The year 2016 was a pivotal year for Great Parks of Hamilton County as we continued our commitment to enrich lives by connecting people to the great outdoors. In April we opened a universally accessible canoe and kayak launch at Miami Whitewater Forest that also meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). And in May we celebrated the extension of an additional 3.2 miles of the Little Miami Scenic Trail, one of the longest paved trail systems in the state of Ohio.

Among Great Parks’ highest priorities is protecting water quality. One of the most effective methods for protecting waterways and the underlying aquifer is to preserve wooded hillsides, streamside forests and floodplains. Last year we acquired more than 382 acres of additional greenspace including critical bottomland forests along the Great Miami River.

On November 8, the voters of Hamilton County expressed their support and confidence in Great Parks through the passage of the 1 mill replacement levy. This 10-year levy positions Great Parks on a positive course to continue our mission to preserve and protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation and education for our citizens.

On behalf of the Board of Park Commissioners, thank you to all of the visitors and friends who showed support for Great Parks of Hamilton County in 2016. I invite you to review this recap of our 2016 accomplishments and to take time in 2017 to visit and explore your Great Parks!

Jack Sutton, Executive Director
Great Parks of Hamilton County

If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, ancestry, physical or mental disability, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with the Office of Equal Opportunity, Dept. of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.
PROTECTING LAND, PROTECTING WATER
A stream is ultimately a reflection of its watershed. When stormwater runs off a parking lot, it carries oils and other contaminants with it. Those contaminants end up in our local streams, and eventually, in our rivers as well. The result impacts water quality and threatens imperiled animals like mussels and fish. Sensitive aquatic animals are like canaries in the coal mine; their absence should cause concern about the suitability of water for human use.

Streamside forests allow places for runoff to filter through native vegetation and protect water quality. For this reason, Great Parks prioritizes land acquisition along waterways, because protecting land is truly the key to protecting water. In 2016, Great Parks acquired nearly 400 acres, with several parcels located in strategic spots along our waterways, including the 143-acre Welch Tract and 67-acre Bowles Tract that are both situated along the Great Miami River. Safeguarding these streamside forests allows them to continue to serve as stormwater buffers and helps protect the underlying aquifer from contamination. The areas not only provide a healthy home for local wildlife, but they also give the citizens of Hamilton County a great place to indulge in our area’s natural beauty.

CELEBRATING REFORESTATION
In 2013, several organizations in the tristate region came together with one goal: increase the forest canopy in our metropolitan area by 2 million trees by 2020. This ambitious and important effort was called “Taking Root.”

With ash trees dying in parks all over the county from the emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation, Great Parks was expecting to lose 20–30% of its tree canopy. But EAB, which made it to the US in shipping pallets, was only the latest in a growing number of introduced plant and animal species causing damage to the ecology of our forests.

Great Parks responded by making reforestation an agency-wide priority and committed to planting 60,000 trees by the end of 2016. Thanks to many partners, volunteers, grants and donors, the goal was shattered, and the final, three-year tally topped 128,000 trees planted! The accomplishment was celebrated on October 22, 2016, at Winton Woods with a Reforestation Celebration and ceremonial planting of the 100,000th tree. By no means finished, Great Parks plans to push on toward the Taking Root regional goal of 2 million new trees.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION
Great Parks of Hamilton County has established itself at the front line of energy conservation with advancements in lighting and solar energy. Great Parks embarked on its first LED (Light Emitting Diodes) lighting project just two years ago and continued in 2016 with several new projects. Though most projects seem small in scale, Great Parks is already seeing the benefits of LED bulbs and other technological advancements in the lighting industry.

LEDs are extremely energy efficient, have a long life span and are more durable than traditional incandescent, neon or compact fluorescent light bulbs. The exceptionally longer life span (60,000 hours) and enormously lower energy usage (90% more efficient) result in reduced maintenance and operating costs for Great Parks. At the close of 2016, the park district had completed a total of 22 LED lighting projects with an average energy savings of 65%.

In December 2016, Great Parks began installation of its first solar photovoltaic (PV) system at the Winton Woods maintenance building. A solar PV system is designed to supply usable solar power by collecting and absorbing sunlight and converting it to electricity. This new system includes 176 solar modules that will generate an annual average of 63,000 kilowatt hours of energy to the grid. This will reduce the average annual electric consumption at this facility by approximately 95% and will offset approximately 2.5 million pounds of carbon dioxide over 25 years.

To promote the benefits of this system, educational and interpretive components will be provided to the public. Interactive displays will be available at visitor centers as well as online monitoring showing real-time data and information. The project was funded entirely by grants and matching funds provided by the Great Parks Foundation.
ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Great Parks of Hamilton County partners with several universities to conduct research in order to make informed decisions regarding the management of natural areas. In 2016, Great Parks approved eight research permits, and four contractual research projects were funded. Two important research partners are Emily Franzen with Xavier University and Dr. Ron Canterbury of the University of Cincinnati.

Ms. Franzen’s project focuses on which trees are preferred by the Asian long-horned beetle for laying eggs, and it will help to predict which trees will be most impacted as host trees. It also helps Great Parks further understand this insect’s ecology and identify its potential presence within the parks.

Dr. Canterbury has a longstanding relationship with Great Parks, and his bird banding research has brought him to multiple parks over the years. Fall banding research at Otto Armleder Memorial Park & Recreation Complex in 2016 analyzed whether areas that are dominated by invasive plant species are suitable for fall bird migrants versus those that have fewer invasive plant species.

As part of its own ongoing research project, Great Parks also monitors plant diversity utilizing a Floristic Quality Assessment Index. This project compares different plant communities by calculating plant diversity scores for 1,826 sites across natural areas in the parks. These scores provide vegetative diversity data, which helps Great Parks prioritize its management efforts.

PARTNERSHIPS/COLLABORATIONS

COHEN RECYCLING
- Partner for recycling old or broken holiday lights

HAMILTON COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
- Partner for 2016 Native Tree & Plant Sale

MONARCH JOINT VENTURE
- Partnered to protect the monarch butterfly and its habitats

REI
- Partnered to host a trail building workshop and volunteer trail maintenance event at Mitchell Memorial Forest
- Provided volunteers for invasive species removal, trail maintenance and tree planting projects
- Continued support for reforestation efforts

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION & INDIANA WALNUT COUNCIL
- Partnered on a tour of native plants at Shaker Trace Nursery, as well as a tour of mature walnut stands at Shawnee Lookout

OHIO RIVER FOUNDATION, CINCINNATI PARK BOARD & CLERMONT COUNTY PARK DISTRICT
- In-kind partners in establishing a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- Partnered on a grant for invasive species management from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation

US FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE & OHIO EPA
- Continued partnership with Natural Resource Damage Trustees in the restoration of Oak Glen Nature Preserve after the 2014 oil spill

WESTERN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR
- Volunteers assisted at the Shaker Trace Nursery, and Great Parks provided seed for a small prairie restoration at Kirby Nature Preserve in Addyston

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI
- Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship (MAPS) to set up a long-term bird monitoring station in the parks
- Partnered on Cincinnati Groundwater Observatory at Miami Whitewater Forest

EXPANDING NATURE PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY

People are busier now more than ever and are spending their free time differenty than they have in the past. In response, Great Parks offered a variety of non-traditional nature education programs in 2016.

Great Parks’ naturalists conducted several impromptu programs where park visitors were already congregating. The Winton Woods harbor, campground and multi-use trail served as impromptu locations for learning about local plants and wildlife. Naturalists were also stationed along the paved trails at Fernbank Park and Glenwood Gardens, showcasing a black vulture or a small table of interesting artifacts to pique the interest of the passersby.

Other programs covered a larger span of time to allow park guests more flexibility in their attendance. Festivals such as Maple Sugar Days, Black Walnut Weekend and Weekend in 1800 covered several hours and lots of different historical and nature-themed topics.

Animals were also a big draw during summer theme weeks that included Frog Week, Snake Week and Owl Week. The exhibits were designed to appeal to the entire family. Naturalists and volunteers staffed daily exhibits, talking with guests and answering questions. Since families would often arrive early and wait outside before the exhibit opened, additional free play outdoor activities were added.

The more low-key, low-commitment activities were added, the longer families would spend in the park learning about the natural world around them.

Increasing the accessibility of nature programs to park visitors is critical to allowing people to maximize their experience in the parks. Great Parks will continue to provide educational opportunities to park visitors in ways that best fit with their time, abilities, interests or learning styles.
KIDS OUTDOOR ADVENTURE EXPO

In 2016 the biggest outdoor event for children in the tristate area moved to Winton Woods. More than 2,737 children converged on the harbor on July 22, 2016, for the annual Kids Outdoor Adventure Expo.

Great Parks of Hamilton County partnered with Green Umbrella to put on a showcase of the many outdoor activities available in our region. Some of the activity stations that Great Parks presented included fishing, rock wall climbing and obstacle courses. Great Parks’ outdoor education staff introduced kids to animals from Parky’s Farm and Winton Woods Riding Center, and they also led numerous activities to put the kids in contact with the natural world around them. Great Parks’ naturalists got into the Olympic spirit with ‘Animal Olympics’ where kids could test their abilities in the Fantastic Frog Jump, Impossible Bird Perch, Amazing Mole Maze and other fun learning stations. The event was a huge success in its new location thanks in part to the many organizations who also provided memorable outdoor experiences, including the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Groundwork Cincinnati-Mill Creek, Girl Scouts of Western Ohio, Row America, Queen City & Trek Bicycle, Morgan Canoe and Dramakinetics.

NEW OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

In September 2016, a new outdoor education area was created at Sharon Woods. This amphitheater-style area was designed to allow program participants to become submerged in their surroundings as they learn about nature.

With naturalist staff vision in mind, Great Parks’ operations and projects teams prepped the project site, removed honeysuckle, laid a gravel path and spread mulch around the area. Eight benches were constructed using recycled lumber from ash trees felled in the park, with larger stumps turned into tables. A corporate volunteer group from Stantec assisted park staff in putting it all together. This new outdoor classroom can seat up to 50 guests for public, scout, school and other group programs. Facing a wooded hillside, this space enables Great Parks’ naturalists to enhance the way they teach about local wildlife. Nearby trees are used to demonstrate a black rat snake’s ability to climb. And the hillside provides enough vegetation to illustrate the amazing camouflage of a box turtle. There are trees, vines and wildflowers growing within a few feet of participants, giving them the opportunity to hear nearby birds, squirrels or insects while learning how all things in nature are connected.

PUBLIC PADDLING PROGRAMS

Great Parks’ paddling classes allowed more people to connect with the natural world in a new way. The classes grew in popularity in 2016, with new programs offered by Adventure Outpost.

A collaborative program with the naturalist department, Birding by Boat, was held at Miami Whitewater Forest. Participants learned some paddling basics and then enjoyed a float on the lake for a unique perspective on birding. The Climb & Canoe Day Camp at Adventure Outpost in Winton Woods enabled kids to spend a lot of quality time on the water learning the traditional art of canoeing. By the end of the two-day camp, the campers were well-versed in maneuvering their canoes and performing rescues.

In addition to exploration, the park district also focused on the importance of safety on the water. Two new levels of American Canoe Association classes were offered in 2016. Aimed at adults, the Level 1 Kayaking class focused on taking the basic skills of Great Parks’ introductory courses a step further, while building participants’ confidence to become independent paddlers on flat water. Level 2 Kayaking was very similar, a full day for adults with a heavy emphasis on rescue techniques for both flat and moving water.

Adventure Outpost expects to host more classes in 2017 to provide even more people the opportunity to hit the water in a safe, fun environment.

HOMESCHOOL SCIENCE

2015: 176 students reached
2016: 272 students reached

GREAT PARKS OF HAMILTON COUNTY
greatparks.org
LITTLE MIAMI SCENIC TRAIL EXTENSION

Great Parks reached a significant milestone in 2016 with the 3.2-mile extension of the Little Miami Scenic Trail, one of the longest paved trail systems in Ohio, thanks to a partnership with Anderson Township, Anderson Township Park District and other organizations who support regional trail projects.

The project was made possible by a $1.94 million federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program grant administered by the Ohio Department of Transportation, a $52 million capital improvement grant from the State of Ohio administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and local match funds from Anderson Township and Great Parks of Hamilton County.

Construction began with an official groundbreaking ceremony on July 8, 2015. After nearly a year of construction, the trail’s completion was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony at Little Miami Golf Center on May 21, 2016.

The paved trail, which stretches from Little Miami Golf Center to the Beechmont Avenue/S.R. 32 Ramp Interchange, connects three public parks, including Great Parks of Hamilton County’s Little Miami Golf Center, the Village of Newtown’s Robert W. Short Park and Anderson Township Park District’s Clear Creek Park. It also connects communities and people by providing a place to walk, run, bike and enjoy the great outdoors.

The final phase of the trail extension is a proposed trail bridge to be constructed over the Little Miami Scenic River on the Beechmont Avenue bridge. This $5.1 million project would connect the Little Miami Scenic Trail to the City of Cincinnati's Lunken Loop Trail and eventually connect to downtown Cincinnati over the Little Miami Scenic River on the Beechmont Avenue bridge. This

Access to one of Great Parks of Hamilton County’s largest lakes got a little easier for all park visitors in 2016. A new canoe/kayak launch was installed at Miami Whitewater Forest that also meets requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The new access is a floating dock with a canoe and kayak launch area equipped with a universally accessible transfer system that allows an unassisted individual with a physical disability to access a canoe or kayak. It consists of a bench that slides over onto a railing system that allows the individual to sit down in a canoe or kayak and then head out onto the lake. The project was made possible by a $30,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Watercraft for construction of a walkway, gangway, floating dock, accessible system and canoe/kayak launch. Construction was completed in April 2016.

FITNESS FOR ALL

Outdoor recreation comes in all shapes and sizes, and biking in Great Parks of Hamilton County was as popular as ever in 2016. Bike rentals were in high demand at Miami Whitewater Forest thanks to the beautiful Shaker Trace Trail. At one time the park’s rental fleet consisted of six cruiser bikes, but that number has grown to 75 bikes in a variety of styles built all over the globe.

Great Parks has transitioned from industrial Workmen cruiser bikes to a modern rider-friendly Trek bicycle built in Wisconsin. Quadrcycle rentals spiked to more than 700 this year thanks to new surreys built in Texas. Teenagers loved the Berg pedal carts manufactured in Germany, as well as the Fun Cycles from Florida. New kid-friendly bike options were also introduced this year. The Stroller Bike, built by Taga in Taiwan, was a very popular choice for guests with toddlers. And Trek’s Tag-a-Long was perfect for adults with children ages 4-7.

Great Parks is proud of a rental fleet that includes options for all ages and ability levels, and the numbers reflect their popularity. More than 3,500 bikes were rented in 2016—a 10% growth over 2015!
BRINGING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

With parks spread out across Hamilton County, a nearby Great Park is often the gathering place for its surrounding community. Great Parks offered many free events throughout the year as a way to bring its neighbors together.

Four Great Parks Days were held at different parks throughout the summer. These free days of fun were sponsored by the Great Parks Foundation so that everyone had the opportunity to enjoy all their Great Parks had to offer. More than 9,637 people tried golfing, stand-up paddleboarding, fishing and more – many for the first time. The Great Parks Foundation also sponsored several free art events throughout the summer. Two Shakespeare in the Park performances brought the bard to life for visitors at Glenwood Gardens and Miami Whitewater Forest. And more than 5,000 people packed picnics and mingled with other music lovers to enjoy the Cincinnati Pops at twilight along the lake at Miami Whitewater Forest. Almost every week throughout the summer, Great Parks hosted an event for people to come together.

BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

In 2016, Great Parks continued its commitment to helping people get healthier. Free nature hikes served those who needed a slower pace, while others got their blood pumping at free weekly outdoor fitness classes led by YMCA of Greater Cincinnati instructors. After-work yoga was offered at Farbach–Werner Nature Preserve and the YMCA Healthy Kids Day brought approximately 5,000 people out to Parky’s Farm.

A new program called Great Cincy Strides was launched by Great Parks in 2016. With a goal of getting people to explore new trails while getting fit outdoors, Great Cincy Strides offers an easy-to-use tracking system for participants to log their miles, earn prizes for their efforts and find group hikes to make friends and stay motivated.

LISTENING TO RESIDENTS

Great Parks loves to hear what community members want and need from their parks. In addition to the many visitor surveys conducted throughout the year, Great Parks also hosted a series of public listening sessions in 2016. More than 800 comments were gathered at 12 open houses held throughout Hamilton County in March and April. Attendees came from a wide variety of neighborhoods and backgrounds, giving valuable feedback on the park district that Great Parks will use as it plans for the future.
2016 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

GENERAL & CAPITAL FUNDS

Unencumbered $8,404,430
Encumbered 3,298,085
Balance 1/1/2016 11,702,515
Revenue Received 32,479,226
Total Funds Available 44,181,741
Expended 34,513,552
Balance 12/31/2016 10,668,189

REVENUE

Taxes
Local Government Fund $289,297
Real Estate, Public Utilities, & Other 17,184,033
Total Taxes 17,473,330

Earned Revenue
Adventure Outpost 34,749
Athletics 238,201
Golf Management 5,572,490
Golf Merchandise 758,298
Guest Services 354,877
Motor Vehicle Permits 1,852,594
Nature’s Niche 304,911
Naturalists 195,304
Parky’s Farm 167,977
Recreation Services 3,423,891
Riding Center 404,554
Special Events 239,238
Total Earned Revenue 11,666,500

Grants & Misc Receipts 1,339,396
Total Revenue $32,479,226

EXPENSES

Operations $6,672,788 19.33%
Greenspace Preservation 3,780,277 10.95%
Rangers 3,383,720 9.80%
Recreation Services 2,626,260 7.61%
Administration 2,397,852 6.95%
Golf Management 2,197,537 6.37%
Facilities 2,009,170 5.82%
Visitor Services 1,553,957 4.50%
Naturalists 1,135,193 3.29%
Development 1,087,533 3.15%
Natural Resources 927,967 2.69%
Communications 638,901 1.85%
Golf Merchandise 591,283 1.71%
Landscape 581,230 1.69%
Information Technology 579,670 1.68%
Special Events 570,085 1.65%
Planning 567,764 1.65%
Parky’s Farm 532,646 1.54%
Riding Center 418,762 1.21%
Projects 400,268 1.16%
Construction Management 310,076 0.90%
Nature’s Niche 290,948 0.84%
Guest Services 256,366 0.74%
Armieider 239,238 0.69%
Athletics 213,297 0.62%
Adventures Outpost 204,680 0.59%
Fernbank Park 185,797 0.54%
Volunteers 158,087 0.46%
Total Expenses $34,513,552 100.00%

FINANCIALS

2016 SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

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<th>Fund Name</th>
<th>Balance 1/1/2016</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Interest Revenue</th>
<th>Change in Fair Market Value of Investments</th>
<th>Expenditures</th>
<th>Balance 12/31/2016</th>
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<td>$3,951,409</td>
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2016 LAND ACQUISITIONS

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<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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Total greenspace preserved and protected by Great Parks of Hamilton County as of December 31, 2016 was 17,582 acres, including fee simple acquisitions, lease agreements, conservation easements, bike trail easements, out-leases and cooperative management agreements.