

**T**he Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission was established in 1986 by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners, pursuant to Act 261 of the Public Acts of 1965. Membership of the 10-member Commission, by statute, includes the Chairman of the Road Commission, the Drain Commissioner, the Chairman of the County Planning Commission, and seven members appointed by the Board of Commissioners, not more than three of whom are members of the Board. The Parks and Recreation Commission is a policy-making body that operates under the general control of the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners.

The Parks and Recreation Commission's expressed goal for the park system is to provide the highest quality recreational experience possible through creative park design, high quality interpretive programs and by implementing high standards for parks maintenance, facility construction, and security. This goal has been pursued through the diligent efforts of park staff in all aspects of park administration, programs, and operations.

#### **UPDATED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The basic structure for park operations was established in 1990 when the Parks Commission took over operations from the Road Commission. It has expanded and evolved as the park system has grown. Since its inception, the Parks Commission has recognized the seasonal nature of its business and has sought to be efficient by employing a minimum number of highly capable full-time personnel while emphasizing the use of seasonal employees and alternative sources of labor including inmate work crews, community service workers, and related programs.

Over the years, the Parks Commission has worked with the Ottawa County Human Resources Department to evaluate staffing needs in an effort to keep staffing capability in proportion to the growing operational commitment. In addition, organizational structures from successful parks organizations in the state and region are continually reviewed and analyzed and alternative organizational structures are examined. The county park system encompassed approximately 2,000 acres in 1996 and has expanded to over 6,000 acres by the end of 2010. Numbers of full-time park staff (all functions) grew from nine in 1996 to fifteen in 2010.

Issues and observations that have surfaced in assessing the organizational structure of the department include the following:

- It is important to add needed operational staff through a structure that allows for orderly growth and which continues the focus on high-quality maintenance and operations. The system should also result in promotional opportunities for staff, to help ensure motivated employees.

- The need for employees to function well independently was identified as particularly important to Ottawa County Parks, since many employees work in off-site locations without direct supervision.
- As with field operations, the need to maintain the appropriate balance of administrative and clerical support staff in the main office was recognized as a need due to the growing volume of activity.
- Naturalist program: The need to add an additional full-time naturalist and part-time staff was recognized and planned for while planning the new Nature Education Center.
- Need for flexibility: The potential addition of special facilities such as a campground or other staff-intensive operations requires the need for flexibility in the organizational structure. Decisions should be made by the Parks Commission with awareness of staffing needs and the structure should be able to accommodate the necessary staff.
- Recognition that the growing diversity of recreational facilities offered in the park system requires an increasingly diverse staff in terms of training and expertise.
- Geography, the distance between sites and related travel time, is an important factor which influences how to best shape the park operations system. The need for satellite operations facilities has been identified and implemented.
- The seasonality of the operation sets County Parks apart from most other County departments and needs to be considered in shaping future operations.
- The Parks Commission currently uses a wide variety of volunteers to accomplish many special projects within the park system. Parks staff recognizes the potential to significantly expand the use of volunteers but recognizes the need for adequate staff to manage volunteer resources.
- There is growing recognition of the importance of a strong natural resource management component for optimal management of the park system. Additional staffing is needed with training in the development of land management plans for the parks and open space lands and with expertise in habitat restoration, invasive species control, and other land management techniques.

The above issues will continually be assessed and new issues identified as the park system evolves. The goal is to be proactive in evolving the organizational structure of the parks department to best manage the growing park system. In line with this approach, the Parks Commission has requested and received approval for a new position in 2011 which will address both volunteer management and natural resource management (the last two bullet points listed above). A new position called Natural Resource Management Supervisor is scheduled to begin in early 2011 with responsibilities in both areas.

Past study and experience in managing the park system has led to the establishment of three distinct divisions within the parks and recreation department: Park Operations, Park Planning, and Interpretive and Information Services (see long-term organizational chart on following page). This framework provides a logical division of basic functions within the department that allows for growth of staff and provides for promotional opportunity in all three divisions.

### Maintenance and Operations

The Coordinator of Park Maintenance and Operations oversees all maintenance and operations functions including a staff of seven. Park Maintenance and Operations encompasses all park maintenance activities at over 30 separate properties as well as administration of fee collection

at lakeshore parks and boat launches, winter operations and concessions, and other special operations. The Parks and Recreation Manager reports to the Coordinator and oversees five full time Park Supervisors plus one full time Maintenance Worker (added in 2009). A sixth Park Supervisor, the Natural Resources Management Supervisor referenced previously, will also report to the Parks Manager beginning in 2011. The position of Park Manager was created in 2005 to provide more field-level planning and supervision and to permit the Coordinator to undertake more general park system administrative duties. A full-time Maintenance Worker was added in 2009 to provide added year around capability. The addition of this full-time Maintenance Worker position reflects a recognition that, while seasonal employees can carry the bulk of the operational burden during the peak summer season, additional maintenance expertise and year around capability is needed to keep the park system functioning at a high level. Adding both seasonal staff and additional Maintenance Workers is considered a cost effective way to adding maintenance and operational capability as the park system grows.

### Park Planning and Development

Following approval of the first parks millage, the Parks Commission added a Park Planner to help implement the expanding program. The Park Planner was hired with responsibilities for assessing lands, planning new parks and facilities, and developing long-range planning strategies. As the park planning and development functions expanded, the need to add the Coordinator of Park Planning and Development to oversee this function was identified, and Park Planning and Development was established as a division within the department. Park Planning and Development encompasses preparing and updating the long-range parks and open space plan, individual park master plans, planning and oversight of park improvements within the park system, and input and assistance in a wide range of other matters. The Coordinator of Park Planning and Development was hired in 2005 to oversee the Park Planner position and all functions within the Park Planning and Development Division.

### Interpretive and Information Services

The Interpretive and Information Services Division within the Parks and Recreation Department oversees all interpretive functions, including operation of the Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing. The four-season interpretive program is based out of the Nature Education Center but also includes programs at parks throughout the system. In addition to educational programs, the Interpretive and Information Services Division also oversees public relations functions within the department including brochures, the quarterly parks newsletter, and other efforts. The Coordinator of Interpretive and Information Services was added in 2009 to oversee the Naturalist/Information Specialist position. The establishment of this new position coincided with the development of the new Nature Education Center. Part-time Naturalist Guides were also added in 2010 to help with operation of the new Center. In addition to their other functions, the Interpretive and Information Services staff also provide expertise in natural lands restoration and management, natural features inventory, and trail design on a system-wide basis.

### Administrative Support

General administrative support consists of the Parks Director, the Administrative Secretary and the Parks Secretary. The position of Administrative Secretary was created in 2007 to respond

to growth in facility reservations, mailings, general phone inquiries, and a wide range of clerical and administrative functions. This position oversees the Parks Secretary and provides administrative support for the Director.

### Future Needs

It is critical that the organizational chart (**Figure 12.1**) remain flexible depending upon how the park system evolves in the future and the types of facilities added. A future campground, for example, would have very specific staffing needs and likely offsetting revenues. It is believed that the current organizational structure could accommodate this type of growth but will likely need to be adjusted in response to opportunities as they arise.

As noted in Chapter 9: Mission Statement, Goals, and Objectives, providing "high quality maintenance and operations" is a high priority of the Parks Commission. Maintaining high standards in an expanding park system is particularly challenging. It is critical that necessary administrative, operational and seasonal staff be added as operational requirements expand. Funds for supplies, repairs, needed equipment, and related items must also grow proportionately.

The Millage Budget Projection shown in **Table 11.1** estimates staff needs and related operational costs for new facilities as they come on line over the next several-year period. Of course, with uncertainty regarding future land purchase and facility development, it is not possible to accurately project all specific operational requirements.

Figure 12.1 Long Range Organizational Chart



