

Date: March 29, 2021

To: Jane Howington, City Manager

Subject: Hudson Parks Department Tree Maintenance Management Review

From: Frank J. Comeriato, Jr. Asst. City Manager-Operations, Trent Wash, Asst. Public Works
Director-Parks, Golf, Cemeteries, John Spivak, PW Asst. Superintendent-Parks

BACKGROUND

In February 2021 Hudson City Council asked City staff for a workshop discussion concerning the Parks Division's current maintenance practices with regards to tree management within forested and woodland areas of the City's Park system. The main concern expressed to staff was one of aesthetics.

It should be noted for clarification that the Assistant Superintendent of the Hudson parks was asked to defer several maintenance tasks during the 2020 season as the City had reorganized priority tasks and staffing levels in response to the rapidly changing COVID-19 restrictions and requirements. As such, there are several areas along hiking and walking trails at Hudson Springs Park, Maple Grove Park and Cascade Park that will be fully cleaned up in 2021 season. For example, all three parks have felled tree trunks that need to be sectioned and moved accordingly.

THE QUESTION AND CONCERN

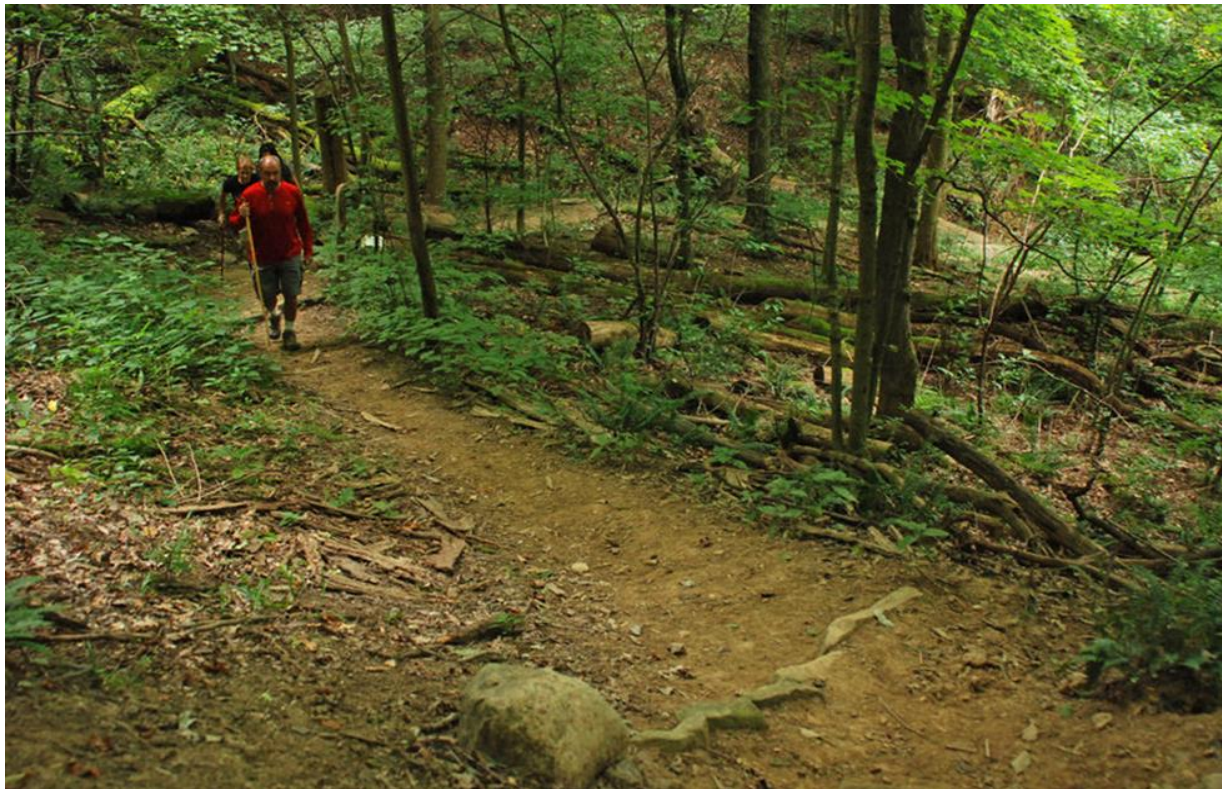
The question as we understood it has three components as related to the Hudson Parks current practices:

1. The practice of leaving fallen trees and branches in place on the forest or woodland floor to become part of the eco-system through natural decay providing habitat and contributing to over health of forest and woodland areas.
2. The practice of returning felled or fallen tree debris that has impacted park trails, and have been cut into manageable sections, back to the forest or woodland floor. This includes felling trees that have been deemed a hazard and that could impact trail areas or trees and branches that have naturally fallen onto a designated trail.
3. Can the City allow residents to remove wood from parks for use as firewood?

INDUSTRY STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES

leaving wood debris or what is referred to in the industry as “Course Woody Debris” (CWD) on the forest or woodland floor is the accepted method of management and is currently practiced by the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Service, Summit County Metro Parks, Ohio State Parks, and many other parks like those here in Hudson. It is a general practice that CWD be left in place on the forest floor except where large numbers of trees are downed by severe storms or species-specific disease and are covering large areas. In addition, where trails meander through forested and woodland areas and trees have fallen into or over trails, it is typical practice to cut the trees and large branches into manageable lengths and move them far enough back to return the trail to its designed width. Brush debris is typically hauled away when practical.

The following collection of photos serve to illustrate the described the condition which is essential to the healthy balance of forest and woodland eco-systems.



Typical condition of CWD to the sides of established trails



Large tree trunk covered in after growth serves as an example of wildlife food, shelter, and soil rejuvenation



Trail head entry point

HUDSON PARKS CURRENT PRACTICE

The City of Hudson Parks currently has the following maintenance practices in place for tree management as it relates to CWD:

- Regularly police hiking, biking, and walking trails to identify trees that may pose a hazard of falling onto established trails and remove them accordingly.
- Trees that have fallen or are felled as hazards, that impact trails are cut up into manageable lengths and pushed off the established trail or path to naturally decay. Brush is typically hauled out or machine chipped into the forest or woodland.
- Trees and branches that have fallen within the forest or woodland areas are left in place as part of the forest and woodland natural life cycles.
- Removing wood for use as firewood is not permitted

NOTE: The park rules as established by the Park Board prohibit the removal of any wood from park lands. As such, residents are not permitted to take wood out of the parks for use as firewood. Staff does not recommend making wood available for firewood as the operation itself on a consistent basis will result in continuous trail damage and the compaction of the forest and woodland floors due to heavier equipment such as trucks, loaded trailers, and tractors having to be used in the process. From an operational perspective, parks would need additional resources to properly manage such a program such as staffing, equipment and proper, secure operational locations.

OPPORTUNITY FOR A DIFFERENT APPROACH

In reviewing the current parks practices, industry standards, and concerns of aesthetics, as well as the dynamics of the forest ecosystem and commitment to the natural preservation of forest and woodlands within the parks, staff recommends the following program modifications moving forward:

1. As trees naturally fall on to hiking/walking trails or need to be removed as a potential hazard, The CWD will be relocated at least ten feet off the trail. The current practice of hauling out branches or chipping them into the woods will continue to be the standard practice.
2. Where green belt and maintained areas of park property meet woods lines staff will also relocate CWD at last ten feet into the forested or woodland area. If the majority of the tree debris is on maintained area it will be removed.
3. Entry points to trailheads will be focus areas for a modified standard of CWD management. CWD will be removed and/or pulled and relocated at least 25 feet into the forest or woodland to better manage potential concentrations of CWD.
4. Staff does not recommend making firewood available to the public as described above.
5. The Parks Division will release public educational materials for residents to learn and understand forest and woodland management and the importance of CWD in the overall health of natural fauna and flora in the City parks.

The Hudson Parks staff recommendation is the current practice of the Ohio State Parks/ODNR, Summit County Metro Parks, and the CVNP.

The collection of photos below illustrates woodland and forested areas within the City's park system and describe a modified approach moving forward.



Push back and scatter CWD further off established trails



Remove CWD such as this from trail head entry points



Remove majority and push back CWD where woods line meets manicured green space



Leave dead wood that does not pose a hazard to serve as part of the natural habitat