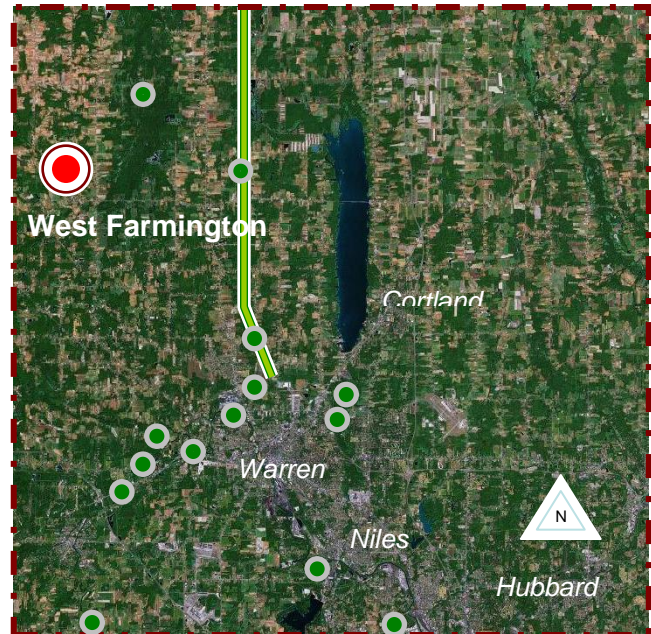


WEST FARMINGTON NATURE PRESERVE

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

Introduction

MetroParks' largest nature preserve is found between Curtis-Middlefield and Girdle Roads in Farmington Township. The undeveloped park boasts over 230 acres of woodlands, fields, and streams resting upon gently rolling terrain. Only a short way off from State Route 88 in West Farmington Village, the property is relatively easy to locate and only a moderate drive from Trumbull County's urban centers as well as from Cleveland's eastern suburbs. Future developments include expanding the current perimeter of the park in order to create room for a Winter Wonderland that would offer a warming hut for wintertime visitors, cross-country skiing trails, activities and concessions, an ice-rink, and a sledding area. Several of the aforementioned amenities would be contingent upon attaining additional land, as the deed restrictions attached to the current preserve would not allow for certain improvements. Also, several gas wells are clustered within the center of the property as well as along Curtis-Middlefield Road, all of which provide the MetroParks with significant royalties.



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West Farmington Nature Preserve

- Trumbull County MetroParks' largest parkland featuring open meadows, evergreen forest, and deciduous woodlands crisscrossed by Swine Creek and its tributaries.
- Other attributes include abundant animal life and diverse terrain as well as an old maple sugar shack that could serve as classroom space.
- The nature preserve was acquired in 2007 with the help of Clean Ohio funds.
- Located approximately 40 minutes from downtown Niles and Cleveland's eastern suburbs.
- Future plans include nature trails, mountain bike routes, and bridal trails, each of which could double as cross-country skiing and snow-shoe trails in winter.
- Opportunities exist for historical and conservation exhibits throughout the nature preserve along with a canoe launch, parking, picnic areas, and fire rings for winter.
- Trumbull County MetroParks will continue to investigate expanding the park to attain access to Girdle Road and to attain additional land for a warming hut, concessions, pervious parking, sledding hill, ice rink, and other amenities.

Area Attributes

Surrounding land uses include agriculture as well as rural residential. The park surrounds Farmington Woods Estates, a small and low-density residential subdivision containing one public street, Richards Way, which terminates at a cul-de-sac. Access to the property



is available from Curtis-Middlefield Road and from Girdle Road via Richards Way. Farmington Township is very agrarian in nature, offering a quiet escape from the bustle of urban Youngstown-Warren and Cleveland. Increased snowfall is another attribute of the West Farmington Nature Preserve, which often receives 10 percent to 25 percent more snow than typically found in Trumbull County's urban areas. Also, West Farmington Village is located a little over a mile south of the park along State Route 88. Supporting area attractions include Amish shops and farms as well as additional preserves nearby.

Swine Creek flows into the Farmington Nature Preserve from Geauga County and eventually makes its way through the Grand River Valley and out to Lake Erie. While the river is shallow most of the year, it can sometimes be canoed after heavier spring rains. The park is speckled with a few wetland areas while the vast majority of the land is comprised of deciduous and evergreen forest as well as open fields. Also located on the site is an old maple sugar shack nestled in a thick grove of maple trees. While the structure requires some investment to repair, it will provide shelter for visitors and allow the property to function as a land laboratory.



Maple Sugar Shack in Summer

History

It is believed that the nature preserve was once used for farming and maple sugar harvesting, as evidenced by the existing maple sugar shack and accompanying equipment. Over the last several years, West Farmington Nature Preserve has been left undisturbed aside from the farming of a few fields, tree harvesting, and gas well maintenance. The property was eventually acquired in order to create the Farmington Woods Estates residential subdivision, which was originally intended to be a large residential community. However, in early 2007, real estate

developers sold the property to the Trumbull County Commissioners. Trumbull County utilized Clean Ohio funds to acquire the land before subsequently donating it to the MetroParks. Deed restrictions on the property allow passive recreation throughout the park, including mountain biking trails, walking paths, camping sites, arboretums, and select educational improvements.

Farmington Township and surrounding areas were initially settled in large part by the Amish or Pennsylvania Dutch. The Amish are Separatist Christians known for maintaining a simple way of life as part of their faith, typically avoiding the complications of electronics and certain modern developments in order to concentrate more upon the value of self-sufficiency and compatibility with nature. As farming has become less economically productive over the years for the Amish, many families have turned to creating businesses and developing markets for tourism. Today's Amish communities are still heavily involved in agriculture, but have also established businesses specializing in retail, food production, construction services, and also furniture building and craft making. Tourism is a major part of an Amish community's economy, particularly in the northern Trumbull County and Geauga County region.



Present Conditions

West Farmington Nature Preserve is primarily accessed through Richards Way, a residential subdivision street that passes by 12 residential lots, some of which contain homes. The cul-de-sac portion of the road is surrounded by the nature preserve, where an existing trail leads off to the Maple Sugar Shack about 200 yards away. The trail continues northward where it connects with a gas well road that leads out to the preserve's easternmost field. An additional vehicle entrance exists along the lightly traveled Curtis-Middlefield Road and leads to a set of gas wells in a large and rutted field. Because of its deteriorated condition, small passenger vehicles are only able to traverse the road for the first one hundred feet, and there is little space for parking.

The single-room maple sugar shack's design is very simple, containing wood shingles along a wooden frame and featuring a few large windows. Due to the age and lack of upkeep over time, the shack will need repairs. Because the sugar shack is located on a property acquired with Clean Ohio funds, MetroParks will be restricted in expanding the structure beyond its current foundation.

The remainder of the 230 acres features a collage of open fields, deciduous trees, and evergreen forest. Small streams crisscross the property and eventually flow into Swine Creek. Also, beaver dams are not uncommon on the site. The rolling terrain also allows for the development of challenging mountain biking and pedestrian trails. Future developments should take advantage of the park's rich environmental diversity as well as consider the needs of visitor access.

Future Development Plans

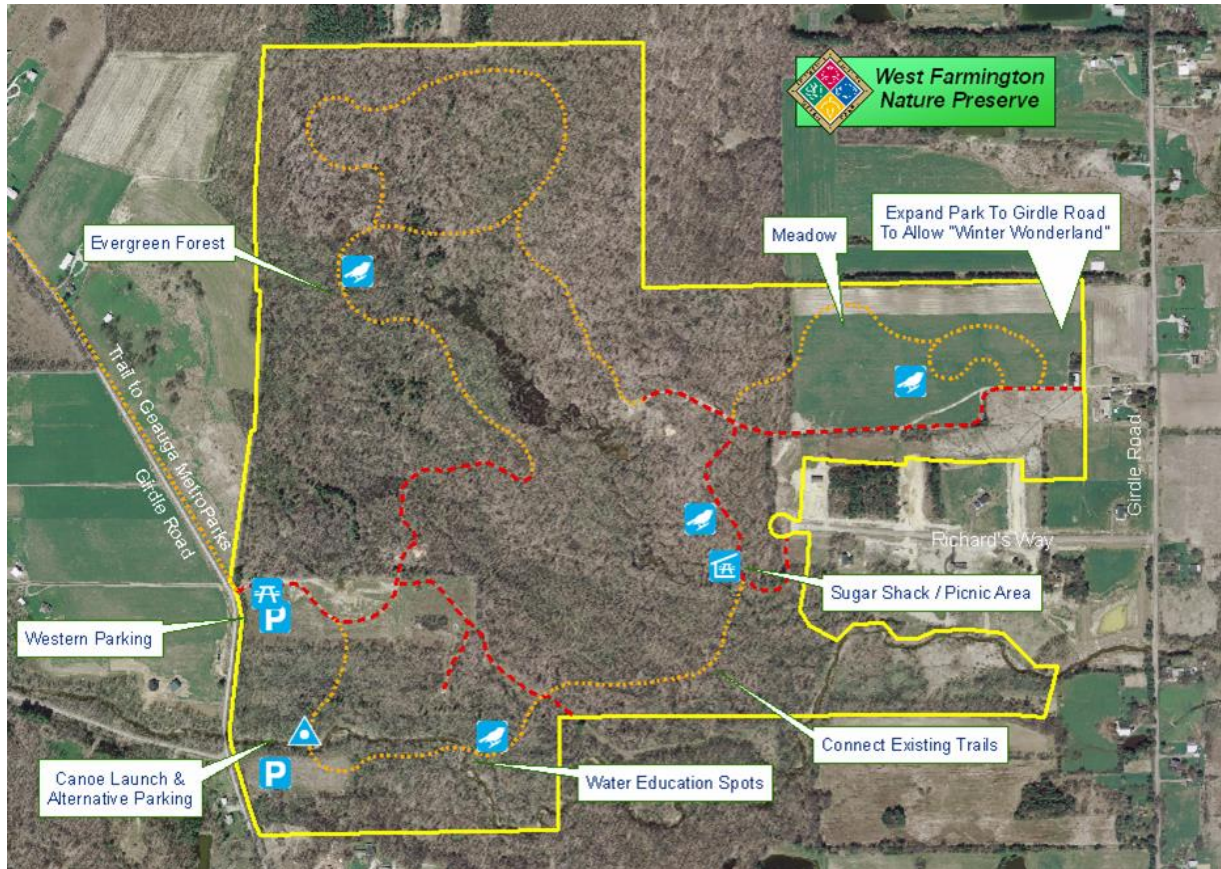
Future developments within the West Farmington Nature Preserve may include expanding the park's perimeter, creating special-use trails, providing educational signage, working to develop a connection to a regional trail accessing Swine Creek Park in Geauga County, and conducting a forest inventory. Many of the amenities required to create the nature preserve's *Winter Wonderland* area may be contingent upon acquiring additional land. The location of specific features, such as canoe launches or restrooms, may also be dependent upon where parking lots and trails are ultimately established.

Preserve Expansion & Entrances

The optimal location for an entrance and parking area for the preserve would be along Girdle Road, an area which lies outside of the park's present boundaries. The park district could gain direct access to the road by working to purchase one of the many properties between Girdle Road and the nature preserve. Additional acreage clear of significant deed restrictions would allow MetroParks to install features such as pavilions, impervious parking areas, an ice rink, a water well, a warming hut, and a sledding hill. Additionally, frontage along Girdle Road would make the park more accessible to out-of-area visitors. MetroParks may also consider expanding the nature preserve to the south where it could attain access to Larson Road. Over the next few years, MetroParks may approach neighboring land owners about purchasing or attaining easements and donations in order to expand the preserve's boundaries and provide a primary entrance. MetroParks may



also work to enhance the Curtis-Middlefield entrance where a second parking lot is desired. As detailed in the following section, the same location could also serve as a main parking lot if need be. Ideally, the Richards Way entrance would be utilized only as a service entrance. However, it could also prove a suitable location for visitor parking.



Parking and Entrances Alternatives

MetroParks would also coordinate with the residents of Farmington Woods Estates in order to determine the feasibility and potential design of a primary parking lot located off Richards Way. Such an arrangement would seek to place prominent directional signage at the intersection of Richards Way and Girdle Road. Otherwise, it would be ideal to establish primary parking from the field areas abutting Curtis-Middlefield Road.

Nature Preserve Entrance and Directional Signage

The park would benefit from directional signage placed at State Route 45, State Route 88 in West Farmington Village, and along Girdle Road. Prominent MetroParks signage would also be placed along the property at Curtis-Middlefield Road and at the terminus of Richards Way. Each sign should be sized appropriately in relation to the type of entrance it designates. For instance, a service entrance sign would be substantially smaller than a visitor entrance sign.



Sugar Shack Rehabilitation & Use

MetroParks could secure, inspect, and refurbish the existing Maple Sugar Shack so that it can be utilized as a gathering area and an educational facility. MetroParks may also provide educational signage and exhibits at the site elaborating upon the area's history and environment as well as explaining the process for making maple sugar. The facility should be designed to accommodate students with a small classroom setting while also doubling as space for concessions and visitor rest area. MetroParks could also work to establish fire pits at a safe distance away from the structure in order to allow wintertime visitors additional areas to warm up.



Maple Sugar Shack Interior

Nature Walks, Bridal Paths, and Mountain Biking Trails

MetroParks may coordinate with area volunteers to develop a nature trail system that could take visitors from the western parking lot to the various environments located throughout the park. Specifically, the trail would traverse the evergreen forest in the northern area of the park, offer a connection to the Maple Sugar Shack, pass along Swine Creek, and take visitors through the open field near Girdle Road. During the winter, the same trail could be utilized for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Additionally, the park district may work to establish a network of single-lane and ecologically friendly mountain bike trails. MetroParks may also design a bridal trail that would utilize its own trail sections and possibly sections of pedestrian trails in areas with hardy soils.

Primitive Canoe Launch

MetroParks may also provide a primitive canoe launch at Swine Creek, which traverses much of the southern end of the park, meandering back and forth across the property line. Though not always passable and part of the complicated and convoluted Grand River Watershed, Swine Creek could provide adventurous canoeists with rigorous recreation. Therefore, MetroParks may seek to designate a riverbank area as a launch site at within easy walking distance of a parking area.

Plantlife Inventory

MetroParks may collaborate with volunteers in conducting a plantlife inventory. With information gathered on tree species and certain fauna, the park district would be able to attain additional information for educational signage. Also, depending upon the results of the inventory, the park district may be able to establish an arboretum within the preserve.



Educational Signage

MetroParks should showcase the preserve's many environments and features with educational signage to increase the public's knowledge and awareness about conservation, wildlife, and healthy lifestyles. In particular, MetroParks may coordinate with local schools and interested citizens in developing signage for nature trails. MetroParks may also work to create historical placards and exhibits at the Maple Sugar Shack which would offer information about the structure's use and the West Farmington community. MetroParks may also highlight the features of Swine Creek and its tributaries by establishing water education spots. Such sites, consisting of trails and field study areas with detailed educational signage, would offer children and adults a chance to learn about biology and earth sciences. Signs could include information on the hydrologic cycle and macroinvertebrates.

Connector To Geauga County's Swine Creek Reservation

As a future consideration, MetroParks will work toward developing a connection to Geauga County's Swine Creek Reservation. In particular, MetroParks may examine lightly traveled roads and a former rail right of way which exists between the vicinity of Swine Creek Reservation and the center of West Farmington. Other connection opportunities may exist through the purchase or donation of access easements from adjacent property owners.

Winter Wonderland Area

Although attributes such as cross-county skiing trails and the Maple Sugar Shack will be important components in making the nature preserve a wintertime recreation destination, the MetroParks Winter Wonderland Area would offer visitors an ice rink, concessions, restrooms, parking, and possibly a sledding hill. As mentioned previously, such improvements would not be permissible on lands purchased with Clean Ohio funds. The park district will need to acquire additional land to host such amenities. Depending upon soils, the proposed ice rink could be natural or require impervious surfacing. As with all of its parks, MetroParks will also work to establish permanent restrooms once the number of visitors warrants the cost. Additionally, depending upon access to electricity and funding, the park district will work to establish lighting strings along Winter Wonderland Area trails and walkways that will serve to brighten up the park on dreary winter days and during special evening events.



The Maple Sugar Shack is located along the southeastern end of the nature preserve



Implementation Strategies

MetroParks' first task in developing the West Farmington Nature Preserve should be to seek the additional land necessary to create an ideal nature preserve entrance and Winter Wonderland Area. Once additional lands can be secured, MetroParks should conduct planning sessions to determine the design and layout of the proposed Winter Wonderland. If land can not be found in a reasonable amount of time, however, the park district may go ahead with trail development, parking lots, educational signage, and the restoration of the Maple Sugar Shack.

West Farmington Nature Preserve Implementation Checklist

Phase I – Expansion

- Explore and pursue opportunities to attain access to Girdle Road
- Also explore and pursue opportunities to attain access to Larson Road
- Determine feasibility of attaining additional property (with reasonable opportunities for development) along Richards Way and provide signage at Girdle Road

Phase II – Create Access

- Place directional signage to park accordingly along major corridors
- Repair entrance and provide parking along Curtis-Middlefield road
- Place signage establishing existing Richards Way entrance at cul-de-sac as service access only
- Establish Picnic area at primary parking lot with information kiosk

Phase III – Maple Sugar Shack Rehabilitation

- Inspect integrity of sugar shack structure
- Repair roof and exterior of facility
- Make interior repairs as necessary
- Establish educational signage
- Create convertible classroom area within the facility
- Inspect fireplace, make any appropriate repairs
- Provide fire ring area outside of structure for portable fire rings for use in winter
- Provide picnic area with tables and grills nearby

Phase IV – Trail Creation

- Coordinate with area groups to develop walking trails
- Establish separate mountain biking trails
- Create bridal trails for horses
- Provide educational and directional signage along trails geared towards appropriate users as well as cross-country skiers, dog sleds, and snow shoe travelers



Handiwork of beavers on display at West Farmington Nature Preserve



Phase V – Swine Creek Enhancements

- Designate area along riverbank as primitive canoe launch
- Conduct plantlife inventory of property, display content on educational signage
- Create “water education spots” along swine creek and tributary with educational signage / exhibits
- Place emphasis on hydrologic cycle and aquatic life at water education spots

Phase VI – Swine Creek Trail Connection

- Coordinate with appropriate agencies, including Geauga County MetroParks and the Trumbull County Highway Engineer to establish Curtis-Middlefield Road and Swine Creek Road as a Hike and Bike route between West Farmington Nature Preserve and Geauga County’s Swine Creek Reservation
- Explore opportunities to link to West Farmington Village, establish signage along viable routes (Curtis-Middlefield to Larson to Girdle)
- Collaborate with Geauga County MetroParks in investigating opportunities for establishing a trail along the abandoned Baltimore & Ohio Railroad right of way
- Partner with area property owners to construct trails along property lines or in areas of least impact

Phase VII – Winter Wonderland Area

Additional land without major restrictions required

- Establish electricity at Winter Wonderland Area
- Build warming hut or area with fire rings
- Create connections to existing trail networks
- Provide restrooms during winter
- Establish place for vending or concessions
- Build sledding hill if space permits
- Provide ice-rink and information area
- Establish string lighting along Winter Wonderland walkways and areas of interest
- Place appropriate signage

West Farmington Nature Preserve Statistics

Parkland Attributes:

Acreage: 263.00
Land Cover: Forest & Fields
Surrounding
Land Uses: Rural, L.D. Res.
Farms, Forest
Topography Gently Rolling
Creek – Canoe Access
Cabin in Need of Repair
Some Existing Paths
Gas Wells To Be Maintained
Daily Traffic Counts: SR 88 ~ SR 534 3,550 ~ 2,410

Pervious Entrance Road & Parking Areas
Canoe Livery
Camping Areas
Natural Trails / Boardwalk Trails
Observation Decks / Educational Signage
Education / Nature / Research Study Programs
Easements to be Given To Sanitary Engineer
Arboretum / Riparian Forest / Wetland Creation

Permitted Uses / Restrictions:

Facilities to make open space usable by the public
Park Facilities -
Picnic Tables
Composting or Portable Restrooms