

# You Can Help Prevent Car Break-ins

by Chief Ranger Jim Sivak



The top priority of Lake Metroparks is to provide the citizens of Lake County and the broader region with clean, safe, and outstanding parks. Lake Metroparks is an awesome place to enjoy nature and recreation! Our Ranger Department takes immense pride in the role we play regarding the overall safe environment you find when entering Lake Metroparks properties. When visiting Lake Metroparks, please remember to practice the same personal safety routines you would in any other public place or at home.

When visitors arrive in the parks, they are often eager to exit their vehicles and enjoy the outdoors whether it's to take their dog for a walk, go for a run, get the kids on the playground, or simply take a peaceful stroll to relax. Understandably, everyone wants to get out of the car and start their activities.

However, this desire to move quickly can cause us to forget basic safety protocol involving our vehicles and their contents. Simple things we regularly do at the mall, the grocery store, or the driveway at home are overlooked. We may forget to roll up a window, fail to lock the car doors, or leave valuables in plain view all because we are focused on enjoying the park.

On occasion, there are bad actors in our parks looking for easy prey. These criminals randomly walk through or monitor parking lots waiting for an easy opportunity to enter your vehicle and steal your possessions.

In both 2020 and 2021 respectively, our Ranger Department investigated six incidents of valuables stolen from unattended parked cars. In 2022, this number increased to 19. In 2023, we have had an additional four incidents of vehicle break ins so far.

Surprisingly, 33 percent of these vehicles were left unlocked, making them easy targets for thieves. Even more surprising, the stolen items were left in plain view 88 percent of the time! A thief can break a car window and make off with your valuables in less than 60 seconds. Within 15 minutes, they can make purchases with your credit cards and/or withdraw funds from an ATM (Yes! Some people leave their ATM passwords on the back of their ATM cards!).

**You can help us reverse this trend by following these simple steps:**

- Roll up car windows and lock doors.
- Keep valuables out of sight.
- Plan ahead and leave valuables at home, including purses/wallets.
- If you decide to place items in your trunk, do so prior to arriving at the park. Thieves know to watch for this activity, and it will motivate them to target your car.
- If you observe suspicious activity in a park, call dispatch at 440-354-3434 or dial 911.

Although vehicle break-ins are concerning, this and other crimes rarely occur in Lake Metroparks. You can be certain your visit to Lake Metroparks will continue to be a safe and enjoyable experience. I look forward to seeing you out in the parks!

**While in the parks, for non-emergency help, contact Ranger Dispatch: 440-354-3434**