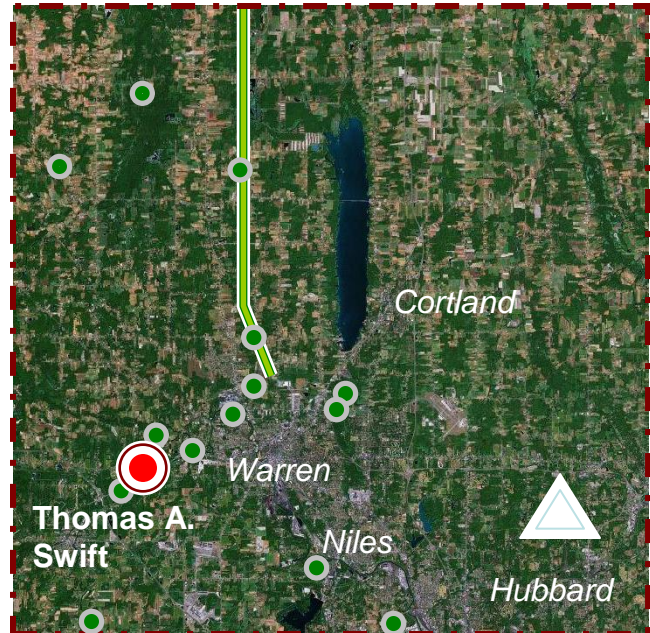


THOMAS A. SWIFT METROPARK

Introductions • History • Present Conditions • Future Development Plans • Implementation Strategies • Statistics

Introduction

As an open meadow park positioned along the Mahoning River, Thomas A. Swift MetroPark offers tremendous education and conservation opportunities as well as the possibility of establishing a viable water trail. The undeveloped 12.5-acre park located in Braceville Township consists of relatively flat grassland and is bordered by the Mahoning River to the east and the lightly-traveled Benedict-Leavittsburg Road to the West. Trees enshroud the low-lying and sometimes muddy riverbanks, an area that has also been designated as a floodplain. As a property obtained with Clean Ohio funding, only ecologically sensitive improvements to permit public access and passive recreation can be made. Additionally, the park contains a gated gas pipeline facility, which is located along the roadway near the center of the property.



Thomas A. Swift MetroPark

- With 12 acres of open meadowlands and some riverfront woods, Thomas A. Swift MetroPark will serve as the starting point for Phase I of the Mahoning River Water Trail.
- MetroParks will work to enhance existing avian habitats with bird houses, build trails with educational signage and observation points, and establish a picnic area and parking.
- Thomas A. Swift MetroPark is adjacent to an abandoned rail right of way which has been proposed as the future Western Reserve Heritage Trail which would link the region with Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

Area Attributes

Surrounding land uses include rural residential, agriculture, and light commercial, with much of the surrounding land remaining undeveloped woodland and fields. A Christmas tree farm exists directly south of the property. Located immediately to the north of the park is the Cleveland & Mahoning Rail right of way. A second rail right of way passes within 1,000 feet of the park's southern end. Plans are being proposed by various public agencies to create a connection between Warren and the Cleveland/Akron area that would likely utilize at least one of the rail rights of way if the necessary property can be acquired for the length of a practical trail. There are also proposals to build a regional



high-speed rail network that could also utilize either of the corridors. A 2000 Eastgate traffic study determined that an average of 93 cars traverse Benedict-Leavittsburg Road daily; however access to Thomas A. Swift MetroPark from the heavily traveled State Route 5 is very fast and simple. Additionally, located about a mile away along State Route 82 is the popular Braceville Athletic Club, an area offering an assortment of active recreation activities, including several baseball fields.

History

MetroParks acquired the 12-acre Braceville property in 2003 through a donation by the Trumbull County Commissioners, who had purchased the property through the Planning Commission utilizing Clean Ohio Funds. The land was targeted by the Planning Commission out of concern for preserving the sensitive wetland and riverbank environment along the Mahoning River. While those lands surrounding the park are undeveloped, they are not necessarily protected, and the pressure for residential development within Braceville may rise during times of economic prosperity. Park Commissioners named the park in honor of the sitting Trumbull County Probate Court judge, Thomas A. Swift. MetroParks began promoting the park shortly thereafter in its brochures, website, and even a grand opening ceremony in summer of 2006. However improvements such as a pervious parking area and trails will be necessary to make the park accessible for the public.

Present Conditions

Braceville and western Warren Townships are sparsely populated, yet located around heavily traveled highways. The serene meadow at Thomas A. Swift Park features an abundance of wildlife, as do the surrounding fields and forestlands, presenting plenty of opportunity for nature lovers. The existing gas pipeline substation is gated with warning signage already in place. Perhaps the largest attribute of the park is its potential as a trailhead for the Mahoning River Water Trail and the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Trail.



Abandoned Rail Right of Way traversing along Thomas A Swift MetroPark's northern boundary

The Western Reserve Heritage Trail

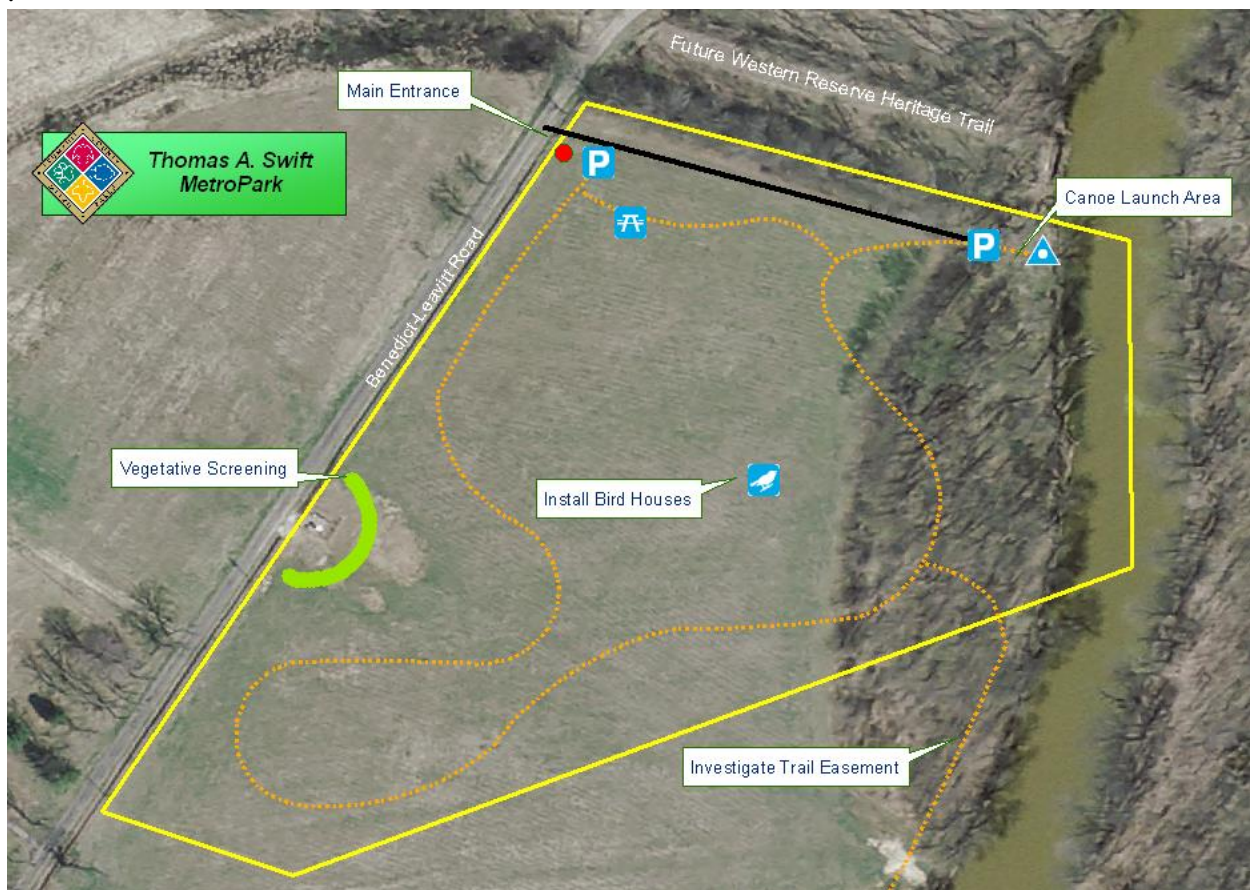
The former Cleveland & Mahoning Rail Right of Way runs alongside the park's northern boundary and terminates at the river on an abutment. The corridor has been targeted for the development of the Western Reserve Heritage Trail, a conceptual regional trail that would be made up of smaller connecting trails. The Western Reserve Heritage Trail would run from Cleveland through Youngstown, passing through Trumbull County along the way. The trail network created as a result would ultimately link the county



and Pittsburgh, from where existing paved trails continue on to the District of Columbia. The Headwaters Trail, located in northern Portage County between the villages of Mantua and Garrettsville, would comprise part of a completed Western Reserve Heritage Trail.

Future Development Plans

Thomas A. Swift MetroPark has great potential to serve as the start of the initial phase of a Mahoning River Water Trail and also as a bird sanctuary. Such developments are relatively inexpensive to create and, with no grass to mow or major equipment to maintain, little maintenance would be required to keep the park in operation. Prior to MetroParks' acquisition of several woodland tracts of land, Park Commissioners have discussed the establishment of an arboretum on the site, which remains an option.



Houses for Endangered Bird Species

With its rich environment, the existing meadow presents a great opportunity to promote conservation and education. In particular, the field would be very well suited for the establishment of an endangered bird sanctuary. MetroParks could establish several bird houses in the meadow area of the park that are specifically attractive to endangered species. Educational signage placed along any nearby trails and observation points could



inform visitors about the various bird species as well as provide information on the bird house project.

Interior Trails & Educational Signage

Trail development is an imperative improvement for the park. Trails could take visitors through the park's rich meadow and within a safe viewing distance of the endangered bird habitats. Observation lookout points, or areas, could also be established at key locations. In addition to identifying bird species, educational signage could also detail the plant and flower life in the field as well as the environment along the riverfront. Additionally, connections to the proposed Western Reserve Heritage



Proposed site of the Western Reserve Heritage Trail

Trail could be prepared, particularly at nearby the parking lot. Such a connection would likely require a bridge to cross over the seasonally flooded ditch that exists between the park and the proposed trail. Once the trail is constructed, it would be best if MetroParks prioritized the development of the connections and promoted the park as a trailhead.

Canoe Launch

A primitive or lightly graveled canoe launch at Thomas A. Swift MetroPark would serve as the first destination along the Mahoning River Water Trail. The park is approximately 4.5 miles upstream from Canoe City, about an hour and a half trip by canoe. With only a few reported tree falls and the water-access only Woodview Property located in between, the first phase of the trail would be relatively easy to establish. The best location for the launch appears to be along the northern end of the site where the terrain allows easy access to the river.

Parking & Signage

A parking lot and signage established near the Benedict-Leavittsburg Road would increase the park's visibility, though care should be taken to establish an entrance and sign far away enough from the curve to allow motorists adequate sight distance. It would be best if directional signs were installed to direct traffic to the park from State Route 5. While the parking lot will easily suit nature enthusiasts and the patrons of a possible Western Reserve Heritage Trail along the Cleveland & Mahoning rail right of way, canoeists will be best served with a vehicle-accessible driveway from the parking area to the canoe launch. A turn-around spot will have to be cleared near the launch for any vehicles. The same area could serve as an additional parking area.

Other Amenities

MetroParks could further serve visitors by providing picnic tables and a kiosk nearby the entrance. An additional kiosk or sign could be posted at the canoe launch to alert visitors to park rules. As the park's popularity increases, a temporary lavatory could also be provided at the parking lot.



Connections

To help expand the park's size and scope, MetroParks could work to obtain an easement to construct a natural trail along the river between the park and the Braceville Athletic Club. At the present time, the club offers only field sport recreation, baseball in particular. A walking trail could be a great amenity for both parks and increase visitor traffic. MetroParks would have to collaborate with the Braceville Athletic Club as well as the few owners with property in between to determine if the creation of a trail is feasible. Not only would such a trail work to connect the park with other recreational resources and maximize its exposure and use, it would also increase options for routing the Western Reserve Heritage Trail across the Mahoning River over an existing bridge.

Vegetative Screening

The gas utility substation which exists near the center of the park along the roadway could be enshrouded from view with vegetative screening. Options for vegetative screening include fast-growing pine trees, vines placed on a terrace, or bushes.

Implementation Strategies

The following implementation strategy below breaks the development of Thomas A. Swift Park into three manageable phases taken from the master implementation schedule. The first phase focuses upon opening the park with a low-cost attraction. Paving for parking lot areas would comprise the bulk of the park's development costs. However, the other items, such as establishing a primitive canoe launch, nature trails, bird houses, and basic amenities such as grills and picnic tables, are relatively inexpensive investments for a park. Significant costs may be incurred in developing a bridge to cross the existing depression to reach the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Trail; however, additional monies may be made available for such a project.



Overlooking Thomas A. Swift MetroPark

Even in the event that no funds are available for any type of support or services, the park could remain open and functional, barring any security or safety issues. In such an event, however, it would be best to have a Park Commissioner assigned as a park shepard to the park and to monitor its conditions and use. Any lavatory or trash pickup service would have to cease. However, there is no landscaping required and trails with their accompanying signage could be left alone for years. Rehabilitation agencies could be tapped for their support in obtaining cost-free litter cleanup.



Thomas A. Swift MetroPark Implementation Checklist

Bold text indicates that the listed task is integral to completing other MetroParks projects. Full checklist available in appendix.

Phase I – Park Necessities

- Establish park signage**
- Establish parking
- Establish directional signage from State Routes 5 and 82
- Install bird houses designed for endangered species
- Create nature trails through meadow

Phase II – Water Trail Necessities

- Develop vehicle-accessible driveway from parking area to canoe launch**
- Install directional and destination signage for canoeists at or near canoe launch**
- Create parking lot near canoe launch for vehicle parking & turn-around
- Construct canoe launch

Phase III – Amenities

- Establish picnic area with tables and grills
- Establish educational signage along nature trails
- Establish signage at canoe launch
- Construct kiosk
- Plant vegetative screening around gas utility
- Investigate easement to Braceville Athletic Club
- Develop connections to Western Reserve Heritage Trail

Thomas A. Swift Park Statistics

Parkland Attributes:

Acreage: 12.19
Land Cover: Grassland Forest
Surrounding Land Uses: Agriculture, Rural Residential, Light Commercial, Undeveloped
Topography: Flat, Steep Banks
* Riverfront - Canoe Access
Daily Traffic Counts:
Benedict-Leavittsburg Rd: 93
SR 82 (approx.): 2,900
SR 5: 13,560

Permitted Uses / Restrictions:

Facilities to Make Open Space Accessible and Usable by the Public, Park Facilities - Picnic Tables, Composting or Portable Restrooms, Pervious Entrance Road & Parking Areas, Canoe Livery, Camping Areas, Natural Trails / Boardwalk Trails, Observation Decks / Signage, Education / Nature / Research Study Programs, if Bus Access Created, Easements to be Given To Sanitary Engineer For Proposed Sewer Line, Arboretum / Riparian Forest / Wetland & Floodplain Creation