



2012
Annual Report
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**OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS**



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The 2012 Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission.

John A. Scott, Vice Chairman John P. McCulloch, A. David Baumhart III, Gary McGillivray, Christine Long, Robert Kostin, Secretary J. David VanderVeen, Chairman Gerald A. Fisher, Chairperson Emeritus Pecky D. Lewis and Eric S. Wilson.

Message from the Executive Officer

Oakland County Parks and Recreation continues to be a premier recreation provider. As a community resource, the 13-park system provides a wide range of opportunities for residents and visitors to experience outdoor activities. A connection to nature, physical activity and improved quality of life all start in parks, making Oakland County, Michigan a great place to live, work and play.

The summer of 2012 was record setting in terms of fantastic weather, increased attendance numbers, decreased spending and increased revenue. We wrapped up 100 days of summer without incident despite prolonged temperatures in the 90s and low 100s. This was a true testament to the professionalism of our staff of 65 full-time and nearly 600 seasonal employees committed to providing outstanding customer service in all aspects of operations. They are aided by more than 400 volunteers who delivered 20,000 hours of service.

I'm proud to report that our record attendance of 1.808 million visitors exceeded expectations. We hosted 300,000 more visitors than last year.

In addition to record attendance, we also worked hard to improve our financial picture by \$3.6 million. This was accomplished by underspending projected expenses by \$2.9 million and exceeding projected revenues by \$651,000. Kudos go to our staff for keeping tabs on their budgets and working more effectively to accomplish our shared goal of fiscal responsibility.

We continued to listen to what residents say they want for recreation opportunities. As a result, the parks system worked cooperatively with the City of Madison Heights to create a lease agreement to add a city-owned nature center to the existing facilities at Red Oaks County Park.

We also incorporated the Oakland County Market featuring a seasonal farmer's market and year-round flea market to our offerings. In addition, a concessions/restroom facility, playgrounds and recreation fields were constructed at Catalpa Oaks County Park.

Another milestone project was construction of a 2.4-mile connector trail at Addison Oaks County Park that links to Bald Mountain State Recreation Area and Cranberry Lake Park in Oakland Township, enhancing trail connectivity within Oakland County.

Biennial surveys tell us trails are the number one requested and used amenity within the Oakland County Parks system. We were honored when *Metro Parent Magazine* named Addison Oaks and Independence Oaks county parks two of the top 10 family-friendly hiking destinations in Southeast Michigan. We provide grass, paved, boardwalk and crushed limestone surfaces totaling 65 miles of trails located within 6,700 acres.

From waterpark splashes to campground bashes, 2012 was a year to celebrate. Thanks for your patronage and keep spreading the good news about what's happening at your 13 Oakland County Parks. Be sure to tell your family and friends about your latest experience recreating and share what makes Oakland County such a great place to live, work and play.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Daniel J. Stencil". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue background.

Daniel J. Stencil, Executive Officer, CPRE

OUR MISSION

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission is dedicated to providing quality recreation experiences that encourage healthy lifestyles, support economic prosperity, and promote the protection of natural resources.

Underground drain doubles as park land

The history of Red Oaks County Park is unique as it literally sits on top of the George W. Kuhn Drainage District.

The land above the drain, with its storage capacity of 124 million gallons, is ideally suited to be a park and otherwise unavailable for development since permanent structures are not permitted.

The parks system has installed productive recreational facilities such as a popular waterpark, nine-hole golf course, youth soccer complex and a five-acre dog park. Environmental sustainability has been increased with the establishment of rain gardens and no-mow areas that filter rainwater and provide wildlife habitat.



The most recent addition to Red Oaks County Park is a nature center, formerly operated by the City of Madison Heights.

A partnership between OCPR and the city resulted in the facility

being leased to the parks system at \$1/year for 25 years.

“Our new nature education model reinforces that outdoor education is not limited to the four walls of a nature center. We want to get visitors outdoors experiencing nature where it lives,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said.

OCPR is in the process of master planning Red Oaks to increase the recreational opportunities for county residents and strengthen the positive effect of a local park on urban communities.

Constructing Catalpa Oaks

In April, the parks commission hosted a groundbreaking ceremony at Catalpa Oaks County Park to begin construction on a concession and restroom facility, picnic shelter/pavilion, two playgrounds, utilities and infrastructure improvements including a new parking lot.

Historically, Catalpa Oaks provided local municipalities with access to a recreational field complex. With appropriate site improvements, operation and maintenance, the park has the potential to create opportunities unique in southeast Oakland County.

“The new amenities in an urban area are key to expanding the use of Catalpa Oaks for tournaments and special events making it a recreational asset of significant importance,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said.





Providing youth with recreation options

The Pontiac School District's extended day program, Project EXCEL, partnered with Oakland County Parks and Recreation to provide approximately 50 children with an environment for outdoor activities.

During the six-week program, Pontiac elementary, middle and high school students took field trips to Waterford Oaks County Park for enrichment-learning activities organized by grade level.

The primary goals of the program were to: provide a safe haven, free of drugs and violence; and expose students to many different types of enrichment and recreational activities that they may not be able to access otherwise.

30 years of giving recreation

In 2012, Oakland County Parks and Recreation celebrated 30 years of providing recreation through the commission-supported Recreation Assistance Partnership Program. RAPP offers support in outreach programming to: cities, villages and townships; community parks and recreation departments; schools; downtown development authorities; non-profit organizations; and underserved populations.

In addition to providing recreation experiences for residents, the program fosters community and recreation collaborations which strengthen relationships and creates awareness of the parks system. The commission provided \$150,000 to fund GetOutdoors! Adventure Programs, bouncers and bus transportation.

Noteworthy

- Nostalgia was the impetus for the Retro Games Unit that took hula hoops, kick ball and sack races to community events reviving "old school recreation".
- To commemorate the 100th anniversary of Japan's Yoshino Cherry Tree donation to the United States, ITC Transmission donated 20 trees to Glen Oaks Golf Course at a ceremony hosted by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.



New partnership grows record crops

A community service garden received a much needed boost in production when a partnership with Forgotten Harvest blossomed.

“Forgotten Harvest brought years of experience and expertise regarding maximizing production and land use as well as volunteers and specialized equipment which turned around the garden’s production,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said. “Quite literally, in one season, we’ve experienced increased production, including a large crop of squash, zucchini, watermelon and cantaloupe. This year we gathered more than 50,000 pounds of produce which was donated to emergency food providers and soup kitchens.”

Forgotten Harvest’s mission is to relieve hunger in the Detroit metropolitan community by rescuing surplus, prepared and perishable food for hungry people in Oakland County and metro Detroit.



Connector trail provides many links

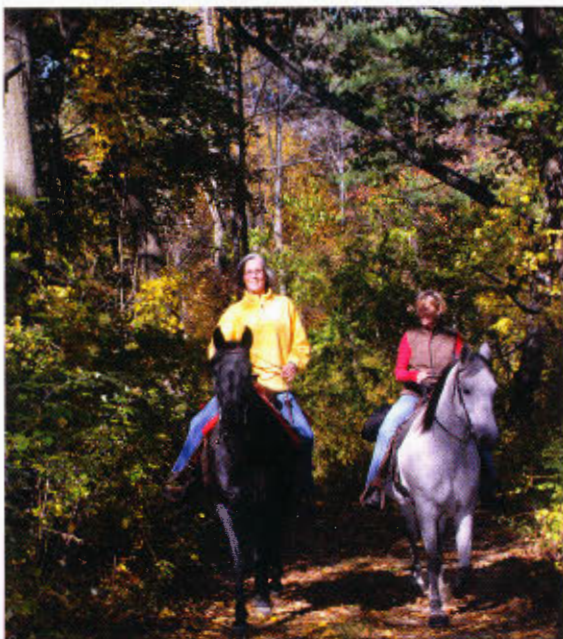
A trail is ultimately just a way of getting from one place to another...what is amazing about the Addison Oaks Connector Trail is where users are coming from and where they are going.

For the first time in the history of Oakland County Parks and Recreation, staff designed a trail

to move visitors not only from one location within the park to another but also from one park to another. Since their creation, Bald Mountain State Recreation Area, Addison Oaks County Park and the Oakland Township Cranberry Lake Preserve have been neighbors, but neighbors separated by roads and fences.

By building a trail right through Addison Oaks, visitors with a variety of interests can combine the trail experiences of all three public recreation areas and create a rural adventure that is authentically Oakland County.

The 2.4-mile gravel connector trail was made possible, in part, by a Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund Development Grant.



Noteworthy

- By adding opening night fireworks and four extra days, the Oakland County Fair reached 102,000+ in attendance. The fair traces its roots back to the Oakland Agricultural Society founded in 1830.

Finding new experiences in 'old stuff'

What is it about a place that makes it unique and memorable? That is the central question behind the notion of placemaking and it is a major focus for agencies across the country looking to attract visitors and businesses while retaining the quality of life their residents have come to expect.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation staff is taking a new look at old things within the parks system to discover the role that heritage could play in reshaping recreational experiences.

In partnership with the Michigan Barn Preservation Network and Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services, staff hosted a workshop for park volunteers at the Ernst Barn, part of the Waterford Oaks Greenhouse Complex. Over two days, volunteers learned to document a historic structure, take detailed measurements, look for clues of the barn's origin and even participate in critical stabilization measures including foundation mortar repair.

Steve Ernst, whose family owned the barn and land that later became part of Waterford Oaks County Park, spoke at the workshop and shared how the barn was used and modified by his family over the years. Ernst was so impressed with the interest shown by volunteers that he donated more than 100 agriculture-related artifacts and participated in a living history project that was filmed by Waterford Schools in partnership with Oakland County Parks.

Discovering the county's railroad past

In 2012, OCPR staff partnered with the Oakland County Historical Commission to host a "History of Oakland County Railroads" event at Springfield Oaks County Park. Visitors were able to view train-associated artifacts and observe presentations on the history of rail travel in Southeast Michigan including the architecture of train stations and the rise and fall of interurban trolley lines.

As part of their presentation, the historians led the visitors on a virtual journey through the mind of a history detective. They learned about the clues that can be uncovered from the most basic internet searches, and the value provided by amateur train enthusiasts.

In the end, all involved were given a new appreciation for the hidden history everywhere. Chances are that the next time they are teeing off at Springfield Oaks Golf Course and catch a glimpse of the train tracks in the distance, they may picture a time when settlers were building the first mill pond.



Natural Resources and Environment

Promoting access to high quality natural areas through the stewardship of the county's green infrastructure vision

Hooked on conservation

A lake that had only been fished by the family owning the land is now a public access lake with a special designation.

In April, Upper Bushman Lake at Independence Oaks-North became the first and only public access lake in Southeast Michigan with a Catch-and-Release-Only Special Designation. It is one of only seven catch-and-release-for-all-fish-species lakes in Michigan. This variance from the standard state fishing regulations was authorized by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The spring-fed lake is part of the Clinton River Watershed headwaters.

"The catch-and-release designation prevents the 31-acre lake from becoming over-harvested and allows it to perform at its biological potential, producing and supporting a high quality fishery," Executive Officer Dan Stencil said.

The lake provides anglers with the opportunity for high catch rates and above-average sized fish including largemouth bass, pumpkinseed sunfish, bluegill and northern pike.



Coyote habits tracked in park

Coyote numbers are growing in Southeast Michigan. As part of an ongoing Wayne State University project, a 36-pound adult male coyote at Waterford Oaks County Park was collared and released for radio tracking.

The animal's movement pattern and diet are currently being studied by Wayne State Ph.D. candidate Bill Dodge. Based on radio telemetry movement data collected throughout the spring and summer, researchers believe the collared male may have successfully denned and mated.

The research team is also exploring what types of food are available to coyote in the parks. To do so, they marked and recaptured small mammals via live trapping, (meadow voles and field mice) as well as counted pellets to estimate abundance of rabbits at Waterford Oaks.

"Results of the research can guide how staff manages coyote in our parks and help us educate our park guests about coyote behavior," Natural Resource Planner Brittany Bird said.

Taking nature education on the road

OCPR is expanding local outreach through its Rotating Exhibit Project, which makes interpretive displays available free of charge to Oakland County municipalities and public recreation providers.

The exhibits feature topics including Clever Coyotes, Invasive Species and Birding in Oakland County.

Since the beginning of the program, this effort has resulted in more than 125,000 viewers and now boasts more than 20 participating communities.



Noteworthy

- Feeding the hungry is a charitable byproduct of a wildlife management program that involves volunteer hunters to reduce and maintain the Whitetail Deer population at two parks. Last year, 717 pounds of venison was donated to Gleaners Food Bank of Southeast Michigan.
- Nearly 3,500 holiday trees were collected via a free recycling program.



Healthy Living

Promoting the role of recreation in supporting quality of life and active lifestyles of residents and visitors

Creating access to healthy living

In the spring of 2012 Oakland County Parks and Recreation assumed management and operation of the Oakland County Market, a mainstay for providing grower-direct fresh produce and flowers to residents since 1953.

The Parks and Recreation Commission saw the County Market as a perfect addition to the parks system, aligning with the commission's mission to encourage healthy lifestyles, support economic prosperity and promote the protection of natural resources, while providing high-quality recreational opportunities. Oakland County Parks and Recreation plans to utilize the market to promote access to fresh and local produce, meat, dairy, plants and flowers in a fun, exciting and educational atmosphere to its more than 300,000 annual visitors.

OCPR recognizes that not everyone recreates at a golf course or a waterpark. "An afternoon spent walking among market vendors has become part of an active lifestyle for many adults and families with young children," Jon Noyes, supervisor-planning, said.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation received its first grant for the market in July, providing \$50,000 toward \$125,000 in much-needed projects courtesy of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. The grant will fund educational programs for patrons, training on business development for farmers, upgrades to accessibility, the introduction of EBT and an increase in marketing to draw more customers to the market. Patrons can expect to see many of these projects well underway or completed by the start of the 2013 season.





• Thanks to the OCParks Express, 200 senior citizens traversed Oakland County on Holiday Light Tours. Support was provided by 80 Girl Scouts who served hot chocolate, sang carols and assisted seniors with a craft project.

Building Healthy Communities

The parks system was recognized by the Oakland County Health Division for participating in Building Healthy Communities grant initiatives. These included participating in the building of a coalition to conduct a community-wide assessment and develop a three-year strategic action plan. This collaborative partnership strives to reduce chronic diseases such as obesity and cardiovascular disease in the City of Pontiac through policy,

system and environmental changes that increase physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco-free environments.

The grant was awarded to the Health Division by the Michigan Department of Community Health and built the foundation for Oakland County to receive additional 2013 funding through the State of Michigan Health and Wellness 4 x 4 Plan and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program education grants.



Sustainability

Implementing environmental, social and fiscal practices that will help ensure long-term viability

Food and beverage services get makeover

In an effort to provide enhanced customer service, Oakland County Parks and Recreation restructured its food and beverage service delivery.

Since 1974, the parks system had relied upon a single provider responsible for golf course grill rooms, concessions at waterparks and campgrounds, limited vending and banquet service at multiple locations.

“One of our priorities is to mirror the parks system’s exceptional recreation experiences with a superior food and beverage service. Changes needed to be made to maintain the highest quality service for our patrons,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said. “We weren’t unhappy with the service being provided, but staff realized greater efficiencies could be attained through the process of breaking down the single contract into several smaller contracts to allow for more diversity in pricing, products and services provided. This allowed vendors to concentrate in particular areas based upon their expertise and ultimately provide specialized service to our guests. We focused on the distinct areas of concession operations, approved caterers, vending and banquet services.”

“In this current economy, we were aware that we have to offer guests a distinctive impression in order to capture, maintain and grow our market,” Business Development Representative Phil Castonia said.

“We saw room for growth in offering traditional camp store and logo items, based on demand from our guests.”



Interns learn in the field

Oakland County Parks and Recreation offers college students internship opportunities to jump head-first into the real world of natural resources and parks and recreation.

“Interns are future parks and recreation professionals and it is important that their involvement with Oakland County Parks and Recreation is as useful as possible,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said.

Students are encouraged to exchange ideas with their supervisors, use innovative thinking, create strategic tactics, lead projects and network with professionals during their internship period. While working in a team environment, interns meet the professional standard while applying academic and practical experience to hands-on, real life experiences.



Planning for the future of recreation

The Park Master Planning Process provides staff, park users, the public, and decision-makers with a clear understanding of the desired character and future direction of individual parks within the Oakland County Parks and Recreation system. The Guiding Principles lay the foundation for developing visions for the park and the park's individual facilities that are guided by recreational need and contribute to community sustainability.

The Guiding Principles for Park Master Planning include:

- Understand and Enhance the Character of the Park
- Preserve, Maintain and Create Natural Communities
- Help People Become Healthier
- Improve Access to Recreation
- Develop Facilities that Protect and Improve the Environment
- Plan for Successful Outcomes

Public engagement is an important component of the Park Master Planning Process. Online surveys for Waterford Oaks and Red Oaks county parks have had high participation and provided input that completed the planning process.

The Park Master Planning Process results in the Park Vision and Facility Concepts, which is approved by the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission and provides a framework for making decisions regarding capital improvements, business plans and other actions requiring Commission approval.

Noteworthy

- The switch to electronic comment cards from the paper version saves about \$2,000 annually and allows staff to respond faster to guest inquiries.



Parks

ADDISON OAKS

W. Romeo Rd., Leonard
248.693.2432
Conference Center: 248.693.8305

CATALPA OAKS

Greenfield Rd., Southfield
For information-248.424.7081

GROVELAND OAKS

Dixie Highway, Holly
248.634.9811

HIGHLAND OAKS

Milford Rd., Highland
For information-248.858.0906

INDEPENDENCE OAKS

Sashabaw Road, Clarkston
Park: 248.625.0877
Nature Center: 248.625.6473

LYON OAKS

Pontiac Trail, Wixom
For information-248.858.0906

ORION OAKS

Clarkston Road, Lake Orion
For information-248.858.0906

RED OAKS

13 Mile Road, Madison Heights
Nature Center-248.585.0100
Waterpark-248.858.0906

ROSE OAKS

Fish Lake Rd., Holly
For information-248.858.0906

SPRINGFIELD OAKS

Andersonville Rd., Davisburg
248.634.7899

WATERFORD OAKS

Activity Center
Watkins Lake Road, Waterford
248.858.0913
Waterpark
Scott Lake Road, Waterford
For information-248.858.0906

Golf Courses

GLEN OAKS

13 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills
248.851.8356

LYON OAKS

Pontiac Trail, Wixom
248.437.1488

RED OAKS

John R, Madison Heights
248.541.5030

SPRINGFIELD OAKS

Andersonville Rd., Davisburg
248.625.2540

WHITE LAKE OAKS

Williams Lake Rd., White Lake
248.698.2700



Parks Commission

Founded in 1966, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission is the policy-making board that oversees the system's 6,700 acres. Commissioners are tasked with allocating resources over 13 parks, and making decisions about purchasing park land, constructing facilities, preserving maintenance standards and developing innovative programs and services.

Commissioners

Gerald A. Fisher, Chairman
John P. McCulloch, Vice Chairman
J. David VanderVeen, Secretary
Pecky D. Lewis, Chairperson Emeritus

A. David Baumhart III
Robert Kostin
Christine Long
Gary R. McGillivray
John Scott
Eric S. Wilson

Daniel J. Stencil, Executive Officer

Administrative Offices

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2012 Awards

- Michigan Recreation and Park Association: Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson – Outstanding Local Elected Official and Regina Ellis – Outstanding Volunteer
- Lifeguards Gold Medal – Ellis and Associates, International Aquatic Safety & Risk Management Consultants
- Executive Officer Dan Stencil and Business Development Representative Phil Castonia were certified by the National Recreation and Park Association and the National Certification Board as Certified Park and Recreation Executive and Certified Park and Recreation Professional
- Karen Kohn, Certified Administrative Professional – Organizational Management, International Association of Administrative Professionals
- Natural Resource Planner Brittany Bird is the recipient of the 2012 Park Resources Leadership Award from the Michigan Recreation and Park Association.
- Regina Ellis, National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials Outstanding Volunteer



Visitors experienced this broad-wing hawk up close at the Wint Nature Center's Birds of Prey Program thanks to a collaboration with the Howell Nature Center.

Oakland County—A great place to live, work and play