




**Great
Parks**

WILD

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION

To protect nature and inspire communities to explore, learn and care for the outdoors.

VISION

A thriving region where everyone values outdoor experiences and champions the natural world.

CONTENTS

- A Message From the CEO2
- Great Parks at a Glance.....3
- Big Lands, Bigger Impact.....5
- Your Levy Legacy.....13
- Looking Ahead to 2026 & Beyond19
- Community Access 25
- A New Digital Experience 28
- Protecting Parks, Advancing Sustainability..... 31
- Volunteer Impact 33
- Awards & Recognitions 37
- Planting the Seeds of Change 39
- Financials 41

Board of Park Commissioners

The Hamilton County Probate Court Judge, the Honorable Ralph Winkler, appoints the Board of Park Commissioners. The Board is comprised of five individuals who serve without compensation for three-year terms.



2025 Board of Park Commissioners (Top Left to Bottom Right)

Marcus Thompson, Scott Schuster, Melissa Wegman, Caren Laverty, Caroline Keating



Hamilton County Probate Court Judge,
the Honorable
Ralph Winkler

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Thank you to the voters of Hamilton County, who in November 2025 renewed Great Parks’ 1-mill levy for an additional 10 years. This continued investment is critical in protecting our parks and inspiring communities to explore them. Through thoughtful stewardship of trails, waterways and greenspaces across Hamilton County, we are helping build a thriving region where outdoor experiences are valued and accessible.



Expanding access to the outdoors is central to Great Parks’ existence. In 2025, we advanced this commitment by investing in features and amenities that provide more equitable ways to connect with nature, including new trails, improved recreational opportunities,

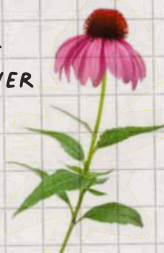
reimagined outdoor spaces, new adventure programs and expanded benefits for active-duty military members and veterans.

Whether enhancing a trail experience, introducing new programs, creating sustainable routes to natural areas or reimagining beloved spaces for children, Great Parks is expanding opportunities for everyone to enjoy the benefits of time spent outdoors. I invite you to continue reading this report to learn how these commitments translate into lasting impact across our parks and the communities they serve.

Be wild, be well.

Todd

PURPLE
CONEFLOWER



BEECH TREE



GREAT PARKS AT A GLANCE

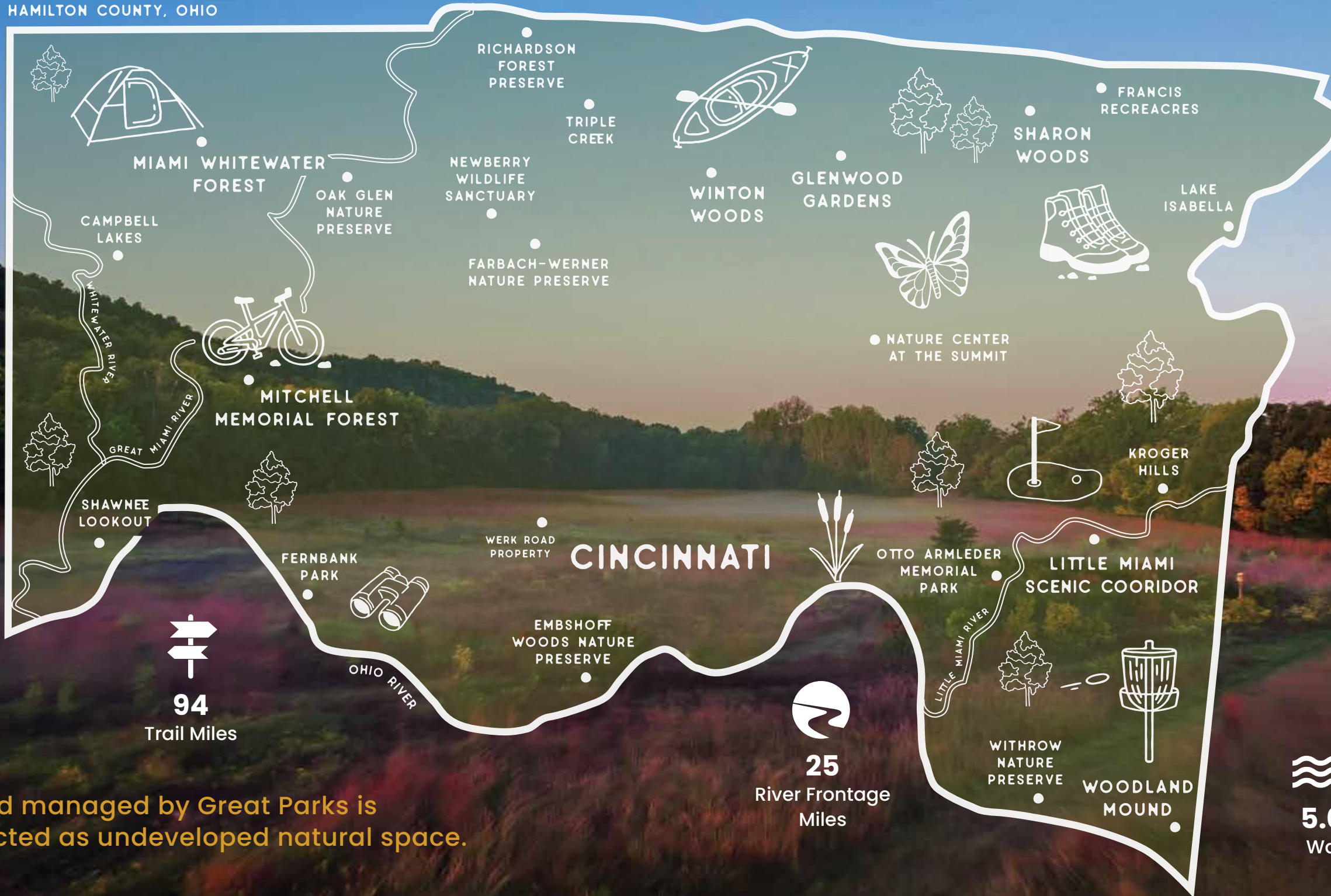
23
Parks & Conservation Areas

18,113
Total Acres Protected

94
Trail Miles

25
River Frontage Miles

85% of land managed by Great Parks is protected as undeveloped natural space.



59.0%
Forest

7.8%
Meadow

4.9%
Brushland

4.7%
Prairie

5.0%
Water

3.7%
Wetland

IMPACT AT
A GLANCE



1,624 Trees
Planted



4,000
Plant Plugs
Grown from
Native Seed



261,286 lbs.
of Waste
Diverted from
Landfills

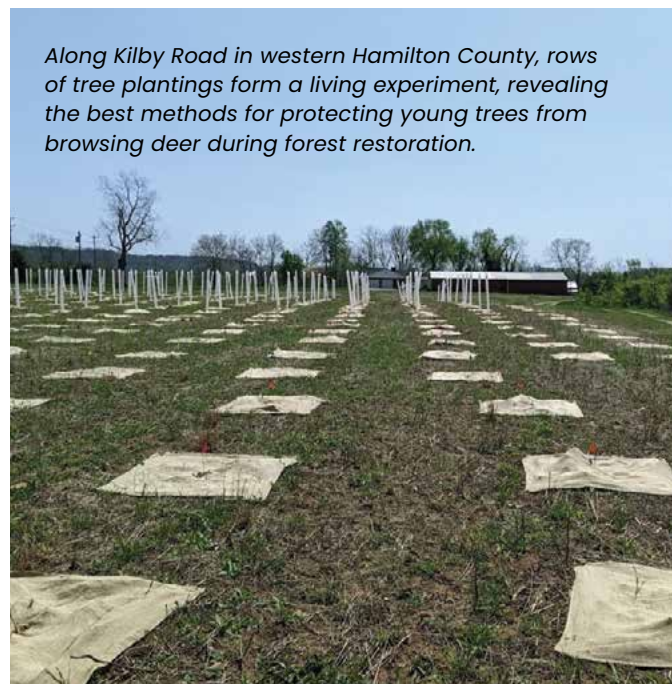
BIG LANDS, BIGGER IMPACT

As the region's most-visited attraction and Hamilton County's largest landowner, Great Parks is the leader in conservation and nature-based experiences in Southwest Ohio, delivering personal health, education and economic benefits while safeguarding natural resources and preserving native biodiversity.

Protecting Natural Spaces

Through strategic, evidence-based land management, Great Parks' dedicated team restores and sustains healthy forests, streams, wetlands and grasslands across Hamilton County. In 2025, collaborations with local universities and other public agencies strengthened

this work, providing data to help inform key decisions. As natural systems recover and function as intended, native wildlife responds, reflecting the cumulative impact of long-term stewardship and a year of progress within nearly a century of conservation leadership.



Along Kilby Road in western Hamilton County, rows of tree plantings form a living experiment, revealing the best methods for protecting young trees from browsing deer during forest restoration.



Electronic waste (e-waste) is the world's fastest-growing waste stream. In 2025, Great Parks partnered with Cohen Recycling to collect **62,068 lbs. of e-waste** (24% of total waste diverted from landfills).




Great Parks team members on a site visit to the Shawnee Lookout Stream Restoration project (see pp. 21-22 for more information).

2025 Wildlife Highlights at Great Parks




◀ The ever-elusive **eastern red bat**, spotted by a Great Parks employee in March 2025, often resembles a dead leaf as it hangs by one foot.



◀ The first documentation of **eastern red-spotted newts** in Hamilton County since the 1950s, a strong indicator of healthy wetland habitats.



◀ A young adult **rough green snake**, studied by Miami University for genetic research supporting Great Parks' ongoing herpetology surveys.



**A Record
7.32 Million
Total Park Visits**




**1.23 Million
Total Trail Users**



**253,283
Rounds of Golf**



**8,219
Boat Rentals**



**1,047
Bike Rentals**



**118,064
Program & Event
Participants**



**13,865
Campsite
Reservations**



Driving Economic Impact

As a major tourism driver, Great Parks contributes to a strong and resilient local economy by supporting jobs, attracting visitors and leveraging public and private funding. Its impact extends well beyond park boundaries, delivering measurable economic returns for Hamilton County and the broader region.

\$138 Million Total Economic Impact Generated by Great Parks

\$3.15 in Economic Activity Generated for Every \$1 of Great Parks' Tax Funding

4,000+ Jobs Supported Through Great Parks' Economic Impact

\$3.5 Million Generated in Income, Sales & Property Tax Revenue for State & Local Governments

\$47 Million in Total Economic Output Generated by Out-of-County Park Visitors

Data reported by the University of Cincinnati Economics Center in 2025, reflecting economic impacts from 2024.





2025 special events & programs

- 1. Fairy Tale Festival | Glenwood Gardens
- 2. Hispanic Heritage Festival | Sharon Woods
- 3. Pumpkin Patch | Winton Woods
- 4. Hops & Hyzers | Woodland Mound
- 5. Maple Sugar Days | Farbach-Werner Nature Preserve

- 6. Protect Your Wild | Winton Woods
- 7. Winter Hike Series | Multiple Locations
- 8. Kids Outdoor Adventure Expo | Winton Woods
- 9. Spark in the Dark | Miami Whitewater Forest
- 10. Holidays on the Farm | Winton Woods

POLLINATOR FESTIVAL
@ MIAMI WHITEWATER
FOREST

BUMBLE
BEE



YOUR LEVY LEGACY



74%

Approval Rate
for the 1-Mill
Levy Renewal in the
November 2025
General Election

Guided by community input and completed in 2019, Great Parks' Comprehensive Master Plan establishes a vision for parks, facilities and services through 2028. This multi-year plan, which addresses community needs like greenspace preservation, natural resource protection and trail development, is supported in part by levy funding.

In 2016 and 2021, Hamilton County voters approved 1-mill and 0.95-mill tax levies, respectively, to support day-to-day operations and capital improvements. In November 2025, voters renewed

the 1-mill levy by a resounding 74% approval rate, demonstrating strong public trust in Great Parks and continued investment in a conservation legacy with lasting community benefits.



New entrance signage introduced in 2025 reflects the continued evolution of Great Parks' brand and visual identity.



Avoca Mountain Bike Trail

Great Parks opened a new, 1.5-mile natural-surface trail at Avoca Trailhead along the Little Miami River, expanding access to the river corridor for adaptive riders, mountain bikers, hikers and other trail users. Replacing informal paths with a purposefully designed route, the trail represents the first segment of a planned, nearly 10-mile braided trail network located between the river and the existing Little Miami Scenic Trail. The broader network was designed by Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) in partnership with other communities, drawing inspiration from nationally recognized trail systems to enhance outdoor recreation, conservation and regional connectivity.



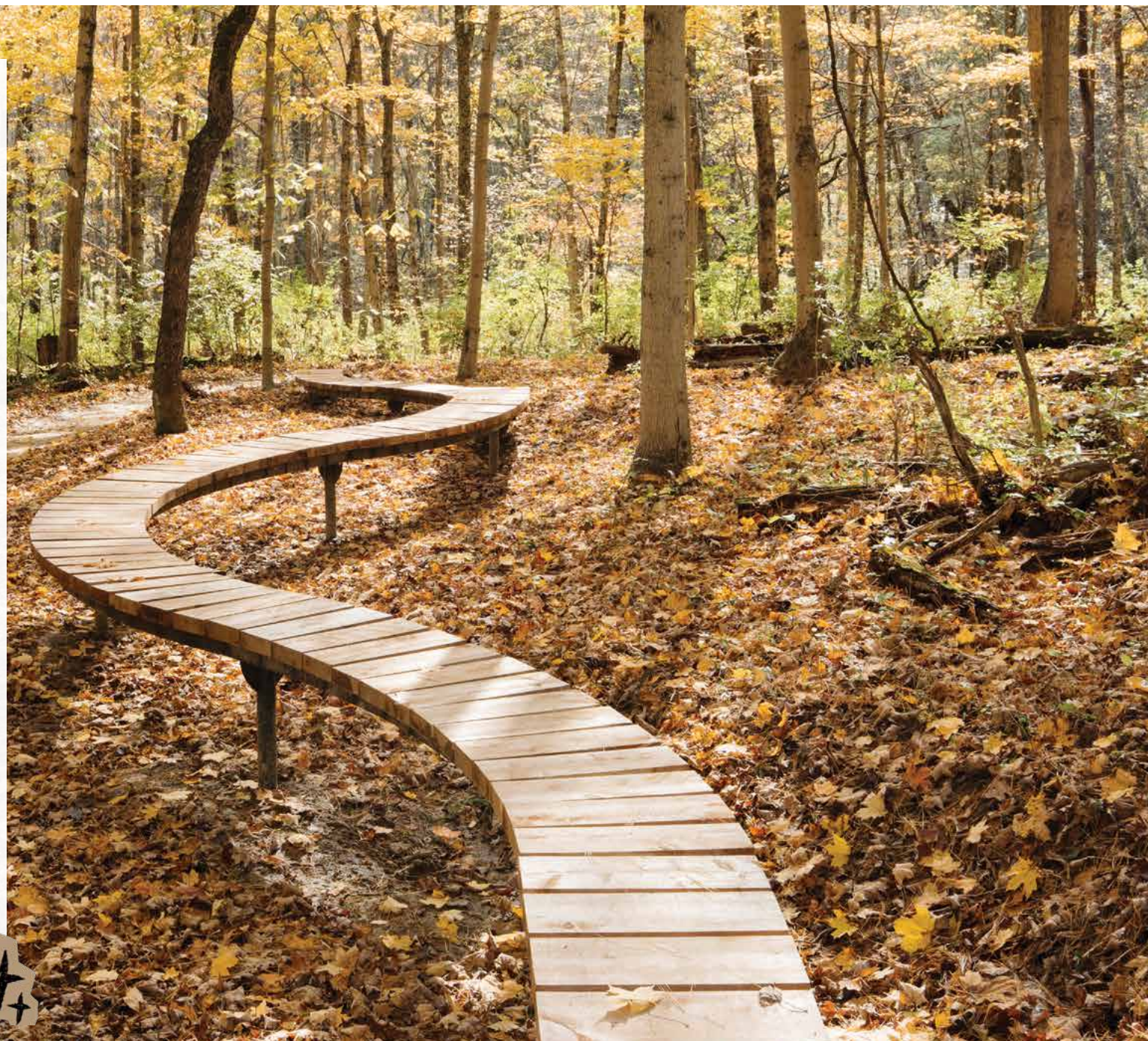
Glenwood Gardens to Winton Woods Trail

Great Parks completed the first phase of construction for the Glenwood Gardens to Winton Woods Trail, a new extension of the West Fork Mill Creek Greenway Trail that will provide a safe, paved and accessible link between two popular destinations. The initial phase included sidewalk connections to a new Metro bus stop and a signalized crosswalk for improved pedestrian and bicycle safety. The second and final phase of construction, which started in fall 2025, will complete the trail connection between Glenwood Gardens and Winton Woods.



Mitchell Memorial Forest Skills Course & Skills Loop

A beginner-friendly mountain bike skills course and an advanced skills loop trail opened at Mitchell Memorial Forest, enhancing the park's existing mountain bike trail system and expanding riding opportunities for the region. Designed to help riders develop basic and advanced skills, the new features include progressively challenging rises, dips and banked turns for practicing balance, momentum and control in a dedicated learning environment. Located adjacent to the existing mountain bike trail, the skills areas enable riders to immediately apply what they learn, strengthening Mitchell Memorial Forest's role as a premier regional destination for mountain biking.



Glenwood Gardens Upgrades

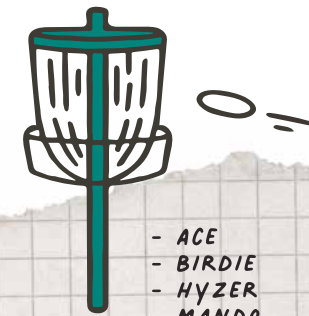
Great Parks completed a series of upgrades at Glenwood Gardens, enhancing accessibility while preserving the park's signature features and extending the lifespan of some of its most beloved spaces. Enhancements along the Woodland Walk include a new composite boardwalk with custom adult- and child-sized handrails, new whimsical sculptures and restored iron fencing, while the Spider Patio received new stamped concrete reflecting its web overhead. At the Cotswold Overlook, the trellis was replaced and stamped concrete was added to better match the original design, and the gatehouse entrance was renovated with new structural elements and drainage improvements. Upgrades to the iconic Discovery Tree were also completed, including refreshed finishes and new decking, roofing and netting, ensuring the play structure remains safe, accessible and engaging.



Disc Golf Course Upgrades

Great Parks' disc golf courses have undergone phased improvements that include new tee boxes, baskets, signage, realigned holes and native plantings. Guided by public input, the upgrades enhance playability and access for disc golfers of all skill levels. Projects at Woodland

Mound, Winton Woods and Miami Whitewater Forest are complete, including the expansion of Miami Whitewater Forest from a 9-hole course to a full 18-hole layout. Final course upgrades at Embshoff Woods Nature Preserve are expected to be completed in fall 2026.



MONARCH BUTTERFLY

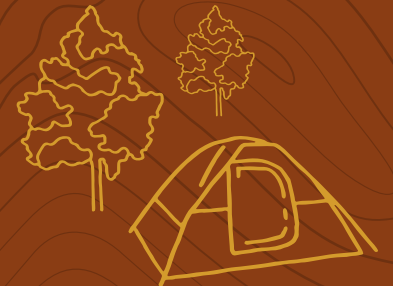


BUTTERFLY MILKWEED

- ACE
- BIRDIE
- HYZER
- MANDO

Winton Woods Campground Improvements

Great Parks completed an expansion and major improvements to the Winton Woods Campground, enhancing the guest experience while supporting infrastructure and conservation goals. Improvements include a fully renovated shower facility, upgraded electrical service throughout the campground and new full-hookup sites that expand RV capacity. In support of Great Parks' conservation leadership, a new graywater collection system was also installed to safely capture and manage wastewater, reducing environmental impacts while maintaining a comfortable and modern camping experience.



**LOOKING
AHEAD TO
2026 &
BEYOND**



Sharon Lake Reopening

One of the largest projects in Great Parks' history, the Sharon Lake Improvement Project repositioned a significant amount of sediment to optimize lake depth and introduce new wetlands, ultimately leading to healthier aquatic habitats. New amenities like boardwalks, fishing piers and a floating kayak launch enhance recreational opportunities and expand public access to natural areas around the lake. Sharon Lake and its surrounding amenities reopened in winter 2026.



*SHARON LAKE IS SEEING
WILDLIFE RETURN
AFTER REFILLING IN
LATE 2025*



**Bass Island
River Access**

River access improvements are under construction at Bass Island, a popular destination for paddlers entering and exiting the Little Miami River in Anderson Township. The improved site includes new restroom facilities, a designated walkway to the riverbank and a ramp to the river's edge. An expanded parking lot and a vehicle drop loop will provide improved access for loading and unloading equipment, while the pedestrian walkway will reduce informal paths that cause bank erosion and damage to the riverbank ecosystem. The site is expected to reopen in fall 2026.



Biochar Project

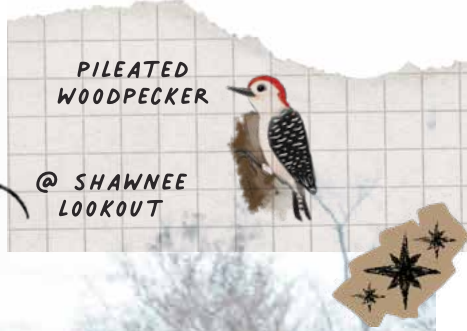
Great Parks is constructing a new composting facility at Winton Woods as part of an innovative collaboration with Cincinnati Parks to produce biochar, a carbon-capturing material that improves soil health and helps combat climate change. The project repurposes waste materials, including manure from Winton Woods Farm & Equestrian Center and wood debris from Cincinnati Parks, into a soil additive that sequesters carbon while supporting tree growth, landscaping, stormwater management and urban canopy health. Among the first of its kind in the United States, the project aims to capture hundreds of tons of carbon dioxide annually and produce biochar for both internal and commercial use. The composting facility is expected to be completed in spring 2026.





Shawnee Lookout Stream Restoration

Great Parks, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, is restoring nearly two miles of buried streams from beneath the former Shawnee Lookout Golf Course. The project removes asphalt golf cart paths and underground culverts, restores natural stream features and replaces invasive vegetation with native riparian plantings to improve habitat and water quality. A new, two-mile natural-surface trail will be constructed, following an accessible grade and improving connectivity to the surrounding landscape. Shawnee Lookout is an important archaeological district inhabited for more than 10,000 years, and the stream restoration project represents a foundational step in reestablishing it as a premier destination for hiking, environmental stewardship and cultural education. The project site is expected to reopen in spring 2027.



Shaker Trace Nursery Improvements

As one of the largest seed nurseries in Ohio, Shaker Trace Nursery at Miami Whitewater Forest produces more than 200 native plant species and harvests hundreds of pounds of native seed each year. The nursery's revitalization increases its capacity to support ecological restoration across Hamilton County while expanding opportunities for public education. Improvements include a new, modern greenhouse, a climate-controlled seed storage facility, preservation of the nursery's historic 1880s barn and a new, half-mile trail connection linking to the existing Shaker Trace Outer Loop. When complete, the improved nursery will serve as a community hub that showcases how native habitats are grown, restored and sustained. The project is expected to be completed in spring 2026.



Going to Bat for Local Wildlife

During renovations, Great Parks took an innovative approach to conserve a long-established maternity roost for big brown bats living in the nursery's historic barn. By creating a dedicated, bat-only enclosure and carefully timing construction around seasonal migration, the project protected critical habitat. The bats' return last spring confirms that thoughtful design can support wildlife while also improving facilities.



**BIG
BROWN
BAT**

COMMUNITY ACCESS

Great Parks works to provide inclusive access to its greenspaces, as outlined in Master Plan priorities identified by Hamilton County residents. The Comprehensive Master Plan calls for added programming for diverse audiences and expanded access for all users, with the goal of removing barriers to entry. Through these commitments, Great Parks helps ensure all community members feel welcome, supported and connected to the natural world.

Community Days

Great Parks' annual Community Days expand user access by waiving Motor Vehicle Permit (MVP) requirements on 10 select days throughout the year, including Earth Day, National Trails Day, National Public Lands Day and others. Community Days apply to motor vehicle entry only, as admission to Great Parks' 23 destinations is always free for pedestrians and cyclists.

Free & Discounted MVPs

Free MVPs are made available to certain guests, including U.S. Armed Forces members and veterans, participants in the Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library's Discovery Pass program and Hamilton County residents with a valid food assistance card. Discounted MVPs are available to students enrolled in a Hamilton County college or university.



PGA HOPE

Great Parks proudly partners with PGA HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere), a free golf program for military veterans designed to support rehabilitation and help ease the transition back into civilian life. Led by Great Parks' PGA Professionals, the program offers expert instruction, with clubs and adaptive equipment provided as needed.



Out in the Outdoors

This monthly series brings LGBTQIA+ community members and allies together to explore the outdoors in a supportive, welcoming space. Led by Great Parks employees who are proud members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the program rotates among Great Parks' destinations, offering opportunities to build connections and learn about various nature-based topics.



Veteran & Active Military Benefits

Great Parks expanded its recreation benefits in 2025 for U.S. Armed Forces members and veterans, offering discounts on golf, boating, camping and fishing. The expanded benefits build on the existing free MVP program for former prisoners of war and disabled military veterans by extending eligibility to active duty and reserve members.



Women in the Outdoors

This seasonal series is designed to create a welcoming space for women to build confidence and outdoor skills while connecting with others. Led by female instructors, the program introduces participants to activities like archery, paddling, land navigation and outdoor cooking through hands-on experiences on the range, in the woods and on the water.

Free & Reduced Cost Programming

Great Parks removes financial barriers for families, local school districts and other organized groups by providing in-park programs, classroom programs and other educational opportunities at a free or reduced cost. In 2025, 25,644 students (pre-kindergarten-12th grade) and 13,572 adults participated in 1,045 free or reduced-cost programs.





America's River Roots Festival

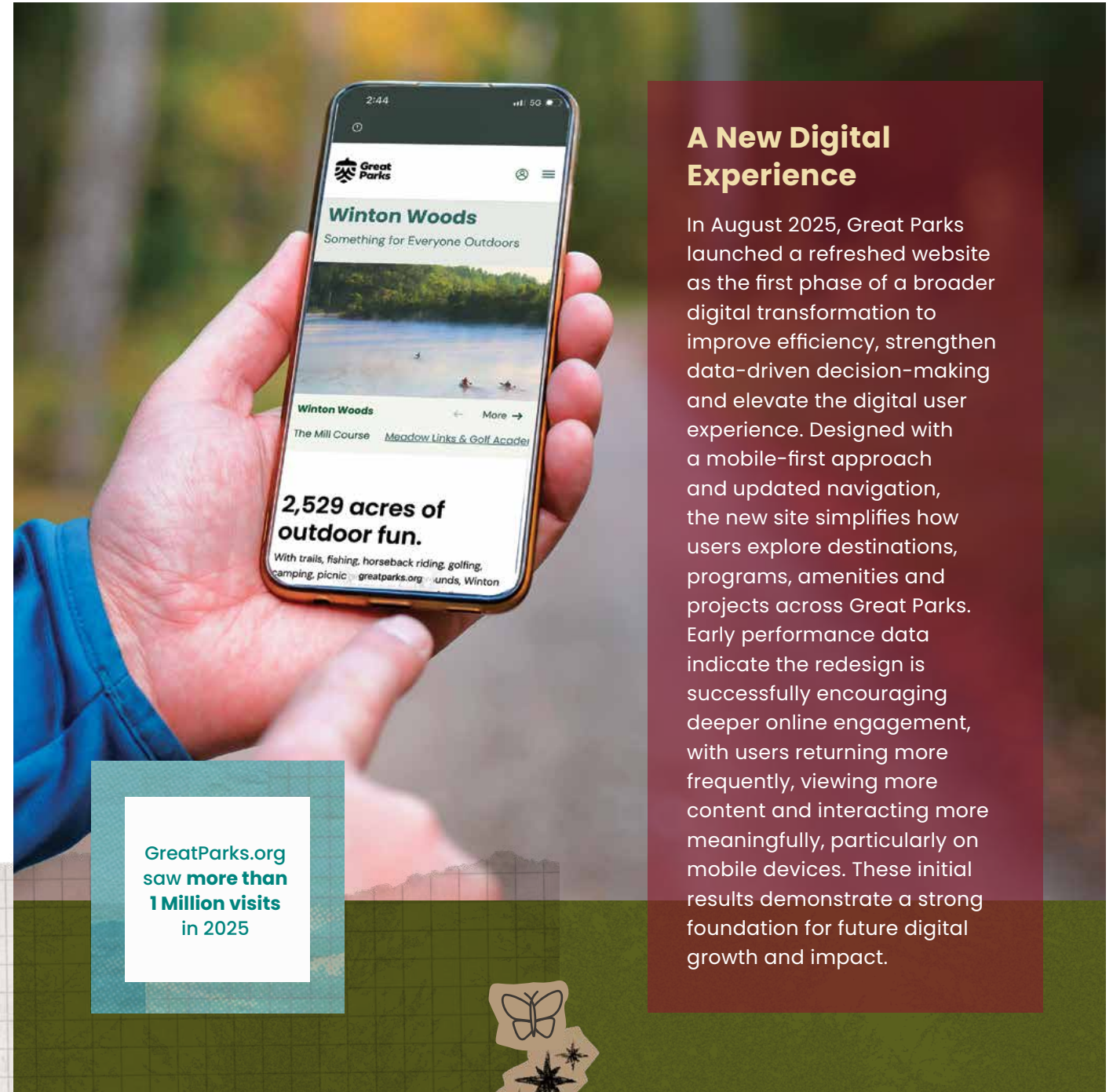


Cincinnati Reds Wellness Fair

Great Parks engages with the community through key partnerships and participation in events beyond its own parks and programs, connecting with residents in familiar spaces and settings throughout the region.

28
Community Events Attended

6,900+
Total In-Person Engagements



A New Digital Experience

In August 2025, Great Parks launched a refreshed website as the first phase of a broader digital transformation to improve efficiency, strengthen data-driven decision-making and elevate the digital user experience. Designed with a mobile-first approach and updated navigation, the new site simplifies how users explore destinations, programs, amenities and projects across Great Parks. Early performance data indicate the redesign is successfully encouraging deeper online engagement, with users returning more frequently, viewing more content and interacting more meaningfully, particularly on mobile devices. These initial results demonstrate a strong foundation for future digital growth and impact.

GreatParks.org saw **more than 1 Million visits** in 2025

SUGAR
MAPLE LEAF
@ WINTON WOODS
HARBOR



PROTECTING PARKS, ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY

As state-certified law enforcement officers, **Great Parks Rangers** serve a vital role in protecting guests and natural resources by enforcing park by-laws and state laws year-round. Patrolling by cruiser, UTV, boat, bike and on foot, Rangers bring deep knowledge of Great Parks and surrounding communities to create a safe and welcoming experience for all guests, while actively engaging with residents through community events and outreach efforts.

While their day-to-day work is rooted in public safety and stewardship, Rangers are also helping advance Great Parks' conservation and sustainability goals through a recent transition to hybrid police cruisers. Despite representing roughly 3% of Great Parks' total fleet, Ranger vehicles account for nearly 20% of annual fuel use due to extended patrols. Once fully implemented, the transition to hybrid technology is expected to deliver substantial

fuel savings, reduce maintenance costs and lower carbon emissions by 107 metric tons annually (the equivalent of planting 4,000 trees each year). Purpose-built and customized for law enforcement, the hybrid cruisers maintain the performance, durability and safety features Rangers rely on, ensuring they are well-equipped to protect park guests and public spaces in a more sustainable, fiscally responsible way.



2025 BY THE NUMBERS



448

Bags of Trash Collected



66

Bags of Recyclables Collected



897

Native Trees & Shrubs Planted



1,300

Annuals Planted



125

Community Volunteer Days

VOLUNTEER IMPACT

With more than 18,000 acres to manage, 94 miles of trails to maintain and daily educational programs to facilitate, Great Parks' growth and success are largely dependent upon the immense contributions of volunteers.

Through long-term service and one-day volunteer projects, corporate groups, retirees, students, scouts and other dedicated stewards help advance Great Parks' mission, advocate for its work and elevate community support across the region.



1,570
Total Volunteers

25,902
Total Volunteer Hours



"Great Parks is a 'force of nature' in so many ways for me that I find myself often sharing news and encouraging friends to participate in events and to consider volunteering. I am excited and proud to be a part of such a great organization that enriches life in our community in so many ways."

-Susan, 18 years of volunteer service

"It is evident that staff has thought of everything and with a focus on safety. Staff are also very open to suggestions, knowledgeable and efficient in giving feedback. Much appreciated!"

-Long-term volunteer



7.6 Miles
of Natural-Surface
Trails Monitored &
Improved



1,481 Hours
Spent
Monitoring Trails
Through
Adopt-A-Trail
Program



209,701 Square Feet
of Land Cleared of
Invasive Plants

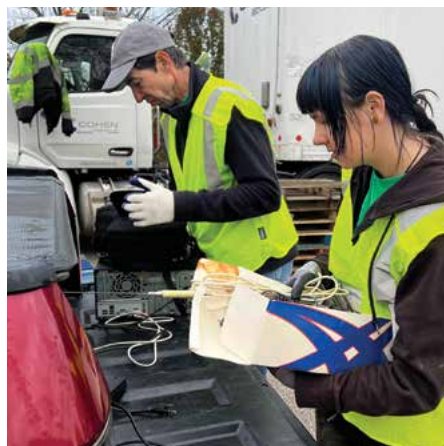


"Even staff and volunteers that I have NOT worked side-by-side with have said hello, given a smile or a nod and wave. I'm not surprised to find so many kind and caring people doing this kind of work. It's exactly why I volunteer for Great Parks: Great Parks=Great People."

-Long-term volunteer

"It's rewarding to help with the conservation efforts and experience stellar teamwork in action."

-Jon, 4 years of
volunteer service



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Great Parks received several awards and recognitions in 2025 from both industry and governmental organizations at the local, state and federal levels.



- ◆ Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting
- ◆ GFOA Award of Financial Reporting Achievement
- ◆ GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award
- ◆ GFOA Certificate of Recognition for Budget Preparation



- ◆ Ohio Auditor of State Certificate of Highest Achievement in Open and Transparent Government



- ◆ GovDeals Certificate of Appreciation for Reaching \$1,000,000 in Assets Sold While Providing Exemplary Service and the Highest Returns for Customers

RECEIVED BY LESS THAN 5% OF ELIGIBLE ENTITIES



- ◆ Ohio Auditor of State Award with Distinction
Andrew Collins, Chief Financial Officer



- ◆ National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO) Award for Innovative Financing for The Farmer Family Foundation Match and Great Parks' GO BIG Capital Campaign



- ◆ Public Relations Society of America – Cincinnati Chapter (PRSA Cincinnati) Blacksmith Award for Crisis Communications for the Sharon Lake Improvement Project

- ◆ PRSA Cincinnati Blacksmith Award for Integrated Communications for Great Parks' Park Passport

- ◆ Blacksmith Best in Show, Campaigns for Great Parks' Park Passport



- ◆ Ohio Parks and Recreation Association Awards of Excellence, First Place in Marketing Innovation for Great Parks' Park Passport



- ◆ Rachel Doellman, Chief of Marketing & Brand Strategy, was recognized with NACPRO's New Professional Award, which celebrates up-and-coming leaders in the parks and recreation profession with less than seven years of experience.



- ◆ First Tee – Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky 2025 Partner of the Year

- ◆ Matthew 25 Ministries 2025 Green Giving Partner for Work to Repurpose Uniforms for Humanitarian Aid



- ◆ Greater Cincinnati Family Choice Awards presented by Cincy Magazine Favorite Hiking Spot: Sharon Woods



- ◆ Greater Cincinnati Family Choice Awards presented by Cincy Magazine Favorite Place to Camp/Campground: Miami Whitewater Forest



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

LEARN HOW YOU CAN "FUND YOUR WILD" & INVEST IN GREAT PARKS



As Great Parks' philanthropic partner, Great Parks Forever leverages public funds to support new projects, preserve greenspaces and protect natural resources. In 2022, the foundation launched its GO BIG Capital Campaign to raise \$50 million and maximize the impact of public funding. Through 2025, **more than \$25 million** has been secured. To further leverage public support, Great Parks' philanthropy team has also secured **more than \$31 million** in state and federal grants. Together, these investments support a wide range of projects and programs that foster deep connections with the natural world.

More than 300 guests attended the **2025 Root Ball**, Great Parks Forever's largest annual fundraising event.



Parks Light Lager

In 2025, Great Parks partnered with HighGrain Brewing to launch Parks Light Lager, a park-inspired beer that supports conservation by contributing a portion of proceeds to Great Parks Forever. Available at Great Parks destinations, HighGrain taproom locations and retailers throughout the region, Parks Light reflects a shared commitment to celebrating the outdoors while generating philanthropic support. The beer builds on an ongoing partnership that includes event sponsorships, community engagement initiatives and a Great Parks-themed interactive mural at HighGrain's Brentwood taproom.



Making History

Great Parks was awarded **\$6 million** in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program grant funding by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) for phase two construction of the Oasis Trail, a new 4.75-mile shared-use trail that will extend between Downtown Cincinnati's Sawyer Point and the Lunken Airport area. This adds to the record-breaking **\$8 million** CMAQ grant awarded by OKI in 2024 for phase one construction, the largest grant in Great Parks' history.

Farmer Family Foundation Match

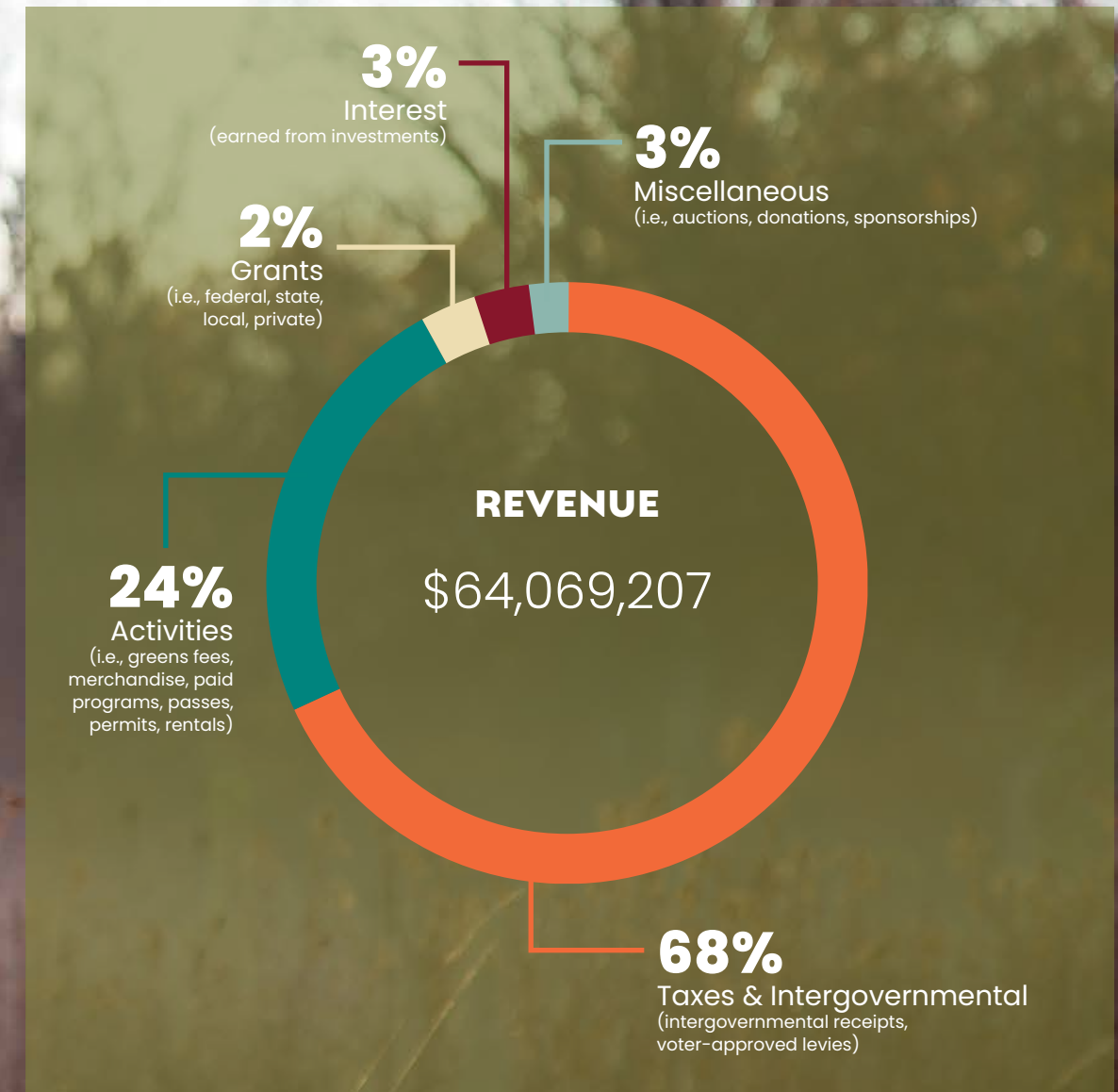
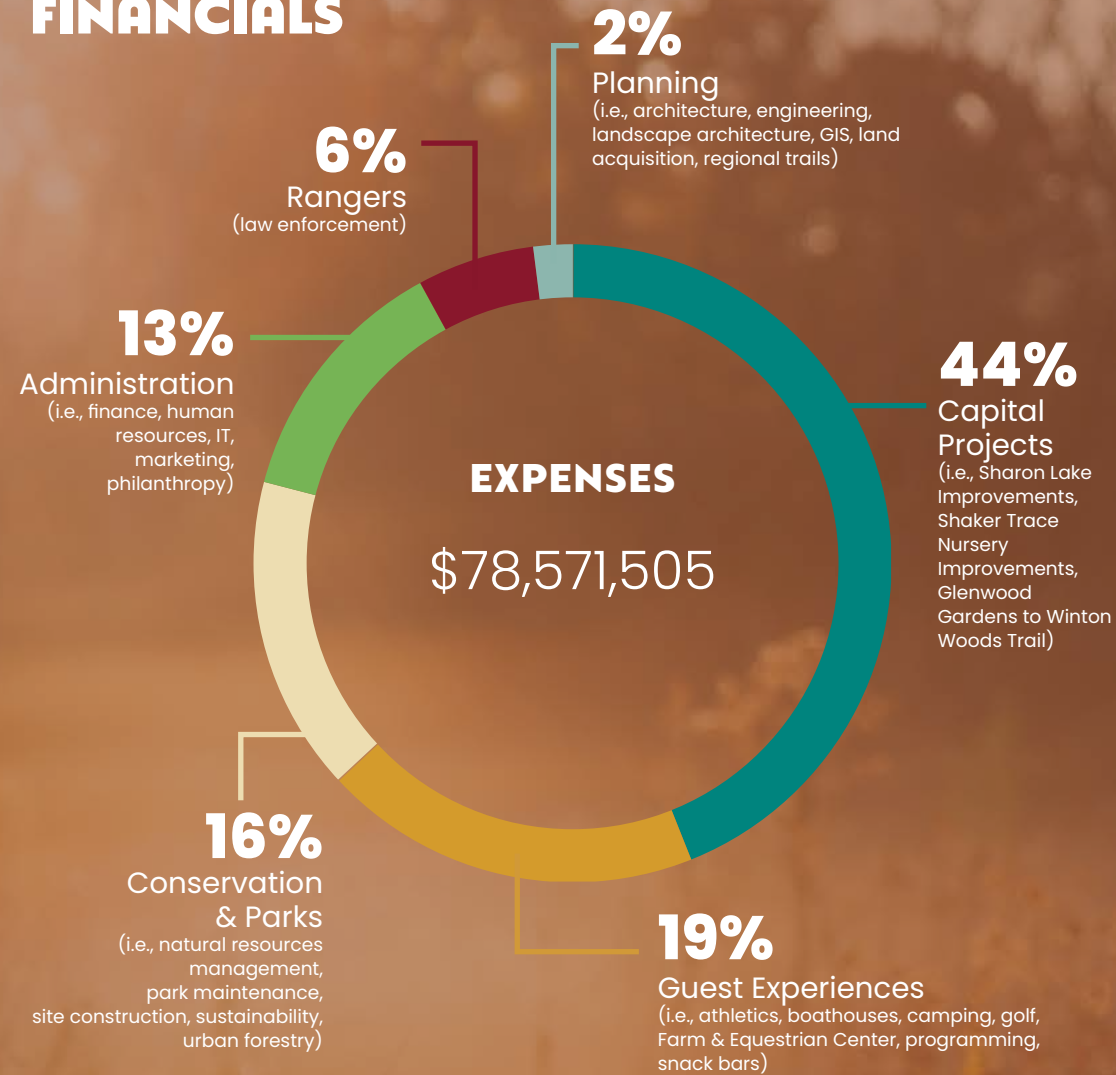


From April 2024 through June 2025, the Farmer Family Foundation committed to matching every gift made to the GO BIG Capital Campaign, up to \$2 million. By the June 30 closing date, 100% of the donation goal was secured, fully activating the matching gift. This generous **\$4 million** commitment helps advance the ambitious goals outlined in Great Parks' Comprehensive Master Plan.



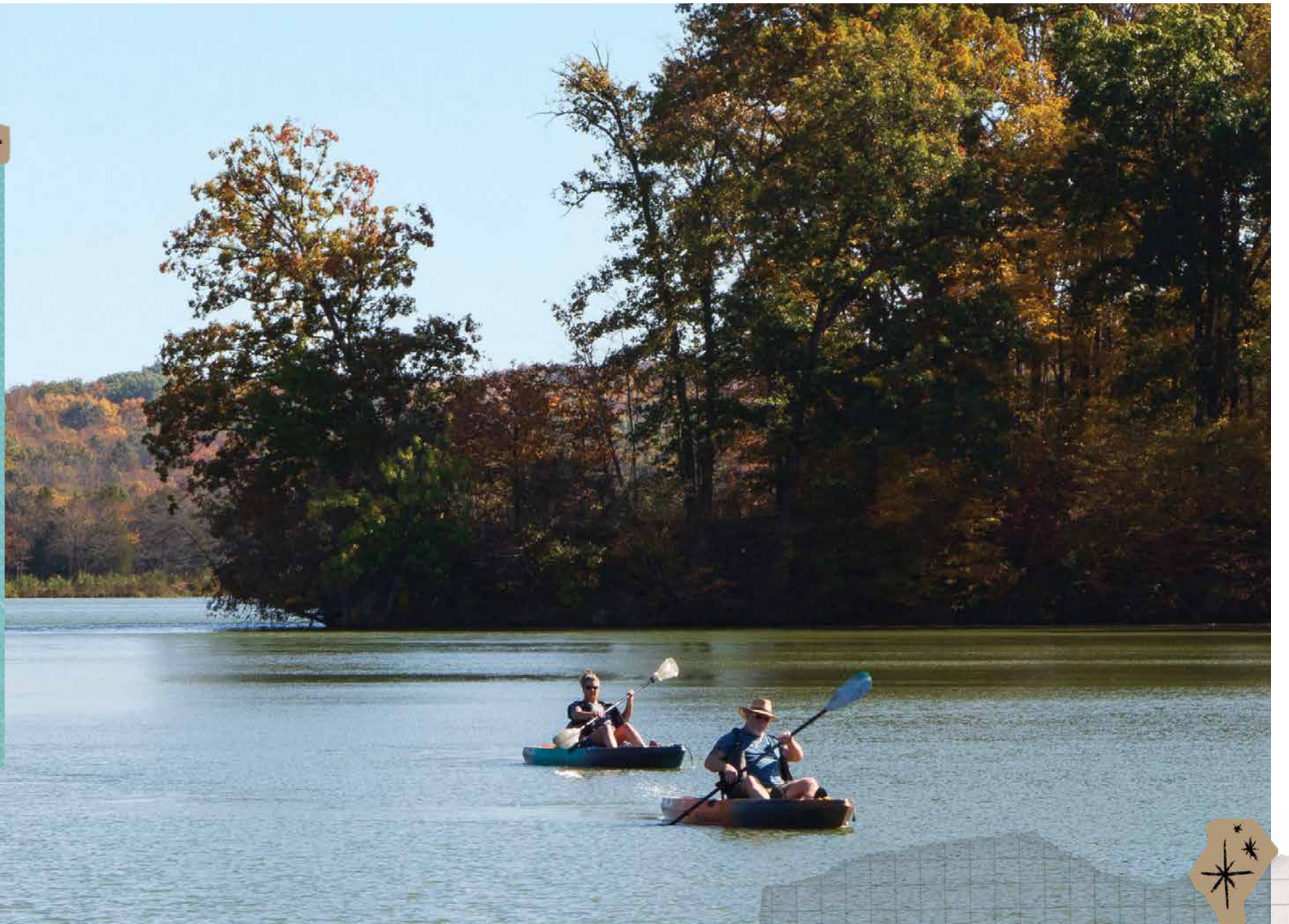
\$6 MILLION GRANT RECEIVED!

FINANCIALS



All Great Parks funds are allocated across a 10-year forecast to specific projects and park operations.

FIND YOUR WILD



Great Parks of Hamilton County

10245 Winton Road

Cincinnati, OH 45231

513-521-7275 | GreatParks.org

**2025 Board of Park
Commissioners**

Caroline Keating, Caren Lavery,
Scott Schuster, Marcus Thompson,
Melissa Wegman

Chief Executive Officer

Todd Palmeter

