



Naturally Speaking



Newsletter for the friends of the LaPorte County Parks.

Winter 2020-2021

Administrative Office
Red Mill County Park
0185 S. Holmesville Rd.
LaPorte, IN 46350
219-325-8315
Fax 219-325-8317
E-Mail lparks@csinet.net
rangerjeremy@csinet.net
www.laportecountyparks.org

Naturalist Office
Luhr County Park
3178 S. 150 West
LaPorte, IN 46350
219-324-5855
E-Mail natureniki@csinet.net
rangerlaura@csinet.net
www.laportecountyparks.org

Luhr Park Maintenance Facility 219-326-0524

Creek Ridge County Park
7943 W. 400 North
Michigan City, IN 46360

Bluhm County Park
3855 S. 1100 West
Westville, IN 46391

(undeveloped)
Kankakee Property
Kankakee Township

Foundation Properties:
(undeveloped)
Sebert Property
Springfield Township

George R. Menkes Nature Preserve
Galena Township

What a Year!

In many ways 2020 has been the most difficult year to be a park professional that anyone could imagine. Most of our programs have been and will be cancelled, many rentals had to be cancelled due to stay at home orders, trainings and get togethers were either postponed or cancelled and more. All of these things have brought about very difficult decisions and ones that we never thought we'd have to make.



In many other ways this year has shown us how important parks can be to our patrons and community. During statewide stay at home orders, parks were one place that people were told they COULD go! That made us essential and our staff and patrons took that to heart. While people were unfortunately off work, school or working from home we saw high park visitation in all of our parks. People came out in droves to hike, play, have a picnic and just enjoy nature. We always love seeing people come out and enjoy our parks but we are especially happy to see them choose us at times like these.

Being able to provide a place to relax and forget about what is going on in the world is really rewarding when people start to realize that they NEED parks.

Even through all the difficulties, 2020 was actually a very productive year for the LaPorte County Parks as well. While in many professions it is nearly impossible to distance staff to keep them safe through



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something like this pandemic. In the parks, we have plenty of room to spread out and continue provide a much needed service and in many ways even improve them. This year we completed a 2018 DNR Land and Water Conservation Fund grant that added a new picnic shelter, restroom, trail, paved the parking lot and added a new one, expanded park acreage by 15 acres and constructed a rain garden at Luhr County Park. We were able to have the parking lot and drive paved at Red Mill. Volunteers constructed and re-opened 3.5 miles of mountain bike trails at Red Mill. We also started work to revitalize the LaPorte County Shared Bikeways system. These are just a few of the projects and improvements that our staff and contractors were able to accomplish this year in your parks!

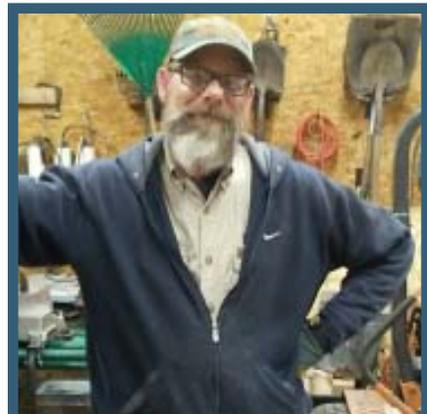


Park buildings were closed completely at times, parks were short staffed at other times, programs were minimal and we had to sometimes find new ways to get things done. Over all we realized that parks are essential to many people. That is something we take to heart and will continue to remember as we go about our jobs and things hopefully get back to normal. Thank you for your continued park visitation and support. We look forward to seeing you in our parks and facilities during and after these strange times.

*Jeremy Sobecki
Park Superintendent*



Barb Janeczko - The Parks Maintenance Technician will be retiring in January. She has worked full time with the parks department for 13 years and part time for several years before that. Thank you for all of your years of dedicated service.



Don Fuller joined our team in March and is the Parks Maintenance and Construction Supervisor.



Park Programs

Live Virtual Luhr Park Nature Center Tours

Attention Formal Educators

Ranger Laura and Nature Niki will be offering free live nature center tours to schools starting in December. Invite us to your zoom session and get a personalized tour of our facility. The tour, including a question and answer session will last around 30 minutes.

Email- natureniki@csinet.net or call 219-324-5855 to schedule your virtual tour.



Reptiles and Amphibians Oh My!

Attention Formal Educators

If you teach 1st or 2nd grade students in a school that is in LaPorte County, your computer screen, outdoor space, or classroom, could have a visit from a park naturalist, along with reptiles and amphibians. Programs can be set up for individual classes with visits to each room, outdoor space, or zoom meeting, lasting 45 minutes each. Length of program may vary depending on method of presentation. Social distancing will take place and masks will be required when distancing is not possible. These programs are free and meet Life Science Standards. Email- natureniki@csinet.net or call 219-324-5855 to schedule your classroom visit.



LaPorte County Parks Staff

Jeremy Sobecki - Superintendent
Char Kalk- Office & Finance Manager
"Nature" Niki Schmutte - Chief Naturalist
"Ranger" Laura Moyer - Recreation and Education Programmer
Don Fuller- Maintenance Supervisor
Boyd Lomow - Maintenance Technician
Barb Janeczko - Maintenance Technician

Seasonal Staff / Part-time

Cathy Fuller- Office / Nature Center
Theresa Wojkovich- Office
Michelle Bair-Maintenance / Gardener / Office
Ken Havlin - Gate Keeper



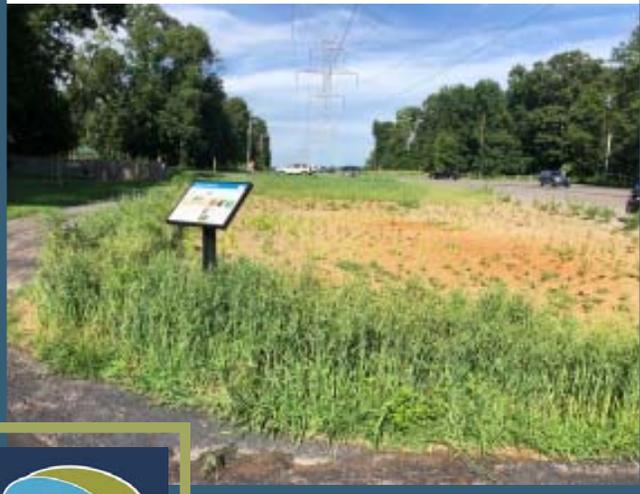
Due to covid 19 restrictions all programs are being done virtually at this time.

A Year in Review



Despite many challenges the programming staff did 35 public and 67 school / group programs. 2,125 participants attended these programs. Several programs were cancelled and the numbers were greatly affected by Covid 19.

The parking lot at Luhr Park was expanded and paved. This Rain Garden was added. It is designed to temporarily hold and soak in rainwater runoff that flows from the parking lot.



Fitness equipment was installed at all four of the county parks. The fitness equipment has sixteen different exercises, offering a full body workout.

The removal of non-native / invasive plants continued throughout all of the parks and they were replaced with natives. This redbud tree was one of the replacements.

