



# PARKS & NATURE SYSTEM PLAN

WINTER 2016



## Nature makes this place feel like home

**N**o matter where you stand in the greater Portland area, nature is never far. With 17,000 acres, Metro manages parks 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 Broughton Beach on the north to Graham Oaks on the south.

This portfolio of land represents both a big opportunity and a big responsibility. Voters have trusted Metro to wisely spend the money they've invested through two regional bond measures and a levy – more than \$400 million – to protect and care for these special places, while also creating opportunities for people to enjoy them.

In 2015, Metro celebrated its 25th year as a parks provider. This milestone comes at a time of tremendous growth, with new destinations, programs and partnerships taking root. A strong plan is needed to guide future decision-making and investments, building a world-class Parks and Nature system that will serve the region's residents for another quarter century and beyond.

Metro's flourishing network of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and cemeteries supports the agency's broader mission: making a great place. As Metro invests in livable communities, connections with nature are as critical as homes, jobs and transportation. A successful Parks and Nature system protects water quality and vanishing wildlife habitat. It increases housing values and attracts employers to the region, providing welcome access to the great outdoors for people who live in urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Perhaps most importantly, Oregonians' sense of place is rooted in the forests, rivers and meadows that Metro protects. Nature makes this place feel like home.

The Parks and Nature System Plan lays out Metro's mission and role, the state of the portfolio today, 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, natural areas and trails. This plan also provides a framework for future decisions about the funding needed to sustain Metro's portfolio of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and cemeteries.

Metro's vision will succeed only if it benefits diverse communities across our region. Too often, parks and nature investments have focused on people who are already engaged, and already have access to the outdoors. Woven throughout the Parks and Nature System Plan, Metro makes commitments to doing a better job serving people of color and low-income communities. Making a difference will take resources, planning, collaboration, careful listening – and time.

The parks and system plan will play out on the ground in many tangible ways, from prioritizing restoration efforts to helping shape the look and feel of future destinations. Ultimately it elevates Metro's stunning landscapes, popular destinations and fun programs to more than individual successes, tying them together as part of a world-class Parks and Nature system.

# MISSION

## Metro's Parks and Nature mission

**"It is our assertion that if we are to have parks and open space areas in the future, we need to reposition our planning and funding priorities now to reflect the importance of greenspaces in our urban fabric. The protection, acquisition and active stewardship of greenspaces must become just as important as planning highways, transit, water and sewer lines, and other basic services."**

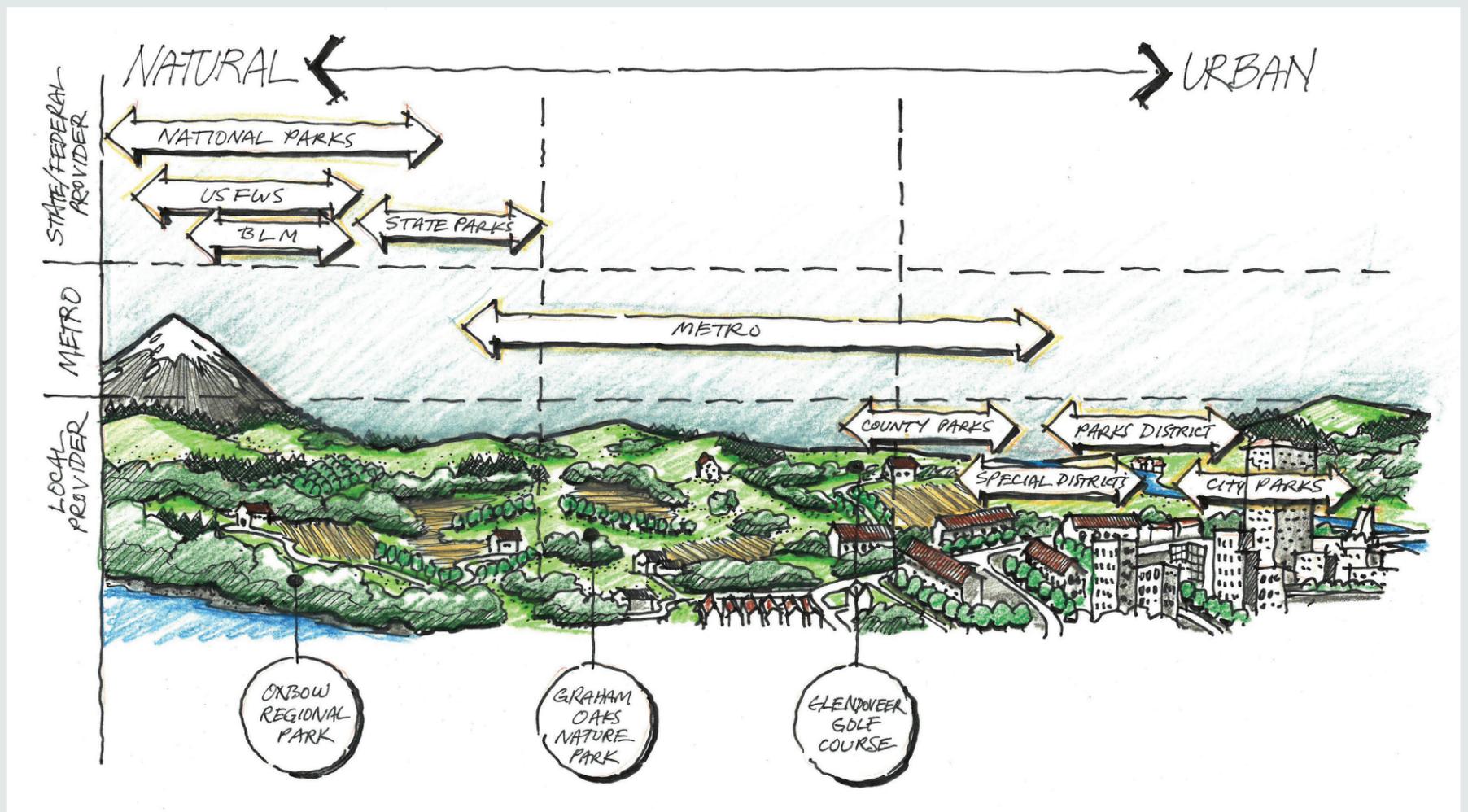
METROPOLITAN GREENSPACES  
MASTER PLAN, 1992

This call to action in the 1992 Greenspaces Master Plan helped spur remarkable investment in the greater Portland region's parks and natural areas over the last two decades. It also started Metro's transformation into one of the largest land managers in the region. Metro's mission as a provider of parks and natural areas has been shaped by two bond measures, the 2013 local option levy and regional planning efforts such as

the Regional Conservation Strategy for the greater Portland area.

### METRO MISSION STATEMENT

Metro Parks and Nature protects water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and creates opportunities to enjoy nature close to home through a connected system of parks, trails and natural areas.



## Metro's role in the region

More than 20 years of policy, voter investment and community support have established Metro as a provider of parks, trails and natural areas. The system plan clarifies Metro's role, particularly its niche relative to other park providers. Metro's work is built on partnerships with local governments, which are strongest when parks systems complement – rather than compete with – one another.

When you arrive at a Metro destination, you'll have a front-row view of some of the most spectacular habitat in the greater Portland area. Across its portfolio Metro leads science-based restoration, provides nature education and volunteer programs, invests in community nature projects

and plays a key role in convening local, regional, state and federal partners to plan and develop parks, natural areas and regional trails.

It is just as important to be clear about what Metro *doesn't* provide. In general, Metro does not operate local and neighborhood parks, sports complexes, indoor or developed swimming facilities or indoor recreation centers.

The greater Portland region has a strong network of local park providers and an excellent system of protected state and federal land. However, Metro is one of just a few agencies focusing on large-scale conservation of natural areas close to home in an urban setting. Metro can acquire and

provide access to large sites that typically are beyond the reach of local jurisdictions, but closer to population centers than those managed by state and federal providers. Metro's resources also provide unique support to regional partners through grants and partnerships.

While growing in its role as a major park provider, Metro remains a committed leader in advancing regional initiatives to protect, restore and connect people with nature. Metro will continue to take a collaborative approach, working with The Intertwine Alliance, local park providers, community-based organizations and other partners.

# NATUREHOODS

## Metro's Parks and Nature portfolio: a collection of 'naturehoods'

In the greater Portland region, nature creates a backdrop for family photographs, weekend walks, computer screensavers, tourist guidebooks and national news coverage – in other words, it's a big part of who we are. Metro's Parks and Nature properties reflect the region's unique natural environment, from the ancient forest at Oxbow Regional Park to the languid flow of the Tualatin River beside a future boat launch, from wetlands in North Portland to towering oak trees along the curves of the Willamette Narrows in West Linn.

To organize its Parks and Nature portfolio, Metro has defined 11 "naturehoods" named for their unique geographic and ecological identities. For example, in the Tonquin Naturehood, large boulders and scoured ponds tell the tale of historic floods that ripped through the area – and set the backdrop for today's Graham Oaks Nature Park and Ice Age Tonquin Trail. In the Clackamas River Naturehood, the namesake gives life to nearby Christmas tree farms, as well as native turtles, salmon and other wildlife. Each naturehood provides a new way of thinking about where you live, just as meaningful as your neighborhood or the Pacific Northwest.

Within each naturehood, Metro manages a variety of properties along the spectrum from popular destinations to sensitive habitat where humans rarely set foot. However, up to this point, Metro has not established definitive criteria for classifying its inventory. The way sites were named has evolved over time, starting with the transfer of Multnomah County properties such as Blue Lake Regional Park, Chinook Landing Marine Park and Howell Territorial Park. Through the 1995 and 2006 bond measures, properties acquired for habitat protection typically were assigned as natural areas with a few key sites selected for development as nature parks.

After 25 years of exponential growth, Metro's Parks and Nature portfolio needs a classification system to help focus planning, development and management. The new system outlined in the system plan describes the primary characteristics and values of each type of place, from regional recreation areas to habitat preserves. Using this system as a guide, Metro can ensure consistency across the region when planning for natural resource protection, park development, amenities and programming.



### FIND YOUR NATUREHOOD

Read the full system plan to discover – or rediscover – voter-protected land in your part of the greater Portland region.

- Clackamas River
- Columbia River and Willamette Lowlands
- Dairy, McKay and Rock creeks
- East Buttes and Johnson Creek
- Greater Willamette Narrows
- Lower-Tualatin
- Mid-Tualatin
- Sandy River
- Tonquin
- Tualatin Mountains
- Upper Tualatin



# ON THE GROUND

## Putting the system plan on the ground

As the greater Portland region continues to grow, Metro's Parks and Nature Department will play a critical role in protecting the natural environment and serving the people who treasure it.

The system plan outlines strategies that provide a roadmap for improving on successful places and programs, developing new and innovative approaches, and strengthening relationships with partners. Each strategy lays out not only what Metro Parks and Nature will do, but also how. What does success look like? And what are the most important actions to get started?

Six mission-critical strategies come first, because they are the highest priorities for advancing Metro's Parks and Nature work on behalf of the region.

Some mission-critical strategies are threaded through many program areas, while others describe distinct efforts. The common thread: Each mission-critical strategy is deeply embedded in Metro's Parks and Nature mission. These strategies deserve extra resources and scrutiny.

### MISSION-CRITICAL STRATEGIES

- ▶ Use science to guide Metro's Parks and Nature portfolio.
- ▶ Ensure that Metro Parks and Nature programs and facilities support the needs of underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income communities and young people.
- ▶ Develop a stable, long-term funding source to support Metro's Parks and Nature portfolio.

- ▶ Ensure that parks, trails, natural areas and cemeteries managed by Metro are knit together into an integrated system.
- ▶ Diversify the businesses and people who do contracted work for Metro Parks and Nature.
- ▶ Build, sustain and leverage partnerships to advance the region's shared commitment to an interconnected system of parks, trails and natural areas.

**The remaining strategies - which represent a large, important body of work - are organized by five broad categories that guide Metro's portfolio going forward.**

- ▶ Protect and Conserve Nature
- ▶ Create and Maintain Great Places
- ▶ Connect People to Nature
- ▶ Support Community Aspirations
- ▶ Convene, Plan and Build a Regional Trail System



The system plan is a natural evolution and a critical step in Metro's 25-year journey as a parks provider. It is a major milestone, and it represents the beginning of a new phase.

Strategies and actions in the system plan set out an ambitious work program. Focusing on conservation science, securing long-term funding, developing and operating welcoming and inclusive parks and incorporating equity across the Parks and Nature portfolio are key to the long-term success of the program. Just as Metro did not get to this point without the help of a diverse group of partners, the body of work laid out in the system plan cannot be completed without the continued partnership of the local governments, residents and community organizations that supported the creation of the system.

## A brighter, wilder future

From preserving farmland to brewing beer, Oregonians do a world-class job at the things we love - and protecting nature towers near the top of that list.

Over the last quarter-century, voters have supported investments to build a regional park system that spans 17,000 acres and touches every community in the greater Portland area. Metro is proud to serve as steward of the forests, savannas, wetlands and riverbanks that make this region unique.

Our landscape creates a stunning place to call home, and a lot of opportunities to explore. By protecting nature, we keep our air and water clean. We secure the future of native fish, wildlife and plants. We make our communities more resilient, and more fun. We attract businesses and tourists who seek out a beautiful, healthy, playful destination.

After 25 years of investment, Metro owes it to Oregonians to make the most of the land they've protected. Very few metropolitan areas have the opportunity before us: leveraging our natural setting to create a brighter, wilder future. That's why we're crafting a Parks and Nature System Plan to guide the next generation of decisions and investments.

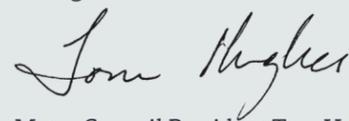
A plan can be a powerful tool. We've seen proof in the 1992 Greenspaces Master Plan, which charted a vision and galvanized support to bring it to life. Back then, our natural setting was a palette waiting to be protected. Today, that plan has translated to a big portfolio of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and historic cemeteries. What we need is an overarching strategy to protect, care for and connect people with these special places.

While laying out Metro's mission, role and priorities, the system plan also promises to make

sure that nature benefits our whole community. Sparkling water, soaring birds and family picnics belong to every Oregonian - including people of color and low-income residents, who have often been left behind by public investments. It is Metro's responsibility, and our honor, to build an equitable Parks and Nature system.

We have all the right ingredients: A landscape worth protecting. People who love it. A track record of innovation and investment. And, now, a plan to guide our efforts over the next 25 years and beyond.

Let's get started.



Metro Council President Tom Hughes

### Metro Council President

Tom Hughes

### Metro Councilors

Shirley Craddick, District 1  
Carlotta Collette, District 2  
Craig Dirksen, District 3  
Kathryn Harrington, District 4

### Auditor

Brian Evans

Thanks to voters, Metro Parks and Nature protects clean water, healthy wildlife habitat and opportunities to connect with nature on 17,000 acres across the greater Portland region. Explore news, photos and events at [oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturenews](http://oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturenews)