recent updates were completed during 2024 and funded by the Summit Metro Parks Foundation Trails Fund, which supports the ongoing costs of trail and trailhead maintenance, as well as the creation of new trails.

Though both trails consist of the same 18 exercise stations, each offers unique terrain and scenery for visitors to enjoy. The 1.8-mile Parcours Trail at Goodyear Heights Metro Park begins with an uphill hike before continuing through woods and crossing paths with the 2-mile Piney Woods Trail. The 1.5-mile Parcours Trail at Sand Run Metro Park connects to the Jogging Trail after descending into the valley, then breaks off to return uphill to the trailhead.

If you're looking for your next brisk winter hike or a unique workout in support of your New Year's resolution, look no further than Parcours trails in Summit Metro Parks!

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Happy New Year! We enter 2025 with gratitude for an exceptional year behind us and enthusiasm for what is ahead.

In 2024, among many improvement projects, Summit Metro Parks opened an extension of the popular Jogging Trail in Sand Run Metro Park, installed new Parcours Trail stations at Sand Run and Goodyear Heights Metro Parks, and, after several years of grant-funded restoration, we were proud to open new amenities at the Valley View Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park where visitors can now hike two new trails, enjoy natural play

spaces and an open-air river shelter as well as river access for paddling the Cuyahoga.

As the year begins, we look forward to exciting movement in the nationally significant effort to "Free the Falls" in Gorge Metro Park (Akron). Soon, the process to remove sediment from behind the dam will begin, setting the stage for future dam deconstruction. We will also continue to develop new opportunities, based on public input, at both Munroe Falls and Silver Creek Metro Parks and share ways to practice sustainability in our everyday lives.

Thank you to our visitors and supporters for your trust in our organization to conserve and sustainably manage more than 15,000 acres of greenspace in Summit County. We are grateful to you and to the many partners who help us advance our mission. We can't wait to see you in the Metro Parks and hope you'll enjoy your favorite way to connect with nature this year.

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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.