

LITTLE MIAMI SCENIC TRAIL STATE PARK TRAIL MANAGEMENT PLAN



Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio State Parks, Southwestern Park
District, Cowan Lake Region

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Background and History

The Little Miami River Valley is historically significant to the state of Ohio. These wooded lands were home to several early Ohio Indian cultures. Nearby are the largest and some of the best-known earthworks in the state. The Hopewell people, who inhabited the area from 300 B.C. to 600 A.D, built Fort Ancient, near present day Morrow and just above the present-day state park trail, overlooking the river.

In more recent history, the Miami and Shawnee Indians inhabited this area. After the War of 1812, these Indian cultures were dispersed and the area attracted white settlers. Harnessing the power of moving water, numerous mills were developed on the riverbank and several still stand today. Clifton Mill near Yellow Springs is still in operation. By the mid 1800s, the river corridor was bustling with gristmills, textile mills, stagecoach trails, and a railroad line.

Remnants and relics of this rich cultural history can still be found in the Little Miami River valley. In 1979, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, designated the old rail line from Hedges Road just south of Xenia to Terrace Park in Hamilton County, the Little Miami Scenic Park. This park became the spine of the ever-growing rail-trail system we see in Ohio today.

Little Miami State Park introduced a unique concept to the state park system--a trail corridor. This non-traditional "greenway" approach to park building focused on offering numerous recreational pursuits--bicycling, hiking, cross-country skiing, rollerblading, backpacking and horseback riding. The corridor also provides access to canoeing along the Little Miami River

Little Miami State Park is approximately 55 miles in length. It averages 66 feet in width and runs through four counties of southwest Ohio (Greene, Warren, Clermont and Hamilton). This abandoned railroad right-of-way, converted for public use, boasts 55 miles of paved trail from Terrace Park to Hedges Road. The remainder of the trail to Springfield is paved and operated by Greene County Parks and Recreation (for more information on the bikeway north of Hedges Road, Contact Greene County Parks and Recreation at 937-376-7440). The southern portion, Terrace Park to the south, is currently under development by the Hamilton County Park District (513-521-7275).

Three staging areas (Loveland, Morrow and Corwin) have been located along the developed portion of the park. These include parking lots, restrooms, public phones and trail access points. These facilities are wheelchair accessible.

Vision

“Little Miami Scenic State Park, strives to be a vibrant addition to the communities of southwestern Ohio, a focal point for economic development, an attractant for tourism, and a pathway for healthy citizenry and livable communities”.

The multi-use trail will provide a place where visitors can gather to walk, bike, ski, ride horses, and participate in other non-motorized recreational activities.

The trail will provide easy access to the rich scenic, cultural, and historic offerings of the Little Miami Scenic River valley. Access points will be provided along the length of the trail with parking and restroom facilities located in most of the neighboring communities.

The trail will provide economic opportunity, recreational resources, and health and fitness benefits for residents and visitors to the river valley.

The trail will provide linkages for alternative transportation between the communities in the valley.

Benefits of a Multi-Use Recreational Trail

The Little Miami Scenic Trail State Park provides the following basic benefits:

- * **Economic** - Benefits include increased tourism opportunity in the area, increased property values for residences, and increased business along the trail. Recent studies conducted by the University of Cincinnati concluded that homebuyers are willing to pay a \$9,000.00 premium for homes located within 1,000 feet of the scenic trail.
- * **Preservation** - The trail serves a preservation function for the scenic river valley. The trail acts as a buffer to increasing development along the river in this southwestern corner of Ohio. In partnership with other ODNR agencies (Natural Areas and Preserves/Scenic Rivers), county agencies, and private conservation organizations, the trail can serve as an educational instrument, providing controlled access to otherwise fragile and “at-risk” ecosystems.
- * **Recreation** - Opportunities abound for those who pursue non-motorized trail sports. The 55-mile state park-maintained trail is only a portion of an ever-growing trail system across the state. The trail system provides opportunity for cycling, hiking, horseback riding, skiing, and other muscle-powered activity.
- * **Health** – Many health agencies have recognized the epidemic of obesity and other health issues caused by poor physical fitness. Outdoor activities such as walking, running, and cycling have proven to be of benefit to the cardiovascular health of people of all ages. The trail can serve as a focal point for a variety of state, local agencies and private organizations as they develop plans for “walkable” communities.

Rail Corridor Preservation

The Trail follows the corridor previously occupied by the Penn Central and Little Miami Railroads. The trail infrastructure rests upon and is dependent on the integrity of the century-old rail bed. It is the intention of this management staff to preserve the current condition of the trail infrastructure and improve upon it when possible. The trail also meanders with the Little Miami State and National Scenic River, following that natural treasure for most of its length. Preservation of that waterway will be of utmost concern whenever repairs or developments are made to the trail. It is the intention of this management staff that the trail will rest easily upon and intrude as little as possible on this wonderful "green corridor".

Trail Design

Much of the state park trail was designed and built in the early 1980's, seeing completion in the mid 1990's. The entire 55-mile stretch is asphalt paved. Design engineers utilized existing railroad structures such as bridges and culverts whenever possible. Several thousands of feet of wooden fences were erected to provide for safe passage along steep riverbanks and to provide screening to/from neighbors.

Trailhead Locations

Three primary trailhead "staging areas" are located in the communities of Loveland, Morrow, and Corwin. These areas feature parking, water, and restroom facilities. Those respective communities maintain the facilities at Loveland and Morrow. Recently, Hamilton Township has erected a modern restroom facility at Foster's Crossing. State Parks has recently reclaimed property in the Village of Oregonia and plans are underway to further develop parking and a rest area there. There are no plans to build flush restrooms at that location. The Village of Spring Valley has a Village Park adjacent to the trail and trail-users are welcomed to stage there.

Interpretive Program

Recent reorganization of District State Park Interpretive staff promises new opportunity for program development along the trail. Park staff recognizes the rich natural and cultural heritage in the river valley and looks forward to providing a full slate of fun and interesting program offerings. Park staff will also be developing a series of interpretive signs for the trail.

Trail Administration and Management

The State Park portion of the trail is managed through the Regional office located at Cowan Lake State Park. Recent reorganization within State Parks has placed the Cowan Lake Region within the management structure of the State Parks' Southwestern District. New staff and new initiatives promise to bring a fresh approach to the trail management philosophy. The basic maintenance and management tenets remain – Safety, Reclamation, Rehabilitation, and Development.

Safety – It is our primary goal to maintain the trail in a manner, which provides safe access to the recreational opportunity afforded by the trail. We have worked tirelessly over the years to assure that conditions remain safe for all visitors to the park. In recent years, we have partnered with our major support group, Friends of Little Miami State Park, on several projects which have substantially increased safety and usability of park/trail facilities.

Reclamation – We understand that past maintenance practices have allowed invasive plant species to choke much of the trail corridor with dense overgrowth. A major goal is to reclaim ditches, waterways, and culverts, to allow free drainage and easy access for maintenance.

Rehabilitation – Repairs to bridges, culverts and pavement will be prioritized for safety. Repairs will be made as funding becomes available.

Development – We will continue to seek out and secure funding for development projects along the trail. Modernization of restroom facilities, information kiosks, interpretive signage, stream bank restoration, and road crossing/intersection development should remain priority projects.

Funding

National statistics show that trails similar to Little Miami require annual routine operating budgets of \$1,000.00 to \$1,500.00 per mile. This would indicate that a nominal annual budget for routine Little Miami maintenance would be in the neighborhood of \$55,000.00 to \$82,500.00. Currently, no dedicated funding sources have been identified to meet this level of support. Operating funds for the Little Miami State Park are derived from the Southwest District operating budget. At current state funding levels, operating funds are limited within the District. It is the goal of the Ohio State Parks South West district management staff to work closely with trail support groups and other constituents to seek dedicated funding for trail maintenance projects. The search for dedicated funding and grant preparation will continue to be of utmost importance.

Friends of Little Miami State Park

In 2008, Hurricane Ike ripped through southwestern Ohio, leaving a wide path of devastation in its wake. The State Park Regional staff was occupied with the restoration of power and services to its facilities and campgrounds. Mr. Simeon Copple, owner of the Corwin Peddler, stepped forward to offer assistance to the park staff. In the following days, he was able to summon forth and organize a large band of volunteers along the length of the trail. That corps of volunteers was able to clear hundreds of downed trees and reopen the trail within next few weeks. In the coming months, those few volunteers, under the leadership of Mr. Copple, formed the core of the Friends of Little Miami State Park. In record time these staunch supporters of the trail were able to achieve their 501 (c) (3) tax exempt status and were raising funds for their next project, bridge re-decking. By partnering with the State Park, the group was able to leverage funding to accomplish the redecking and paving of all 15 wooden decked bridges on the trail. Since that time, the FLMSPP has become the primary support group for the trail and continues to be a strong advocate for trail safety and maintenance.

Trail Maintenance Operational Plan

Trail Maintenance Plan

Trail Surfaces – National statistics indicate that the most successful paved multipurpose rail/trails receive new paving every 20 years. Asphalt paving should be sealed every 7-10 years and cracks and holes should be patched and sealed immediately. Paving on the Little Miami Scenic State Park began in the early 1980's and the final stretches were paved in the mid1990's. While some portions of the trail have fared well, many miles are in dire need of resurfacing. At current state funding levels and with the lack of dedicated state park capital improvement dollars, a major paving project seems unlikely in the near future. Regional management will continue to fund repairs from operating budgets and explore other funding opportunities outside of state funding sources.

Snow Removal – Snow and ice accumulations will not be removed from the trail surface. Snow accumulation will provide recreational opportunity for cross-country skiers and snow-shoers. Additionally, snowplows and deicing applications cause damage to trail surfaces and harmful runoffs into fragile riverbank ecosystems. Trail users should be prepared to handle ice and snow conditions when they exist.

Vegetation – Vegetation control along the trail has been the primary focus for state park maintenance crews for the past many years. The entire 55-mile length will be mowed a minimum of 6 times per year. Mowing operations will be scheduled to occur just before each of the three major summer season holidays – Memorial Day (late May), July 4th, and Labor Day (late August) and as needed throughout the season. An herbicide spray plan will be used as needed for controlling unwanted vegetation and invasive species along the trail corridor. Every fall we will spray re-sprouts of non-native invasive species such as Bush Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive and Tree of Heaven. We will use Garlon 3a on the re-sprouts in a foliar spray. By spraying and treating the re-sprouts in the fall of the year we will lessen the potential harm to native vegetation.

Calls for immediate response to windfalls and downed trees should be directed to park maintenance staff at 937-382-1096. Staff and volunteers will perform a reconnaissance after major storms to spot trail blockages. Park staff will depend heavily on communication from our trail volunteers to assist in pinpointing downed vegetation. One drawback to a heavily forested and shaded trail is the continual presence of debris on the trail. Leaves and twigs should be expected. State Park crews will sweep or blow debris from the length of the trail at least once per year. The goal of leaf and debris removal in the autumn will be to clear the trail prior to winter and to prevent the buildup of decayed vegetative matter over the course of the cold months.

Drainage and Erosion – Perhaps the biggest threat to trail integrity along the Little Miami is poor drainage caused by blocked culverts and poor ditch design and maintenance. We are also observing several issues with stream bank erosion from the river and its tributaries. State Park Maintenance crews will continue to remove culvert blockages and make drainage improvements where possible. We recognize that many of the issues we are currently observing will require major infrastructure improvements. These improvements will be made as time, funding, and regulatory controls permit. Several successful projects in recent years will serve as models for future efforts. Of utmost importance in the coming months is continued mapping and observation of current threats to the trail and formulation of wise solutions.

Trailheads and Amenities – Three major, developed trailheads (staging areas) exist along the state park portion of the trail. These areas are located at Corwin, Morrow, and Loveland. Currently, state park maintenance crews maintain only

Corwin. Morrow and Loveland are maintained by the respective municipalities. A smaller staging area has been developed by Hamilton Township at Foster's Crossing. Each staging area offers flush restrooms, water, and parking. Amenities between these staging areas are sparse and/or non-existent. Trail users should plan their extended trips accordingly.

Signs, Traffic and Access Control – Traffic signage along the trail will be minimal with an emphasis toward user safety. Because of its official designation as a “multi-use, non-motorized recreational trail” only approved signs will be erected and maintained by park staff. Park policy will be to post and maintain standard, recognizable signage wherever safety concerns deem it appropriate. Other informational signage and interpretive markings will be erected according to State Park approved standards. Access control has become less of a problem as neighboring communities become accustomed to the trail's non-motorized designation. Barricades and posts that were erected at many roadway intersections to prevent vehicular access are often outdated. These will be removed by park crews when appropriate.

Fences, Bridges, and Tunnels – During its development, many miles of wooden fences were erected along the trail for safety and screening purposes. Many of those fences no longer serve those purposes. Park staff will remove fences where their removal does not impact safety, security, or screening. ODNR Engineering staff has provided the following guidelines for fencing:

Fence is required:

- ...Over all bridges
- ...At culverts, where the inlet (or outlet) drop is less than fifteen feet from the edge of pavement.
- ...On all dangerous slopes. This includes any slope greater than 2:1 within fifteen feet of the edge of pavement. This also includes any slope to the river where there is nothing to keep the user from entering the water. (basically a non-vegetated slope.).

Fence is optional:

- ...Where it was originally placed due to the request of the adjacent property owners. Fencing may be removed at their request or through agreement.

Bridges: In 2009, ODNR, Division of Engineering contracted with American Structurepoint, Inc. to survey and evaluate the condition of all bridges and culverts along the Little Miami State Park. There are 46 separate spans on the trail, ranging from small culverts to iron trestle bridges and one plate girder bridge over the Little Miami itself. All spans over public roadways are inspected regularly by the Ohio Department of Transportation. They report to ODNR on the condition of these structures and make appropriate recommendation on needed

maintenance. All other structures are periodically inspected by ODNR and maintenance performed as needed. In 2009, all structures were found to be in safe and usable condition, with only recommendation made for cosmetic and preservation maintenance (i.e. rust-removal and painting).

Safety, Law Enforcement, and Emergency Response

Safety will always be the foremost concern when developing trail policies, performing routine maintenance, and making park improvements. Staff and volunteers will follow all State Park rules, guidelines, and policies at all times.

The Ohio Revised Code (State laws) and the Ohio Administrative Code (Park Rules) apply on the trail corridor. The primary enforcement agency is Ohio State Parks and State Park Officers will patrol the trail regularly. All other police agencies along the trail have jurisdiction and will patrol the trail and respond to incidents when called.

Emergency calls for assistance should be directed through the “911” system. Questions, comments, and reports of a non-emergency nature should be directed to the Regional Park Office at Cowan Lake, 937-382-1096.

Trail Rules and Etiquette

General Ohio State Park rules are described in the Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 1501:41 Division of Parks and Recreation. These rules carry the weight of law and violations can be met with citations. The entire chapter is not included in this document, but it can be found on the LAWriter webpage here <http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/1501%3A41>.

Trail etiquette is not enforceable by law, so it remains the responsibility of each trail user to behave in such a manner as to make everyone’s trail experience enjoyable and safe. Many trail-use guidelines are common sensical and demand only that one respect fellow trail users.

Most trail user conflicts arise from the perception that one group or another is operating on the trail unsafely and without due regard to another group. Surveys show that the most effective way to decrease conflicts is through education. The most effective form of education comes from trail-user groups themselves and secondly from trail management agencies. Only through effective communication between the users and the managers will positive trail-use guidelines be developed.



Common General Guidelines for users include:

- o Keep right. Keep as far right of the trail as practical. When overtaking slower users, control your speed, slow down, and make fair warning.
- o Be predictable. Don't make erratic moves and be aware of other users when changing your position on the trail.
- o Don't block the trail. When stopping, get off the trail to allow others safe, convenient passage.
- o Obey traffic signs and signals. Use caution when approaching cross-roads.
- o Be courteous.
- o Be respectful.

References

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