

2019 Annual Report

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission is dedicated to providing all residents quality recreation experiences that encourage healthy lifestyles, support economic prosperity, promote the protection of natural resources and enhance the quality of life throughout Oakland County.

RECREATION INVESTMENTS ADD VALUE TO LIFE



Celebrate the value of parks and recreation

During the past 53 years, Oakland County Parks and Recreation has become an important part of life for the residents of Oakland County.

Generations of families and friends have incorporated the Oakland County Parks into their traditions, summer vacations and outdoor adventures.

There are moments shared over campfires, waves surfed at waterparks, fish hooked at lakes, scout badges earned, wedding vows exchanged, trails hiked, golf balls struck, first jobs worked, and snowshoes worn.

Whatever the reason, whatever the season, Oakland County Parks and Recreation adds value to life through its people, parks and programs.

Early Fall named Best of Show

Early Fall, pictured on the cover, was photographed at Independence Oaks County Park by Wai Nguyen of Troy. Spike, Radio Personality of Channel 955's Mojo in the Morning Show, selected the image as Best in Show in the sixth annual Pics of the Parks Photo Contest. Forty-one local photographers submitted 131 images.

"This year's entries were the most colorful I've seen," Spike said. "They reflected a variety of great recreational uses of the parks and showed some of the creatures big and small who enjoy Oakland County's wide-open spaces. But the image I chose highlights the real star attraction: nature. This photo perfectly captures the peaceful and colorful slow change of Autumn. The photographer did a great job of balancing the warm and cool colors – it makes me want to visit this park!"

Spike is a photographer in his own right; his work can be viewed at BuzzClickPhotography.com. His travel company, ExploreWithSpike.com, helps others create stunning photographs while exploring the world on exciting vacations.



All entries are available for viewing online at OaklandCountyParks.SmugMug.com. All entries were blindjudged by members of the Oakland Camera Club. The Best of Show and First Place winners in each category received canvas prints of their entries, generously donated by Hite Photo of Bloomfield Hills. The winning prints were displayed in the Wint Nature Center Great Hall at Independence Oaks County Park.

2019 Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission

Pictured left to right:
Ron Fowkes, Nancy L. Quarles,
Vice Chairman J. David VanderVeen,
Chairman Gerald A. Fisher,
Executive Committee Member Christine
Long, Secretary Gary R. McGillivray,
Andrea LaFontaine, Robert E. Kostin,
Ebony Bagley and Jim Nash.
The commission was photographed at
Springfield Oaks County Park.

Oakland County Parks, programs,
services and facilities are made possible
by millage funds supported by Oakland
County residents. For a home valued at
\$200,000, the homeowner pays less than
\$25/year to support Oakland County
Parks and Recreation.



Chairman's Message

Budgeting wisely for Oakland County Parks and Recreation is a key role for the Commission.

Park Commissioners have the task of approving an annual budget for Oakland County Parks and Recreation. Each year, we find ourselves in the same position as most government budgeters: there's so much we need to do with limited funds. This creates the responsibility for wise and careful decision making, leading to consensus on priorities that will promote and maintain our first-class parks system that serves a diverse public.

Your first thought is that making these decisions should be easy: simply look for facilities and services that provide the most fun! How can you miss with this formula? Of course, the 'fun factor' can't be ignored. But there is so much more to consider. High on the list is making sure that our facilities are safe, and that park and recreation experiences are accessible to as many people as reasonably feasible. These have been very high priorities and are represented in expenditures for such things as safe drinking water, accessible trails, and docks designed to allow individuals of all abilities to enjoy the experience of boating and kayaking.

Commissioners have also adopted a guiding policy that we need to serve the needs and desires of the greatest number of users. One of the expenditures in this category, which hits the jackpot by providing the most demanded facility in our parks, is for safe, accessible and scenic trails for hiking, family outings, cross-country skiing, dog walking, bird watching and jogging – something for nearly everyone!

Don't forget the important goal of fulfilling the responsibility for good stewardship of the natural resources in our parklands. A conscientious job on this front calls for preserving open space and wooded areas, eliminating invasive plant species, protecting animals that reside in our spaces, and generally doing no harm as we use and maintain the parks.

Other complicated budgeting must be done to provide focused programs for affordable youth recreation, golf courses, waterparks, a farmers market, conference centers and campgrounds – and concessions that go with many of these activities. We are now in

the final stages of planning and development with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources of an off-road vehicle facility which will be unique and exciting for the County. And, speaking of a focused use: did you know that you can play 'cricket' in an Oakland County Park?

All these budget decisions must be made within the context of ensuring that our programs are both attractive and affordable, and at the same time not unreasonably competitive with similar privately owned facilities.

Of course, an all important part of the budget is to provide funding for the talented individuals engaged in parks and recreation programs: our fantastic full- and part-time employees, and resources for our extensive contingent of volunteers – all of whom perform well beyond expectation to provide consistently outstanding experiences for our users. When you visit our park facilities and programs, or attend events like the Oakland County Fair, Fire & Ice, or Arts Beats & Eats, you will find Oakland County Parks people in the thick of things . . . and this includes nights and weekends that are given up by these individuals to serve the public. The County is so fortunate to have such a dedicated group of people.

As 2019 closes, and we head into 2020, Oakland County is preparing to celebrate a major milestone – its 200th birthday. The Parks and Recreation Commission wishes Oakland County a 'Happy Birthday,' and congratulations on a job well done!

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission was not around when the County was 'born,' having passed our first millage in November of 1966. Voters have consistently approved every millage since then. In 2020, voters will again be asked to approve a millage to support their parks and recreation system.

Please take advantage of our great parks and recreation opportunities and thank you for your support.

Gerald Fisher,
Chairperson



The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission was established by Public Act 261 of 1965. Founded in 1966, the commission is the policy-making board that oversees the parks system's 6,700 acres. Commissioners are tasked with allocating resources throughout 13 parks and making decisions about purchasing park land, constructing facilities, preserving maintenance standards and developing innovative programs and services.



Projects meet need for trails, soccer fields

Investment in southeast Oakland County included a walking trail and improvements to two soccer fields at Catalpa Oaks County Park in Southfield.

A 2018 project survey and open house public engagement indicated multi-use trails as the highest requested development priority. Historically, a berm was used by walkers resulting in an informal dirt path.

“Formalizing the walking trail around the park perimeter is an improvement for all users,” Tom Hughes, chief of operations and maintenance – south district, said. “Installing a crushed stone path which has Americans with Disabilities Act compliant grades and accessible concrete entry points will allow users of all abilities to enjoy the perimeter trail.”

The soccer fields, created prior to OCPR’s management, were built using clay construction material from the I-696 freeway development. The fields log more than 30,000 annual visits with league play. Quality turf condition was difficult to maintain, with lack of irrigation and poor drainage.

“Providing quality athletic fields will attract multiple user groups looking for well-maintained athletic fields. Irrigation will improve the turf quality and permit staff to seed, repair and maintain high traffic areas keeping the grass green and healthy the entire season,” Hughes said. “These improvements will create a welcoming atmosphere for all our visitors.”

Most of the project’s \$702,000 investment was \$421,000 for the soccer field improvements. Due to the expense and other project commitments, only two of the four fields were being improved at this time.



Oakland County Parks and Recreation investing \$1 million in south Oakland County

In March, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners voted to approve making a \$1 million investment in Normandy Oaks, a park owned and operated by the City of Royal Oak, in the highly populated southeast quadrant of Oakland County where green space is limited.

The investment, over three fiscal years, will fund park trails, a nature area and a bridge providing trail access to the park from the adjacent Elks Park into the nature area. The investment will come directly from the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission budget: \$521,250 in FY2020; \$276,320 in FY2021; and \$213,080 in FY2022. Although the park name ends in “Oaks”, it is not and will not be owned or managed by the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission system, whose 13 parks all feature the word “Oaks”.

Additionally, OCPR is committed to hosting programs and special events at the park, like “Come Out and Play” which takes inflatable units and retro games to locations around Oakland County.

In the south end of Oakland County, OCPR currently operates Catalpa Oaks County Park in Southfield, Red Oaks Dog Park, Golf Course, Nature Center and Waterpark in Madison Heights and Glen Oaks Golf Course in Farmington Hills. However, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission believed investing in Normandy Oaks would provide a regional facility in a central area of the county.

Trails are the number one reason people visit the Oakland County Parks, and the city has identified trails as its top need as well. Trails are also a top priority across the state and the nation. The Normandy Oaks project is expected to feature approximately two miles of trails.

OCPR will provide recommendations to the City of Royal Oak on native trees, shrubs and grasses to plant in the natural area and provide educational interpretive signage for park users.



Holly Oaks ORV Park Gearing Up for 2020

In 2019, the park was open to special permit test events to help OCPR and MDNR test the site. OCPR takes control of the site Jan. 1, 2020. Great Lakes Four Wheel Drive Association hosted an event in February, the Bent Wheels Motorcycle Club held a motorcycle event in May, and Z Performance held a mixed-use event (Detroit 4Fest) in September. Participants were surveyed for their feedback on amenities like parking, signage and course challenges.

While not opening to the public until 2020, Holly Oaks ORV Park hosted strategic test events to assess existing features and planning activities to inform future operations.

Three events were held in 2019, each of which was permitted through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), bringing full-size vehicles, side-by-sides, ATVs and motorcycles to the park. Not only did these events provide a unique and exciting experience for participants, but they also provided planning and operations staff with critical feedback.

The park will open with 113 acres of off-road vehicle riding in Groveland and Holly townships, adjacent to Mt. Holly Ski and Snowboard Resort. The remaining property (currently being mined) will come online over the next five years, ultimately creating a 235-acre ORV playground serving residents of southeast Michigan as well as visitors from across the country and Canada.

When the DNR acquired the park property in 2017, it already looked like the beginning of an ORV Park. One of the property owners, Steve Stolaruk, who was excited to see the recently mined property turned into an ORV Park, left his parcels with dramatic hills and valleys, water bodies, and even some ORV challenge features he created before his passing in 2018.

"Our main goal over this past year has been to determine what we need to do in order to open an exciting and sustainable park in 2020," Principal Planner for Oakland County Parks and Recreation Jon Noyes said. "Sustainability will be key to the planning and operations."

ORV features and trails are created largely out of material on the site, including clay and sand. Ongoing site maintenance will be required to keep features and trails in good, usable condition.

The park will benefit not only from OCPR staff expertise in high-quality park operations in Oakland County, but also from the years of experience DNR staff brings to this unique partnership as well.

The DNR operates several ORV recreation areas in the state, the most notable being Silver Lake Recreation Area. Staff from both OCPR and the DNR have been working together for more than five years to develop Holly Oaks ORV Park. Through this partnership, OCPR will operate the park as the 14th Oakland County Park, in partnership with the DNR, which not only owns the property, but who has been a partner contributing expertise on everything from staffing to design to the best ways to handle ticket sales.

"Overall this has been a great experience working with the DNR," Melissa Prowse, Supervisor – Planning said. "We've had a long, positive relationship with the DNR, but this project takes that to a new level. We've been meeting and talking with our counterparts at DNR weekly for the past two years as we've worked through all of the details from the grant to purchase the land all the way through the nitty-gritty details we're working to finalize now."

Both OCPR and the DNR will promote Holly Oaks ORV Park through their websites, social media and other outlets.

The park will have an entry fee that is still being determined, and DNR ORV stickers will be required. However, an OCPR vehicle permit and DNR Recreation Passport will not be required for entry.

For the latest updates follow Holly Oaks ORV Park on Facebook.



Oakland County has the highest percent of licensed ORVs in the state and residents purchase the highest percent of ORV trail permits, with no legal riding areas. Holly Oaks ORV Park will fill a much needed recreation void.



Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commissioners and staff, Michigan Department of Natural Resources staff, several Oakland County Board of Commissioners and officials from Holly and Groveland townships gathered on July 18 for a park preview.



Safety top priority for park guests

“The Parks Commission and staff must look at the needs of 13 parks and 7,000 acres to make critical decisions about the investment of taxpayer dollars,” Stencil said. “We survey to determine the greatest demands, follow current recreation trends and strive to serve the most Oakland County residents we can through our parks, programs, special events and outreach services.”

Working in the recreation business isn’t always fun and games, Executive Officer Dan Stencil mused, especially when strategic business decisions remove attractions that generations of visitors love.

Stencil, parks commissioners and parks staff found themselves in that quandary when two of the parks system’s beloved waterslides failed structural inspections. “It was the perfect storm. We were months from our opening when we received news that the 36-year-old waterslide at Groveland Oaks County Park and Campground and the 22-year-old waterslide at Waterford Oaks Waterpark both had to be torn down. It was devastating.”

Despite annual inspections and diligent maintenance, the structures were simply worn out. The wood and concrete structures supporting the waterslides had been eroded by age, water, chlorine and Michigan winters. Replacement was not viable – the cost would run in the millions for only three months of operation a year.

\$1.5 million invested to keep on trend with camper needs

Fifty-two campsites at Groveland Oaks County Park were improved with upgraded electrical and new sanitary hook-ups, providing campers the comforts of home.

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission allocated \$1.5 million to the upgrade project in sections A & B of the popular campground near Holly. The park’s existing electrical service, installed in the 1980s, could not keep up with the amenities of today’s RVs and their components, such as microwaves and washer/dryer units.

Prior to the upgrade, high demand caused electrical outages and melted electrical circuits, posing a safety hazard to staff and guests.

After reviewing plans for the electrical improvements, the parks commission decided to include the installation of sanitary hook-ups at each campsite, enhancing camper convenience.

An unusually wet spring and existing groundwater made the project a challenge and delayed the planned opening. The project was completed in September.

The upgraded sites now include water, sewer and 50 amps of electricity. In 2014, the commission approved a similar project with 60 campsites, upgraded with electrical and sanitary service, at a cost of \$1.5 million.



Camper’s like to bring the comforts of home to the campgrounds to enhance their experiences.



Correl boats have been popular with younger park patrons.

Oak wilt is a fatal vascular disease that spreads rapidly in red, and often white oak trees, starting with discoloration in the canopy and resulting in defoliation and death in as soon as eight weeks. The disease is spread through the grafting of oak roots or by beetles that can travel many miles from infected trees to wounds on healthy trees.

Since there is no cure or treatment for oak wilt, prevention is essential to slow the spread between oak trees and within forests. Oakland County Parks and Recreation Groundskeeper II Luke Murchie who is a certified arborist injects a fungicide (Propiconazole) into a healthy at-risk oak tree.



Managing ecosystems top priority for parks staff

The Oakland County Parks function as major ecological hubs within Southeast Michigan by supporting important ecosystems, protecting air and water quality and providing wildlife habitat.

OCPR's Natural Resources Management program focuses on an ecosystem approach to ensuring the health and function of 21 distinct natural communities.

A few initiatives staff undertook in 2019 included combatting oak wilt disease within park borders. A vascular disease, oak wilt is caused by the fungus, *Bretziella fagacearum*, which prevents water from moving through a tree. Once contracted, oak wilt is lethal to trees in the red oak family (red oak, black oak, pin oak, etc.) and can be recognized first in the canopy as leaves turn army-green then brown, and quickly drop.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation has lost many old majestic oaks as a result of this disease. Staff has used several methods of managing the disease in the parks, including injection of a fungicide, trenching and removals.

"OCPR takes a cautious approach to oak wilt and limits trimming and pruning to the winter months only. Oak wilt is spreading quickly across the parks system and Oakland County, so our staff is working to limit the impacts on our oak dominated natural communities," Sarah Cook-Maylen, OCPR Natural Resources Coordinator said.

Natural Resources staff regularly spread native seed across the park system and has recently expanded those efforts into new no-mow zones. At Waterford Oaks County Park, an area that was formerly mowed was tilled and seeded with a native prairie mix created by the natural resources staff. The seeded area began blooming this past summer.

"These native buffers help protect wetlands by providing stormwater runoff filtration, refuge for native wildlife and encourage pollinator populations to expand," she said.

The parks system also deals with beaver activity at two locations – Independence Oaks and Rose Oaks county parks – where water level problems can create issues for natural habitats and infrastructure.

Instead of destroying beaver dams, Natural Resources staff installed beaver baffles – long pipes – under the beaver dams that allow water to continue flowing and beavers to continue damming.

"We want to support healthy beaver populations on our lands while protecting infrastructure. Beaver baffles are a great, cost-effective way to ensure our park patrons and wildlife can co-exist," Cook-Maylen said.

And the first-ever managed Canada Goose Hunt was held at Lyon Oaks County Park in September. Ten registered youth hunters were accompanied by five guides to learn about waterfowl hunting. No geese were taken during the hunt.

Unusually high Canada Goose populations have been threatening park natural resources and creating hazardous conditions for park patrons.

The Natural Resources staff also utilizes several other goose management options including deterrence, egg and nest destruction and goose roundups.

During the weekly TrailBlazer Walking Series Recreation Supervisor Melissa Nawrocki interpreted lakeshore ecology at Addison Oaks County Park then led a one-mile hike. Other hike topics during the summer-long program at the county parks included rare habitats, vernal ponds, deer ecology and tree identification. The hiking series capitalizes on the popularity of the park system's nearly 80 miles of trails.

"My husband and I saw the Trailblazer series through email and thought it sounded intriguing. Forest and deer ecology didn't sound too exciting, but we wanted to see the park. We hadn't even reached the trails when I knew we'd made the right decision to drive the 24 miles from our home. A big part of the enjoyment was our informational guide, Morgan. She was very knowledgeable on a variety of subjects and had a delightful, bubbly personality," Heidi Tack, a Clarkston resident said. "What a great way to both get some exercise and explore the county parks, while learning about specific topics."



Trail enhancements boost connection to outdoor recreation

Trails consistently top the list of reasons why people visit the Oakland County Parks. It's easy to see why: Trails are a great way to engage with nature, boost health and fitness efforts and connect with friends and family.

O CPR maintains nearly 80 miles of paved and natural trails throughout its 13 parks. Major trail projects were completed at Addison Oaks, Independence Oaks and Red Oaks county parks.

Addison Oaks County Park has architectural elements that offer a glimpse into its history and the natural setting provides spectacular views of the landscape. Trail views were enhanced through surface improvements, better sightlines, traffic flow patterns and vegetation management.

At Independence Oaks County Park, an accessible loop was created around 68-acre Crooked Lake, providing a beautiful trail experience and lake views for users of all abilities.

The Lakeshore Loop Trail project also included replacement of an existing boardwalk to resolve high water issues caused by lake level fluctuations.

"The Lakeshore Loop trail improvements have been a great upgrade," Jamie Weasel, Parks Supervisor at Independence Oaks and Orion Oaks county parks, said. "The surface is compact and firm and recent trail trimming offers great viewing of Crooked Lake."

To improve connectivity with the Hales Street parking area, 3,000 linear feet of asphalt along the Habitat Trail loop in the northern portion of the Red Oaks Nature Center property was resurfaced.



Wayfinding signage improves mountain biking trail

The new wayfinding system at Addison Oaks and Addison Oaks – East county parks north of Rochester consists of redesigned trail intersection signs, trailhead kiosk signs, mountain bike trail markers and mileage posts for the popular Buhl Lake Trail. The signage also further details trail uses by category and difficulty using easily recognizable symbols and icons. A similar system was also installed at Independence Oaks County Park near Clarkston.

Traveling along a trail is a fantastic experience – until the rider or walker questions their location. A wayfinding project implemented at Addison Oaks County Park helps hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians and fat tire cyclists better track their progress and identify their location in case of an emergency.

The project included trail intersection signs, large kiosk signs and quarter-mile markers along Buhl Lake and the 6.9-mile single-track mountain biking trail. Signs made of alupanel, an aluminum composite material were chosen for its durability and rust-free qualities. Trail markers made of Carsonite, a composite composed from glass-fiber reinforced polymers that bend, but don't break when struck, were also part of the project.

"The wayfinding signage is easy to read with clear trail identification and trail loops. Replacing the text on the signs with standard symbols, identifying trail loops, adding trail loop distances and trail difficulty allows for an improved trail user experience," Tom Hughes, Chief Park Operations and Maintenance – South District, said.

For his efforts in creating the signage, Parks Graphic Artist Garrett Ebbeling was honored with an Environmental Graphics Award from Graphic Design USA, a national design publication.

Wayfinding signage has also been updated at Independence Oaks County Park. Projects are in the design process for Red Oaks and Catalpa Oaks county parks with plans for spring 2020 installation.



Two fair attendees learn how to milk a demonstration cow in the Miracle of Birth Barn, one of the popular attractions where fairgoers can see newborn farm animals.

Fair provides glimpse into farm life

Oakland County Parks and Recreation has been the presenting sponsor of the Oakland County Fair for more than 20 years. The Oakland County 4-H Fair Association's mission is to provide a public educational showcase for youth through hands-on experience with exhibits, demonstrations and presentations as young people develop life skills in a family atmosphere.

Hosted at Springfield Oaks County Park, this large community event requires the coordination of Oakland County Parks and Recreation staff, Oakland County Sheriff's Office, Oakland County Homeland Security, Oakland County Health Department and Oakland County 4-H Fair Association board members and volunteers. Animal exhibits, arena events, carnival rides and midway food are favorites of the 100,000+ annual attendees.

Staff takes recreation services on the road

Outside its parks' borders, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission provides recreation to 400,000 residents annually. The Recreation Assistance Partnership Program (RAPP) provides outreach programs to Oakland County's 62 cities, villages and townships, plus schools, churches and non-profit organizations. Grants include inflatable bouncers, nature education visits, a bus trip and Get Outdoors! Adventure Units. In 2019, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission committed \$215,000 to RAPP.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation's Recreation Assistance Partnership Program continues to provide critical programming to the City of Hazel Park that gives children access to recreational opportunities they may not otherwise have, according to City of Hazel Park's Director of Recreation Sareen Papakhian.

"Over the summer, Hazel Park received bouncers and retro games for fun, family-oriented events, such as a Summer Reading Picnic and a 'Night in Green Acres Park'. Additionally, a 'Come Out and Play' event was hosted in Hazel Park, by Oakland County Parks, which featured a rock wall and zip line," Papakhian said. "The Hazel Park youth summer camp program was given transportation to Independence Oaks County Park where the children were able to experience the natural world around them."

Specific groups of children are selected to participate in OCPR's Adventure Days. The program works with urban communities where children may not

have the opportunity to visit parks. Youth are transported to a park and treated to a day of outdoor recreation, experiencing adventures such as fishing, hiking, and making s'mores around a campfire.

"When you overhear a 13-year-old child ask what that smell is and you realize they have never smelled a campfire before, you know you have the right kids attending the programs," Chief of Recreation and Program Services Brandy Boyd said.

Additionally, OCPR's Adaptive Unit provides special events and programs throughout Oakland County, as many communities have limited programming for individuals with disabilities. Year-round activities include dances, hayrides, sports, picnics and boating.



The GetOutdoors! Unit teaches youth the basics on fishing — on dry land.

Inflatable bouncers are popular requests from the RAPP program and add a recreation element to community events.





Parks Historian Carol Bacak-Egbo has the rapt attention of Camp OakVentures attendees during a faux historical dig. She interprets stories of the previous landowners and has campers sift bins for items found on park properties.



The Classic Christmas program features the history of the park system's conference centers and their storied pasts.



Big imaginations and tiny hands are a perfect combination for archeology.



Time for Tea provided a history of tea and the 1884 Ellis Barn at Springfield Oaks County Park. The barn once housed the Ellis Family's prized Percheron Stallion Ingomar.

Peek into past provides programs

Oakland County Parks and Recreation acknowledges the importance of its past and incorporates history into many programs.

The National Association of Counties acknowledged these efforts by awarding OCPR a 2019 Achievement Award in the category of Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation for its integration of the Bailey Homestead archaeological project at Independence Oaks County Park into Camp OakVentures summer day camp program. Parks Historian Carol Bacak-Egbo and volunteers led campers in screening, sorting and washing contents from the homestead's farm dump located within park property.

Popular adult historical programs include a fall color tour, holiday luncheon and tea party.

The Addison Oaks Fall Color Historical Tour features a tour of the Buhl Estate at Addison Oaks County Park. In the 1920s, the estate was called Puddleview by the Buhl Family who commissioned the 27-room Tudor-style mansion built as their weekend home.

The history of Glen Oaks Golf Course is celebrated with a program called Classic Christmas. Participants enjoy an elegant buffet, seasonal music and the site's history, which includes its former use as a school.

The Time for Tea program immerses visitors in stories of the 1884 Ellis Barn at Springfield Oaks County Park. The barn's original owners, the Ellis Family, introduced the Percheron horse breed to Southeast Michigan.

“ These programs serve as a reminder and celebration of the remarkable history that accompanies the natural beauty of our parks, ” Bacak-Egbo said.

Campers and park guests enjoy expanded facilities

The Adams Lake Beach at Addison Oaks County Park was transformed into a natural shoreline a year ago. Native vegetation was planted along the water, which became more established in 2019. Sidewalks and drainage were improved at Adams Lake Lodge to eliminate flooding issues.

The new Adams Lake Boardwalk opened, providing another fishing opportunity for guests plus a way for trail users to cross over Adams Lake. The site will serve as an access point for ice skating in winter.

Visitors to Addison Oaks County Park can check out lifejackets, boats and bikes at a new boathouse. The old boathouse was removed to create an open view of Buhl Lake and improve dock access. Increased office space will allow for future merchandise sales and additional equipment rentals.



The new 800-square foot pole barn structure features a Tudor-style exterior finish to match existing buildings at the park. The previous structure was a 100-square foot trailer.



The boardwalk has also become a popular fishing destination. Anglers can fish off the dock in approximately 10 feet of water.



Creative play imagined at Addison Oaks

Visitors at Addison Oaks County Park were delighted with a new playground, installed near the Adams Lake Lodge. The new structure, created for all abilities, catches eyes of the children with its unique design and colors.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation staff worked with Miracle Recreation to create the one-of-a-kind play area for ages 5-12. In addition, the equipment works with Biba Playground Games, an application available on mobile devices, which encourages social and imaginative gameplay. The games spur on imaginary activities that include the playground equipment.

A 23-year-old playground at Addison Oaks County Park was replaced with a larger and more prominent playground for day-use visitors and campers. The playground, which meets accessibility guidelines, provides opportunities for inclusive play.

Christopher Crame, Parks Helper at Red Oaks Nature Center, cares for an Eastern Box Turtle. With his background in animal care and husbandry, Crame spearheaded the installation of the nature center's tank layout for the new animal exhibit wall.

Creating a Sense of Wonder

If you had to conjure in your minds-eye an image of your favorite childhood space, what would it be? Would it be a backyard fort, a sunny spot by a bedroom window, or maybe a dock near your grandparent's cabin? What treasures filled that space? How did you feel when you were there?

When park staff set about the task of updating the exhibits at the Red Oaks and Wint nature centers these were some of the questions we asked ourselves. We wanted our nature center spaces to appeal to visitors of all ages, and to convey a sense of wonder.

At Wint Nature Center, we introduced a look we call "Eco-chic". By reclaiming discarded materials and found objects, incorporating the weird and wonderful of 50 years of park operations, and taking inspiration from Pinterest boards, our staff created the imaginary world of The Wint School for Field Studies. In this space, young visitors walk past what looks like old storefronts to view live animal displays, interact with our Featured Creature/Career area, and even catch a stuffed fish in a simulated beaver pond.

Trail encourages walking, reading, discovery

Park staff can be wonderfully creative, especially when we know it will help create memorable experiences for our guests. Anyone who has been to one of our nature center programs can attest to the magic that can be made with a bit of ingenuity, dedicated volunteers, and (of course) Pringles cans! Staff used that same creativity and ingenuity to create the parks system's first "Storybook Trail".

With a generous Healthy Recreation Catalyst grant from MI Big Green Gym, mParks (Michigan Recreation & Park Association), Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Blue Cross Blue Shield, staff proposed to enlarge a nature-oriented children's book and mount it along a trail at the Red Oaks Nature Center. The storybook trail concept is something that has been shown to encourage kids to walk more



and to inspire whole families to integrate reading into their outdoor adventures. But what if the book that would be perfect for this location is longer than grant funds will afford to print? Well, you improvise.

Park staff repurposed native white cedar that had to be removed during the preservation of a historic farmhouse at Independence Oaks County Park. In a style reminiscent of the railings of a rustic hunting lodge, staff used the cedar branches instead of signposts to prop up the book pages.

The Great Hall, which extends past the live animal displays, is filled with nature inspired interior decorations, rotating exhibits, and large windows that look onto bird-feeding stations and wooded natural areas. The Great Hall is now available for rent and has become a popular location for small events that range from baby showers to retirement parties.

We followed a slightly different path with the Red Oaks Nature Center. Staff introduced a professionally fabricated wall that incorporates live animal displays into a life-sized image of the surrounding forest. A puppet theater that doubles as a "playhouse" was added as well as a custom indoor turtle habitat featuring an underwater viewing window. The new exhibits complement, and contrast with, the rustic log cabin feel of the nature center that is operated under a joint agreement with the City of Madison Heights. The new look helps reinforce the idea that our "urban wild" spaces contribute to the enjoyment of Oakland County – the place we call home.

Red Oaks Nature Center visitors enjoy the new Storybook Trail through Friendship Woods. The project was funded by a \$3,000 Healthy Recreation Catalyst Award from mParks (Michigan Recreation and Park Association), Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The cost savings provided by the artsy reclamation allowed staff to print the full story *How to Hide a Butterfly and Other Insects* – by Ruth Heller, and the rustic posts look like they took inspiration from insect camouflage as they blend into the surrounding forest.

Naturalist Sarah Hudson said she has received "overwhelmingly positive comments" about the trail, particularly from one patron who walks the Red Oaks trails daily. "He couldn't say enough about how wonderful he thought the trail was - how it was fresh, new, vibrant and engaging to look at - and he even deviated from his normal trails to enjoy the story," she said. "A builder himself, he was also impressed with the construction of the signposts and frames."



Investment in staff through training

In order to give all Oakland County Parks and Recreation employees the opportunity to grow in their career, the Organizational Development team oversees training plans for both individuals and organization-wide efforts to develop skills. Courses are available to full-time and part-time staff, and may be required by job assignment as directed by Park Supervisors or Chiefs. Oakland County Parks and Recreation employs 769 part-time and seasonal employees as front line staffers in all service areas.

The training provided to employees supports organizational effectiveness by developing new skills related to customer service, safety, innovation and compliance standards.

“We support individuals at various stages of their careers, whether they are new to the workforce or leaving a career for part-time work,” Business Development Representative for Organizational Development Stephanie Mackey said. “These efforts help employees grow from their current role into a future career or from former careers into part-time positions at the parks.”

Oakland County Parks and Recreation leadership understands that learning is the key factor in keeping employees interested and engaged. The development of a lifelong learner optimizes motivation and retention.

At Glen Oaks Golf Course pro shop in Farmington Hills, Golf Services Worker Bob Goulding helps a guest make a tee time to play the 18-hole course.

Parks and Recreation Program Leader Kaley Miller (upper left) plays touch football with day campers.

On surveys, park visitors consistently rate “safety” high on the list of reasons they like and visit the Oakland County Parks. The parks system contracts with the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office to provide protective services for its 13 parks and facilities. Deputy Joe Sharrak patrols Red Oaks Waterpark via bike and interacts with park patrons.



Safety rates high among park users

Since 1990, the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office Parks Unit has been the law enforcement arm of the parks system, ensuring the safety of all park patrons, providing a visible patrol force and supervising work details of prisoner trustees who help keep the parks clean. Their goal is to provide policing services to park visitors and staff.

The Parks Unit started with just three deputies, and has grown to consist of one lieutenant, one sergeant and three full-time deputies. There are also more than 50 part-time deputies who patrol the parks. Throughout the year, full-time and part-time deputies all train together to stay current on topics like firearms, CPR, first aid, legalities and more.

“It’s enjoyable to work for the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office Parks Unit because we’re in an environment where people are there to have fun and get out in nature,” Lieutenant Todd Hill said. “We keep the peace to make sure everyone has a good time and patrons are not causing problems for others.”

The Parks Unit not only patrols on foot and in cars, but is also comprised of Mountain Bike, Mounted Horse and Golf Cart patrols.

Grants help improve accessibility for all

More than \$28,000 in Americans with Disabilities Act internal mini grants were awarded to various projects within the parks system.

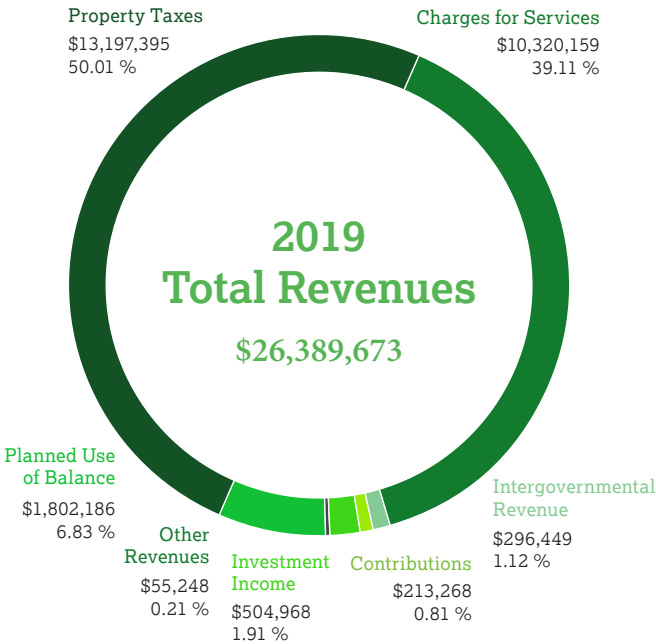
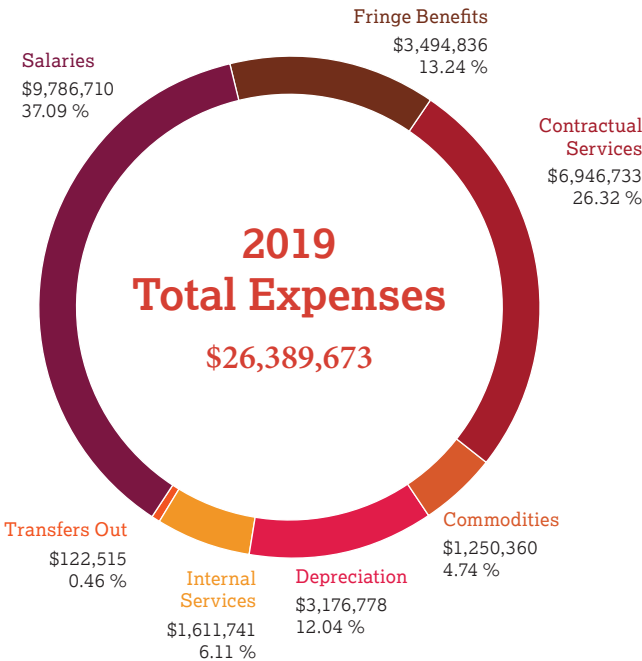
“The OCPR Accessibility Work Team’s goal is to make recreation accessible for everyone,” Recreation Program Supervisor Sandy Dorey said. “Annually, internal grant funding is set aside, and park supervisors submit ideas based on input from our guests. The new amenities boost participation and increase enjoyment of the outdoor recreation by our visitors.”

Projects approved as part of the 2019 mini grant program included:

- Accessible parking for the Cottage Island deluxe yurt at Groveland Oaks Campground
- An accessible, two-tiered water fountain/water bottle filling station at Groveland Oaks near the Blue Water Grill Concessions
- Two kayak outriggers each for Addison Oaks, Groveland Oaks and Independence Oaks county parks. These stabilize kayaks and help prevent tipping. This is not only useful for adaptive recreation activities, but first-time kayakers and youth as well. Kayak outriggers have been installed on existing kayaks in the current fleets
- A floating beach chair at Independence Oaks County Park that transitions from land to water. This, in addition to the new beach mat, creates better access to the beach and water for individuals using wheelchairs and those with mobility challenges
- Accessible parking spaces near the grill room entrance and a path between the two levels outside Bunkers Bar & Grill at Springfield Oaks Golf Course
- A hand pedal boat at Independence Oaks County Park. Already in operation at Groveland Oaks and Addison Oaks county parks, hand pedal boats are useful for people with spinal cord injuries or limited leg strength



FY 2019 Actuals





Springfield Oaks Golf Course in Davisburg is one of the four 18-hole courses operated by OCPR. And a nine-hole course in Madison Heights is great for those learning the game. Besides viewing the natural beauty of immaculately maintained courses, the benefits of golfing include social interaction, exercise, reduced stress and improved mood.

Awards & Accolades



2019 Achievement Award for its program titled “Digging into The Past: The Bailey Homestead” in the category of Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation



mParks Golden Wrench Award



mParks Community Service Award – Clarkston Area Optimist Club and Elizabeth Romano



Red Oaks Waterpark named “Best Splash in Town” in the April-September 2019 issue of Visit Detroit



Best Dog Parks in Metro Detroit. Orion Oaks #1 and Lyon Oaks #3.



Named top 7 waterparks in Metro Detroit. Red Oaks Waterpark took the #2 slot and Waterford Oaks Waterpark was voted #5.



Addison Oaks Boo Bash named #3 of Halloween Celebrations in Metro Detroit



Executive Officer Dan Stencil
American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration,
National Recreation and Park Association



Recreation Supervisor Sandy Dorey
Presidents Award,
Arc of Oakland County



Graphic Artist Garrett Ebbling
2019 Inhouse Design Awards
Environmental Graphics



Detroit Free Press named Top 10 metro Detroit Public Golf Courses for 2019. Lyon Oaks Golf Course was named #5.

Project Manager:
Desiree Stanfield

Graphic Design:
Garrett Ebbling

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Desiree Stanfield, Katie Stiefel,
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Mary Zednik

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“Some days are simply made for playing.”
Mary Ann Radmacher, Author

Untie Me
taken by Wai Nguyen
at Independence Oaks County Park.