



CONNECT WITH NATURE

Planning parks and nature with communities of color

Resource guide and recommendations
June 2019



Metro

oregonmetro.gov/parks



Executive summary

From the wild forests of Chehalem Ridge to salmon spawning grounds in Oxbow Park, Metro provides a regional network of parks and natural areas for recreation, beauty, connection and wildlife habitat. Time in nature connects people to themselves, their community and the natural world. As our communities become more urban, a little bit of green goes a long way.

Yet, not everyone benefits from parks and natural areas in our region. Some neighborhoods suffer from limited access to nearby open space or lack easy connections to nature. Some communities do not realize where nature parks or natural areas exist and what they offer, or they don't feel safe or welcome there. Data indicate that people of color are the most impacted and have the least amount of familiarity, access and connection to the region's green spaces.

Connect with Nature is a partnership between community members and Metro to transform the way Metro engages with people of color when planning, building and operating parks, and to learn how parks and natural areas could better serve people of color in the region.



Connect with Nature seeks to increase benefits of parks and natural areas for people of color, and remove barriers for participation in park planning and decision making.

As part of a three-year planning process for two new nature parks— East Council Creek in Cornelius and Gabbert Butte in Gresham— Connect with Nature explored how parks and natural areas could better meet the needs of communities of color. Through a series of community workshops, Connect with Nature asked people of color about their values and experiences with nature, parks and the outdoors. Connect with Nature workshops explored how to make parks and natural areas more welcoming and relevant for participants' communities, and how to incorporate these ideas into the new nature parks at Gabbert Butte and East Council Creek as well as inform future planning. New, more equitable practices were implemented that can be replicated agency-wide.

Equitable participation in government is critical to effectively serve all people. Connect with Nature highlights the importance of setting up a process whereby the community can lead and succeed, allocating sufficient resources for authentic community leadership, and changing policies that disproportionately exclude people of color. Connect with Nature created space for community leaders to set the agendas, guide the conversations while also reducing barriers for people of color to engage with the project as workshop participants, community liaisons, consultants and collaborators.

The lessons learned through Connect with Nature are documented in this report. This guide is intended to be a resource for staff, leadership and elected officials, other park providers, community organizations and advocates to more effectively work together in parks and natural area planning, design and operations.



Many of the lessons learned and processes developed through Connect with Nature are now broadly informing Metro's work.

The Connect with Nature resource guide summarizes what we heard from people of color who participated in the project. It is not intended to generalize about people of color's needs and preferences.

The summary includes specific feedback about values, park and natural area infrastructure, park programs and day-to-day park operations. Participants' insight shed light on what park providers can do to help make people of color feel safe and welcome in parks from clean facilities, to rangers and staff who look like the people they serve and visible, clear, multilingual signs at park entrances.

The intent of this guide is to share what we heard from community members and summarize themes that emerged in order to inform and inspire richer and more meaningful future collaboration. Reading this report is no substitute for directly engaging with communities of color. Real, earnest, thoughtful and time-intensive work of true community engagement and listening is required. When agencies engage with communities of color respectfully—providing time, space and resources for community leadership and authentic influence over outcomes—the results reflect community values, identities and needs.

The Connect with Nature resource guide serves as a tool to advance the regional conversation about how to ensure people of color fully benefit from investments in the region's open spaces, so that the region's parks and natural areas can truly benefit everyone in the region.

What we heard

The following values consistently emerged in the Connect with Nature workshops and offer a starting place for new or continued conversations about natural areas, nature and parks in the region.

- Nature
- Family, community and cultural connection
- Access to parks and natural areas
- Safe and welcoming places
- Access to usable and relevant information
- Meaningfully contributing to parks and natural areas