mParks℠ | Michigan Recreation & Park Association

The voice of Michigan's parks and recreation community.

# Transformation, Collaboration & Momentum

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

we advocate
we teach
we inspire
we unite

mParks.org

Parks℠ | Michigan Recreation & Park Association

**The voice of Michigan's parks and recreation community.**

# Transformation, Collaboration & Momentum

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| Letter from the Executive Director | 3 |
| Letter from the Board President | 4 |
| 2024-25 Leadership Team | 5 |
| Building the Foundation for the Future | 6 |
| We Advocate | 7 |
| We Teach | 10 |
| We Inspire | 12 |
| We Unite | 14 |
| Thank You | 17 |
| Financials | 18 |

# LETTER FROM THE Executive Director

2024 Fall Joint Meeting, Wyoming Senior Center

**Dear mParks Members, Partners, and Friends,**

As I look back on 2024, I am filled with pride, gratitude, and renewed optimism for the future of parks and recreation in Michigan. This past year was one of transformation, collaboration, and momentum. A year where mParks not only strengthened its foundation but also set a bold course for the years ahead.

Together, we advanced our mission to advocate, teach, inspire, and unite – four pillars that continue to guide every decision we make and every community we serve.

Through strategic planning, we took a deep, honest look at where we are and where we're headed. We listened to our members, engaged our leadership, and shaped a forward-looking plan that reflects both the passion and professionalism of Michigan's recreation community.

Our advocacy efforts reached new heights, from hosting the inaugural Director & Legislative Networking Summit to forming the Coalition to Modernize the Recreation Passport. These milestones reaffirmed our collective voice and demonstrated what's possible when we stand together for the people and places we serve.

Education continued to shine as a cornerstone of mParks' mission. With over a thousand professionals participating in training sessions, workshops, and the 2024 Conference & Trade Show, we strengthened not just skills but the shared sense of purpose that defines our profession.

And as always, we celebrated excellence – honoring those who lead with creativity, compassion, and vision through our annual awards program and throughout the myParks Weekly and on social media. Their accomplishments remind us that innovation and service go hand in hand.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the extraordinary individuals and organizations who make up the mParks family. To our strategic partners, whose collaboration amplifies our impact; to our Board of Directors, for your steady leadership and commitment; to our committee and focus area chairs, for driving meaningful progress in every corner of our field; and to the mParks staff, whose passion and dedication fuel every success – thank you. Your work exemplifies what it means to serve with heart and purpose.

As we look toward the future, I am confident that mParks will continue to be a catalyst for positive change, connecting people to parks, building healthier communities, and ensuring that everyone, everywhere, has access to the benefits of recreation.

Thank you for being part of this journey, for believing in our mission, and for helping make Michigan a state where parks and recreation truly thrive.

With gratitude–

Nichole Fisher, CMP
Executive Director

> **"This past year was one of transformation, collaboration, and momentum. A year where mParks not only strengthened its foundation but also set a bold course for the years ahead."**

# LETTER FROM THE mParks Board President

2024 Come Out & Play @ the Capitol

As I reflect on 2024, I am reminded of the extraordinary power of collaboration, which defines mParks and drives our shared mission forward every single day. 2024 was not just about programs or policies; it was about people coming together with purpose, determination, and a shared vision to make Michigan's communities stronger, healthier, and more connected.

Our field faced both opportunities and challenges in 2024, and I could not be prouder of how our members responded. Whether through innovative programming, advocacy at the Capitol, or new educational initiatives, mParks professionals once again demonstrated that parks and recreation are vital to the quality of life in every Michigan community.

Together, we strengthened our Association's foundation through a comprehensive strategic planning process, ensuring our priorities align with the needs of our members and the communities we serve. We expanded partnerships, modernized structures, and continued to amplify our collective voice on behalf of parks, recreation, and open spaces across the state.

Our annual Conference & Trade Show captured the energy of a profession on the rise, filled with learning, networking, and inspiration. The Come Out & Play at the Capitol event showcased our advocacy in action, reminding state leaders that parks are not luxuries; they are essential services that touch lives in every zip code.

And of course, we celebrated our peers through the mParks Awards Program, recognizing individuals and organizations whose creativity, leadership, and commitment elevate our entire field. Their stories continue to inspire us all.

As I close this chapter as Board President, I am deeply grateful to everyone who made 2024 a year of progress and pride. Looking ahead, I am excited for what's to come. Together, we will continue to build on the legacy of those before us, ensuring that Michigan's parks and recreation system remains a model of excellence, inclusion, and community impact.

Respectfully,

Chad Stevens, CPRP

**"Our annual Conference & Trade Show captured the energy of a profession on the rise, filled with learning, networking, and inspiration."**

# 2024-25 Leadership Team

2024-2025 mParks Leadership Team

we advocate / we teach / we inspire / we unite

## Board of Directors

**President**
Chad Stevens, CPRP
DeWitt Area Recreation Authority

**President-Elect**
Kyle Langlois, CPRE
Sterling Heights Parks & Recreation

**Past President**
Lori Irwin, Ed.D., CPRP
Central Michigan University

**Secretary/Treasurer**
Nikki McEachern, MPA, CPO, CPRP
Royal Oak Parks & Recreation

**Director at Large**
LaReina Wheeler, MHA, CPRP, AFO
Ferndale Parks & Recreation

**Director at Large**
Greg Morris, CPRP, CFEA
Northville Parks & Recreation

**Presidential Appointment Government Relations**
Gary Kirsh
ITC

**Presidential Appointment Health & Wellness**
Dan Ekonen
Special Olympics Michigan

## Committees

**Advocate Committee**
Derek Smith, CPRP
Northville Parks & Recreation

**Teach Committee**
Timothy Church, CPRP
Howell Recreation

**Certification (sub-committee)**
Jeanette Aiello, CPRE
Canton Leisure Services

**Conference & Trade Show (sub-committee)**
Kevin Troshak
Howell Area Recreation

**Inspire Committee**
Melissa Nawrocki, CPRP
Oakland County Parks & Recreation

**Hall of Fame**
Chad Stevens, CPRP
DeWitt Area Recreation Authority

**Unite Committee**
Zach Zuchowicz, MPH, CDP, CWP
Oakland County Parks & Recreation

## Focus Areas

**Active Aging**
Kristen Briggs, CPRP
Sterling Heights Parks & Recreation

**Adaptive**
Becca Lynn, CTRS
Sterling Heights Parks & Recreation

**Aquatics**
Stacey McNamara, CPRE, CPO, AFO
Lansing Parks & Recreation

**Archery**
Bryan Farmer, CPRP
Farmington Hills Special Services

**Athletics**
Steve Fellhauer, CYSA
Novi Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services

**Directors**
Kendall Klingelsmith, MPA, CPRP
Petoskey Parks & Recreation

**Facilities**
Sunshine Lambert
Saline Parks & Recreation

**Marketing**
Marissa Russo
City of Sterling Heights

**Middle Managers**
Michele Vannerson, CPRP
Chesterfield Township Parks, Recreation, & Senior Services

**New Professionals**
Allyson Leach, CPRP
Troy Recreation Department

**Park Maintenance**
Larry Hess, CPSI
Independence Township Parks, Recreation & Seniors

**Past Presidents**
Stu Alderman, CPRP
Grosse Pointe Neighborhood Club

**Programming**
Jordan Hilbrecht
Howell Area Recreation

**Students**
Nick Wing
Meridian Township Parks & Recreation

**Trails**
Brett Kaschinske, CPRP
Lansing Parks & Recreation

**WIRED**
Angela Dove
Haslett Community Education

**Youth, Teens & Camps**
Chelsea Straub
Canton Leisure Services

## Strategic Partners

**mParks Foundation**
Mike Hoffmeister
The Mannik Smith Group, Inc.

**Michigan Association of County Park & Recreation Officials (MACPRO)**
Nick Smith
Newaygo County Parks & Recreation Commission

**Knuckles Knorth**
John Chase, CPRE
Grand Traverse County Parks & Recreation

**Northeast Recreation and Park Association (NERPA)**
George Cardaris
Clinton Township Parks & Recreation

**Northwest Park and Recreation Association (NWPRA)**
Shawnie Stamper
Pleasant Ridge Recreation

**Southern Michigan Recreation and Park Association (SMRPA)**
Jodi Ackerman, CPRP
Lansing Parks & Recreation

**Wayne and Monroe (WAM)**
Laura Mortier, CPRP
Canton Leisure Services

**West Michigan Recreation and Park Association (WMRPA)**
Krashawn Martin, CPRP
Wyoming Parks & Recreation

All job titles and places of employment throughout this document are reflective of the 2024 status.

# BUILDING THE Foundation for the Future

2024 mParks Leadership Team Retreat, Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island

mParks Board of Directors and Staff Strategic Planning Session

## Strengthening Structure, Expanding Vision

In 2024, mParks strengthened its foundation by restructuring its committees to provide more explicit guidance, more profound expertise, and greater alignment with the Association's mission. Each of the four committees represented one of mParks' core pillars—advocacy, education, inspiration, and unity—ensuring that every effort advanced the collective goals of Michigan's park and recreation professionals.

The restructured framework empowered leaders across each Regional Group and diverse specialties to collaborate more effectively. Each committee was charged with considering, investigating, and acting on initiatives that furthered mParks' strategic vision. By expanding representation to include regional partners, subject matter experts, and historians, mParks cultivated a more inclusive and forward-thinking leadership model.

This new structure not only deepened engagement but also created a sustainable model for the years ahead—one built on shared expertise, accountability, and a unified commitment to elevating Michigan's park and recreation system.

## Strategic Planning for Long-Term Impact

2024 marked a milestone year in mParks' strategic direction, under the leadership of Executive Director Nichole Fisher. The Association launched a comprehensive planning process led by Julie Hales-Smith of North Coast Community Consultants (NC3) and Patrice Martin of Innovative Community Solutions, that engaged voices from across the state to chart a bold course for the future.

Beginning in June with stakeholder surveys, mParks gathered critical insights from members, partners, and community leaders. In July, the Board of Directors and staff convened for a full-day strategic planning session, laying the groundwork for a renewed organizational roadmap. Follow-up reviews in August and a leadership team retreat in September refined those ideas into actionable priorities.

By October, the Board and staff worked side by side to finalize the plan, and in November, the first draft of the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan was proudly unveiled to the membership at the Fall Joint Meeting. This collaborative process exemplified mParks' dedication to transparency, inclusion, and continuous improvement, ensuring that every decision reflected the needs and aspirations of the professionals who bring recreation to life across Michigan.

### 5 major milestones:

Surveys → Workday → Review → Retreat → Plan Finalization

**The restructured framework empowered leaders across each Regional Group and diverse specialties to collaborate more effectively.**

## Regional Groups

NERPA · NWPRA · SMRPA · Knuckles North · WAM · WMRPA

# We Advocate

**In 2024, mParks amplified its voice at every level of government, championing policies that strengthen Michigan's park and recreation system and protect the communities it serves. From the Capitol lawn to legislative roundtables, advocacy remained at the heart of everything we do, uniting professionals, policymakers, and residents in support of the spaces and programs that enrich daily life across the state.**

2024 Directors & Legislative Networking Summit, Heritage Hall, Michigan State Capitol

## Director & Legislative Networking Summit

mParks proudly hosted the first-ever Director and Legislative Networking Summit, bringing together agency leaders and lawmakers for open dialogue and collaboration. The event laid the groundwork for stronger partnerships and mutual understanding, ensuring Michigan's recreation professionals were directly connected to decision-makers shaping the future of public parks.

Members of the Board of Directors at the 2024 Come Out & Play @ the Capitol

2024 Come Out & Play @ the Capitol

## Come Out & Play at the Capitol

In June, mParks hosted the annual Come Out & Play at the Capitol—a vibrant celebration that set the stage for National Parks and Recreation Month in July. This signature event reminded Michigan's elected officials that recreation services are more than amenities; they are essential lifelines that support families, boost local economies, and enhance well-being.

Throughout the day, the Capitol lawn buzzed with interactive demonstrations and smiling faces. Twenty-two agencies brought energy and innovation to Lansing, showcasing the incredible variety of programs offered throughout the state. Together, they represented 2,250 campers who experienced the joy, connection, and growth that only parks and recreation can provide.

With more than 80% of park and recreation agencies offering out-of-school programs that support childcare, tutoring, and nutrition, the event effectively highlighted how recreation continues to fill vital community needs—especially when schools are not in session.

**22** agencies participated in *Come Out & Play at the Capitol*

**2,250** campers represented across Michigan

**80%** of agencies provide out-of-school programs supporting families

# We Advocate

Advocate Committee Chair, Kyle Langlois, CPRE and Executive Director, Nichole Fisher, CMP testifying before Michigan House Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee

## Coalition to Modernize the Recreation Passport

mParks formed the Coalition to Modernize the Recreation Passport, advocating for the transformation of the program to better fund Michigan's state and local parks.

The Coalition began by exploring the option of turning the Recreation Passport into an opt-out system. This shift promised to expand funding for Michigan's parks, increasing access for residents while supporting local and state park infrastructure. While the Opt-Out mode did not pass the Michigan Legislature, a renewed sense of pride for Michigan's parks and recreation amenities was formed.

By advocating for a modernized system and a larger share of funding for the Recreation Passport Grant Program, mParks reaffirmed its commitment to the belief that thriving parks are essential to thriving communities. The initiative aimed to make participation effortless for residents and to ensure consistent, sustainable revenue for preservation, enhancement, and innovation across Michigan's park network.

In December, mParks Advocate Committee Chair Kyle Langlois, CPRE testified before the Michigan House Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee–an essential moment for elevating the needs of Michigan's park and recreation system.

His testimony highlighted the critical importance of modernizing the Recreation Passport and updating its funding formula to support local agencies better.

The Coalition to Modernize the Recreation Passport also strengthened mParks relationship with like-minded organizations across the state.

FLOW FOR LOVE OF WATER

MICHIGAN LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

LEAGUE OF MICHIGAN BICYCLISTS

MTGA MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS ALLIANCE

HEART OF THE LAKES

RAILS TO Trails conservancy

MACPRO Michigan Association of County Park and Recreation Officials

SEMCOG SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

**The Passport is more than just a fee to enter state parks—it's a vital investment in Michigan's outdoor future. Modernization would help close the funding gap, expand access, and ensure sustainable support for the parks and recreation opportunities our residents depend on.**

# We Advocate

The voice of Michigan's parks and recreation community.

mParks leadership team alongside Michigan DNR Director, Scott Bowen, and Chief Administrative Officer, Kristin Phillips.

## Paid Sick Leave Advocacy

mParks also joined statewide partners to advocate for updates to Michigan's Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA). The Association supported measures that balance employee well-being with operational practicality, calling for exemptions for employers with strong existing paid leave policies, protections for small employers, and flexibility in how leave time is used and administered.

This effort reflected mParks' commitment to fair, responsible policies that support both Michigan's workforce and the organizations that serve them.

Advocate Committee Chair, Kyle Langlois, CPRE and Executive Director, Nichole Fisher, CMP testifying before Michigan House Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee

## Strengthening Policy Through Continued Advocacy

mParks continued to advance several key advocacy priorities throughout 2024. The Association actively engaged in discussions surrounding the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) Appropriations, underscoring the importance of sustained investment in land acquisition, park development, and recreation infrastructure. By providing perspective from local agencies across the state, mParks helped highlight how MNRTF projects strengthen community vitality and expand outdoor access for residents of all ages.

mParks also contributed to statewide conversations on updates to Camp Licensing regulations, working to ensure that new requirements protected public safety while remaining practical and achievable for local providers. Through collaborative dialogue with regulatory partners, the Association emphasized the need for clear guidance, consistency, and flexibility for agencies operating day camps, specialty camps, and youth programs.

These efforts reflected mParks' continued commitment to shaping policies that enable parks and recreation professionals to deliver safe, equitable, and high-quality outdoor experiences for all Michiganders.

# We Teach

**In 2024, mParks inspired growth, learning, and innovation for park and recreation professionals statewide. Through a robust calendar of educational programs and workshops, the Association empowered members to strengthen their skills, embrace emerging trends, and lead with confidence in their communities.**

## Building Knowledge, Advancing the Profession

Throughout the year, mParks delivered 19 educational opportunities, offering a total of 13.6 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to help professionals maintain CPRP, CPRE, CPSI, CTRS, and CYSA certifications and elevate their expertise.

**February**

- WEBINAR: Embracing Diversity in Parks & Recreation - Navigating Transgender Narratives for Advocacy
- 2024 Conference & Trade Show

**April**

- Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course
- WEBINAR: Tobacco-Free Parks: Keeping Michigan Parks Healthy and Beautiful for All
- Park Resources Spring Safety Workshop
- Marketing Summit

**May**

- Emerging Leaders Workshop
- Diversity Series: Exploring Cultural Sensitivity & Inclusion - Arab American National Museum
- WEBINAR: Artificial Intelligence for Parks and Recreation Professionals

**June**

- Director & Legislator Networking Summit
- Virtual Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course & Exam

**September**

- Virtual Aquatic Facility Operators Course
- Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course
- Webinar: Major Changes Coming to Michigan's Minimum Wage and Sick Time Laws

**October**

- Programmers Workshop
- Park Maintenance Workshop + MowDeo
- Playground Maintenance Technician Training

**November**

- WEBINAR: Positive Coaching Alliance: Sports Can Battle Racism

**December**

- Virtual Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course & Exam

Exploring Cultural Sensitivity & Inclusion at Arab American National Museum

A record 1,096 park and recreation professionals participated in sessions that challenged perspectives, expanded skills, and inspired collaboration.

From webinars exploring diversity, inclusion, and public health to in-person training on playground safety and facility management, mParks provided accessible, high-quality learning for professionals at every stage of their careers.

These experiences didn't just teach technical skills–they fostered leadership, connection, and confidence in those who shape Michigan's recreational future.

**1,096**
professionals participated in mParks educational events

**19**
educational opportunities offered in 2024

**13.6**
CEUs available throughout the year

# We Teach

Leap! 2024
Leadership Education for Advancing the Profession

## Conference & Trade Show

The highlight of the educational year was the 2024 mParks Conference & Trade Show, held from February 27 to March 1 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Kalamazoo. Centered on the theme *Leadership Education for Advancing the Profession: Leap!,* the conference embodied the forward momentum of the parks and recreation field.

The event welcomed 442 delegates and featured 65 exhibiting organizations, showcasing the latest tools, products, and innovations in recreation management. With 94 speakers leading 90 sessions and offsite tours, attendees had the opportunity to earn up to 1.3 CEUs while exploring topics ranging from leadership and inclusion to design and operations.

Dynamic keynote sessions brought inspiration and insight, including "The Beesness of Leadership" by Leigh-Kathryn Bonner, Founder and CEO of Bee Downtown—a reminder that even the smallest actions can create lasting impact.

Offsite tours at Landscape Forms and the Portage Senior Center gave attendees a behind-the-scenes look at design excellence and community-focused facility planning in action.

2024 mParks Conference & Trade Show Keynote Speaker, Leigh-Kathryn Bonner, Founder and CEO of Bee Downtown

2024 mParks Conference & Trade Show Exhibitors

2024 Innovative Programming Award Recipient, Farmington Hills Special Services

**442**
delegates attended the Annual Conference

**65**
exhibitors showcased the latest innovations

**94**
speakers presented across **90 sessions** and tours

Up to
**1.3 CEUs**
earned at the Conference

# We Inspire

**In 2024, mParks proudly celebrated the exceptional individuals and organizations who exemplified passion, creativity, and dedication in Michigan's parks and recreation profession. Each award recipient reflected the heart of our mission—to enrich lives, strengthen communities, and inspire the next generation of leaders.**

**Through the Annual mParks Awards Program, we recognized excellence across every corner of the state—from innovative program design to forward-thinking leadership. These honorees didn't just do their jobs; they elevated what it means to serve, creating experiences that will echo through their communities for years to come.**

Conference attendees exploring the Trade Show

2024 Individual Award Winners

## Celebrating Leadership and Innovation

This year's award winners demonstrated that inspiration comes in many forms: from the professional who guided a team through new challenges, to the volunteer who brought neighbors together, to the agency that reimagined how parks can connect people to nature and one another.

At the top of the honors, the Grand Award went to USA Softball of Metro Detroit and USA Softball of Michigan for their exceptional collaboration and commitment to community recreation.

mParks also honored local and state officials who championed the value of recreation. Supervisor Mark Abbo of Northville Township and Senator Sarah Anthony of Michigan's 21st District were recognized for their ongoing advocacy and partnership.

## Other Professional Awards:

### Commitment to Excellence

**Clay Summers,** Grants Management Section - Michigan DNR

### Fellowship

**Jim Dunleavy,** Oakland County Parks & Recreation

### Recreation Leadership

**Lisa Bryant,** Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge
**Lisa Christensen,** CPRP, Independence Township Parks & Recreation

### New Professional

**Adam Abraham,** CPRP, New Baltimore Parks & Recreation
**Andre Harris,** Detroit Parks & Recreation

Three dynamic student showcase presenters from Central Michigan University, **Emma Apap, Adriana Fiorino, and Jenna Steeb,** shared their forward-thinking visions for the future of parks and recreation, offering fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that inspired attendees. Each student highlighted how they plan to make a meaningful impact on the profession—whether through advancing inclusive programming, strengthening community engagement, or promoting sustainable practices. Their passion and commitment underscored the bright future of the field and the important role emerging professionals will play in shaping it.

# We Inspire

2024 Park Design Award Recipient, Innovation Hills, Rocheser Hills Parks & Natural Resources

2024 Facility Design Recipient, Thomas Township Nature Center, Thomas Township Parks & Recreation

2024 Innovative Recreation Programming Award Recipient, Petite Prix, Michigan DNR

## Creativity That Inspires Communities

The 2024 awards showcased extraordinary creativity through programs and designs that brought communities together. The Recreation Programming Awards redefined engagement, while Park Resource and Facility Design Awards highlighted outstanding spaces that proved design excellence can spark joy and inclusivity. The Marketing Awards celebrated excellence, showing residents that Michigan's parks are vibrant, ever-evolving centers of community life.

### Innovative Recreation Programming

**Hero Hikes,** West Bloomfield Parks
**Mario Kart Live,** Saline Parks & Recreation
**Petite Prix,** Michigan DNR
**Rock Around the Hawk,** Farmington Hills Special Services

### Innovative Park Resources

**Eagle Ridge Nature Area,** Midland Parks & Recreation

### Park Design

**Ben Celani Play Area,** Livonia Parks & Recreation
**Innovation Hills,** Rochester Hills Parks & Natural Resources
**French Landing Park,** Van Buren Township Parks & Recreation

### Facility Design

**Thomas Township,** Nature Center, Thomas Township Parks & Recreation

### Landscape Design

**Frances Park Rose Garden,** Lansing Parks & Recreation

### Integrated Marketing Campaign

**Concerts in the Park,** Wyoming Parks & Recreation

### Seasonal Brochure / Activity Guide Design

**Fall Guide,** Farmington Hills Special Services

### Social Media Campaign

**Hidden Gems,** Huron-Clinton Metroparks

### Graphic Design Piece

**More to See,** More to Do, Huron-Clinton Metroparks

### Website Design

**wbparks.org,** West Bloomfield Parks

## Celebrating the Heart of Parks and Recreation

Behind every thriving park, vibrant event, and successful program were the people who gave their time, talent, and heart to make it all possible. In 2024, the mParks Community Service Awards celebrated these dedicated volunteers, advocates, and everyday heroes who embodied the spirit of service in Michigan's parks and recreation communities. Presented locally by each nominating agency, the awards ensured recognition happened where it mattered most, in the communities that benefited from their impact. Through these local celebrations, mParks shone a statewide spotlight on the individuals and organizations that truly represented the heart of parks and recreation.

The 2024 award winners didn't just inspire admiration; they inspired action. Their work continues to motivate all of us to imagine what's possible when creativity meets purpose.

**20+**
individuals and organizations honored statewide

**Grand Award**
presented to USA Softball of Metro Detroit & Michigan

**Award winners**
represented local, regional, and state impact across Michigan

# We Unite

**In 2024, mParks strengthened its greatest asset — its community. Across the state, members came together to share ideas, form partnerships, and build momentum for a stronger future in parks and recreation. Through meetings, programs, and shared experiences, mParks continued to unite Michigan's recreation professionals.**

2024 Programmers Workshop

## Collaboration in Action

Collaboration defined 2024. mParks hosted an impressive 149 meetings across committees, focus areas, and regional groups – a remarkable increase of 59 more gatherings than the previous year. Each conversation, whether virtual or in-person, represented another step toward collective progress.

These gatherings fostered cross-regional connections, allowing members to share solutions, celebrate successes, and build the partnerships that will carry Michigan's park and recreation forward.

**149** meetings held statewide – **a 59-meeting increase** from 2023

Highlights from the 2024 Member & Alumni Picnic

## Member & Alumni Picnic

In 2024, mParks hosted its first-ever Member & Alumni Picnic, a new tradition designed to bring together members past and present for a relaxed day of connection, conversation, and community. Held in a beautiful park setting, the event provided an informal space for colleagues and friends to reconnect, share stories, and celebrate their shared commitment to Michigan's parks and recreation profession.

From lawn games and laughter to meaningful conversations about the future of the field, the picnic captured the heart of what makes mParks special – its people. By uniting current members with longtime supporters and retirees, the event strengthened bonds across generations and reaffirmed the enduring spirit of the mParks community.

# We Unite

mParks Flag on the porch of the Grand Hotel

## The Grand Experience

A beloved tradition continued to flourish as mParks celebrated 57 years of the Grand Experience, one of the Association's longest-running and most cherished programs. Designed for travelers aged 50 and older, the Grand Experience offered members a chance to reconnect, recharge, and rediscover the magic of Mackinac Island.

In 2024, mParks expanded the program by introducing its first-ever Spring Trip, adding new opportunities for exploration and fellowship alongside the classic Fall excursions. Over the course of the year, 35 park and recreation departments and travel groups brought 1,973 guests to the iconic Grand Hotel, filling its halls with laughter, camaraderie, and inspiration.

mParks was proud to continue its longstanding relationship with the iconic Grand Hotel—one of our most valued and enduring partners. This historic venue has hosted countless meaningful gatherings for our association, and in 2024 we were especially excited to bring the Leadership Retreat back to the Grand. The setting provided an inspiring backdrop for collaboration, reflection, and strategic planning, helping our leaders connect and recharge in a place that truly embodies Michigan's heritage and hospitality.

**Spring Trip - May 14-17**
**240 Guests**

1. Ferndale Parks & Recreation
2. Livonia Parks & Recreation
3. Northville Parks & Recreation
4. Portage Zhang Senior Center
5. St. Joseph-Lincoln Senior Service Center
6. Woodhaven Parks & Recreation

**Fall Trip 1 – September 22-25**
**545 Guests**

1. Bridgewater Parks & Recreation
2. Dearborn Heights Parks & Recreation
3. Frenchtown Center for Active Adults
4. Livonia Parks & Recreation
5. Midland Parks & Recreation
6. Orchard View Travelers
7. Taylor Tours
8. Troy Recreation

**Trip 2 October 15-18**
**561 People**

1. Howell Parks & Recreation
2. Independence Township Parks, Recreation, and Seniors
3. Livonia Parks & Recreation
4. Marshall Recreation
5. Novi Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services
6. OPC Social & Activity Center
7. Oxford Township Parks & Recreation
8. Royal Oak Senior Center
9. Southfield Parks & Recreation
10. West Bloomfield Parks

**Trip 3 October 20-23**
**627 People**

1. Ann's Adventures
2. Brownstown Travel Club
3. Custom Holidays, LLC
4. Dearborn Parks & Recreation Seniors
5. Delta 39'ers
6. Grand Traverse County Senior Center Network
7. Horizon Travel / Lenawee Dept of Aging
8. NERPA Regional Group
9. SMRPA Regional Group
10. Spectrum Tours
11. Waterford Parks & Recreation

Guests enjoyed a full itinerary of enriching activities, including ballroom dancing, watercolor painting, bocce tournaments, and yoga. Every experience reflected the program's mission – to celebrate community, encourage active living, and create lasting joyful memories.

Travelers from Grand Traverse County on the 2024 mParks Grand Experience

**Beyond its social impact, the Grand Experience continued to be a vital source of support for mParks' mission, generating revenue that allows the Association to reinvest in professional resources and statewide initiatives.**

**57** years of the *Grand Experience* celebrated

**1,973** travelers across **35 groups** attended Grand Experience trips

**FIRST-EVER** Spring Trip added in 2024

# We Unite

Golfers at the 2024 Champions Classic Golf Outing

## Champions Classic Golf Outing

In 2024, mParks hosted its inaugural Champions Classic Golf Outing, bringing members together for a day of friendly competition, camaraderie, and fun in support of the mParks Foundation. Held at White Lake Oaks Golf Course, the event drew park and recreation professionals, partners, and friends from across Michigan to celebrate community and connection on the greens.

Proceeds from the outing supported the Hall of Fame Banquet & Induction Ceremony and the mParks Foundation's initiatives, helping to advance the mission of strengthening parks, recreation, and leisure services statewide. The day was filled with laughter, great weather, and even better company, setting the stage for what's sure to become a beloved annual tradition.

## Fresh Air Forums

Looking to the future, mParks joined forces with Heart of the Lakes and the Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance to host the Fresh Air Forums, a series of statewide listening sessions focused on building a more inclusive and sustainable future for Michigan's open spaces, parks, and trails.

**A total of three sessions were held:**

- **March 15** | Waterford Oaks Activity Center, Waterford Township
- **April 19** | GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute, Muskegon
- **May 10** | Northland Brewing Company, Indian River

These gatherings encouraged participants to share challenges, exchange innovative ideas, and explore new financial models to sustain outdoor recreation. Each session featured in-depth discussions, interactive engagement, and actionable takeaways, ensuring that every voice contributed to shaping the path forward.

By bringing together advocates, practitioners, and community leaders, mParks created a space where collaboration could thrive, making Michigan's outdoor future more straightforward than ever.

**3 STATE WIDE** Fresh Air Forums hosted in partnership with key outdoor organizations

2024 Fall Joint Meeting

# Thank You

**We are grateful for the tremendous support of our sponsors and partners. This report underscores the importance of collaboration, and we extend heartfelt appreciation to all who have been part of this journey. Together, we've made this year truly exceptional.**

Beckett & Raeder
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
Discover Kalamazoo
Grand Hotel
Great Lakes Recreation Company
Heart of the Lakes
ITC
Kaizen Labs
Knuckles Knorth
Landscape Structures
Michigan Association of County Park & Recreation Officials (MACPRO)
McKenna
Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance
Midstates Recreation
Midwest Recreation- Play & Park Structures
mParks Foundation
mParks Past Presidents
Northeast Recreation & Park Association (NERPA)
Northwest Park & Recreation Association (NWPRA)
OpenGov
Penchura
Porous Pave
Portage Zhang Senior Center
Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
Sinclair Recreation
Southern Michigan Recreation & Park Association (SMRPA)
SYNLawn
TinyMobileRobots
Vortex
Wade Trim
Wayne and Monroe Counties (WAM)
webuildfun
West Michigan Recreation & Park Association (WMRPA)

Marci Post, Midland Parks & Recreation Group Leader on the 2024 Grand Experience

# Financials

mParks operates on an accrual system–deferred revenue and accounts receivable are recorded when they occur. The Ways and Means Committee meets regularly to review the financial statements and to provide input on the processes of the organization.

**2024 proved to be another successful year for mParks. Streak of financial growth continued.**

**The 2024 Fiscal Year ended with a net gain of $19,192.54**

| 2024 REVENUE | |
|---|---|
| Membership Dues | 235,730.61 |
| Advertising | 16,077.83 |
| Registration | 2,160,959.44 |
| Sponsorships | 145,417.00 |
| Interest | 9,886.10 |
| Donations | 4,890.42 |
| Commission | 11,594.90 |
| Misc. Income | 4,091.71 |
| Admin Income | 3,790.00 |
| Grants | 10,841.00 |
| | |
| **TOTAL** | **$2,603,279.01** |

| 2024 EXPENSES | |
|---|---|
| Event / Membership | 1,929,169.15 |
| Operation Expense | 97,247.14 |
| Administrative Expense | 17,657.87 |
| Wages and Benefits | 408,080.85 |
| Taxes and Insurance | 9,139.00 |
| Dues and Subscriptions | 3,923.57 |
| Design/Print/Publish | 19,441.24 |
| Bank and CC Fees | 25,435.65 |
| Professional Fees | 56,900.00 |
| Contract Labor | 17,092.00 |
| | |
| **TOTAL** | **$2,584,086.47** |