

*Vision for the Future*

# **Strategic Plan**

**For the**

# **Wood County Park District**

**2013 Update**

**Wood County Park District**

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## **Introduction**

The Wood County Park District was established in 1934 in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 1545 and is governed by a five member Board of Park Commissioners.

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When the Park District was established in 1934, it operated at a subsistence level for most of the first fifty years. Although this level of operation may have been satisfactory for many of those years, due mainly to the rural character of Wood County, people began to realize in the 1980s that the existing parks were in jeopardy of becoming unusable, and that the possibility for change in the rural landscape was growing. Therefore, in order to save the existing parks and provide opportunities for new parks, a levy was passed by the voters of Wood County in May of 1988.

The original Park District Strategic Plan entitled *Vision for the Future* was established in 1997 in advance of a replacement park levy passed by the voters in May, 1998. This strategic plan document assisted the Park District in park planning as well as preparation for the levy and gave insight into the needs of the Park District and funding necessary to complete the assigned goals.

The present Park District levy has provided excellent opportunity for growth in the addition of park lands and passive recreational facilities for Wood County citizens. With this current 10-year park levy due to expire at the end of 2018, the Board of Park Commissioners initiated an update to the strategic plan in order to continue forward thinking and planning for the future. The future of Wood County will involve many changes related to the development of land. As a natural resource based park agency, the Park District will continue to play a role in the future land use in Wood County. In addition, the Wood County Park District continues to strive to meet the needs of the citizens by providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and facilities for their continued enjoyment.

This update to the Wood County Park District's *Vision for the Future* will again assist in planning for the future by guiding the continued growth and development of the Park District. In addition, this plan will assist in establishing adequate funding levels for the continued success of the Park District, based on needs identified by the public served.

## **Mission Statement**

A mission statement defines an organization. It is a statement of purpose for the organization, its reason for existence. The mission statement guides the actions of the organization and spells out its goals. In progressing through the strategic planning process, the mission statement was revisited and examined to determine its reflection of the Park District and if it defined the Park District as an organization. The result was a slightly revised statement that incorporates subtle changes including the fundamental

purpose of a Park District, conservation of natural resources, as defined in the Ohio Revised Code.

*Previous Mission Statement:*

The mission of the Wood County Park District is to preserve, enhance, protect, and interpret the natural and cultural resources of Wood County while providing quality passive recreational and educational opportunities for present and future Wood County Citizens.

*Revised Mission Statement:*

The mission of the Wood County Park District is to conserve, enhance and protect the natural and cultural resources of Wood County, while providing quality outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for Wood County Citizens.

## **Vision Statement**

The levy passed to support the Wood County Park District in 1988 was based on a dream. This dream was founded on the idea of greater access to quality outdoor recreational facilities for the citizens of Wood County through the rejuvenation of existing parks and opportunities for new parks by the preservation of unique natural areas. The replacement levies passed by Wood County voters in 1998 and 2008 were an affirmation of that dream and a recommitment to the mission of the Park District. Many parts of this dream are now a reality. At the same time, because the mission of the Park District is based on the conservation of natural areas, additional opportunities and challenges exist that if not addressed within the next ten years, will be lost.

Wood County has a wealth of natural, cultural, and historic resources that make it a truly unique place to live. It is in the middle of what was the Great Black Swamp with its expanses of wetlands, swamp woods, and prairies. Its rivers, the Maumee and the Portage, are naturally and historically significant in terms of local and national settlement. Its level, rich land is very desirable for agriculture as well as construction. Changes in the Wood County landscape are inevitable and are occurring at an increasing rate. The Wood County Park District must be prepared to play a role in this change.

The Wood County Park District seeks to play a leadership role in the conservation of natural areas and the provision of quality outdoor recreational facilities and opportunities for the citizens of Wood County. This leadership will stem from being able to take a proactive approach to land preservation from working with Wood County citizens, organizations, and governments to plan for the future quality of life, and from maintaining high standards for park facilities. The Park District will: (1) work to ensure an adequate financial base to support park maintenance, land acquisition, capital improvements, and all other park operations; (2) develop an active strategy to increase citizen awareness of the Park District and participation in educational and planning efforts; and (3) place greater emphasis on citizen education in terms of stewardship and the conservation of natural resources. The Park District is committed to the preservation of the Wood County's natural heritage for the benefit of future generations.

# Introduction to the Strategic Planning Process

## Description:

The Wood County Park District Strategic Planning Process was designed to include feedback and suggestions from all stakeholders, to include: Board of Park Commissioners, staff, Friends of the Parks, volunteers, elected officials, and concerned Wood County citizens. During the strategic planning process, Cavins Custom Solutions worked hand-in-hand with the Wood County Park District administrative team to coordinate data collection and facilitate the identification of future needs and key priorities that align with the mission of the Park District.

## Strategic Planning Goal:

To plan and facilitate a strategic planning process applying an “Appreciative Inquiry” format to gather valuable feedback from all stakeholders, and identify and define key priorities for the Park District moving forward.

## Strategic Planning Objectives:

After completing the strategic planning process, the Park District Administrative Team and Board Members will:

- 1) better understand the aspirations of staff and board members regarding key mission-driven operation areas;
- 2) have a clearer understanding of stakeholder interests and suggestions regarding the identified mission-driven operation areas;
- 3) have gathered feedback from staff regarding their perception of key priorities that are based on the mission statement, collected data and information identified through the strategic planning process; and
- 4) have the appropriate information with which to plan operational priorities.

## Schedule:

The strategic planning process combined team development initiatives between the Wood County Park District staff and board members, online surveys, town-hall data gathering meetings, and a staff and board member prioritization meeting. The following schedule provided a framework for data collection and planning.

January: Strategic planning team meetings – These meetings were designed to plan and schedule the strategic planning initiatives.

February: Staff/Board Strategic Planning Retreat - The purpose of this retreat was to bring the staff/board team together to both build stronger relationships and create aspiring statements about five key areas of the Park District operation: 1) Natural/Cultural Resources, 2) Education and Interpretation, 3) Human Resources, 4) Passive Recreation, and 5) Facilities.

March: Staff/Board Retreat Data Analysis and Town Hall meeting planning – During this phase of the process, Cavins Custom Solutions and the Park District administrative team utilized staff/board retreat data to design the format and goals

for the town hall meetings.

April and May: Facilitate Nine Town Hall Meetings for Data collection – The town hall meetings were designed to update attendees about the progress of the Wood County Park District and gather feedback and suggestions regarding the five identified operational functions of the Park District.

April and May: Online Survey – This online survey corresponded with the information gathered during the town hall meetings for those citizens who were unable to attend the meetings.

June: Staff and Board Data Review and Prioritization Meeting – After data was gathered and analyzed, the Park District staff assisted in creating the priorities for the organization moving forward.

July – September: Report Writing – During this phase, the Park District Strategic Planning Team reviewed all of the findings of the Strategic Planning Process and showcased the strategic priorities included in the strategic plan document.

November-December: Finalized Report and Distribution – Board members reviewed the draft strategic plan, suggested changes and modification, and approved a final version. After final approval, the report was posted and distributed throughout the county.

### **Staff/Board Strategic Planning Retreat/Aspiring Statements**

During a staff and board development retreat, both staff and board members reflected on the high points, values, and core factors that contributed to the success of the Park District. Later in the retreat, board and staff members collaborated on the development of “Aspiring Statements” for five key areas of the Wood County Park District mission.

The following statements were written and approved by the Park District Staff and Board. These aspiring statements are designed to serve as a positive vision for each of the representative areas. With each statement, the Wood County Park District aspires to:

**Facilities:** Provide facilities that include unique natural and cultural features that are the foundation of the Wood County Park District. Clean, safe, functional buildings and areas will provide opportunities for diverse recreational activities that meet public needs and provide engaging experiences.

**Passive Recreation:** Provide *passive* recreational opportunities, defined as “recreational activities that are commonly unorganized and unstructured including, but not limited to, bird watching, biking, hiking, hunting, fishing, camping etc.” that are safe and engaging to all park visitors. Each of our parks and preserves provide unique features that are relaxing, entertaining, and enjoyable.

**Natural/Cultural Resources:** Embrace a leadership role to connect the public with local natural and cultural resources through preservation, conservation and restoration. We plan to accomplish this by bringing public awareness and support to environmental issues through education, stewardship, and volunteer opportunities.

**Education and Interpretation:** Promote education and interpretation by using the knowledge, skills, and experience of our employees. Through creative thinking and high educational standards we offer exciting opportunities to connect participants with their natural and cultural surroundings.

**Human Resources:** Acquire and retain talented, dedicated, and properly trained staff members and volunteers with a positive work ethic. Our staff members are the foundation for our success and we aspire to retain these invested employees through competitive wages and training opportunities.

### **Town Hall Meetings and Online Survey Data Collection**

The aforementioned “Aspiring Statements” served as a vision for the data collection process. Participants of both town hall meetings and an online survey provided ideas and suggestions on how the Park District can achieve the five aspiring statements.

#### **Town Hall Meetings:**

The Wood County Park District organized nine town hall meetings to collect feedback from citizens on suggestions for the future of the park district. Eight town hall meetings were conducted, and one was canceled due to low participation. To promote the town hall meetings, Park District team members included information in the Park District newsletter, email list, announcements at Friends of the Parks gatherings, and press releases. A total of 52 participants took part in the town hall meetings across Wood County. Locations for the town hall meetings were designed to capture data at various locations throughout the county and included:

- 1) W.W. Knight Preserve (4-3-13 – Participants = 9)
- 2) Otsego Park (4-11-13 – Participants = 5)
- 3) North Baltimore Library (4-15-13 – Participants = 4)
- 4) Pemberville Library (5-1-13 – Participants = 7)
- 5) Wood County Park District Headquarters (5-15-13 – Participants = 5)
- 6) Lake Township Hall (5-23-13 – Participants = 5)
- 7) Bradner Preserve (5-29-13 – Participants = 5)
- 8) Wood County District Public Library (6-6-13 – Participants = 12)

#### **Online Survey:**

The online survey asked for similar suggestions on how to move the five Aspiring Statements forward. Links were posted on the Park District website and emails sent to encourage participation. A total of 54 participants started the survey and 49 of them completed the survey (90.7% completion rate).

#### Number of Ideas and Suggestions Per Data Collection Initiative

- 1) 406 ideas and suggestions were collected through the Online Survey.
- 2) 340 ideas and suggestions were collected through the Town Hall Meetings.
- 3) 80 ideas and suggestions were collected during the Park District Staff and Board Prioritization Meeting.

## **Departmental Mission Statements and Staffing Summaries**

### **Administrative Department**

*Mission Statement:* To provide an organizational culture of excellence through quality leadership and clear communication while administering the fiduciary and managerial duties of the Park District in a professional manner and fostering a team oriented atmosphere of cooperation and support.

*Present staffing:* 4 full-time

### **Naturalist Program Department**

*Mission Statement:* To support the preservation, protection, and enhancement of Wood County's natural resources through interpretation and education with hands-on, non-consumptive activities, events, and programs.

As interpreters, the naturalist program department helps to form connections between the citizens of Wood County and their surroundings, be it natural or cultural, that result in a better appreciation of and therefore stewardship of a resource.

*Present staffing:* 3 Full-time

### **Operations/Construction Department**

*Mission Statement:* To provide the public with safe, clean, quality parklands and facilities through professional and environmentally conscious work practices.

*Present Staffing:* 8 full-time; 2 part-time; 6 seasonals

### **Ranger Department**

*Mission Statement:* To protect and serve while providing community leadership by developing crime prevention partnerships.

*Present staffing:* 6 full-time

### **Stewardship Department**

*Mission Statement:* To provide the sound management of our area's natural resources on behalf of the community and the Wood County Park District.

The Stewardship Department coordinates propagation and planting for park lands. This may involve invasive species control, native seed collecting and cleaning, plant cultivation, transplanting, and maintenance. Many of the gardens in the parks and around Park District facilities have vegetation grown by the Stewardship Department in their greenhouse and planted and maintained by the department and its many dedicated volunteers.

*Present staffing:* 4 full-time; 2 seasonal

## Areas of Emphasis Prioritized Action Steps

**Introduction:** To identify priorities, data was collected, combined, and analyzed from Town Hall Meetings, Online Survey and a “Town Hall Meeting” with the WCPD Staff. After all data was collected, a prioritization meeting was conducted with both board members and the park district staff to determine the feasibility of each idea and suggestion, develop action steps and create a frame for completing each action step. The action steps are color coded to demonstrate where each item was collected and which items overlapped between participant responses and WCPD staff responses. Please note the “response key.”

Capital improvements suggested for construction in specific parks are included in Appendix A.

<b>YEAR ONE</b>
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**Facilities and Passive Recreation**

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| <p><b>Response Key</b></p> <p>1. Survey Only</p> <p>2. Town Hall Only</p> <p>3. Survey &amp; Town Halls</p> <p>4. Staff Only</p> <p>5. Staff and Other</p> |
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- 1) Implement green practices wherever possible and incorporate into any planning. (Ongoing)
  - 2) Market existing primitive camping areas to potential groups that may utilize the facilities:
  - 3) Explore the potential for camping facilities with modern amenities.
  - 4) Continue investigation of critical land acquisitions opportunities. (Ongoing)
  - 5) Improve accessibility for people with disabilities in all parks.
  - 6) Develop and provide interpretive features within the parks.
    - a. Flora and fauna identification
    - b. Educational materials and photos
    - c. Interpretive brochures
    - d. Interpretive displays
  - 7) Research and construct nature based playground opportunities. (Ongoing)
  - 8) Provide wildlife viewing opportunities.

**Education and Interpretation**

- 1) Provide public programs utilizing various Park District departments – operations, rangers, stewardship, etc.
- 2) Provide more organized bicycle rides led by naturalists, rangers etc.
- 3) More naturalist led field programs i.e., bird watching programs.
- 4) Plan and facilitate more hunting, trapping, and fishing educational programs/classes.
- 5) Provide additional and more varied night programs such as astronomy, star gazing, overnight camping, etc.
- 6) Offer additional and greater variety in adult programs such as wine and beer tasting, wine and beer making, a variety of programs for an adult audience (such as empty nesters).

- 7) Provide additional canoeing and kayaking educational programs.
- 8) Provide wilderness survival programs.
- 9) Continue to provide Park District presentations for local organizations.

### **Human Resources**

- 1) Insure that Park District staff wages are at comparable salary levels. (Ongoing)
- 2) Provide opportunities for staff cross training. (Ongoing)
- 3) Provide additional team development opportunities (Ongoing)
- 4) Provide additional opportunities for staff training. (Ongoing)
- 5) Insure that department staffing is at adequate levels. (Ongoing)
- 6) Continue marketing of volunteer program.
- 7) Continue volunteer recognition programs.
- 8) Increase partnerships with community organizations such as OSU Extension, Black Swamp Conservancy etc.
- 9) Develop staff recognition program.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources**

- 1) Provide living green programs such as alternative energy and recycling.
- 2) Provide programs on composting.
- 3) Provide programs on gardening.
- 4) Provide programs on natural landscaping.
- 5) Expand invasive species education and restoration.
- 6) Expand natural areas restoration opportunities for volunteers.
- 7) Host naturally and culturally significant special events.
- 8) Promote green living through educational programs that highlight everyday green practices.
- 9) Provide home landscaping programs.

<b>YEAR TWO</b>
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### **Facilities and Passive Recreation**

- 1) Research and construct a shooting/archery range.
- 2) Research and offer more opportunities for hunting and fishing in the parks where appropriate.
- 3) Develop and provide park information and signs.
  - a. Local and park history (early settlers, Native Americans, etc.)
  - b. Features of interest
  - c. Marketing and signage that explains the special features and passive recreation opportunities of each facility.
  - d. Increase and improve trail markings (including direction, distance, special features, etc.).
  - e. Better directions to the parks – include street addresses on all promotional materials etc.
- 4) Plan and market scavenger hunts and organized geocaching events in the parks.
- 5) Research and develop varied types of trails such as mountain bike trails, multi-use trails, bridle trails, etc.

- 6) Increase use of new and existing technology in the parks.

### **Education and Interpretation**

- 1) Provide programs that showcase special features of parks i.e., Black Swamp, Maumee River etc.
- 2) Provide programs utilizing outside guest speakers.
- 3) Provide programs on outdoor skills/survival.
- 4) Provide programs on Black Swamp history.
- 5) Provide programs on the history of Wood County. (History of sites, Native Americans, Early Settlers, etc.)
- 6) Present major park events/festivals.

### **Human Resources**

- 1) Provide more opportunities for volunteers to train after work hours, including more OCVN training opportunities.
- 2) Offer volunteer opportunities for younger kids through high school students. (Ongoing)
- 3) Develop and distribute periodic satisfaction surveys for volunteers and public. (Ongoing)
- 4) Conduct satisfaction surveys for staff. (Ongoing)
- 5) Research opportunities for internships and practicums with Universities (Ongoing)

### **Natural and Cultural Resources**

- 1) Provide information and signage of natural and cultural features in parks.

<b>YEARS 3-5</b>
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### **Facilities and Passive Recreation**

- 1) Land Acquisition: North Baltimore Quarry
- 2) Expand canoeing and kayaking offerings.
- 3) Research and construct sports and fitness facilities and equipment such as soccer, tennis, baseball, practice golf greens, swimming, fitness trails etc. at site appropriate locations.
- 4) Research options for equestrian trails and facilities then plan and construct at areas identified.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources**

- 1) More cultural and historical programming on site specific history, Native Americans, pioneer living, early settlers, reenactments, mushroom hunting, etc.
- 2) Research opportunities for public forums on local, national, and international environmental issues and concerns.

<b>ONGOING; 6 YEARS AND BEYOND</b>
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### **Facilities and Passive Recreation**

- 1) Research, plan and construct more camping areas.
- 2) Research options for construction of a large rental facility in southern Wood County.
- 3) Work with concerned citizens to research a dog park in northern Wood County (Perrysburg area).
- 4) Plan and restore parks into specialty parks – Black Swamp Theme/Restoration, Butterfly, Humming Birds, Sensory Garden, etc.
- 5) Land Acquisition: Focus on southern Wood County.
- 6) Land Acquisition: Focus on Beaver Creek Corridor.