

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Cover Photo: Trail at sunrise 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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# ABOUT US

## Parks & Places

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

## Park Staff

Mary Franke, Director  
George DeWald, Superintendent  
Leslie Arnold, Interpretive Naturalist (through September)  
Daniel Schelinski, Events Planner/Nature Interpreter (Nov. - Dec.)  
Chris Sluyter, Maintenance Technician  
Eric Jordan, Maintenance Technician  
Jacob Weimer, Maintenance Technician  
Emily Wolfe, Administrative Assistant/Communication Specialist  
Randy Merrifield, Park Ranger  
Doug Leslie, Part Time Park Ranger  
Seasonal/Temporary Staff - 8 Summer and 1 Fall/Winter

## Park Board

John Egli, President  
Eric Maginn, Vice President  
Ardala Hepler, Secretary  
Paul Yoder, Member (retired August)  
Julia Wolhete, Member  
Paul Baker, Member  
Perry Miller, Member (began December)

## County Council

Jeff Campos  
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

Acres managed by the County Park Department. This includes nearly 400 acres of natural areas, 27 buildings, 3 playgrounds, 3 public beaches, and over 10 miles of trails and boardwalks.



2634

Maple syrup suckers made and sold at Maple Syrup Days.

864

Bottles of maple syrup sold: 379 pints and 485 quarts



751

Bags of maple cotton candy made and sold at Maple Syrup Days



237

The number of facility reservations increased by nearly 21% over 2022. Delt South River Pavilion led with 67 reservations, Greenwood Pavilion had 45, and Pine Knob Clubhouse had 42 reservations in 2023.



1565

At least this many archers enjoyed the 3-D archery target trail at Pine Knob Park - nearly 15% more than 2022.



7467

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

12,423

At least this many Facebook accounts saw a Maple Syrup Days event post.



# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

## COMPLETED!! - Mike Metz Fen Trail Project at Pine Knob Park

The three year Fen Trail Project has been completed.

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.

In 2023, the final pieces of the project were completed. In April, 360 Tamarack trees were planted. A shade shelter and vault toilet were installed on the north end of the trail. New signage includes updated trail maps, mile markers, "you are here" signs, and interpretive signs. At the end of August, DNR representatives inspected and approved the completion of this laborous project.

The official ribbon-cutting dedication was held Saturday, April 22 as the start of the first FeNGke 5k Fun Run & Walk event. Park Director, Mary Franke and Park Superintendent, George DeWald held the "ribbon" as Park Board President, John Egli and Park Board Member, Julia Wolheter made the offical cut.



# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

## New "Greenwood" Picnic Pavilion at Delt Church Park

The Greenwood Pavilion was built after the old failing Field Pavilion was removed.

Leading renter requests for Delt Church Park are large pavilions for large family and social gatherings, close to the playground, and near restrooms. This is now the largest picnic pavilion available, is closest to the playground, and has two restrooms available nearby. It is the only one with a working wood fireplace and retractable sides. These features were added to help prolong the rental season at Delt Church Park.

Once opened at the first of June, the Greenwood Pavilion was rented 45 times through November.





# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## Maple Syrup Days

The Parks Dept. offered school tours by reservation. Maple Syrup Tours broke an attendance record once again -- 1111 students -- of which 555 traveled from outside LaGrange County!

The Friends of LaGrange County Parks hosted the annual Sap Run/Syrup Stroll for 28 participants.

The Friends 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. LaGrange County Tri-Kappa made maple cotton candy for the 2-day event, and Roz Puppets provided puppet show entertainment. Volunteers and interpreters assisted in all areas.

2700+ people attended the event. Maple syrup was sold out!

- Trees tapped: 575
- 91 gallons of syrup made
- First drops collected on February 6



## LaGrange County Connecting Youth

This event happened for the second year in cooperation with LCYC (LaGrange County Youth Center). The Friends 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 275 in total attendance including 117 youth and will be planned again for June 2024.

We gave away 117 backpacks and several disc golf starter kits. We were also fortunate to have enough door prizes for everyone present with a raffle ticket.

# EVENT FIRSTS

## FenGke 5k Fun Run & Walk

The first year for the FENgke 5k fun run and walk and it was considered a success, with the support of the Friends of LaGrange County Parks. This was part of the dedication and official opening of the new trail through the fen at Pine Knob Park. We estimate 70 in total attendance with 51 participating in the 5k. We had fun with a FeNGke costume contest and a snack cart.



## Art in the Park

This event was developed in collaboration with LaGrange County Arts and support from the Friends of LaGrange County Parks. Held at Dallas Lake Park, art vendors shared their talents, food was available, and live music filled the air. An estimated 50 people were present.



## Every Park Every Trail

A fitness group was offered this year to encourage walking on each park trail at least once during program season - once each month, on the first Saturday. Attendance was tracked and prizes were awarded at the end of the season. A total of 21 attended at least one walk, with one participant attending all 7 monthly walks.



## Disc Golf Course Fundraising Tournament

This fundraising tournament was made possible with collaboration from Chad Yoder, sponsor support from community businesses, and event support from the Friends of LaGrange County Parks. Twenty participants / total of 30 attended to brave the cool, rainy, October weather. Funds raised will go towards replacing the goal baskets.





# PARK IMPROVEMENTS

## Disc Golf Course Improvements Continue

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. In 2023, improvements continued with the completion of a rest station which includes a course map sign, shade sail, water source, and picnic tables. 2024 will bring new goal baskets and directional signage to complete the renovation.



## New Signs!

Three park entry signs were replaced due to existing ones cracking and fading. Purchased from a local business, the new bright blue signs are cheerful and easy to see in all seasons.

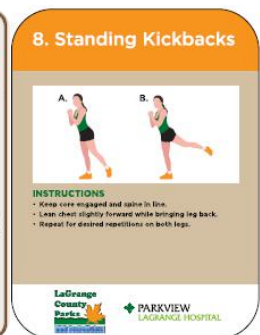


Many new signs have been installed on all of our trails in response to community survey feedback.

- "You are Here" signs.
- Mile markers
- Fitness stations (Dallas Lake Park)

Additional, seasonal interpretive signage & children's fitness signs are planned for the future.

Other general park signs have also been replaced or updated as needed.





# PARK IMPROVEMENTS

## Playground Maintenance Continues

This summer two open slides and a Tyre climber were replaced in an ongoing effort to keep our playground equipment at Delt Church Park safe for use.



## Trails at Dallas Lake Park

A fourteen station Fitness trail was added to the trail at Dallas Lake Park in cooperation with Parkview LaGrange Hospital. A primitive mowed half-mile walking trail was created through the prairie for an opportunity to lengthen the walk and see prairie flowers more closely.



## Drinking Fountains

Several new ADA accessible drinking fountains/bottle filler units were installed.



## Syrup Evaporator

Portions of syrup evaporator was rebuilt in preparation for the upcoming 2024 syrup season.



## Park Car

A new car was purchased for the Parks Department and is assigned to the Park Director.





# PROGRAMS

## Summer Day Camp

By Gone Days, Nature Bound, & Adventure Bound offered 4 weeks of summer day camp this year. Conservation was led by LCYC at Pine Knob Park.

81 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 for 38 students.

Two certified lifeguards with swim instructor training led lessons.



## Make-n-Take Crafts

Park Naturalist Leslie Arnold offered opportunities for seasonal make-n-take crafts on the Second Saturday of each month. Held at Maple Wood Nature Center in the winter and Delt Church Park in the summer and shared as a free, fun, family activity. Examples of activities offered in 2023: pinecone birdfeeders, trail art, s'mores, butter in a jar & ice cream in a bag. Favorites included scavenger hunts and fairy walks.



## Not So Spooky Trail

The Parks Dept staff and The Friends of LaGrange Parks put on another successful free family event. Attendance was at 350, a nearly 90% 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, playing games, and doing crafts.



# NATURALIST REPORT

## Maple Wood Nature Center Attendance

**In Building:** This total represents every patron who entered the Nature Center for a purpose other than, attending a program or a private occasion through reservation.

**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.

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

Beginning in September the Park Board decided to no longer have scheduled open hours for the Nature Center building.

|               | People in Building | Program Attendance | Number of Programs | Days Open |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| January       | 5                  | 76                 | 6                  | 7         |
| February      | 23                 | 105                | 8                  | 7         |
| March         | 18                 | 1197               | 21                 | 7         |
| April         | 26                 | 74                 | 6                  | 6         |
| May           | 23                 | 158                | 11                 | 8         |
| June          | 15                 | 42                 | 3                  | 6         |
| July          | 14                 | 18                 | 3                  | 6         |
| August        | 2                  | 20                 | 3                  | 3         |
| September     | 24                 | 32                 | 3                  | 0         |
| October       | 0                  | 26                 | 3                  | 0         |
| November      | 0                  | 22                 | 2                  | 0         |
| December      | 0                  | 25                 | 3                  | 0         |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>150</b>         | <b>1795</b>        | <b>72</b>          | <b>50</b> |

## Number of Programs Attendance

|               |           |             |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| January       | 5         | 320         |
| February      | 5         | 273         |
| March         | 0         | 0           |
| April         | 8         | 240         |
| May           | 13        | 583         |
| June          | 8         | 129         |
| July          | 4         | 40          |
| August        | 5         | 61          |
| September     | 9         | 239         |
| October       | 5         | 91          |
| November      | 0         | 0           |
| December      | 3         | 132         |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>65</b> | <b>2108</b> |

## Visiting Naturalist Programs

The Naturalist traveled to schools to share educational programs and directed summer day camps. Many visits are established and repeat monthly, while others may be a "once a year".

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

## Publications



*Thirteen Lines:* a quarterly newsletter created by the Park Naturalist. Currently, 148 receive by email and 257 receive by mail.



*The Lonely Satyr:* an electronic newsletter, created and authored by Leslie Arnold, started in May 2020. Currently, 52 have subscribed to receive 7 issues/year.





# NATURALIST REPORT - Summary

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

2019 - Leslie Arnold begins as Park Naturalist

2020 & 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.

2023 - Leslie Arnold resigned in September of 2023. Daniel Schelinski was hired & began at the end of November.

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

We look forward to expanding events and programs in 2024.

|                                   | 2023        | 2022        | 2021        | 2020        | 2019        | 2018        |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Special Events                    | 3584        | 3234        | 646         | 45          | 4053        | 4140        |
| Maple Wood Nature Center Programs | 1787        | 1793        | 1633        | 1472        | 1359        | 1435        |
| Visiting Naturalist Programs      | 2108        | 3218        | 2971        | 1351        | 2123        | 1293        |
| Indiana Hunter Education          | 0           | 0           | 83          | 116         | 93          | 177         |
| <b>TOTAL ATTENDANCE</b>           | <b>7479</b> | <b>8245</b> | <b>5333</b> | <b>2984</b> | <b>7628</b> | <b>7045</b> |



# FINANCIALS

## 2023 Annual Budget

|                             | Budget            | Spent             |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>General Fund (1219)</b>  |                   |                   |
| Personnel                   | 575,181.13        | 523,243.26        |
| Supplies                    | 74,860.00         | 75,222.26         |
| Other Services              | 55,939.00         | 48,049.14         |
| Capital Outlays             | 1,000.00          | 12,855.05         |
| 1219 Total                  | 706,980.13        | 659,369.71        |
| Final Amended 1219 budget : | 735,370.93        |                   |
| <b>Non-Reverting (1179)</b> |                   |                   |
| Summer Seasonal             | 25,494.72         | 3,341.58          |
| Supplies                    | 22,550.00         | 19,412.63         |
| Other Services              | 45,510.00         | 31,499.26         |
| Capital Outlays             | 34,500.00         | 97,994.78         |
| Refunds                     |                   | 75.00             |
| 1179 Total                  | 128,054.72        | 152,323.25        |
| Final Amended 1179 budget : | 208,941.91        |                   |
| <b>Summer Camp (4906)</b>   |                   |                   |
| Recreation Personnel        | 8,770.36          | 4,538.83          |
| Supplies                    | 300.00            | 319.22            |
| Other Services              | 1,060.00          | 450.00            |
| 4906 Total                  | 10,130.36         | 5,308.05          |
| <b>TOTALS:</b>              | <b>845,093.21</b> | <b>817,001.01</b> |

### Encumbered Amounts

Purchases made in 2023 but will not be received/paid until 2024, will be paid from remaining 2023 balances.

1219 Encumbered Funds = \$ 49,000

## 2023 Revenue

|                             |                   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Archery Trail               | 7,825.74          |
| Dallas Lake Admissions      | 7,909.30          |
| Summer Day Camp Fees        | 4,325.00          |
| Maple Wood Sales            | 23,816.50         |
| Program Fees                | 7,850.00          |
| Reservations                | 31,014.00         |
| <b>Total Earned Revenue</b> | <b>82,740.54</b>  |
| Donations                   | 16,653.30         |
| Grants                      | 31,141.00         |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>        | <b>130,534.84</b> |

## Revenue Notes

Archery trail collections increased by nearly 15%. This is our only resource to purchase new targets.

Maple Wood Nature Center receipts increased 15% over last year.

Program fees increased nearly 98% over last year. This includes:  
 43% increase in quilt class attendance  
 55% increase in maple syrup field trip attendance  
 110% increase in swim lesson participants

Reservation collections increased by 21% over last year. The completion of the new Greenwood Pavilion at Delt Church Park increased facility use.



# GIFTS & GRANTS

\$ 2,341

Grant received from The National Wild Turkey Federation was used to purchase fire safety apparel and equipment to protect park staff when conducting prescribed prairie fires on park property.

\$ 1,800

Grants awarded by REMC Roundup to fund horse-drawn wagon rides during Maple Syrup Days.

\$ 2,000

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

\$ 1,500

Grant received from LaGrange County Convention Visitor's Bureau to help fund interpretor fees for horse-drawn wagons and maple syrup demonstrations for Maple Syrup Days.

\$ 3,500

Grant received through LCCF from an Anonymous Donor to be used for general upcoming projects.

\$ 20,000

Grant received from LCCF to go towards purchase of a parcel to expand Pine Knob Park.

\$ 16,653

Donations are privately gifted to the parks department throughout the year.  
Memorial/Memorial Bench Donations \$1,095  
Disc Golf Course Improvement Fund \$8,104  
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 in the Park Ranger vehicle. Valued at \$1,700.

# PARK STAFF CHANGES

The park staff has evolved and grown again in 2023.

Jacob Weimer accepted a position as a full-time Maintenance Technician.

Leslie Arnold resigned as Park Naturalist in September after serving nearly 5 years with the Parks Department.

Daniel Schelinski began at the end of November as the new Events Planner/Nature Interpreter.

The Parks Department now has a year-round, full-time staff of seven with 2 part-time park rangers and 1 part-time maintenance tech.

# 2024 - 2029 MASTER PLAN

The Park Department staff began the process, in 2022, of creating a new 5 year park master plan.

After 2023 revisions were submitted, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources reviewed and approved our 2024-2029 Master Plan in September.

The Park Board then adopted the Master Plan in October with Resolution 2023-10-19.

This 5 year plan is the result of collecting and analyzing community survey input, county statistics, and park reports.

The results will serve as a guide for planning future park improvements and activities.

## LaGrange County Department of Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2024 - 2029



Prepared for and by:

**LAGRANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION**

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Wolcottville, IN 46795  
260-854-2225

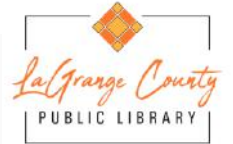
Email: [parks@lagrangecounty.org](mailto:parks@lagrangecounty.org)

Website: [www.lagrangecountyparks.org](http://www.lagrangecountyparks.org)



# PARTNERSHIPS

Friends of LaGrange County Parks  
 LaGrange County Community Foundation  
 LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District  
 LaGrange County Convention Visitors Bureau  
 LaGrange County Library  
 Blue Heron Ministries  
 Dekalb Horseman  
 LaGrange County Leadership  
 Acres Land Trust  
 LaGrange Communities Youth Centers  
 Indiana Fish and Wildlife  
 LaGrange County Highway Dept.  
 Parkview LaGrange Hospital  
 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, time, and manpower that make 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.

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

# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

## CEDAR LAKE BEACH 4.3★

"We liked it, very rocky beach & swimming area, wear water shoes."

## DALLAS LAKE PARK 4.6★

"Beautiful park." "Nice place to go with family"  
"Nicely groomed trails for hiking." "Always the best people."

*"New favorite place to be!"*

## DAVID ROGERS PARK 4.9★

"Quiet little park, very nicely managed and presented"  
"Wonderful place! I got married there!"

## DELT CHURCH PARK 4.8★

"Beautiful, well manicured park with playground."  
"Wonderful Park! Playground and trail are amazing!"  
"The new (Disc Golf) layout is a vast improvement! Makes this one of my favs!"

## MAPLE WOOD PARK 4.8★

"Beautiful place with nice trails."

"Cool place. Awesome to chck out during maple syrup days."

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

*"Maple Wood is great county asset!"*

*"My new favorite spot!"*

## PINE KNOB PARK 4.8★

"First time visiting...will go back!"  
"Very nice trail, a real gem. Nice job LaGrange County!"  
"The views are gorgeous!" "Well maintained. Simply beautiful."  
"Wonderful archery targets - trail is awesome!"

*"This place is absolutely amazing!"*

## WALL LAKE BEACH 4.2★

"Great beach!"

## Social Numbers...

The posts that receive the most response share information about Maple Syrup Days or Pine Knob Park.



Followers increased 22% to 2,902



Top Facebook post: Maple Syrup Days Flyer reached 12,423 accounts.



2nd Facebook post: Archery Targets up Reached 10,811 accounts.



3rd Facebook post: Not So Spooky 5,922 accounts.



Followers increased 58% to 243

## Email Platform

A new email platform began in December of 2023. This will be used to share our Thirteen Lines Newsletter and monthly updates.

We began with 181 emails. By the end of the year, 72 more had registered -- a 39% growth in one month!



# SUMMARY & CONSIDERATIONS

## 2023 Summary

- The completion of the new trail system in the Mike Metz Fen was a wonderful accomplishment.
- Continued renovation of the Delt Church Park's Disc Golf has increased usage
- Completed 2024-2029 Master Plan for the Parks Department
- The new Greenwood Pavilion was completed with its first reservation on June 10
- New signage was added on all hiking trails, & 14 fitness station signs on the Dallas Lake Park trail.
- New events included: a *5K FeNGke Fun Run & Walk* on the new fen trail at Pine Knob Park, *Art in the Park* was held at Dallas Lake Park in September, a monthly *Every Park Every Trail* fitness walking club was enjoyed by many, and a disc golf fundraiser tournament was held at Delt Church

## 2024 Considerations

### Overall

- Continue to add signage and interpretive signage in parks
- Continue invasive vegetation control efforts on all park properties
- Introduce more social classes and programs/events
- Increase attendance in parks
- Expand summer camp opportunities

### Dallas

- Replace tractor bridge boardwalk surface east of Pond Lil
- Lodge and office building improvements

### David Rogers

- Reinvent park use
- Cabin assessment

### Delt

- Disc Golf Course - new baskets and signage for next tee
- Continue restoration efforts in Oak Savanna Prairie areas
- Add new limestone surface to trails
- Replacement of South River Pavilion deck surface

### Duff Memorial Park

- Reinvent park use

### Maple Wood

- Improve benches
- Improvements for sap collection system
- Building improvements

### Pine Knob

- Add shade sail stations in fen
- Add new limestone surface to trails
- Expand property and plan future trail addition
- Replace north boardwalk on Meter Lake

## Future Considerations

- Shishewana Lake Park - Reinvent park use



