



Chapter 1.0
INTRODUCTION



Parks and open spaces provide direct and indirect benefits to residents of urbanized areas. These consist of economic, social and environmental amenities. Examples of these benefits include natural and cultural resource conservation, improved air and water quality, as well as preservation of biodiversity. Increased property values and improved human health and wellness are also benefits provided by green spaces. The availability of green space and its interrelationship with other land uses is a critical quality of life factor in most communities.

1.1 CLEVELAND METROPARKS

Cleveland Metroparks is the oldest and second largest park district in the state of Ohio. It is also the largest property owner in Cuyahoga County. A three-tiered mission of conservation, recreation and education guides the park district in its stewardship of plant and animal diversity, ecosystem management and the interpretation of the region's natural and cultural resources.

Cleveland Metroparks directly provides stewardship for 21,250 acres in sixteen reservations, primarily in Cuyahoga County. The Park District completed its most recent master plan, entitled Cleveland Metroparks 2000: Conserving Our Natural Heritage, in 1995. Since then, the Park District has added a total of 1,906 acres, including three new reservations (Ohio & Erie Canal, Washington and West Creek).

The mission of the Cleveland Metroparks is to, “conserve significant natural resources and enhance people’s lives by providing safe, high-quality outdoor education, recreation and zoological opportunities. Further, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo is committed to improving the future for wildlife.”

1.2 PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals

Cleveland Metroparks is currently updating its master plan. The goal of this project - “From Forest to Lake: Envisioning the Emerald Necklace,” - is to augment that plan by providing information and recommendations about the Metroparks. This project is also intended to enhance information about planning opportunities and partnerships with the Cuyahoga County Green Print, city park plans, state lakefront parks and other open space managed by nonprofit organizations.

Objectives

The objectives of this project are to understand the role of open space and parks in the region and to assess the influence of parks on surrounding communities. Another major objective is to identify the economic, social and ecological value contributed by parks to their communities. The study examines opportunities to enhance connections between Cleveland Metroparks and other existing parks. Links between parks and neighborhoods are also considered. Threats to the

value of existing parks and natural resources are identified and strategies for improvement are offered.

1.3 PROJECT ORGANIZATION – PHASE I

Phase one of this project divided research and analysis into five sections: Data and monitoring; valuation models; organizational landscape; regional collaboration; and user surveys.

Data and Monitoring

Research was conducted to identify the existing social, economic and ecological conditions in the Cleveland Metroparks planning regions. Some common themes that emerged included a general decline in county population and housing value, along with an aging housing stock. Foreclosures were shown to play a significant role in the planning regions.

Valuation Models

Methods for measuring the economic, social and ecological value of parks were researched and assessed. The effort resulted in three valuation models that could be applied to assign a dollar value to the Cleveland Metroparks. The main areas of focus were economic value, social value, and environmental value. Based on best practices and previous studies, the valuation models accounted for the overall services provided by parks. Millions of dollars of services are offered by the parks.

Organizational Landscape

Researching the organizational landscape for open space protection provided an opportunity to identify the status of recent greenspace projects. Planned projects were identified by reviewing the Cuyahoga County Greenprint. Assessment of over twenty organization's efforts identified existing green initiatives. In addition, research was conducted on the Towpath Trail as well as public transportation access to greenspace projects and the Cleveland Metroparks.

Regional Collaboration

Best practices for collaboration for park planning and management were explored. This section focused on how to make open spaces become great community places. Ideas were offered on gaining green space through land banking, easements, and conservancy groups. The role of collaborative relationships was analyzed.

User Surveys

Both on-site and web-based surveys were conducted to assess the user experience of the Cleveland Metroparks. The purpose of the survey was to obtain data regarding the demographic composition of Cleveland Metroparks users, satisfaction of park resources, facilities and programming, and overall value of the Metroparks mission of Conservation, Education and Recreation.

1.4 PROJECT ORGANIZATION – PHASE

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The second phase of this project served as case studies of four parks within the region. Three of the parks were in the Cleveland Metroparks system. These include Garfield Park Reservation, Hinckley Reservation and Rocky River Reservation. The fourth case study, Forest Hill Park, is a municipal park straddling Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland.

Selection Criteria

In order to study a variety of parks, several selection criteria were applied. For example, the case studies capture an urban to rural gradient by exploring the rural communities of Hinckley Reservation to the highly urbanized communities around Garfield Park Reservation. Variation in size and amenities was also considered. The park selection accounted for opportunities to connect municipal parks (Forest Hill) with Cleveland Metroparks reservations and other assets such as Lake Erie. A final factor included opportunities to address the value of each park for its surrounding community.



