

Oak Openings Preserve Highlights

Please use this as a supplement to information provided on the Oak Openings Preserve map.

Messages for Interpretation

Protection is paramount as Metroparks Toledo preserves ‘one of America’s last great places.’ (The Nature Conservancy).

- As the largest preserve in the Oak Openings Region, the geology and specialized habitats here are globally significant.
- Oak Openings Preserve history reflects changing needs and values of conservation and people over time.
- Restoration, education and partnerships combine to help preserve this Metropark and the Oak Openings Region.
- Cutting-edge trails and facilities offer gold-star recreation.

What’s In A Name?

Oak Openings was a phrase settlers gave to this region because they observed large, widely-spaced oaks among openings of prairie wildflowers and grasses.

Natural and Human History

The natural history of Oak Openings Preserve is closely linked to sandy, post-glacial beach ridges left behind around 15 thousand years ago when ancestral Lake Erie was shrinking to its present size. These ridges, combined with a unique hydrology that often causes perched groundwater and standing surface water, result in high, dry-loving plants growing in exceptionally close proximity to those that prefer wetlands. This situation causes the biodiversity of the region to skyrocket when compared to other places in the state, country and even world. The region is home to well over 100 state-listed, rare plants!

Additionally, Swan Creek and its tributaries (such as Gale Run and Ai Creek) support significant migratory bird and wildlife habitat, and the preserve is known as a birding hotspot with exceptional numbers of nesting species. Finally, this Metropark contains numerous vernal pools – semi-permanent bodies of water that are critical breeding habitat for amphibians and macro-invertebrates. Notable species include wood frogs, fairy shrimp, and mole salamander larvae – all three of which are obligate to vernal pools, meaning that they can’t survive elsewhere.

During the mid-20th century, parts of the Swan Creek watershed within the preserve were dammed to construct aesthetic, recreational lakes such as Springbrook, Mallard, Wintergreen and Evergreen. Acquired in 1931 and known then as Springbrook Park, the Springbrook Lake Area is actually the oldest part of Oak Openings



Spatulate-leaved sundew



Wild lupine



Golden ragwort



Prickly pear

Preserve. While these lakes are still favorite sites to park visitors, they support fewer plant and animal species than their natural counterparts.

Today, the combined efforts of Metroparks staff, partners and volunteers help protect this preserve. Plant and wildlife monitoring helps Metroparks make informed natural resource decisions. Prescribed burns, mowing and invasive species removal support rare communities. Non-native pine stands, planted over half a century ago, are being restored to prairie and savanna communities. Wildlife nest boxes seen throughout the preserve encourage cavity nesting birds. Finally, programming and education promote a strong ethic of conservation.

To protect this preserve and the Oak Openings Region at large, Metroparks partners with state and federal agencies, organizations and universities that collectively make up The Green Ribbon Initiative. Other Metroparks within the Oak Openings Region include Wildwood, Secor, Toledo Botanical Garden, Wiregrass Lake, Westwinds, and Cannonball Prairie. Regional trails such as Moseley and Wabash Cannonball help connect lands through the Oak Openings Region corridor.

Oak Openings Preserve offers its visitors top quality recreation unique to the area. The Beach Ridge Singletrack Trail is a 12-mile, mountain bike trail with three trail heads – located at Springbrook Lake, Buttonbush and Beach Ridge Areas. The Beach Ridge Area

is also home to Mercy Fit Ride, a mountain bike skills development course, the multi-use Wheelhouse with a concession for coffee and micro-brews, and the Cannaley Treehouse Village where guests can sleep in the trees via up-scale camping, tent platforms and hammock sites.

Plant Life (* = state-listed rare species)

Notable plants include:

- *Birdsfoot violet
- Bracken fern
- Butterfly milkweed
- Cinnamon fern
- *Gaywings
- Golden ragwort
- Poison sumac
- *Prickly pear cactus
- Rough blazing star
- Royal fern
- *Scaly blazing star
- Several species of Goldenrod
- Several species of Aster
- *Several species of Gentian
- *Spatulate-leaved sundew
- *Sweet fern
- *Wild lupine

Native grasses and sedges include:

- Big bluestem
- Little bluestem
- Indian grass
- *June grass
- Pennsylvania sedge
- *Porcupine grass
- Switch grass
- *Three awn grass sp.

Wildlife (* = state-listed rare species)

Visit the Window on Wildlife at Mallard Lake Area to observe some of these birds and mammals.

Some mammals known include:

- *8 species of bats
- *American badger
- American beaver
- Coyote
- Eastern chipmunk
- Eastern fox squirrel
- *Gray fox
- Raccoon
- Red fox
- Red squirrel
- Southern flying squirrel
- Virginia opossum
- White-footed mouse
- White-tailed deer

Notable amphibians include:

- American toad
- *Blue-spotted salamander
- Gray treefrog
- Green frog
- Mole salamander sp.
- Northern spring peeper
- Redback salamander
- Western chorus frog
- Wood frog

Reptiles known to occur include:

- *Blanding's turtle
- Blue racer snake
- Common five-lined skink
- Common water snake
- *Eastern hognose snake
- Midland painted turtle
- Northern ring-necked snake
- Snapping turtle
- *Woodland box turtle

(Note: There are no venomous snakes known here.)

Some of the many birds include:

- American goldfinch
- Bald eagle
- Black-capped chickadee
- Blue jay
- Chipping sparrow
- Cooper's hawk
- *Lark sparrow
- Barred owl
- Numerous nesting warblers
- Pileated woodpecker
- *Red-headed woodpecker

- Downy woodpecker
- Eastern bluebird
- Eastern screech owl
- *Eastern whip-poor-will
- Field sparrow
- Great-horned owl
- Hairy woodpecker
- Indigo bunting

- Red-tailed hawk
- Scarlet and Summer tanagers
- Song sparrow
- Tufted titmouse
- Turkey vulture
- Wild turkey
- White-breasted nuthatch

Avoid Poison ivy, American dog ticks, mosquitoes and chiggers by staying on marked trails, covering up with lightweight clothing and using insecticide when necessary. (Note: There is no poison oak in Northwest Ohio.)



American beaver



Mole salamander sp.



Blanding's turtle



Blue racer



Eastern whip-poor-will



Red-headed woodpecker



Lark sparrow



Wood frog