



**Great
Parks**

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

CONNECT | PROTECT | EXPLORE

*DESTINATIONS BEYOND DISTRACTION,
AND WITHIN YOUR REACH.*



CONTENTS

A Message from the CEO.....2

Social Media Highlights3

Big Lands, Bigger Impact.....5

Connecting the Region to
the Natural World7

Your Levy Legacy..... 15

Looking Ahead to 2025 & Beyond 20

Community Impact23

Park Passport25

Protecting Parks & People.....28

Volunteer Impact29

Awards & Recognitions33

Planting the Seeds of Change35

Stewarding Public Funds37



Board of Park Commissioners

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



2024 Board of Park Commissioners
(Left to Right)

Marcus Thompson,
Scott Schuster,
Melissa Wegman,
Caren Laverty,
William J. Burwinkel



Judge of Probate Court,
the Honorable
Judge Ralph E.
Winkler

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



In 2021, Hamilton County residents approved a 0.95 mil levy, which enabled Great Parks to make significant strides in achieving the public’s vision for the future of our parks. The levy helps fund key projects like the Sharon Woods Playground, Woodland Mound Fitness Equipment, Miami Whitewater Forest 240-acre land acquisition, and the Music Garden at Glenwood Gardens.

In coordination with the 2021 levy, Great Parks also launched the 10-year Go Big! Capital Campaign, with an ambitious \$50 million goal to help reduce reliance on tax dollars and to privately fund major capital projects. We are proud to share that less than halfway into our Go Big! Capital Campaign, we have achieved over 40% of the goal. We have also prioritized seeking outside public funding, through state and federal grants, allowing us to secure more than \$56 million in alternative funding. This support is essential in advancing \$100 million in critical infrastructure and \$124 million in park improvements identified during our master planning process.

Looking ahead to 2025, we’re excited to continue delivering on our promises. Current projects underway include the Glenwood Gardens to Winton Woods Shared-Use Trail, Bass Island River Access, Shaker Trace Nursery improvements, and the West Region Blueway and Trail System, plus so much more that will contribute to making our region a premier outdoor destination for all to enjoy. One of the most significant projects in Great Parks’ history, the Sharon Lake Improvement Project, will be completed in late 2025 with a full opening in Spring 2026.

Thank you for your partnership in advancing our region as a better place to live, learn, work, and play.

Be wild, be well.

Todd




SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS


By leveraging platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn, Great Parks increases visibility, develops relationships with the community, and builds brand awareness to a vast audience. Being active and engaged on social media allows for real-time interaction, enabling Great Parks to highlight new projects and programs, engage with guests, and showcase its values and culture. Social media is a cost-effective, dynamic tool for building brand loyalty and driving growth.

THANK YOU TO GREAT PARKS' SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT.


2024 BY THE NUMBERS



77,209
Total Followers
in 2024



16.1%
Follower
Increase




Facebook:
40,552
Followers



Instagram:
29,228
Followers

18,422,021
Impressions
(how many times
a post is displayed
on a screen)



8.5%
Impressions
Increase*

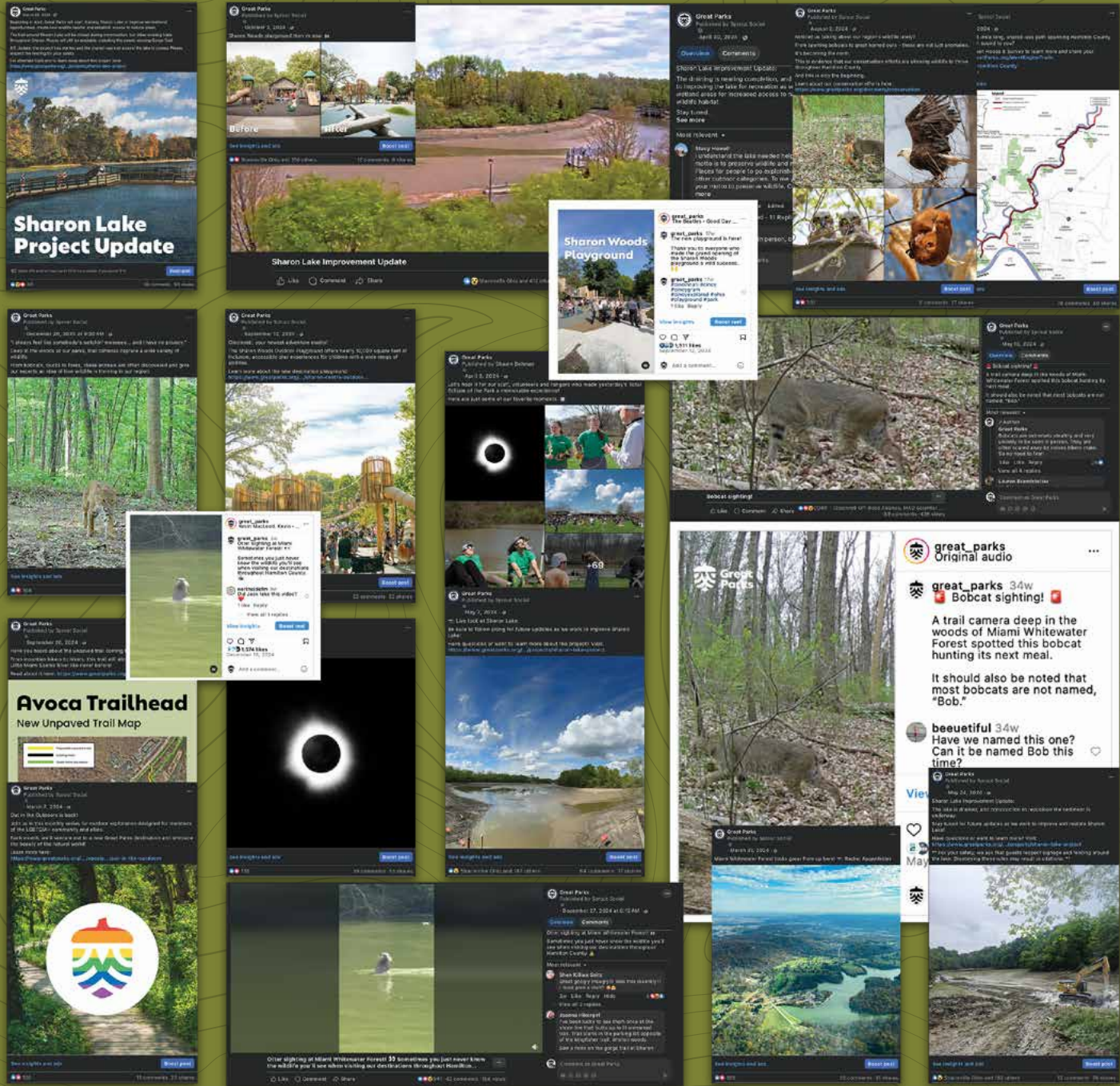


3.2%
Impressions
Increase*



44.5%
Followers
Increase*

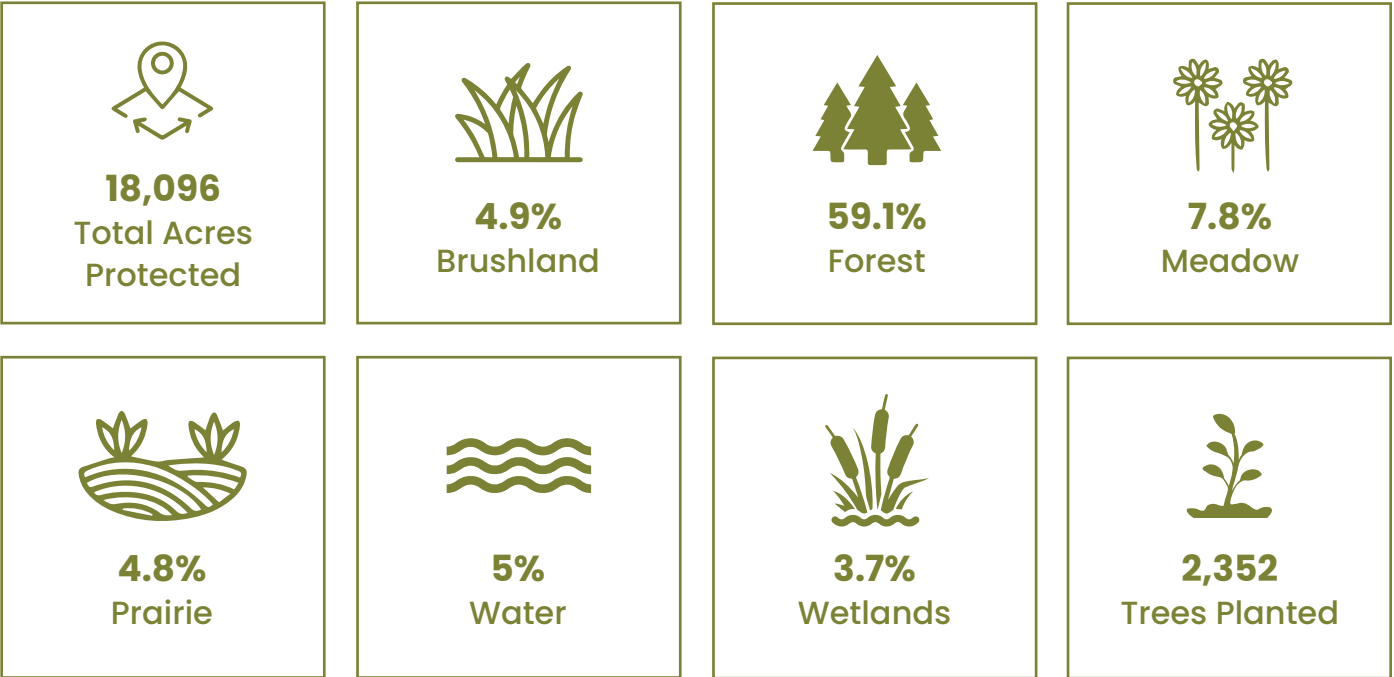
*Over 2023



BIG LANDS, BIGGER IMPACT

Conservation is core to Great Parks’ mission. It ensures the long-term health and sustainability of natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity within Hamilton County. Great Parks’ dedicated team of natural resource management professionals ensures native plants, animals, and habitats are protected for generations to come. Preserving natural areas allows for continued recreational and environmental education opportunities and promotes mental and physical well-being for guests.

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



In 2024, Great Parks published its first-ever **Sustainability Strategic Plan**, which outlines key steps Great Parks is committed to making to improve the environmental sustainability of its operations. Goals include energy and water reductions and reducing impacts from Great Parks’ fleet of vehicles by 2030.

286,935 lbs of waste diverted from landfills, equivalent to **3.5 tractor trailers**.

fun fact

Great Parks staff spotted otters in Miami Whitewater Forest after seeing signs of the animals in previous years!





7.17 Million
Total Park
Visits



*CONNECTING THE REGION TO
THE NATURAL WORLD*



84
Trail Miles



25
River Frontage
Miles



1,076,433
Total Trail Usage



115,004
Program & Event
Participants



264,376
Rounds of Golf



1,664
Bike Rentals



13,324
Boat Rentals



21,841
Campsite
Reservations





WINTON WOODS

Outdoor Adventure Expo Expansion

Great Parks expanded this popular event to two days to provide more opportunities for guests to find their wild. While preserving the Kids Outdoor Adventure Expo mission to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to underserved children, the Outdoor Adventure Expo added 5k and 10k competitive races and offered more opportunities for adults and families to enjoy climbing, rafting, fishing, vendors, food, and more!



NEW IN
2024

MIAMI WHITEWATER FOREST

Pollinator Festival

Great Parks hosted the inaugural Pollinator Festival and 5k Race, a special event focused on celebrating all the great things pollinators, like bees, butterflies, bats, and birds, allow us to do. The event included local vendors with pollinator-themed items, a 5k race, and special Great Parks Pollinator Festival merchandise to celebrate its inaugural year.





14,010
Total Guests

MIAMI WHITEWATER FOREST

Total Eclipse of the Park

Great Parks offered special viewing sites for the 2024 total solar eclipse, including a full viewing celebration at Miami Whitewater Forest, the only Great Parks location in the path of totality. Satellite locations were also set up at Sharon Woods and Winton Woods where guests could experience near-totality. The celebration included education stations, a partnership with NASA to learn about how animals act during an eclipse, food trucks, and special Total Eclipse of the Park merchandise.

As guests left the eclipse celebration, Great Parks collected and recycled special viewing glasses. The glasses were donated to the Cincinnati Recycling & Reuse Hub, which shipped them to South America for the 2025 eclipse.





MIAMI WHITEWATER FOREST

Spark in the Dark

Great Parks’ largest destination transformed into a nocturnal showcase with colorful glow boats, campfires, nighttime adventures in nature, and hours of fun during the all-new Spark in the Dark series at Miami Whitewater Forest.



LAKE ISABELLA

Burgers & Brews

Burgers & Brews at Lake Isabella saw its largest attendance in 2024 with the support

of a new strategic partnership with Loveland Paddlesports, which offered guests an enhanced and unique experience. Throughout the summer, guests could park at Lake Isabella, get a shuttle to Loveland Paddlesports, paddle approximately 2 miles on the Little Miami Scenic River, and finish the evening enjoying fresh burgers, beers, and live music on the dock at Lake Isabella. The unique partnership helped Burgers & Brews reach record-breaking attendance and showcased the incredible communities around Lake Isabella.



GREAT PARKS

2024 Day Camps

Great Parks hosted 50 camp sessions in spring and summer focused on adventure, farming, nature, and horseback riding. Nearly every day camp sold out with a 21% increase in campers over 2023.



SHAWNEE LOOKOUT

1800s Harvest Jamboree

The 1800s Harvest Jamboree, an annual celebration designed to educate guests on how locals lived over 200 years ago, saw its largest gathering of guests at Shawnee Lookout in 2024.



SHARON WOODS

Honoring Our Veterans

Great Parks hosted its first annual Veterans Day event for staff and volunteers who served in the U.S. armed forces. Service men, women, and their guests gathered at Sharon Woods to enjoy breakfast, camaraderie and to plant a tree.





In 2016 and 2021, Hamilton County residents voted to approve 10-year levies. The levies support part of a multi-year vision and master plan to address the needs of Hamilton County residents, including preserving greenspaces, protecting natural resources, resolving critical infrastructure issues, and improving parks and facilities.

***THE COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN WAS
GUIDED BY COMMUNITY INPUT TO SET
THE VISION FOR PARKS, FACILITIES,
PROGRAMMING, AND SERVICES
THROUGH 2028.***



Multi-Use Trail and Fishing Pier
(rendering)



Sharon Lake Wetland Installation

SHARON WOODS

Sharon Lake Improvement Project

Great Parks began the \$13.6 million renewal of Sharon Lake, one of its largest projects, aimed at enhancing recreation, wildlife habitat, and natural access. Beginning in April, the 35-acre lake was drained to optimize depth, create new wetlands, and add rock weirs, a boardwalk, a fishing pier, and an accessible kayak launch. The project addresses public priorities from the Comprehensive Master Plan, such as improving ecological resilience and expanding access, and is expected to be completed in late 2025 with a full opening in spring 2026.

COLUMBIA CONNECTOR TRAIL

Culvert Repair

Great Parks maintains critical infrastructure around Hamilton County to provide safe access for guests to parks, trails, and more. In 2024, one of the many critical infrastructure projects completed was the Columbia Connector Culvert Repair project to provide improved access to the Columbia Connector Trail above it. The project entailed replacing aging infrastructure with new materials to improve the critical stormwater drainage system.





SHARON WOODS

Sharon Woods Destination Playground

Great Parks opened a \$3 million, 10,000-square-foot destination playground at Sharon Woods in September. The nature-inspired playground includes bird nest play structures, a crayfish climber, dragonfly wobble boards, and features reflecting the park's wildlife and nearby creek. Designed with input from the public, it is accessible to children of all abilities. More than 500 guests attended the grand opening, featuring free snow cones, games, animal encounters, and lots of smiling faces.





LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025 & BEYOND



Shaker Trace Nursery

The revitalization of Shaker Trace Nursery in Miami

Whitewater Forest will increase the nursery's capacity to produce native seed for restoration projects while also expanding its ability to educate the public about native plants, ecology, and restoration. The project is expected to be completed in late 2025.



Glenwood Gardens to Winton Woods Trail

In 2025, Great Parks is working to progress the 3.6-mile Glenwood Gardens to Winton Woods shared-use trail, making it easier for commuters and recreators to travel between the two destinations and extending the existing West Fork Mill Creek Greenway Trail to 9 miles of continuous trail.



Mitchell Memorial Forest Skills Loop & Skills Course

The Mitchell Memorial Forest Skills Loop & Skills Course will provide opportunities for beginner and novice mountain bikers to practice balance on the track while testing out new skills additions along the trail. The new amenities will open in late 2025.



Avoca Trailhead Improvements

Great Parks looks forward to fully opening the new 1.5-mile mountain bike trail at Avoca Trailhead, which includes formalizing the natural surface trail with views of the Little Miami River and improving access for adaptive mountain biking. This will be the first in a braided network of mountain bike trails planned along the river and the Little Miami Scenic Trail.



To stay up to date on the progress of all our projects, visit GreatParks.org/projects

WHERE THERE IS WILD -
ALL IS WELL.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Great Parks engages with the local community through key partnerships and event participation to increase awareness about resources available to the public throughout the over 18,000 acres of the park district.

WINTON WOODS FARM & EQUESTRIAN CENTER

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful

In its third year, Great Parks' annual holiday celebration, Holidays on the Farm, partnered with Keep Cincinnati Beautiful to display inCANdescent. Built from hundreds of reused paint cans, inCANdescent was designed by artists with Keep Cincinnati Beautiful for the 2024 Blink celebration. The installation is a fitting symbol of Great Parks' and Keep Cincinnati Beautiful's shared focus on improving the quality of life for all who live and work in the region.



HIGHGRAIN BREWING BRENTWOOD

Great Parks + HighGrain Mural

Great Parks and HighGrain Brewing share a vision as community gathering spaces and environmental stewards working to create a sustainable future for Hamilton County and the greater Cincinnati region. Launched in November, the Great Parks Mural at HighGrain Brentwood showcases the vibrant plant and animal life found throughout Great Parks' 22 destinations. An interactive, digital mural was launched simultaneously and is found on GreatParks.org. The mural celebrates our shared commitment to *Protect* natural spaces, *Connect* with our community, and *Explore* the great outdoors.



Park Passport

To inspire guests to explore all of its offerings, Great Parks introduced the Park Passport, highlighting popular parks throughout Hamilton County with skills challenges, trail maps, journaling pages, and more. The Passports are available at visitor centers at no cost and on GreatParks.org.

5,000+

Park Passports were distributed across the region in 2024.



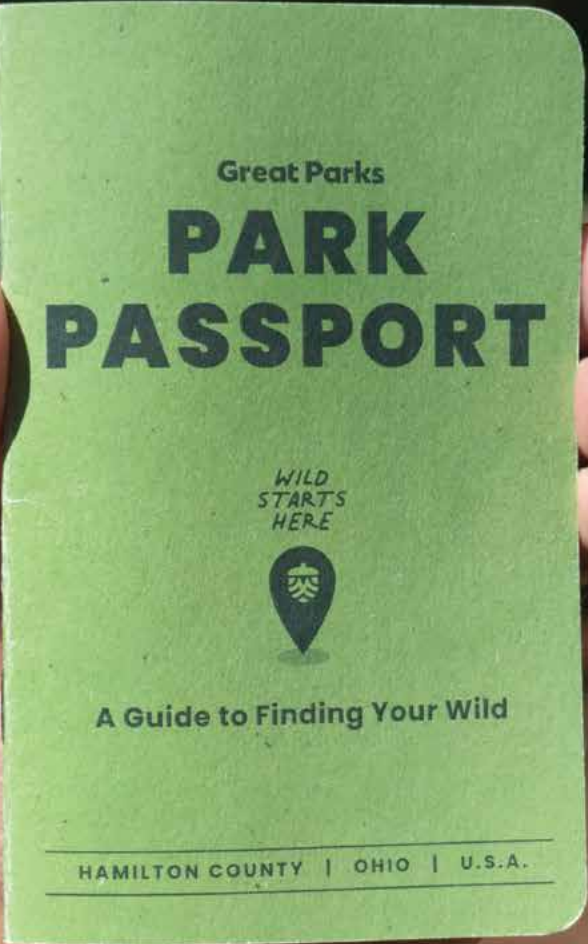
▶ Park Passport Pop-Up at REI at Rookwood Commons.



Julie, Kathleen, and Shelby the border collie were the first guests to complete their Park Passport and did so in just over one month!

“We loved seeing what unites the Great Parks and what makes each unique. Even though we’ve lived in Hamilton County for most of our lives, the Great Parks Passport encouraged us to explore new nature preserves and parks. The more time you spend outside, the more you see.”

– Guests Kathleen Maciag & Julie Gerdes





RANGERS

PROTECTING PARKS & PEOPLE

The Great Parks Rangers are state-certified law enforcement officers who exercise full police powers and work for the protection of guests, the conservation of parks and wildlife, and the enforcement of state laws and park by-laws. The Rangers patrol all 22 destinations and over 18,000 acres of land by cruiser, UTV, boat, bike, and on foot 24 hours a day, year-round. Their in-depth knowledge of the parks and surrounding communities allows them to provide a safer and more welcoming experience for all guests. In 2024, the Rangers participated in 25 community events and hosted four special events for Hamilton County residents.



VOLUNTEER IMPACT

Volunteers are essential to Great Parks’ success in education, conservation, community events, and more. In 2024, 1,655 volunteers dedicated 27,852 hours to projects that advance Great Parks’ mission. Great Parks also recognized four volunteers with 45 years of service: Dot Topper, Steve Wagner, Randy Bales, and Jim Meiser, with a combined 9,545 lifetime service hours.

2024 BY THE NUMBERS



67

Bags of Recycling Collected



1,778

Trees Planted



214

Shrubs Planted



1,575

Annuals Planted



482

Bags of Garbage Collected



8

Community Volunteer Days



544 Feet of Natural Surface Trail Improved

92,613 Feet of Trail Monitored Through Adopt-A-Trail Program



If you or your company would like to get involved, visit GreatParks.org/get-involved/volunteer



27,852

Total Volunteer Hours

1,152%

Increase in Hours Working with School Groups over 2023

1,655

Total Volunteers



Green Team Expands

In 2024, Great Parks hosted two Green Teams, a program that cultivates high school students for employment readiness within the green industry. Each team participated in the eight-week program and contributed to the improvement and maintenance of trails, parks, and community spaces across Great Parks while learning about the different career opportunities.

Green Team contributed to **1,277 feet** of trail maintenance.



WINTON WOODS

Protect Your Wild

In the event’s second year, Great Parks continued to celebrate Earth Day with the community through environmentally friendly vendors, fun entertainment, and education. This enriching community event is coupled with Great Parks’ largest volunteer event of the year, during which 149 volunteers collected 152 bags of trash and 22 bags of recycling around Winton Lake.



NATURE CENTER AT THE SUMMIT

MLK Day Community Cleanup

In partnership with the Roselawn Community Council, Great Parks hosted the second annual MLK Day Community Cleanup. The event engaged 85 volunteers who collected 62 bags of trash around Roselawn, then returned to the Nature Center at The Summit to connect with each other and honor Martin Luther King Jr.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

In 2024, Great Parks received more than 16 awards and recognitions from local, state, and federal industry and governmental organizations.



♦ **Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting**

♦ **GFOA Award of Financial Reporting Achievement**

♦ **GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award**

♦ **Ohio Auditor of State Award with Distinction**
Given to less than 4% of total audited entities in Ohio.



♦ **Greater Cincinnati Family Choice Awards presented by Cincy Magazine**
Sharon Woods: Favorite Hiking Spot



♦ **NACPRO Social Justice** ▶
Nature Center at The Summit

♦ **NACPRO Professional Lifetime Achievement**
Retired Chief of Planning, Tim Zelek



♦ **PRSA Cincinnati Blacksmith Award**
for Integrated Communications for the Sharon Lake Improvement Project.



◀ ♦ **PRSA Cincinnati Award of Excellence** for Marketing for Wild Starts Here.



♦ **Cincinnati PGA Hall of Fame**
Sam Arnold, Golf General Manager, was recognized for his significant contribution to the game of golf through service, playing ability, and contributions to The Vineyard Golf Course and fellow professionals.



♦ **Top 50 Stand Alone Golf Ranges in America by the Golf Range Association of America**
Meadow Links & Golf Academy

♦ **Cincinnati's Best Community's Choice Awards — Best Golf Course**
Sharon Woods Golf Course



♦ **Certificate of Special Recognition**
Presented by State of Ohio House of Representatives for the Sharon Woods Playground.

♦ **Adopt A Class 2024 Overall Best Partner Award** for work with Cincinnati Public Schools 3rd Graders.

♦ **2024 Don Conaway Partnering Award** for the Embshoff Woods Paving Project.

♦ **Matthew 25 Ministries 2024 Green Giving Partner** for work to repurpose uniforms.



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

As the philanthropic partner for Great Parks, Great Parks Forever stewards natural and financial resources for all, forever. In 2022, Great Parks Forever launched the Go Big! Capital Campaign to raise \$50 million to leverage public funds. In 2024, Great Parks Forever raised more than \$1 million in private donations and more than \$13 million in committed grants to support the numerous projects and programs that foster a deeper connection between the community and the natural world.



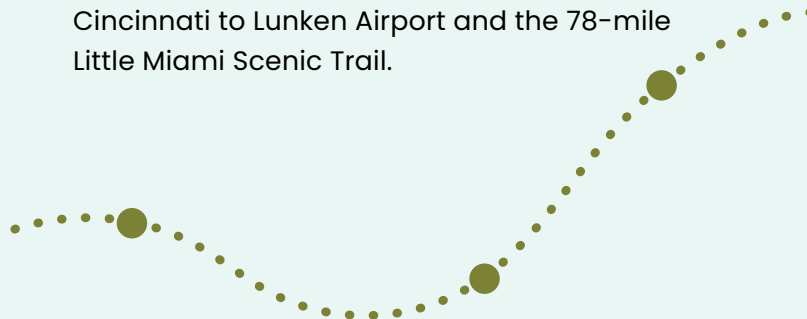
▲ Guests at the 2024 Root Ball.

Learn how
you can invest
in Great Parks.



Record-Breaking
OKI Grant

Great Parks was awarded \$8 million from the OKI Regional Council of Governments for phase one construction of the Oasis Trail – the largest grant in Great Parks’ history. This crucial trail expansion will be a 4.75-mile paved, shared-use trail for cyclists, runners, and walkers that safely connects downtown Cincinnati to Lunken Airport and the 78-mile Little Miami Scenic Trail.



Farmer Family
Foundation
Match

Through June 30, 2025, the Farmer Family Foundation is matching every gift, up to \$2 million to the Go Big! Capital Campaign. By the end of 2024, Great Parks reached more than 40% of this goal! This generous gift encourages community involvement and support for the ambitious goals outlined in our Comprehensive Master Plan.

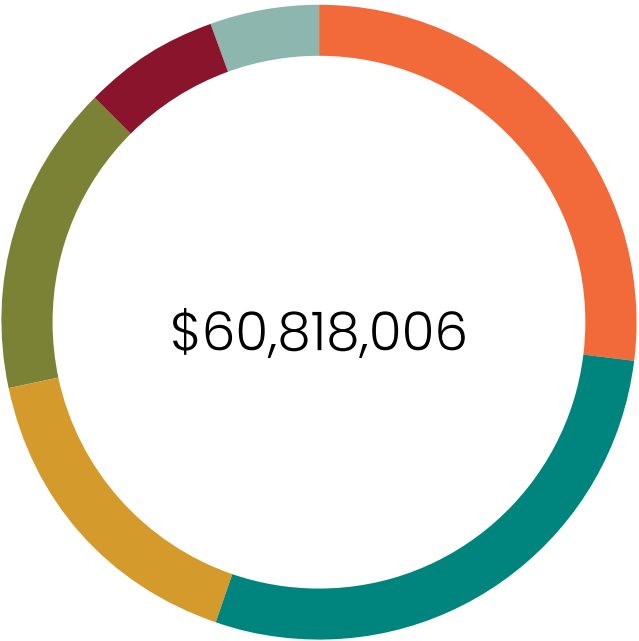
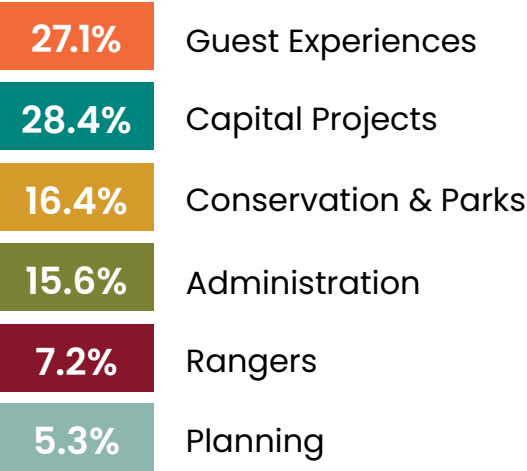


FUND
your wild.

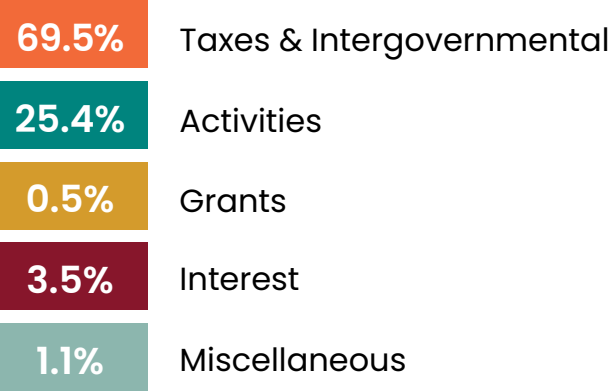
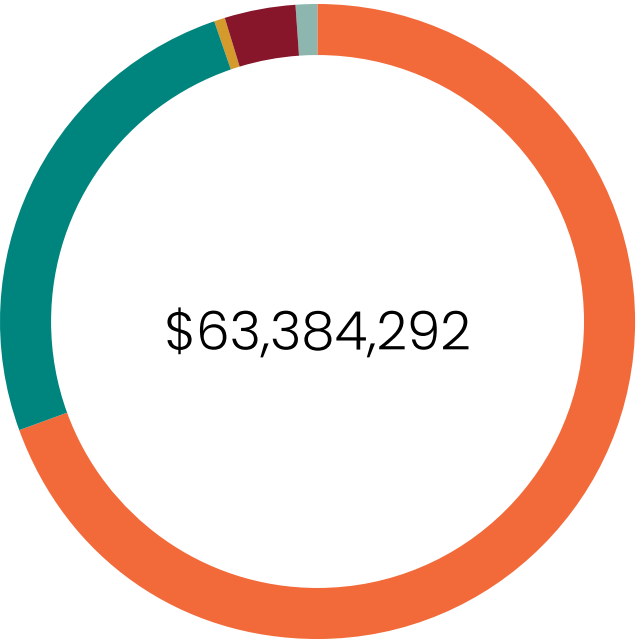
FINANCIALS

STEWARDING PUBLIC FUNDS

Thank you to the voters of Hamilton County, who in November 2016, passed a 10-year 1.0 mill replacement levy, and in November 2021, passed a 10-year 0.95 mill levy to support critical infrastructure needs and park and facility master plan projects. These funds allow Great Parks to maintain existing facilities and amenities, provide ongoing recreation and wellness opportunities, preserve and protect over 18,000 acres, and build and maintain trails across the region. Additional funding leveraged by earned revenue activities, programming, and events, along with state and federal grants and donor-generated private funding from Great Parks Forever, helps support the priorities of the 10-year Comprehensive Master Plan.

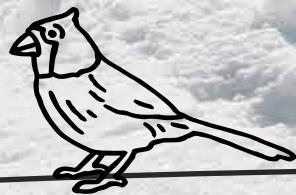


EXPENSES



REVENUE

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



Great Parks of Hamilton County

10245 Winton Road

Cincinnati, OH 45231

513-521-7275 | GreatParks.org

2024 Board of Park

Commissioners

William Burwinkel, Caren Laverty,
Scott Schuster, Marcus Thompson,
Melissa Wegman

Chief Executive Officer

Todd Palmeter



If anyone believes they have been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, ancestry, physical or mental disability, you may file a complaint alleging discrimination with the Office of Equal Opportunity, Dept. of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.