



Metro

2017–18 Annual Report

# Parks and Nature



## Continued investments protect clean water, healthy habitat, connect people to nature close to home

More than 1,000 people move to greater Portland every month. As the region grows, so too does the need to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature close to home.

Over the past quarter century, voters have passed two bond measures that allowed Metro to create a unique regional park system with nature at its heart – and two levies to care for it. Today, Metro cares for more than 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas.

June 2018 marked the end of funding from the original parks and natural areas levy voters approved in 2013. Thanks to voters who approved a levy renewal, funding has been extended to June 2023.

The levy renewal supports restoration work, such as tackling invasive weeds and restoring habitat for endangered wildlife. It supports nature education classes, volunteer opportunities and other activities – many developed with community partners. It also

supports park improvements and operations – the people and places that welcome more than 1.6 million visitors each year to hike forest trails, play on riverside beaches and enjoy lakeside picnics.

The levy complements the 2006 natural areas bond measure, which is winding down after a dozen years. The need, however, continues. Metro is starting to explore the possibility of referring a third bond measure to voters, perhaps in 2019, that could support continued investments in protecting land, improving parks and natural areas and supporting community projects.

Future work will continue to be guided by the Parks and Nature System Plan, a long-term strategic plan and framework for the future of the regional network.

It will also be guided by Metro Parks and Nature Department's Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. People of color, low-income residents and other historically marginalized groups continue to face

barriers to accessing nature. The action plan comprises more than 80 actions – some multi-year, department-wide undertakings, others short-term, discrete tasks – that work toward Metro's racial equity goals. The actions drive to three desired outcomes: economic equity, environmental equity and cultural equity.

As Metro crafts a potential bond measure, input from community members and partners will be crucial in helping ensure the benefits of clean water, healthy habitat and access to nature can be enjoyed by all of the region's residents.

To see the impacts of current investments and the opportunities ahead, listen to the stories on the ground. Learn more about how your tax dollars were spent from July 2017 to June 2018 to plan for new parks, protect sensitive land, provide for nature classes and events – and much more.

Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at [oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2018](https://oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2018)

# Diversity, equity and inclusion

Communities of color, low-income residents and other historically marginalized groups have faced barriers to accessing parks and nature and enjoying the benefits of clean water and healthy habitats. Thanks in part to voter investments, Metro is working to rectify historic inequities and making a concerted push to create safe and welcoming spaces for all community members.

In 2016, the Metro Council adopted the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The plan established that “Metro will concentrate on eliminating the disparities that people of color experience, especially in those areas related to Metro’s policies, programs, services and destinations.”

Over the past year, the Parks and Nature Department created its Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The actions support three goals: economic equity, environmental equity and cultural equity.

One initiative now underway 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.

The department is also working to develop and implement a transition plan that would bring parks into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.



## Metro, Centro Cultural partnership shapes Chehalem Ridge Nature Park

Construction could start in 2020 on Chehalem Ridge Nature Park. The 1,230-acre future park, 15 minutes south of Forest Grove, will provide visitors with opportunities to enjoy picnics, take in views from the Coast Range to the Cascade Mountains, and hike, bike and ride horses on about nine miles of trails.

The Metro Council in October 2017 unanimously approved the master plan that will guide visitor amenities.

Metro and Centro Cultural partnered during the community engagement phase to ensure the plan incorporates the needs of the fast-growing Latino community in Washington County. For instance, people of color and Spanish-speaking people said that activities for families, youths and people with disabilities were particularly important.

Metro and Centro Cultural co-hosted Spanish-language events, translated materials and hosted outreach booths at cultural events.

Metro staff also trained Centro Cultural staff and volunteers to lead public tours of Chehalem Ridge in English and Spanish.

“Most importantly, we’re able to advance the way communities of color engage with nature,” said Juan Carlos González, the development director of Centro Cultural, who will be joining the Metro Council in January. “This partnership has fostered a way for communities of color to really authentically engage with the planning process.”

The partnership with Metro provided a lot of value for the Centro Cultural community, said Maria Caballero-Rubio, the executive director.

“For me, the highlight has been that we’ve been able to engage our entire staff in going out and becoming engaged and learning about Metro,” she said. “We’ve claimed this park. It belongs to us. We have a lot of pride, and we’ve internalized that.”

# Access to nature

Metro is expanding opportunities to hike, explore, see wildlife and learn about the landscape at voter-protected destinations. Killin Wetlands Nature Park opened in September 2018, and places like Newell Creek Canyon are taking shape, too.

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 the installation of security cameras and a new

HVAC system at Blue Lake and replacing a pumpout and dump station at popular M. James Gleason Memorial Boat Ramp.



FY 2018

## Restoration and maintenance

Protecting clean water and restoring fish and wildlife habitat are at the core of Metro's parks and nature mission.

Nearly half of the money from the levies 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 management 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 the forests, rivers, wetlands, prairies, oak savannas and other habitats. It can often take years or decades to restore a site, after which it transitions to maintenance.



## Oxbow restoration, improvements benefit people, wildlife

Big changes are taking shape at Oxbow Regional Park. Improvements at the beloved park include a new welcome center, a pair of nature-based play areas, 17 more campsites and continued efforts to restore salmon habitat in the Sandy River.

"We'll be able to provide visitors with a memorable and unique experience and understanding of the natural world at Oxbow," said park operations manager Monty Woods, whose team welcomed about 195,000 visitors to Oxbow last year.

The projects cost about \$3.2 million combined. Funding comes from grants, the 2006 natural areas bond measure and the 2013 parks and natural areas levy.

The new welcome center, scheduled to open in fall 2018, will serve as a gateway to the park. It will house interpretative displays and materials about the park and provide office space for staff. The 2,600-square-foot center will take the place of the small, 1960s ranger station, which has been demolished.

"It'll be one-stop shopping for information," Woods said. "People can feel confident and understand the lay of the land before they head in."

The number of campsites has expanded from 67 to 84. New sites, which opened before Memorial Day weekend, were built on a new access road. The area was reconfigured to create a more

streamlined entry to relieve congestion near the day-use and boat launch area.

The two new children's nature play areas – a sand and water area and an adventure camp area – include features that tell the story of Oxbow. Construction is expected to be completed by spring 2019.

Metro is intentionally making sure the amenities can be enjoyed by kids who use wheelchairs and cochlear implants and those on the autism spectrum, said Mary Rose Navarro, a Metro grants coordinator.

"I hope they'll feel really immersed in their play and that it will spark curiosity in the natural world and inspire them to continue to explore," she said.

Last summer, Metro and the Portland Water Bureau worked on separate but related restoration projects along the banks of the Sandy River. The work is part of a multi-year project to improve water quality and restore habitat for native fish.

Two side channels and an alcove were restored to create deep, slow-moving pools for fish. Hundreds of logs and boulders were placed in the water to provide resting and hiding spots. The restored channels provide cold water in the summer, when warmer temperatures in the main river become lethal for fish. In fall 2018 and winter 2019, crews will plant native trees, shrubs and grasses.

## Community investments

Each year, Metro provides millions of dollars in grants and local share money to support local community nature projects. Over the last 25 years, more than \$90 million has been invested across greater Portland to acquire land, restore habitat, build visitor amenities and more. All of the grants available through the 2006 bond measure and 2013 levy were awarded prior to 2017-18. Using money from the levy renewal that started in July 2018, the Metro Council last summer awarded \$800,000 to 14 nature education and outdoor experiences programs.



## Grant to Depave transforms parking lot at M&M Marketplace into greener, urban plaza

It's hard to find a parking spot at Hillsboro's M&M Marketplace on a Sunday afternoon as a constant stream of cars rolls past the bright blue warehouse. Colorful portraits of the artist Frida Kahlo gaze down at cars gliding past a new patio of permeable pavers, where women make pupusas and a man turns pollo asado on a large grill.

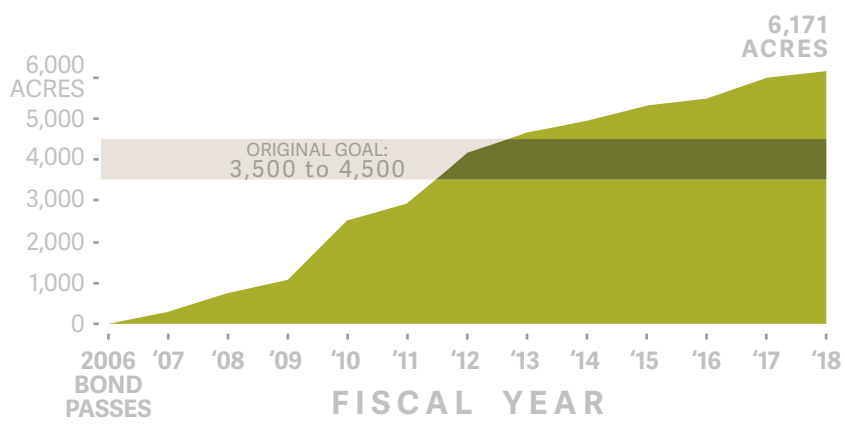
At the market's main entrance, founder Jaime Miranda points at rain gardens along the front of the building planted with native red osier dogwood, rushes, sedges and shrubs. "It used to be a swamp right here," he explains. "Some winters, water would flood right into the building. Now these islands absorb the water."

Local nonprofit Depave installed the rain gardens as part of a project to transform the busy parking lot into a greener, urban plaza. The work was largely paid for by a \$30,000 Metro Nature in Neighborhoods grant in 2016.

Miranda, who was born in Mexico and moved to Oregon as a child, opened the business with his sister in 2000. The two wanted to give people an opportunity to start small businesses without onerous leases and huge overhead costs. They rented a former industrial warehouse and opened the weekend market with a dozen vendors.

Now, more than 70 vendors sell food, goods and services from densely packed stalls. Customers can get clothes altered or made, photographs taken, or jewelry, watches and computers repaired. Occasional dance, wrestling or mariachi performances and regular events connect customers to information and services, including a health fair. "It's not just a business, it's a community hub," says Eric Rosewall, former executive director of Depave.

Retrofitting the parking lot involved excavating asphalt and building rain gardens to mitigate flooding and to filter pollutants from stormwater. Volunteers laid a patio of permeable pavers, planted street trees around the perimeter, installed a pergola over an outside seating area and added an extra entrance to the lot to improve traffic flow. Artists were also commissioned to add to the existing murals.



### 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 swaths of native prairies, wetlands and other valuable habitat – home to rare plants and endangered or threatened fish and wildlife. Other properties fill gaps in regional trails, providing key connections for commuters, bicyclists and joggers.

### Nature education FY 2018

**6,568**  
Youth participants in nature education programs

**22**  
Sites where nature education programs took place

### Volunteers FY 2018

**12,088**  
Total volunteer hours at parks and natural areas

**48**  
Sites where volunteers worked  
Target = 33 sites

## Promises made, promises kept

Metro's system of parks, trails, natural areas and historic cemeteries is the result of more than a quarter century of commitment, action and investment by the region. It exists because of voter support for two bond measures and two levies.

Spending from the 2006 natural areas bond measure is winding down, though some money remains to protect more land and support locally significant projects. Conversations are underway now about the possibility of continued investments to protect land, improve parks and natural areas and support community projects.

The final year of funding from the original levy expired in June 2018, and money from the levy renewal kicked in the following month. Continued funding builds upon the successes from the first levy. More sites will be restored to provide healthy habitat. New nature parks will welcome visitors. Popular parks will continue to see improvements 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, from left: Councilors Bob Stacey, Sam Chase, Shirley Craddick, Metro Council President Tom Hughes, Councilors Kathryn Harrington, Betty Dominguez and Craig Dirksen

### Parks and Nature spending\* FY 2018

	General fund	2013 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$2,529,369	\$4,049,997	\$0	\$6,579,366
Access to nature	\$551,595	\$2,517,002	\$725,397	\$3,793,994
Park improvements and operations	\$5,364,506	\$2,517,002	\$0	\$6,464,683
Cemeteries	\$779,263	\$0	\$0	\$779,263
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$279,652	\$909,075	\$0	\$1,188,727
Community investments	\$58,863	\$1,316,097	\$3,959,994	\$5,334,954
Land acquisition/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$5,637,390	\$5,637,390
Administration**	\$2,330,505	\$4,771,162	\$3,665,743	\$10,767,410
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,893,753</b>	<b>\$14,663,510</b>	<b>\$13,988,524</b>	<b>\$40,545,787</b>

\* 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 2018



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