The 19,000 acres of Cleveland’s Metroparks System provide a challenge even for 350 peak-season workers.

by Carl Kovac

Keeping Greater Cleveland’s “Emerald Necklace” sparkling is mostly a case of “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

It’s not an easy job, considering that the “necklace,” known officially as the Cleveland Metroparks System, consists of almost 19,000 acres of rolling, wooded hills, valleys and open fields in 12 reservations draped around the eastern, southern and western fringes of Cuyahoga County.

Worked into this scenic strand are more than 100 miles of park roads providing access to wildlife management areas and waterfowl sanctuaries; picnic areas and playfields; hiking, bridle, all-purpose and physical fitness trails; six golf courses; swimming and boating areas; stables; tobogganing, sledding, skating and cross-country skiing areas and four nature centers.

“Our aim is to preserve and enhance the natural environment,” explains Mark Oesterle, superintendent of parks for the Cleveland Metroparks, who oversees some 150 full-time workers and approximately 200 seasonal employees.

Wanted: weeds

Weeds are left pretty much alone throughout most of the system. Some weeds, in fact, add to the necklace’s glitter. For example, the July edition of The Emerald Necklace, the Metroparks’ monthly newsletter, tells readers that “Joe-pye and common milkweed both unfold pale purple blossoms this week. Take time to smell a milkweed—a pleasant surprise!” and “Enjoy the summer woods as we search for wildflowers and weeds that bloom (this month).”

“We don’t try to keep any of our grassy areas totally weed-free; we’re not concerned with it,” Oesterle reports. “We do some weed control, mostly around parking lot posts, road delineators and sign posts, and along bridle trails. String Trimmers have been such a big help. We use chemicals, like Roundup, only in areas where we need longer kill periods. About the only other chemicals we handle are in the swimming pools.”

Oesterle explains that Metroparks uses Stihl string trimmers for the most part because “we have found them to be light and durable and easily used by inexperienced seasonal employees. We can drop off a couple of seasonal people, accompanied by a worker on a riding mower, and together they can clear a large area in a relatively short time. The mower cuts six-foot swaths and the String Trimmers trim around trees, picnic tables, buildings, signs, and so on.”

Grassy areas are seeded

Last year almost 400,000 golfers played at the six Metropark Golf Courses, including this one, Big Met.

Carl Kovac is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.
estimated cost of about $100,000 per hole, was begun last fall. The project includes leveling hills and removing trees and brush. When completed in early 1988, Shawnee Hills will have an 18-hole, par-72 course approximately 6,316 yards long; the official length will be set by the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA). The 1,323-yard nine-hole executive course will remain unchanged.

“We keep the courses in as good shape as possible,” says Blatnick. “We water fairways on the 18-hole courses, we fertilize the tees, fairways and greens on a regular basis, and we use chemicals to curb crabgrass and insects. We normally don’t seed. But bent, the fescues and perennial ryegrasses are used when we have to.” His crews use triplex and gang mowers to keep the courses trim.

Pre-emergence chemicals are used in the spring for crabgrass control; contact leaf herbicides are sprayed or applied with spreaders in the spring and fall; and fungicides are used as needed, Blatnick says. Insecticides to control white grubs and ataenius beetles also are used.

Overlapping species
In addition to grasses, weeds and a wide variety of shrubs and wildflowers, the Emerald Necklace also boasts more than 100 species of trees, tended by a small forestry crew headed by natural resource specialist Joan Pfingsten.

“Our geography and climate, we’re really in an interesting position here,” she says. “Many of the species overlap geographically. We have aboreal forest trees found in Canada, and we have flood plain forests in addition to beech, maple and oak trees native to this area.”

Pfingsten says that “we do an awful lot of planting in the spring and fall. We have eight nurseries—well, actually 7½. The deer are working on one harder than I am. “We employ selective release,” she reports. “We feature certain trees along certain trails, for example, depending on the season. This way, we keep the park roads looking attractive. After all, it’s the first thing people see; it’s a first impression.”

All of the people who keep the Emerald Necklace shimmering are apparently doing the right things. Last year, more than 21.5 million visitors took the opportunity to bask in the radiance of the necklace’s gems. WT&T

**LANDSCAPE PROFILE**

**Estimated Cost**

- About $100,000 per hole
- Began last fall
- Includes leveling hills and removing trees and brush

**Course Specifications**

- 18-hole, par-72 course
- Approximately 6,316 yards long
- Official length set by the PGA
- 1,323-yard nine-hole executive course remains unchanged

**Maintenance Practices**

- Water fairways on 18-hole courses
- Fertilize tees, fairways, and greens regularly
- Use chemicals for crabgrass, insects
- Normally don’t seed

**Equipment**

- Use of triplex and gang mowers
- Pre-emergence chemicals for crabgrass
- Contact leaf herbicides sprayed in spring and fall
- Fungicides used as needed
- Insecticides for white grubs and ataenius beetles

**Overlapping Species**

- Aboreal forest trees from Canada
- Flood plain forests
- Beech, maple, and oak trees native to the area

**Visitors**

- More than 21.5 million visitors last year

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Frank Blatnick, superintendent of Cleveland Metroparks’ six golf courses.

Mark Oesterle, superintendent of the Cleveland Metroparks System.