



Metro

2018–19 Annual Report

Parks and Nature



Continued investments strengthen unique parks and nature system in greater Portland

When greater Portland voters first approved a natural areas bond measure in 1995, they helped put into action a vision of clean water, restored fish and wildlife habitat and opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home. Voters sent a clear message that parks and natural areas, just like housing and transportation, are an integral part of healthy, livable communities.

Today, Metro manages more than 17,000 acres of parks, trails, natural areas and historic cemeteries as part of a unique system with nature at its heart. This is possible thanks to voter support for the 1995 and 2006 bond measures and two subsequent levies to help care for the land. Funding from the second levy kicked in July 2018.

November 2019 marked another milestone, with voters approving a \$475 million bond measure to support land purchase and restoration, Metro park improvements, Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants, local parks

and nature projects, walking and biking trails and complex community projects.

While continuing to build on past investments, projects supported with bond money will include an emphasis on advancing racial equity, deepening community engagement and reducing the impacts of climate change.

“We are grateful for the support of voters throughout the region who recognize the value of these investments in our water quality, parks and open space, and the opportunity we have to improve equity and access for all the people of our region,” Metro Council President Lynn Peterson said on election night after results showed the bond had passed.

The work is guided by the Parks and Nature System Plan, a long-term strategic plan and framework, and the Parks and Nature Department’s Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The action plan, completed in late 2018, comprises more than

80 actions aimed at improving economic, environmental and cultural equity.

With the passing of the 2019 bond measure, the work is just starting. Parks and nature staff will spend late 2019 and early 2020 to connect with community members and develop a work plan to implement the bond measure.

“The work that we do is important for now and future generations,” Jonathan Blasher, parks and nature director, said after the election. “We will take good care of the voters’ dollars, and we’ll do everything we can to keep their trust now and in the future.”

The impacts of current investments can be seen on the ground, with cleaner water, healthier habitats and new opportunities to enjoy parks and nature, like the popular new nature play areas at Oxbow Regional Park.

Learn more about how your tax dollars were spent from July 2018 to June 2019 and stay tuned for more.

Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at
oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2019

Improving, planning access to nature

New parks provide more opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home, including Killin Wetlands Nature Park, which opened in September 2018. Projects begin with reviewing the scientific and cultural resources at a site and mapping areas compatible with access and areas where sensitive habitat and cultural resources would be unsuitable for development. Extensive conversations with

community members, partners and others ensure that access improvements provide the nature experiences and visitor amenities the community wants. After a thoughtful planning process, the Metro Council needs to approve a formal “master plan” before design, engineering and construction drawings can be completed. Land-use permits and funding must be secured before construction begins.



Children of varying abilities are now able to enjoy two nature play areas at Oxbow that opened in May 2019. One features climbing structures and water and sand play stations. The other is a kids “adventure camp” with a nature lab and small camp kitchen. Planners worked with FACT Oregon, an organization that provides resources and support to families experiencing disabilities.

New welcome center, nature play areas greet Oxbow visitors

Visitors to Oxbow Regional Park can’t miss the new welcome center at the park entrance that opened in January 2019. It’s a hub for visitors to find maps and general information, and the center’s educational elements are designed to spark curiosity about nature.

Children can follow 11 sets of wildlife tracks imprinted in the ground to discover the animal

that made them, a floor-to-ceiling engraved metal panel with hidden animals, a display of seasonal plant and wildlife cards and more. The 2,600-square-foot modernist timber frame building also houses staff offices, public restrooms, a locker room and a multipurpose room. Money for the new building came from voter-approved levies and revenue generated from prior salmon festivals at Oxbow.

Because of parent insight, play area designers were better able to accommodate how children could transfer from wheelchairs to play equipment. They planned accessible paths from parking areas, designed fencing around the play areas and chose building materials that won’t interfere with the use of cochlear implants. The two nature play areas cost \$565,000. About \$375,000 came from the levies, with additional money from a federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant.



Direct investments in local communities in the form of Nature in Neighborhoods grants continue to be one of the most popular programs. Summer 2018 marked the first round of grants awarded from the levy renewal, and the Metro Council awarded 14 nature education and outdoor experiences grants totaling \$800,000 to support ecology education, scholarships for nature-focused bike camps, urban

forestry job training programs and more. The Center for Diversity & the Environment received a \$60,000 grant for its Environment 2042 Emerging Leaders program, which identifies and develops people ages 18 to 25 to help build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environmental movement in greater Portland. The grants emphasize building cultural, environmental and economic equity.

A focus on equity

In fall 2018, Metro released the Parks and Nature Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The plan brings together Metro's work to protect clean air and water and connect people to nature with its commitments to improve racial equity in the region.

The document sets down dozens of specific actions Metro will undertake over the next five years to increase racial equity, diversity and inclusion in its parks and nature work.

For Metro, achieving racial equity in greater Portland means that race would no longer be a reliable way to predict a person's life outcomes on measurements like education level, health or wealth, which are currently very closely related to race. In the process of creating racial equity, every group and community in greater Portland would see its well-being improve.

"It's important work that we have to take on individually and collectively," said Jonathan Blasher, director of Metro's Parks and Nature Department. "What gets me excited

is seeing the small successes people have... People see that this isn't some big magical or mystical work. It's about treating people with respect and integrity and acknowledging historic wrongs."

This means making sure that people of color feel welcome and safe when they visit Metro destinations. It means creating job training and mentoring for people of color so that the department's workforce looks like the people it serves, which isn't true now. It means that Indigenous people, both those with close historical ties to the region and those with tribal roots in other parts of the country, will have meaningful and easier access to cultural resources on properties that Metro protects and manages, all of which are land ceded by regional tribes in the early years of colonization. It means contracting with more minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses.

Through these and other efforts, Metro is working to ensure that more people of color will gain the benefits of parks and natural areas.



Connect with Nature: As part of planning for the future East Council Creek and Gabbert Butte nature parks, Metro tried a different approach in an effort to encourage the participation of new and culturally diverse voices. Staff played a supporting role, giving control to community partners and empowering members from African-American, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and immigrant and refugee communities to sit in the planner's seat, help facilitate community

conversations, and guide the park design process and outcomes. For many, the series of workshops were a long overdue opportunity for people of color to take a more active role in the parks planning process and a chance for their ideas, critiques and aspirations to be heard. The lessons learned as part of the Connect with Nature initiative are now being turned into a resource guide for other park providers to use when they create a new public park space.



Restoration and maintenance

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

Restoration and maintenance work includes controlling invasive weeds, planting native trees and shrubs, removing unnecessary or harmful culverts and roads, maintaining existing roads and infrastructure, decommissioning unauthorized trails, improving connections between streams and wetlands, and improving habitat for fish and wildlife.

The first levy provided money to complete weed assessments across Metro's entire portfolio, and crews treated weeds across the vast majority of parks and natural areas. That important work continues.

After Metro acquires a property, a stabilization plan is drawn up, invasive weeds start getting treated, and dilapidated buildings, septic systems and other structures are removed. This initial work is paid for with money from the 2006 natural areas bond measure.

After a site is stable, a site conservation plan is developed to identify the most important actions to improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. A site stewardship plan is also developed to detail weed treatments and maintenance of fence lines, signage and more. Restoration work can take years or even decades to complete, after which a site transitions to long-term maintenance.

Metro last year participated in nine regional conservation partnerships, such as efforts to protect oak prairies. In the Clackamas River Basin, an initiative now in its third year coordinates efforts between federal, state, regional, and local partners and private landowners in managing invasive species and preventing the introduction or spread of new species.

The Clackamas River Invasive Species Partnership, or CRISP, grew out of conversations between the nonprofit Clackamas River Basin Council, the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District and Metro in late 2015 and now includes 13 public and nonprofit partners. The partnership brings everyone together to identify and prioritize the weed infestations that pose the greatest threat to the watershed and focus limited resources where they would be most effective.

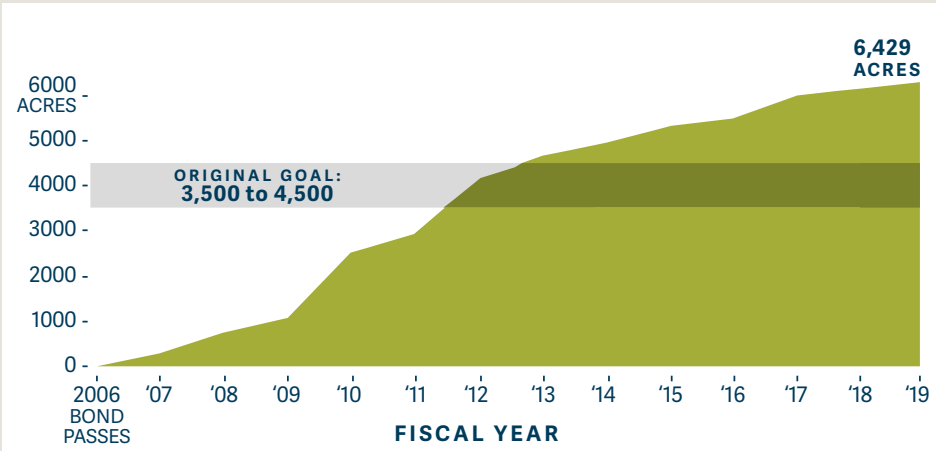
By the numbers

81 projects to restore habitat and protect clean water

1,500 acres of completed restoration work

48 planting projects

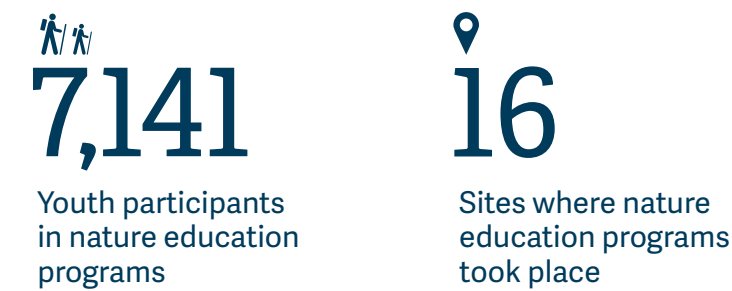
79 weed treatment projects



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 gaps in regional trails, providing key connections for commuters, bicyclists and joggers.

Nature education
FY 2019



Volunteers
FY 2019



Promises made,
promises kept

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

Spending from the 2006 natural areas bond measure is winding down, and voters in November 2019 approved a new \$475 million bond measure to continue investments to protect land, improve parks and natural areas, support community projects and more.

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 from the levy renewal builds upon the successes in the first levy. More sites are being restored to provide healthy habitat. New nature parks are welcoming visitors. And popular parks 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.



Parks and Nature spending*
FY 2019

	General fund	2018 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$2,564,761	\$4,386,330	\$0	\$6,951,091
Access to nature	\$663,216	\$563,742	\$1,349,230	\$2,576,188
Park improvements and operations	\$5,727,651	\$3,604,233	\$0	\$9,331,884
Cemeteries	\$892,200	\$0	\$0	\$892,200
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$265,384	\$787,870	\$0	\$1,053,254
Community investments	\$61,054	\$1,052,454	\$912,748	\$2,026,256
Land acquisition/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$6,090,342	\$6,090,342
Administration**	\$4,136,642	\$4,672,456	\$4,013,635	\$12,822,733
Total	\$14,310,908	\$15,067,085	\$12,365,955	\$41,743,948

* 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.

2018 parks and natural areas levy

Promised to voters



Actual levy spending
THROUGH JUNE 2019



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