

Parks, Preserves, and Pathways Stewards Review:

Enhancing Scio Township's Outdoor Spaces for a Thriving Community

Intro:

As Stewards for the Parks, Preserves, and Pathways department, we have had the privilege of serving Scio Township and contributing to the community's well-being. Over the past few months, we have been dedicated to enriching the quality of outdoor spaces in our township. While we remain humble about our efforts, we find it essential to highlight the progress we have made toward our primary objectives. Our commitment to expanding and developing trails, improving accessibility, enhancing community involvement, and managing invasive species has resulted in a transformative impact on our parks and preserves.

Trail Expansion and Development:

One of our key responsibilities was to expand and develop trails at Marshall Park, West Scio Preserve, Sloan Preserve, and Liberty Nature Area. We are proud to report significant advancements in these locations. Through careful planning by scouting potential trails and flaggings designated paths, we have successfully extended existing trails and established new ones, providing visitors with diverse experiences that showcase the natural beauty of our township. In the beginning of the summer we planned to expand only a couple of trails, but ended up adding to existing trails systems at 3 of our park locations and creating a previously nonexistent trail system at one of our other parks. Another way we have developed trails is through working paths with tools to mimic the effects of strenuous usage of the trails. One example of this could be seen in the transformation of Marshall Park's trail system. Before we worked these trails, the ground was littered with woody plant roots and weeds which made them undesirable to walk on. We spend countless hours working these trails with tools to rid them of these hazardous roots and to expose the dirt to make them a more desirable walking trail.

Estimated Hours Devoted: 128 Hours

Enhancing Community Involvement and Outreach:

Publicizing parks and preserves has been a key aspect of our mission. By increasing community outreach efforts, we have successfully amplified the visibility of our outdoor spaces. From social media campaigns to hosting engaging events, we have effectively connected with a wider audience, attracting both locals and visitors alike.

Scio Township's parks and preserves belong to the community, and we believe in fostering a strong sense of ownership among its residents. To achieve this, we have focused on improving Scio Outside/Community involvement in our parks. One of our primary focuses this summer has been to encourage active participation in park-related activities and events within the Scio Farms

community. As one of the densest communities in the township, we believed it was especially important to provide access to a natural space. After a few months, efforts are starting to bear fruit, as we witness more community members embracing the benefits of spending time outdoors and connecting with nature. The process of our outreach has not been an easy one because we did not have much of a following for our parks. As stewards, we have felt compelled to encourage people to get involved in the development of this community's wonderful parks and preserves. Because of this, we started our mission by creating flyers to help promote the events we were organizing for volunteers to get involved. After that, we had to find ways to get people to see the flyers so they were informed on what was going on. One way we did this is by bringing physical copies to local businesses and also posting them around town. Another way we tried to accomplish this goal was by social media. We poured time into creating content with the purpose of promoting the beauty of our parks in preserves to compel people to visit them and/or get involved.

Estimated Hours Devoted: 160 Hours

Improving Accessibility and Signage:

A core objective for our department has been to improve the general accessibility of parks, preserves, and pathways. Given Scio Township's aging population, we aimed to improve the safety and enjoyability of our trails. Investments in drastically better tools and equipment enabled us to provide more accessible pathways and take significant strides toward ensuring that our outdoor spaces are inclusive for all. One example of this could be the development of simplistic board walks in the Floodplain Loop of Sloan Preserve to make the trail safer and more accessible to everyone.

Additionally, each trail has been adequately labeled and we have revamped kiosks with new maps and other signage in our parks and preserves. By providing clear and informative wayfinding, we tried to minimize potential for error and make every visitor's experience enjoyable. With the aid of our more tech-minded colleagues, we were able to utilize a GPS software called ArcGIS to accurately map each property. This development was a big step for our parks because we had properties with no maps and signage. The accomplishment of updating and/or creating maps and signage for our parks takes a huge step in making them safer and more appealing to the public. As a result if you visit our parks and preserves you will see kiosks loaded with maps, map keys, informational flyers, field guides, rules, and regulations. You will also see trails marked with signage that coordinates with the maps on the kiosks to create more fun and accessible hiking.

Estimated Hours Devoted: 192.5 Hours

Conservation and Management:

As stewards of the land, we are acutely aware of the importance of preserving our natural resources. The identification and management of invasive plant species have been a priority for us. Through thorough research and targeted management strategies, we have made considerable progress in protecting our parks and preserves from the harmful effects of invasive species. This preservation not only benefits the environment, but also ensures that visitors can continue to enjoy the treasured beauty of these areas for generations to come. We have used the outlet of our organized events to help these management practices. What this has looked like for us is taking our volunteers along the paths in our parks and preserves where we target the most prevalent invasive species which are garlic mustard, common buckthorn, and multiflora rose. One of the most accessible and effective strategies has been manual removal of these species, which means we pull garlic mustard out of the ground from the roots to be properly disposed of and cut buckthorn and multiflora rose at the base. This strategy can be strenuous and time consuming but is very effective in eliminating invasive species and stopping them from outcompeting native species for resources which results in the preservation of our properties.

Estimated Hours Devoted: 363 Hours

Maintenance:

One of the biggest responsibilities we had this summer as Parks Stewards was the maintenance of our parks. We made great progress in the development and improvement of the township properties but it felt most important to keep them in peak condition. As you may know, summer is the peak season for the growth of plant life. This caused us to constantly rotate between parks to maintain their desirable appearance. What this looked like for us was to make sure all the trails were cleared of debris and plant growth. With plants constantly growing and our trails being lined with them, we had to use tools like weed whackers and a brush hog to keep the level down so the trail was clear. Not only did we have to make sure the ground was cleared to walk on but also the space above it too. This meant we had to use hand tools like loppers to trim trees and other brush that might have limb growth that is impeding over the trail. This was a constant battle this summer because of weather conditions and rapid growth of plants but we were very happy with the result of maintaining beautiful and accessible trails.

Estimated Hours Devoted: 116.5 Hours

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the accomplishments of the Park, Preserve, and Pathway Stewards have played a vital role in enriching the Scio Township community. We are humbled by the support we have received from residents and visitors alike. The results of our endeavors are evident, with increased usage of our parks, improved accessibility, heightened community involvement, and strengthened environmental conservation efforts.

While we strive to let our work speak for itself, we are confident that our dedication and achievements demonstrate the importance of our department for the well-being and prosperity of Scio Township. As we continue to forge ahead, we look forward to further enhancing our outdoor spaces and leaving a lasting, positive impact on our community.