

Middlegrounds Metropark Highlights

Please use this as a supplement to information provided on any Metroparks maps.

Messages for Interpretation

- The Maumee River and its location are central to the Middlegrounds past and future.
- The river and its historic ecosystems provided the necessary ingredients for wildlife and early people.
- The Maumee River and its location once made Toledo one of the largest transportation hubs in the United States.
- Restoring Middlegrounds improves important wildlife habitat and water quality along the Maumee River.
- Located in the heart of Toledo, Middlegrounds introduces urban populations to Metroparks.

What's In A Name?

Folklore suggests that this site was once the “middle grounds” or neutral zone between the rowdy canalers and the brawling railroaders, and also contained most of the breweries. Over time, it became known as Middle Grounds.

Natural and Human History

Middlegrounds Metropark is approximately 28 acres in size, consisting of Maumee River floodplain habitat and restored urban green space. The Maumee River boasts the largest watershed of all rivers in the Great Lakes system, draining over 6,600 square miles of land. The mouth of the Maumee and the original mouth of Swan Creek were historically what researchers call fresh water estuaries. Supporting thousands of acres of native grass called Wild rice, these wetlands attracted remarkable numbers of waterfowl who preferred this nutritious food source. 19th century alterations such as dredging, filling and water diversion caused serious loss of this now state threatened plant, and in turn, fragmented this important migratory stopover habitat.

Since its formation about 13,000 years ago, the Maumee River has enriched human life and served as an important route of travel among native people. Through the ages of nomadic hunters, toolmakers and woodland tribes, Native Americans, made the fertile Maumee River Valley their home. The fur trade, which depended upon navigable waterways such as the Maumee, was one of the earliest and most important industries in the United States. In early years of settlement, two cities, Port Lawrence and Vistula, merged to create Toledo. Toledo's location on the Maumee River made it highly coveted land, and Michigan and Ohio went to war over it in 1833. Holding Michigan's statehood hostage Congress forced the end of the war without any bullets



Smooth sumac



Switch grass



Canada goldenrod



Biennial gaura

causing casualties. Ohio kept Toledo, while Michigan was awarded the Upper Peninsula as compensation.

When the Wabash and Erie Canal was mapped out in 1832, the location of Toledo was chosen as one of the termination points. The canal was opened in 1845, and resulted in Toledo as a growing seaport along Lake Erie, with much commerce. In addition to the Wabash and Erie Canal, Toledo was connected to the city of Cincinnati by way of the Miami and Erie Canal.

Railroads signaled changing times for the canals, making them obsolete before some were even finished. In 1848, Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad purchased 30 acres of Middlegrounds for \$70/acre, and there built railroads, docks, the Island House, station bridges, and roundhouses. A roundhouse is a building used for servicing locomotives. These large, circular structures were traditionally located surrounding or adjacent to turntables and facilitated access when the building was used for train repair or storage.

A number of industries began to emerge in the city, including furniture companies, carriage makers, breweries, railroad manufacturing companies, and glass companies. Glass manufacturing requires sand, which was in abundance in the Oak Openings Region west of Toledo – a fact that links some of Toledo's industrial history with its natural history. By the mid-19th century, Toledo boasted a population of more than fifty

thousand people, making it one of the largest cities in the state. In 1888, twelve grain elevators stood on Middlegrounds land and had a capacity of 7.2 million bushels with daily receipts and shipments of 1.2 million bushels.

In 2006, Metroparks purchased the Middlegrounds with funds granted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. The following decade ushered in an unprecedented beautification and restoration initiative. Thousands of tons of dirt and debris were removed, soil was restored, and a creative, eco-friendly plan for cleaning the polluted water from Anthony Wayne Bridge run-off was implemented. Water from the bridge gets collected through pipes and channeled into a series of bio-swales that filter with the help of rocks and plantings. It then flows into a cove designed especially for kayakers before entering the Maumee River. In 2012, Rotary Club of Toledo celebrated its 100th anniversary and presented Metroparks with a donation of \$300,000 for the development of a shelter built in the form of an historic roundhouse. The stone ruins on the far south end of the park – formerly a possible barge dock and grain elevator – have been redesigned as a scenic river overlook. Fossils can be found in the limestone from the original structure there.

Plant Life

Native plantings of the bio-swales include:

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|--------------------|-------------------|
| Dense blazing star | Stiff goldenrod |
| Black-eyed Susan | Cardinal flower |
| Blue vervain | Tall ironweed |
| Butterfly milkweed | Swamp milkweed |
| Switch grass | Little bluestem |
| Big bluestem | American hazelnut |
| Fragrant sumac | Buttonbush |

Native trees/shrubs/vines include:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Eastern cottonwood | Green ash |
| Black locust | Mulberry |
| American sycamore | Hackberry |
| Weeping willow | Catalpa |
| Silver maple | Box elder |
| Gray dogwood | Smooth sumac |
| False indigo bush | Wild grape |
| Poison ivy | |

Native and non-native wildflowers include:

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|-------------------|------------------------|
| Thoroughwort | Grass-leaved goldenrod |
| Queen Anne's Lace | Chicory |
| Common milkweed | Everlasting pea |
| Goatsbeard | Common St. John's wort |
| Red clover | Common teasel |
| Wingstem | Butter and eggs |
| Biennial gaura | Evening Primrose |
| Canada goldenrod | |

Native Wildlife

- Northern cardinal
- House wren
- Mourning dove
- American coot
(our Mud hen)
- Ring-billed gull
- Great egret
- Mallard
- Turkey vulture
- Monarch
- Pearl crescent
- Meadow katydid
- Black saddlebags
- Wandering glider
- Snapping turtle
- Northern brown snake
- Eastern cottontail
- Coyote

- American goldfinch
- Catbird
- Downy woodpecker
- Herring gull
- Killdeer
- Canada goose
- Great blue heron
- Double-crested cormorant
- Clouded sulfur
- Carolina locust
- Goldenrod fly and gall
- Green darner
- Bluet damselfly
- Softshell turtle
- Virginia opossum
- Common water snake
- White-tailed Deer
- Raccoon

Stay on trails and use protective clothing and insecticide to avoid poison ivy, American dog ticks and mosquitoes.

(Note: There is no poison oak in Northwest Ohio.)



Snapping turtle



Mallard



Pearl crescent



Great egret



Raccoon



House wren