



Thanks to voters, regional parks and natural areas are getting healthier and more fun. A 2013 levy allows Metro to restore habitat, add visitor amenities and improve maintenance at sites across the Portland metropolitan area.

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North Tualatin Mountains Frequently Asked Questions

On the northwest edge of Forest Park sit four voter-protected natural areas in the North Tualatin Mountains, totaling 1,300 acres.

Thanks to 20 years of voter investments, Metro has been able to protect water quality, restore fish and wildlife habitat and – soon – provide new opportunities for people to connect with nature. Visitors will soon be able to enjoy hikes through lush forests, rides on trails optimized for off-road cycling, panoramic views of Sauvie Island and more, all while restoration continues.

The [North Tualatin Mountains master plan](#) is the culmination of two years of conversations with the community to craft a vision for the future of these four special places. Metro is proposing official public access and visitor improvements at two of the four sites: Burlington Creek Forest and McCarthy Creek Forest natural areas. There are no planned visitor improvements at Ennis Creek Forest and North Abbey Creek Forest natural areas, except for a provision for the future Pacific Greenway Trail through Ennis.

Throughout the process, Metro heard a variety of questions. Below are the most frequently asked questions, largely around the access project itself and its potential impacts on habitat and wildlife.

Access questions

Why is Metro providing official public access to the North Tualatin Mountains?

Since the voter-funded program began more than 20 years ago, Metro Parks and Nature has aimed to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and provide access to nature close to home.

Thanks to the parks and natural areas levy voters in the region approved in 2013, Metro has the opportunity to provide public access at its four sites in the North Tualatin Mountains. About half of the money from the levy goes toward restoring and maintaining habitat, with the rest of the money for making park improvements, offering nature programs, providing public access to new destinations and more.

The resolution the Metro Council passed that sent the levy to the ballot listed six areas across the region where Metro intended to use levy money to provide access for people to connect with nature. Agency Creek, the former name of Burlington Creek, and McCarthy Creek natural areas were specifically listed as one of the areas:



“Agency Creek/McCarthy Creek
Various parcels near to but outside of Forest Park are currently or could be used by walkers or cyclists to access nature close to Portland. Access to the site is challenging and there may be opportunities to enhance use. Over the past decade the demand for single track mountain biking trails has increased. This project would explore the potential to provide quality cycling and hiking experiences for formal single track cycling and walking trails, and as appropriate, construct the facilities.”

Wasn't this land purchased to protect wildlife and not for human access?

A. Metro's four sites in the North Tualatin Mountains were purchased with money from bond measures that voters in the region approved in 1995 and 2006. Providing public access to the North Tualatin Mountains is consistent with promises made in the 1995 and 2006 bond measures, both of which specifically mentioned preserving land to allow for future opportunities for people to connect with nature.

As reflected in Metro Parks and Nature's mission, the bond measures aimed to protect clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and to provide opportunities for people to access nature. The bond measures also provided money for local cities, counties and park providers for locally significant projects and for Nature in Neighborhoods grants.

[1995 bond measure Voters' Pamphlet statement:](#)

“Approved bonds will preserve local

lands for parks and trails; maintain water quality in rivers and streams; protect salmon, trout, steelhead; provide areas for walking, picnicking and other outdoor recreation.”

“If approved by the voters this measure will allow Metro and local parks providers to acquire and protect regionally significant land for open space, parks, and trails in 14 targeted areas and five corridors.”

“The proposed bond measure would provide funds to acquire and protect some of this land for future public use and enjoyment.”

[2006 bond measure Voters' Pamphlet statement:](#)

“This measure directs Metro to buy and restore natural areas for the protection of water quality and preservation of fish and wildlife habitat for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.”

Why is Metro proposing off-road cycling trails?

A. Metro is recommending off-road cycling trails at the North Tualatin Mountains near Forest Park and Newell Creek Canyon in Oregon City. The two sites would be the first places that Metro provides off-road cycling opportunities and comes after hundreds of cyclists voiced their desire for new trails near Portland.

Metro is recommending trails optimized for off-road cycling to meet the existing and growing demand for this type of nature-based recreation. Not everybody connects with nature through binoculars or hikes, and it's important to provide a variety of opportunities for people to experience nature in different ways.

Protecting clean water and fish and wildlife habitat remain Metro's top priority across its 17,000 acres of voter-protected land. Throughout the planning process for the North Tualatin Mountains, Metro has taken an approach based in science

and shaped by community input that ensures healthy habitats and provides meaningful experiences in nature.

With careful planning, it's possible to create opportunities for people to enjoy nature while also protecting it. Well-designed and constructed trails will limit habitat impacts by minimizing erosion and stream crossings, by providing corridors for wildlife to move, and by leaving the canopy intact, which help wildlife that needs large areas. Exact trail alignments will be laid out on the ground during the future design phase of the project; detailed analysis will be done to ensure that trails avoid the most sensitive habitat areas.

The shared trails will be family-friendly and will be designed for beginning and intermediate riders. Trails will be designed to slow riders down using speed checks, such as short uphill sections, turns and obstacles. The trails will be monitored and maintained in partnership with user groups, such as the Northwest Trail Alliance.

Metro is purposely proposing modest mileage for its first trails optimized for off-road cycling; the intent is to start small to make sure Metro gets it right. The trails will work in within the constraints of each site and will not accommodate a large-scale trail system like Sandy Ridge.

Will equestrian use be allowed?

Equestrian riders will continue to have local access to former logging roads at Burlington and McCarthy that are not being decommissioned. The master plan does not recommend any trails specifically for equestrian use.



Why doesn't Metro allow dogs?

At the core of all of Metro's [voter-approved investments](#) is the region's priority to protect clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and to create opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home.

Dogs and other pets can damage sensitive habitat and threaten wildlife the region has worked hard to protect. Strong scientific data show that animals think of dogs – even the friendliest ones – as predators. Animals don't necessarily think of people as predators, depending on their past experiences.

Animals have a keen sense of sight, smell and hearing. The presence of a dog, even on a leash, [will disrupt their normal behaviors](#) and force many to avoid going near trails. Numerous scientific studies show that in natural areas where dogs are not allowed, people see more wildlife and get closer to it.

People have many options when they want to spend time outdoors with their pets, but very few places they can depend on to protect sensitive habitat and provide a unique experience in nature so close to home. [At Metro destinations](#), visitors get special opportunities to see native Swainson's thrush in the ancient forest at [Oxbow Regional Park](#) along the Sandy River, Western painted turtles bask in the sun at [Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area](#), and mule deer at [Graham Oaks Nature Park](#) in Wilsonville.

These are just some of the native animals that would be significantly affected if dogs were regularly allowed. In particular, birds that nest

on or near the ground would decline in numbers if dogs were allowed.

Although dogs aren't allowed at Metro sites, it's important to invest in parks, trails and natural areas where dogs are allowed, on leash or off. Metro has supported a number of dog-friendly destinations throughout the region with money from the [natural areas bond measures](#) voters approved in 1995 and 2006.

These bond measures designated money – \$44 million in the 2006 bond measure – to local cities, counties and parks providers to acquire land or make improvements. Voter investments have supported dog-friendly destinations such as [Forest Park](#) in Portland, [Cook Park](#) in Tigard, [Hood View Park](#) in Happy Valley and dozens of other sites.

Dogs are allowed on designated regional trails, such as the Ice Age Tonquin Trail at Graham Oaks Nature Park. Service animals are allowed at all Metro destinations.

Habitat questions

How will habitat connectivity be impacted?

The top priority is to protect water quality and preserve core habitat areas 30 acres or larger, including upland forests and streams that wildlife depend on for connections between Forest Park and the Coast Range.

Of the 1,300 acres of Metro's four sites in the North Tualatin Mountains, about 970 acres will be protected as core habitat areas: 350 acres at Ennis, 320 acres at McCarthy, 210 acres at North Abbey and 90 acres at Burlington. There are no planned visitor improvements at Ennis Creek Forest and North Abbey Creek Forest natural areas, except for a provision for the future Pacific Greenway Trail through Ennis.

Metro is applying basic conservation biology principles to protect wildlife and wildlife movements including:

- Protecting large blocks of forest
- Maintaining regional connectivity
- Reducing habitat fragmentation by removing unnecessary roads
- Using old road networks for access when possible
- Maintaining some sites in a low- or no-use state
- Reducing the presence of non-native predators
- Improving habitat quality via active restoration
- Collaborating with other regional experts for guidance on important species like northern red-legged frogs.

Opening sites to public access will have some effect on habitat. To minimize the impact, public access is focused at Burlington and McCarthy. Most of the visitor improvements are focused at Burlington, in part because it has the most existing use as well as habitat fragmented by roads and power lines. Burlington has about 2.5 miles of existing former logging roads and is bordered on a third of its perimeter by U.S. 30.

In addition to protecting three-quarters of the project area for core habitat, restoration will continue on all four sites to improve forest health and water quality. Metro is committed to restoring old-growth habitat, , preserving habitat connectivity, supporting wildlife and protecting clean water.

All of the sites were previously in commercial use, mostly as tree farms. Under Metro's care, even with public access, they will provide much better wildlife habitat than the dense Douglas fir plantations that previously existed or large-lot residential subdivisions, as was previously planned at Burlington.



How will water quality be impacted?

Protecting clean water is an important project priority. Restoration at all four sites will continue to restore streams by removing unnecessary culverts, increasing down wood, and planting more native trees and shrubs in stream corridors. More than three miles of unnecessary roads will be decommissioned.

Public access will be focused away from the most sensitive habitats. For instance, no visitor improvements are planned for North Abbey Creek Natural Area, which has the steepest ravines and houses the headwaters of North Abbey Creek. The creek later flows into the Tualatin River, directly affecting water quality in Washington County's main river.

At Burlington and McCarthy, well-designed and constructed trails will limit stream and habitat impacts by minimizing erosion and stream crossings. Exact trail alignments will be laid out on the ground during the future design phase of the project; detailed analysis will be done to ensure that trails avoid the most sensitive areas.

Wildlife questions

What wildlife studies has Metro conducted at the North Tualatin Mountains?

Metro's approach to conservation is to manage for habitats rather than individual species. Nurturing healthy forests and streams at the North Tualatin Mountains will create diverse habitats for a variety of native animals, such as birds and

northern red-legged frogs, which are listed by the state as a sensitive species under threat.

In coming up with the plan for the North Tualatin Mountains, Metro relied on formal and informal studies of wildlife at the North Tualatin Mountains and similar habitats and has also consulted with other agencies and organizations.

Metro contracted for a bird monitoring study in 2015 and will continue this study for at least two more years. Metro staff has also led terrestrial amphibian monitoring studies at McCarthy in 2012 and North Abbey in 2015 and will conduct terrestrial surveys at Burlington beginning in 2016.

Informal mammal surveys have been conducted by staff, and visitors and neighbors have observed a wide variety of mammals typically associated with upland forest habitat and riparian forests of this area, including elk, black-tailed deer, coyote, bobcats, Douglas squirrels, Townsend chipmunks and mountain beavers.

There is also an extensive body of scientific and academic literature on the habitat in and around Forest Park and especially about second-growth Douglas fir forest habitats, such as those in the North Tualatin Mountains. Metro also received input from regional conservation experts, such as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Urban Greenspaces Institute and the Audubon Society of Portland.

Given the extensive studies that have already been about this type of habitat, it's unlikely that spending tens of thousands of dollars of voter investments on additional studies would produce any significant new information that would affect management decisions.

Metro may implement project-based monitoring to inform ongoing management of access. It's also important to note the limitations of monitoring and inventory

surveys: They only include what was observed during a set time and cannot definitively say a certain species is not present at a site.

How will elk be impacted?

Elk can be found throughout the North Tualatin Mountains, but the area is not a major elk refuge and the herd is not considered regionally significant, according to the state. The North Tualatin Mountains elk herd is part of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Willamette Unit, which is designated as a "de-emphasis area."

However, Metro recognizes that the elk are locally significant to neighbors, and the North Tualatin Mountains master plan takes this into consideration. The earlier preferred alternative recommended included a trail through the northeastern portion of McCarthy that would have offered visitors access to a viewpoint with stunning vistas of the Tualatin River Valley and Coast Range. However, this trail is not included in the draft master plan because elk frequent a meadow in this area.

To account for the loss of this trail, all of the trails at both Burlington and McCarthy are now proposed to be mixed-use trails for hikers and off-road cyclists.

The North Tualatin Mountains elk herd is born and raised around humans and is generally acclimated to people. The elk move within a relatively large area and frequently cross roads, use backyards and farm fields.

Elk use of the North Tualatin Mountains habitat will change as the habitat changes over time. What Metro does or does not do on our properties is not the only future determinant of how elk fare in this area. New home construction, changes in farm or forestry practices by private land owners, or even new fencing can all influence elk behavior.



Metro

Whether you're in the mood for a short hike or a weekend camping trip, a boat ride or a picnic, Metro has a destination for you. You'll share the landscape with salmon swimming in restored streams, birds streaking across the sky and giant old oak trees towering overhead.

Thanks to voters, you can explore 17,000 acres of regional parks, trails and natural areas across the Portland metropolitan region. You also have opportunities to take nature classes and volunteer at these special places.

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Access improvements at McCarthy are not planned to occur until a later date when funds become available. At that time, Metro will re-assess access to the viewpoint in the northeastern portion of McCarthy and its potential impacts on local wildlife, including elk. The trail, if constructed, would provide a unique opportunity for residents throughout the region to share in the experience of elk living so close to urban areas, as well as stellar views of the Tualatin River Valley and the Coast Range.

How will amphibians be impacted?

A. Burlington and Ennis provide important foraging and winter habitat for northern red-legged frogs, which are listed by the state as a sensitive species under threat. Many of the frogs migrate seasonally between the North Tualatin Mountains and breeding habitat on the opposite side of U.S. 30, including the Palensky Wildlife Area, also known as Burlington Bottoms.

Visitor improvements are not proposed for Ennis, except for a provision for the future Pacific Greenway Trail.

Trails at both sites will be designed to minimize stream crossings, employ amphibian friendly crossings where needed, and minimize soil erosion and trail rutting. The sites will be closed at night, which is when seasonal migrations typically occur. Seasonal closures may be implemented. Metro will monitor for amphibian activity on trails.

Continued restoration will improve amphibian habitat, including increasing down wood, boosting the diversity of the understory and maintaining the forest canopy.

In addition to northern red-legged frogs, Metro's four sites in the North Tualatin Mountains are also home to western red-backed salamanders, Pacific giant salamanders, Pacific chorus frogs, rough-skinned newts and *Ensatina* salamanders.