



Metro

Parks and Nature

2015–16 Annual Report



Building on Metro's unique park system – with nature at its heart

Ask anybody in the greater Portland region what makes this place special, and many people will mention nature and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

Metro operates a unique park system, one with nature at its heart. Thanks to two decades of voter investments, Metro manages 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across every community in the region – from Chehalem Ridge on the west to the Sandy River Gorge on the east, from Blue Lake and Smith and Bybee Wetlands on the north to Graham Oaks on the south.

In 2015, Metro celebrated its 25th year as a parks provider. After creating a world-class regional parks and nature system, the natural next step was to develop a long-term strategic plan to guide the future of the treasured regional network.

The Parks and Nature System Plan, approved by the Metro Council in February 2016, lays out Metro's mission and role, the state of the portfolio, trends that will shape this work and a slate of strategies to guide the future. By providing clarity on Metro's direction, the plan is intended to support Metro's partners and strengthen relationships – complementing the broader regional network of parks, trails and natural areas.

Since the plan was approved, Metro has been working to bring it to life, focusing on conserving natural resources, developing and operating welcoming and inclusive parks and incorporating equity across the Parks and Nature portfolio.

The plan also provides strategic direction in investing the money that voters have approved through two regional bond

measures and a levy – more than \$400 million to date – to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and provide people with opportunities to experience nature close to home.

To see the impact of these investments and the opportunities ahead, listen to the stories from people on the ground. Learn more about how your tax dollars were spent from July 2015 to June 2016 to return a former gravel mine to its wild roots, provide opportunities for diverse communities to access nature, make much-needed improvements to popular parks – and much more.

Access to nature

Metro is expanding opportunities to hike, explore, see wildlife and learn about the landscape at voter-protected natural areas. From Newell Creek Canyon to Killin Wetlands, new destinations are taking shape.

Work is also underway to improve parks and facilities that more than 1.3 million visitors a year already enjoy. Projects focus on upgrading aging facilities, improving sustainability, and enhancing safety and security – such as new

boat docks at Chinook Landing, new restrooms and entryway at Blue Lake and a safe, scenic overlook at Canemah Bluff.



Diversity, equity and inclusion

Metro’s park system will be truly successful only if everybody in the community feels welcome in the outdoors and can reap the health rewards and other benefits of nature.

Thanks in particular to money from the 2013 levy, Metro is providing more nature programming to underrepresented communities, planning more inclusive parks, working to support more minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses – and more.

In the first year of the levy, a new effort called Partners in Nature piloted projects with several groups to co-create relevant programming tailored to each community. These programs provided guided opportunities for diverse community members to enjoy the outdoors, introduced young people to potential careers in conservation, and nurtured a growing comfort and passion for nature. Partners in Nature continues to grow, with several new partnerships kicking off during 2015 and 2016.

Another initiative called Connect to Nature is contracting with Verde, a community-based organization, to develop a new approach to designing parks that are welcoming to diverse communities. It’s getting a tryout starting in 2016 as Metro and the City of Gresham launch an effort to plan for public access at Gabbert Butte.



Partnership with Centro Cultural helps shape Chehalem Ridge, connect Latinos with nature

On Chehalem Ridge, high above Gaston, nine people stand in tall grass. Their eyes are closed, palms raised and fingers outspread. Each time they hear a sound, they fold one finger down. After 10 sounds they open their eyes and gaze at the blue hills in the distance.

Finally, their tour guide, Juan Carlos Gonzalez, breaks the silence. “What did you hear?”

Three different kinds of bird. The wind through the grass. Someone cracking their knuckles.

Gonzalez is development director at Centro Cultural de Washington County, an education, social services and economic development nonprofit that is helping Metro bring the Latino community into the planning process

for a future nature park at Chehalem Ridge, a 1,200-acre site 15 minutes south of Forest Grove. In summer and fall 2016, Centro leaders are offering bilingual tours of the site and leading other outreach efforts with the Latino community.

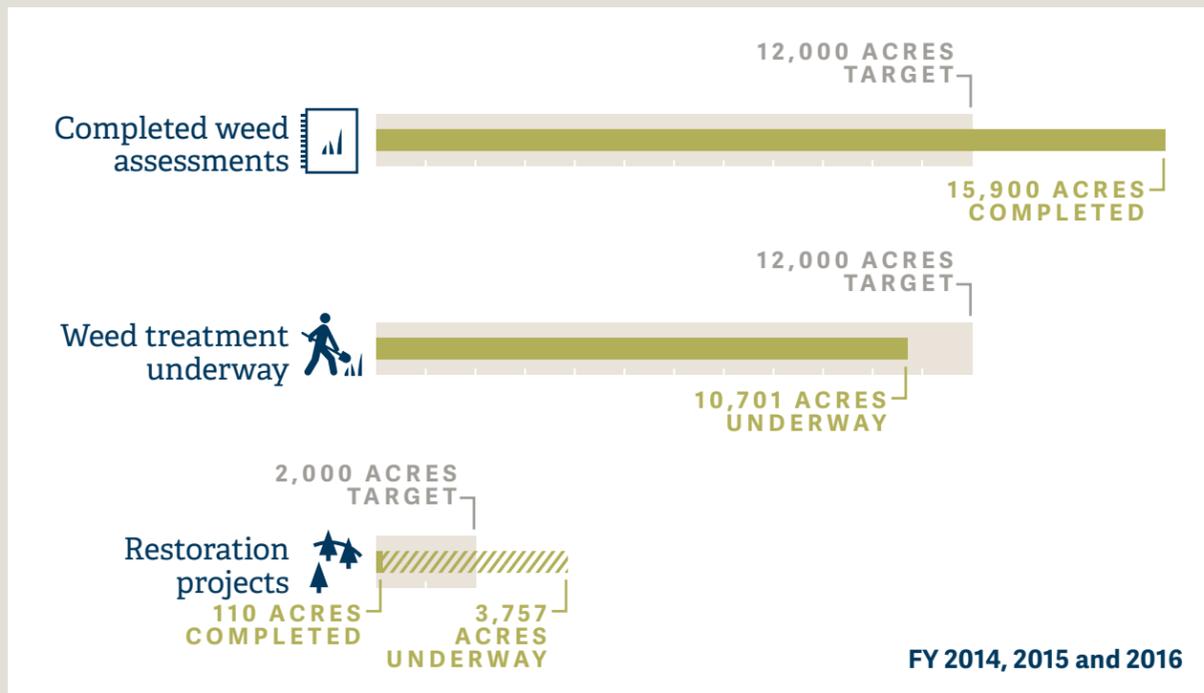
The work with Centro Cultural is just one of a number of collaborations through Partners in Nature, Metro’s program with culturally specific organizations throughout the region to better connect diverse communities with nature. The partnership will help make Chehalem Ridge more welcoming to the region’s increasingly diverse residents. At the same time, it will help Centro Cultural build capacity and allow staff to gain experience and expertise in engaging the community.

Restoration and maintenance

At the core of Metro's parks and nature mission is protecting water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

About half of the money from the 2013 levy is dedicated to protecting water quality and habitat, including controlling invasive weeds, boosting native plants and animals, and improving habitat for fish and wildlife.

After Metro acquires a property, a stabilization plan is drawn up as the first step of the restoration process. Invasive weeds start getting treated. After stabilization, a site conservation plan is developed to restore a site to its natural state. Restoration work can take years to complete, after which a site transitions to long-term maintenance.



River Island restoration helps the Clackamas River heal

Four great blue herons interrupted the stillness of a blazing summer afternoon on the Clackamas River, their giant wings flapping gracefully off into the horizon. A whitetail dragonfly flitted about, dancing and weaving through waist-high grasses.

The scene seemed straight out of a nature documentary, except for two hints suggesting otherwise. The dry, cracked riverbed on one side hearkened to a former life of the river, a life abruptly ended. On the other side of the river, a little ways upstream, came the faint mechanical noises of two excavators, hard at work building a new future for this area.

Decades of gravel mining and devastating floodwaters in 1996 changed the course of the Clackamas River and left their mark on River Island, a 240-acre natural area just upstream from Barton Park. Metro acquired the main part of the site in 1999 and added to it over the years with money from Metro's two voter-approved bond measures. In summer 2015, work began on a two-year, large-scale restoration effort that will return River Island to a more natural, healthier state and help improve water quality in a river that provides drinking water to nearly 400,000 people.

In summer 2015, restoration work on the south side of the river included removing concrete and asphalt from the riverbank, creating

essential habitat for fish and decommissioning two sections of gravel roads close to the water.

Work continued throughout the winter with the planting of native trees and shrubs. In summer 2016, crews began to restore the natural area on the north side of the river.

"This restoration project will not only benefit fish and wildlife, but also people," said Brian Vaughn, a senior natural resources scientist at Metro who is leading the River Island restoration project. "Fish need logs and boulders and places to hide to get away from predators and to find food and shelter. The river is also a scenic corridor, and rafters and boaters who use this section of the river will see an improved shoreline and healthy riparian forest."

River Island also includes significant open water ponds, oak savanna and upland forest habitat that support Western painted turtles, bald eagles, deer, and a variety of birds and wildlife.

Over the years, crews treated invasive weeds and stabilized the site. Metro's voter-approved bond and levy, along with grant funding, have made it possible to pursue a large-scale restoration project.

The project is possible thanks to partnerships with the Clackamas River Basin Council, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, Portland General Electric and others.



Nature education and volunteering

There's more to parks and nature than just native plants and wildlife – it's the people who make truly special, memorable places. Providing meaningful experiences for people of all races, ages and abilities to connect with nature is critical to nurture the next generation of conservation leaders.

Thanks to money from voter investments, expanded nature education programming has provided groups and individuals more opportunities to learn from Metro naturalists, including school field trips, free guided nature walks, survival skills classes and other activities.

Volunteering also helps people build connections with the nature around them.



Graham Oaks provides habitat for pollinators – and students

Early on a spring morning, first-grade students filed out from Boones Ferry Primary School for a field trip to the park they visit monthly. But for these students, it doesn't take a bus to get there – Graham Oaks Nature Park is located right next to their school.

Because the school and nature park are so close, Metro and the West Linn-Wilsonville School District have partnered to use Graham Oaks as an educational environment for the students, where they can explore and participate in service learning projects regularly.

"We've been doing stuff throughout the year," said Bonnie Shoffner, volunteer coordinator for Metro. "At our last monthly field trip, they planted native shrubs in a hedgerow for pollinators."

On this visit, the students, teachers and parent-helpers gave those pollinators houses.

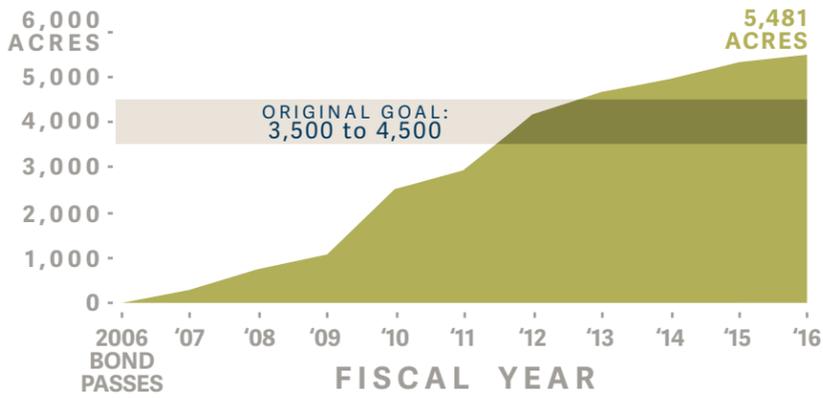
"Mason bees typically would be in hollow stems of bushes and trees," Shoffner said. "But because they need a little help, people put wooden boxes out with holes in them."

As the kids got into groups, the adults nailed the boards and boxes to snags near the hedgerow. The students also learned about the life cycle of plants and sang a song to remember the parts of insects.

Rachael Romanouk, 7, has high hopes for the bees. "They might be cute! I love cute things," she said. Rachael was also pleased to hear that mason bees rarely sting.

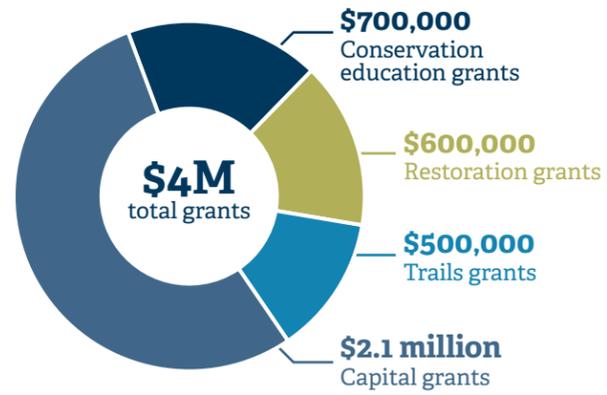
Graham Oaks provides an excellent learning opportunity for the students, who benefit from participating in restoration projects at the park, said Bob Carlson, director of the West Linn-Wilsonville School District's Center for Research in Environmental Sciences and Technologies – which is next to the park.

"The school district really appreciates the partnership and sees it as a really valuable thing," Carlson said.



Land acquisition with 2006 bond measure (CUMULATIVE)

The biggest portion of the 2006 bond measure earmarked \$168 million for land acquisition from willing sellers. More than 5,400 acres have been acquired and protected – significantly surpassing the original goal. Thanks to voters, Metro has been able to conserve some of the last swathes of native prairies, wetlands and other valuable habitat – home to rare plants and endangered or threatened fish and wildlife. Other properties fill key gaps in regional trails, providing connections for commuters, bicyclists and joggers.



Nature in Neighborhoods grants FY 2016

Direct community investments, such as Nature in Neighborhoods grants, are one of the most popular and important parts of the Parks and Nature portfolio. Through the 2006 bond measure and the 2013 levy, four types of grants gave a collective \$4 million boost to innovative projects across the region this year. Partners are restoring salmon habitat, protecting land, improving parks, connecting diverse communities with nature and much more. In 2016, trail grants were awarded for the first time.

Promises made, promises kept

Metro's system of parks, trails and natural areas is the demonstration of a quarter century of commitment, action and investment by the region.

Two decades of voter investments have protected 17,000 acres. These are the places where endangered fish and wildlife are able to thrive, where family outings happen, where memories are made.

Spending from the 2006 natural areas bond measure is winding down, though money remains to acquire and protect more land and support locally significant projects.

The last two years of the 2013 levy will build upon the successes in the first three years. More sites will be restored to their wilder, natural roots. New parks will open while existing ones will see more upgrades. And there will be more opportunities for people to experience nature.

More work remains. Stay tuned for next year's annual report to track improvements in parks and nature throughout the region.



Metro Council at Blue Lake Regional Park's nature play area, from left: Councilors Bob Stacey, Kathryn Harrington, Carlotta Collette, Shirley Craddick, Craig Dirksen and Sam Chase and Metro Council President Tom Hughes

Parks and Nature spending* FY 2016

	General fund	2013 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$1,947,065	\$3,720,019	\$3,528,194	\$9,195,278
Access to nature	\$1,058	\$1,135,448	\$266,778	\$1,403,284
Park improvements and operations	\$6,378,634	\$2,636,722	\$0	\$9,015,356
Cemeteries	\$801,431	\$0	\$0	\$801,431
Conservation education and volunteer programs	\$110,255	\$297,582	\$0	\$407,837
Community investments	\$60,410	\$1,288,103	\$1,773,619	\$3,122,132
Land acquisition/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$6,879,450	\$6,879,450
Administration**	\$810,749	\$4,445,036	\$3,885,965	\$9,141,750
Total	\$10,109,602	\$13,522,910	\$16,334,006	\$39,966,518

* Unaudited
** Administration spending includes expenses for department administration and support services, such as the Office of the Metro Attorney, the Data Resource Center and Communications.

2013 Parks and natural areas levy

Promised to voters



Actual levy spending THROUGH JUNE 2016



Improving public access to natural areas

Regional park operations

Nature in Neighborhoods grants

Restoring natural areas for wildlife, fish and water quality

Conservation education and volunteers