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Conservation

Rum River Enhancement

Nominee's Organization: Anoka County Parks Department, MN

Population:

In 2018, Anoka County partnered with Anoka Conservation District to develop a comprehensive Rum River Habitat Enhancement Strategy (https://www.anokaswcd.org/images/AnokaSWCD/Reports/Inventory/Rum_River_Erosion_Inventory_Final.pdf). This created an erosion inventory along the Rum River in Anoka County and identified 80 sites, involving 133 public and private property owners that span over seven miles. These sites are estimated to contribute more than 7,800 tons/year of sediment to the river. There were three generalized approaches and various financing was identified to address the habitat and erosion issues. The County developed an aggressive 5-year funding program to address as many sites as possible within that timeframe. Funding has been secured in the amounts of \$816,000 in Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Funds; \$440,000 in Board of Water and Soils Clean Water Legacy Funds; and \$185,000 in MNDNR Conservation Partners Grant. To help defray restoration costs for private landowners, the County is contributing \$442,000 and the Rum River Watershed Management Organizations are contributing \$30,000. The costs for private landowners is expected to range between 10-15% of the cost of the project on their land with grants funds covering the remaining portion. After the 5-year period, the project will be assessed to ensure outcomes are as expected and if successful, it is anticipated to continue for another 5 years, provided funding is available. The Rum River is a highly recognized fishing and recreational river that feeds into the Mississippi River. The sediment loading is substantial and significantly affects water quality and habitat in the area. This project is significant and should be recognized because it combines multiple partners and multiple funding sources over a 5-year period to ensure that no one agency or landowner carries the cost burden for the project, while all agencies, landowners and the public will reap the benefits of cleaner water and improved habitat.

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Conservation

Nominee: Climate Resilient Restoration at Grant Woods Forest Preserve

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserve District, IL

Population:

The preserves found in the Lake County Forest Preserve District have experienced increased flooding, prolonged late summer drought and higher-intensity winter storms. In 2020 the Lake County Forest Preserve District updated its strategic plan "Roadmap to 2025" to specifically address the consequences of our changing climate. At Grant Woods, we have implemented a unique demonstration project designed to ensure the resiliency of our preserves long into the future. We began by applying climate-adapted seed in a newly fallowed agricultural field. Using results from regional climate change models, we are using seed collected or produced from central and southern Illinois, as well as Kentucky. We are breaking draintiles, designed to move water off the field, to recreate the wetland hydrology that existed before the land was farmed. Hedgerows that separated former farm fields are being cleared to provide one, continuous habitat for birds and small mammals. Sourcing climate-resilient seed has been challenging. We determined that sourcing seed south and west might be our best strategy. When we reached out to new vendors, we found that seed produced as far south of us as Kentucky may have originally been collected from much further north of us in Minnesota! To determine the success of this project, our Education team is working with local high schools to develop a curriculum to monitor differences in the plants that establish from local seed with those sourced from further away. They will take data on measures of plant success such as flowering time and abundance, as well as observing pollinators. In addition to our on-the-ground restoration, we are sharing our experience and our seed sourcing techniques with other land managers, commercial seed producers and volunteers through virtual workshops and conferences. This forward-thinking project has also received the notice of the local press and the nursery trade.

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Conservation

Nominee: Herman and Dorothy Shooster Nature Preserve

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Broward County Parks and Recreation (FL), Environmental Management Group

Population:

Before its dedication as the Herman and Dorothy Shooster Nature Preserve in 2010, this site was nicknamed “The Forest”. It was an apt description for the lush landscape - almost 20 acres of basin swamp deep within, with bald cypress, red maple, and pond apple, as well as areas of willow and a disturbed mesic flatwood with slash pines and laurel oak running along one edge. Broward County Parks and Recreation Division began creating a Master Plan for the site in 2006. It wasn’t until 2019, however, that the park was fully developed, using funds from the County’s 2000 Safe Parks and Land Preservation bond program. Due to COVID-19, the site opened with little fanfare in November 2020. Improvements include on-street parking for eight vehicles, two thousand linear feet of nature trails (including an elevated walkway and overlook), interpretive signage, picnic tables, and bicycle racks. There were multiple challenges to transforming the site. A virtual wall of invasive plants ringed the property, which had also been used for dumping garbage. Construction of the trails had to be done inside protected wetlands during the wet season, all while minimizing environmental impact. The elevated boardwalk had to be routed to avoid clearing trees while also maintaining the degree of sloping required by the ADA. To minimize environmental impact, the use of large, heavy construction equipment was impractical, so that all work had to be done by hand and with small equipment. The Shooster family’s original purchase of the land helped prevent its almost certain fate of being developed into an office park. Broward County’s purchase of the land from the Shoosters ensured that, as a nature park, its character as “The Forest” would be restored and preserved.

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Conservation

Nominee: Mow-Free Zones/Pollinator Gardens

Nominee's Organization: Gwinnett Parks and Recreation, GA

Population:

Two years ago, we developed mow-free zone and targeted pollinator garden programs to create habitats and corridors for native fauna and flora to safely live and travel. While the mow-free zones allow natural growth free of invasive plants, the pollinator gardens comprise specific plantings that benefit the local ecosystem and attract pollinators. These areas, such as hillsides, lake edges, and spaces between sport field fences and established forest, have low-recreational value and provide several economic and environmental benefits. These low-maintenance areas decrease staff time and equipment usage, saving approximately 1,000 hours of labor and 500 gallons of fuel annually. They also reduce carbon dioxide emissions, eliminating approximately six tons annually. Lastly, they reduce erosion and increase biodiversity. Wildlife, particularly birds that disappeared year ago, have begun re-populating these areas. Within the past year, we partnered with UGA Extension Gwinnett and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to plant two acres of pollinator gardens, totaling 10 acres at 20 parks with more than 500 volunteers and 2,000 hours planting thousands of individual plants. Additionally, Live Healthy Gwinnett planted more than 2,500 fruit- and nut-bearing plants and 9,800 pollinator species in 20 acres at 19 parks as part of a food forest program. This program combats local food insecurity exacerbated by the pandemic, providing both an immediate and sustainable food source in areas where people have limited access to affordable and nutritious food. And the pollinator plants not only produce larger, more flavorful fruits and higher yields, but they also support habitats for more than 100 animal species. Thanks to this collaborative effort, we have not only developed diverse, healthy and sustainable ecosystems for thousands of local plants and animals to thrive, but we have also provided the community access to fresh food thanks to thoughtful planting.

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Conservation

Nominee: Natural Features Inventory

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Cleveland Metroparks has protected natural areas for over 100 years, now totaling more than 24,000 acres. Many of these areas represent remnants of a once larger, interconnected mosaic of habitat types. The Park District recognizes the ecological significance of its land holdings and has worked since 2012 to build a natural features database through its Natural Features Inventory Program. The development of this program represents a new, focused effort to capture and curate critically-important conservation data in meaningful ways and to develop management strategies that protect natural resources for future generations. The Natural Features Inventory Program focuses on capturing accurate locations and descriptions for a variety of natural features. Data are cross-referenced with national and regional datasets and made available to park managers. Since data gathering began, nearly 83,000 natural features, including plants, animals and habitat types, have been captured in the database. Many of these discoveries have led to the protection of previously unknown high-quality natural areas and globally-vulnerable species. The effort has contributed to state-wide efforts to track species of conservation concern with more than 100 new records of rare species shared with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Cleveland Metroparks is currently the only park district in Ohio represented by staff on the Ohio Rare Plant Advisory Committee, which is an expert panel that debates and sets the conservation status of vascular plants, mosses and lichens. Natural features data are also regularly shared with local conservation-focused partners and academic researchers to advance conservation science and protect biodiversity. This spatially referenced information allows the Park District to carefully plan trails, picnic shelters or general natural resource management with eye to preserving our special natural features. Despite the urban land use surrounding Cleveland Metroparks, park guests can still expect to see high-quality and uncommon natural resources when they visit.

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Conservation

Nominee: River Oaks County Park Acquisition

Nominee's Organization: Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department, WI

Population:

River Oaks County Park is (established in 2016) located in a residential community built in the 1930's adjacent to the Milwaukee River and within the 100-year floodplain. During flood events, residential properties within the current park location would become inundated, damaging homes, structures, and content and preventing vehicle access, including emergency responder vehicles. Recognizing these issues, the Ozaukee County Land and Water Management and Planning and Parks Departments, in partnership with the Town of Grafton, applied for Wisconsin DNR Municipal Flood Control and FEMA Flood Hazard Mitigation grants beginning in 2014. These initial grants were awarded in 2014 for the demolition of the structures on a 1.9 acre parcel and formally designated as River Oaks County Park. Since then, 4 additional parcels have been acquired and incorporated into the park, which is currently 4.12 acres. These parcels were listed for acquisition and designation as a County Park in the County Park and Open Space Plan. The Town of Grafton Board and County Board of Supervisors have continually supported this project. In addition, the County Departments hosted several public meetings during the acquisitions. All property acquisitions were voluntary - no properties were acquired through eminent domain. These grants require that the properties are maintained as permanent, public open space use, which is accomplished through inclusion in the Ozaukee County Park System. Park amenities (proposed and existing) include a kayak/canoe launch, fishing, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball court, grills, picnic tables, and bathrooms. The Planning and Parks Department is also restoring and managing the properties through planting of native trees, shrubs, and areas of no-mow grass and removal of invasive vegetation. Overall, this unique acquisition project has provided economic relief to landowners protecting them from future flood damage and resulted in a community-wide benefit of additional park and open space land.

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Conservation

Nominee: Saginaw River Headwaters Recreation Area

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Saginaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, MI

Population:

The Saginaw River Headwaters Rec Area project seeks to restore a critical river corridor while providing a quality-of-life enhancement for an underserved urban population in the City of Saginaw. The project site is a long-abandoned brownfield spanning 334 acres, most recently as Saginaw Malleable Iron, a General Motors manufacturing complex. The property was acquired by RACER Trust through the GM bankruptcy proceedings. RACER was assigned monitoring and remediation efforts to remediate environmental impacts and has spent \$5 million to date with \$4 million available for continued monitoring. The site currently meets EPA Recreational Use Standards. RACER spearheaded a unique initiative creating partnerships with the State of Michigan, the Nature Conservancy and Saginaw County to develop an urban nature area to provide passive recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing and wildlife observation, together with historical and interpretative educational features. The site will have easily accessible pedestrian linkages to the urban community. The partnership coalition expanded to include the USFW, the Saginaw Community Foundation and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan. The park site, which is located at the confluence of the Saginaw River and adjacent to the 9870A Shiawassee National Refuge, is a significant part of the Saginaw Bay Watershed which was designated a "US Important Bird Area". In addition to its global significance to migratory waterfowl along with 265 species of birds, the watershed boasts a great diversity of other wildlife, in addition to being a world class Walleye fishery. The State of Michigan executed a long-term lease agreement allowing Saginaw County to develop, operate and maintain the proposed park. MNRTF grants have been secured in the amount of \$590,000 for immediate site development, in addition to \$1 million dollars from Dow Chemical through the NRDA Settlement, of which \$750,000 will be placed in a maintenance endowment.

<https://www.seconwavemedia.com/features/saginaw-riverfront-mnrtf-series-4.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9mguJ2aEWk>

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Historical or Cultural Facility

Nominee: Brecksville Trailside Program Center

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Built in 1939 of wormy American chestnut, Brecksville Nature Center (BNC) was built as a trailside museum. While the architecture is beautiful, the building is only 1000 square feet, and open to the public daily, so modern indoor programming was limited. In the 2000's, the community asked for more classes and bathrooms, not available with the existing historical building. With growing demand for the essentials of enjoying a good program, how do we pay homage to the past, while building a new future? Cleveland Metroparks solved this problem with the Trailside Program Center. In 2018, with support from the community (\$335,000 in donations) and investment from Cleveland Metroparks (\$415,000), the new Trailside Program Center was built. It included four bathrooms and a 1,540 square-foot classroom. The new building mirrors the 1939 Trailside Museum with wormy American chestnut salvaged from other structures in Cleveland Metroparks. Although a brand-new building, standing in the room, one could feel that the builders built the new Center with the past in mind. Since the Trailside Program Center was built, 8,141 people have utilized it. Staff provide programs that were never done before due to space restrictions. Primitive Skill series, pie-iron cooking, paper-making are popular. A new special event, Dr. Seuss day, brought in over 400 people in 2019 and 2020. With the new Center, storage space doubled. BNC staff hosted guest speakers like a talks on coyotes and the Ohio Buckeye Trail. In addition, the building accommodates workshops and trainings such as the National Association of Interpretation's Certified Interpretive Guide workshop (2019). The Center will continue to provide innovative programming. The response from the community has positive: "The building is beautiful and thank you for offering these programs". The smiles of program participants are the telling signs of success of this project.

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Historical or Cultural Facility

Nominee: Colvin Run Mill Miller's House Exhibit

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

A recently completed exhibit at Colvin Run Mill broadens the historiographical narrative of merchant families' lives during two of Colvin Run's historically significant periods, the 1810s and 1890s. Visitors choose how they experience the exhibit and learn about mill history, families that likely occupied the house, and ways those families fit into the community. The exhibit has two rooms, one dating to the late 18th to early 19 century Federal Period, and the second to the mid-late 19th to early 20th century Late Victorian period. Extensive research included discussions with staff of similar period regional historic properties, period-appropriate catalogues such as Sears-Roebuck, and histories housed at Colvin Run Mill and Fairfax County Library. Catalogs revealed items that could have populated spaces, while histories explored families that likely occupied the rooms and the household items they might have had or recognized. Research also included design periods that pre and post-dated the exhibit plan because the occupants would likely own inherited or gifted pieces. The furniture combines period reproductions and period-specific antiques. There are reproductions such as cards on a table, game pieces, glasses, dolls and books. These are fully accessible to guests who are invited to move through the spaces without a guide. Visitors experience the rooms as guests in the homes. Room design is ADA compliant. Room design is educational and experiential. Guests sit, peruse books, touch items and play a game. Two projectors convey historical information on a loop that lets visitors linger with the information. The projectors provide interpretive flexibility as additional historical information becomes available. As exhibit focus shifts, projections can change. When projection is off, guests enjoy an immersive experience as if visiting during the historically significant periods. This helps at evening events when rooms are illuminated with (now electric) candles and interpreters greet guests.

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Historical or Cultural Facility

Nominee: Goochland History Center and Courthouse Green

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Goochland County Parks and Recreation, VA

Population:

The Goochland County Courthouse Green and History Center project, managed by Goochland County Parks and Recreation in conjunction with the Goochland Historical Society, is located in the heart of Goochland Courthouse, at the County seat of Goochland County. The County Courthouse c. 1835, is considered to be the most well maintained and operational Jeffersonian Courthouse in America. The Courthouse Green project and the History Center are adjacent to one another and were intended to provide programming and recreational opportunities, context, accessibility, and visibility to Goochland's rich history. The Green serves more as a self-directed recreational experience while the History Center, operated by the Goochland Historical Society, partners with the Parks and Recreation department on tourism and programming efforts. The green project includes not only the Courthouse and History Center, but the restoration of the old stone jail, and original circuit court clerk's office. Construction of the project focused on the historical influences of the time period - porous brick, dirt and stone floors, and recreated interpretive scenes within the old stone jail. The History Center was rehabilitated and redesigned to capture the period elements of the Courthouse history including columns, brickwork, and Charleston Green shutters. The interior of the Center includes historical exhibits and multiuse programming space. The Courthouse Green and History Center is fully ADA compliant and includes historical, interpretive signage as well as a living history museum found in the old stone jail. The renovations to the old stone jail, the History Center, and the Circuit Court Clerk's office as well as the installation of the period sidewalks cost an estimated \$500,000. The County funded approximately \$75,000 of the work - primarily related to the renovations of the History Center building. The remainder of the funds required for the project were privately raised by the Goochland Historical Society.

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Marketing

Nominee: Cruise the Zoo

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

In March 2020, Cleveland Metroparks was required to close the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo to the public due to Ohio Department of Public Health mandates to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Despite closing to the public, the Zoo's more than 2,000 animals still needed caring for and expenses continued without the Zoo's main source of revenue. In order to generate needed revenue, Cleveland Metroparks launched a donation effort called Cruise the Zoo, which allowed the public to drive their cars through the Zoo for the first time in over 100 years. This event was marketed as a way for guests to stay connected to the Zoo and its animals and support its mission. The fundraiser was offered on select dates at the height of the pandemic lockdown from May 20 to June 14. Over the fundraiser, an estimated 66,000 individuals visited the Zoo from the safety of their personal vehicles, raising over \$500,000 for the Zoo's operations. Market research revealed that the fundraiser helped reach people that would not have been able to visit the Zoo even in non-pandemic times. A post-event survey indicated over 70% would have been unlikely to visit Cleveland Metroparks Zoo in 2020 without the drive through option, and 36% of those said it was because of a mental/physical disability. To provide a safe and accessible option for zoo visitors, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo incorporated the drive through option at the Zoo's other major public events throughout 2020, drawing an additional 53,000 guests that visited from the safety of their vehicles. These events boosted employee morale and helped maintain a sense of connectedness for staff and guests. Due the proven success of the concept through market research, the Zoo plans to continue to provide a drive through option for guests in 2021 and beyond.

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Marketing

Nominee: Get Back to Golf

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

During the pandemic, Golf Fairfax's Get Back to Golf Safely marketing campaign combined paid social media ads, email marketing, on-site signage, video and website updates to communicate the re-opening of seven courses and four ranges. Content focused on Park and Play Safety and Cleaning Guidelines and options for play, practice, and instruction at newly renovated state-of-the-art amenities. The campaign led to record revenue that contributed to overall Park Authority revenue, much of which was impacted by closures/limitations. During course closures communication focused on updates, maintenance projects, alternate ideas to golf at home and golf entertainment to keep customers engaged and active. Park and Play Guidelines were developed based on market research from the Golf Course Owners Association (NCGOA), Professional Golf Association (PGA) and aligned with measures approved by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC). Email marketing (targeted by course and topics) and organic social media targeted current Golf Fairfax golfers. Paid Facebook and Instagram ads were implemented to reach Fairfax County residents or those who had recently visited. Detailed targeting included Men and Women ages 21+ with detailed interest targeting of golf, driving ranges, outdoor recreation, and visitors of the recently closed Top Golf. Success Measures:

Digital Marketing Metrics

- Paid Facebook and Instagram ads 2.2M+ impressions, Reached 960K+ Facebook and Instagram users, 13K+ website visits
- @GolfTwitter followers up 30%, engagement up 97%.
- Email Marketing: 37% open rate while closed, 30% open rate over all
- Website visits up 21%

Revenue

- Golf (overall) up \$2M
- Greens fee sales up \$1M
- Range sales up 50%
- Pass sales up 61%
- Instruction up 100k
- 1000s of golfers and Top Golfers that were new to our courses.
- 1000s of beginner golfers to golf which translated into increased lessons.

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Marketing

Nominee: Marketing Division

Nominee's Organization: Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation, NY

Population:

The mission of the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation's Marketing Division is to increase awareness of the Westchester County park system, which includes 50 parks and recreation facilities across the county. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the division was tasked with keeping Westchester County residents up to date with the latest information related to parks and increasing digital interactivity. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic there was confusion. Rules and protocols changed daily, facilities were transformed to meet the immediate needs of the community, and programs were cancelled and postponed. At the same time, the parks began to see record attendance, and communication was vital. The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation's Marketing Division kept visitors up to date with information about the department's facilities, programs and protocols with posts on the County website and across the department's social media channels. These posts allowed guests to plan their outings and increased confidence in the safety of the parks. The Marketing Division was also committed to shining a light during this dark time. Multiple video initiatives were introduced across social media channels including story time for young children and nature videos that appealed to a wider audience. Additionally, the division shared activity sheets and scavenger hunts, created Spotify playlists and Zoom backgrounds, and increased digital interactivity with new games on the Playland Amusement Park website. The Marketing Division also had to reimagine seasonal hire recruitment for our increasingly virtual world. The "take charge, be a lifeguard!" campaign ran across all social platforms and included e-blasts as well. Playland recruitment followed a similar approach with an innovative virtual job fair, where applicants could explore opportunities. The division has done a truly outstanding job.

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Marketing

Nominee: Marketing Team

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Howard County Recreation and Parks' Marketing division created or oversaw the creation of several new and unique marketing efforts. Under the umbrella of #AtHomeWithHoCoRec, Recreation and Parks created original videos and printable activities designed to be enjoyed by Howard County residents who could not attend in-person programs disrupted by COVID-19 guidance. Work on this content began in March of 2020. These materials were publicized on Recreation and Parks' social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and housed on <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/athomewithhocorec>. Videos created for #AtHomeWithHoCoRec include mini work outs led by Gary J. Arthur Community Center personal trainer Sara Schwab, athletic tips and tricks from HCRP sports instructors, video story times and historical craft projects designed by the staff at the Baltimore & Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum, step-by-step recipe videos and educational nature videos from the educators at the Robinson Nature Center. In addition, the marketing division created original print outs designed for children to enjoy while their parents work from home. These included coloring pages, word searches and more. These activities, which were offered free of charge using minimal resources, served as a launch point for many other creative "at-home" replacements for Howard County Recreation and Parks' special events and activities under the supervision of the Marketing team. The Robinson Nature Center continued to refine their video offerings, developing many of their popular programs as take-home kits and initiatives such as "Camp in a Bag". Staff at the Gary J. Arthur Community Center and North Laurel Community Center turned their annual parent-child dances into "family fun kits" that included instructions and materials for pizzas, cookies, crafts and more. Lastly, many programs from divisions such as Therapeutic Recreation, Active Aging and Sports were transformed from in-person activities into online versions held via Zoom or Skype.

Primary Contact

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Marketing

Nominee: Nature is Open

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Five Rivers MetroParks, OH

Population:

The pandemic posed a challenge for Five Rivers MetroParks, as residents flocked to outdoor spaces to destress and stay active. MetroParks saw a 25% increase in visitation in 2020, calculated after removing the impact of cancelling programs and events that draw hundreds of thousands of people. Keeping the safety of the public, its volunteers and staff top-of-mind, MetroParks introduced a campaign to promote safety, health and independent-use activities in its parks. Nature Is Open was a multifaceted approach to connect people to nature amid a pandemic by offering tools for guidance and support. According to a statistically valid survey that informed MetroParks' 10-year comprehensive master plan, trails are the public's most valued park amenity. The MetroParks Trails Challenge, introduced in May 2020, was a fun way to encourage people to explore the region's natural surface, paved and water trails in a safe way, on their own time and pace. The free MetroParks mobile app was also launched in summer 2020. To alleviate associated costs, MetroParks utilized an existing platform, OuterSpatial, to feature its content. The mobile app allows users to navigate the trails, discover points of interest and amenities, and discover custom outings, such as the Trails Challenge. Additionally, the mobile app communicates important COVID-19 safety messages. These opportunities were elevated through traditional and earned media, in addition to MetroParks' Nature Is Open blog, which houses curated content that encourages independent use of the parks - and connecting to nature in one's back yard - to maintain physical and mental health during challenging times. Both the MetroParks Trail Challenge and the new mobile app were successfully received. In its first year, the MetroParks Trails Challenge welcomed 921 registrants. The MetroParks mobile app more than doubled download projections in its first month, currently downloaded by more than 5,200 users.

Primary Contact

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Marketing

Nominee: Oakland County Parks and Recreation 2020 Millage Campaign

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Oakland County Parks and Recreation, MI

Population:

For the first time in its 54-year history, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission sought voter approval on an increase to its millage rate on the November 3, 2021 general election ballot in the midst of a global pandemic that limited services and operations during the 2020 season. The proposal sought replacement of the .2310 millage and increase to .35 mills from 2021-2030. Staff created a multifaceted approach to millage awareness, acknowledging target audiences:

- Active users including golfers, trail walkers and campers
- Passive park lovers staying home for safety but engaging on social media
- Registered Oakland County voters

Because of the timeframe and stay home orders preventing normal customer service interactions, the crux of the millage awareness effort was digital, although other strategies were used to reach target audiences and provide consistency for market penetration. Efforts included:

- "Vote Nov. 3" signs at park entrances and elongated banners in prominent locations. This design was repeated in staff email signatures and eMarketing messages
- An informational website with Frequently Asked Questions and a digital toolkit that included testimonial videos from partners, program participants and volunteers
- Restroom posters with additional "Protect, Outreach, Reinvest and Increase Access" messaging to explain the millage increase
- Kiosk signs in parks
- Inserts on golf cart visors
- Social media posts addressing millage topics and sharing video testimonials 2-3 times per week beginning nine weeks before the vote
- A Facebook frame for fans, staff and volunteers to use
- Weekly eMarketing messages beginning nine weeks before the vote
- A mailer delivered to 484,000 registered voter households
- An invitation to local municipalities, offering staff to share information and answer questions at virtual presentations

Thanks to these efforts, Oakland County voters supported Oakland County Parks and Recreation with 76.32% approval.

Primary Contact

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Marketing

Nominee: OC Parks Virtual Content

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks, CA

Population:

OC Parks encompasses regional, wilderness, historical and coastal facilities throughout the County of Orange in California. Each park has its own unique features and amenities as well as free community events and programs year-round. Due to COVID-19, community events and programs across County-owned parks were paused, while other facilities closed some amenities. The OC Parks events and communications team pivoted social media strategies, aiming to maintain public outreach and increase audience visibility/engagement by developing meaningful digital campaigns and virtual programs in lieu of in-person events for the community. Daily social media content, a virtual concert series, and Halloween and holiday-themed campaigns used various digital programming strategies, resulting in growth on all social media platforms. Over a nine-month period, OC Parks adjusted its social media calendar to deliver daily content and produce short and informative features and graphics while working remotely with zoo and park staff. Impressions and engagement increased across OC Parks' Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter by over 690% with a 164% net audience growth and a total of 17,330 followers and 937 new email subscribers from March 16-Dec. 31. In April, OC Parks launched "OC Parks Sound Check," a six-week virtual concert series with a cohesive brand and different local artist each week. The series generated more than 71 million impressions overall, 139,035+ video views across platforms and reached more than 84% more people for \$275,000 less than the annual in-person series. In October, OC Parks presented "OC Parks Spooky Series," a fun week of virtual Halloween offerings, including a virtual concert on Halloween night, which generated 964,072 impressions and 550.4k video views on Facebook. In December, OC Parks presented virtual concerts, storytimes, scavenger hunts, crafts and more to celebrate the holidays safely. The holiday content garnered more than five million impressions and increased overall audience by 1,211.

Primary Contact

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Marketing

Nominee: Park Places and Family Faces

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

Metroparks Toledo is a safe space for all individuals to enjoy. One of the highest priorities is ensuring that all individuals in Lucas County are aware of Metroparks and feel welcome to visit. In order to help spread our message of inclusivity on June 19 and 20 Metroparks Toledo hosted the free family event, Park Places and Family Faces. This event helped Metroparks provide a unique opportunity for families to have their portraits done by a professional photographer for free. To ensure this event was easily accessible for all families, locations were strategically chosen to ensure that regardless of where in Lucas County someone lived they had a park nearby. Locations included Pearson, Swan Creek, Secor and Middlegrounds. Pearson falls in Oregon, Ohio, an industrial suburb of Toledo, in the east region. Swan Creek is located in the central region, and is a highly visited park in South Toledo. Secor is in the west region and is located in Berkey, Ohio, an up and coming residential area that receives a large volume of park users year-round. As our first downtown waterfront Metropark, Middlegrounds serves the city of Toledo and serves a diverse population of park users. This program provided families with the opportunity to enjoy free portraits in the beautiful Metroparks surroundings, while providing us with authentic and relevant promotional materials that highlight diversity and inclusion among our park users. This year's event was a huge success in highlighting a wide array of park users, over 225 people were photographed over the span of two days. We were able to capture the true diversity of our community featuring a wide range of family-units, whether conventional or not. We had five local photographers who were interested in participating in this free program. The program was marketed through social media, newsletters and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. Website Link: <https://metroparkstoledo.com/about/park-places-and-family-faces/>

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Marketing

Nominee: ParkMobile App

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Government, FL

Population:

In 2020, Charlotte County Community Services initiated a public service campaign aimed at replacing all the County's beach parking meters from cash/credit to a contactless app-based pay program. When the county's beaches and boat ramps were able to re-open during the pandemic, parking was free to the public up until fees were reinstated, June 1, 2020. As was the case with every county in the United States, Charlotte County wanted to ensure that their residents and tourists could still safely access outdoor amenities. Charlotte County has some of the most beautiful Gulf Beaches and the goal was to enhance the beach and boating experience while limiting crowds, lines, and human contact with surfaces. The Community Services Marketing Team used a multi-faceted marketing approach to implement the ParkMobile© app, which involved traditional print media such as newspaper ads, large posted signage, and 1,000 rack cards available at all beach and boat ramp meters, tourism office and chambers. The social media approach included iHeart Radio© ads with geofenced iHeart Radio© app ads, along with social media videos and commercials on how to use the app. Within one month from June to July 2020 the ParkMobile© app saw over 4000 transactions conducted at the eight beach and boat ramps and continued to maintain over 2000 transactions until December 2020. The app was well received by the public and continued to provide a safe, socially-distanced, contact free payment method for residents and tourists.

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Marketing

Nominee: Recreate Recreation Videos

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population:

With Orange County's shelter-in-place order March 26 to April 9, 2020, the Parks and Recreation team had to find a new way to connect to families. Management approved having recreational staff make creative videos, Marketing staff developed the "Recreate Recreation" (#RecreateRecreation) to be posted on Twitter. Parks management presented details to eight program managers who oversee 31 staffed parks (which oversee the remaining 75 parks) so they could explain to employees what was needed. Staff used their work cell phones to record then submitted each to Marketing for review. Staff created the first 35 videos by April 7; 51 total videos were posted by June 22 and, as time progressed, we had 16 other videos by early September. Each was about a minute in length, on a variety of topics: fitness and sports, animals, arts and crafts, games, gardening, photography and the historical park's structures, antiques and toys. Our in-house graphic artist created colorful opening graphics for the videos: one with Orange County Parks and Recreation logo, and the other, Recreate Recreation. He edited all videos, estimating that it took several hours in the beginning but only 30-40 minutes each with practice. The background music came with the program which offered dozens of royalty-free tracks. Marketing scheduled the first 51 #RecreateRecreation videos on @OrangeCoParksFL Twitter April 7 - June 22, Mondays through Fridays at 9 am. By tagging relevant organizations that retweeted to their audiences, Parks slightly exceeded the goal of adding 200 more followers, going from 1,676 followers (as of April 1) to 1,911 by June 22 - a 14% increase. The first run of videos were viewed, on average, 118.66 times each, for a total of 6,052 views. The #RecreateRecreation videos, posted two more times through January 2021, were viewed more than 14,500 times.

Primary Contact

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Marketing

Nominee: The Buzz

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserve District of Will County, IL

Population:

In 2020 amid the pandemic and looking for new ways to reach our audience while expanding on the District's existing video work, the Forest Preserve District of Will County set out to create a unique offering with a nature show to be broadcast to our 300,000+ social media followers as well as aired on local television stations across the county. "The Buzz" launched in June 2020 and airs on our Facebook and YouTube pages on the last Wednesday of every month under the Facebook and YouTube "Premiere" platforms. The show runs 22 minutes and is hosted by Forest Preserve program coordinator Suzy Lyttle. The goal of the show is to educate and connect viewers to the natural, cultural and historical aspects of their local preserves. The show covers a wide variety of entertaining topics as well as explores places that the general public may never see. In 2021, we took what we learned in the first season of the show and revamped it, giving it a more polished look while also adjusting the format to go a little more in-depth on featured topics.

Primary Contact

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Operational Facility

Nominee: Cannaley Treehouse Village

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

Treehouses capture the imagination, turning adults into kids and kids into outdoor adventurers. One reason for the success of the long-running TV show “Treehouse Masters” was that it tapped into childhood memories of backyard expeditions. Metroparks Toledo hired the star of the popular reality show, Pete Nelson, to design a village made up of five unique treehouses and three tent platforms. The goals of the Cannaley Treehouse Village were to:

- Connect people with nature in innovative and exciting ways
- Create an attraction that helped put our region on the map as a destination for outdoors adventure
- And relaunch a foundation with a major project to demonstrate its ability to raise funds from private sources to support Metroparks mission

The village has a large, common treehouse accessible by ramps that can accommodate up to 49 people for day uses. Four treehouses are available for overnight reservations: A pair of two-person treehouses, an accessible four-person treehouse and a six-person treehouse. Three platforms can be reserved for camping in the trees, in tents or hammocks. The park system’s construction crew crafted the structures from Nelson’s designs on land recently added to our largest park, Oak Openings Preserve. But it took a village to build the village. The Metroparks Toledo Foundation surpassed its fundraising goal, raising more than \$1.6 million from 750 individual and corporate donors. Gifts ranged from \$5 to a lead donation of \$750,000. There were in-kind gifts of labor and materials from over 15 local companies, plus hundreds of volunteer hours. By the time the village opened in July, 2020, at an event with Pete Nelson in attendance, more than 20,000 people had entered a raffle to be among the first to reserve an overnight stay. Today, the treehouses are mostly sold out through 2021.

<https://youtu.be/yg1MXC8cblk>

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Operational Facility

Nominee: Centennial Park Recreation Center and Aquatic Facility

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Government, FL

Population:

Located in Centennial Park (formerly North Charlotte Regional Park), the Recreation Center and Community Services Administrative Offices opened for business in December of 2019. The adjacent aquatic facility opened in October of 2020. The Recreation Center includes a large lobby with control desk, gymnasium, two multi-purpose rooms, fitness center, Master Gardener office, office space for Recreation and Maintenance staff, and an employee break room. In addition, the facility has a community garden, playground and multiple open spaces slated for future amenities. The complex is adjacent to four soccer fields, five baseball fields, one softball field, a disc golf course, a Veterans memorial, fishing ponds, and paved walking/biking trails. The Aquatic Complex includes a 50-meter by 25-yard pool with one and three-meter diving boards, extensive deck space with multiple shade structures, Daktronics timing system with digital video/scoreboard, locker rooms, and staff offices. The Administrative offices are attached to the Recreation Center and include office space for approximately 30 staff, two meeting rooms, lobby and control desk, a central work area with shared office equipment, restrooms with showers, and an employee break room. Offices are occupied by Parks and Natural Resources, Recreation, Libraries, and University of Florida Extension Services administrative staff. The complex was funded by a 2014 Sales Tax initiative approved by the Board of County Commissioners and voted on and supported by Charlotte County residents. What makes the facility unique and the objective of locating the complex in Centennial Park is it made it possible for development of the newest planned communities in Charlotte County. Development began shortly after the opening of the Recreation Center and is moving at a rapid pace with infrastructure in place and homes being built. Patrons are already embracing the facilities and Centennial Park will be a focal point within the community as it grows.

Primary Contact

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Operational Facility

Nominee: Daniel Maltz Rhino Reserve

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo (CMZ) is dedicated to securing a future for wildlife through global conservation efforts. In the last few years zoological facilities underwent a poignant look at welfare. And proper social groupings and space distribution have critical welfare impacts. One of the core goals for rhinos under human care is to facilitate breeding success through improvements in facilities, management and expanding housing capacity with the end goal being to grow the population. This is one of the first occasions CMZ doubled its resource contribution to a single species' sustainability. CMZ has had significant success in breeding critically endangered Eastern black rhinoceros including the birth of two calves in 2018. Eastern black rhinoceros are critically endangered and less than 750 of them remain in the wild due to poaching and habitat loss. Female rhinos are rarely observed alone in the wild. However, male rhinos are solitary. This basic information on rhino social organization contributes to breeding success in zoos. And is the main natural history element driving the expansion of the bull (male rhino) barn and exhibit addition. Previously the males, females and calves were in closer quarters. The new bull barn and exhibit added additional space, but it also added new elements and complexity for animal enrichment and comfort. These include a shade structure, misting area, mud wallow and rubbing pole. A fully accessible viewing deck was added for visitors. The most valuable attribute was adding the interconnectivity to the existing barn and spaces. It allows each rhino an alternative environment to experience as well as provide space and visual separation, outside of breeding times. This \$2.5M project was made possible by generous donations of the Daniel Maltz, The Walter E. and Jean C. Kalberer Foundation and funding from the Cleveland Zoological Society and CMZ.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: Diana Kunze and Buzz Brown

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

The Chippewa Creek Gorge in Brecksville Reservation holds the earth's history in its rocks. This remarkable area created by glaciers that once covered the region has long been admired from an overlook deck. Now, with the generous support of Diana Kunze and Buzz Brown, this incredible area is safely accessible from the new Chippewa Creek Gorge Trail that connects to the existing trail network within the Reservation. Creating safe access to Chippewa Gorge presented many challenges for Cleveland Metroparks trails division. However, with the special funding provided by these donors they were able to create and implement a plan that included hand-built stone and timber staircases, a log ladder, stone retaining walls and milled lumber bridges. The funds allowed most of the work to be completed by hand to prevent damage to surrounding natural resources using techniques similar to the CCC nearly one hundred years ago. In addition to the spectacular new trail, this project allowed the trails crew to refine its skills and develop new techniques that will be used throughout Cleveland Metroparks. Over the past 13 years Buzz and Diana have contributed more than \$260,000 to Cleveland Metroparks to support trails, capital projects and to ensure its future through the Emerald Necklace Endowment. However, their gift of \$70,000 to fund 95% of this project is personally significant. The Chippewa Gorge is located near their home and they have watched the seasons change within it for many years. They also funded this trail because of its proximity to the historic areas of the Reservation and nearby Brecksville Nature Center and Trailside Program Center (also supported by Diana and Buzz). In their words this trail is "an escape to nature" which means a great deal to them and will provide the same experience to many people for years to come.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: Harry Glasgow

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Foundation, A

Population:

Harry Glasgow has devoted his retirement to the belief that we must protect our natural world and has been a passionate supporter of the Fairfax County Park Authority and the Fairfax County Park Foundation. He has contributed not just money but significant personal time, serving on both the Park Authority Board and the Park Foundation's Board of Directors. Since joining the Foundation Board, Mr. Glasgow has donated more than \$14,300 in personal funds. His volunteer hours have accounted for more than \$32,800 in in-kind contributions. As the Park Foundation's treasurer for eight years, he also encouraged numerous Board members to make donations that totaled in five figures. His contributions are tangible and intangible. It is much harder to put a price tag on the value of the time he has devoted to park advocacy. During his tenure on the Park Board, scholarship funding increased over \$1 million for the first time; funding poured into management of parkland resources; land acquisition continued through proffers, easements or partnerships, rather than purchases; and the Park Authority provided environmental education to thousands of school children. He also served on the Board's Green Team, successfully appealing to the public for support of much-needed Park Bond funding. An active member of the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, he has inspired goodwill among park visitors as the leader of weekly bird watching groups, and he contributes many hours of service each year to the support group's Board. He is a certified Master Naturalist and Master Gardener with a demonstrated ability to connect people with the natural world around them. His skills as an environmental educator have no doubt inspired others to follow his lead as a park supporter. Thousands have benefitted from his stewardship education initiatives and gained greater appreciation of their local parks and natural resources.

Primary Contact

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: Russell and Helen Means Observation Tower

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Johnson County Park and Recreation District, KS

Population: 600,000

Russell and Helen Means were passionate people, who were decades-long Johnson County citizens, and it was their dream that their much-loved rural property kept its scenic beauty after they were gone. To this end, the Means family donated 355 acres of their undeveloped property to the Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD), which met their charge, as they had envisioned it, to become the centerpiece of a new regional park in the underserved western portion of Johnson County. In their honor, Kill Creek Park, a 900-acre regional park, was opened for public use in 2001, leaving an everlasting mark on the landscape. Following their passing, the Means estate additionally donated \$900,000, which was earmarked for improvements at Kill Creek Park. After much analysis and study, the Russell and Helen Means Observation Tower was designed, built, and opened for public use in October 2020, highlighted by a fitting ribbon cutting ceremony, for which several Means family members traveled to attend. As a part of JCPRD's commitment to accessibility for all, the 50-foot tower features a fully accessible elevator and stairs for those willing to make the climb. The stunning views of the park and western Johnson County make the trip to the top, however one makes it, more than worthwhile. The tower was officially named Russell and Helen Means Observation Tower to commemorate this giving couple. The tower fits into the landscape of this nature-based park, preserved for future generations due to the Means' generous donation of land and their estate gift. Please help Johnson County Park and Recreation District provide further recognition to this devoted family through consideration of the Russell and Helen Means Observation Tower for a national "Facility" award.

Primary Contact

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: Kathleen O'Connor

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation, NY

Population:

I nominate Commissioner of the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation Kathleen O'Connor for the 2021 Outstanding Public Official NACPRO Award. Commissioner O'Connor has been with the department for over 35 years and is our first female commissioner. Over the course of the past year, her leadership not only benefited the park system, but the greater Westchester County community as well. In March of 2020, Westchester County became the epicenter of the of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States. O'Connor met the needs of the community during this difficult time, working with other local and state officials to transform the Westchester County Center and Glen Island into a field hospital and one of the country's first drive-thru testing sites. At the same time, she began to address the community's need to mourn with the construction of the "Ribbons of Remembrance," a memorial dedicated to the victims of Covid-19. This unprecedented time has shown the essential need for recreation outlets. Westchester County Parks saw record attendance as mental and physical health deteriorated. O'Connor mobilized staff and met the increased demand for recreation at the county's parks, nature preserves and trails. As we moved into the summer months, and our new reality set in, she managed the highly successful reopening of golf courses, Bicycle Sundays, pools and beaches, camps and outdoor drive-in movies, all with Covid-19 safety protocols in place. While doing this, O'Connor also ensured visitors were up to date with the latest information, increased digital interactivity with the parks, rehabilitated turf fields, and also kept two beloved Westchester County traditions alive with the reimagining of the Lasdon Park Train Shows and Winter Wonderland at Kensico Dam Plaza. She's an outstanding public official.

Primary Contact

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: Steve Klika

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Johnson County Park and Recreation District, KS

Population:

Steve Klika was first appointed as the Johnson County Board of Commissioners ex officio member to the JCPRD Board in 2014. Because of his resulting advocacy for parks and recreation and his strong desire to remain in this role, Steve served seven consecutive years as on the JCPRD Board. Steve advocated for additional funding for parks and recreation through the Board of County Commissioners. His tenacity resulted in an unprecedented .75 mill levy increase. This additional funding has allowed JCPRD to improve existing assets and develop over 3,500 acres of new parks and trails. In 2017, the long-awaited Lexington Lake Park opened as well as an additional 3.5 mile trail along Coffee Creek. In addition, Big Bull Creek Park opened in late 2018, and Meadowbrook Park opened in the summer of 2019. Development continues with Cedar Niles park opening in the spring of 2021. Steve was also a motivating force in JCPRD's involvement in the new Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center. This beautiful 75,000-square-foot facility was always planned to be the home of the Johnson County Museum, but there was not a clear vision for the remainder of the space. Because of Steve's involvement with JCPRD, he recognized that JCPRD was the perfect organization to operate and manage the space and that the facility could include opportunities for JCPRD's fine and performing arts programs. This facility opened to great fanfare in 2017 and became the cultural hub for JCPRD's new culture division. His persistence to ensure that JCPRD receives the financial and supportive resources needed to provide essential park and recreation services to the county's citizens is unmatched. There is truly no better advocate for parks and recreation. Thank you for your consideration of Steve Klika as the NACPRO Outstanding Public Official Award. He is truly deserving.

Primary Contact

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: William Bouie

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Two Gold Medal Awards, acquisition of over 10,000 acres of parkland and open space, the passage of four park bonds worth nearly half a billion dollars in capital funding, CAPRA accreditation with perfect scores - twice, adoption of our first five-year, agencywide Strategic Plan and most recently, embracing the One Fairfax initiative which envisions an equitable and accessible park system for all. These represent a legacy of accomplishment during the tenure of William G. Bouie, Chairman of the Park Authority Board since 2009. Thirteen years of leadership in recreation and parks. His leadership is providing a path forward during COVID-19's darkest days. Never cowed by adversity, this Chicago native has guided staff and the Park Board through park closures, the inundation of trails and open space by record crowds looking to safely recreate, and the emergence of virtual programming and online governance and community engagement. FCPA, once renowned for its ability to generate significant revenues via fee-based programs including golf, RECenters, water parks and summer camps, now depends on reserves and General Fund support. However, change is in the air as the Park Authority balances pandemic safety with the system reopening and resumption of park operations; again, under Bill Bouie's leadership. Our Park Foundation raised record amounts in the past fiscal year; staff morale is up, and communication internally externally is up with virtual connections now the norm. While no individual can claim full credit for this nationally acclaimed park system Chairman Bouie remains an icon. The first African-American to lead FCPA, intrinsically honest and well-spoken, educated, politically astute, successful in business and generous with his time, he is a renaissance man in the right place at the right time and the Park Authority, even during difficult times is thriving under his guidance and ready for the post pandemic future.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Friends of Frying Pan Farm Park

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Collaboration is key between FCPA sites and the Friends Groups which support them. Linked by MOU's, staff support and shared goals, these non-profit organizations pay for those things tax dollars can't. In 2020, the Friends of Frying Pan Farm Park lost their "cash cow" fundraisers due to the pandemic, but they created a novel NASCOW experience to more than make up for the loss. For years, the Friends provided critical support to the park, raising money to care for the 100 animals they own at this urban farm by hosting events such as horse shows, Spring Farm Days, a 4H Fair and Fall Harvest Day. Last year, all these events were canceled due to COVID-19. Undaunted, the Friends asked park fans for donations to care for the park's popular animals and raised almost \$100,000 - three times more than they had ever raised in one year. One third of these donations came from one ingenious event -- NASCOW. The Friends offered the public a chance to "sponsor" the park's cows in a "race". Staff first trained them to follow a bucket, then inspired the cows with sweetened feed and the spectator-free race was held. A post-event virtual social media post allowed fans to watch the winner cross the finish line. Supporters got such a kick out of a cow race and word spread far and wide. What started as a local event attracted more than \$26,000 from 500 corporate and individual donors from 16 states. NASCOW raised nearly enough to pay for the farm animals' needs for the entire year while raising awareness of the park. During 2020, the group also replaced nearly a half-mile of fencing, built a cattle shade structure, and improved parking lots. Innovative, out-of-the-box and effective. Look for NASCOW to moo-ve into next year's programming as well.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Friends of the Chicago River

Nominee's Organization: Friends of the Chicago River, IL

Population:

Friends of the Chicago River (Friends) is a non-profit organization with the mission of improving and protecting the Chicago River system for people, plants and animals. The Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) is one of the country's oldest and largest urban conservation districts managing nearly 70,000 acres of public land that shelter unique plants and animals and provide more than five million residents with opportunities for recreation, education and relaxation. The FPCC is primarily focused on protecting and restoring land-based habitats while Friends primary focus is on rivers and other aquatic habitats. This has led to a natural partnership that combines expertise and advocacy for projects that require solutions for the entire watershed, including both water and the surrounding landscape. Friends is an essential partner to the FPCC in restoring natural habitats and in connecting people to nature. Friends is helping to advance the FPCC's Next Century Conservation Plan which lays out a set of bold actions to make Cook County a national leader in urban conservation. Friends has assisted in the implementation of significant aquatic ecosystem conservation and restoration projects at the FPCC as well as creating wildlife habitat along the FPCC's water bodies, including turtle habitat that benefits many species, erecting osprey nesting platforms, and building bat houses. Friends is a big proponent of citizen science and engages people of all ages in wildlife monitoring activities including bats, frogs and more. Friends also helps people feel welcome in the preserves by offering paddling activities, river clean up events, school programs that focus on river health, and engaging new volunteers through, Centennial Volunteers, an ambitious collaborative volunteer recruitment initiative. The FPCC is fortunate to partner with Friends on projects and programs that restore and conserve Chicagoland's local and regional waterways.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Glenmore Woods Home Owners Association - Buckthorn Eradication

Nominee's Organization: Glenmore Woods Home Owners Association, IL

Population:

The Glenmore Woods Home Owners Association has been a valuable partner in the Lake County Forest Preserves' effort to eradicate the exotic tree, European buckthorn. Buckthorn impacts natural areas and native species in many ways. Glenmore Woods HOA has been a leader in the management of buckthorn on their property and been an example to other landowners. To date, the HOA has assisted in the management of nearly 25 acres of land impacted by buckthorn and planted more than 220 native trees and shrubs in areas where buckthorn was removed. Additional background information is provided in the Support Information.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Make a Difference Day with The University of Toledo

Nominee's Organization: University of Toledo, OH

Population:

In October 2020, we were in the midst of a global pandemic but people were still eager to get outside and volunteer. On October 24, national Make a Difference Day, over 100 students from the University of Toledo arrived at Metroparks to make a difference in the lives of others and in their community. Their planning for this day was excellent with team captains identified for each of the 5 park locations. The team captains, their advisor and Volunteer Services Team member met virtually to confirm group projects, identify safety precautions and ensure the students were dressed appropriately for the weather and the project. Going above and beyond, the students' advisor, sought donations from Lowe's to support the work projects with hand-sanders, litter tongs, gloves and buckets galore. Since most of the students were from the Leadership Academy, Metroparks was asked to share a leadership story. As we all have a story to tell, the employee leading shared their personal story before the volunteer projects began. And the students accomplished so much! At the "just days away from opening to the public" Glass City Metropark, truckloads of litter were removed from the park, including litter from a new sledding hill making the hill safe for sledding. Debris was removed from the bioswales at Middlegrounds Metropark and garden beds were improved. At Wildwood Metropark, picnic table after picnic table were refinished while at Swan Creek Metropark the park and waterways were much cleaner with the students' help. Side Cut Metropark also saw clean up along the riverbank and removal of invasive species. During a time of unprecedented park attendance, help was needed to maintain high park standards. The work these students accomplished, in just one day, made a difference at multiple park locations throughout the county.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

Nominee's Organization: Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, OH

Population:

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS) works to protect public health and the environment by leading effective stormwater and wastewater management operations. NEORS serves 62 communities and one million residents; it treats 90 billion gallons of wastewater a year within a 380 square mile area, and is the largest wastewater treatment provider in Ohio. The organization boasts an award-winning treatment plan and exceptional laboratory performance. Its current "Project Clean Lake" construction program aims to reduce Lake Erie pollution by 4 billion gallons by 2036; its Regional Stormwater Management Program addresses flooding, pollution, and erosion across multiple communities. Cleveland Metroparks works directly NEORS to address problems related to stormwater runoff, which degrades our region's water quality. NEORS contributed millions of dollars to the construction and opening of the Watershed Stewardship Center located in Parma, Ohio in 2013. This Center serves as an innovative hub for community education, environmental stewardship, and scientific research. This unique partnership with NEORS has supported and promoted an award winning Watershed Volunteer Program. Annually, over 60,000 people attend programs based on watershed-science curriculum, school field trips, youth camps, public hikes, and citizen science events. In recent years, support from NEORS has fostered professional development training for hundreds of individuals ranging from watershed policy and climate change resilience to in-depth Ohio Credible Data programs. NEORS also actively participates in special events, such as World Water Day and Backyard Nature Bash, that engage thousands of diverse guests in watershed-friendly practices for homes and communities. As of 2021, NEORS's contributions have led to key park expansions, linking West Creek Greenway with numerous municipal parks and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. NEORS also matches Park District stormwater fees one-for-one to support green infrastructure and stream restoration projects in Cleveland Metroparks that contribute to an improved regional stormwater system.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Tri-State Trails

Nominee's Organization: Tri-State Trails, OH

Population:

Tri-State Trails (TST), an initiative of Green Umbrella, was created to connect and expand Ohio's regional trails and bikeways TST's Director, Wade Johnson, has succeeded in working with communities and organizations, including MetroParks of Butler County, to facilitate collaborations that have made new trails or trail sections a reality.

Accomplishments as they relate to Butler County:

- 2014: Completed the Regional Trails Plan that identified the Great Miami River Trail (GMRT) and the Miami 2 Miami Connection as significant regional trail corridors.
- 2016: Conducted two Butler County Regional Trails Forums. Brought together many stakeholders to provide input on trail planning for the County.
- 2017-18: Spearheaded Miami 2 Miami Action Plan, a long-term plan to connect two significant regional trail corridors, GMRT and the Little Miami Scenic Trail, through Butler and Warren Counties. 18 local government and private stakeholders participated and contributed financially to the study, including eight local governments, two county agencies, three community foundations, one park district, and one educational institution.
- 2018: Brought MetroParks and the City of Hamilton together to partner on applying for Transportation Alternatives funding for the portion of the Miami 2 Miami Connection within Gilmore MetroPark.
- 2019: Brought together about 25 stakeholders to strategize closing the approximately 6 miles of gaps that remain in the 80+ mile GMRT corridor.
- 2020: Secured funding from nine public and private organizations for a feasibility study that will examine how to close the remaining gaps in the Great Miami River Trail corridor.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Yark Subaru

Nominee's Organization: Yark Subaru, OH

Population:

Yark Subaru, a local car dealership, has committed to ensuring more of the community has the opportunity to engage with nature and Metroparks Toledo. Yark Subaru partnered with Metroparks Toledo on three key initiatives: the Cannaley Treehouse Village, Connections Camp, and the Outdoor Expo. Yark's support of the Cannaley Treehouse Village allowed the Metroparks Toledo Foundation to realize, and even surpass, the fundraising goal to support the construction of the five-treehouse village, making the vision a reality for hundreds of visitors to enjoy every year. Connections Camp is a Metroparks program that provides week-long nature camp experiences to over 700 children every year from underserved populations, at no cost to their families. Yark Subaru chose to sponsor Connections Camp to provide the campers the opportunity to travel to the Treehouse Village as part of their week of activities to explore and learn in the unique setting. The Outdoor Expo is a free event held annually to allow community members the chance to try out all of the programs Metroparks has to offer, from kayaking to archery, tree climbing to camping. Yark Subaru's sponsorship of this event will ensure thousands of community members continue to be exposed to the variety of outdoor activities available to them through their Metroparks. Yark Subaru's support of outdoor experiences for the community shows a deep commitment to the health of the community and the availability of nature experiences for all generations. They are an excellent example of a true community partner and a company dedicated to the outdoors. Any one of their contributions would have made a significant impact on the community, but they chose to support multiple projects and programs, amplifying their impact and the benefits achieved.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Bruce Rinker

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

As a political subdivision of the state of Ohio, Cleveland Metroparks is governed by three Board of Park Commissioners who serve three-year terms without compensation. Bruce Rinker has served on Cleveland Metroparks board for the past 11 years overseeing every aspect of the 24,000 acre park district, which includes 18 park reservations, eight golf courses and nationally acclaimed zoo. The park district is guided by three core pillars: conservation, education and recreation. To that end, under Bruce's management over the past decade, the park district has served more than 5.3 million guests through educational programming, increased trail mileage and park visitation by 10% each, respectively; and acquired more than 2,715 acres for protection. Bruce was instrumental in the strategic acquisition and transformation of 750 acres of underutilized city parks into safe, active beaches. In 2017, as Board President, Bruce guided the park district through its centennial year celebration which drew record visitation of 18.5 million park visits through programming and capital investment. In addition to his service to Cleveland Metroparks, Bruce has practiced real estate law for over two decades on cases involving land protection. In 2019, he testified before the Ohio House Civil Justice Committee on the importance of governments to retain eminent domain rights for public use projects. He also served as Mayor of Mayfield Village, a suburb of Cleveland, from 1993 to 2015. As Mayor, he implemented a 2.5 mile shared-use trail corridor to connect businesses, residents, schools and parks. In his honor, the trail has been named the Bruce G. Rinker Greenway. Over the past 11 years, Bruce has worked tirelessly and selflessly for the protection of park land across Northeast Ohio.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Dave Szaflarski

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

David Szaflarski grew up playing on the lands that are now Oriole Grove Forest Preserve, and returned as an adult to lead Restoration Workdays and inspire the next generation to love and protect nature. Since 1997, Dave has removed invasive species, collected and sown native seeds, helped maintain trails, led and taught other volunteers, and provided connections to local agencies. He has been certified in a variety of skilled roles, including Chicago Wilderness Brush Pile Burn Boss, LCFPD Chainsaw Operator, Illinois Pesticide License, and Red Cross First Aid. Dave has long been an advocate for the site. Most recently, he worked with District staff to provide input for the new Master Plan. This plan overhauls the trail system, incorporates ecological restoration, all while preserving the legacy of the esteemed Jens Jensen (early 20th Century landscape architect). Oriole Grove borders the Skokie River and is an important link between Lake Bluff Open Land's Skokie River Prairie and Lake Forest Open Land's Skokie River Nature Preserve. Dave's dedication transcends these boundaries. Dave has an eye for important details, such as collecting seeds from a mature surviving American Elm. The District's Nursery grew them into saplings which volunteers planted in numerous preserves, spreading the Dutch Elm Disease-resistant genes around the county. He gleans information from historical photos. He always shows up prepared for any possibility: on a seed sowing day he was also prepared with a small bottle herbicide and PPE to treat an invasive bittersweet vine discovered in the seeding unit. Dave is our eyes on the ground. Monthly workdays have been regularly filled with students from the nearby high school, learning about ecology and restoration from Dave. Hard to fathom the number of young minds Dave has inspired over the last 24 years!

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Joyce and George Proper

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

Joyce Proper grew up exploring the grounds that became Grant Woods Forest Preserve. Since 1994, she and her husband George have been incredibly dedicated volunteers. They run Restoration Workdays at Grant, leading other volunteers in invasive species management, collecting and sowing native seeds, and planting native flowers and trees. Joyce inspires with her vast knowledge, her personal memories of Grant, her love of all plants but especially the spring-blooming hepatica. She also bakes cookies to thank and entice volunteers to return. George is a wonderful partner, supporting her leadership with his skills with a chainsaw and herbicide. Their passion, dedication, smiles, and humor make everyone feel welcome. Grant Woods is an ambitious preserve for volunteers, with over 1200 acres and more habitat diversity than any other preserve in the District. A third of the preserve is dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve, in recognition of the high quality and ecological importance. In addition to their own workdays, they are fantastic collaborators. Over the years they regularly helped with volunteer workdays at Rollins Savanna, Marl Flat, St. Francis Woods, the Native Seed Nursery, and any preserve that requested their help. Joyce has also been a longtime volunteer with the Plants of Concern program, monitoring rare plants at Grant Woods. The data is held by the Chicago Botanic Garden; the results help the District and our neighboring counties to understand regional trends in management needs. Joyce and George have worked tirelessly in prairies, woodlands, wetlands, ravines, and bogs. Just in the last 15 years they have donated over 10,000 hours! They and their work is an inspiration to staff, who have taken on clearing and restoration projects as well as a large-scale grant-funded project studying climate change. Grant Woods grows more special every year, thanks to Joyce and George.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Leo and Sharon Knox

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

Leo and Sharon Knox have always had a deep appreciation for nature and have been lifelong Metroparks Toledo users and supporters, instilling a love of nature in their children as well. The Knoxes have been Metroparks supporters through the volunteer and membership programs for over 20 years, giving annually to support new programs and projects every year across the park system. They also ensure their friends and family enjoy the benefits of Metroparks membership, gifting memberships to new neighbors and friends. In recent years, they have found special projects that truly resonated with them and chose to deepen their commitment to Metroparks. Leo and Sharon fell in love with the Cannaley Treehouse Village project and chose to support the building of the treehouses philanthropically, becoming one of the project's top donors. Leo also went a step further, lending his building talents as a volunteer as well. Their generosity helped to ensure the five-treehouse village became a reality for hundreds of visitors to enjoy every year, fulfilling childhood dreams of spending the night in the trees. The Knoxes now have found their next Metroparks project that has captured their interest and generosity: the new Glass City Metropark. The newest addition to Metroparks places rejuvenated greenspace in the heart of downtown Toledo, inspiring Leo and Sharon to support this community enhancing project and sharing the story of Metroparks with their friends, family and greater community. Leo and Sharon Knox exemplify the spirit of giving: generously contributing of their time, treasure and talent, often without being asked to do so.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Cannonball Prairie Metropark

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

Cannonball Prairie Metropark, located in the globally significant Oak Openings Corridor, opened in April 2020 and immediately provided an exceptional location for both wildlife and recreation. At a site that was once part of a 1,000 acre working farm, Metroparks Toledo has planted prairies, created a lake for boating and fishing, established three primitive campsites, and provided walking paths and a connection to very popular Wabash Cannonball Trail. There were almost no camping opportunities along the Wabash Cannonball until Cannonball Prairie opened. Built in 1855, the northern leg of the Wabash Railroad ran from Toledo to Chicago until 1969. Folklore tells us that "Cannonball" comes from a fictional train created by the song writer J. A. Roff in 1882. The song was so popular that the rail line named a passenger train after it - the Wabash Cannonball. In the 1990s, the rail line became a rails- to-trails project and today, is one of Ohio's longest rail-trails, covering a total of 63 miles. The almost 100 acre park is an ideal habitat for birds, frogs, and turtles, and specific to birding, the park will serve as an important stop for both migratory birds and grassland nesting birds. Visitors to the park have a tremendous opportunity for wildlife viewing after a walk or bicycle ride. Fishing is not currently allowed while the fishery is being established, but in a few short years, the site will be a prime destination for fishing and will serve as the hub for Metroparks fishing programs. As the site was previously a farm for corn, soybeans, tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers, prairie restoration efforts were aided by utilizing local native seeds from Metroparks' own Blue Creek Native Seed Nursery. Funding for the project was supported by a successful grant application to the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Chester Dog Park

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population: 355,000

The Chester Dog Park at Goynes Park was the culmination of a five-year effort that began with community engagement. The Chester Community Association, a volunteer group, conducted an online poll asking the community what amenities they wanted in Chester. A dog park ranked No. 1 on the list. The community group approached the Parks and Recreation Department with the idea to place a dog park within the local park. The group also donated \$5,000 towards the construction. The first phase opened in April 2019, with an entrance area with benches, 80' release foyer, and a 0.25-acre enclosed play area for small dogs. The one-acre large dog run area opened in July 2019, with water access and a shade structure added shortly thereafter. The dog park meets national standards for pet safety and trends. The final addition was an agility course on 0.15 acres. Staff consulted with a professional trainer at West Chester Pet Resort, a local business, and national canine agility experts to design the seven-element course. Volunteers from Dominion Energy installed the elements for the dog agility course, spread mulch and completed landscaping. The agility course opened in March 2020. The Parks and Recreation Department capitalized on this new amenity and began offering classes in canine agility training for adult dogs and puppies. The department was able to utilize the skills of an existing staff person to offer the classes. The Chester Dog Park is the second dog park in Chesterfield, opening 15 years after the first facility. This site has the advantage of great topography for running the dogs and is heavily shaded. Mulch was used as groundcover for the enclosed areas making it animal friendly. The dog park has been extremely well-received and heavily used, making it the envy of canines and their owners in the region.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Glass City Metropark Phase 1

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

Imagine a reinvigorated downtown with a new, 300-acre greenway bordering both sides of a large river, connecting six neighborhoods with a six-mile, multi-use trail. This is the vision for Glass City Riverwalk in Toledo, Ohio, and it is not too far on the horizon. Glass City Metropark, the main hub of the future Riverwalk, opened in December and is already drawing visitors to enjoy the view. In a former vacant field that once detracted from the area, luxury apartments now overlook the new park. It is the first new residential development in a generation for an aging neighborhood, and its developer cited the planned park next door as the reason for his \$50 million investment. Glass City Metropark will anchor Riverwalk, which will also connect two other Metroparks, a city park, and the campuses of some of the region's largest employers. Additional phases will break ground this year, including an ice-skating ribbon, restaurant, immersive play areas, community enrichment center and urban campground. A bike/pedestrian bridge will connect the Metropark to a city park that our agency will acquire and renovate. Riverwalk is a work in progress. Tens of millions of dollars in local property taxes, state and federal grants and private contributions are secured. However, Glass City Metropark Phase 1 has already become a popular destination for people to enjoy the city skyline across the river, or slide down the new sledding hill (and magnet for kids in our flat region). Numerous project proposals for the city's mostly vacant riverfront have come and gone over the last 30 years. Glass City Metropark is the first to be completed. The park has stimulated private investment, enhanced one neighborhood created momentum to complete the renovation of the city's entire riverfront.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Gwen Thompson Briar Patch Park

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services, VA

Population: 406,850

Gwen Thompson Briar Patch Park is a five-acre neighborhood park in Sterling, Virginia, which includes one of the most heavily used playgrounds in the county. The objectives of the 2020 facility redevelopment plan included the following:

- Playground redesign with shade structures and rubber flooring.
- Trail access and replacement.
- Upgraded tennis court, including pickleball.
- Bridge replacements.
- Retaining wall.
- Installation of the outdoor fitness court.

Many of the individual projects included fixing existing drainage and sub-surface issues that have arisen over time. The playground, tennis courts and trails were cracking and in need of replacement. The former playground and swing set areas were leveled, and the woodchip flooring was replaced with poured rubber to allow better drainage and lower maintenance costs. The outdoor fitness court project, completed in 2020, is a unique park feature for Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS). The project was accomplished in partnership with the National Fitness Campaign, and the Sterling court represents the first of its kind for the department. It provides outdoor exercise for all ages and abilities and is designed to engage the entire body with seven zones that accommodate beginners and experts. To offset project costs, staff from the Maintenance and Facilities Planning and Development divisions completed various components of each project. The next portion of Gwen Thompson Briar Patch Park to be redeveloped will be the large pavilion. The community has expressed excitement and appreciation for the enhancements and upgrades.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Manhattan Marsh Preserve Metropark

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

With the opening of Manhattan Marsh Preserve Metropark in October 2020, Metroparks Toledo achieved their goal, set in 2002, of placing a Metropark within five miles of every Lucas County resident. The 70-acre park, located in North Toledo, includes over a mile of loop trail around the marsh, multiple boardwalks and overlooks, basketball court, 20 vehicle parking lot, and a restroom facility. Chase STEMM Academy, a Toledo Public School with a science focus, sits immediately next the park and is an ideal location for students to learn from a living laboratory. Manhattan Marsh is a significant stopover habitat for migratory song bird and waterfowl species in Northwest Ohio within one of the most significant migratory flyway areas in North America. Manhattan Marsh is first Metropark in North Toledo, and will continue community revitalization efforts already underway in this underserved area. For several decades, the north side of Toledo has been known as a disadvantaged area, with over 50% of the surrounding residents in poverty. 100% of the children who attend Chase STEMM Academy qualify to receive reduced cost or free lunches. Many of these children have never been to a Metropark, and thus not benefited from exposure to nature. By offering direct access to the wetlands, Manhattan Marsh opens opportunities to this urbanized neighborhood that they otherwise would likely not have access to. The project took a property that would likely be deemed un-useable for other purposes into one of the neighborhood's and larger city's greatest recreational and educational assets. The project is the result of decades of community input, grassroots activity, and organizational partnerships built on the common goal of improving the neighborhood surrounding Manhattan Marsh. Funding for the project was supported through a \$475,000 Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership grant through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

<https://www.13abc.com/2020/09/12/metroparks-meetup-manhattan-marsh-preserve-to-open-in-october/>

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class I

Nominee: Pickleball Complex at CTC@Hull

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department

Population: 355,000

Capitalizing on the availability of an existing athletic site, Chesterfield Parks and Recreation developed a USAPA-certified pickleball tournament facility while meeting increased county demand for play space. CCPRD partnered with the Chesterfield Pickleball Club to convert four tennis courts to twelve pickleball courts. With existing infrastructure, conversion to the new facility was accomplished more quickly and economically than new development. The facility opened May 1, 2019. The department recognized an opportunity for adaptive reuse of the former courts as an economical way to address the growing community pickleball demand. The CTC@Hull site already contained restrooms, ample parking and good transportation network offering short travel time for many users. The property was already part of the County's athletic facilities inventory. Building on previous partnership successes, this project is the third collaboration with the Chesterfield Pickleball Club. Total budget for the facility was \$300,000. Club donations provided amenities like benches, safety divider nets, and bulletin boards. The partnership extended county resources. More recent upgrades to the facility have included a permanent shade structure, bulletin/message board, and lights. Future use includes promotion as a sports tourism destination, attracting a different clientele that ultimately will contribute to the tax revenue for the County. Since 2010, Chesterfield Parks and Recreation has offered some form of pickleball instruction. Interest and demand have since skyrocketed. Currently, the department provides play opportunities at ten locations (indoor and outdoor) and 14 instructional courses available each season. Annual class attendance exceeds 2,600. We maintain 26 courts, plus 14 more courts with blended lines. This new 12-court tournament facility provides much needed court time. Club members immediately flocked to the facility, and it continues to serve the community as a popular location for play and the department's instructional classes. The complex is the only one of its kind in the metro area.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Estrella Park Development Project

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 3,347,270

Estrella Park is a 6.6-acre local park located in the unincorporated community of Valle de Oro in San Diego County. The park remained undeveloped since 1977 and, at times, was used as a dumping location. The park was designed to reflect input received during an outreach campaign that included two community meetings and numerous meetings with local stakeholder groups. The nearest parks are located 1.5 miles away from Estrella Park outside of walking distance. This park provides new, unique recreational opportunities within walking distance for the Valle De Oro community. Estrella Park was a community priority for over a decade. In addition to providing new recreational opportunities for local residents, two schools are within 780 feet of the park and will be using the park for recreation and educational field trips. Located in a disadvantaged community with 45% of the population living in low-income households, the park provides free recreational amenities and open spaces within walking distance. The project also implemented innovative "green" construction methods for the nature play area that are not common practices in most counties. The nature themed play area includes recreational amenities made of all-natural wood that either fell or needed to be removed for safety purposes for other county parks. The project incorporated boulders existing in the park and fallen trees from other parks resulting in cost savings to the county. Improving the undeveloped park supports the Live Well San Diego, the County of San Diego's vision for a region that is Building Better Health, Living Safely and Thriving, by promoting an environment where residents of all ages and abilities can enjoy parks, open spaces and outdoor experiences. Upon completion of the Estrella Park, the county has received numerous positive comments from park users. Additionally, park visitation has increased substantially upon completion of the project.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Herman and Dorothy Shooster Nature Preserve Development

Nominee's Organization: Broward County Parks and Recreation, FL

Population: 1,900,000

Herman and Dorothy Shooster Nature Preserve is an important part of Broward's environmental and cultural heritage. In the mid-1980s, the property, nicknamed "The Forest," was slated to become office buildings. Thanks to the 2000 Safe Parks and Land Preservation bond program, the County purchased the 19.78-acre site from the Shooster family for \$4.15 million. Parks started creating a Master Plan for the site in 2006, and the County transformed the property into the urban oasis it is today, which is home to several species of fauna, including the vulnerable Florida box turtle. The project included removing a wall of exotics, cleaning up debris, and building street parking for eight cars, walking trails, and an elevated boardwalk. The challenge was the means and methods of construction needed to build in the protected wetlands during high-water/wet season while minimizing the environmental impact. In building the elevated boardwalk, the construction approach was to field-adjust the path to avoid trees while maintaining ADA slopes. Heavy construction equipment could not be used in the wooded swamp basin. The work had to be done by hand and with a small excavator - clearing the walkway route, digging foundations, and carrying individual prefabricated aluminum sections to set in place. The premixed concrete was placed using long hoses. When the conventional method to pour the pad footings into the flooded forms didn't work, a cost-effective solution was developed. The preconstructed wood forms were lined with heavy-duty 100-gallon plastic bags to contain the concrete and prevent contaminating the wetland. The bags were flexible enough to allow the concrete to flow into the shape of the forms and simultaneously displace any water. Using this simple method, the construction was able to be expedited. Once the water receded, the plastic bags were cut away and removed, and "The Forest" was preserved.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Holly Oaks ORV Park

Nominee's Organization: Oakland County Parks and Recreation, MI

Population: 1.25 million

After more than 10 years of planning and collaboration, Holly Oaks ORV Park opened in September 2020. The park, situated in Groveland and Holly townships, is operated by Oakland County Parks and Recreation (OCPR), in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division. It is the second state park area in Michigan to be jointly managed by a state and county recreation agency. Planning began once officials realized that Oakland County had a large number of licensed ORVs, but no riding opportunities in southeast Michigan. The first 106 acres opened in the fall with the remaining 122 acres of ORV trails and terrain expected to be ready for riders by 2023 as mining operations wrap up. The initiative is unique because Holly Oaks re-purposes former and active sand and gravel mines, making it a one-of-a-kind destination for all types of ORVs. Each of the 20 Adventure Areas are uniquely themed, capitalizing on the landscape left behind by miners. Most of the areas are designated as "Pick Your Own Adventure," scramble areas where riders are free to explore and choose the experience that best suits them and their rigs. All ORVs, including full-size vehicles, side-by-sides, all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles are welcome. Riders are challenged by features like 4x4 trails, single track trails for motorcycles, steep hills, water crossings and rock crawls. Mt. Magna, a 9,000-square-foot peak designed to replicate the experience of popular, massive rock formations in Moab, Utah, is a signature feature. Public response has been phenomenal. During the two months Holly Oaks was open in 2020, most weekends were sold out. More than 9,000 people statewide follow the Holly Oaks ORV Facebook page and nearly 2,800 people checked in on Facebook during the season, happily sharing their experiences with friends, family and fellow ORV enthusiasts.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: OC Zoo Interim Entry Plaza

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks, CA

Population: 3.2 million

OC Parks manages the OC Zoo inside Irvine Regional Park, California's first regional park, which sees roughly one million visitors annually. The zoo's 4.5 acres house mammals, birds and reptiles representing the American Southwest. Many animals have been rehabilitated but cannot be released to the wild. The zoo opened in 1985 without a restroom or significant improvements for more than 30 years. In 2013, the Orange County Board of Supervisors approved the zoo's General Development Plan, including adding a restroom, entrance enhancements and new exhibits to enhance visitors' experience. Construction began in 2018 on a new restroom building and interim entry plaza. OC Parks collaborated with OC Public Works, using a Construction Manager At-Risk Contract delivery, a time and cost-effective alternative to the traditional design-bid-build process. Final construction cost was \$4.1 million. The completed interim entry plaza and restroom building opened in December, 2019. It matches the craftsman architectural design of the existing buildings. The project also included undergrounding overhead power lines and removing four supporting power poles. Additionally, a Tesla solar battery will provide emergency power to selected vital areas of the OC Zoo in the event of a prolonged power failure. The interim entry was designed to take into consideration the existing resources and layout of the zoo and upcoming improvements. The new entry improves circulation problems the previous gate had. A two-gate system with a wider entry and separate exit gate provides better circulation through the zoo. A drinking fountain and landscape improvements were also included. Due to COVID-19 restrictions forcing the zoo to close for most of 2020, it's difficult to know the effect the project had on attendance. However, January and February saw a 57% increase in attendance, from 22,460 in 2019 to 52,656 in 2020.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Roosevelt Park Storm Water Project

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Park Regional Stormwater Capture Project (Project) is a regional, multi-benefit, sustainable project that integrates both below-ground and above-ground green infrastructure and low impact development (LID) type features. The below-ground features include two infiltration galleries below the soccer field at Franklin D. Roosevelt Park and three infiltration wells on an adjacent street, Whitsett Avenue, that have a total 24-hour capacity of 8.5 acre-feet. The above-ground green infrastructure features construction of pervious walkways, and vegetation using drought-tolerant plants and native trees. The project diverts, captures, and infiltrates stormwater from a 203-acre tributary area into the Central Groundwater Basin. In addition to below-ground water quality improvements, the project enhances the community's green space by incorporating an education garden with drought-tolerant and native vegetation that can adapt to climate change and bilingual educational signage. The project also incorporates recreational features such as a redesigned artificial turf soccer field with lighting, new skate ramps, exercise stations, a picnic area, and playgrounds. Construction of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Park Project was substantially completed in June 2020. The implementation of 37,000 square feet of drought-tolerant landscaping, 54 new trees, and bioswales reduces water usage, reduces the impacts due to the heat island effect, helps mitigate the impacts of climate change, and creates new habitat within the park for native species. In its entirety, this project will highlight global and regional environmental challenges by interfacing with local communities with educational materials that illustrate how local projects - whether big or small - can make a significant contribution in improving the climate adaptiveness of their community. The above-ground amenities offer several education opportunities to engage the local communities with information on landscaping materials and processes that conserve water, improve water quality, and reduce local temperatures. The native landscaping and green infrastructure elements installed in the education garden provide park patrons with information on how they can incorporate water conscious habits into their daily lives. The densely populated urban area of Florence-Firestone has a high percentage of impervious surfaces consisting of rooftops, streets, sidewalks and parking lots. The area needed major green infrastructure to capture and treat stormwater. Stormwater and urban runoff have been identified as major contributors to pollution in local water bodies, and Roosevelt Park was the critical and significant location to reverse this trend of environmental inequity.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Woodcrest Play Park

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

The Woodcrest Play Park project was designed to address the critical need for park space for the residents by creating an innovative play park on-site at the existing Woodcrest Library. This creative use of space offered mutual benefits to Los Angeles County Library and LA County Parks by increasing recreational opportunities and park space in a dense, park-poor community and increasing patronage to an aging library experiencing declining usage. Creating a park on this shared site with the library is an important opportunity to extend services in an area that has seen a history of divestment and disinvestment. This project presents a significant, targeted improvement to promote safe park access and programming opportunities in a dense, urban environment. The West Athens-Westmont community is rated as having a Very High Park Need in the 2016 Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment. When compared to countywide averages, West Athens-Westmont shows a critical lack of park and open green space: 0.2 park acres per 1,000 residents compared to the County average of 3.3 acres, and only 26% of West Athens-Westmont residents live within half a mile of a park compared to the county average of 49%. Further indicating the extreme lack of access for the community, West Athens-Westmont ranked 118 out of 120 LA County communities in available parkland, according to the LA County Department of Public Health. Additionally, demographic factors impact the types of facilities needed in the community since approximately 29% of the population is under 18 years old, and 32% of households in West Athens-Westmont have children. This community is ranked last out of 120 LA County unincorporated communities in terms of years of potential life lost due to cardiovascular disease. The transformation of an underutilized entrance to a library into a lively and beautiful space for rest, play, socializing, learning, and exercise will have a substantial positive impact on the quality of life for the community members of Westmont. This community is severely lacking in park space and suffers from an extremely high risk of death from diabetes and the highest rate of premature mortality from cardiovascular disease in Los Angeles County, so addressing the community's need for access to parks and recreation is critical. Working within a limited 1,800-square-foot space, LA County Parks was able to design and construct the innovative, interactive Woodcrest Play Park along the apron around the existing County library building. Due to the size constraints, an effective, innovative design was critical to maximize the recreational opportunities without impacting - rather, enhancing - the library's operation.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

Do you believe in Magic? The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) pulled out all the stops to create a newly transformed Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park with the addition of 300 new trees, more than 30,000 plants, a redesigned lake and a half-mile walking trail. The renovation also includes new play areas and a splash pad for the 250,000 children who live within five miles of the park, improved walking paths with security lighting and plenty of new landscaping that give the park an entirely fresh look. The scenic lake combines beauty and function with a new stormwater treatment system, which will collect runoff from surrounding communities and use that water to fill the lake. The centerpiece of the transformation is a new event center, which will be used to host conferences, educational programs and other large gatherings. There is also a dedicated outdoor wedding pavilion to host memorable occasions in the park. The project was designed to enhance the community through revitalization of the existing facilities and implementation of new active recreational amenities, multi-purpose use facilities, community gathering areas, and a safe environment. The project is comprised of the following primary components summarized below: As an exciting milestone for LA County Parks and its residents, the transformation of Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park is a well-deserved investment in our public spaces to make them centers for gathering, learning, and respite. Parks are important community gathering place, and the revitalization of Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park has generated economic, physical, and social benefits, in addition to creating stronger community ties. The project redesigned 30 acres of the park to include a new community event center, children's play areas, splash pad, seating, drought tolerant landscaping, exercise course, wedding lawn, picnic areas, pedestrian ring around the south lake, walkways, lighting, security cameras, signage, lake improvements, stormwater capture and recycling system, lake enhancements, restrooms, parking lot upgrades and related improvements. The new approximately 20,000 square foot community event center creates a central space for park users and local organizations to host and attend conferences, workshops and other events. The community center includes a reception lobby, multi-purpose hall, commercial kitchen and computer training room -all built with sustainability and technology in mind. The community center earned Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certified rating on the community building. The popular path around the lake now features landscape elements including seat walls, steps, benches, shaded tables, handicapped accessible routes and a pedestrian bridge. The lake includes an innovative feature that will help address both water conservation and water quality. It will divert storm runoff from surrounding neighborhoods and nearby Compton Creek, clean it and then use it to fill the lower lake and irrigate 30 acres of the park, creating a wetland experience for park goers.

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Park & Recreation Facility- Class II

Nominee: Shoreline Public Access, Sea Level Rise, and Habitat Restoration Projects

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: East Bay Regional Park District, CA

Population: 2.8 million

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD), located in the San Francisco Bay Area, completed three projects in 2020 to provide public access, mitigate sea level rise, and restore wildlife habitat. These project sites are in the cities of Bay Point, Albany, and Oakland. These projects are exceptional examples of forward-thinking endeavors that thoughtfully constructed sustainable public access for the entire SF Bay area and especially for the adjacent communities. The Bay Point Regional Shoreline Restoration Project included enhanced amenities such as ADA restrooms, drinking water, and shade structures. This project incorporated an innovative adaptive-retreat design to address projected sea level rise. Diverse habitats and structures were created including transition zones, tidal channels, and other marsh features which facilitated tidal exchange and controlled seasonal inundation. The Albany Beach project closed the last critical gap in the SF Bay Trail between Emeryville and Richmond, added new amenities, and habitat improvements on the beach area and dunes. The completion of this project follows decades of planning, community and stakeholder engagement, and overcoming challenging engineering design to successfully construct portions of the trail cutting into a steep rock slope. The Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline project is the culmination of 50+ years of diverse community engagement and regional collaboration among nine agencies. This 22.47-acre park is located along at the foot of the eastern span of the SF-Oakland Bay Bridge. The project was funded and constructed by Caltrans in partnership with EBRPD. The 600' observation pier, built using re-purposed old bay bridge footings, provides waterfront access with unique views of the bay. Park amenities included ADA restrooms, security lighting, and interpretive panels with the region's rich transportation history. A trail connects to the bridge, providing a four-mile link from Emeryville to Yerba Buena Island.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: "One Thing to Do" Virtual Program

Nominee's Organization: Columbus Parks and Recreation, GA

Population: 195,769

The "One Thing to Do" virtual program was a series of minute-long videos that encouraged residents to find productive and enjoyable activities to do while many typical outlets had been impacted by the COVID-19 shutdowns. The series included various crafts, fitness routines, life skills, games, food preparation, seasonal specials, educational topics, and more! The first video was released on the Columbus Parks and Recreation Facebook page on April 13, 2020 with new videos released every weekday. The series had a total of 240 videos with its finale airing on March 12, 2021. The "One Thing to Do" series was created by Columbus Parks and Recreation Department employees because staff saw how the COVID-19 shutdown had left an enormous deficit in recreational activity for people of all ages and staff wanted the department to reach out and provide for citizens during the shifting pandemic situation. The department was extremely fortunate to have staff who had prior experience making videos and used that knowledge in creating concepts, writing scripts, shooting video footage, video capturing, audio voiceovers, editing, and publishing. Many episodes were the brainchild of one Parks and Recreation employee, but over time many other staff would also contribute and be featured in episodes throughout the duration of the virtual series. The "One Thing to Do" video series was largely produced using just an iPhone and a laptop and did not require funding from the department which made it very budget friendly and easy to produce. The response from the people of Columbus was overwhelmingly positive! For many months, almost every video received hundreds of views! "One Thing to Do" is unique in its ability to have new and different content out consistently, becoming the flagship virtual program of the department and a springboard for additional virtual programming for the department.

<https://www.facebook.com/columbus.parksandrecreation>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Activity Bags

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Henderson County Parks and Recreation, NC

Population: 115,000

The pandemic hit and staff started trying to access how to reach out to our community. They knew they needed to act fast and make things happen for all the youth stuck at home. Brainstorming sessions began with our new online meeting skills and ideas around remote activities started to form. They saw plenty of others using online resources that already existed, but they wanted this to be more personal. We have programmers that have been in this department for many years and they have developed great relationships with families. They wanted the remote activities to still have this connection with our community. They decided to create a newsletter that would go out with a brief description, an online custom made word search, joke book and crossword puzzle; these would be made with varying themes all related to Parks and Recreation. These items would be available for everyone who saw the newsletter but, in addition they wanted hands-on activities for our youth. They decided to fill a bag with supplies that would provide participants with the exact items to do a handful of different crafts and activities. These projects were selected to cover a diverse demographic in hopes that they would appeal to everyone! Then they worked to determine how they would teach the projects; the answer was through short videos. A brief video was created for each project by staff, they have been creative, funny and entertaining! The community loves them and sends us kudos all the time. The videos were available via a link in the newsletter or on our Youtube channel. This means everyone has access to the videos even if they do not get an activity bag. Once the newsletter goes out registration starts, people sign-up and then pick-up their bag. Staff developed a drive-thru pick-up to keep people safe, guardians never have to leave their vehicle to pick-up the bag. They sign up online or call us; we register them for FREE! Staff determined that they could fully fund the bags from our special events budget since all of these were cancelled due to the pandemic. Great fun and its FREE! I am including a link to the videos, to date they have created 95 of them! These videos are the best and most creative part of this entire process and the community has loved them. I cannot say enough about the creativity to think outside of our norm and make great things happen for our community! Thank you for considering us and please watch a video or two; a couple of favorites are the Frisbee Toss, Slime and Ranger Riley Fun Stuff.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/hendersoncountync/search?query=Parks%20>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Metroparks Trivia

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 325,820

The COVID-19 pandemic helped Metroparks become a leader in virtual content and enabled our programming team to use creativity to engage our homebound audience. One of the most popular in person activities in Toledo are trivia nights at local establishments. But COVID prevented people from traveling out; enter Metroparks Trivia--part entertaining gameshow, part educational quiz show--this lively and creative virtual content utilized Menti and Zoom to bring Metroparks into our participants homes weekly in May. Participants were able to watch the entertaining hosts via Zoom while they interactively responded to trivia questions using Menti. The trivia highlighted aspects of Metroparks mission, as well as conservation, natural resources, history, and programming opportunities. As a new program it was advertised with little lead time but still proved to be so popular that we are bringing it back this March! Sessions were recorded and released on YouTube as weekly episodes to re-watch or share with friends/family to help maintain our sense of community and camaraderie while living in quarantine. For the four weeks of Trivia there were over 160 participants. Each week the top three scorers received prizes hand delivered to their doorsteps with a socially distant song and celebration dance. Scores were cumulative with the month's top scorer receiving a grand prize overnight stay at one of Metroparks' unique facilities. When asked what they enjoyed about the program a few of the responses were "It was fun and entertaining plus educational" and "the host was pretty funny and entertaining. I liked the explanation on some of the answers from the Naturalist" and finally "being able to learn new things. " These comments reinforced that we had achieved our objectives of providing an educational and entertaining program to those who were homebound during a stressful and tense time. Trivia Videos: <https://metroparkstoledo.com/discover/activities/metroparks-trivia/>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Piece of the Puzzle Parade

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 825,820

Fall is usually the time when Metroparks holds a volunteer recognition event to celebrate the over 50,000 hours volunteers donate annually. This year, due to the pandemic, things were different. Volunteers are a critical piece to keeping the parks running. More than ever we wanted to show our appreciation but knew that we would have to get creative. Our solution was the Piece of the Puzzle Parade. Puzzle themed invitations were sent to our active volunteers with parade line-up instructions and encouraging decorated cars. The October day couldn't have been more perfect. Fall colors were near peak along the heavily treed parkway. The sun was shining and smiles were abundant. Approximately fifty employees lined the mile long stretch of roadway - the largest staff turnout at a volunteer recognition. Every department was represented, from field staff to senior staff. To show their appreciation, some employees brought family. Some made their own signs or held pre-made signs with sayings such as "Volunteers Rock", "Volunteers have Superpowers" and "Volunteers have Heart". Still others rang bells, blew horns, waved or yelled "thank you". Excitement was in the air as cars began to line up behind the patrol vehicle, half-an-hour before start-time. Volunteers came in convertibles, decorated cars and some even decorated themselves. Then with intermittent sirens, the patrol car began the parade. It took nearly two hours for approximately 150 cars to reach the end of the route where they were met by the Volunteer Services team who handed the volunteers puzzles of a Metroparks fall scene with the words "Volunteers are a piece of the Metroparks Puzzle". Metroparks was able to recognize our volunteer's hard work even in a crisis, staff and volunteers had a great time, and everyone loved getting to safely see each other after months of isolation!

<https://youtu.be/hgrMKnIewM>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Robinson Nature Center

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population: About 326,000

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Howard County Recreation and Parks' Robinson Nature Center created a unique "take home" programming model to deliver nature-based programming to community members. Participants purchase a kit of materials with everything needed to complete nature-based educational and sensory activities at home. These take-home programs were first developed in March of 2020 and the Nature Center released the first kits as "Camp Came to Me" experiences in June. Over 135 families enjoyed at-home camp experiences at a time when many families had no other camp options. Positive feedback from Camp Came to Me experiences led to an expansion of this programming into the school year. From home school content, to holiday gift kits to "at home" special events and DIY workshops, over 567 additional individuals and families have benefited from our take home programs. Response to our new at-home programs has been enthusiastically positive and the Center has received numerous testimonials lauding the program as a safe, stress-free way to enjoy nature and time with their families. By providing both written instructions and videos, the Center also met its objectives to make the programs accessible. The Center was also able to achieve its mission to connect people to nature by using short videos rather than longer, live guided sessions. Participants were given clear instructions on how to complete activities and enjoy heading outdoors into their yard or neighborhood to both complete activities and enjoy longer experiences in nature. The Camp Came to Me and Take Nature Home programs were a creative way to serve our community during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing participants to enjoy nature programming without visiting the Robinson Nature Center. The Center has been able to serve both new and existing patrons by engaging them from the comfort of their own homes.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Scout Archaeology Program, Living History and Heritage Program

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population: About 326,000

Howard County's Scout Archaeology Program, managed by Howard County Recreation and Parks, was created in 2016 to allow Boy Scouts to complete the requirements for the Archaeology merit badge. The program expanded in 2019 to include the Citizen Scientist Journey for Girl Scouts, increasing the reach of the program. The Scout Archaeology Program was developed to offer scout programming as well as educate the public about local archaeological sites in Howard County. The program is the only local archaeology program that offers these hands-on opportunities for the public. It connects scouts to professional archaeologists and the research they are conducting. This model offers a unique approach to scout programming as it allows the participants to become fully immersed in the process as they gain an understanding of the significance behind the process. The program is completed over multiple days, requiring Scouts to research archaeology, as well as understand how it is used to study and understand cultures of the past. During the program, Scouts participate in site location, research, field and lab work, and interpretation. The Scout Archaeology Program is unique in the sense that it allows participants hands-on experience on actual sites with professional archaeologists. While much of the program focuses on the "digging" aspect of archaeology, staff try to focus more on the point that archaeology is just more than digging. As the only comprehensive archaeology program for scouts in the region, Howard County Recreation and Parks' Scout Archaeology Program is worthy of a 2021 NACPRO award. Not only does the program offer a unique opportunity for local scouts and their families, it creates awareness of local history. This educational awareness enables scout groups from across the state of Maryland to help protect the past for future generations.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Snow Place Like Metroparks

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

Usually, opening a park is done with great fanfare. The community gathers together to celebrate. But in 2020, Glass City Metropark opened quietly due to a pandemic. Needing a new way to introduce this park to the community, the idea of Snow Place Like Metroparks was born. Skilled volunteers cut 150 three-foot-tall snowmen from plywood and park donors, members, volunteers and community partners were invited to decorate. The plywood snowmen were picked up and taken home where individuals, families, schools, and more used their creativity, in three weeks, to express what Metroparks means to them. And decorate they did! The plywood snowmen transformed into binocular clad birders, playground swingers, attentive rangers, gnarly mountain bikers, wood-burned birch trees, and even a sparkly “glass (city)” snowman. The creativity was phenomenal. Snowmen were covered in moss, bluebirds or the smiling faces of park staff while others wore native plant headpieces. Participants excitedly shared progress photos on social media. When complete, the snowmen were returned to the park where crews quickly lined the main park road with them. Metroparks shared photos of the snowmen on social media and a video of the drive was posted <https://youtu.be/VI5ceavacTA>. TV crews came out and a special Metroparks Meetup media spot was recorded. And Mother Nature lent a hand with a light snowfall. For opening day, donors, members and volunteers were the first to drive along the snowmen-lined parkway. A parade of cars, for nearly two hours, filled the park. Cars were filled, some to capacity, with smiling faces. Some cars came through multiple times! At the park exit, staff distributed a booklet of 2020 park highlights. For weeks, the snowmen remained standing as a daytime, free, self-guided event and a way to safely introduce the community to a new park. There is no place like Metroparks!

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Stay-Cations

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

In a year defined by COVID-19 and sheltering in place we at Metroparks brought our citizens a safe and healthy way to vacation without traveling. Metroparks introduced Stay-Cations in August 2020, when it became clear that our extremely popular Backpacking and Hiking Trips through the Appalachian Trail would be cancelled. Programming decided it was time to highlight all of the wonderful amenities that Toledo has to offer and provide individuals and families with a way to relieve stress and reconnect to nature in their own backyard. The programming team offered seven unique stay-cation opportunities. These included:

- Camping 101: Wildwood Night Hike and Overlook Tent Camping
- Camping 101: Swan Creek Night Hike and Overlook Tent Camping
- Oak Openings Hiking Experience, 3 Nights, 1 of the Last Great Places on Earth
- Meteor Shower Hammock Camping
- Hammock Camping and Moonlit SUP Experience
- Hammock Camping and Sunset Kayak Experience
- Tree Tent Camping and Hammocking at Height Experience

All stay-cation opportunities were beginner friendly, but they had a range in service levels to make it more approachable to some. The Oak Openings Hiking Experience was more of a glamping (glamour camping) opportunity for those not yet comfortable spending the night in the woods. It was a full-service experience so included gourmet campfire meals and tent set-up. The Camping 101 programs were much more affordable and families were able to learn how to stay safe, dry, and warm in the woods. The public was over the moon about these programs because it was unique, fun, and very COVID-safe. These were opportunities only for a private group--so they didn't have to worry about social distancing from anyone other than the staff. They were so popular, we ran two others as a special requested program. Participants were so thrilled, they sent letters to the Director.

Link: <https://metroparkstoledo.com/discover/blog/posts/metroparks-staycations/>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Stir Crazy Programming

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

In 2020, Metroparks recognized immediately that COVID-19 would force us to reevaluate how we did business. With the shelter in place mandate looming we set a plan in motion to record over 3 months of nature nugget videos and coordinated the creation of downloadable activities. We then compiled all of this virtual content into themed weeks to be released daily on social media and available on demand via a new landing page on our webpage. This page allowed the public to filter activities by media type as well as by activities that could be done safely at home or self-led in parks. Examples of the downloadable resources included scavenger hunts, BINGOS, Explorer Bags, puzzles and board games. Recorded videos included seasonal nature changes to look for, nature app how to's, and even a storytime from a kayak. Our activities and virtualized content provided participants with a way to get out and enjoy the parks safely. Activities could be utilized on phones or in print to explore new aspects of the park or learn new skills through geocaching, tech exploring or survival skills. Other important socially responsible activities were virtualized field trips and summer camps. We provided virtualized field trips immediately for families who were new to home schooling. Offerings included nature habitat exploration with naturalists, field trips with partner agencies and engaging activities that inspired creativity. Through our virtualized content we were able to reach over 485,000. Once the stay at home order was lifted we were also able to continue to offer our virtualized content in conjunction with our COVID safe in person programs. This included virtualizing our most popular special event Holidays. We were so successful with this virtualized event that we are now going to offer it both in person and virtualized in 2021. <https://metroparkstoledo.com/discover/activities/>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: The Witching Hour at Henricus Historical Park

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population: 355,000

A unique focus on the traditional Halloween celebration resulted in an unusual event attracting a large crowd. The idea for The Witching Hour originated with an interpreter at Henricus Historical Park, an open-air living history museum. The site recreates 17th century life in the second permanent English settlement in North America. The focus of the event was to explore the history of witchcraft. Interpreters at venues within the village offered demonstrations and discussions on witch trials, witch hunters, familiars, and cunning folk. Video from a local university professor detailed why women were targeted as witches. Craft projects and tarot reading were offered. Visitors enjoyed a gallery show with original works for sale by local artists. Vendors filled the Witch Market with handmade jewelry, magic wands, ceramics, crafts, and crystals. Transcend Paranormal was on site to promote overnight ghost hunting programs at the park. The event catered to adults and youths. A special program for children included a story, craft, and trick-or-treating. A parade around the historic site allowed the children to show off their costumes. This optional program sold out quickly. A local brewery offered libations for sale during the first installment of History by the Pint, which was held in conjunction with this event. This element attracted adults and added to the festive nature of the event. This first-time event attracted over 200 people. In keeping with COVID-19 protocols, all guests, staff, and vendors were required to wear facial coverings indoors and outdoors. Guests were asked to maintain social distancing of at least six feet. Market vendors were placed 10 feet apart. Not your everyday trick-or-treating event, The Witching Hour showcases the creativity of the Henricus Park staff and provides a model for others to think outside of the box.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Virtual Nature Camp

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 425,820

An extremely popular program Metroparks provides during the summer is our Nature Camps which serve ages 3-14. In the past we've reached over 900 children, 600 of which are underserved populations who attend camp free of charge. Planning for camps begins a year in advance; themes are chosen, lesson plans produced, supplies purchased and registration opened in February. "Let's Go Green" 2020 Nature Camp already had participants by March. Enter COVID-19 and the end of in-person programs. While others were cancelling offerings, we were shifting gears and from adversity was born "Log-on to Nature Camp". A potential set-back became one of our biggest triumphs--instead of cancelling camps, we were able to provide two different virtual experiences for our campers. One was completely free - anyone at any time could participate in an experience that combined virtual content with downloaded activities at home. The second option was a paid for camp that provided campers with an Explorer Bag containing all necessary materials to complete 10 nature related activities, access to camp Flipgrid communities to facilitate an interactive camp-like atmosphere, video discussions as well as virtual field trips to Metroparks and partner agencies through Zoom webinars. These same experiences were also provided free of charge to our underserved populations. Almost 18,000 campers participated. Once shelter in place was lifted we provided in-person camps in accordance with the Ohio Department of Health Youth Day Camp guidelines along with the virtual option for anyone who didn't feel comfortable on site. In person camps reached almost 100 kids. Comments included: "The activity bag was absolutely perfect because it dovetailed with activities we were already doing in-class." "I have to say that in all of my years working at the Club, I have been having the best experience ever with Metroparks. We are forever appreciative."

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Virtual Programs

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Government, FL

Population: 167,500

When Charlotte County Community Services closed for the COVID- 19 pandemic, the Recreation Division wanted to continue serving the entire community. Staff wanted to provide safe recreational opportunities the public could enjoy at home. The need was met by producing virtual programs. More than ever, people needed to feel connected and valued to remain motivated, emotionally uplifted, and most importantly active. Staff took to social media platforms and discovered that it could still provide quality, safe, and fun programming to people in the comfort of their own homes. An added benefit was keeping staff members engaged, tapping their creativity, and allowing them to continue their outreach to the community. The program started with each recreation center taking a day during the week they would go Live on Facebook with different recreational and aquatic programming. Staff highlighted many recreational opportunities and covered all age groups. Some of the programs included: water aerobics, park tours, fitness classes, and arts and crafts. By using the Facebook Live platform, staff could still interact with community members who were watching and participating. Members of the community could ask questions and receive answers from staff in real-time. The feedback staff received virtually helped shape the programs at a time when staff couldn't collect feedback from in-person visits to our recreation facilities. The staff receives excellent reviews from the virtual participants, and many videos receive over 1,000 views in a day. The most popular video boasted over 5,000 views at last count. The public excitedly anticipates upcoming programs. Staff has had people comment and interact from across the country. During the pandemic closure, staff produced and aired 136 videos which have received over 136,000 views. The success continues, and staff still produces at least one video per week.

Supporting Evidence:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2656404807906227>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/CharlotteFLParksRec/>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class I

Nominee: Wildlife Window Visits

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Stark Parks, OH

Population: 370,606

When COVID-19 became widespread in the United States in March 2020, Stark County, Ohio was not immune to its intense consequences. As people, schools, families, and agencies changed their way of living and operating, one group in particular was dramatically affected - senior citizens living in retirement homes and care facilities. Stark Parks looked for ways to continue to engage with them during a time when people could not gather together, and found the solution with wildlife. Stark Parks manages a Wildlife Conservation (Rehabilitation) Center, housing animals that are unable to be released to the wild due to permanent physical or social injuries or conditions. These "wildlife ambassadors" help educate as representatives of their species, and traditionally make appearances at in-person public programs and events. Stark Parks provides an abundance of opportunities for the senior demographic in a typical year, including presentations on various nature-minded topics, weekly sunset pontoon boat rides at two park locations, and an outdoor concert series presented by the local symphony orchestra. Without these senior-focused happenings in the last year, park employees had to get creative to continue engagement with this group. In May 2020, Stark Parks began Wildlife Window visits to local senior care facilities. With the residents on the inside of the building, park staff could safely navigate the outside, moving room-to-room and providing a safe, up-close view of ambassador owls, hawks, and kestrels through the windows. As of March 5, 2021, Stark Parks has reached a total of 2995 senior residents in 19 locations throughout the county. The visits have been so well received there has been a request from nearly every facility in Stark County. With these visits, seniors have remained connected to their local parks, and are given a unique and joyful form of interaction during these isolated and lonely times.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: OC Parks Drive-In Movie Events

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks, CA

Population: 3.2 million

OC Parks encompasses regional, wilderness, historical, and coastal facilities throughout the County of Orange in California. Each park hosts free community events and programs year-round, such as an annual, in-person summer concert and movie series that travels across several County parks. Due to COVID-19, the OC Parks events and communications team pivoted strategies to continue offering a source of safe entertainment to the community through affordable drive-in movie experiences throughout the county. OC Parks drive-in movie events, in accordance with CDC, State and County guidelines, offered local communities a chance to come together safely and experience movies under the stars from the comfort of their own vehicles. The ticketed, multi-night events took place on select weekends from July-December 2020 highlighting different county parks. Tickets were sold online for \$10 per vehicle with most events selling out within a few hours. The drive-in events were promoted via earned media and with a modest social media budget of \$550. Nineteen movie nights generated 2,259 tickets sold for a total of \$17,474, which helped cover costs. Each drive-in event offered free OC Parks-branded face masks and pre-movie entertainment via on-screen video, highlighted local partnerships, and featured movie-themed staff. The Jurassic Park July drive-in showcased replicas of Jurassic Park Jeeps and surprised movie-goers with an appearance from an inflatable T-Rex. The Lion King screened in September at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park with an educational mountain lion safety video prior to the movie. In October, guests arrived in costume for a Halloween-themed drive-in featuring Hocus Pocus and received candy bags courtesy of the Girl Scouts of America. In December, the holiday drive-ins featured National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation and Elf, and prior to the movie offered a snowflake craft with instructional video provided by OC Public Libraries.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Our Voice is Black History

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserve District, IL

Population: 696,535

Our Voice is Black History showcases a collaboration between Lake County Forest Preserve's Dunn Museum and the College of Lake County (CLC) that examines and explores multigenerational stories from Lake County's African-American community, and examines how these stories compare over time. In July 2020, Dunn Museum staff approached CLC faculty to discuss the possibility of collaborating on an exhibit project. After a series of meetings, the following project goals were defined:

- "Student Voices" - Listen to the voices of the students. Encourage students to express themselves through art; sharing their experience growing up in Lake County today.
- "Generational Voices" - Selected students interview prominent community members to learn from their experiences.
- "Comparing Voices" - Look for themes that arise when comparing these stories.
- "Our Voice is Black History" - Create an exhibit from these stories that allow visitors to listen, reflect and better support Lake County's African-American community.

Support the exhibit's theme with wide-ranging programming that engages the wider community. The resulting project involved three phases:

- Phase 1 - CLC faculty coordinated a student art competition and selected 10 students to have their art included in the exhibit and interview community members.
- Phase 2 - Students and CLC faculty selected and interviewed prominent community members; interviews were professionally documented.
- Phase 3 - Dunn Museum used the student artwork and community interviews to create the Our Voice is Black History exhibit.

Programmatic support is in development. The Our Voice is Black History exhibit opened virtually on February 6, 2021 and will open at the Dunn Museum on July 3, 2021. Both exhibits will remain open to the public through October 31, 2021. Public response has been strong to the virtual exhibit, with more than 600 visits in the first two weeks. Students involved with the project have emotionally expressed gratitude for being included in the experience.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Social Places and Opportunities for Teens

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) launched Our SPOT (Social Places and Opportunities for Teens) as a comprehensive after-school teen program aimed at engaging and providing community youth with support, life skills and positive experiences that will empower them to create bright futures for themselves. In May 2019, nine LA County Parks locations simultaneously opened their doors to Our SPOT Teen Rooms to provide access for youth to technology, arts and culture, safe and supportive environment, and other engaging activities. Many of the sites had live concerts, arts programming, mindfulness meditation activities, sports and recreation, art installations, lounge areas, music and entertainment etc. The program has since been in full operation at all nine locations with an average of 15-20 participants per site. The program is located across Los Angeles County at the following parks: San Angelo, Ruben Salazar, City Terrace, Amelia Mayberry, Mona, Jesse Owens, Loma Alta, El Cariso and Steven Sorensen. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is the primary funder for this program. The LA County Our SPOT locations were chosen based on extremely high need areas and considered risk factors affecting our youth and communities of Los Angeles County. Using several data sources and geographic boundaries we derived an index value/score; TPI (Teen Programming Index) to show the need for teen focused programming. Data sources used to develop the Teen Programming Need index/score (TPI) were from 5-statistical indicators: (1) Youth Population percentage, (2) Park Needs Assessment, (3) Drop-Out Rate, (4) Households Below Poverty Rate, and (5) Crime Index. Curriculum for the Our SPOT program is centered around a Positive Youth Development framework that uses a strength-based approach to engage our park youth. Our SPOT staff were strategically selected so that we could find leaders we felt aligned well with the Our SPOT objective. Our SPOT staff have attended over 60-hours of training. Youth leaders have been given the tools so that Our SPOT youth can participate in active, engaging and meaningful learning that provides positive experiences that serve as lifelong lessons. Activities include:

- Career Pathway Exploration with access to College Tours
- Arts and Culture
- Outdoor Adventure Sports and Recreation
- Field Trips: Museums, Art Galleries, Volunteer Opportunities, Youth Conference etc.
- Youth Empowerment and Mindfulness and Self-Care activities
- Music Production Courses

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: PAD in Motion

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

With the pandemic and associated public health orders limiting in-person gatherings in 2020, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) was unable to offer its highly popular, award-winning Parks After Dark (PAD) program as it had done since 2010. However, recognizing the needs and desires of community members to be physically active and recreate outdoors, LA County Parks initiated the "PAD in Motion" program, which temporarily closed off park-adjacent streets to allow residents to safely walk and ride. Specifically, this innovation provided community members - especially families with children - with opportunities to walk and ride their bikes, scooters and skateboards along a designated route around and within their local park. For everyone's safety, participants were asked to wear protective equipment and a face mask or covering. PAD in Motion was offered at ten parks in various unincorporated communities in Los Angeles County every Thursday evening from 5:00 to 8:00 pm and Saturday mornings from 8:00 to 11:00 am from June to October 2020. PAD in Motion was an "open streets" program, which has grown in popularity in Southern California and across the U. S. Essentially, open streets initiatives temporarily close streets to automobile traffic and open them to cyclists, pedestrians and other modes of non-motorized transportation.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Los Angeles County residents were asked to stay home as much as possible, but they could walk or bike in neighborhoods, including nearby parks, while maintaining physical distancing and wearing face masks or coverings. Having convenient access to parks is critical for our physical and mental health and well-being, especially during these trying times - and particularly for those without reliable transportation. In Los Angeles County, most parks have stayed open during the pandemic, but certain amenities like playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment have remained off-limits, and in-person recreational programming has been suspended.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Parks@Home

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population: 817,000

On March 13, 2020, Great Parks of Hamilton County canceled all in-person activities and closed all in-door facilities due to the pandemic. Within three days, six days before a stay-at-home order, our marketing team quickly collaborated to brainstorm a way to keep everyone connected to the parks when public activities were not an option. That was when Parks@Home was born, utilizing existing communication channels to stay in touch with the community during a time of uncertainty. Parks@Home brought the parks to the public virtually, anytime and anywhere (<https://blog.greatparks.org/category/parks-at-home/>). Live nature programs, scavenger hunts, crafting series, nature journaling and other interactive activities were offered daily online and via social to keep people connected. The highest engagement occurred during live social media programs, which were broadcast on Facebook every weekday through August (now three days a week), reaching an average of 4,300 people per video. The Great Parks blog was the hub for resources and materials, visited by an average of 2,000 people each week last year. Great Parks live broadcasts were at the highest they had ever been, with 190 videos reaching 3,928 viewers per video. Parks@Home became a one-stop shop for families and schools looking for creative activities from the safety of their homes. It was a unique way for Great Parks to engage and interact with the public and provide daily access to materials without having to visit a park. Internally, it gave staff, whose in-person programming and events were halted, a way to still provide resources and nature education to everyone, anytime. Although slimmed down from the height of the pandemic, Parks@Home remains a go-to resource for family and schools who are looking for virtual programming. Whether it be archived nature journaling, scavenger hunts or ongoing Facebook Lives, Great Parks continues to provide a strong asset to the community.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Save the Summer Initiative

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District and Hennepin County, MN

Population: 834,033

Save the summer! Get kids outdoors!The pandemic hit all park agencies hard. Summer staff funding was cut, and many regular programs didn't meet pandemic safety guidelines. Kids faced a summer in front of a screen. Hennepin County reached out to Three Rivers with a proposal: If you can develop a grant program to get kids outdoors this summer, we will fund it using CARES ACT funds. Three Rivers contacted the most diverse and economically challenged cities within our jurisdiction. We developed and administered a grant program to serve as many children as possible through programs at the local level. The county, Three Rivers and the local cities worked together to "Save the Summer". Funded programming included:

- Teach Me to Fish programs - where kids were given fishing gear to keep.
- Bikes 4 Kids - provided 400 kids with refurbished bikes, helmets and safety training.
- Drive-in programs, concerts and movies
- Storybrook Trail - where pages of children's books were posted along a trail for a self-guided "reading" hike.
- Family activity packs for do-in-the-yard fun.
- Development of numerous on-line programs that reached over 500,000 views.
- Re-engineering of classic programs where the gear needed to be safe.
- Hiring of seasonal staff that otherwise had been cut from budgets due to the pandemic.

The results were a success, with over 50,000 families served by the Save the Summer Initiative, with a total expense of \$728,000 funded through Hennepin County's share of CARES ACT funding. Bloomington's Park Director summed it up well: "The CARES ACT funding you provided and administered played a key role in helping us mitigate the loss of many popular and longstanding programs and events, allowing us to replace them with new and unique solutions and approaches to recreational engagement of our residents."

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Sensory-Friendly Programming

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population: 817,000

Great Parks of Hamilton County typically hosts several programs that are well attended with lots of sensory stimulation. With the focus to always engage all park guests in educational programming, interpreters created sensory-friendly hours for programs to include those with sensory processing difficulties. Staff collaborated with Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and the University of Cincinnati Leadership in Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program to develop the standards for these events. Pre-pandemic, Great Parks hosted sensory-friendly hours at three different events in early 2020: Wonderful Winter Weekend Exhibit on January 19, Step Into the Ice Age on January 19 and Maple Sugar Days on February 23. These special times were added before the start of a public program to allow attendees to get the full experience without interruption. During these hours, lights were dimmed, room volume was lowered, crowd presence was limited and activities were adapted to provide an enjoyable experience for guests. Social narratives and schedules were also created so that families could prepare for the activities being offered. Great Parks adjusts programs each year to improve the experience, with input from Cincinnati Children's Hospital and attendee' feedback. For example, input suggested quiet spaces during programs to provide a place for retreat during a potential sensory episode. One guest's feedback said that his child enjoyed the activities so much that he would implement them at home. Great Parks also continues to collaborate with other local organizations, such as the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, to share the benefits and help implement sensory-friendly programs. Overall, sensory-friendly programming has provided staff, volunteers and other guests a new understanding of how sensory challenges can impact a family, increasing their compassion and support for those dealing with sensory sensitivities.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Academy

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population: 1.23M

For 91 years, Cleveland Metroparks (CM) has initiated connections with the public through natural and cultural history programming, recently including digital media. In 1930, CM was one of first park systems in the country to offer nature education programming and since then has strived successfully to be a standard bearer in Outdoor Education. In the past year with a global pandemic, CM's Outdoor Experiences Division faced the struggles through innovation, creativity, and experience. Through the wise use of resources, and with its own reduced funds and professional interpretive staff, CM Virtual Academy was created to answer the crisis of schools being restricted to virtual classrooms. As schools were reeling for opportunities to bring expertise in the field of earth and life sciences, CM was asked to join the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's (CMSD) CLE4Sci (Cleveland Learning Experience for Science) initiative to provide virtual programming targeting the Ohio's earth and space science standards for grades 6-8. With the help of outside funding, the Outdoor Experience Division formed a Virtual Learning Committee to develop synchronous and asynchronous video content, lesson plans and at-home enrichment for CMSD students and teachers. An audio-visual production studio was created for in-studio and in-the-field recording. Once the 6th-8th grade lessons were completed, CM staff developed more standards-based asynchronous programming for grades preK - 5. Approximately 20 programs are being offered to CMSD and other surrounding school districts free of charge. The second phase of the CM Virtual Academy are standards-based synchronous programming coordinated with classrooms for preK - 8th graders. These programs are more in-depth and interactive presentations. We foresee these Virtual Academy programs extending beyond the current Covid-related needs for virtual learning. While our priority is to connect students with the natural environment firsthand, this alternative connection is essential for CM to stay relevant and engaged our community.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Cheer Off

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

LA County Parks and Recreation is celebrating the 25th Anniversary of our Cheer Program! In honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Cheer Program, LA County Parks will unite the cheerleading spirit from across the county by hosting the first-ever Virtual Cheer Camp from July 27 to 31, 2020. While the COVID-19 pandemic Safer at Home health order does not allow to meet in-person, LA County Parks and the Los Angeles Rams Cheerleaders will ensure that our cheer participants across LA County have the celebration they deserve with this virtual experience. The celebration begins on Monday, July 27 with an interactive livestream event with the Los Angeles Rams Cheerleaders. LA County Parks and the LA Rams Cheerleaders will teach cheer and dance routines while promoting positive self-esteem, teamwork, and empowerment. Youth between 4-18 years old may participate. All levels of experience welcomed. With over a thousand youth registered, our first Virtual Cheer Camp is a success. Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation is proud to be working with the Los Angeles Rams Cheerleaders to celebrate 25 years of our Virtual Cheer Program. Each year, approximately 800 youth, ages 4-18 take part with LA County Parks Cheer Program. Twenty parks across LA County offer minis, juniors, and teen options. We, as a Department, felt it was important that we offered an alternate avenue to unite and maximize the power of online. With today's kick off, we offered a full week of Virtual Cheer Camp with pre-recorded videos for all levels from both the LA Rams Cheerleaders and LA County's Cheer Program. Please visit:

<https://parks.lacounty.gov/virtualcheercamp/>

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Recreation Center

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation has become the “go to” destination for all things recreation - from trails and local and regional parks to sports and outdoor programming to community classes and golf and aquatics. LA County Parks has also become the haven to connect with peers, learn a new skill or talent, create an environment of calmness (especially in a world that isn't calm right now) and enjoy family bonding time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LA County Parks realized that since our park patrons could not come to us, we had to adapt to find innovative ways to reach our communities. In March 2020, LA County Parks launched “Parks From Home” as a Virtual Recreation Center to offer online recreational programming that is free to stream from home and mobile devices. Parks have been traditionally a gathering place for families, sports leagues and fitness groups. However, since the COVID pandemic, isolation and mental illness are on the rise. LA County Parks is doing its part to offer classes to combat mental illness, elevated levels of stress, anxiety and uncertainty due to the COVID-19 outbreak. LA County Parks found ways to engage our audience with interactive classes and to provide alternative ways to improve mental health and manage the stress of the pandemic in positive ways. As individuals and families navigate their way through this pandemic, it's also a time to focus on the overall health of communities. Our Virtual Recreation Center has made it possible while physically distancing from each other. LA County Parks created virtual classes and instructional videos for individuals, families, youth. Schools closed in March; many students of whom were lacking recreational activities have taken advantage of this source of programming. The virtual classes are free, and no registration required. Since we launched “Parks From Home”, we have added over 60 videos to our YouTube channel, which have been viewed 15,665 times. We have nearly doubled our YouTube subscribers from 391 subscribers to 748 subscribers (and growing). The Our SPOT programs earned 667 followers collectively on private Instagram accounts established at LA County Parks locations. LA County Parks has contributed to 547.5 hours of new content in virtual programming. This system can be promoted as best practice among public pools and replicated with relative ease as the industry standard. It has proven to be truly an invaluable investment in the name of public safety, health and mental wellness. County parks are the settings for our shared experiences and are an extension to many residents' home. Having an avenue to connect during this crisis is helping improve the quality of life for all by providing access to recreation. During this crisis other social emergencies have taken place. Youth and teenagers specifically needed a place for social and civic engagement.

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Sports Drill

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

While the COVID-19 pandemic Safer at Home health order does not allow youth to meet in person, LA County Parks and the Los Angeles Chargers teamed up to offer options for fitness, sports drills, and fun during the holiday season. The fun began on December 8 with interactive pre-recorded videos followed by livestream event with the Los Angeles Chargers on December 10. Students learned from the Los Angeles Chargers coaches and players, LA County Parks Recreation staff about stretching, warm-ups, football exercises, drills, and how to train at home or at their local park. 1,075 youth between 4-18 years old registered and over 200 participated in the live virtual event.

- YouTube Videos: Total views = 4,058
- Hook Curl Drills w/ Denzel Perryman: 138 views
- Intro Box Drills w/ Denzel Perryman: 222 views
- Football warm-ups with Nate Gilliam: 154 views
- Weave Drills w/ LA County Parks: 94 views
- Warm-ups Drills w/ LA County Parks: 81 views
- Boxing Workout for Beginners: 199 views#ParksFromHome
- Virtual Recreation Center Volleyball Skills - Ready position: 332 views#ParksFromHome
- Football Warm-Ups with the Los Angeles Chargers' Jeff Cotton: 38 views
- Three Cone Drills w/ Los Angeles Chargers' Denzel Perryman: 41 views
- Four Corner Plant Drill w/ LA County Parks: 43 views
- Boxing Workout: 849 views#ParksFrom Home
- Soccer Skills and Conditioning: 334 views#ParksFromHome
- Golf Skills - Chip Shot: 762 views#ParksFromHome

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Lighting of the Tree

Nominee's Organization: Gwinnett Parks and Recreation, GA

Population: 936,250

Thirty-three years ago, we started a family-friendly tradition involving Santa Claus lighting the great tree at the Gwinnett Historic Courthouse on Thanksgiving evening. Last year, we adapted the tradition into a live television broadcast due to the pandemic, allowing families to enjoy the event from the safety of their own homes. Fox 5 Investigative Reporter Randy Travis, who has emceed the event for more than 20 years, provided the narration. The virtual ceremony featured four of our historic sites - Isaac Adair House, Lawrenceville Female Seminary, McDaniel Farm Park and Gwinnett Historic Courthouse - and included past and present holiday traditions from historians and community leaders. Chairman Charlotte Nash, Commissioner Marlene Fosque, Commissioner Ben Ku, Mayor David Still and Veteran Museum volunteer and Purple Heart recipient Don Bullard all shared their personal family customs. It also highlighted a new tradition that celebrates the county's diverse cultures and personal experiences - hand-made fencepost nutcrackers crafted by community members. Like previous years, the narrator detailed how each year trees, like that year's 25-foot Norway spruce, have been hand-picked, driven on a flatbed truck, lifted into place using a crane and adorned with thousands of lights and decorations by dozens of employees and volunteers. The ceremony concluded with Santa Claus and some of the county's essential workers counting down the lighting of the great tree and wishing everyone a happy holiday season. Every year, thousands of people spend Thanksgiving evening with their families at the beloved annual Lighting of the Tree, kicking off the festive season by participating in fun holiday-themed activities and watching the great tree light up. Although this year looked a little different, it still captured the joy and magic of the holiday season, yielding more than 1,400 views on our Facebook. "It's now Christmas" one viewer commented.

Primary Contact

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Recreation Programs

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population: 1. 4 million

When area parks closed and recreation programs were put on hiatus due to COVID-19, the dedicated staff at Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation's Nature Centers and Riverbend Park got creative in order to continue engaging our citizens. Staff became video producers, directors, editors, and film stars to bring virtual nature-based education and exciting, recreation experiences into homes and classrooms! When fieldtrips were cancelled and virtual learning became the new normal for students, PBC Nature Centers and Riverbend Park began offering virtual fieldtrips to local schools. Okeetee Nature Center created a virtual fieldtrip video shared with teachers. The video, entitled "Animal Homes and Habitats", covers much of the state education curriculum requirements as the in-person version of the program. In the video, naturalists lead students on a trip around the nature preserve while highlighting several interesting features along the trails. After watching the video, students are able to video chat live with nature center instructors and meet several animal ambassadors. County Nature Centers launched a new partnership with Palm Beach County Libraries to provide a series of virtual programs. Monthly recreation sessions highlighted a different type of animal, included featured animals, biofacts and entertaining programming that kept children engaged while they learned. The libraries reported record program attendance and have booked another virtual series to continue this partnership through 2021. Videos created are featured on the Facebook pages of the organizations and are available on the PBCParks YouTube channel where all residents and visitors of Palm Beach County can view at no cost. Using video as an outreach tool helps engage, educate and connect individuals with positive recreation experiences. Virtual programs keep nature recreation programs on the minds of thousands of Palm Beach County's citizens until they are able to safely return to enjoy our facilities, greenspaces and programs.

Primary Contact

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Park & Recreation Program- Class II

Nominee: Virtual Recreation Center

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 3,347,270

The County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) shifted most of its programming from live to online in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly one-year old, DPR's Virtual Recreation Center has connected thousands of people to DIY recreation activities - bridging a gap in service during closures while keeping lines of communication open. Inside are opportunities for people of all ages, interests and abilities - embodying DPR's commitment to accessibility and inclusivity: Facebook Live tours and how-to videos; ranger-led Zoom chats on topics like bugs and invasive species; a printable activity book for teens to complement DPR's Energy Savings Adventure program; a Mental Health Month Mood Board/Coloring Kit for kids to address pandemic-related concerns; a reimagined Summer Movies in the Park series (at home) with recipes, crafts, games and prizes; a revamped San Diego/Safe Destination Nights program to entertain teens during critical hours; YouTube Premieres of our popular Hawktober birds of prey series and Dia de Los Muertos event; a growing catalogue of virtual hikes/rides and 360-video park tours; and DPR's first Tour Our Trails Challenge highlighting 15 trails across San Diego. Social media links at the bottom of the page help us reach more people, more often, in their preferred online space - satisfying Needs Assessment Survey goals. Popular social campaigns during this period include a park trivia contest hosted by a local author, reaching 14,533 people on Facebook with 229 likes/comments/shares. Also, a May Photo Month picture challenge, which reached 47,052 people on Facebook and 20,017 on Instagram. A majority of the work is done in-house, and costs are minimal, but the impact is huge; Spring and summer 2020 brought the highest web traffic in sdparcs.org history; year over year, page views were up 55.7% and total visitors jumped 41.7%. Social media channels demonstrate similar unprecedented growth. Website: <https://www.sdparcs.org/content/sdparcs/en/participate/VirtualRecreationCenter.html>

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: 2040 System Plan

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District, MN

Population:

Three Rivers Park District's 2040 System Plan was developed through extensive public outreach that included the general public, park/trail visitors, partners, underrepresented community groups, volunteers and staff, with a deliberate focus on input and review by our equity partners. The plan lays out a vision: Every person can connect with nature every day with three overarching goals, each with identified strategies and tactics.

1. You Belong Here
2. Parks Matter
3. Lead by Example

Of interest to other agencies are two models detailed in the plan that will be used to help achieve these goals. These models are easily transferable to other park systems. The Visitor Experience Model (VEM) is a framework for understanding the program, service and facility needs of our visitors. The model functions as a spectrum and is designed to meet people where they are. VEM categorizes the experiences and needs of individuals into five stages: not aware, curious, beginner, advanced and expert. The VEM framework allows us to focus on reaching and serving underrepresented community groups and new visitors within each category. The plan calls for a renewed focus on introductory offerings to ensure we are making nature available and accessible to all community members in ways that are convenient and comfortable. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a park classification tool to ensure a diversity of experiences are present throughout our system. Originally developed by the U. S. Forest Service, Three Rivers' adaptation of ROS marks one of the first applications of the model in urban areas. ROS classifies each park and trail based on a combination of natural, social, and managerial settings, ranging from urban to primitive. ROS helps resist the one-size-fits-all approach and provides a strong rationale for maintaining some large parks in a primitive state in perpetuity.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Parks and Recreation Capital Investment Model

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

The County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation recently developed of a tool that would inform the prioritization of proposed capital projects. The model is structured to collect and standardize data, organize and score data against benchmarks, and output project ranking according to weights and summaries of scores. The tool analyzes how well projects meet the Department and County goals, as well as national standards, which serve as Benchmarks for standard levels of service. Benchmarks measures amenities and assets in a study area, capital dollars spent annually in a study area, park acres and park access service areas, and benefits projects contribute to sustainability and community value. Through the development of 32 worksheets and analysis of 26,000 data points across 33 benchmarks in 25 study areas, the tool was successfully implemented by providing quantitative data to help inform the prioritization of DPR capital projects for the next two years. The outcome of this program is a data-driven model that improves process efficiencies and provides a tool for analyzing potential projects by how well they meet DPR and County goals, service deficiencies, and community needs. The model is innovative as it fills gaps in the availability of services; improves the administration of existing county government programs; and provides information that facilitates effective public policy making. The model provides a necessary tool to support good stewardship of public funds and to help address community needs and service deficiencies as it demonstrates measurable, data-driven results to promote equity throughout the County of San Diego Parks.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Cleveland Harbor Eastern Embayment Resilience Study

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

The Great Lakes are tremendous resources, providing fresh water, transportation, and industry along with the serenity of waves and a distant horizon. In Cleveland, parks created in the 1800s provided popular spots for swimming, gatherings, and scenic views. Subsequent pollution, railroads, and highways created barriers to public use, leaving the parks isolated and disconnected from nearby neighborhoods. In 2020, five partners obtained funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to study two miles of Cleveland's east side lakefront. The Cleveland Harbor Eastern Embayment Resilience Study (CHEERS) partners are Cleveland Metroparks, the City of Cleveland, Port of Cleveland, Ohio Department of Transportation, and Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Partners selected WRT from a field of national consultants. Cleveland Metroparks coordinates the project; see additional information at www.clevelandmetroparks.com/cheers. CHEERS proposes to supplement existing lakefront parks through beneficial re-use of dredge material, protecting the shore and expanding aquatic and terrestrial habitat. Improving access along the lakefront and reconnecting the community to the parks are also priorities. Nearby neighborhoods are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change with many residents living in poverty, a large minority population, and low rates of owner-occupied housing. In addition to these risk factors, area residents have historically been left out of decision-making processes. The CHEERS team engaged more than 1,000 organizations, community partners, and individuals to create flexible and approachable community engagement strategies to reach residents. This strategy toolkit evolved throughout the process as we learned more about the community and found new ways to overcome challenges. CHEERS digital tools, traditional media outlets, and limited in-person and socially distanced events responded to the additional challenges of 2020: COVID-19, political upheaval, and social unrest. Embarking on both short-term improvements and long-term initiatives to improve the resilience of the east side lakefront are the next steps for CHEERS.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: COVID Phased Reopening Plan

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Community Services, FL

Population:

Community Services Recreation Division cancelled all scheduled programs and events and closed the doors to Recreation facilities March 17, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. County residents along with the rest of the country began searching for ways to live, work and play in this “new normal”. Recreation Division staff researched and began planning ways to reopen facilities including pools to provide much-needed outlets for exercise, recreation and socialization when County Administration deemed it safe. This was accomplished by monitoring various governmental agencies such as Executive Orders issued by the Governor of Florida, Guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Emergency Declarations issued by Charlotte County’s Office of Emergency Management. Staff participated in state and national conference calls, read articles published in professional journals and networked with colleagues across the state to develop plans to provide a safe environment for patrons and staff. Plans were developed using the following considerations:

- Social Distancing guidelines and recommendations
- Maximum occupancy loads
- Enhanced cleaning/disinfection protocols

Facility hours, program offerings and special event availability was determined based upon factors including citizen needs and desires, the feasibility of running programs within established guidelines, recommendations and state mandates, and developing a reliable advance registration process for patrons to register for programs. Community Services Administration directed staff to use a phased approach to cautiously re-open facilities. Staff divided their re-opening plans into three phases including limited programming in Phase I to “full and normal operations” in Phase III. Re-opening relies upon state declarations to determine when to progress to the next phase. We currently remain in Phase II with reduced programming and occupancy loads. Due to the fluid nature of the pandemic, the phased re-opening plans need to stay flexible to adapt to conditions “on the ground” and have been revised several times since implementation.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Ecological Prioritization GIS Tool

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department, WI

Population:

Climate change, land use, and invasive species threaten Ozaukee County's valuable natural resources and can contribute to the loss of high-value ecological lands and farmland, degraded water quality, and loss of habitat and native flora and fauna. The Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department (Department) recognizes that a variety of planning tools are needed to confront growing threats to existing ecological resources and ecosystems and to leverage and maximize the available resources to their highest potential. The Department's Ecological Prioritization GIS Tool (Tool) has formalized a holistic process of comparing and prioritizing individual parcels for preservation and restoration through a GIS-based analysis helping guide, and improves decision-making for maximum ecological benefit. The Tool prioritizes areas by producing preservation and restoration scores for land parcels based upon factors that make up 19 unique GIS layers, such as proximity to protected areas, or migratory bird habitat. Since 2016, the Tool has been critical in securing greater than \$1.26 million in federal, state, and private foundation grant funding to support implementation of these projects, including completion of the Ulao Creek Habitat Restoration project (2.2 stream channel miles restored, 140 wetland acres reconnected), the acquisition of multiple parcels prone to flooding on the Milwaukee River, now River Oaks County Park, and holistic restoration (0.36 stream channel miles restored, 7.2 acres of diverse wetland habitat created) of a 56 acre parcel - Little Menomonee River Fish and Wildlife Area - recently acquired by the county and included in the County Park System. Tool maps and outputs were critical for planning, fundraising, and public education and outreach components for all these projects. Tool outputs are shared with project partners, local officials, and the public to inform and direct future land and water preservation and restoration efforts. Through public presentations of the tool and its applications, more than 650 people have been reached.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Glass City Riverwalk Planning

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

Metroparks Toledo is leading the effort to plan and implement the \$200M Glass City Riverwalk (GCR) Project that will transform brownfields and underutilized property along the Maumee River in Toledo into a public park and greenway with multi-modal transportation, programming, and green infrastructure. Toledo's riverfront has largely been closed off to the community due to heavy industrial land use. The vision of the GCR is a completely accessible riverfront that extends both sides of the Maumee. The new riverfront network in downtown Toledo will provide the cornerstone for the region's park and trail systems, creating a strong central core at the heart of the region. The overall goal is that the new connected waterfront will highlight Toledo as one of the most livable cities in the United States through the use of modern infrastructure, share-use paths, active transportation systems, and safe and vibrant neighborhoods. Implementing this vision will result in an estimated \$254,937,218 in community benefits over the 20-year life of the project. Funding for the project will come from a variety of sources including private and corporate donations, public partnerships, the recent passage of a 10 year, 2 mill levy, and a heavy reliance on grants. The Glass City Riverwalk partners and internal leads including Metroparks Toledo, Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, City of Toledo, ConnectToledo, Destination Toledo Convention and Visitors Bureau, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, and Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority came together in order to identify and secure the recently announced \$23.6 million BUILD (Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development) grant. To date, other secured funding includes two CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) grants totaling \$3.8M, a \$721K TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) grant and millions in pledged donations.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Trails Master Plan Virtual Meeting

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population:

Orange County Parks Planning hired consultants in May 2020 to revise the Trails Master Plan, which, due to COVID-19, would require Parks' first-ever virtual meeting to seek public input. Planning and Marketing staff worked with consultant VHB to create a virtual lobby that would be navigated by moving a computer's mouse and a 17-question survey. Parks' manager recorded an audio message to introduce the meeting. Visitors clicked on the Meeting Room to see maps and hear details of the Orange County's current trails; they could click on the Take the Trail Use Survey frame to complete the survey regarding use of Orange County trails, or click on "Submit Your Comments Here." The webpage www.OcflTrailsPlan.com was developed with a Project Overview, Project Documents (presentation and 2012 Trails Master Plan), Project Schedule and Submit Feedback. The virtual meeting room provided a thorough presentation about Orange County Trails; 800 people offered their opinions through the survey, along with some individual comments. As a bonus, 200 people signed up through the survey for future emails regarding the yet-unscheduled second Virtual Trails Master Plan meeting. Posted August 20 - September 10, Facebook events had 14,521 impressions and 232 engagements, and Twitter posts had 7,914 impressions and 193 engagements. At least three media published the story; 24 yard signs on trails were highly visible to trail users; and Parks' e-newsletter, sent to 8,537 emails, had a 21 percent open rate (or 1,788), with 7.8 percent click rate (or 139 clicks). At the end, consultant VHB reported just over 1,600 visitors to the virtual meeting, which was 814 percent increase from the 175 people who attended our most successful in-person meeting; more than 800 completed the survey responses. Parks plans to host a second Trails Master Plan virtual meeting to present the survey findings.

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Professional- Fellow

Nominee: Art Weber

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

Nothing tells our park system's story of conservation and memorable outdoor experiences like beautiful, compelling photographs. But the person behind the camera telling those stories often goes unnoticed. Art Weber's work over nearly five decades has introduced generations of local residents to the Metroparks and deepened their knowledge and appreciation of nature. For the first 30 years of his Metroparks career, Art served as Public Information Manager. In that capacity, he was the face of the park system in the local media, public relations advisor, writer, photographer, videographer and troubleshooter. As part of the park system's leadership, he has cultivated Metroparks reputation as a leader in our field, instilling public confidence in our agency and pride in our community. After retiring from that full-time role, he rejoined the park system as director of a nature photography center specifically created around his talents. For a decade, he managed the gallery and introduced hundreds of budding nature photographers to photography while making award-winning images of his own that have appeared in galleries and national publications. As the park system's presence on social media expanded, Art transitioned again, focusing (literally) on nature photography. Up before the sun most days, he captures the natural areas of northwest Ohio in stunning scenes that have helped Metroparks dramatically grow its online following and engagement. In his fifth decade behind the lens, he now reaches a whole new audience on Instagram. The University of Toledo Press recently published "Richness and Rarity: The Natural History of Lucas County," a coffee table book written by a local ecologist and illustrated with more than 100 of Art's images, showcasing Art's decades of artistry and accumulated knowledge of nature. The archive of images and writings that Art has amassed will continue to inform, educate and inspire future generations.

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Professional- Fellow

Nominee: Dr. Sad'a Ray

Nominee's Organization: Hoke County Parks and Recreation, NC

Population:

Dr. Sad'a Ray has an Associates Degree in Science, Bachelors Degree in Physiology and Kinesiology, Masters Degree in Sport Administration and a Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership and Management. She carried a 3.5 Gpa in undergraduate school, 3.75 Gpa in graduate school, and a 4.0 in Doctoral school. Dr. Ray attended college at Kaskaskia College in Chicago Illinois, And UNC Pembroke where she was offered a Full Volleyball and Basketball Scholarship. Dr. Sad'a Ray is currently the Director of Parks and Recreation for Hoke County in which she has made tremendous progress for the department. Starting 3 new sports, a host of programs, doing events that impact the community for the first time such as Parades, Christmas on Mainstreet, Movie Nights, etc. Dr. Ray also made the department the first ever department in Hoke County to become a partner in prevention for Child Advocacy and receiving a Seal. Dr. Ray is the first ever to hold a position in Parks and Rec and receive the 40 under 40 award. This award is 40 top leaders in the surrounding areas that are under the age of 40 and are current and the greatest future leaders in surrounding areas.

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Professional- Fellow

Nominee: Holli Browder

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Columbus Parks and Recreation Department, GA

Population:

Holli Browder began her career in March of 1999 as a part-time administrative assistant before working her way up to Superintendent of Athletics and leaving to work for Columbus Parks and Recreation in 2002. For the next nine years she would work as a community/special event planner and after school collaborator while working with inner-city youth, seniors, arts, and special populations. In the Spring of 2011 Holli would become the Recreation Division Manager to oversee the operations in Columbus over all Recreation, Seniors, Therapeutics, and Arts until July of 2013 when she would again be promoted this time as the Assistant Director of the Department holding that position until being named Director in August of 2016. Since becoming director Holli has helped to garner well over \$1.25 million in CDBG funding that has been used to replace playgrounds in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods across the city that were no longer viable but due to funding could not be replaced. As well as the current renovation of the Tillis Recreation center that had been closed due to much needed repairs. This in addition to countless other projects funded by outside donations and organizations to benefit the community at the request of their director. Holli oversees an accredited agency and is well respected amongst her peers both locally and nationally serving on the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association Executive Board where she is the incoming state president for 2022 and has served on all committees/networks statewide. NACPRO Executive Board President-Elect, Holli has also served on the NRPA CAPRA Commission since 2018. Locally, Holli serves on the Women's United Board and Community Investment Committee for United Way, Point in Time Count Chair for Homeless Coalition, Home for Good and is a liaison for City employees on the City's Employee Benefit Committee.

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Professional- Fellow

Nominee: Nicola Morgal

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population:

Recreational Licensed Childcare and Community Services Division Superintendent Nicola Morgal led Howard County's urgent need for childcare for first responders in March 2020 when the pandemic closed childcare facilities and schools across the state. Nicola created a free licensed childcare program for emergency and essential personnel at the Robinson Nature Center. Children enjoyed nature walks, virtual museum tours, puppet shows and received free meals. Nicola continued with childcare operations in the summer, redesigning the licensed summer camp program for the general public that included new CDC, state and local guidelines. By partnering with HCPSS she found locations that allowed the program to be affordable, safe and scaled to demand. She utilized qualified childcare workers and not only secured free lunches for each participant in these programs but for all Recreation and Parks summer camps (over 2,300 meals served). During this time, Nicola created new Department guidelines for opening indoor camps, outdoor camps, field usage, and childcare programs while simultaneously developing COVID safety protocols for each. With schools closed for the fall and winter 2020-2021 school year, Nicola collaborated with HCPSS to provide childcare services from 7am-6pm, Monday-Friday, to those in the community that needed childcare. This also meant securing CARES Act funding to ensure a lower fee for parents and arranging for free meals to be delivered daily to all students in the program (approximately 150 per week). As vaccinations began to roll out, Nicola was asked to manage the outside operations of the Vaccination Clinics. In less than 24 hours, Nicola secured a team of staff to work rotating shifts in cold weather and ensured that residents could access the clinic safely (this included parking, line control, assisting with mobility concerns, etc.). Nicola created a pool of 44 county staff and has scheduled the Clinic weekly since January 27.

Primary Contact

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Professional- Fellow

Nominee: Yvonne Johnson

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Yvonne Johnson embodies the spirit of a hands-on parks professional, having done everything at Frying Pan Farm Park from gardening to driving wagon rides to developing a new park master plan. She began as a volunteer more than 31 years ago and gradually climbed the ladder to become park manager in 2012. Frying Pan is a working farm in a highly urbanized area. It preserves and interprets farm life from the 1920s to 1950s through tours, classes, camps and special events. As manager, Johnson helped to grow the park's acreage and revenue, as well as its interpretive and volunteer programs. She spearheaded a bond project to acquire land for a visitor center and led the design team for that center. She helped develop an exhibit for the park's antique cider press and coordinated a year-long celebration for the 100th anniversary of the site's Floris school building. Johnson worked on the Master Plan Revision for the park, helped write the Historic Site Report for the 1791 Frying Pan Meetinghouse, was the site lead for a Cultural Landscape Report, and worked to acquire artifacts for the park's farmhouse. Revenues have grown steadily under Johnson's leadership, reaching \$1.3 million in 2019. Attendance for the park's annual 4H Fair and Carnival grew from 10,000 to 80,000. She helped the Friends of Frying Pan Farm Park increase their annual fundraising efforts from a few hundred dollars to \$96,000 last year through innovative programs such as a NASCOW barnyard cow race. In addition, Johnson helped manage the park's annual Bluegrass Barn winter concert series and numerous annual equestrian events. Colleagues noticed her accomplishments. Johnson has been honored with four Park Authority Outstanding Performance Awards, three Director's Leadership Awards, and three National Association of Interpretation (NAI) awards, as well as serving as Director of NAI Region 2.

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Professional- Lifetime

Nominee: Kirk Kincannon

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Park Authority Executive Director Kirk Kincannon retired in February, feted with a virtual retirement gathering that drew 204 individuals including congressmen, county and park officials, and employees past and present who worked with him in the field years before. It was a moving tribute to a park professional who dedicated 31 years to making recreation a joyful reality for countless park visitors. His vision of accessible parks, open space, recreation and fitness as a link to increased health, diverse experiences and world-class facilities became reality. He inspired, made tough decisions and achieved, sharing success and humbly accepting only limited credit. His achievements made FCPA a national leader: CAPRA accreditation twice, meeting all 151 standards; a fourth Gold Medal Award from NRPA; creating enviable revenue to general fund ratios of 66% to 34% respectively; passing two park bonds totaling a quarter billion dollars with more than 70% voter approval during difficult times, and most recently, sound management as the agency shut down for COVID-19 but retained most employees by utilizing financial reserves. COVID turned the world virtual, meant accommodating tremendous crowds on trails and in open spaces, and only recently meant limited reopening with COVID-19 safety protocols that protect customers and staff. Director Kincannon helped the Park Board make wise policy decisions, including adoption of and implementation of the One Fairfax policy that mandates a look at all issues through the equity lens. He left an agency in good standing, ready to address the need for greater accessibility, aging infrastructure, and a more diverse staff. He is considered a leader of national consequence in the field and often lent his thoughts to colleagues across the country. His legacy remains to be seen but will likely pave the way for a more robust, nimble and responsive park system in Fairfax County.

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Professional- Lifetime

Nominee: Laura Wetherald

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population:

Howard County Recreation and Parks wishes to nominate former Recreation Bureau Chief Laura Wetherald for the Lifetime Professional award. A gifted recreation professional and thoughtful friend, Laura passed away in February of 2021 due to complications from COVID-19. Joining Howard County Recreation and Parks in 1987, Laura helped shape the department's then-new Therapeutic Recreation program and was a passionate advocate for individuals with disabilities in the years that followed. In 1998, Laura was named the department's Bureau Chief of Recreation. During her 34 years at Recreation and Parks, Laura served as the President of the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) and as a member of both the National Recreation and Parks Association's CAPRA Commission and the Learning Education Resource Network (LERN)'s Recreation Council. Throughout her life, Laura demonstrated the value of hard work and perseverance. She was the Howard County Employee of the Year in 1998, received MRPA's Member of the Year award multiple times and was named a Hope Award Honoree for excellence in the field. In 2016, she was honored with election into the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration as a Fellow. In addition to her many professional accomplishments, Laura was a loving wife, mother, and friend. She was proud to give back to the Howard County community, serving on many local community organizations including the Columbia Festival of the Arts Board of Trustees. Laura spoke passionately about recreation programming and management, whether at the office with coworkers or at conferences, panels, and in her daily life. In her own words, she reminded us each day that "the benefits of recreation and parks are endless!"

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Don Dussault County Park - Park Improvements

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

Don Dussault Park is a .75-acre neighborhood nestled in the unincorporated community of Fallbrook and surrounded by multi-family and single-family homes. Over the years, the park has received upgrades to improve the accessibility of the hilly site including an accessible parking stall, new play equipment for 2-5 year olds and a covered picnic area with accessible tables and BBQ in the upper level of the park. However, most of the park's lower area was only reachable via an old stairway or steep concrete walkway. New improvements currently being constructed in the park provide an accessible walkway to access to this area of the park as well as adding new amenities to this lower area. As one travels down the new accessible path, they are able to enjoy outdoor exercise equipment, a drinking fountain, a shaded play structure for 5-12 year olds and a new picnic area with tables, trash receptacles and BBQ. Throughout the improvements seating walls intertwine with the amenities and provide the ability to enjoy the existing mature trees of the park and intermittent stream that bisects the park. New plantings include low water use shade trees and native shrubs to prevent erosion and add to the natural beauty of the park. New lighting and upgraded fencing will assist in providing additional security to this underutilized area of the park.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Doneghy Inclusive Garden

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

A long-standing partnership between Metroparks Toledo and The Ability Center of Greater Toledo identified the need for accessible community gardening spaces. Early on in the development of the Doneghy Inclusive Garden the focus shifted from accessibility to an inclusive gardening experience that engages all five senses. Designed and funded in collaboration with community partners, the final concept resulted in a project with the following components:

- ADA compliant concrete paths with stamped concrete patterns producing a change of texture at edges and intersections for those with visual disabilities.
- Synthetic turf at the raised beds for texture change and added stimulation through color.
- ADA compliant raised beds for wheelchair access at gardening spaces. Additional planting beds constructed with rotating planters for ease of access. Four perimeter beds designed with a trellis for sensory experiences focused on vertical gardening rather than the traditional horizontal layout.
- Wooden pergola placed for shade and designed to provide an enclosed feeling for those with emotional or mental challenges.
- Stone seating wall with ADA compliant height and depth of sitting surface. Accessible spaces in the seating wall allow wheelchair bound individuals to sit with their group rather than being separated from friends and family.
- Vertical rain curtain provides a visual screen and soothing sounds. Lit internally for evening programs/events. Motion sensor activation allows individuals of all abilities to engage with the water.
- Species of plants selected to stimulate sight, smell, touch, and taste
- Plants selected for fragrance and taste have been shown to trigger memories for those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

Since it's dedication in July of 2020, the Doneghy Inclusive Garden has seen consistently increasing utilization and has been incorporated into over 30 programs serving 1,700 citizens with a wide diversity of special needs and challenges. <https://youtu.be/7sqw28VgvsI>

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Extra Ordinary News Show

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Columbus Parks and Recreation Department, GA

Population:

No one was prepared for the effect that the pandemic would have on our lives, least of all our participants in our Therapeutic Recreation Program. When it became apparent that we would no longer be able to keep the Therapeutic Recreation center open, we had to devise ways to keep our participants engaged, encouraged, inspired, and in contact with one another. We immediately began making plans to keep our therapeutic program available by utilizing ZOOM. By our second week, we had successfully gotten most participants logged into classes. Eventually, we were able to have a complete schedule of classes online to include Math, Science, Geography, Auto Mechanics, Easy Sign Language, Language Arts Class with French/Spanish, Life Skills, and Social Skills. We also provide Arts and Crafts, Cooking Classes, Exercise Classes, Karaoke and Friday Night Dances. Holidays and special events have always been popular so we took our annual Creative Arts Show virtual. The participants did such a great job that we continued to implement special events. They participated in a virtual Christmas Concert making their own costumes. For Black History Month participants learned about Black Inventors, gave presentations, chose African names, and wore African necklaces and crowns they made. The highlight to their weekly activities is the Extra Ordinary News Show where each of them investigate and report their news topic. The topics are Weather, Sports, Fashion, Food, Entertainment, Comedy and What's New. Each week their EONS (Extra Ordinary News Show) is uploaded to their EONS YouTube Channel (their own YouTube Channel). They now have EONS shirts that were designed and ordered for them to wear on their news show, and we are still working on ways to improve the production of this show for them. All and all we have made the best of the worst of times.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvUJpomR67WkOn8l4jNI1hg>

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Recreation Cooking Class

Nominee's Organization: Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services, VA

Population:

The Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) Adaptive Recreation Program strives to offer participants opportunities to develop and practice life skills. One of the most popular programs, before and during COVID, is a Cooking Class. The class is much more than recipes and a meal. The program offers citizens with disabilities the opportunity to build skills that will serve them in their everyday routines and help them participate more fully in parks and recreation and other areas of life. People with disabilities face many barriers, from food access to the preparation process. Getting to the store can be challenge and, once there, these participants are not always able to ask for help. The Society for Disabilities found that people with disabilities are often encouraged to have premade meals because cooking is presumed too dangerous. The kitchen itself poses challenges to people with disabilities. Countertops may be too high or the stove too far from the sink. The PRCS Adaptive Recreation team took an inclusive approach to creating a cooking class that empowers all participants to prep and enjoy a meal among their peers. The program continued to operate throughout COVID, meeting state requirements and fully implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies. At a time when so many programs were paused, this cooking class kept participants focused as they continued developing skills. During a typical class, participants are provided recipe cards. Each person has their own supplies and workstation. An instructor teaches basic cooking skills, including cutting. After food preparation, participants sit together, using complete table settings, and enjoy their meal. Results have exceeded class goals. Along with cooking skills, participants are learning math, measurements and nutrition, and proper etiquette modeled by staff has boosted their social skills development. The communal dinner creates a sense of community and belonging for participants, who report practicing their learned skills and applying them in their daily lives.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Recreation Summer Camp

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services, VA

Population:

The summer of 2020 presented many challenges related to the ongoing pandemic. Children with disabilities were greatly affected, and these are the children who most rely on consistency and routine. The disruption of routine leads to anxiety, anger and other negative feelings. These children also struggled with social isolation. COVID-19 made it difficult to operate an adaptive recreation summer camp, but the team at Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services made it happen. Experienced staff were able to modify the camp in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions, creating a safe and stable environment. Board games were built with plexiglass to separate players. Each camper was provided their own supplies. Masks and handwashing were required. While adhering to mitigation strategies and state requirements, staff broke the barriers that existed for campers with disabilities. Children were provided a recreation-based summer experience in which they could benefit from play and social interaction. With encouragement from staff, campers increased their self-reliance, enhanced their self-esteem and developed relationships with their peers. Parents also benefited. The camp offered some downtime, as well as the opportunity to develop relationships with other parents of children with disabilities. Staff even choreographed an outdoor stage show to give parents a fun time and build confidence in their children.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Office of Therapeutic Recreation and Accommodation Services

Nominee's Organization: Howard County Recreation and Parks, MD

Population:

The Office of Therapeutic Recreation launched our online therapeutic recreation programs last April. These programs were designed to address the overwhelming social isolation that individuals with developmental disabilities experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals with developmental disabilities faced innumerable challenges as a result of the pandemic, including increased isolation, depression and community disconnection. Overnight, intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals in Howard County lost employment or had their day programs canceled due to the pandemic. Activities such as Special Olympics events and practices were canceled, school days went virtual and Recreation and Parks' in-person programs were canceled. As a result, many with developmental disabilities lost critical social engagement and community connections. In response, we developed and launched a comprehensive strategy to transition from in-person programs to completely virtual experiences. These programs were based on existing events or activities and re-tooled into an easy-to-access online experience. This was accomplished using existing resources and staff at no additional cost to the department. In addition, virtual program fees were significantly reduced or free to encourage as many participants as possible to join. Even as online offerings, these programs continued to provide important opportunities for social engagement and community connections for this underserved population. Over the last year, we have expanded our offerings to include theatre groups, dance parties, bingo, book clubs, and social clubs. Currently, we are preparing to add music, cooking, and photography programs later this year. The Therapeutic Recreation team has watched participants grow engaged and excited as they enjoy connecting with existing friends and making new ones. The response to our online programs has been enthusiastically positive and we have received many requests to offer even more programs. Although challenging, these new programming initiatives have helped us to better serve members of Howard County's developmentally and intellectually disabled community.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: San Dieguito Regional Park ADA Playground Improvement

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

In 2007, the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), in coordination with the San Diego Miracle League, constructed Miracle Field at San Dieguito Regional Park to ensure park users of all abilities can engage in active, organized sports, such as baseball and softball. Directly adjacent to Miracle Field, was an existing non-ADA compliant playground. As a result, there were limited recreational opportunities for park users with disabilities at the park. The existing playground equipment with wood chip surfacing was replaced with an all-inclusive playground and poured-in-place surfacing. The goals of the San Dieguito Park ADA Playground Improvement project were to provide positive, enhanced and expanded playground experience for park users of all abilities who use San Dieguito Regional Park's Miracle Field, picnic areas, and wedding venues; and to incorporate additional inclusive, sensory, and fitness-based play to help children of all abilities improve social skills and health while promoting healthy lifestyle activities that will continue into adulthood. The play equipment was designed specifically to promote character development, build inclusive communities by creating awareness, breaking down barriers, and fostering friendships. Designed to maximize the physical, cognitive, communication, social and sensory elements of inclusive play; the play environment effectively incorporates balancing, spinning, brachiating, sliding, climbing and swinging. Newly installed shade trees irrigated with recycled water protect park users against the harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. This project involved public outreach that consisted of coordination with San Diego Miracle League and attending multiple San Dieguito Community Planning Group meetings. Upon completion of the project, the county received numerous positive comments regarding the new playground. Reservable spaces throughout the park and those near the new playground have become the most requested upon completion. Additionally, park visitation has increased by 25% each month following completion of the project.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Wildlife Connections Ambassadors

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserves of Cook County, Misericordia, and Clearbrook, IL

Population:

Wildlife Connections Ambassadors is a new partner-based work experience program with the Forest Preserves of Cook County, Misericordia and Clearbrook. The program creates opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to deliver nature programming to school groups and visitors, bridging the gap between science and social emotional learning standards. Employment and volunteer opportunities are important for all people, but especially persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities as they provide growth opportunities, dignity of labor, demonstration of competence, and extension of personal community. This program's goals are to (1) provide leadership opportunities for people with developmental disabilities; (2) provide educational programs for students and the general public; and (3) inspire empathy in students and the general public. The program launched in February 2019 at River Trail Nature Center in Northbrook, one of the Forest Preserves' six nature centers, in partnership with Misericordia (Chicago, IL) and Clearbrook (Arlington Heights, IL), organizations that support children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ambassadors were taught how to engage with visitors and school groups at the nature center using mammal, bird and reptile artifacts. In 2019 the ambassadors presented on 51 days (April-December) with a total of 2,118 participants from twelve local schools and four community organizations, as well as the general public. The program has been so well received and successful that it will be expanded to other nature centers. The program has created an inclusive, supportive and nurturing community, placing persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in positions of leadership. This encourages independence and confidence for those participants, and allows for positive interactions between visitors, including elementary aged students, and aids in the development of empathy. Wildlife Connections Ambassadors is an excellent example of an innovative program that contributes to a kinder and more inclusive world.

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Social Justice

Nominee: Breaking Down Social Justice Barriers through Parks in the Glades Region

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population:

Lake Okeechobee is cradled by the cities of Belle Glade, Pahokee, South Bay and Canal Point, the westernmost communities in Palm Beach County. The area, known as the Glades Region (population 32,000), is comprised almost entirely of agriculture with low-paying jobs filled primarily by seasonal migrant workers leaving 41% of residents unemployed and living at or near the poverty level. Suitable housing, healthcare, infrastructure, education and social services are issues, primarily for people of color. Recognizing the beauty and recreational opportunities of Lake Okeechobee, we developed eight parks in the region, in addition to municipal parks, equating to 6.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents compared to 5.6 acres elsewhere throughout the county. Understanding the need for everyone to benefit from park services equitably, we embarked on a program to build up this region through parks. We partnered with the Orange Bowl Committee, with additional funding from National Football League Foundation and Quantum Foundation, to develop a football field at Glades Pioneer Park. The \$3.4 million dollar project is our first synthetic turf sports field and includes a scoreboard, shaded seating, and building with space for community meetings and health/recreational programming. We later added an outdoor shaded fitness gym with 17 pieces of equipment, creating more free health/wellness opportunities. In addition to hosting annual health/wellness events with outdoor games/activities, fresh fruits/vegetables, nutrition/healthy eating tips, we provide permanent recreation programming staff to the region and assist the cities in the delivery of their programs as well. Throughout COVID, we partnered with an area church to host drive-thru food distributions in our parks. We also provide one of the two public swimming pools and provide free youth swim lessons with the Drowning Prevention Coalition. It's our honor to break down social justice barriers through parks in the Glades Region.

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Social Justice

Nominee: First Responders and Multicultural Community Cup

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population:

The First Responders and Multicultural Community Cup was a regional partnership between Chesterfield and Henrico Counties, City of Richmond and Virginia State Police. The event brought the communities together for a day of soccer, community building, family activities and opportunities to interact with each other. Ten soccer teams contained 140 players from public safety agencies and multicultural communities (Asian, African Americans, and Latinos) who played in a tournament. Over 500 attendees enjoyed competitive soccer action, children's activities, first responders' vehicles and booths, food, and music. This first event was held in September 2019 with plans to host the event annually. Working with the multicultural community, Chesterfield County identified two main reasons to plan the event. First, residents from other cultures often feel uncomfortable interacting with government officials. This is especially true when communicating with public safety or authority figures. Nationwide, the relationship between law enforcement agencies and minorities, including immigrants, has deteriorated because of high-profile incidents involving discrimination, accusations, and mistrust. These situations have further damaged the relationship between residents and law enforcement. Second, immigrants typically do not report crimes. Language and cultural barriers, immigration status, and fear of reporting make them frequent victims of criminals. One goal was to educate the multicultural community about the roles of public safety officials in a relaxed atmosphere. The first responders learned the cultural norms of the groups and gained a greater understanding of their concerns and needs. The Community Cup was a great demonstration that people from the region, with different backgrounds and cultures, can live, work and play together, respecting and appreciating our differences and similarities. On the soccer fields, cultural barriers fade, challenges are conquered, and relationships flourish. The event serves as a model for other communities to partner with the multicultural community for increased trust, understanding, and communication.

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Social Justice

Nominee: REDI Committee

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserves of Cook County, IL

Population:

The Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) protects nearly 70,000 acres of public land within the second most populous county in the nation. Cook County's size and diversity is a significant strength, but our region is also plagued by considerable inequities including unequal access to nature, clean air and water and outdoor recreation opportunities. The FPCC has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting an infrastructure and culture that is based on equity and inclusion. In 2018 the FPCC formed and empowered a Racial, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (REDI) of employees focused on analyzing and understanding internal agency challenges and barriers in order to implement solutions based on racial equity. REDI works to educate employees on how to practice racial equity in the workplace and restructure internal processes to reflect the FPCC's values of equity and inclusion. REDI is currently focusing its efforts on projects around human resources and hiring, community engagement, professional development and volunteers. Furthering this work, in 2020 the FPCC Board of Commissioners adopted "Moving Towards Racial Equity", a position paper developed in partnership with the FPCC's Conservation and Policy Council and REDI which makes several recommendations including applying a racial equity lens to all of the FPCC's future plans, programs, policies and investments. The FPCC has also begun training all 502 employees on Unconscious and Implicit Bias education and has launched an independent analysis of its Law Enforcement Department. The FPCC is striving toward equity in its workplace, with its partners, in communities and throughout Cook County. This work is ongoing, and the FPCC continues to listen and learn. Racial equity is achievable if we all acknowledge the depth and intensity of the problem. The FPCC pledges to do its part and ensure everyone feels welcome at the forest preserves.

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Social Justice

Nominee: Parks and Community Together (PACT) Program

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Even though Fairfax County is the third wealthiest county in the United States, more than 68,000 residents live in poverty. Nearly 22,000 of these are children. According to the most recent (January 2020) count of persons experiencing homelessness, 1,041 persons in Fairfax County were homeless, in shelters or in time-limited transitional housing programs. Families accounted for 51% of this population, including 318 children under the age of 18. Summer is an especially challenging time for families in these situations because public school is not in session. There is a significant drop in educational and recreational opportunity and parents, or caregivers often must focus on how to retain a job, find employment or improve job skills while struggling to care for children in these facilities. Without assistance, summer could be a real setback on their journey to financial independence. The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and the Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) work together annually to address this need by providing children in transitional facilities with free summer camp opportunities. Since 1997, the Parks and Community Together (PACT) Camp Scholarship program has allowed more than 850 of these students ages 6 to 17 to enjoy a summer of fun and education at no cost. In 2019, 56 children attended a combined 345 weeks of camp and 142 extended care sessions. Though the pandemic forced closure of most Park Authority in-person camps in 2020, FCPA and FCPF still worked with partners to provide 3 PACT scholarships to cover virtual camps so that youth still received enrichment opportunities from their shelter or transitional housing. The program plays an important role in meeting Fairfax County and the Park Authority's commitment to One Fairfax - a countywide initiative to provide equitable opportunities to our entire community. In Fairfax County, the PACT program ensures that summer still means camp even during difficult times. *Please note that for privacy purposes, photos of children in the program are not available. The attached photo is a thank you note drawn by a program participant.

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Social Justice

Nominee: Recreation Pass Plus Program

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District, MN

Population:

Based on 2018 Three Rivers Park District research, people with household incomes of less than \$50,000 are underrepresented in our system. The Recreation Pass Plus initiative began in 2019 and offers fee assistance to help qualifying Hennepin and Scott County residents enjoy Three Rivers parks and programs. The program is based on the idea that everyone belongs in the parks - to play, explore, discover and enjoy nature. Participants must live in Hennepin or Scott County, Minnesota, and be enrolled in a designated federal, state or county service program. Participants receive a pass card valid for one year that includes:

- Unlimited free equipment rentals
- Free annual recreation passes (i. e. off-leash dog areas, swim ponds, cross-country skiing, disc golf, archery)
- Discounts on programs and events
- Discounts on Gale Woods Farm products

The initiative aims to make it easy for people to enroll - online, over the phone, or via printed application. Participants display a card just like other users of the park system and are able to use their benefits simply by entering their number online or over the phone, or by having their card scanned by a Park District employee when onsite - the same as all other park guests do. Because the same card is used, the program eliminates any stigma potentially associated with the Recreation Pass Plus benefits. As part of the process of revamping fee assistance offerings, in conjunction with community engagement around the 2040 System Plan, Three Rivers staff gathered feedback from thousands of people through surveys, listening sessions, pop-up events, partner meetings, and more. Engagement of underrepresented members of our community was a top priority and shaped the development of the program. Hennepin County Human Services staff administered our previous fee-assistance program and were heavily involved in the two-year process of developing the Recreation Pass Plus program.

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Trails & Corridors- Class I

Nominee: Blue Ridge Tunnel Trail

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Nelson County, VA

Population: 14,930

The Blue Ridge Tunnel was constructed between 1850 and 1858 beneath Rockfish Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains of central Virginia. The tunnel is 4,273-feet-long and approximately 700 feet below the surface at its deepest point. It was originally constructed to move goods and people back and forth from the coastal plain to the Piedmont, Shenandoah Valley and beyond. In 1944, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway replaced the 86-year-old Blue Ridge Tunnel with an adjacent tunnel at a slightly lower elevation that could accommodate larger locomotives. In the 1950's, the Dixie Bottled Gas Corporation built massive concrete bulkheads in the old tunnel with the intent to store propane in the chamber created between the bulkheads. The venture was unsuccessful. The bulkheads created a barrier for walking through the entire tunnel, which sat vacant, unused and reclaimed by nature. That is, until Nelson County envisioned the passage as a major recreational and historical amenity; an economic initiative that will further strengthen the area's thriving recreation and tourism industry. The 4.5 mi round trip trail (0.81 within the tunnel) has experienced an extremely high level of visitation since opening on November 21, 2020. From opening day, to early February 2021, we've had 35,000 visitors. Nelson County is currently working to expand parking on the east due to the amount of visitors, which will surely increase over the spring and summer months.

NPR Radio IQ: <https://www.wvtf.org/post/blue-ridge-tunnel-opens-public#stream/0>

MSN: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/historic-blue-ridge-tunnel-restoration-complete-after-nearly-two-decades/ar-BB1bifpS>

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Trails & Corridors- Class I

Nominee: Hidden Rock Park - Connector Trail

Nominee's Organization: Goochland County Parks and Recreation, VA

Population: 24,000

The Hidden Rock Park Connector Trail is a 1-mile expansion of new trail and general improvements made to the existing park trail. The trail was conceived and designed to allow for increased mobility, experiential recreation, and interconnectivity for the entire governmental complex and park. The trail design includes a 300-foot-long boardwalk, an ADA compliant stone and asphalt surfacing, and meandering elevations that allow park visitors to experience natural elements of the Courthouse Creek viewshed. Two dog parks, multiple rest and socialization areas, disc golf course, directional kiosks, and interpretive signage were incorporated in the design of the trail. The trail's construction was completed by Goochland County staff and community volunteers over the course of six weeks as weather allowed. The creativity, connectivity, and ingenuity are what makes the connector trail project worthy of recognition. The trail interconnects Hidden Rock Park and the county's new state of the art Animal Shelter and Adoption Center. The interconnected trail maximizes the full 68 acres of the Hidden Rock Complex. Construction Costs were kept to a minimum. All design and permitting was completed by County staff - including Parks and Recreation, Community Development, and General Services. Materials were primarily donated including the stone, lumber, and equipment. If the project was fully funded and completed utilizing a design firm and contractor, it was anticipated to cost \$200,000. The project was completed for less than \$20,000. The County's community partners played a huge role in completing the trail connector. Partners included the Goochland Rotary (materials donation and labor), Goochland Pet Lovers (donor for the dog parks), and Goochland County Public Schools. Whether its walking a dog, connecting with nature, or exercising, the connector trail will serve the Goochland community for years to come.

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Trails & Corridors- Class I

Nominee: Trail Wayfinding System

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Ingham County Parks, MI

Population: 293,551

Ingham County developed a Trails Wayfinding system, to provide a unified wayfinding system for hundreds of miles trails within the County, while allowing each community to tailor their system to their unique style. There was a lack of wayfinding on most of the trail systems in the County, no consistency in physical design and frequency, and trail users felt lost and disoriented. Furthermore, if a trail user needed to contact 911 for assistance, it was difficult to identify your location. In 2017 Ingham County developed the Wayfinding Plan (Plan) with stakeholders from local governments, County 911, state government, private businesses, organizations, and individuals. The family of signs includes information, directional, identification and warning information. They were designed to be cost effective, adaptable, and to maintain a unique visual identity with unifying graphic style to enhance the branding and image, while also being flexible to fit multiple communities and allow for customization. The signs were bid out and installed in 2019-20. The unique features of this Trail Wayfinding System are:

1. Provides a contiguous look.
2. It's a unified signage system that provides an image and branding for all of the trail systems in the County, while allowing each community to customize.
3. With the signs marked in GIS, it allows Ingham County 911 to easily track users who require assistance.

Since the signs have been installed, the County, and each participating community, have received positive feedback and praise for the well-thought-out system of wayfinding. The signs have provided trail users with better trail systems that solve navigation issues, enhance safety and security, and promote a sense of place. Users have said the trails are much easier to navigate, the maps are very helpful in seeing where you are and where you are going, and the mileage helps plan their trips.

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Trails & Corridors- Class II

Nominee: Gwinnett Trails Master Plan

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Gwinnett Parks and Recreation, GA

Population: 936,250

Five years ago, our Board of Commissioners identified the need to define a vision for a high-quality trail system that would offer an alternative mode of transportation and an inclusive place for people to exercise and socialize with family, friends and neighbors. We then developed a team, co-led with our Department of Transportation, to identify trail projects and receive public comment at numerous county-wide community outreach events. Three years ago, our Board of Commissioners adopted the Gwinnett Trails Master Plan, which details trail priorities and provides guidance on trail networks, typologies and branding. Gwinnett Trails receives funding from our Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), a one percent sales tax that voters approved in 1985 and reapproved in 2016. Both Parks and Recreation, and Transportation help fund the plan's projects using their specific SPLOST budgets. Last year, we began construction on the Harris Greenway Trail, which includes a 2.2-mile paved multi-use trail with a 760-foot boardwalk, and links Harbins Park and Tribble Mill Park, providing better access to nearby parks. The trail, named after local visionary and conservationist Lloyd Harris who laid the groundwork for our world-class parks and recreation system, will complete in spring 2021. While the Harris Greenway Trail serves as the first trail to have a segment open since the plan's adoption, it exemplifies just one of the many Gwinnett Trails projects underway. The plan proposes nearly tripling trail mileage to more than 310 miles in the coming decades, building a comprehensive trail system that connects facilities and amenities across the county. This unique initiative allows our team to continuously collaborate with cities and community improvement districts to create experiences as vibrantly connected as our community, providing endless environmental, health, recreational, social and transportation opportunities.

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Trails & Corridors- Class II

Nominee: Monarch Singletrack Trail

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District, MN

Population: 834,033

The Monarch Singletrack Trail, a professionally built mountain bike trail at Carver Park Reserve, is an example of how a public-private partnership can achieve shared goals and provide a new amenity for a growing sport in Minnesota. Three Rivers Park District partnered with the One Track Mind Foundation (OTM) to collaboratively design and construct a state of the art singletrack trail for riders of all abilities. One Track Mind Foundation is a nonprofit 501(C) (3) organization that funds mountain bike trail building and maintenance across the United States, collaborating with regional partners, local youth and volunteers to give back and grow the sport. OTM provided the funding resources, which include a professional trail builder, who brought expertise to the design and construction of the 10 miles of singletrack trail which included numerous features and challenge areas to ride. Park District staff were guided by the principle of designing a new singletrack through an existing park while minimizing impacts to natural resources as well as interactions and conflicts with other park users. Staff sought public feedback through online survey tools and interactive map, as well as meeting with avid park users, including equestrians, to garner feedback and ensure the new trail wouldn't cause conflicts between different user groups. Additionally, the Park District's relationship with the Minnesota Off Road Cyclists (MORC) volunteer group is a model partnership for ongoing trail maintenance. MORC volunteers coordinate ongoing trail maintenance tasks, which keeps the Park District from needing to commit Maintenance staff resources to keeping the trail maintained. The project is a model of how partnerships can offer keys to a project's success at all phases: design, construction and operations. Feedback from each of the partners - and, most importantly, the trail users - has indicated that the partnerships and the project have been a great success.

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Trails & Corridors- Class II

Nominee: Park to Playa Trails

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9,969,510

The final phase of the project built a 235-ft. long bridge that spans La Cienega Blvd, a 6-lane highway, and connects to two County parks - Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area and Stoneview Nature Center. The bridge features native landscaping to facilitate safe crossings for small wildlife that call the local habitat home. The Park to Playa trail helps to abate both automobile traffic congestion and vehicle pollutants, thus improving human health and the ecosystem by encouraging foot-travel and bicycling, the trail provides numerous social, health, and recreation benefits to the community. Traversing urban neighborhoods with many access points, the trail connects diverse communities and provides equity to lower-income communities once cut off from easy beach access. The Park to Playa Bridge is a segment of the Park to Playa Trail that connects Kenneth Hahn State Recreational Area (KHSRA) to the Stoneview Nature Center (Stoneview) and serves as a valuable wildlife corridor. The pedestrian bridge spans La Cienega Boulevard and features a planter with native plants that provides the critical linkage across La Cienega Blvd. At each end of the pedestrian bridge, the trail connects to existing trail pathways at KHSRA and Stoneview. Research data shows that the Baldwin Hills once comprised an extremely diverse population of habitats and with it an abundant and diverse group of animals. However, the urbanization of the Los Angeles Basin has effectively isolated the natural areas of the Baldwin Hills from those of the surrounding area. The wildlife corridor provided by the bridge fulfills a need for habitat linkages between Baldwin Hills and the Ballona Wetlands and creates a safe passageway for animals moving across habitats, prevents species isolation and inbreeding, and lessens the unnatural dominance of one predator. The Park to Playa Bridge Project builds upon the 2002 Baldwin Hills "One Big Park" Plan which provides a unified vision for creating a multi-use vibrant park, with a variety of recreational opportunities, community facilities, and areas restored to natural habitats. The One Big Park creates an over two square mile zone within Los Angeles' urban core which allows natural habitat areas to coexist with recreational, educational, and cultural resources. The opportunity to create a 1400-acre unified park cannot be fully realized without significantly mitigating the many negative impacts of La Cienega Boulevard. This six-lane, limited access road functions as a freeway that runs through the center of the site, dividing the park into two separate pieces, limiting wildlife access and creating negative noise, visual and safety impacts on the proposed park uses. Park to Playa will improve existing deteriorated paths with several parklands and will close the gaps between existing trails by creating new and safe connections where the public improvements are needed. Improvement include new trailheads and gateways entrances with native plants landscaping, decorative gates, and parking lots. Bike racks, artwork and interpretive, wayfinding and connection signage along portions of the entire Park to Playa connection route enhance the trail user's experience.

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Trails & Corridors- Class II

Nominee: Reconnecting Cleveland - TIGER Project

2021 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population: 1. 23M

In July 2016, Cleveland Metroparks was announced as a winner of \$7. 950 million for its Re-Connecting Cleveland: Pathways to Opportunity grant application in the highly competitive Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program through the US Department of Transportation. Submitted in partnership with The Trust for Public Land and LAND studio, TIGER funds have been used to construct five trail projects totaling over four miles, including a new bridge, to fill critical gaps in the active transportation network in the city of Cleveland that also help serve as linear parks. At the time of the award, only one other park district had received a TIGER (now called BUILD) grant out of the 421 funded projects, and more than 7,300 applications received, since the competitive grant program's inception in 2009. This innovative bundling of projects also leveraged another \$8.4 million in funding from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement program, the State of Ohio's Clean Ohio Trails Fund and State Capital programs, the Wendy Park Foundation, and several other philanthropic sources. The TIGER project addresses neighborhoods in Cleveland, Ohio that had been subject to decades of disinvestment and where residents were physically cut off from employment centers, each other, and amenities by man-made obstacles, including railroads, freeways and industrial development, resulting in economic, social, and racial segregation for more than 1/6th of the city's residents. The TIGER Project will help stabilize local neighborhoods, provide low-cost transportation options, generate economic re-investment and provide city residents with access to jobs, transit, and two major green space venues which have been inaccessible for decades - the Lake Erie shoreline and the Cuyahoga River. The final piece of the suite of TIGER trail projects, the Wendy Park Bridge, will be complete in May 2021. Learn more at:

<http://www.clevelandmetroparks.com/TIGERproject>

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