

## Chapter 11

# Open Space and Recreation

### Introduction

The importance of open space and recreation has long been recognized. In the 1850s the City Beautiful Movement advocated public parks as retreats from the congestion and overcrowding of city life. New York's Central Park (1856, Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr.) is the best known American example. Many desirable communities in America have a significant park and recreation system as one of their building blocks. The economic benefits of open space cannot be understated. Undeveloped land demands fewer community services and requires less

infrastructure than suburban-style development. There is an old adage that says "cows do not send their children to school," which emphasizes the fact that farms and other types of open lands generate more in property taxes than the services they demand. And given the evidence that single-family housing rarely "pays its own way" through additional property tax revenues, open space becomes an important part of a local government's economic outlook. (Source: *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space, Trust for Public Land, 1999*)



*The park at Orange Township Hall*

Convenient access to parks improves the quality of life for residents. Numerous studies have shown the benefits of green space and active parks. Orange Township has supported parks and recreation both in creating an advisory parks board of township residents and through several ballot initiatives. The Ohio Revised Code acknowledges the importance of open space and recreation in both the zoning and subdivision enabling legislation. ORC 519.02 states that the trustees may regulate by [zoning] resolution "sizes of yards, courts, and other open spaces...the uses of land for...recreation." ORC 711 states that "a county or regional planning commission shall adopt general rules [subdivision regulations]... to secure and provide for ...adequate and convenient open spaces for...recreation, light, air, and for the avoidance of congestion of population."

### Open Space Standards

The Subdivision and Site Design Handbook (*David Listokin and Carole Walker, 1989, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, Center for Urban Policy Research*) is considered a planner's bible for many accepted standards in subdivision review. In their chapter on open space and recreation, they relate the following critical functions of open space:

- Preserves ecologically important natural environments
- Provides attractive views and visual relief from developed areas
- Provides sunlight and air
- Buffers other land uses

- Separates areas and controls densities
- Functions as a drainage detention area
- Serves as a wildlife preserve
- Provides opportunities for recreational activities
- Increases project amenities
- Helps create quality developments with lasting value

## **Open Space Defined**

Listokin and Walker define open space as:

*“Essentially unimproved land or water, or land that is relatively free of buildings or other physical structures, except for outdoor recreational facilities. In practice, this means that open space does not have streets, drives, parking lots, or pipeline or power easements on it, nor do walkways, schools, clubhouses and indoor recreational facilities count as open space. Private spaces such as rear yards or patios not available for general use are not included in the definition either.”*

*“Open space is usually classified as either developed or undeveloped. Developed open space is designed for recreational uses, both active and passive, whereas undeveloped open space preserves a site’s natural amenities.”*

## **Land Area Required**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has developed a set of standards for local developed open space. Recreational needs vary from community to community, and desires for recreation vary also. Listokin notes that:

*“Ideally the national standards should stand the test in communities of all sizes. However, the reality often makes it difficult or inadvisable to apply national standards without question in specific locales. The uniqueness of every community, due to differing geographical, cultural, climatic, and socioeconomic characteristics, makes it imperative that every community develop its own standards for recreation, parks, and open space.”*

## **Location of Parcels**

Listokin notes:

*“Open space parcels should be easily accessible by development residents. In smaller developments, one large, centrally located parcel may suffice; but a large development may require several parcels, equitably distributed. Linking open space parcels is a good strategy, because it enlarges the area available for recreation. Parcels containing noise generators, such as basketball courts or playgrounds, should be sited to minimize disturbance to residents.”*

## Regional Parks

Orange Township is blessed with two large parks that provide passive (undeveloped) open space and active (developed) open space in the southwest and northeast corners of the township. They do not, however, provide recreational fields for organized sports.

### Highbanks Metro Park

Highbanks Metro Park is located at the southwest corner of Powell Road and US 23. Automobile access is the only way to conveniently use the park. Access to the main entrance was made easier in 2007 when the entrance was moved to align with Green Meadows Drive. A new access was added in 2008 at the Highmeadows Village Drive/Powell Road signal. This entrance is limited to certain times for automobile access, but is a pedestrian entrance during regular park hours. Highbanks is part of the Franklin County Metro Parks District.

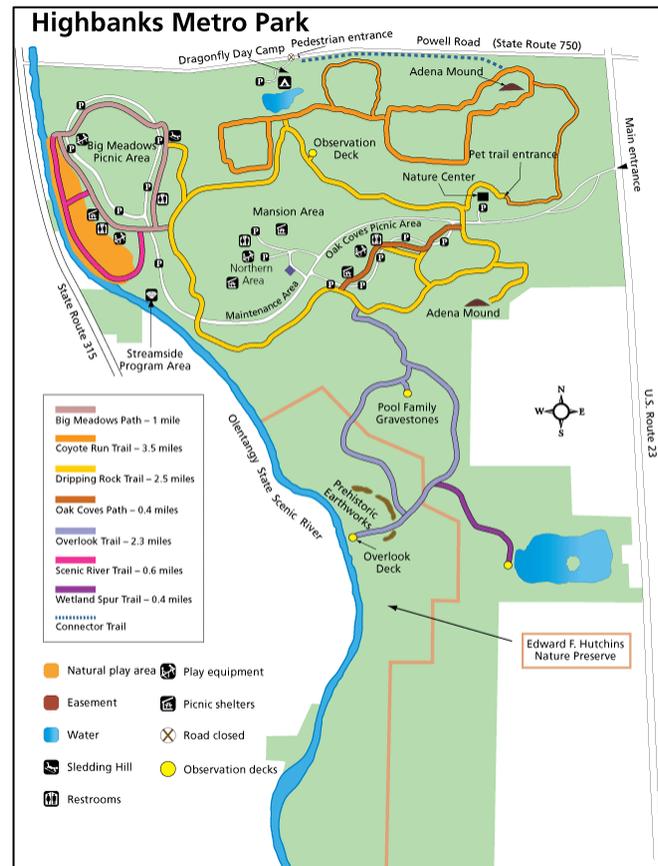
Highbanks consists of 1,159 acres of rolling land in the southwest corner of the township. Its land starts at the top of the Olentangy plateau along the US 23 corridor and then drops steeply into the valley of the Olentangy River. It also offers a nature center, streamside study site, large playfields and playground equipment. There is also a conference and resource room, ranger station and naturalist's office.

The park offers passive open space, two large picnic areas with 9 shelters enclosed on three sides and 4 open shelters and grills. There are seven hiking trails that total eleven miles, observation decks, fishing and canoeing on the river, a sledding hill and 3.5 miles of cross country ski trail (used as a pet trail during the warmer months).

The park also contains two Adena Indian burial mounds and a 1500-foot horseshoe-shaped prehistoric earthwork. Highbanks is also known for its geology, particularly within the Edward F. Hutchins State Nature Preserve. Exposed bedrock is Ohio shale, a sedimentary rock formed 350 million years ago when Ohio was covered by sea. Concretions are a unique feature of Ohio shale. These are rocks that form around an organic object, as small as a fist or as large as a car. The area has been designated a National Natural Landmark. Additionally one wetland and view shelter overlooking the wetland has been set aside within the park.

Highbanks has no facilities for organized active sports.

Figure 11.1 Highbanks Features



## **Alum Creek State Park**

Alum Creek State Park comprises 8,874 acres principally within Orange, Berlin, and Brown Townships. Smaller portions of the park are located in Kingston and Genoa Townships. The park is located in the northeast corner of Orange Township on Africa and Lewis Center Roads. The Corps of Engineers leases the land to the state of Ohio for use as a state park.

That portion of Alum Creek State Park within Orange Township comprises an area of 2,338 acres, of which 1,050 acres is lake. The lake was created by impoundment of Alum Creek behind an earthen levy and concrete flood control dam built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from 1970-73. The dam is 93 feet high and 10,500 feet long between the levies. The minimum outflow of the dam is 60 gallons per second, with a maximum outflow of 12,216 gallons per second. The lake ranges from 65-78 feet deep.

Today, Alum Creek Lake serves five purposes: flood control, water supply (40 million gallons per day), fish and wildlife enhancement, water quality and recreation.

Recreational opportunities at Alum Creek are shown on the US corps of Engineers Map, and may be itemized as follows:

### **Land (entire park) – 4,630 acres**

- 286 electric campsites with 3 full-service campsites;
- 8 “Getaway” cabin rentals;
- 4-acre Dog Park;
- Hiking Trails – 9.5 miles;
- Mountain Bike Trails – 14 miles;
- Bridle Trails – 38 miles;
- Hunting – 20 duck blind sites and 8 day-use blinds;

### **Lake – 4,244 acres**

- 4 Boat Launching Ramps;
- South of Cheshire Road allows unlimited horsepower for boats, north has a speed limitation;
- Swimming Beach – 3000 feet (largest inland beach in Ohio’s state park system);

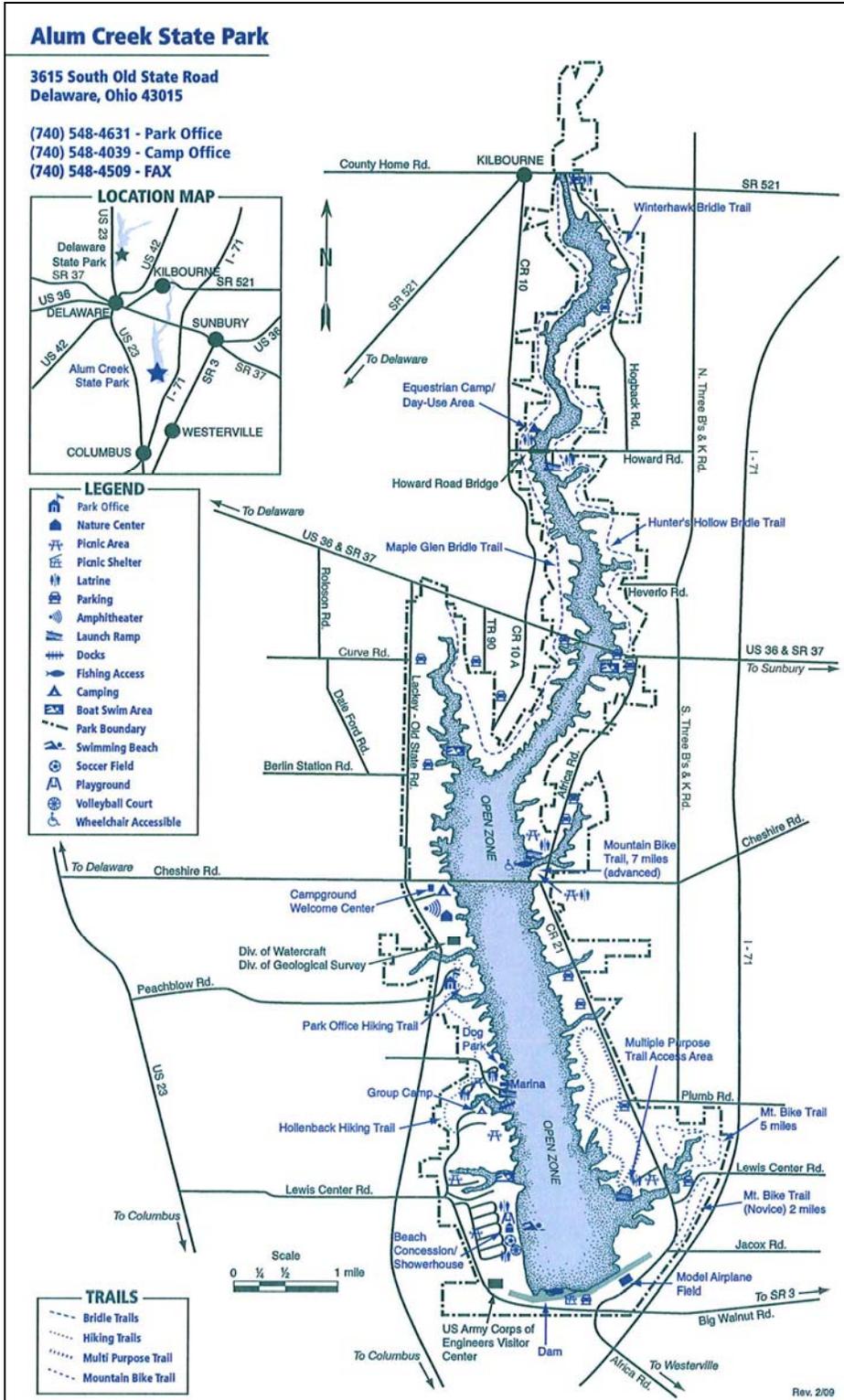


*Alum Creek Reservoir Dam*

Shower house, concessions, sand volleyball;

Picnic areas – 8 scenic areas with tables, grills, restrooms and drinking water and two shelter houses.

Figure 11.2 Alum Creek Lake Opportunities



## Township Recreational Needs

In response to a growing awareness of the rapidly vanishing acreage and need for parks, Township Trustees created a community advisory committee in early 1999. Composed of township residents interested in parks and recreational issues, this volunteer organization was begun as a committee and later became an ongoing citizen advisory board. In the years since, the board has solicited input on several occasions from the community as to what facilities and activities they would like the township to provide.

Initially, the board explored both active (high intensive use) and passive (low intensive use) recreational needs in light of what the township had to offer at the time. The 2001 Comprehensive Plan noted several recommendations made by the Olentangy Youth Athletic Association (OYAA) and made recommendations based on Listokin and Walker's NRPA model, "which surveys the service area population to determine demand for different activities."

Significant accomplishments include the donation of 41 acres of green space as part of the North Orange development in the Spring of 2000. Later that year a 2.8 mil levy passed for the development of the land which is now the North Orange Park and Aquatic Center.

## Current Township Park Inventory

The township maintains the following parks in its inventory:

**Ro Park at Glen Oak:** Ro Park is a 14-acre neighborhood park located in the Glen Oak development. The park offers a variety of activities for the neighborhood including two baseball fields, a picnic shelter, a playground, a restroom facility, and wooded trails. Ro Park is now considered a typical park for the "neighborhood"-size parks.



*Ro Park at Glen Oak*

**North Orange Park:** North Orange Park is a 36-acre community park facility that features four small soccer fields, one large soccer field, basketball courts, a sledding hill, an accessible playground, a large picnic shelter, walking trails, and the community pool complex. The pool complex features an 8,500 square foot outdoor swimming pool which includes a zero depth entry and water slides. A new pool addition was completed in 2009. There is also a community room available for public use in the pool complex.

**Township Hall and Park:** The park consists of about 18 acres and has been expanded through improvements to an adjoining 6-acre property in the Villages of Oak Creek Development. The grounds of the park features several trails with overlooks, two ponds, a gazebo, and a basketball court. The park also serves as a symbolic center of the residential township, enhanced through entrance features at the intersection of South Old State and East Orange Roads. The park is also the location of the township hall.

## Future Development and Implementation

The **Orange Township Parks, Trails & Greenways Master Plan** was updated in October, 2008, with the following overarching goals:

1. Connect all parks by developing a number of bike routes;
2. Provide a north/south connection through the center of the township by completing a trail along South Old State Road and provide a trail along the railroad tracks to East Powell Road;
3. Plan major leisure trails and routes that connect the Orange Township Trail System to outside trail systems and parks, including Alum Creek State Park, Highbanks, Westerville and other county trails;
4. Require developers to construct leisure trails and trail improvements;
5. Construct leisure and pedestrian trails along with roadway improvements;
6. Create trail hubs along community trails to provide parking and facilities for trail users;
7. Develop Glen Oak property as a neighborhood park;
8. Investigate opportunities for more neighborhood parks;
9. Study North Road property for development as a community park with active recreation;
10. Investigate the need for a community center – consider North Road property as a potential site;
11. Implement a park system strategy that will acquire and construct park facilities east of South Old State Road;
12. Study the potential for expansion of the North Orange Aquatic Center;
13. Adopt an open space dedication policy that prefers scenic open spaces, open spaces along roads, and the potential for Homeowner Association-owned facilities;
14. Preserve and/or acquire floodplain property for open space and trails;
15. Develop standards for park amenities.



*Shelter and playground at North Orange Park.*

According to the Master Plan, the following is the implementation timeline, subject to funding and other changes:

**To be implemented in 2009**

Pool addition, Glen Oak Park Phase I, Owenfield Trail, Highmeadows Trail marking, South Old State to High School (Orange Road Trail), Lewis Center Multi-Use Trail (Lewis Center Rail Trail) North, Gooding Blvd trail extension to Home Road property.

**To be implemented in 2010**

Loveland Pond (Oak Creek School Pond Junction), Lewis Center Rail Trail south to Oak Creek School Pond Junction, Orange Road Trail from High School to Bale-Kenyon, Kingwood Multi-Use Trail, North Road Property development, Alum Creek Freedom Trail easements, Glen Oak Park Phase II.

**To be implemented in 2011**

West Orange route to North Orange Park, Rail Road Crossings at East Orange Road and Lewis Center, Orange Road Commerce Center Trail, East Powell Loop from Gladshire to Oak Creek School Pond Junction, Alum Creek Freedom Trail

**To be implemented in 2012**

Alum Creek Freedom Trail South, Bridge over Route 23,

**To be implemented in 2013**

Community Center, South Old State Trail - Abbey Knoll to Lewis Center Road, South Old State Trail - Trails within Alum Creek.

**Greenways**

An inexpensive way to provide undeveloped open space is to assure the linkage of neighborhoods by greenways, or corridors of natural or man made landscaped paths, and trails. Greenways may be nothing more than a buffer of natural grass or vegetation thoughtfully placed to connect some areas or camouflage others. Leisure trails can be incorporated into greenways to give cyclists and hikers a safe and attractive path. The township has begun an aggressive plan to build leisure trails as noted in Chapter 8 and shown on Figure 8.6.

Greenways can connect disjointed areas of the township and in so doing unify the community. Greenways can be used in both in commercial and residential areas to create an aesthetic transition from one area to another. Sewer easements, high-tension powerline easements and other utility easements lend themselves to such uses because they are often part of land that can't be developed, or are have common ownership/oversight across multiple developments.



*Greenway/Bike Path near the Township Hall*

**Parks and Open Space Goals and Means**

<p>Goal</p> <p>Preserve the rural and natural character of Orange Township as expressed in its open spaces, green areas, farms, natural resources (floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, ravines, creeks and rivers) as it continues to develop.</p>	<p>Means</p> <p>Increase the dedication of useable open space in planned developments. In open space that is managed by Homeowners' Associations, encourage a mix of active versus passive open space in each neighborhood.</p> <p>Set landscape and architectural design standards for planned developments that stipulate the kinds of centralized green spaces envisioned.</p> <p>Require the linkage of planned developments by bike paths or walking paths in greenways so that new neighborhoods are all pedestrian-oriented and residents can move safely between neighborhoods.</p> <p>Require natural landscaping for developments that front on original township roads.</p>
<p>Goal</p> <p>Provide passive and active recreational areas as the township grows.</p>	<p>Means</p> <p>Support the Parks and Trails Master Plan by requiring proposed trails to be built as part of new developments.</p> <p>Consult the Parks and Trails Master Plan when zoning large Planned Districts to achieve the plan's goals for neighborhood parks as well as larger active recreation areas.</p>
<p>Goal</p> <p>Preserve scenic views.</p>	<p>Means</p> <p>Consider secondary conservation areas (scenic views, open space along the road) as part of the open space design of new PRDs.</p>