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# Lake Views

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## Reimagining Recreation: Welcoming the Next Generation of Campers

By Pete Novotny, Chief of Recreation

As part of MWCD's Reimagining Recreation strategy, we are embracing the evolving definition of "camping" to better serve the diverse interests of today's outdoor enthusiasts. While RV camping remains a cornerstone of our parks, we are expanding offerings to meet the growing demand for alternative, flexible, and immersive outdoor experiences.

From rooftop tent setups to compact trailers like teardrops and vintage campers, younger generations—particularly Millennials and Gen Z—are reshaping outdoor travel. According to the 2023 KOA Camping Report:

- 54% of Gen Z and Millennials prefer unique or less traditional lodging options.
- Car campers and rooftop tent users are motivated by spontaneity, affordability, and access to scenic, off-grid locations.
- Smaller trailer users value cozy simplicity, scenic views, and Instagram-worthy experiences over traditional campground amenities.

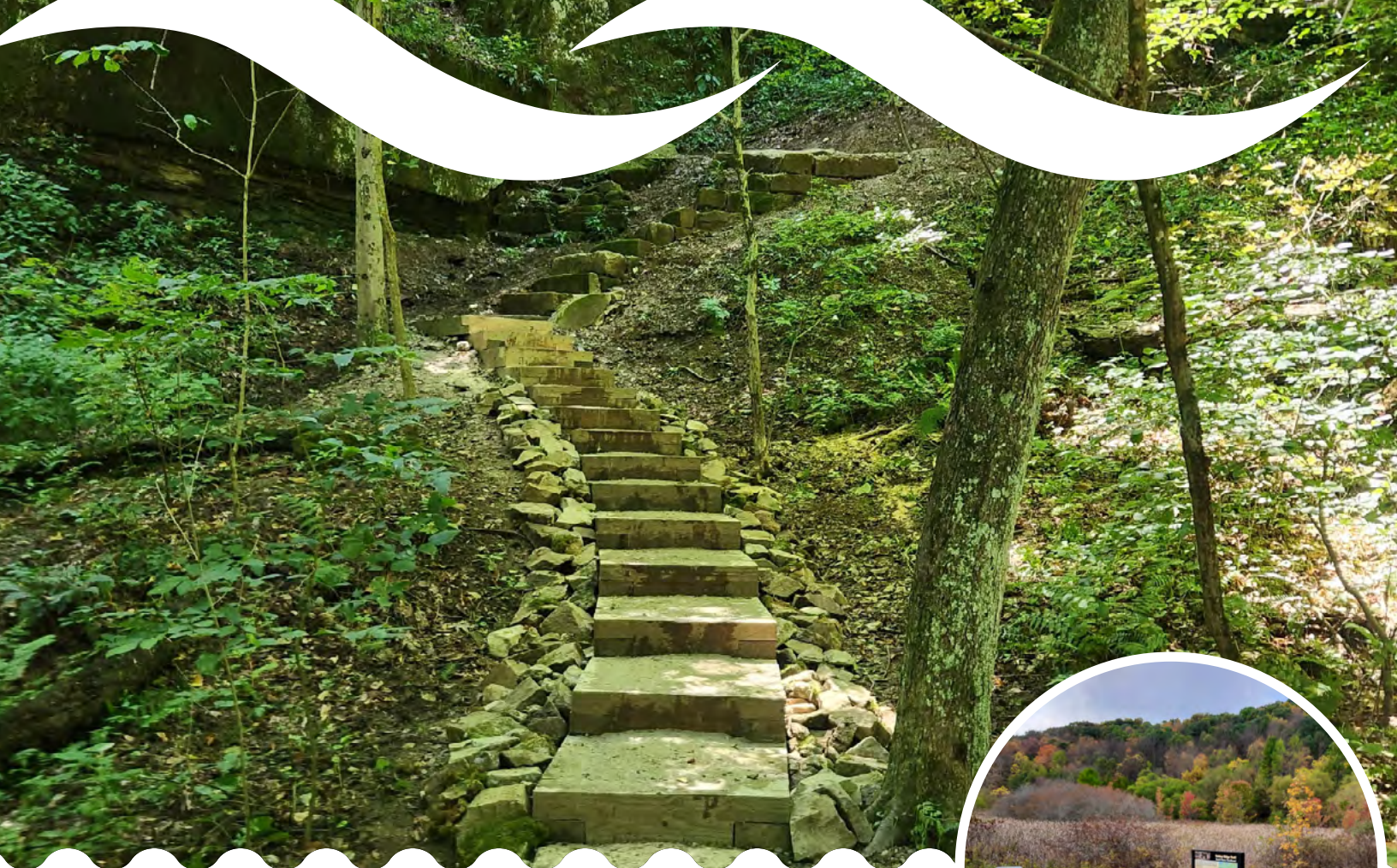
These visitors are also more likely to seek out digital connectivity, sustainability, and community-minded spaces—such as shared fire rings, outdoor gathering zones, and hammock-friendly areas.

In response, MWCD has already embarked on designing new site types specifically tailored for teardrop trailers and car-top camping setups. These sites will offer level pads, scenic placement, light infrastructure, and a blend of privacy and social connection. This proactive planning ensures we meet the expectations of today's travelers while protecting the natural character of our parks.

We also recognize that modern campers are more experience-driven than ever. Many are looking for trips that feel personal and curated, whether that means a quiet night under the stars, an unplugged weekend of paddleboarding, or cozy fireside moments with friends. Our reimagined camping spaces are intentionally designed to help create those meaningful moments.

This evolution of recreation invites more people to connect with more authenticity. With these new experiences on the horizon, camping at MWCD should feel like it was designed just for you.





# MWCD Continues Commitment to Trail Improvements and Expansion

By Dylan Sayre, Trails Coordinator

For most of MWCD's 92-year history, families in Ohio and beyond have been visiting the lakes as a place to connect with nature. Since 2012, MWCD has invested significant resources to upgrade campgrounds and facilities to enhance the users' experiences. Whether it is camping, boating, fishing, hunting, biking, hiking, or trail riding, guests know they can depend on MWCD's facilities as a place to spend quality time with family and friends.

In 2021, MWCD conducted a Park Amenity and Activity survey to determine amenities that visitors would like to see improved. Of all activities, trails were ranked near the top. 87% of the 3,800 respondents stated that trails were "somewhat important" or "very important" to their experience. This is similar to other reports published by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2019 where 82% of Ohioans stated that trails were "very important" to their daily lives. Trails play a vital role in improving the lives of our visitors as well as residents in surrounding communities.

Due to the demand for better trails on MWCD's properties, staff was hired in 2021 to focus on trail maintenance and

development. The trails department, along with park staff and volunteers, is responsible for maintaining and improving 67 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails located on properties throughout the district. Conservation crews have also assisted staff to create over three miles of new natural-surface trails in and around the parks. Other notable improvements include trail signage, trail paving at Atwood Lake Park, and the addition of a "pump track" for bikes at Tappan Lake Park.

The Muskingum Watershed is also home to 290 miles of state-designated water trails located on the Muskingum, Tuscarawas, Kokosing, and Mohican rivers. The 23-mile long Walhonding River, located in Coshocton County, is currently going through the designation process and is expected to be recognized later this year. Information is provided on designated water trails to make passage of these rivers safe and enjoyable.

Though many improvements have been made to the existing trail system in the last four years, new construction of trails was purposely minimized, as the need for a coordinated, long-term plan for expansion was recognized early on.

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# Research and Monitoring Projects at MWCD Lakes and Properties – Summer 2025 and Beyond

By Chris Stanton, Sustainability Coordinator

Scientific research and formal monitoring programs are both vital to the goals of the Conservation Department. These efforts are necessary to better understand our constantly changing environment and to make informed management decisions. However, many people are not aware of how much data collection goes on each year. This past summer, multiple projects were conducted by MWCD, local universities, and other agencies that may not have been noticed, but were extremely valuable.

Some of the summer monitoring completed by MWCD includes data on the water quality of five of our lakes using newly deployed buoys. These instruments record information 24 hours a day at Atwood, Tappan, Seneca, Charles Mill and Pleasant Hill Lakes and alert us to unusual changes in water temperature, oxygen levels, and other important characteristics.

As swimmers returned to the beaches in our parks, MWCD staff tested the waters every week to ensure optimal water quality. They also

conducted aquatic vegetation surveys at the lakes to document plant community changes over time.

Baseline data on stream macroinvertebrates are currently being collected in the Tappan Lake Watershed with the goal of recording water quality improvements from sites as they recover from highly erodible farm fields to native grasses, wetlands, and waterways.

## Academic Collaborative Projects

In addition to research and monitoring programs, collaboration is an essential goal for MWCD. This past summer, the Conservation Department supported multiple research projects with funding, manpower, and equipment usage. Some of these projects were led by local universities and their students. At Tappan Lake, researchers from Youngstown State University measured nutrient levels to model watershed management plans, while researchers from Ohio University sampled surface waters for microplastic pollution. Other water quality projects included a study by Kent State University students on algal populations in Pleasant Hill Lake. The results of these studies will be available on the MWCD Conservation Department website.

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Above: MWCD Conservation Technician prepares a Water Quality Buoy.

Pictured: MWCD Conservation Technician records water data at Seneca Beach.



## Research and Monitoring Cont.

Also, the University of Cincinnati is studying a colony of little brown bats at Clendening Lake. Once considered to be “common” in Ohio 25 years ago, this species is now “state endangered” due mostly to an exotic fungus and habitat loss. This study is intended to keep the colony safe and thriving in the future.

The Ohio State University was also funded this summer by the MWCD Fund for Environmental Stewardship, administered by the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio. This project, with help from students at West Liberty University, is monitoring small, terrestrial wildlife around

Tappan Lake and will document biodiversity as well as inform management and planning decisions.



### Inter-Agency Partnerships

But it’s not just academic institutions that do research with MWCD—there are also state and federal agencies that work in the watershed. At Seneca Lake, the ODNR Division of Wildlife conducted a study on the Blue catfish population from May through July 2025. This project was meant to increase the number of tagged fish in the lake so the population can be more accurately measured and managed as a fishery.

Another example of an inter-agency partnership exists with the US Army Corps of Engineers. Three Motus stations are being assembled at local dams, including Atwood and Wills Creek. These towers record banded birds, bats and insects that move through the area and help biologists better understand migration routes, seasonal timing, and animal behavior. Results from these stations, and others in the Muskingum River Watershed, can be viewed by the public at [www.motus.org](http://www.motus.org).

### Research Network Formation

Currently, MWCD is working to establish a network of environmental and economic researchers that will expand the amount of research done in and around the Muskingum Watershed. This group, led by the MWCD Conservation Department, will work cooperatively to address pressing concerns, share information, and inform the public on current challenges and successes. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the group and/or conducting a research or monitoring project on MWCD lakes and properties, contact Chris Stanton at [cstanton@mwcd.org](mailto:cstanton@mwcd.org).

This summer alone, there were five academic institutions, two agencies, and our own conservation staff working throughout the Watershed. These scientific efforts will continue to increase as we build partnerships, invest in technology, and grow the MWCD conservation research program that supports the health of our Watershed and region.



Students from The Ohio State University and West Liberty University construct a drift fence to direct wildlife towards cameras that document activity and biodiversity.

# Plan Your Autumn Adventures Now!

Stay outside this fall and enjoy events at a MWCD Lake near you. The parks and lakes are the perfect place to enjoy time with family and friends snuggled beside a warm campfire, exploring the trails, and enjoying the fall colors! Programs and special events are offered throughout the season and are open to campers, community members, and daily visitors.

## Princess in the Park

This perennial favorite returns to Atwood Lake Park on September 6 and Pleasant Hill Lake Park on September 14! Princesses and princes ages three and up are invited to dress in their royal finest and enjoy an enchanted day at the park. Everyone will participate in a craft, royal tea party and snack, face painting, and horse-drawn carriage ride through the park. Make all your dreams come true at the lake! Registration is required at [www.MWCD.org/tickets](http://www.MWCD.org/tickets)



## Halloween Weekends at the Lake

Pack your decorations and costumes for spooky, fun-filled weekends! Bring the family out to the park for trick-or-treating, crafts, games, hikes, and a Halloween-themed movie on the BIG screen. See our website for dates and details at each lake location.



## Bounty on the Bridge

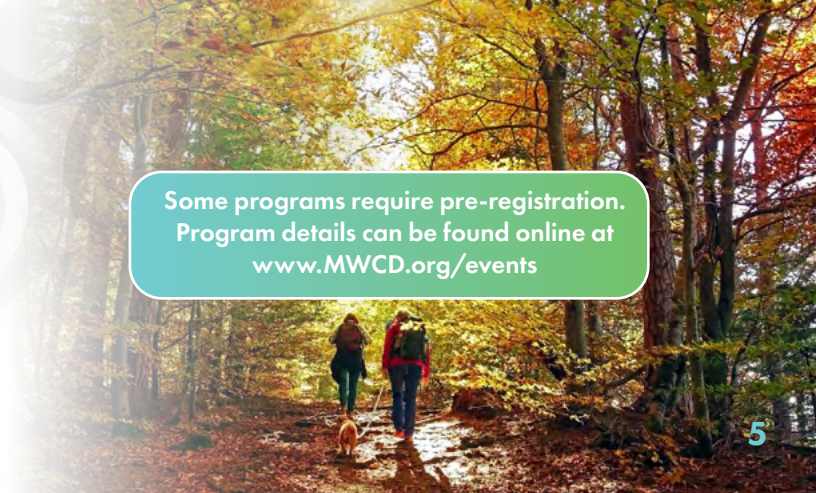
The fifth annual Bounty on the Bridge returns to Atwood Lake Park on Thursday, October 9. Experience an exclusive fine dining opportunity on the pedestrian bridge near the Welcome Center. Tickets may be purchased at [www.MWCD.org/bounty](http://www.MWCD.org/bounty).



## Go Hiking

Take advantage of the innovative OuterSpatial app to plan your outdoor adventures along the trails at MWCD Lakes. MWCD Lakes offer a variety of hiking trails perfect for beginners and experienced hikers. Spend time outside and enjoy the crisp autumn air and fall colors around the lake. Hike on your own or join a guided hike scheduled throughout the fall. Visit [MWCD.org/trails](http://MWCD.org/trails) for information on the OuterSpatial app and downloadable hiking maps. Make it a weekend and reserve a cozy cabin or campsite and end your day around a warm campfire.

Some programs require pre-registration. Program details can be found online at [www.MWCD.org/events](http://www.MWCD.org/events)





# Country Waves 2025: Music, Community and Sustainability

Country Waves returned to Atwood Lake Park on Saturday, August 16, featuring rising star, Jackson Dean, along with Matt Stell and Cody Clayton Eagle. The park was filled with concert goers who enjoyed good music, delicious food trucks, and a beer garden that benefited veteran non-profit group, SAVE22. In addition, Rural Action was onsite to ensure this was a zero-waste event. Their goal was to help reduce landfill waste by sorting out recycling and compost materials. Country Waves 2025 was made possible by our partnership with WTUZ Radio and many other local sponsors.



## Commitment to Trails Cont.

In August 2024, the trails department initiated a Trails Master Plan that will be used to guide new trail development throughout the 45,000 acres of land the MWCD owns and manages. The master plan process is in the final stages and expected to be released later this year.

When the master plan was initiated, a "Trail Use and Development" survey was offered to the public. There was an overwhelming response with great feedback. The results showed that trail users want family-friendly trails that are built to last and that offer adequate parking, restrooms and trash receptacles to keep facilities clean. Most users preferred natural surface trails (native soil) for hiking, biking, and equestrian use followed by trails that are improved to accommodate users with mobility issues or that have the surfaces improved with crushed stone and pavement.

The master plan offers large-scale planning that can be refined before construction of each area. The plan will allow MWCD to communicate to visitors and local users its goals and ideas to develop a trail system that they will be excited to use. The plan offers the opportunity to host up to 300 miles of trails on MWCD's properties, a significant increase from the 67 miles currently available. The scale of this planning effort is currently the largest in the state and one of the largest in the country and we couldn't be more excited to share it with everyone.

Whether you're a traditional trail user or use MWCD's trails to access your favorite hunting, fishing, or wildlife viewing spot, we hope that you continue to get out and enjoy our lakes and parks. The staff at MWCD work hard to provide quality recreation experiences for everyone and we plan to continue that dedication for years to come.



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# Lake Views

## NEED A SPEAKER FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT?

Is your civic, social, or community group looking for speakers for upcoming meetings? How about providing information for a discussion about the MWCD or any of its many programs?

MWCD can provide the details by supplying a speaker and presentation for those in attendance.

For details, topics, or to book a date, contact Ethan Zucal at MWCD at (330) 556-4814 or by emailing at [ezucal@mwcd.org](mailto:ezucal@mwcd.org).