

Lake Metroparks acquires 30 acres of wetlands for free

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Lake Metroparks is picking up an additional 30 acres of valuable wetlands along Arcola Creek in Madison Township and won't have to pay a dime.

On Wednesday, Lake Metroparks three-member board of park commissioners agreed to accept a 30-acre donation from the Nature Conservancy.

This swath of mixed habitats will become a component of the agency's existing 153-acre Arcola Creek Park, which is bordered by Dock Road on the West, County Line Road on the east, Lake Erie to the north and then upstream.

The property is a remnant lake-plain forest and the acquisition will increase the parks system's frontage along Arcola Creek from 1,600 feet to 4,900 feet.

It also will include the East Branch of Arcola Creek that runs under County Line Road, says Paul Palagyi, interim executive director for Lake Metroparks.

Palagyi also said the agency has successfully worked with the Lake County commissioners in managing that portion of the reserve owned by the county.

"We are both very excited and pleased with this donation as it will add to the estuary already being managed by Lake Metroparks for public use," Palagyi said. "The donation will allow Lake Metroparks to further protect one of the few natural estuaries on Lake Erie to ensure it can be enjoyed by future generations and will increase access to this highly popular steelhead stream."

A significant challenge for the park system as it relates to the newly expanded park, Palagyi said, is the presence of various invasive plant species. Among them are phragmites, narrow-leaved cat-tail and multiflora rose, Palagyi says.

"We've secured a grant of approximately \$48,000 to control these plants that negatively impact native species," he said.

"Likewise, we will use some of this funding to restore native vegetation to the stream."

Ross Lebold, land protection specialist with the Ohio chapter of the Nature Conservancy, said the group's donation of the acreage is due in part to its extensive land holdings in Northeast Ohio.

"Lake Metroparks are already doing a great job of managing the Arcola Creek site, and this exchange will free us to work on other projects," Lebold said. "Clearly the land will still be protected."

Lebold did say that while they will outright donate the property to Lake Metroparks the conservation group will "hold some deed restrictions" including maintaining it as a nature preserve that cannot be transferred to a third party and "absolutely no drilling."

"That's just for perpetual protection of the property," Lebold said.

In its present form the park is an important go-to destination for steelhead anglers who fish either the public portion of the creek itself or else wade into Lake Erie and cast for the seasonally migrating trout.

The park also has a rich and colorful history as an important iron works location and ship building site.