

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

**LaGrange
County
Parks** 
and recreation

Cover Photo: Duff Lake at Mike Metz Fen/Pine Knob Park

"To develop and maintain a system of parks that preserves open space and natural areas, and offers outdoor recreation opportunities to the public."

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0505 W. 700 S.

Wolcottville, IN 46795

260-854-2225

parks@lagrangecounty.org

www.lagrangecountyparks.org

ABOUT US

Parks & Places

Cedar Lake Beach
Cedar Lake Fen
Dallas Lake Park
David Rogers Park
Delt Church Park
Duff Memorial Park
Maple Wood / LaGrange Nature Preserve
Pine Knob & Mike Metz Fen
Shipshewana Lake Park
Wall Lake Beach

Park Staff

Mary Franke, Director
George DeWald, Superintendent
Leslie Arnold, Interpretive Naturalist
Chris Sluyter, Maintenance Technician
Eric Jordan, Maintenance Technician
Emily Wolfe, Administrative Assistant/Communication Specialist
Randy Merrifield, Park Ranger
Doug Leslie, Part Time Park Ranger
Seasonal/Temporary Staff - 6 Summer and 1 Fall/Winter

Park Board

John Egli, President
Eric Maginn, Vice President
Ardala Hepler, Secretary
Paul Yoder, Member
Julia Wolhuter, Member
Paul Baker, Member

County Council

Charles Ashcraft
Ryan Riegsecker
Harold Gingerich
Jim Young
Jeff Brill
Steve McKowan
Mike Strawser

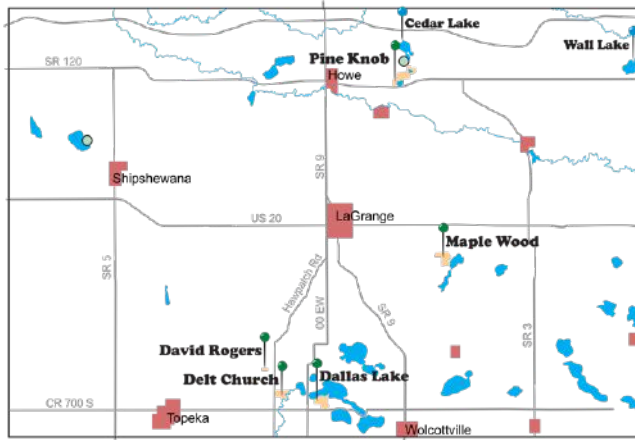
Commissioners

Terry Martin Peter Cook Kevin Myers

We are honored to share our year with you. We are grateful for the continued support and cooperation from our county leadership, area partnerships, and our incredible local communities. Our combined efforts have given us, and offered those who visit, a park system that is truly enjoyed. Thank you.

Mary Franke, Park Director
LaGrange County Department of Parks & Recreation

NUMBERS TO SHARE



712

The number of acres the Park Department manages. This includes nearly 400 acres of natural areas, 27 buildings, 3 playgrounds, 3 public beaches, and over 10 miles of trails and boardwalks.

400 +



Subscribers to our
Quarterly
Newsletter



Thirteen Lines

144,550

At least this many people that have viewed our park pages online through Google.

2700

The estimated attendance for Maple Syrup Days 2022.

7245

At least this many people attended organized park events and programs this year.

825

Bottles of maple syrup sold:
411 pints and 414 quarts

214

The number of facility reservations. Delt South River Pavilion led with 74 reservations. The Pine Knob Clubhouse was second with 64 reservations.

2427

Maple syrup suckers made and sold at Maple Syrup Days

12,300

The number of trail feet built/renewed this year.

800 feet of new boardwalk was built.

4000 feet of new limestone trails were laid.

7500 feet of limestone trails were top-coated.

700

Number of maple cotton candy bags made and sold at Maple Syrup Days

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Maple Syrup Days was back in full force for 2022!

The Parks Dept. offered school tours and family/group tours by reservation. Maple syrup tours broke an attendance record -- 1067 students!

The Friends of LaGrange County Parks hosted the annual Sap Run/Syrup Stroll for 32 participants.

The Friends assisted in all areas. The Stroh Lions prepared the pancake and sausage breakfast.

LaGrange County Tri-Kappa made maple cotton candy for the 2 day event.

The Dekalb County Horsemen's Association shared horse-drawn wagon rides through the sugar bush and Roz Puppets provided puppet show entertainment.

Volunteers and interpreters assisted in all areas.

All was a considered success. 2700+ people attended the event. Maple syrup was sold out!

- Trees tapped: 540
- 950 gallons of sap harvested in first collection
- First boil started on February 22, 2022



2022 MAPLE SYRUP DAYS
March 19 & 20
8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Maple Wood Nature Center
4550 E. 100 S. LaGrange, IN

Pancake Breakfast \$ Served 7am - 1:30 pm South Milford Lions Club	Sugar Shack Tours (free) Tours all day 8 am - 2 pm
Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides (free) Tours all day 8 am - 2 pm Dekalb County Horsemen's Association <small>Sponsored by HEMC / Operation Roundup Grant Fund</small>	Gift Shop \$ Open all day 8 am - 2 pm
Roz Puppets (free) Shows all day 8 am - 2 pm <small>Sponsored by LCCF / LIFE Grant Fund</small>	LaGrange County Parks and recreation

ENTRY & PARKING IS FREE
For more information:
260-854-2225
lagrangecountyparks.org
www.facebook.com/lagrangecountyparks

LaGrange County Connecting Youth was a new event.

This event was in cooperation with LCYC (LaGrange County Youth Center). The Friends and LaGrange Tri-Kappa assisted the Park Dept. Staff. Many area businesses and law enforcement agencies were present to share a positive experience with our local youth. Door prizes and food were available to create a full family event.

This event was considered a success with 271 in attendance and will be planned again for June 2023.

We gave away 125 backpacks and 80 disc golf starter kits. We were also fortunate to have enough door prizes for everyone present with a raffle ticket.



"LaGrange County Connecting with Youth" LCYC

For all youth in 6th grade and up
Forging positive relations between our youth and local law enforcement / community.

ATTENDING
LaGrange Sheriff & Police Depts.
Prosecutor and Probation Officers.
Dunk Tank, Golf Archery, K-9 Demo's, Water Spray, Bird/Nature Hikes, and more!

FOOD
Chicken, Beans, Chips, Dessert, Maple Cotton Candy, Ben's Pretzels

DOORPRIZES
Kayak, Disc Golf Discs, Gift Cards and more!

Saturday - August 6, 2022
10 am to 2 pm
At Delt Church Park 6455 S. 200 W. Wolcottville

Everything is FREE

Donations accepted
Call LCYC to help!
260-463-0334

HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR

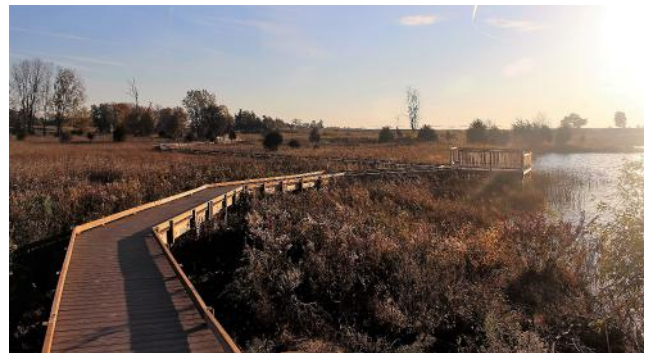
Mike Metz Fen Trail Project at Pine Knob

The new two mile trail loop installation began in 2021 and was completed in December of 2022.

In 2021, the Park staff completed 2800' of boardwalk, including a bridge and fishing platform; and 3500' of limestone trail was laid.

In 2022, the trail was completed with the installation of 800' of boardwalk and 4000' of new limestone trails plus 7500' of topcoat layer of limestone trails. In December, the transition plates were installed to finalize the trail. The Mike Metz Fen Trail was opened to the public on December 19, 2022.

The remaining items (signage, shelter, and vault toilet) will be completed by Fall 2023.



We were fortunate to have an amazing summer crew return this summer. Caden Hostetler had the honor of installing the last boardwalk deck board on July 28, 2022.

Photos include:

Above: Boardwalk with Fishing Dock & Bridge in distance.

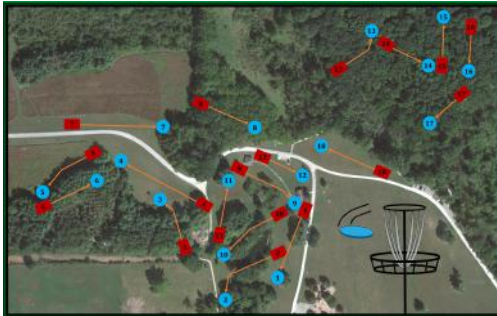
Below: Boardwalk view photo courtesy Daniel Swihart/KPC.



NEW & IMPROVED

Disc Golf Course Improvements

The 18-hole disc golf course at Delt Church Park was installed 13 years ago and in need of improvements as the sport has continued to grow. In 2022, the course layout was revised and new tee pads and tee signs were installed. The second phase will continue in 2023 with the completion of a rest station which includes a course map sign, shade sail, water source, and picnic tables.



Delt Playground Equipment

A few pieces of playground equipment were replaced in 2022. A couple of slide portions, a tipi carousel, and a spica. It is an ongoing effort to maintain safe playground equipment.



Park Equipment - Skidsteer

The Park Department received its first skidsteer in June, and we don't know how we managed without one! The skidsteer has made many tasks, especially trail work, so much easier and more efficient. This equipment addition will save the department time and manpower for years to come.



EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Summer Day Camp

By Gone Days and Nature Bound -- 4 weeks of summer day camp was full again this year. 102 children attended one or more weeks of camp. Games, hiking, exploring, playing, swimming, and learning filled the days.



Swim Lessons

Swim lessons were offered this year. We were able to offer four 2-week sessions. Spots quickly filled to full capacity of 20 students.

We had a small, but effective staff: a lifeguard certified swim instructor and a swim instructor assistant.



Artifact ID

Dallas Lake Park Lodge
September 3 with 26 attending.

Summer Children's Programs

Naturalist Leslie Arnold shared 3 different opportunities for children to learn about fun topics on the office lawn at Dallas Lake Park or Delt Church Park. A total of 57 children attended.

Make-n-Take Crafts

Park Naturalist Leslie Arnold offers opportunities for seasonal make-n-take crafts on the Second Saturday of each month. This is held at Maple Wood Nature Center and is a free, fun, family activity. Examples of activities offered in 2022: pinecone birdfeeders, magic reindeer food, trail art, s'mores, butter in a jar, ice cream in a bag, scavenger hunt, fairy walk, and many others.



Not So Spooky returned for 2022!

The Parks Dept staff and The Friends of LaGrange Parks put on another successful free family event. Attendance was at 185, a nearly 50% increase from last year! Children absolutely enjoyed the evening of face painting, horse-drawn wagon rides through the "not so spooky" woods, roasting marshmallows, drinking maple steamers, with games and crafts stations scattered indoors and out.



NATURALIST REPORT

Maple Wood Nature Center Attendance

In Building: This total represents every patron who entered the Nature Center for a purpose other than a program, as well as groups who used the building for private occasions. For 2022, this number reflects a nearly 68% increase from 2021.

Programs: This is the total number of people who attended public programs offered by the Naturalist at Maple Wood. It also includes school field trips to Maple Wood. For March, it does not include the attendance to Maple Syrup Days. We had a nearly 10% increase in program attendance over 2021.

Days Open: Wednesdays 8 am - 4 pm
Second Saturdays 9am-5pm
Also open by special appointment and for special events and programs.

	People in Building	Program Attendance	Number of Programs	Days Open
January	41	33	7	8
February	82	59	7	8
March	105	1123	20	7
April	29	122	11	7
May	93	105	9	7
June	29	41	5	7
July	42	12	4	5
August	43	74	6	7
September	43	52	5	7
October	202	48	4	7
November	30	64	4	7
December	25	60	6	6
TOTALS	764	1793	88	83

	Number of Programs	Attendance
January	7	371
February	6	274
March	5	246
April	9	305
May	14	603
June	6	57
July	4	60
August	3	112
September	9	411
October	7	183
November	7	364
December	4	232
TOTALS	81	3218

Visiting Naturalist Programs

The Naturalist traveled to schools and day camps in the county. Many visits are established and repeat monthly, while others may be a "once a year" field trip.

Family programs were offered at Dallas Lake Park and David Rogers Memorial Park during the summer and fall months.

When the Naturalist visits a school, she may travel to several classrooms repeating the same program several times -- this is counted as one program.

Although there were 10 less programs, numbers reflect an 8% growth in attendance from last year.



NATURALIST REPORT - Summary

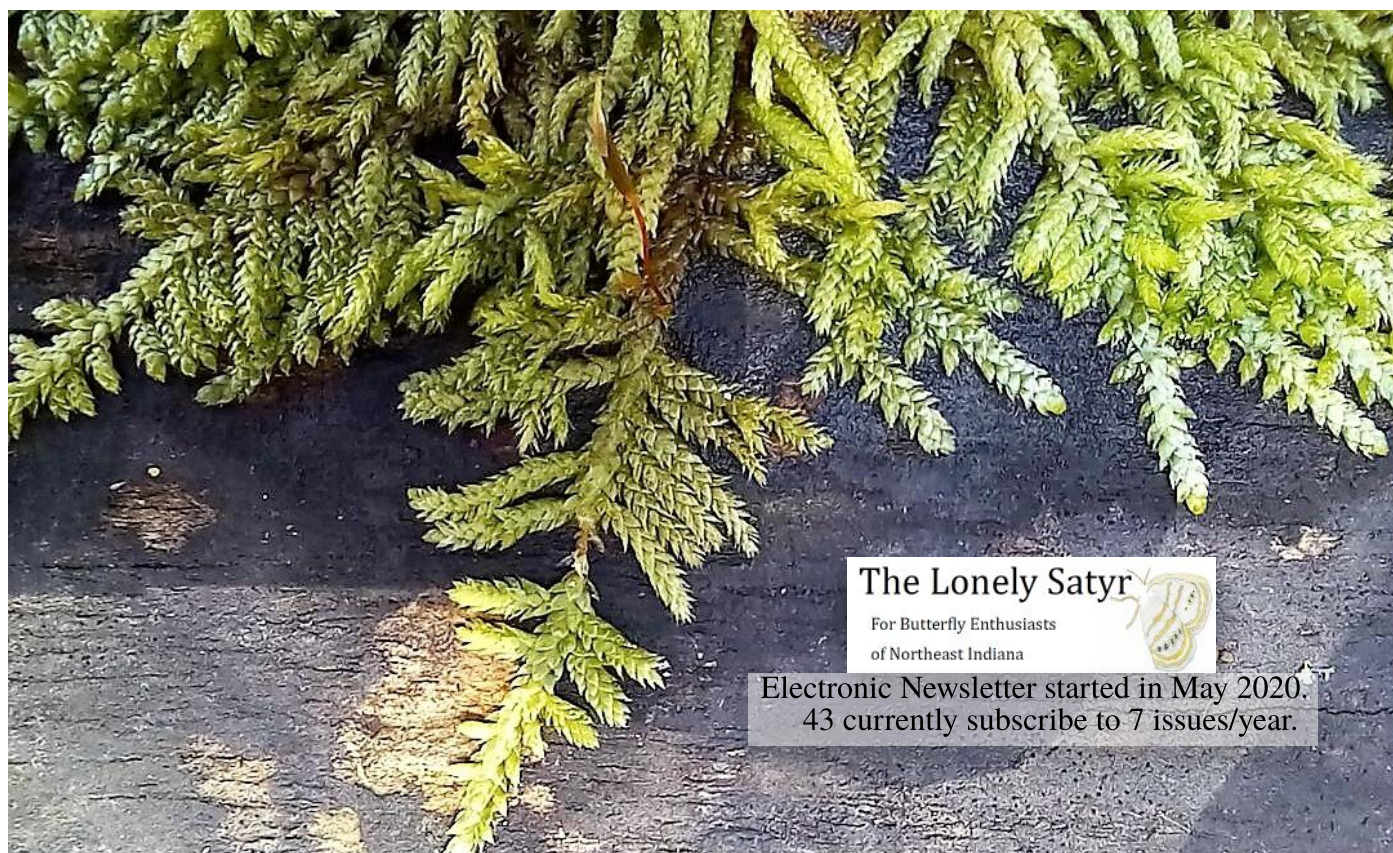
Comparing the attendance of this year with the last three years. Most programs were canceled in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid concerns and/or restrictions. While attendance numbers for organized programs have increased, we look forward to having higher special event attendance.

Maple Syrup Days returned in 2022. Attendance was lower than expected, however a rainy Saturday may have affected numbers. Sunday attendance was very close to average numbers.

Hunter Education Classes were not led by a park staff member this year, so attendance is not counted as a park program.

Overall, we are pleased to see that attendance levels have bounced back; and, we anticipate continued growth as programs and events expand.

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Special Events	3234	646	45	4053
Maple Wood Nature Center Programs	1793	1633	1472	1359
Visiting Naturalist Programs	3218	2971	1351	2123
Indiana Hunter Education	0	83	116	93
TOTAL ATTENDANCE	8245	5333	2984	7628



PARK STAFF

The park staff evolved once again in 2022.

Scott Beam retired on January 7, 2022 after serving 30 years with the Parks Department. The majority of his time was as Park Naturalist. He retired leaving open a position for a Maintenance Technician/Communication Specialist.

Emily Wolfe accepted a new position as Administrative Assistant/Communications Specialist to assume the office portion of responsibilities left when Scott Beam retired.

Eric Jordan accepted the position as full time Maintenance Technician.

Chris Sluyter, Maintenance Tech. will now also be assisting with social events for the Parks Dept.

The Parks Department now has a year-round, full-time staff of six with 2 part time park rangers.

MASTER PLAN

LaGrange County Department of Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2023 - 2027



A great deal of time was spent gathering information, conducting surveys, and creating a new 5-year Master Plan for the Parks Department. Having a Master Plan allows the Parks Department to apply for federal and state grants that help fund many of our park projects, especially trails.

Each of our staff members spent time talking with the public and asking questions to compile information for our survey.

Information about the community, our natural features, area tourism, as well as sharing information about our department and all of its properties, is also included.

Goals and plans are constructed from survey feedback, to help guide the department through the next 5 years.



Prepared for and by:
LAGRANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION
0505 W 700 S
Wolcottville, IN 46795
260-854-2225
E-mail: parks@lagrangeparks.org
Website: www.lagrangeparks.org

FINANCIALS

2022 Annual Budget

	Budget	Spent
General Fund (1219)		
Personnel	\$456,457.41	\$419,208.65
Supplies	\$65,725.00	\$49,813.80
Other Services	\$50,118.00	\$48,389.72
Capital Outlays	\$8,000.00	\$39,000.04
1219 Total	\$580,300.41	\$556,412.21
Non-Reverting (1179)		
Summer Seasonal	\$24,279.30	\$7,177.12
Supplies	\$22,570.00	\$22,996.02
Other Services	\$45,655.00	\$39,782.55
Capital Outlays	\$11,500.00	\$24,996.00
Refunds		\$225.00
1179 Total	\$104,004.30	\$95,176.69
Summer Camp (4906)		
Recreation Personnel	\$8,321.41	\$4,609.91
Supplies	\$250.00	\$326.61
Other Services	\$1,060.00	\$434.00
4906 Total	\$9,631.41	\$5,370.52
TOTALS:	\$693,976.12	\$656,959.42

Encumbered Amounts

Purchases made in 2022 but will not be received/paid until 2023, will be paid from remaining 2022 balances.

1219 Encumbered Funds = \$22,854.56

1179 Encumbered Funds = \$47,516.00

2022 Revenue

Archery Trail	\$6,834.96
Dallas Lake Admissions	\$7,779.12
Summer Day Camp Fees	\$5,600.00
Maple Wood Nature Center	\$20,655.00
Program Fees	\$3,971.00
Reservations	\$25,548.50
Total Earned Revenue	\$70,388.58
Donations	\$50,824.69
Grants	\$12,120.00
Misc Receipts	\$6,212.12
Total Revenue	\$139,545.39

Revenue Notes

Archery trail collections increased by 30% and broke a record in 2022. This fund is used to replace archery targets and inserts each year.

Maple Wood Nature Center receipts are up as we continued Maple Syrup Days this year.

Program fees increased nearly 10% over last year.

Reservation collections decreased around 6%. This is a result of not having the third pavilion available at Delt Church Park. We expect higher numbers in 2023 as the new pavilion becomes available for the summer.

Donations increased by over 1600%!

- Memorials: \$31,365
- Disc Golf Course Improvement: \$10,300
- "LaGrange County Connecting with Youth" event: \$5,950
- Misc Donations made up the remainder

GIFTS & GRANTS

\$ 2,500

Grant received from LaGrange County Visitors Bureau to be used for Park sign replacement and directional road signage to Shipshewana Lake Park.

\$ 5,620

Grant received through LCCF from the Kerm Troyer Charitable Fund. This money was earmarked for Forest School use. Educational materials were purchased to expand learning opportunities. A special Forest School teaching program was also held for area teachers.

\$ 1,500

Grant received from Parkview LaGrange Hospital to fund fitness trail signage at Dallas Lake Park.

\$ 5,000

Grants awarded by REMC Roundup to fund Horse-drawn wagon rides during Maple Syrup Days and to help fund purchasing disc golf sets for the LaGrange County Connecting with Youth event.

\$ 1,500

Grant received from LCCF to help fund puppet shows during Maple Syrup Days.

\$ 49,825

Donations are privately gifted to the park department through out the year.
Memorial Donations \$ 31,365
Disc Golf Improvement Fund \$10,300
Youth Event Fund \$5,950
Other donations received from visitors sharing support for projects within the county park system.

The Parks Department also received a new AED Defibrillator through a grant from Parkview Hospital to be kept at the Maple Wood Nature Center Valued at \$1,700.

PARTNERSHIPS

Friends of LaGrange County Parks

LaGrange County Community Foundation

LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District

LaGrange County Library

Blue Heron Ministries

Dekalb Horseman

LaGrange County Leadership

Acres Land Trust

Indiana Fish and Wildlife

LaGrange County Highway Dept.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Stroh Lions Club

Olive B Cole Foundation

LaGrange Tri-Kappa

LaGrange REMC

JDAI - LaGrange County

Volunteers

Hosts



These valuable partnerships, along with many others, provide funds and manpower that make possible many of the park improvements and programs. We are grateful for each and every one and aspire to continue working with so many of our valued partners as we continue to make improvements to our county parks.

SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

Prairie Heights Community School Corporation

Westview School Corporation

Lakeland School Corporation

Metropolitan School District of Steuben County

Middlebury School Schools

Oak Farm Montessori School

Parochial Schools: 11

Preschools: 7

Home School Cooperatives from: Allen County, LaGrange County, Steuben County, Noble County, Whitley County, and Sturgis, Michigan

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

CEDAR LAKE BEACH 5★

"Nice quiet place to enjoy a little sunshine along with swimming."

DALLAS LAKE PARK 4.7★

"Great place to take family for a walk, swim, and grilling."

"Beautiful area that is very well kept"

" *Very peaceful retreat. Loved it!*"

DAVID ROGERS PARK 4.9★

"This is a beautiful and peaceful little park."

"Beautiful location. Love the historic value of the site."

DELT CHURCH PARK 4.8★

"Wonderful park, playground and walking trail are amazing!"

"It's always been one of the nicest parks!"

MAPLE WOOD PARK 4.8★

"Maple Wood is a hidden local treasure!"

"Cool place. Awesome to check out for maple syrup days!!"

"I learned so much during our visit!"

"Our family had a great time at the Halloween gathering!"

"A gem in the wilderness."

PINE KNOB PARK 4.7★

"I really enjoyed it. It's the longest boardwalk I have ever been on!"

"Very nice and quiet place for our bridal shower."

"Excellent trails and archery targets. Recommend for all ages!"

"Unique place for a nature walk. Woodlands, wetlands, and savanna."

"This is a gorgeous place."

WALL LAKE BEACH 4.5★

"Great beach!"

Survey says...

"Our parks are the jewel of our county, the maintenance is excellent!"

"It is impressive that a county our size has such a wonderful park system. the LaGrange County Parks staff are amazing."

"Love all the parks!"

"We have great parks, we truly do."

"I think the parks are super, easily accessible, and well-kept."

"I feel that they are always well maintained, clean, and inviting. Our parks crew does one heck of a job."

"Keep up the good work!"

Socially speaking...



Followers increased 15% to 2,380



Top Facebook post: Maple Syrup Days Flyer reached 10,657 accounts.



2nd Facebook post: Mike Metz Trail opened Reached 9,887 accounts.



Followers increased 91% to 153

2022 Summary and Future Considerations

A great deal of staff time was again spent on the new trail system in the Mike Metz Fen. While the trail portion of the project is complete now, the remaining items will be completed by the grant deadline in September 2023.

The majority of the renovation plan for the Delt Church Park's Disc Golf course was completed. The remaining items will be completed in 2023.

A great deal of time was spent on creating the new 5-year Master Plan for the Parks Department. It will be presented early 2023 for approval.

The new Greenwood Pavilion construction began in fall of 2022. Completion is expected at the end of May.

A new well was installed at Delt Church Park.

2023 Plans / Goals

Overall

- Complete 2023-2027 Master Plan for approval/adoption
- Add trail signage such as "you are here" and interpretive signs
- Continued invasive vegetation control throughout park properties
- Introduce more social classes and programs

Staff

- Add one more full-time Maintenance Technician position

Dallas

- Install fitness trail signs on existing trail
- Add directional trail signage

David Rogers

- Improvements suitable for Forest School
- Property cleanup - shelter, cabins, fencing, pond

Delt

- Complete new Greenwood Pavilion at Delt Church Park
- Install new water fountains/bottle fillers
- Complete upgrades to Disc Golf Course
- Continue restoration efforts in Oak Savanna Prairie areas

Maple Wood

- Improve and add trail signage and benches
- Improvements for sap collection system
- Building improvements

Pine Knob

- Complete last phase of Mike Metz Fen project (pavilion & vault toilet & signage)
- Add new limestone surface to original trails.
- Add trail signage

Shipshewana Lake Park

- Add signs at road and Pumpkinvine Trail to direct to park

Future Goals

Evaluate funding and needs for improvements at Shipshewana Lake Park

Continue property restoration and invasive control efforts in all properties

Determine identity for Duff Memorial Park

