



2023



ANNUAL REPORT

## BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Park Commissioners is a three-member body appointed by Judge John M. Holcomb, presiding Judge of the Butler County Probate Court. Board members are volunteers who serve for three-year terms.

## 2023 BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

**Daryl Nelson**  
*President*

.....

**Cynamon Trokhan**  
*Vice President*

.....

**Larry Gersbach**  
*Member*



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

MetroParks of Butler County  
2051 Timberman Road  
Hamilton, Ohio 45013

513.867.5835

*[YourMetroParks.net](http://YourMetroParks.net)*

*[info@YourMetroParks.net](mailto:info@YourMetroParks.net)*

## MISSION

The Mission of the MetroParks of Butler County is to provide an exceptional park system that maximizes the community's quality of life through conservation, education and recreation.

## AWAKENING THE EXPLORER IN EVERYONE

Wow – we were extremely busy last year and 2023 flew by! Your MetroParks are some of the county's best assets and we're happy to see so many of you at our parks and programs. Last year our team did a lot of foundational work and spent a great amount of time in your communities learning how we can work together to strengthen and share our mission of conservation, outdoor education and recreation.

MetroParks kicked off 2023 with the Discover Your Parks, Find Your Story campaign to show you more of what the parks have to offer. We're listening to you and creating and expanding outdoor opportunities! We introduced a field trip scholarship so Butler County schools can experience farm life at Chrisholm MetroPark; we received incredible public input for Davidson Woods; and we reinforced the Dry Fork Creek streambank at Governor Bebb MetroPark and installed a bridge across the creek for you to access an additional 60+ acres of greenspace.

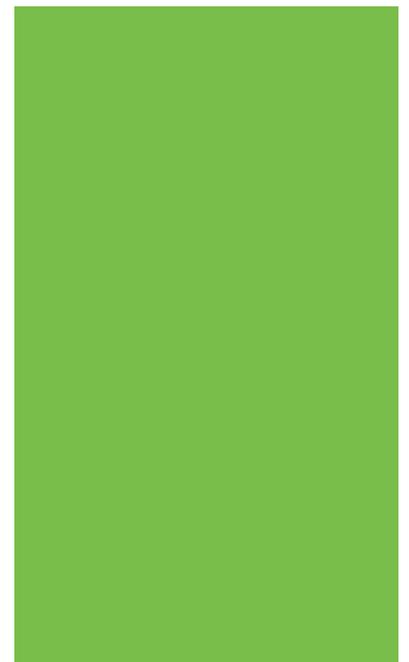
MetroParks also created a vision statement: To Awaken the Explorer in Everyone. We want to encourage your curiosity and foster ways for you to experience your MetroParks through paddling, hiking, meditating, socializing, fishing, birding – and everything in between! Our entire team helped to identify MetroParks' core values (check them out below) that we will use with staff and community partners to make sure the way we work aligns with and advances our mission and vision.

This report shares some of the work we've done, please take time to check it out. I'm proud of our team and am excited for what's next - we look forward to awakening your explorer in 2024!



Jackie O'Connell  
Executive Director

*we are*  
**ENGAGED**  
**COLLABORATIVE**  
**WELCOMING**  
**ACCOUNTABLE**



## PARKS & REGIONAL TRAILS

**Angst Nature Preserve MetroPark**  
*Wayne Township*

**Bicentennial Commons**  
*City of Middletown*

**Chrisholm MetroPark**  
*Madison Township*

**Elk Creek MetroPark**  
*Madison Township*

**Forest Run MetroPark**  
*Ross Township*

**Four Mile Creek MetroPark**  
*Oxford, Milford and St. Clair Townships*

**Gilmore MetroPark**  
*City of Hamilton*

**Green Heron MetroPark**  
*Ross Township*

**Governor Bebb MetroPark**  
*Morgan Township*

**Great Miami River Trail**  
*City of Middletown, Lemon and Fairfield Townships*

**Indian Creek MetroPark**  
*Reily Township*

**Miami 2 Miami Trail**  
*City of Hamilton*

**Rentschler Forest MetroPark**  
*Fairfield Township*

**Salamander Run MetroPark**  
*Morgan Township*

**Voice of America MetroPark**  
*West Chester Township*



### BY THE NUMBERS



**1.24M visits**

to the parks and the Great Miami River Trail in 2023



Nearly **5,000 acres**  
of owned and managed park land and  
**4,500 acres**  
of undeveloped greenspace



**70.9 miles**

of owned and managed trails



**6,810 trees**

planted since 2015

# Operations

## OVERVIEW

Operations is MetroParks' largest division and manages nearly 5,000 acres of land, 56 miles of natural trails and 14.9 miles of paved trails across the county. Staff are also responsible for building and equipment maintenance, landscaping and litter control in the parks.

## BY THE NUMBERS



MetroParks operates **two National Audubon Society important birding areas**

at Voice of America MetroPark and Gilmore MetroPark



Thanks to MetroParks' annual recycling programs

**139 Christmas Trees and 1,972 lbs. of lights**

were kept out of the landfill during the 2023-2024 holiday season

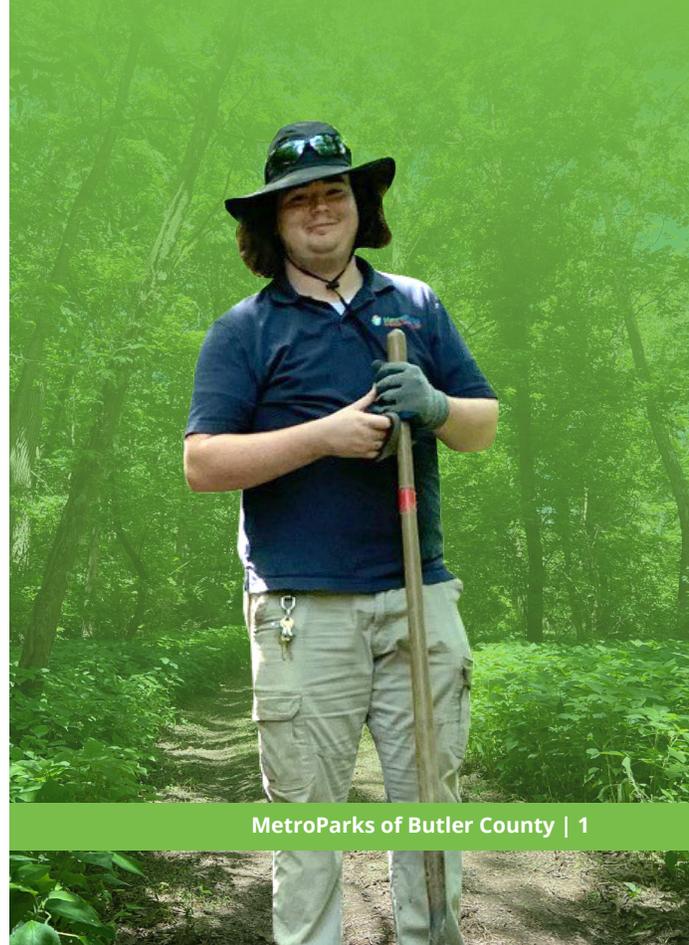


## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Almost three miles of new, natural trails were added to Governor Bebb MetroPark and the Sycamore Bluffs Area of Four Mile Creek MetroPark. The trails were planned and created by MetroParks' Operations team.

Updated trail makers were installed at four MetroParks and Miami Woods. The new markers improve trail navigation and are easier for hikers to find and follow.

In partnership with Travel Butler County, a new irrigation system was installed in the center seven fields of the Voice of America MetroPark Athletic Complex. In-ground irrigation greatly reduces the staff time needed to maintain the fields and improves turf quality.



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Work was completed on the Dry Fork Bridge and Sycamore Grove Trail project at Governor Bebb MetroPark. The bridge opens more than 60 acres of the park previously inaccessible to the public and leads to the one-mile Sycamore Grove Trail, which includes 0.3-miles of ADA compliant surfacing. This project was funded by a \$355,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant with a 50% match provided by MetroParks.

The Dry Fork Creek stabilization project at Governor Bebb MetroPark mitigated the quickly-eroding banks of the creek that runs through the park and improved water quality in the stream, a tributary of the Great Miami River. This project was made possible by a \$488,938 H2Ohio grant and was the first project in Butler County to receive funding from this program.

The Miami 2 Miami Trail opened at Gilmore MetroPark in May 2023. This 1.5-mile paved-trail segment is one of the first steps in connecting two of the region's longest paved trails, the Little Miami Scenic Trail and the Great Miami River Trail. Thanks to Tri-State Trails, the City Hamilton and the Butler County Engineer's Office for their partnership on this important project.

## Park Planning

### OVERVIEW

Park Planning is responsible for MetroParks' capital improvement projects and capital replacement strategy. In 2023, Park Planning received nearly \$5.88 million in grant funding for future capital improvement projects at Gilmore MetroPark, Voice of America MetroPark, Elk Creek MetroPark, the Great Miami River Trail and Davidson Woods, a new MetroPark opening in Hanover Township in 2024. Planning staff also managed the installation of a new playground at the Timberman Ridge Area of Forest Run MetroPark in 2023, with flush bathrooms coming to the park in 2024.

### BY THE NUMBERS



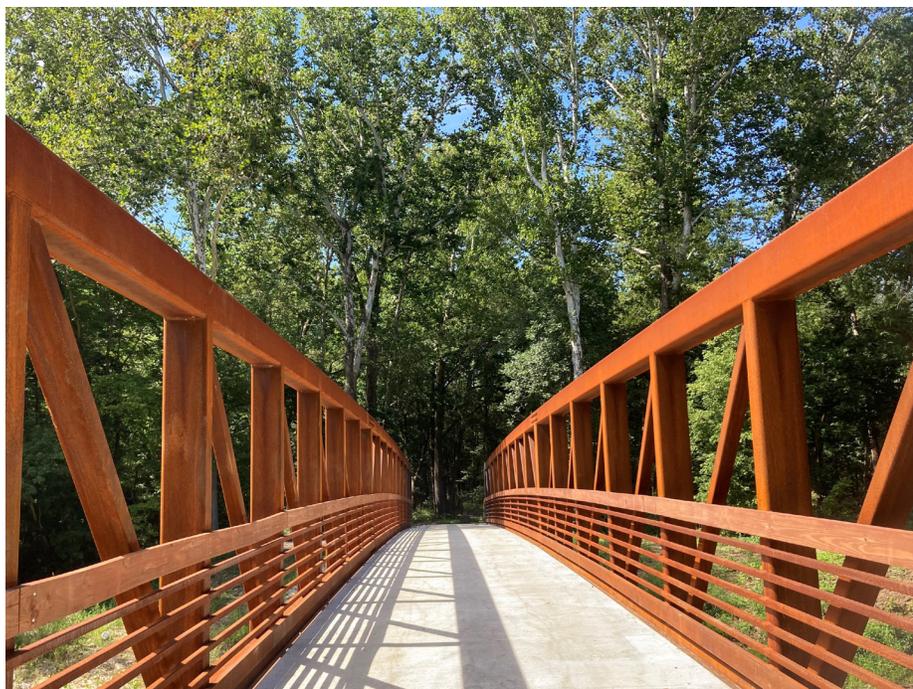
## 4.5 miles

of gaps in the GMRT are currently being planned for completion by MetroParks



## Over 900 people

helped shape the vision plan for Davidson Woods by attending in-person meetings or participating in an online survey





## Programming & Education

### OVERVIEW

Parks are often the first introduction young people have to the outdoors, and MetroParks' Programming & Education staff play a critical role in sparking future generations' love and respect for the natural world. Programming & Education staff are responsible for developing and executing public programs, field trips and overseeing MetroParks' special events. They also manage the farm at the Chrisholm MetroPark Historic Farmstead and the Middletown Community Gardens.

### BY THE NUMBERS



**Over 700 guests**

experienced 1800's Ohio during Pioneer Life at Governor Bebb MetroPark in October



**12,562 people**

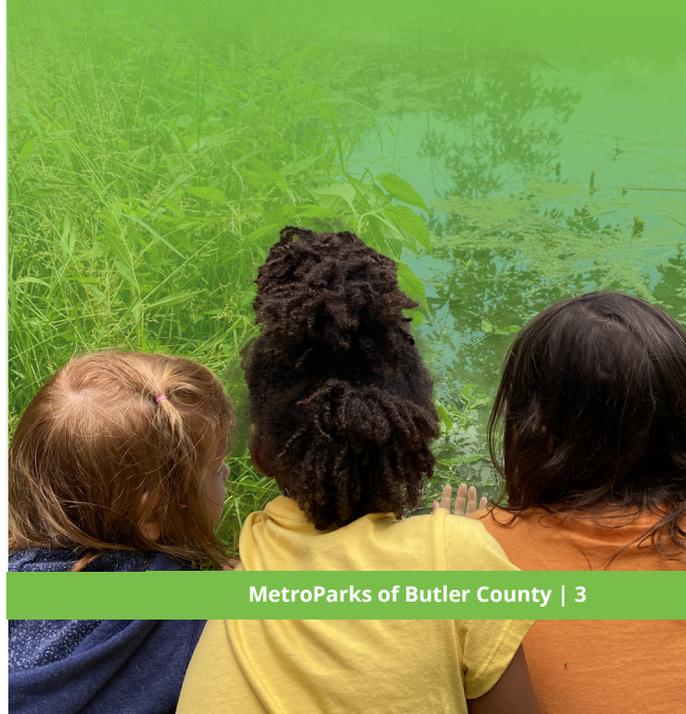
reached through MetroParks' programming, field trips and special events in 2023

### 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Programming and Education reached 14 additional schools with educational programming in 2023, a 39% increase from 2022.

Thanks to the Friends of Chrisholm, all Butler County schools were eligible for field trip and bussing scholarships to Chrisholm MetroPark. Three schools took advantage of the scholarship and learned about farm animals and life on the farm at the historic Amish-Mennonite settlement.

Nearly 800 people celebrated Halloween with MetroParks at Trunks and Treats on the Trail. This partnered event brought the Hamilton Parks Conservancy, 17 Strong, Lane Public Library, the City of Hamilton Police and Fire Departments as well as local businesses and non-profits together at Millikin Woods Park in Hamilton for tricks, treats and family fun.



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Environmental restoration projects are important to the long-term health and recovery of native habitats, which may be damaged by over-farming, development or the spread of invasive species. In 2023, Natural Resources & Conservation staff focused on restoration work at Angst Nature Preserve MetroPark and the Line Hill Mound Area of Rentschler Forest MetroPark.

A prescribed burn was conducted at the Timberman Ridge Area of Forest Run MetroPark in the fall of 2023. Prescribed burns are an important tool to help control invasive plant species and encourage native seeds to germinate in MetroParks' prairies and meadows.

Chronolog stations were installed at the Mill Race Area of Four Mile Creek MetroPark and the Line Hill Mound Area of Rentschler Forest MetroPark. These citizen scientist kiosks allow the public to create a time-lapse of the parks' prairies. Conservation & Natural Resources staff will utilize the images to collect data about plants and animals in the area throughout time.

# Natural Resources & Conservation

## OVERVIEW

Natural Resources & Conservation staff are responsible for the protection of MetroParks' natural resources, invasive species removal and land restoration projects. Over 90% of MetroParks' owned and managed lands remain undeveloped. Nearly 1,110 acres are actively managed as conservation areas, where natural resource protection projects are in progress.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Actively Managed Conservation Areas

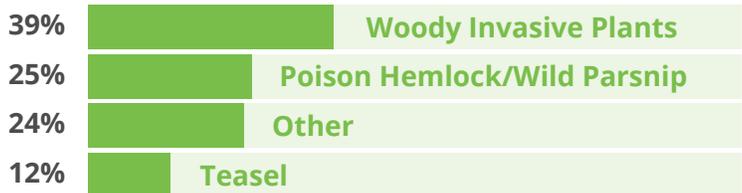
**98%** of Salamander Run MetroPark

**77%** of Forest Run MetroPark

**49%** of Voice of America MetroPark

**352.4 acres** of native prairie and grasslands have been installed park-wide since 2015

### Invasive Plant Control Projects





## Visitor & Event Services

### OVERVIEW

Responsible for overseeing guest services for over one million park visitors, the Visitor & Event Services team works diligently to create superior park experiences for all guests. The division also oversees all organizational marketing, communications, social media and manages tournaments and special events.

### BY THE NUMBERS



**1,042 rentals**

for campsites, shelters and indoor facilities

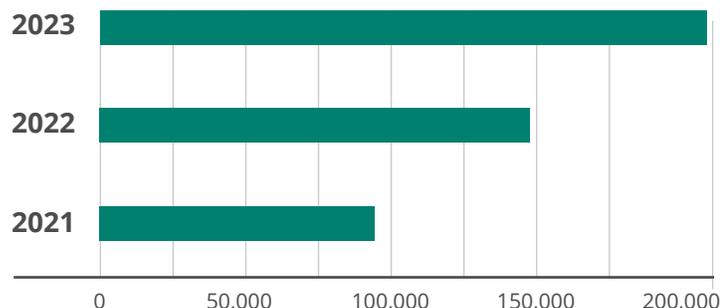


Great Miami River Trail

**usage increased 38%**

from 2022 to 2023

## Combined Facebook & Instagram Reach



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

The Midwest Presidents Cup and the DPL Final Youth Amateur Soccer tournaments held at the Voice of America MetroPark Athletic Complex had a combined local economic impact of \$7.4 million and brought over 12,000 people to Butler County.

The Abner Group took over operations of the Ronald Reagan Lodge at Voice of America MetroPark and opened VOA Cafe, a seasonal concession stand in the Lodge. The Lodge held corporate parties, weddings, birthdays and more in 2023.

MetroParks hosted the organization's first Citywide Hamilton Internship Program intern in 2023 to assist with social media outreach and engagement.



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

A new volunteer management site called Better Impact was implemented that allows volunteers to enter their own hours, see scheduled assignments and sign up for upcoming projects. The new system reduced staff time spent logging volunteer information and expanded MetroParks' data collection and reporting capabilities.

Better Impact's advertising and management tools have engaged more people in one-time service events, increasing participation in invasive species removal projects and more.

MetroParks relaunched the volunteer Trail Ambassador Program in 2023. Trail Ambassadors monitor conditions on the MetroParks managed portions of the Great Miami River Trail and Metro Parks natural trails and play a key role in keeping trails open, clean and safe.

## Volunteer Resources

### OVERVIEW

Volunteers contributed 4,181 hours of service to MetroParks in 2023. Volunteers removed invasive species, painted, mulched, wrestled soccer nets, monitored trails and bird nest boxes and much more. Thank you to everyone who made a difference last year!

### BY THE NUMBERS



**\$132,924** is the estimated value of volunteer service to MetroParks in 2023



Volunteer Trail Ambassadors covered a collective **6,296 miles** in 2023, the distance from Hamilton to Peru's Machu Pichu



If you or your group is interested in volunteering with MetroParks email [volunteering@YourMetroParks.net](mailto:volunteering@YourMetroParks.net) or visit [YourMetroParks.net](http://YourMetroParks.net) for more information.



## Development

### OVERVIEW

Development's efforts help increase MetroParks' revenue and streamline donor relations. Development is also the point of contact for all of MetroParks' friends groups, community foundations and sponsorships.

### BY THE NUMBERS



**\$43,229**

in Community Foundation funding was used to support the kayak rental system and install a new shade structure at Voice of America MetroPark



MetroParks received

**\$839,587**

in direct donations in 2023

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Your tax-deductible contribution to MetroParks' community foundation funds supports our mission of furthering conservation, recreation and educational initiatives in Butler County.

MetroParks has active accounts with the Northern Cincinnati Community Foundation, the Oxford Community Foundation, the Middletown Community Foundation, the Fairfield Community Foundation, and the Hamilton Community Foundation.

To learn more about making a tax-deductible gift to amplify our impact locally, **scan the QR code** or visit [YourMetroParks.net](https://YourMetroParks.net)



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

### Human Resources

MetroParks implemented a new electronic timekeeping system which reduced the possibility of human error with timekeeping and leave tracking and saved MetroParks approximately 20 hours of labor per week. HR staff had more time to create and implement a variety of staff training opportunities focused on skill building and leadership development.

The new Employee Volunteer Program (EVP) encourages staff to volunteer to help local organizations. Some of the most impactful EVP projects were held at the Hamilton Urban Gardens and Supports to Encourage Low-income Families.

MetroParks received a Great Place to Work® (GPTW) certification. All GPTW designated organizations must meet staff participation and survey score requirements, which are geared to evaluate the climate and culture of an agency.

### MetroParks Police

MetroParks' public safety officers rebranded from "Rangers" to "Police" in 2023 to clarify the officers' roles for the general public.

## Human Resources

### OVERVIEW

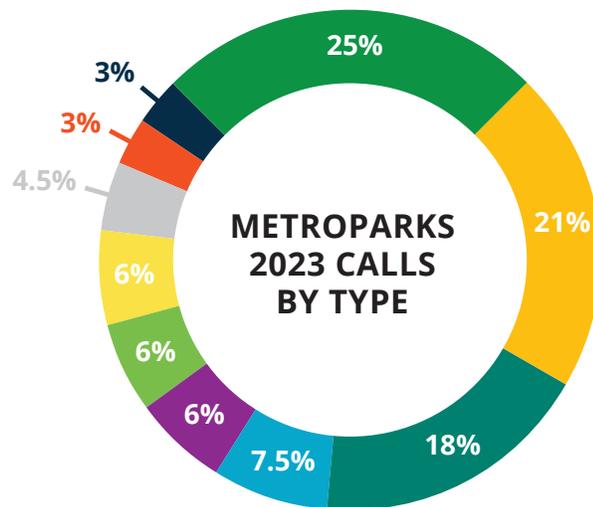
Human Resources is responsible for hiring, payroll and benefit administration. The division has also been instrumental in developing and implementing continuing education strategy for all levels of staff.

## MetroParks Police

### OVERVIEW

MetroParks' officers are fully certified police professionals who patrol 14 parks and regional trails daily. MetroParks Police also provide logistical support for sports tournaments and special events, helping guests to have a safe and memorable experience when visiting the parks.

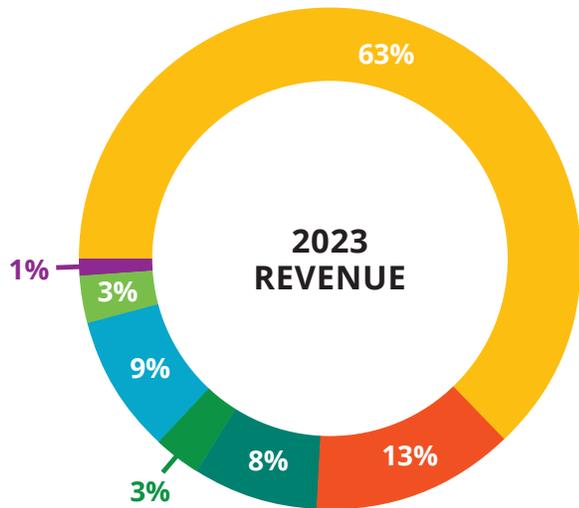
### BY THE NUMBERS



Property Damage	25%
Theft	21%
Suspicious Person	18%
Other	7.5%
Intoxication	6%
Disturbance	6%
Warrant Arrests	6%
Found Property	4.5%
Injured Person	3%
Security Alarm	3%

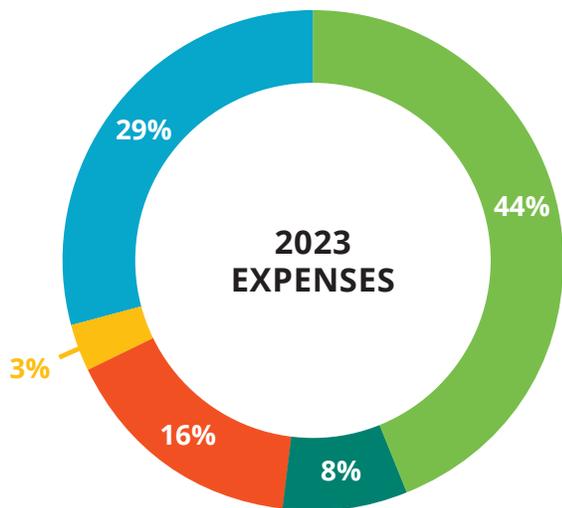


# Financial Information



<span style="color: #FFC000;">■</span> Property Taxes	63%
<span style="color: #FF4500;">■</span> Earned Income	13%
<span style="color: #008080;">■</span> Donations	8%
<span style="color: #008000;">■</span> Interest	3%
<span style="color: #00B0F0;">■</span> Grants*	9%
<span style="color: #90EE90;">■</span> Local Government Funds	3%
<span style="color: #800080;">■</span> Homestead Rollback	1%

\* Grant funding is generally received in the revenue budget in the same fiscal year MetroParks receives grant reimbursement



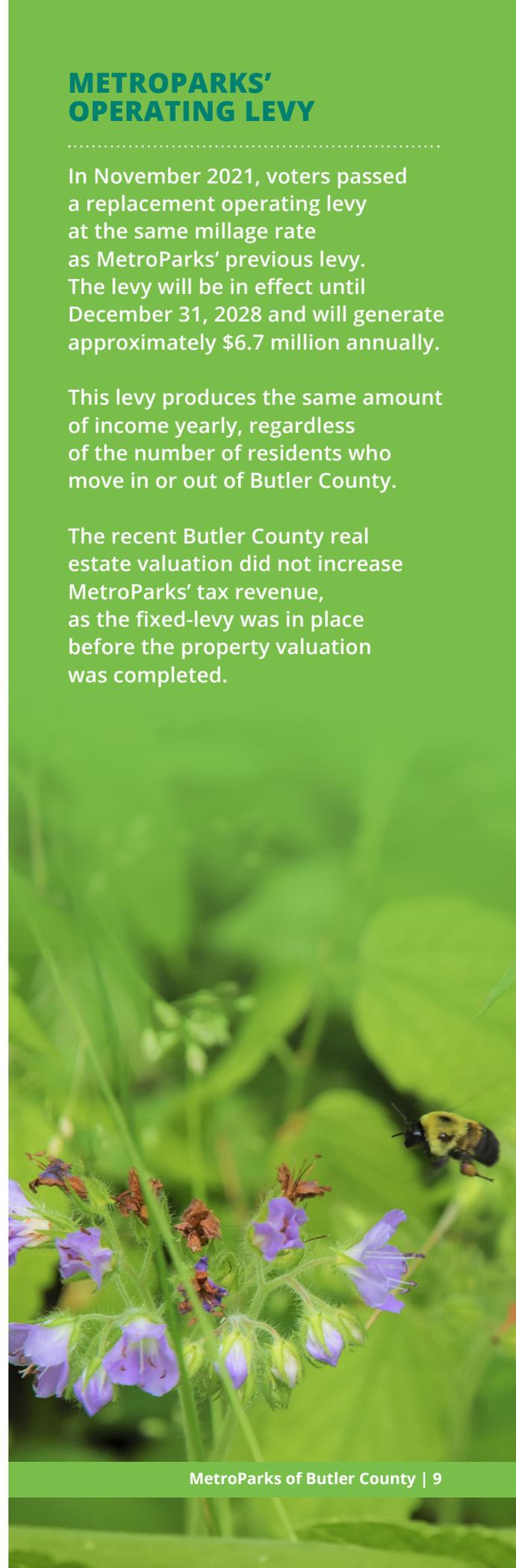
<span style="color: #90EE90;">■</span> Salaries, Including Benefits	44%
<span style="color: #008080;">■</span> Materials & Supplies	8%
<span style="color: #FF4500;">■</span> Contracts/Services	16%
<span style="color: #FFC000;">■</span> Other Expenses	3%
<span style="color: #00B0F0;">■</span> Capital	29%

## METROPARKS' OPERATING LEVY

In November 2021, voters passed a replacement operating levy at the same millage rate as MetroParks' previous levy. The levy will be in effect until December 31, 2028 and will generate approximately \$6.7 million annually.

This levy produces the same amount of income yearly, regardless of the number of residents who move in or out of Butler County.

The recent Butler County real estate valuation did not increase MetroParks' tax revenue, as the fixed-levy was in place before the property valuation was completed.



# Thanks to Our 2023 Partners

Arrow Adventure

Butler County Chapter of the  
Ohio Horseman's Council

Butler County Engineer's Office

Butler Soil & Water Conservation  
District

Cincinnati Cricket Club

City of Fairfield

City of Hamilton

City of Middletown

Citywide Hamilton  
Internship Program

Clean Ohio Fund

Fairfield Chamber of Commerce

Fairfield Community Foundation

FC Cincinnati

Friends of Chrisholm

Friends of MetroParks

Great Miami Riverway

Greater Hamilton Chamber of  
Commerce

Greater Oxford Community  
Foundation

Hamilton City Schools

Hamilton Community Foundation

Hamilton Parks Conservancy

Lakota Local School District

Miami University

Middletown Community  
Foundation

MidPointe Library System

National Park Service

National Voice of America  
Museum of Broadcasting

Northern Cincinnati Foundation

Ohio Department of Natural  
Resources

Orienteering Cincinnati

OSU Extension Office

OSU Master Gardeners

Oxford Chamber of Commerce

Pioneer Church & Burial Ground  
Restoration Committee

The Chamber of Commerce  
Serving Middletown,  
Monroe & Trenton

Three Valley Conservation Trust

Travel Butler County

TriState Trails

UC Health

West Chester Photo Club

West Chester Township

West Chester/Liberty Chamber  
Alliance

17 Strong

If your organization is interested in partnering with MetroParks or learning more about the park district email [info@YourMetroParks.net](mailto:info@YourMetroParks.net) or visit [YourMetroParks.net](http://YourMetroParks.net) to book a speaker, explore partnership or sponsorship opportunities and more.





# DISCOVER YOUR PARKS FIND YOUR STORY



Scan to explore seasonal programs, sign up for MetroParks' email newsletter, learn more about employment opportunities and much more!

Follow us on Social Media:



@metroparks



@metroparks\_of\_butlercounty



# MetroParks

of Butler County

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