Trail Time With Bryan!
Bryan Howell, Trail Specialist

Timberlakes Trail is getting a new look! Employees and volunteers have been hard at work on a reroute of Timberlakes Trail at Miami Whitewater Forest.

The reroute will accomplish a few things from a maintenance perspective. The section of trail leading from the parking lot to the pond is too steep in terms of sustainable trail layout. Heavy rainfall creates washouts which leads to less stable footing. In addition to washouts, foot traffic creates gravel migration which leads to piling up, ruts and clogged drainage. The only means of maintenance for a trail alignment like this is to add more gravel in the ruts and install grade dips to divert water from the trail. The grade dips on a trail this steep end up being fairly large and intrusive to the overall continuity of the trail, essentially becoming speed bumps along the way. After heavy storms, our crews have to clear these drainages and repair the ruts, which may not always be possible depending on schedules. This philosophy of excessive slopes can be applied to many trails within Great Parks and other park systems because the science of trail building is a relatively new concept in relation to when most trails were created.

The new reroute will provide a more scenic experience. It has been cleared of many invasive plants and now provides distant views through the under-story. Removal of invasives will also make space for native vegetation to thrive. Public input through the Great Parks master planning process has revealed that visitors would like longer hiking experiences as well as trail connections. This reroute will accomplish both. Currently the length of trail from the parking lot to the pond is about 1/10 of a mile and the new section will come in between 4/10 and 5/10 miles. This route will also give Great Parks the option to connect Timberlakes Trail to Badlands Trail by crossing the road and utilizing the land to the west of Timberlakes Drive. This will allow hikers to walk both trails without returning to the parking lot, and on a less steep, easier walking surface.

This reroute will benefit both maintenance requirements and the user experience. The trail reroute is scheduled to be complete by the end of the year. Once this trail is open it will be important to get as many people walking the trail as we can to help heal and compact the tread into a sturdy walking surface.

It’s always about the destination, remember to appreciate the journey.
Kirk Kavanaugh
Years of Service – 4
What is your favorite volunteer activity? I enjoy maintaining and improving the trails at Woodland Mound and Withrow Nature Preserve. These activities have heightened my awareness and given me a greater appreciation of the tremendous negative impact that invasive plants have on our parks.

What’s your favorite outdoor activity? I enjoy swimming 3-4 days per week and compete in regional and national open water events. I also teach adult swim lessons and find this experience to be very rewarding. In addition, my wife and I travel to areas that offer both nature and cultural activities. We long for the outdoors!

What cause are you passionate about? Restoration and conservation of the environment in large areas such as Great Parks or in our own backyards allowing for a significant improvement in our ecosystems. The benefits of nature should not be overlooked.

What is your life motto? Several years ago, I decided to adopt the attitude of that great philosopher Bob Seger and make sure I am “living to run and running to live”.

Volunteer Meetings will continue to remain virtual until further notice. No need to RSVP, meetings will take place from 6-7 p.m., just sign on and enjoy from the comfort and safety of your own home! Check out what’s coming up in January:

**Tue, Jan 19** – So you’re a honeysuckle assassin, but have you ever wondered how your work contributes to the big picture of conservation? Join Rosie Santos, our new Woodland Mound Park Manager, for a presentation about plants, conservation, our integrated practices as well as your role in making it happen both at Great Parks and at home!

When recording your hours in VIC for volunteer meetings, log them under Volunteer Meeting [Training] Volunteer Services. Training hours may be doubled. We hope to see you there!

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**Francis RecreAcres Callery Pear Removal**
Wed 1/6, 9 a.m.–noon
Come out to the Francis Homestead to help control invasive species. Volunteers will assist in the removal and treatment of invasive plant, creating better habitat for our native plants and wildlife. Meet at the Francis RecreAcres parking lot. To volunteer, contact Jeremy Barkley at jbarkley@greatparks.org or phone 724-814-1008. For volunteers ages 14 and up.

**Preserving Natural Areas at Parky’s Farm**
Wed 1/6, 1–4 p.m.
The focus of this project is to control invasive species around the Woodlot Trail at Parky’s Farm. The Woodlot Trail is a beautiful natural area which is also used in outdoor education programs. Removing invasive species from this area will provide a more enriching space for native wildlife and for outdoor education. Meet at the Parky’s Farm parking lot. To volunteer, contact Jaimie Martin at jmartin@greatparks.org or phone 631-334-3876. For volunteers ages 14 and up.
Invasive Plant Removal at Woodland Mound Park
Tue 1/12, 1–3 p.m.
Join the Woodland Mound Conservation & Parks team in the ongoing fight against invasive plants. Removing invasives will give our native trees and woodland flower new life and open a view into the forest for park visitors. Meet us at the Chipmunk Shelter parking area in Woodland Mound Park. To volunteer, contact Dan Hart at dhart@greatparks.org or phone 513-250-0925. For volunteers ages 14 and up. **Stew Crew [Woodland Mound Park\C&P East]**

Avoca Trail Invasive Shrub Removal
Wed 1/13, 9–noon
Come out to Avoca Trailhead and help staff with removing invasive shrubs from the riparian corridor of the Little Miami River. We will be cutting and spraying the stumps so herbicide applicators are a plus but not a requirement. Meet at the Avoca parking lot. To volunteer, contact John Walker at jwalker@greatparks.org or phone 513-272-4131. For volunteers ages 14 and up. **Stew Crew [Little Miami \C&P East]**

Volunteer Appreciation Event—Bird Walk
Wed 1/20, 9 a.m.–noon
Come out to Sharon Woods to celebrate our accomplishments. We will take a walk through the park, enjoy the fruits of our labor and do some winter bird spotting. If you have binoculars please bring them, but we will have some (sanitized) pairs if you do not have one. Meet at the Gorge Trail Parking lot. To attend, contact Jeremy Barkley at jbarkley@greatparks.org or phone 724-814-1008. For volunteers ages 14 and up. **Stew Crew [Training\C&P East]**

Volunteer Shout Outs!
Another great event! Got some great rock armoring done and installed a bench with a view of the river. Thank you so much to Rick Dikeman, Erik Brueggemann, Mike Schroeder, Maria Valentina Almeida, Cynthia Duval, and Trent Smitley for all of your hard work!

   —Daniel Hart, Woodland Mound C&P Tech

Thanks for the successful day picking up trash in the Trillium Trails area. We collected 23 bags of trash and a waffle iron :) 
   —Shaun McClary, Glenwood Gardens C&P Tech

Food Deserts, A Nutritional Mirage
Great Parks Diversity & Inclusion Team
Equitable access to healthy food is a growing issue across our country. While the United States is the world’s greatest food-producing nation, over 35 million people (which includes more than 10 million children) struggle with hunger and the health issues associated with a diet limited to fast food and processed gas station staples. While poverty is one factor that can affect a person’s ability to acquire food, another determinate is where a person lives.

Food deserts are places where residents don’t have access to affordable nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Currently, over 23.5 million Americans live in urban and rural communities with no access, or severely limited regular access, to healthy and affordable food. Here in Cincinnati, roughly 1 in 4 residents (over 75,000 people!) reside in food deserts. Instead of grocery stores where healthy produce is available, these areas often have convenience

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stores, gas stations, or fast-food restaurants as the only options for purchasing food. Many residents in food deserts also lack access to stable or reliable transportation, which can make trips to grocery stores incredibly difficult. Even public transport options can turn a quick trip into a multi hour process, time that many people just don't have.

While access to healthy and affordable food is an issue both locally and across our country, when you look at who is most likely to live in food deserts it is clear that there are major disparities. Food access in America is deeply connected to race and socio-economic status. It is a systemic issue that has been shaped through decades of policy that still has tangible effects on underserved communities. Studies have found that when comparing communities with similar poverty rates, predominately black and Hispanic neighborhoods are less likely to have access to grocery stores than their white counterparts. Across Cincinnati you will find that food deserts in neighborhoods like Walnut Hills, Avondale, Roselawn, Evanston, and College Hill are all areas with high poverty rates and predominantly black residents.

It is not by happenstance that low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are often devoid of affordable and nutritious food choices. One of the largest factors that has contributed to the uneven accessibility to healthy food came from policies enacted by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Fair Housing Administration (FHA) in the 1930’s. The purpose of the HOLC and FHA were to encourage homeownership by providing low interest mortgages and loans. However, the lending requirements excluded racial minorities and would not ensure mortgages in or around communities of color in order to keep neighborhoods segregated. Many white families who were able to obtain loans fled to the suburbs, and businesses (including grocery stores) relocated with them, taking advantage of cheaper suburban land and middle-class incomes. These policies prevented many people of color from obtaining the necessary loans to become home owners, leading them to isolation in the urban cores of cities. It also made it incredibly difficult and costly for new businesses to open in these areas as property costs were more expensive, loans were hard to secure and insurance rates considerably higher. Dollar stores, convenient stores, and fast-food restaurants quickly filled the places that grocery stores and markets once held, supplying cheap, highly processed, and calorie dense foods.

Because many residents in food deserts can’t access affordable and nutritious foods the rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, obesity, and heart disease are disproportionally high in many of these communities. Poverty exacerbates these health issues as many families have to make decisions between potential lifesaving medications and putting food on the table. For example, in Cincinnati the drive from Lower Price Hill to Mt. Adams spans 5 miles and takes only seven minutes. However, the difference in average life expectancy between the two neighborhoods is 25 years (88 years for Mt. Adams and 63 years for Lower Price Hill).

Food deserts are not the fault or blame of any individual, but their consequences are real and deadly. They have been created through decades of government policies that targeted low-income communities and people of color. Where we live matters, it determines the resources we have access to, and influences our overall health and life expectancy. As one Cincinnatian puts it, "nutrition should not be based on socioeconomic status or your zip code."

The good news? There are things that we can do, and as a city ARE doing, to help with this problem

- There’s a new, multi-level Kroger in downtown Cincinnati.
- Organizations such as The Center for Closing the Health Gap are working on issues like these with a mission to eliminate racial injustice from health within underserved populations (and you can donate!).
- You can help by promoting urban gardening! Support initiatives such as the Rothenberg Rooftop Garden, the Civic Garden Center, or any urban farmer’s market that strives to bridge the gap between gas station food and fresh, healthy offerings grown locally!
- Check out and learn more about urban gardening and volunteer! Some examples include, Hamilton Urban Garden Systems (HUGS), Clifton Community Garden, and OTR People’s Garden.
- Contribute to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) which support local farmers.
- Continue to learn about the disparities in access to healthy food and our country and teach others!