



2025



ANNUAL
REPORT

Front photo: Log Cabin at David Rogers Memorial Park

Back Photo: Prairie Flowers by entrance drive at Dallas Lake 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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About Us

Parks & Places

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

Park Staff

- Mary Franke, Director
- George DeWald, Superintendent
- Chris Sluyter, Maintenance Technician
- Eric Jordan, Maintenance Technician
- Jacob Weimer, Maintenance Technician
- Emily Wolfe, Administrative Assistant/Communication Specialist
- Randy Merrifield, Park Ranger
- Tim Cleveland, Assistant Park Ranger
- Daniel Schelinski, Events Planner/Nature Interpreter (through Sept.)
- Seasonal/Temporary Staff - 8 Summer and 1 Fall/Winter

Park Board

- John Egli, President
- Eric Maginn, Vice President
- Julia Wolheter, Member
- Paul Baker, Member
- Perry Miller, Member
- Michael Holcomb, Ex-officio Member
- LaGrange Soil & Water

County Council

- Jeff Campos
- Ryan Riegsecker
- Harold Gingerich
- Jim Young
- Jeff Brill
- Karen Eagleson
- Mike Strawser

Commissioners

- Terry Martin
- Peter Cook
- Kevin Myers

Year in Review

Another year has passed us by so quickly! We continue to be amazed & 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!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary B. Franke".

Mary Franke, Park Director

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

4,913,903

According to UDisc, at least this many steps were taken while playing disc golf at Delt Church Park. Over 2100 miles walked. May 3 was the busiest with over 46 rounds played.

8,324

at least this many people attended organized park events & programs

972

bags of maple kettle corn made and sold at Maple Syrup Days

1,761

at least this many archers enjoyed the 3-D archery target trail at Pine Knob Park - about 60 less archers than last year

3,097

maple syrup suckers made and sold at Maple Syrup Days

268

total facility reservations
Delt Greenwood Pavilion 66
Delt South River Pavilion 53
Pine Knob Clubhouse 41

275

acres that now make up Pine Knob Park

540,803

views received on Facebook posts this year

BEST IN INDIANA



Midwestern Traveler offered an opportunity for the public to submit and vote for their favorite places in Indiana. Pine Knob Park was nominated to run for "Best Park" , and WON! We are grateful for being nominated and for all who voted. Thank you!

MIDWESTERN
TRAVELER



We
Won!!

**Best Park:
Pine Knob Park**

Park Upkeep & Upgrades

Park Upkeep

Upkeep includes all of the things done on a regular basis throughout the year. Our full time maintenance staff consists of 4 full time and 1 part-time. They are responsible for a variety of tasks on our ten properties, which is comprised of 733+ acres, 27+ buildings/structures, 3 playgrounds, 3 public beaches, and 10+ miles of trails.

In the summer, we gain up to three more maintenance staff to primarily help with mowing and with the occasional large project.

Maintenance tasks include: mowing and landscape, building cleaning, restroom cleaning, trash removal, pier installation and removal, archery target installation and removal, playground safety checks, maple syrup production, trail of lights installation and removal, maple syrup days setup and tear-down, snow removal, storm damage cleanup, building boardwalks, laying limestone trails, natural area supervision, buildings/structures, trails, and amenities. It's a lot for 4 people with an ongoing list of things to do!

Park Upgrades

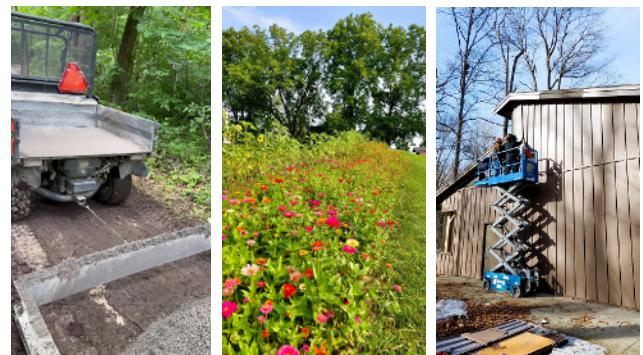
Dallas Lake Park

- Office - replaced siding
- Lodge - new well installed
- Prairie prescribed burn



David Rogers Memorial Park

- Planted annual flowers along drive and cabins



Delt Church Park

- Added connector trail for wooded trail loop
- Resurfaced nearly half the limestone trails
- Installed power lines to help run Trail of Lights

Duff Memorial Park

- Trail - Installed course challenges for mountain bikes
- Signage - Installed trailhead signs
- Invasive species control

Maple Wood Nature Center

- Resided most of Nature Center (will finish 2026)
- Received donated Crane Art
- Replaced old tables with new tables

Pine Knob Park

- Grand Opening for adding 21 acres with .75 rustic trail
- Installed seasonal shade sails along the fen trail
- Repair & improvement on 2 older vault toilets



A WALK IN THE PARK

First Day Hike

Seventy-nine walkers participated in the First Day Hike held at Dallas Lake Park. Glow sticks marked the trail ending at the Lodge where cocoa and cookies were shared.

Every Park Every Trail Fitness Club

Walkers met once each month, May - November, at a different trail for this program. Rewards were shared at the last trail walk to those who walked each trail. Thirty-five participated in at least one walk; ten walked once on each trail; and, seven walked every month. Ten participants were awarded solid wood hiking sticks for walking each trail at least once. This program continues to grow each year. We look forward to next year!



FeNGke 5K Fun Run & Walk

Our third FeNGke 5K had 27 participants. The Friends of LaGrange County Parks were present to help check-in participants and serve after race refreshments.

Six prizes were awarded. Swag bags included an event T-shirt and fun treats.

Event Sponsors : Billman Propane, Schlemmer Hardware, & Bigby Coffee, Avilla

Turkey Trot 5K Fun Run & Walk

This year's Turkey Trot was organized and hosted by the Friends of LaGrange County Parks and was held Thanksgiving Day morning.

24 humans & 1 dog participated. Prizes included medals & turkey inspired stocking hats.



SUMMERTIME FUN

Summer Day Camps

ADVENTURE BOUND June 9-13 Grades 6-9 \$100

By Gone Days June 16-20 Grades 1-6 \$75

Nature Bound June 23-27, July 7-11, or July 14-18
Grades 1-6 \$75



Call the Park Office to register:
260-854-2225

Office Hours:
Mon-Fri 8 am-noon & 12:30-3:30 pm

Free Swim Lessons!

Registration opens
May 5



- Dallas Lake Park
- For students ages 5 - 12
- For swim levels 1 - 4
- 10 classes over a two week session

Summer Day Camp

By Gone Days, Nature Bound, & Adventure Bound offered 5 weeks of summer day camp this year. 97 children attended camp.

Swim Lessons

Swim lessons were free this summer with funding received from an Indiana Dept of Health grant. Thirteen 2-week classes were offered. 80 students received swim and water safety lessons!

Two certified lifeguards with swim instructor training led lessons.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Maple Syrup Days

Maple Syrup Field Trips: 921 students total - 463 of those students attended from an out-of-county school.

The Friends of LaGrange County Parks hosted the annual Sap Run/Syrup Stroll: 39 participants.

The Friends of LaGrange County Parks assisted in all areas of Maple Syrup Days. The South Milford Lions prepared the pancake and sausage breakfast. The Dekalb County Horsemen's Association shared horse-drawn wagon rides through the sugar bush, and LaGrange County Tri-Kappa made maple cotton candy for the 2-day event. Volunteers and interpreters assisted in all areas.

2948+ people enjoyed the pancake meal with a total attendance estimated at 3390+, over the 2 day event.

Event Sponsors: LaGrange REMC, LCCF LIFE group, and LaGrange County Convention Visitor's Bureau. Maple syrup & syrup treats sold out! The syrup flight box, and infused syrups were specialty items.

- Trees tapped: #369
- 2850# gallons of sap collected
- 39 gallons of syrup made
- First drops collected on February 24



Thank You!

to everyone who visited Maple Wood to support and enjoy our 2025 Maple Syrup Days event!

Maple Sales:

392 pint jugs of syrup
462 quart jugs of syrup
51 glass jars of syrup
97 infused bottles of syrup
59 syrup flights
2961 maple suckers
731 bags of maple cotton candy
972 bags of maple kettle corn
365 pkgs of maple sugar leaf candy
- plus books, toys, & pottery.

Pancakes & Sausage: (approximate numbers)

Saturday: 1792 meals
Sunday: 1156 meals
Total meals served: 2948

43 Gallons of syrup used for the pancake & sausage meal.

Volunteer & Interpreter Service Hours:

over 350 hours!



mark your calendars!!

2026 MAPLE SYRUP DAYS
March 21 & 22

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Not So Spooky Trail

The Parks Department staff and the Friends of LaGrange County Parks hosted this year's Not so Spooky Trail event. Estimated attendance was 498, a bit over 3% growth from 483 attending in 2024. The Dekalb County Horsemen were present to share horse-drawn wagon rides along the not so spooky wooded trail. The Friends of LaGrange County Parks and community volunteers shared maple steamers & cider, manned craft and activity tables, and played the witch in the woods. The Franke family donated their time to make and serve kettle corn and play the werewolf in the woods. The bonfire was going for roasting hot dogs and marshmallows.

Event Sponsors: Lake City Bank, Bowen Health, Schlemmer Hardware, & Forest River



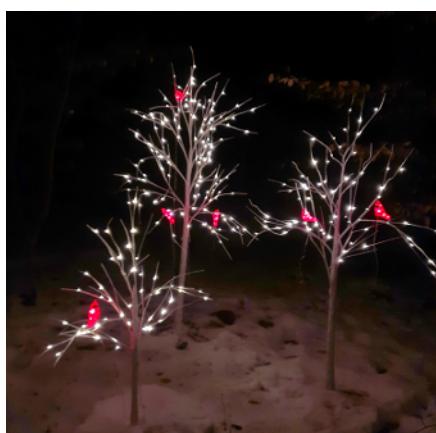
Trail of Lights

We were able to expand our displays and lights this year with generous donations from our community. Sponsor donations raised \$29,250 plus material donations that put us well over \$30,000 in total value! We were open nine nights this year, Thursdays, Fridays, & Saturdays, for the first three weekends of December. We were challenged by bitter cold, wind, and snow/ice this year, which affected installation, ongoing repairs, and attendance.

We estimate a total of 2100 visitors attended this year. Enjoyment fee was by donation - we collected nearly \$6,000 to be allocated to improvements.

We are grateful to the many local volunteer groups who manned the cookie and cocoa stations inside!

We look forward to sharing next Christmas with you!



PROGRAMS & EVENTS REPORT

Programs in our Parks

A program hosted by others and/or a program presented by the Nature Interpreter in one of our county parks. Public programs may include recurring gatherings at a park such as Quilt Class, Breakfast with the Birds, and nature walks/hikes. School programs include number of students who visit one of our parks for an educational field trip. Maple Syrup field trips are included.

Visiting Programs

Visiting programs are programs presented by the Nature Interpreter at a different location.

When the Nature Interpreter visits a school and visits several classrooms repeating the same program several times -- this is counted as one program.

Visiting programs also include attending community gatherings to share information about our county parks, or attending organization meetings to offer requested presentations.

Park Events

An event that has an extended schedule beyond regular "business" hours. A special event may have food, activities, stations, presentations, or a specific purpose. These events require additional staff and/or volunteers, as well as a larger budget. For some special events, it is difficult to record an exact number of patrons, so a "best guess" must suffice. The Parks Dept. prefers to be conservative when estimating.

Programs in our Parks

65 programs
1954 attended

Visiting Programs

15 programs
824 attended

9 Park Events

6370 Attended

Sap Run & Syrup Stroll - 39
Maple Syrup Days - 3390
Disc Golf Tournament - 111
Archery Tournament - 46
FeNGke 5K - 27
LaGrange County Youth Day - 135
Not so Spooky Trail - 498
Turkey Trot - 24
Trail of Lights - 2100

PROGRAM/EVENT SUMMARY

The chart below compares overall numbers for the past five years.

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Special Events	6370	7073	3584	3234	646
Programs in the Parks	1954	1927	1787	1793	1716
Visiting Programs	824	1874	2108	3218	2971
TOTAL ATTENDANCE	9,187	10,874	7479	8245	5333

2021 - Maple Syrup Days was canceled and other events were impacted due to health guidelines.
2022 & 2023 - Maple Syrup Days returns and program numbers and attendance grow.

PARTNERSHIPS

These valuable partnerships, along with many others, provide funds, time, and manpower that allow many park improvements and events possible. We are grateful for each and every one, and aspire to continue working with so many of our valued partners.

Acres Land Trust
 Blue Heron Ministries
 Bowen Health
 Community Businesses
 Dekalb County Horsemen's Association
 Friends of LaGrange County Parks
 Indiana Department of Health
 Indiana Department of Natural Resources
 Indiana Fish and Wildlife Services
 Land and Water Conservation Fund
 LaGrange Communities Youth Centers
 LaGrange County Community Foundation
 LaGrange County Convention Visitors Bureau

LaGrange County Health Department
 LaGrange County Highway Department
 LaGrange County Leadership
 LaGrange County Library
 LaGrange County Soil & Water
 LaGrange County Trails
 Nipsco
 Olive B Sole Foundation
 Parkview Hospital LaGrange
 REMC LaGrange
 South Milford Lions Club
 Tri-Kappa LaGrange Chapter
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Plus Sponsors, Donors, & Volunteers -- And so many more!!

TRAIL OF LIGHT SPONSORS

 **George Bailey Sponsors**

Fritz & Tina Helmuth

Patricia Pichon

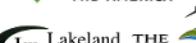
Bontrager Feed

 **Barnyard MARKETING**



 **Kris Kringle Sponsors**

EBERHARD, WEIMER, & GLICK, P.C. Attorneys at Law

Rudolph Sponsors

- Topeka Do It Best
- Backroads Tavern
- Tire Star Wolcottville
- Beers Mallers Back & Salin
- Alliance Truck Group
- Hite Auto Body
- Topeka New Holland
- South Milford Lions
- Nature's Unlimited
- Amish Family RV Services
- Otto Stove & Fireplace
- Alpha Building Center
- Vins of Indiana LLC
- Hippenhammer Bike Shop
- Heartland Bike Shop
- Ban Transit LLC
- Jerry Otto



Elf Sponsors

- Lehman's Variety Store
- Max Platt
- Yoder & Sons
- Woodsides BBQ
- Neff's Gun Shop
- Back County Outdoors
- Caldwell Appraisals
- Greenmark LaGrange
- Ken & Kella Ritchie
- Robert & Deborah Schlemmer
- Snax in Pax
- Rasler Insurance Services
- In memory of Wanda Hart from the Bobay & Spatt Families



Cindy Lou Sponsors

- Bender Automotive
- Kelly's Pro Hardware & Salvage
- Sunders on Sylvan
- Scudder Family
- Stacy Reifahr
- Ace Hardware of Topeka

Plus all who wish to remain anonymous!

FINANCIAL PAGE

2025 Annual Budget

	Budget	Balance
General Fund		
Personnel	637,490.87	54,228.10
Supplies	105,575.00	29,089.70
Other Services	63,131.00	4,762.05
Capital Outlays	2,400.00	6,839.02
Encumbered Funds		-28,898.73
1219 Total	808,596.87	66,020.14
Non-Reverting		
Summer Personnel	30,153.75	18,357.99
Supplies	27,450.00	12,980.27
Other Services	45,220.00	4,973.11
Capital Outlays	17,500.00	17,038.42
1179 Total	120,323.75	53,349.79
Summer Camp		
Recreation	14,254.50	7,545.97
Supplies	300.00	0
Other Services	660.00	316.06
4906 Total	15,214.50	7862.03
Gift Fund		
	Allocated Funds	
Supplies	0	0
Other Services	105.00	0
Capital Outlays	40,447.00	19,999.00
4908 Total	40,552.00	19,999.00
TOTALS:	984,687.12	176,129.69

Encumbered 1219 fund amounts include invoices or purchase orders made in 2025, that are more than \$500, and will be paid in 2026.

2025 Revenue

	2025	2024
Archery Trail	8,804.17	9,108.26
Dallas Lake Admissions	1,711.62	1,091.48
Summer Day Camp Fees	7,375.00	
Maple Wood Sales	28,809.00	28,454.80
Program Fees	7,468.00	8,022.00
Reservations	41,019.00	41,172.00
Total Earned Revenue	95,186.79	87,848.54
Donations	52,605.56	47,767.15
Grants	57,000.00	28,100.00
Misc Income	14,750.00	
Total Revenue	219,542.35	163,715.69

Budget Notes

Indiana Department of Health grant funds were received to cover registration fees, supplies, and activity expenses for summer swim lessons this year.

Large capital purchases included an equipment trailer, UTV, and toolbox.

Revenue Notes

Archery trail collections decreased by 3%. This is our only resource to purchase new targets.

Maple Wood Nature Center receipts had a slight 1% increase from last year.

Reservation collections remained about the same. The Greenwood Pavilion at Delt Church Park leads usage with 66 days rented. South River Pavilion as rented 53 days, & the Pine Knob Clubhouse was rented 41 days.

Park Truck

We inherited an old truck from the Building Dept. This truck will be used for maintenance and assistant park ranger duties.

GRANTS & GIFTS

\$ 189,275

President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust
Grant - acquisition of 21 acres to add to Pine Knob Park

\$ 45,000

Cole Foundation \$20,000 and
LaGrange County Community Foundation \$25,000
Grant - improvements on Dallas Lake Park Playground - coming soon

\$ 4,458

Indiana Department of Health
Grant - provide free swim/water safety lessons

\$ 3,000

Nipsco Nisource
Grant - Nature Bound Camp

\$ 2,500

LaGrange County Convention Visitor's Bureau
Grant - fund puppet shows and interpreter fees for Maple Syrup Days

\$ 2,500

LaGrange REMC Operation Roundup
Grant - funded horse-drawn wagon rides for Maple Syrup Days

\$ 1,000

LaGrange County Community Foundation LIFE
Grant - fund puppet shows for Maple Syrup Days

\$ 1,000

Friends of LaGrange County Parks
Gift - funding acquisition of new 21 acres at Pine Knob Park

\$ 2,000

LaGrange County REMC Envirowatts
Grant - create a prairie flower restoration area at David Rogers Memorial

Donations

Received throughout the year from businesses, community, & visitors

\$ 52,605

Maple Syrup Days related donations: \$ 2,931
Memorial/Memorial Bench donations \$ 3,500
Not So Spooky donations \$ 2,320
Trail of Lights Sponsors: \$ 29,250
Trail of Lights Visitor Donations: \$6,000
Plus undesignated gifts of donation

Total funds received: \$ 303,338

SOCIAL PAGE

DALLAS LAKE PARK 4.6★

"Absolutely beautiful. check it out!" "Beautiful trail."
"Wow! I was very pleasantly surprised with this park!"
"Excellent walking trails." "Beautiful place to go running!"

"Excellent nature trail full of scenery!"

DAVID ROGERS PARK 4.9★

"Took the family - great history!"
"Our homeschool students loved it."

DELT CHURCH PARK 4.8★

"Unexpected find out of the way - nice trails, park is kept clean. Really NICE playground, Clean restrooms."

"Wonderful park." **"Great place to take the family."**
"Nature forward with great trails through the woods."
"Wonderful variety of scenery. Loads of space for free play."

*"Always
a lovely
place"*

MAPLE WOOD PARK 4.8★

"Great place to take kids.." "Fantastic learning experience about maple syrup."
"Love the trails. Well maintained."
"Very scenic trails and well marked"
"Great county park"
"Nice little hiking trail."
"Maple Syrup Days is a must."

PINE KNOB PARK 4.8★

"Beautiful park with well maintained trails."
"Good place to bird watch."
"The fen is breathtaking & is an excellent example of wetland restoration."
"Awesome 3D archery trail."
"First time here - It's beautiful, trails are perfect, Couldn't ask for more."
"In my opinion, this is the nicest park in LaGrange County!"
"This trail continues to be the best around."
"I love a good fen - Unfortunately this one isn't good - it's fantastic!"

**"SO WORTH IT!"
"BEAUTIFUL!"
"IMPRESSED!"**

SHIPSHEWANA LAKE BEACH 3.7★

"Beautiful view. Great for picnic."

WALL LAKE BEACH 4.4★

Social Numbers

Top Facebook posts included:

Not so Spooky Trail
Events Planner Job Ad
Park Ranger Summer Announcement



Followers increased 8%
from 3446 to 3719



Followers increased 13%
from 297 to 337

Email Platform

The year began with 340 subscribers and ended with 447, a 27% increase!

The most clicked links were for the monthly calendar and Thirteen Lines.

AllTrails App

Year-end user star ratings:

Dallas Lake Park 4.6
Delt Church Park 4.6
Maple Wood 4.5
Pine Knob Park 4.8
Mike Metz Fen 4.8

AllTrails rating of 1,421 Indiana Trails:

#354 Mike Metz Fen Trail (in top 25%)
#390 Pine Knob Trail

UDisc Stats

UDisc overall ratings for our disc golf course at Delt Church Park climbed from 4 to 4.2.

Play count: 1,375
Recreation hours: 1,877
Miles walked: 2,181
Steps taken: 4,913,903

SUMMARY & CONSIDERATIONS

The County Parks Department manages 733+ acres. This includes nearly 420 acres of natural areas, 27 buildings, 3 playgrounds, 3 public beaches, and over 10 miles of trails and boardwalks.

2025 Summary

- New well install at Dallas Lake Park
- Property acquisition with rustic trail added to Pine Knob Park
- Added ADA trail along woods for Trail of Lights loop at Delt Church Park
- Installed electric lines for Trail of Lights
- Finished siding on Parks Office and started siding Nature Center
- Resurfaced some sections of limestone trails

2026 Considerations

Dallas

- Boardwalk trail repair & Office walkway repair
- Replace water fountains
- Playground improvements & pickleball courts
- Building maintenance and improvements

David Rogers

- Continue flower habitat restoration & walking trail
- Building maintenance as needed

Delt Church

- Bridge maintenance
- Playground equipment repairs as needed
- Finish resurfacing limestone trails

Duff Memorial Park

- Examine trail usage and determine future trail use

Maple Wood

- Begin resurfacing limestone trails
- Building maintenance

Pine Knob

- Install new ADA water fountain
- Boardwalk maintenance
- Add small pavilion shelter to new property
- Install parking lot lighting

Overall

- Increase attendance in parks
- Develop more activities to encourage more active participation
- Continue invasive vegetation control efforts on all park properties
- Continue maintenance and improvements in all park properties

