

CONSERVE OHIO

Ohio State Parks

Sustainability Plan





“

**WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT
WE ARE CONNECTED TO NATURE
AND HOW WE TREAT THE WORLD
AROUND US WILL HAVE AN
IMPACT, POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE,
ON OUR CHILDREN,
OUR GRANDCHILDREN,
AND GENERATIONS TO COME.**

”

Director Mary Mertz
Ohio Department of Natural Resources

What Is Sustainability?

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) protects and preserves 800,000 acres of land, 120,000 acres of inland waters, 7,000 miles of streams, 481 miles along the Ohio River, and 2.25 million acres of Lake Erie. In these areas, Ohio's 75 state parks host 59 campgrounds, 10 resort lodges, 35 marinas, 71 beaches, and so much more. What we do in our lands and waters influences other areas around the state. Because of that, ODNR is leading by example with a plan to positively impact the *sustainability* of our natural resources.

Sustainability is more than a buzzword to ODNR. In short, it is a balancing act: meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It addresses some of the agency's most pressing challenges such as incorporating energy efficiencies into our buildings and encouraging day-to-day actions that will preserve and protect our natural resources for the future use and benefit of all. However, sustainability isn't just environmentally friendly practices. Three dimensions must always be considered in our efforts: ecological sustainability, economic opportunity, and social inclusion. These dimensions are firmly interconnected, so one dimension cannot be addressed without also considering the others.





ConServe Ohio

ConServe Ohio is a call to action for ODNR staff and visitors to implement sustainability practices in Ohio's State Parks. Of all the public areas entrusted to ODNR, improving sustainability in state parks is crucial because of the large environmental footprint the public use of parks leaves upon the land. Parks are also important catalysts in sustainability movements because of the roles they play in communities. They can help build resilient communities through sustainable practices, such as mitigating severe weather events, helping habitats and wildlife flourish, and serving as advocates for local solutions. Additionally, parks serve as a gateway to nature, inherently encouraging visitors to actively participate in preserving the finite resources offered by the natural world.



Our Vision

To employ simple, sensible changes in park operations and visitor experiences. By making meaningful changes, we will preserve and protect the beauty and health of our natural resources for future generations, while operating more efficiently and reducing costs.



Our Pillars

As we move forward, we are committed to the following strategic areas for sustainability at our parks:

- 1 *Energy Efficiency*
- 2 *Water Conservation*
- 3 *Waste Management & Reduction*
- 4 *Transportation*
- 5 *Maintenance & Engineering*
- 6 *Habitat & Resource Protection*
- 7 *Education & Outreach*

A photograph of three park staff members in a wooded area. They are wearing dark jackets and hats. One person is holding a large black trash bag. The background shows trees and a rusty metal structure.

The Next Steps

PARK STAFF MUST BE EMPOWERED TO LEAD THE CHARGE TO ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND FINANCIAL STABILITY. A CONSERVE OHIO SUSTAINABILITY GUIDANCE BOOKLET IS PROVIDED TO STAFF, WHERE MORE THAN 100 ACTIONS AND GOALS ARE IDENTIFIED TO GUIDE THEM IN PRACTICING SUSTAINABILITY AND MEASURING PROGRESS. LISTED IS A SUMMARY OF THE MOST PREVALENT AND IMPACTFUL GOALS.

1. ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Reducing the amount of energy used by electricity can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lower utility bills. Parks staff are reducing energy usage in park maintenance operations, offices, visitor and nature centers, camp stores, marinas, and restrooms.

- Increase the use of electronic equipment over gas-powered, such as electric mowers.
- Reduce the amount of energy and resources required to operate parks by using energy-efficient systems for lighting and heating, cooling, and ventilation.
- Use energy-efficient appliances and electronics.
- Incorporate renewable energy solutions into park renovations.

2. WATER CONSERVATION

Conserving water at state parks saves money and diverts less water from lakes and rivers, which keeps the environment healthy and helps maintain supplies during periods of drought. Ohio State Parks & Watercraft is making facility upgrades and changing landscape practices to conserve this precious resource.

- Conduct water use assessments and develop water conservation measures for facilities and landscaping.
- Reduce water loss through improved leak detection in water delivery devices such as fountains, plumbing fixtures, etc.
- Use low-flow and touchless restroom plumbing fixtures where feasible.
- Eliminate the need for landscape irrigation by reducing mowing and planting drought-resistant plants.
- Increase stormwater harvesting and use with rainwater collection methods, such as rain barrels.





3. WASTE REDUCTION

It is important that we reduce, reuse, and recycle as much as possible in parks. The garbage and waste that ends up in landfills creates water and air pollution. Plastic is especially problematic because it can be difficult to recycle and does not naturally biodegrade. Parks staff are working to increase the availability of recycling and provide more sustainable products for visitors in our gift shops and camp stores.

- Reduce paper use and provide visitors with options for digital park maps and publications.
- Provide recycling opportunities in all park buildings (i.e. offices, gift shops, restaurants, etc.).
- Eliminate Styrofoam and plastics in park camp stores and gift shops and encourage park partners to do the same.
- Increase the availability of sustainable and environmentally friendly products in park camp stores and gift shops that help decrease waste.

4. TRANSPORTATION

Gas-powered vehicles are a large source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and they produce a lot of waste. Driving less or driving vehicles that use an alternative energy source can help reduce emissions and save money on gas. Ohio State Parks & Watercraft is preparing for the future by planning for more electric vehicles (EVs) at parks and on the road by installing EV charging stations in areas that are used year-round and have visitors that park for several hours at one time.

- Increase electric vehicle charging stations in state parks.
- When possible, purchase fleet vehicles that increase efficiency and reduce GHG emissions.
- Enforce no-idling policies in state parks.
- Encourage staff and visitors to carpool.
- Promote walking and bicycling to and in the parks to cut down on emissions.
- Increase the number of electric bikes for officer bike patrols.

5. MAINTENANCE & ENGINEERING

During the planning and execution of park maintenance and engineering projects, sustainable strategies will address planning, design, construction, and operations while considering energy, water, indoor, environmental quality, materials selection, and location.

- Evaluate opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing facilities.
- Reuse available materials or use recycled products for park maintenance projects (e.g., fencing, furniture, benches, etc.).
- Use high-quality new materials made of recycled or rapidly renewable content for park maintenance and engineering projects.
- Reduce and recycle construction waste during engineering projects.
- Carefully plan and build sustainable trails in environmentally sensitive areas.



6. HABITAT & RESOURCE PROTECTION

All plant and animal species depend on the availability of healthy habitats to survive. Ohio State Parks & Watercraft is committed to protecting Ohio's biodiversity and natural resources by conserving habitat, fostering pollinators, and reducing non-native species on state park lands.

- Increase protection of parks' natural resources by restoring and conserving native habitat, fostering pollinators, and reducing non-native and invasive species.
- Use native plant species in landscaping to support energy and water efficiency, biodiversity, and healthy soils.
- Implement shoreline management practices that follow current environmental best management practices and water quality initiatives.
- Reduce the use of hazardous waste, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and other toxins in park facilities and landscapes.

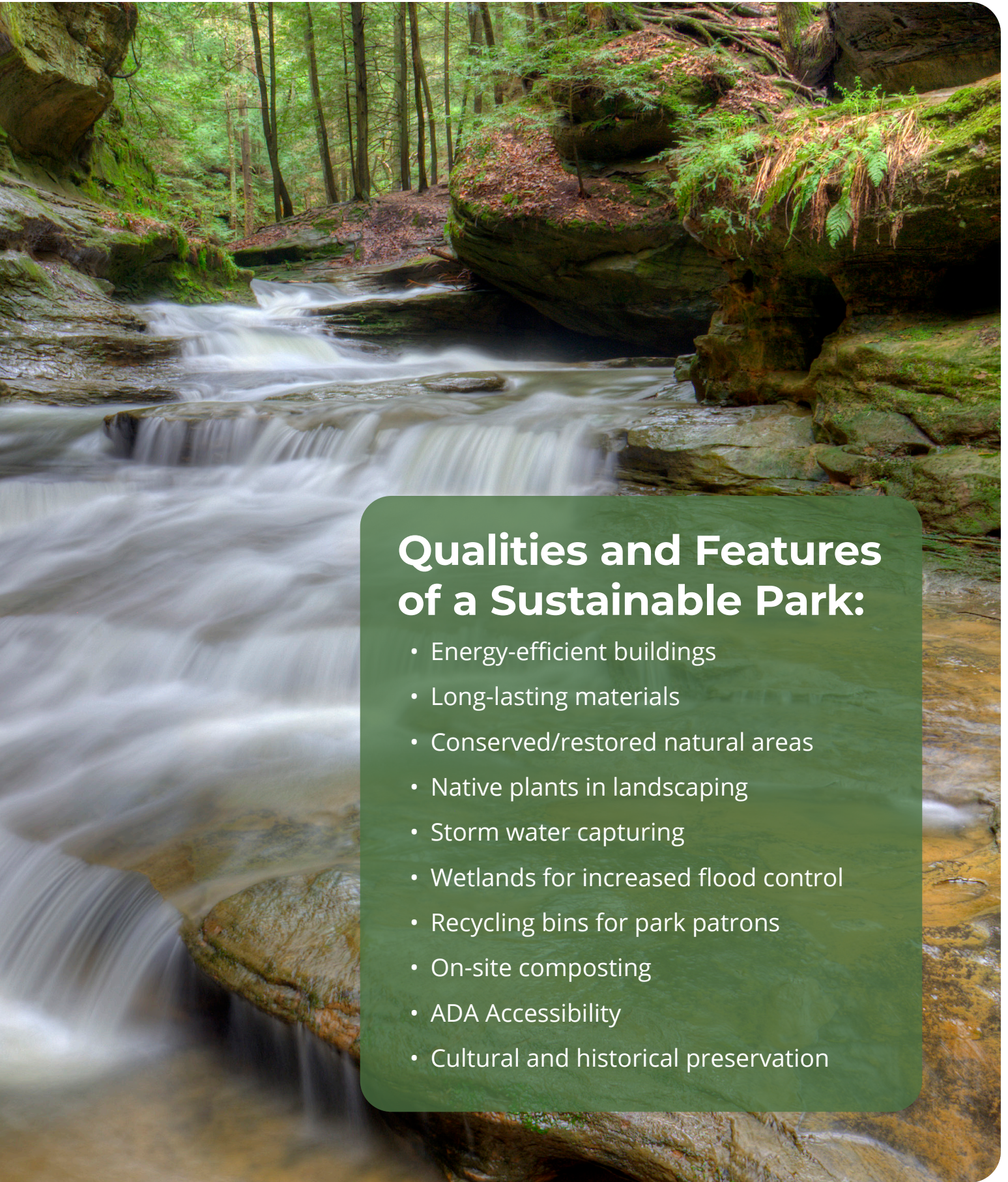


7. EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Being sustainable means balancing a healthy environment, economic vitality, and social equity. Ohio State Parks & Watercraft recognizes that these issues are interconnected and that to be truly sustainable, it is important to engage a diversity of audiences in the stewardship of our natural resources.

- Communicate the importance of the ConServe Ohio initiative to operations staff and partners and educate them on proper sustainability practices.
- Increase park signage promoting sustainable practices in state parks.
- Partner with park groups, organizations, and local communities to host sustainable and environmental events and programs.
- Provide volunteer and partnership opportunities for hands-on contributions to the environment, parks, and local communities.





Qualities and Features of a Sustainable Park:

- Energy-efficient buildings
- Long-lasting materials
- Conserved/restored natural areas
- Native plants in landscaping
- Storm water capturing
- Wetlands for increased flood control
- Recycling bins for park patrons
- On-site composting
- ADA Accessibility
- Cultural and historical preservation

Tracking Progress

As each state park in our region adapts to incorporating sustainable measures, they strive for recognition through attainment of ConServe Ohio certification. This certification is earned by adhering to the guidelines outlined in the ConServe Ohio Sustainability Guidance booklet and documenting sustainable initiatives to accumulate the required points for certification. Given the diverse nature of Ohio's state parks, predefined criteria ensure fair assessment of certification across all parks.

As parks progressively adopt practices outlined in the Sustainability Guidance booklet, they progress towards certification. Advancement through certification levels—from bronze to platinum—reflects the extent to which a park successfully implements sustainable practices, with each achievement bringing them closer to their goal.



A scenic photograph of a forest lake with large rocks and trees, serving as a background for the text. The sun is shining through the trees, creating a bright spot in the upper left. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and rocks. The text is centered in the middle of the image, overlaid on a semi-transparent green background.

**PARK REVIEWS AND
ON-SITE ASSESSMENTS WILL
OCCUR EACH YEAR TO
REVIEW AND CELEBRATE THE
SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENTS.**

Benefits of Sustainability

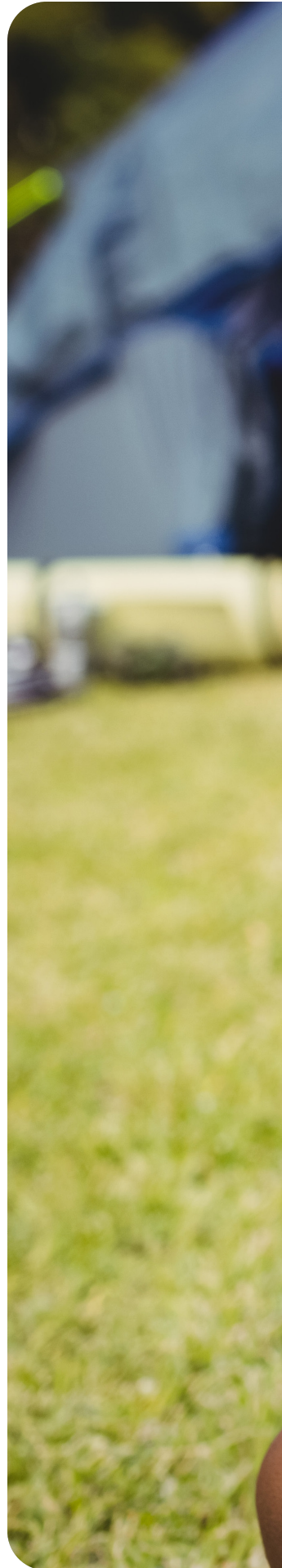
Ohio State Parks & Watercraft anticipates many benefits, both immediate and long-term, from these sustainability efforts.

Sustainability means a smaller impact on the natural environment, which will help plants and wildlife grow, prosper, and reproduce. By reducing and removing non-native plant and animal species, we can improve the habitats of the native species, and we can maintain healthy plant communities by fostering pollinators. By proactively protecting and managing rare and threatened species, we can avoid the costs of mitigating threats and damages to them.

Vibrant and diverse flora and fauna, along with cleaner air and water, are healthier not just for the environment but also for the human visitors in the parks.

By operating more efficiently with better-designed facilities and green equipment, park staff can save time and money, freeing them to devote more effort to other areas of the parks and respond to the visitors' experience.

With sustainability education initiatives, staff and visitors will be better informed about environmentally conscious habits that they can practice not just at state parks, but everywhere they go.







What You Can Do

Parks foster mental, physical, and spiritual health, so first and foremost, take time to enjoy our parks.

There are unlimited opportunities for both young and old visitors from all types of backgrounds to help conserve our natural resources. Listed are just a few examples:

- Become a park volunteer or join a Friends Group to help with sustainability projects.
- Reduce picnic waste by bringing reusable utensils, mason jars, reusable cloth napkins and homemade goods.
- Refill reusable water bottles to save money and keep plastic bottles out of the landfill.
- If you use a disposable plastic product, be sure to recycle or properly dispose of it.
- Practice carrying out everything you carry into a park.
- Help keep park lands and waters clean by picking up litter.
- Stay on designated trails to avoid disturbing or damaging natural habitat.
- Remind others of the importance of our natural resources and encourage them to help ConServe Ohio!

If you have questions or feedback, contact us at:

ConServeOhio@dnr.ohio.gov





“
CONSERVATION IS HUMANITY
CARING FOR THE FUTURE.
Mary Newhall”



Department of
Natural Resources

ohiodnr.gov