



Metro

2016–17 Annual Report

Parks and Nature



Levy renewal provides boost for Metro's unique park system

In November 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved a five-year renewal of Metro's parks and natural areas levy, providing stable funding through 2023.

The renewal by 74 percent of voters provides a boost for Metro's unique park system, one with nature at its heart. Thanks to more than two decades of voter investments, Metro manages 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across every community in the region.

Extending levy funding will allow Metro to continue to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature close to home.

Just like the original 2013 levy, about half of the money from the levy renewal will go toward restoring and maintaining natural areas to improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. About 20 to 30 percent will go toward regional parks operations. The rest will go toward improving parks and natural

areas for people, grants for community nature projects, and nature education and volunteer programs.

Levy money will also be aimed at diversifying the contractors that Metro hires, as well as improving programs and facilities for underserved communities such as communities of color, low-income communities and young people.

The levy renewal is another chapter in the growth of the region's parks and natural areas system, which started to take shape in 1992 with the Metropolitan Greenspaces Plan. The plan paved the way for the 1995 and 2006 natural areas bond measures, which allowed Metro to acquire some of the region's rare and special habitat areas, provide money for capital grants and support local parks providers.

Money from the 2006 bond measure is winding down, though the renewal of the levy will buy Metro time to secure funding for the program's long-term future.

Metro's future work will be guided by the Parks and Nature System Plan, a long-term strategic plan to guide the future of the regional network that the Metro Council approved in February 2016.

The system plan 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. The plan also provides strategic direction in investing the money that voters have approved – a long-term commitment that now totals more than \$480 million to date.

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 2016 to June 2017 to plant more than a million native trees and shrubs, provide opportunities for diverse communities to access nature, offer grants to support community nature projects – and much more.

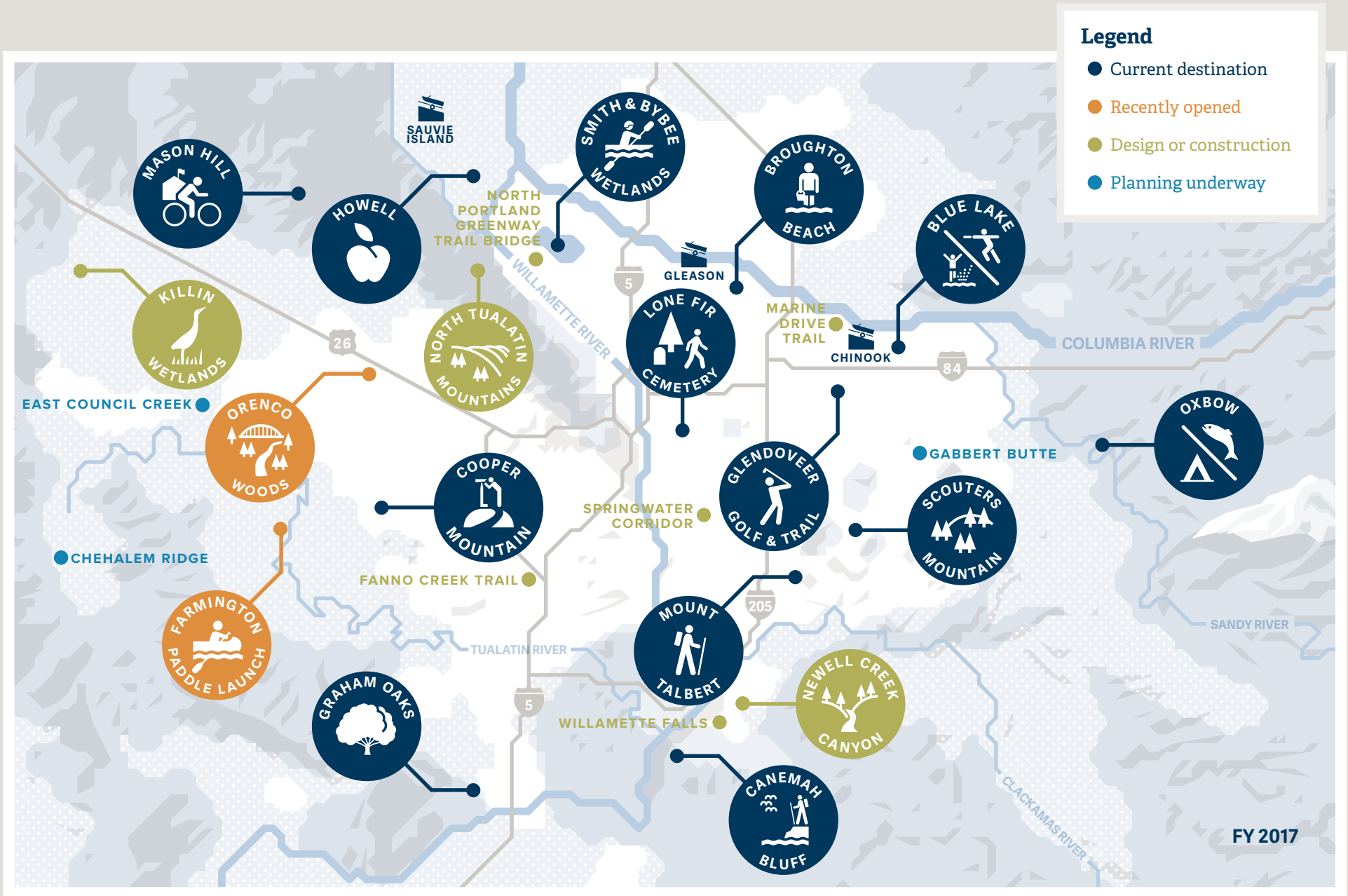
Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at
oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2017

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 1.6 million visitors a year already enjoy. Projects focus on upgrading aging facilities, improving sustainability, and enhancing safety and security – such as

a new dock at Sauvie Island Boat Ramp and improvements for new camp sites in the works at Oxbow Regional Park.



Diversity, equity and inclusion

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

Partners in Nature projects collaborate with organizations that serve specific cultural groups to co-create programs relevant to each community. These programs provide guided

opportunities for community members to enjoy the outdoors, introduce young people to potential careers in conservation and nurture a growing interest in nature. Metro is now working with more than a dozen culturally specific organizations through Partners in Nature collaborations.

Another initiative called Connect with Nature is contracting with Verde, a community-based organization, to develop a new approach to

designing parks that are welcoming to diverse communities. The information gathered from Connect with Nature participants is being used to plan for visitor amenities at East Council Creek Natural Area in Cornelius and Gabbert Butte Natural Area in Gresham.



Muwafaq Alkattan: discovering nature and finding home

When Muwafaq Alkattan arrived in Oregon from Iraq five years ago with his wife, Lubna, and their four grown daughters, they had to learn not just a new city but a new culture, new pretty much everything.

Alkattan didn't have to learn or translate nature. Metro's Cooper Mountain Nature Park near Beaverton quickly became a respite, a place he didn't have to strive to understand but could just enjoy. Now, four years later, he's brought many fellow Iraqis to parks across the greater Portland region, helping them connect to nature, discover a favorite place and make this more of a home.

"Nature is part of my life," he says.

The Alkattan family fled Iraq during the war and applied for refuge in the United States. In 2012, the Alkattans settled in Tualatin.

Alkattan quickly connected with the newly formed Iraqi Society of Oregon and became a

board member. Not long after, he participated in leadership development programs at Unite Oregon, a nonprofit based in Portland that advocates for multicultural social justice issues. That led to an internship with Metro.

The internship was through a Partners in Nature collaboration between Metro and Unite Oregon that's now in its fourth year. He began photographing Metro's parks, showing the trails, views, picnic and play areas. He shared the photos on the Iraqi Society of Oregon's Facebook page in Arabic so that others in the community could know about and enjoy the parks. Then he organized outings, taking fellow Iraqis to parks across the region, introducing them to special places in their new home they might not have connected to without him.

Now, Alkattan is working on a new internship to design a system to catalogue park amenities across Metro's system.

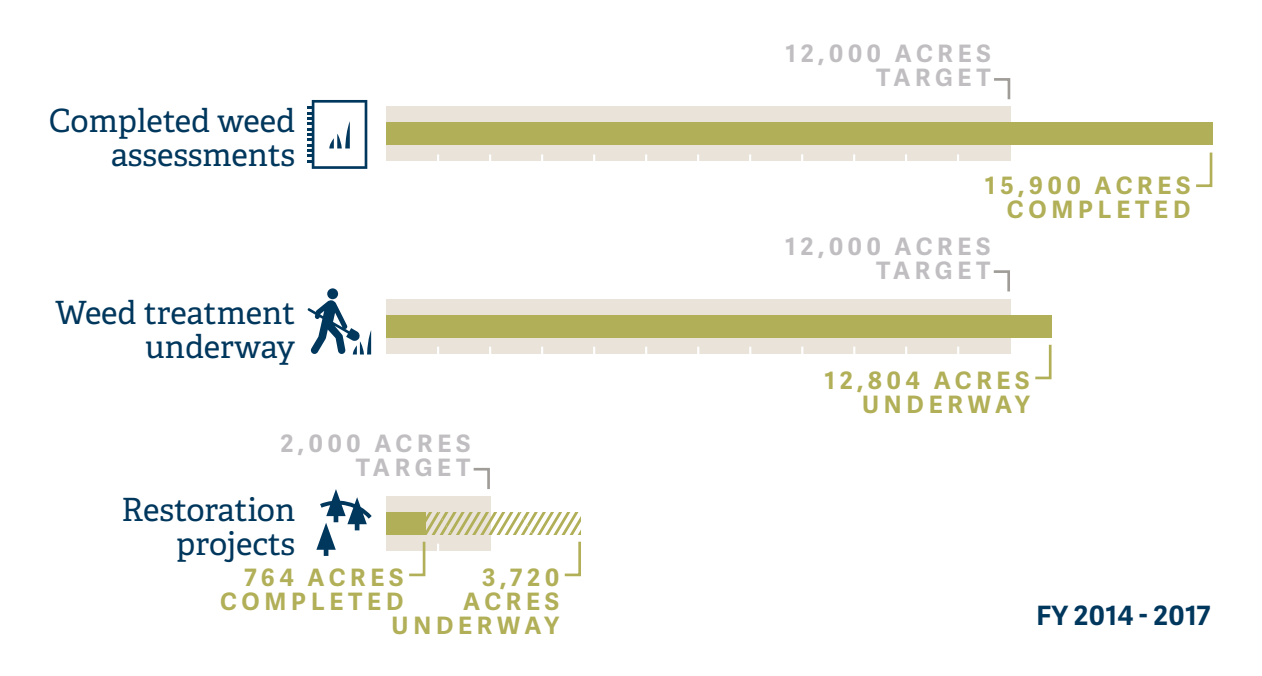
Restoration and maintenance

Protecting clean water and restoring fish and wildlife habitat are at the core of the Metro Parks and Nature mission.

Nearly half of the money from the 2013 levy is dedicated to protecting water quality and habitat. Restoration and maintenance work includes controlling invasive weeds, planting native trees and shrubs, removing unnecessary culverts and roads, maintaining existing roads and infrastructure, decommissioning unauthorized trails, improving connections between streams and wetlands, and improving habitat for fish and wildlife.

After Metro acquires a property, a plan is drawn up as the first step of the restoration process. Invasive weeds start getting treated. Sometimes, dilapidated buildings, septic systems and other manmade structures are removed. This initial work is paid for with money from the 2006 natural areas bond measure.

Restoration takes different forms across forests, rivers, wetlands, prairies and oak savanna and other habitats. Restoration work can take years or even decades to complete, after which a site transitions to long-term maintenance.



Native seeds, plants help restore habitat

The Big Prairie at Cooper Mountain Nature Park offers sweeping views over the Tualatin River Valley. But on a sun-scorched summer morning, Adrienne Basey, botanist and science assistant at Metro’s Native Plant Center, focuses on the earth at her feet.

She walks through tall grass searching for *Sanicula bipinnatifida*, better known as purple sanicle, a native plant in the carrot family. It’s gone to seed, so she can’t look for its flower.

“It’s fun when your eye picks up the pattern and you see things that were invisible a moment ago,” she says. Soon, she bends to a twiggy plant almost indistinguishable from the brown stalks around it.

“Yes!” she says. She’s there at the right time. The seed is ripe and ready to collect.

In fall 2016, 3,500 pounds of native seeds were sown at Metro properties. In the winter,

approximately 1,025,000 plants, live stakes and bulbs went into the ground at parks and natural areas across greater Portland. Collecting wild seed by hand is the first step in restoring oak woodlands, upland prairies, wetlands and other threatened ecosystems that are being preserved at Metro sites throughout the region.

Next, Basey heads to the pond to meet Julie Hawkins, a volunteer in Metro’s Seed Scout program. Hawkins has been trained to identify wildflowers by their seedheads and carries a GPS tracker and paper bags filled with seeds of native larkspur, iris and geranium. She has volunteered to collect seeds for six years, usually at Graham Oaks Nature Park in Wilsonville near her home.

On Hawkins’ last visit, she tied small mesh bags over the seed capsules of Tolmie’s cat’s ears. Since then, the pods have burst open and flung their dark brown seeds – but only so far as the mesh.

At the end of the morning, Basey takes the gathered seeds to Metro’s Native Plant Center in Tualatin, where they will be dried, cleaned, then planted and grown out to make more seeds.

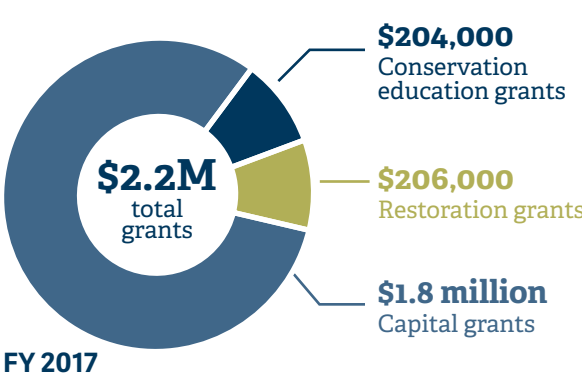
The Native Plant Center focuses on collecting seeds that are not commercially available. Some seeds come from habitats where rare and specialized plants flourish, such as the spring gold or Cascade penstemon that grow on the basalt bluffs at Metro’s Willamette Narrows south of West Linn. Others, like the seeds in the mesh bags, come from plants such as Tolmie’s cat’s ears that are rare in the metro area because development has severely reduced their habitat.

“I get really excited about seeds,” says Marsha Holt-Kingsley, the coordinator of the center. “Finding rare species, then making more – to do that conservation work feels good.”



Community investments

Each year, Parks and Nature provides millions of dollars in grants and local share money to go toward local community nature projects. Over the last 25 years, the public – through Metro – has invested more than \$90 million to support a broad range of community nature projects across the greater Portland region, helping to acquire land, restore habitat, build visitor amenities and more. Over the past year, Metro awarded the last rounds of grants available through the 2006 bond measure and 2013 levy. Nature in Neighborhoods grants will be offered again starting in 2018, when funding from the renewed levy becomes available.



Future nature stewards explore Columbia Slough

On a cool spring morning, 24 students from George Middle School stepped off a school bus in Kelley Point Park at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers. The seventh graders were only a few miles away from their North Portland school, but some didn’t know this park existed.

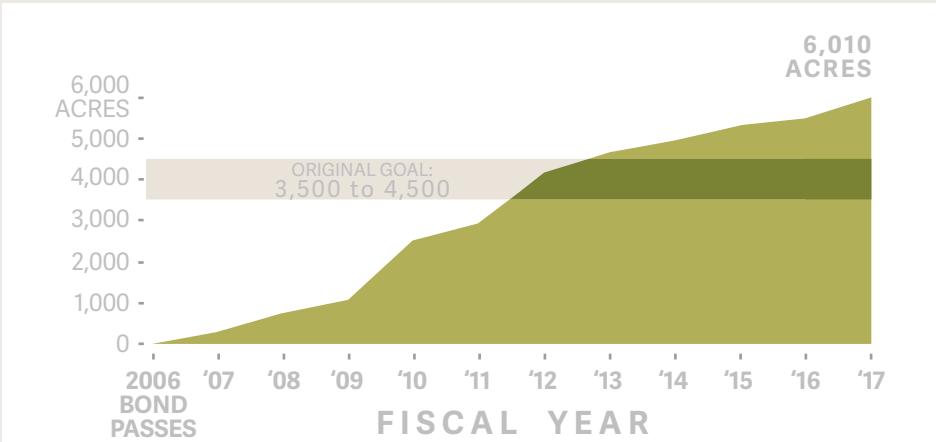
The students had come to paddle the last stretch of the 19-mile Columbia Slough before it spills into the Willamette. Their field trip was sponsored by the Columbia Slough Watershed Council’s Slough School and funded in part by a Nature in Neighborhoods grant from Metro. It would be the first time on water for many of these young students, even though they’d just built a rowboat in their science classroom.

As the tandem canoes launched, the noise of industry gave way to the sounds of birds and the splashing of paddles. Some spotted geese in the cloudy sky, and a lucky few caught a glimpse of a blue heron. “Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream,” one boatload of students sang as the four rowing crews settled into competition and teamwork.

The journey was a highlight of a multi-year focus at George introducing students to North Portland’s abundant but often overlooked natural environment. Educational activities, paid for in part with Metro grants, also extend to students in other schools within the Columbia Slough watershed.

“We want to give them an opportunity to form relationships with natural areas,” said Jennifer Starkey, the Columbia Slough Watershed Council’s education director.





Land acquisition with 2006 bond
(CUMULATIVE)

The biggest portion of the 2006 bond measure earmarked \$168 million for land acquisition from willing sellers. More than 6,000 acres have been acquired and protected – significantly surpassing the original goal. Thanks to voters, Metro has been able to conserve some of the last swatches 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 education
FY 2017



6,479

Youth participants in conservation education programs



6,155

Total hours Youth Ecology Corps
A job training program for low-income youths

Volunteers
FY 2017



35

Sites where volunteers worked
Target = 33 sites



12,325

Total volunteer hours at parks and natural areas

Promises made, promises kept

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

None of this would be possible without voter support for two natural areas bond measures and two parks and natural areas levies.

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 final year of funding from the 2013 levy is scheduled to expire in June 2018, with money from the levy renewal kicking in the next month. Continued funding from the levy renewal will build upon the successes in the first levy. More sites will be restored to provide healthy habitat. Future nature parks planned for in the first few years of the levy will soon open to visitors. And popular parks will continue to see improvements with new facilities and more programming.

The work continues. Stay tuned for next year’s annual report to track how your tax dollars are spent to improve parks and nature.



Metro Council at Blue Lake Regional Park, 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 2017

	General fund	2013 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$2,469,446	\$3,180,086	\$0	\$5,649,532
Access to nature	\$587,444	\$1,468,365	\$6,307,813	\$8,363,622
Park improvements and operations	\$5,321,726	\$784,213	\$0	\$6,105,939
Cemeteries	\$757,091	\$0	\$0	\$757,091
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$117,730	\$661,794	\$0	\$779,524
Community investments	\$59,074	\$1,824,762	\$3,662,481	\$5,546,317
Land acquisition/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$9,007,667	\$9,007,667
Administration**	\$1,980,160	\$4,942,823	\$3,878,438	\$10,801,421
Total	\$11,292,671	\$12,862,043	\$22,856,399	\$47,011,113

* 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 2017



Improving public access to natural areas Regional park operations Nature in Neighborhoods grants Restoring natural areas for wildlife, fish and water quality Nature education and volunteers