



Metro

2019–20 Annual Report

Parks and Nature



Continued investments strengthen unique parks and nature system in greater Portland

Now more than ever, communities in greater Portland count on parks, trails and natural areas as an integral part of healthy, livable neighborhoods. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has kept people from traveling, gathering in large groups or spending time together indoors, and parks and natural areas close to home provide much-needed spaces to relax and connect. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro parks and natural areas have remained open with additional health and safety measures.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the work continues. Parks and nature staff are using virtual tools to connect with community members and develop a work plan to implement the \$475 million bond measure voters passed in November 2019 to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide access to nature for communities across the region.

The bond measure supports 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. These projects include an emphasis on advancing racial equity and increasing climate resilience.

Metro will work with community members, partner organizations, local park providers and others to develop a strategy for bond implementation that reflects the bond principles and criteria and achieves regional goals for protecting habitat, climate resilience, access to nature, racial equity and community engagement.

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. These actions focus on connecting communities of color to resources; providing more equitable access to safe, welcoming parks, trails and natural areas; and helping people of color connect with nature and one another in the region's parks and nature system.

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. It's possible thanks to voter support for the 1995, 2006 and 2019 bond measures and two levies to help care for the land. Funding from the second levy kicked in July 2018.

The impacts of current investments can be seen on the ground, with cleaner water, healthier habitats and new opportunities to enjoy parks and nature.

Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at
oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2020

More access to nature

New parks provide more opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home. In the past year, construction began at two future nature parks: Chehalem Ridge in western Washington County and Newell Creek Canyon in Oregon City. Both are scheduled to open

in 2021. In July 2019, the Metro Council also approved the master plan for Gabbert Butte, a partnership with the City of Gresham to create visitor amenities and add trails to the future nature park.



Chehalem Ridge



Restoring and maintaining natural areas

Diversifying the region's restoration workforce has grown increasingly important in recent years as Metro and other organizations in greater Portland invest more in businesses owned by people of color, women and veterans and emerging small businesses. With the latest round of restoration contracts, the Parks and Nature Equity Advisory Committee worked with experts to make the contracts process more accessible to these business owners. The latest contracts process included in-

person interviews with potential contractors so people could talk more freely rather than relying on the traditional request-for-proposals process that emphasizes writing skills. More experienced contractors, like longtime contractor Rosario Franco, were paired with newer, emerging small businesses to provide mentorship. Franco's crew, pictured here, planted 175,000 native plants last winter at Multnomah Channel Marsh Natural Area near Sauvie Island.

Habitat restoration

FY 2020



89

Habitat and water improvement projects

2,835

Acres with restoration projects underway

Plantings and weed control

FY 2020



40

Planting projects

79

Weed treatments



Education and volunteering

Many people deepen their connection to nature by enjoying a nature education class or participating in a volunteer opportunity. These types of experiences provide guided introductions, group camaraderie and opportunities to learn something new about plants, wildlife, or history in the region’s parks, trails, natural areas and historic cemeteries.

During the COVID-19 crisis, many of these experiences are still available virtually or from

a safe distance. Nature educators have created a suite of activities, including nature education videos and activities that can be done at home or in a local park.

The levy pays for expanded nature education programming, such as virtual field trips, seasonal activity guides and self-guided twilight walks. Volunteers help to restore natural areas, removing invasive weeds, planting native trees and shrubs, picking up litter, cleaning headstones at historic cemeteries and more.

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. This year, with sustained protests against the violence and racism facing people of color occurring in the greater Portland area and throughout the country, the work to create safe and welcoming destinations is even more urgent.

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.

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 and cultural ties to the region and those with tribal roots in other parts of the country, will have more meaningful and easier access to cultural resources on properties that Metro protects and manages, all of which are on land ceded by regional tribes in the early years of colonization. It means contracting with more certified minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses.

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



Celebrate together: On a field at Blue Lake Regional Park in fall 2019, the Asian Immigration and Refugee Youth Council hosted its first Asian Autumn Festival to mark two celebrations: Moon Festival, a mid-autumn tradition across much of eastern Asia, and Diwali, a Hindu festival. Although the holidays have their own customs, Youth Programs Coordinator Dan Le says both

have the common theme of light — candles for Diwali and lanterns for Moon Festival — and symbolize different perspectives.

Metro sponsored the community-led activity with its Community Partnerships program.

Investing in community

Community investments support a variety of projects: restoration, nature education, outdoor experiences, land acquisition, capital improvements and visitor amenities to name a few. Altogether over the last 25 years, the public – through Metro – has invested nearly \$100 million to support a broad range of community nature projects across the region, helping to preserve land, restore habitat, expand access and more.

In July 2019, Metro Council awarded 15 grants totaling \$800,000 for projects designed to increase racial equity and climate resilience in greater Portland by connecting people of color to nature.

The review committee included local experts in nature education, outdoor experiences, cultural programs, racial equity and related fields. The committee rewarded proposals that leveraged thoughtful, authentic partnerships and collaboration between organizations. Each awarded program has between two and 12 partners, with most bringing together five or six schools, governments, community organizations and conservation nonprofits.

Nature education

FY 2020


3,096

Youth participants in nature education programs


14

Sites where nature ducation programs took place

Volunteers

FY 2020


5,703

Total volunteer hours at parks and natural areas


30

Sites where volunteers worked

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 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 and support community projects. Work continues to further develop and implement the six program areas in the 2019 bond measure.

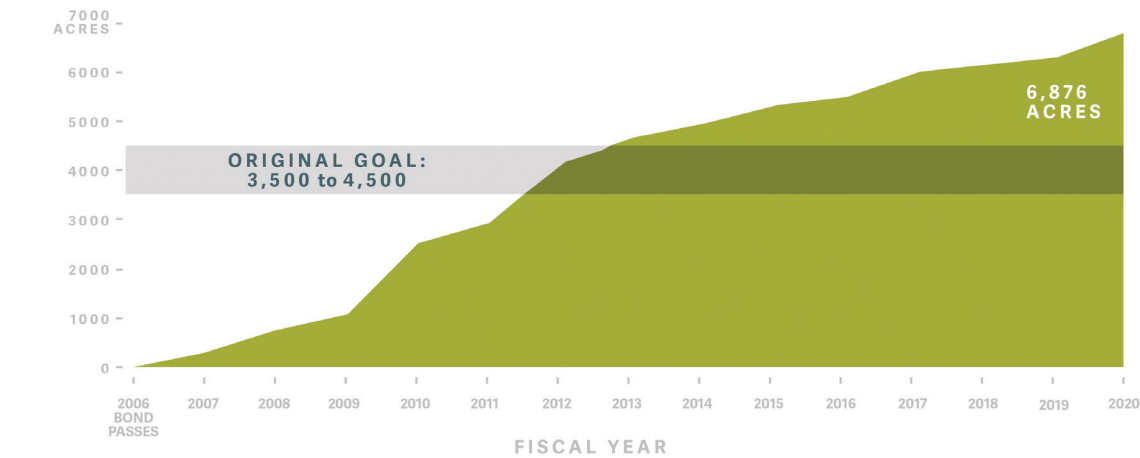
The Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee continues to provide an independent review of the 2006 natural areas bond measure and, starting July 1, 2018, also provides oversight of the capital program in the levy renewal. That oversight committee met one final time in December 2020.

The Metro Council is scheduled to appoint a new committee in early 2021 to provide oversight of the 2019 bond measure and the capital expenditures from the levy renewal. The levy, which kicked off in July 2018, provides funding for restoration, maintenance, park operations and opportunities for people to access nature.

This past year marked the beginning of the 2019 parks and nature bond. Though most of the bond spending to date has been administrative costs associated with issuing the first round of bonds, community engagement and program development, the coming years will include delivering the capital programs outlined in the bond measure, thanks to voter support.

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

Land acquisition with 2006 bond measure (CUMULATIVE)



Thanks to voters, Metro has been able to protect important areas of remaining native prairies, forests, 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 bike commuters, hikers and joggers. Some natural areas will become future nature parks that provide growing communities with access to nature.

Since acquisitions began with money from the 2006 bond measure, more than 6,876 acres have been acquired and protected – significantly surpassing the original goal of about 4,000 acres.

Parks and Nature spending* FY 2020

	General fund	2018 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	2019 parks and nature bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$2,318,585	\$3,260,004	\$0	\$0	\$5,578,589
Access to nature	\$435,519	\$1,643,516	\$2,820,465	\$21,210	\$4,920,710
Park improvements and operations	\$5,112,668	\$2,197,101	\$0	\$221,847	\$7,531,616
Cemeteries	\$853,204	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$853,204
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$96,923	\$694,827	\$0	\$0	\$791,750
Community investments	\$307	\$1,175,776	\$1,722,654	\$42,244	\$2,990,981
Land acquisition and associated costs/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$4,016,754	\$128,960	\$4,145,714
Administration**	\$3,794,189	\$5,112,163	\$2,363,033	\$812,528	\$12,081,913
Total	\$12,611,395	\$14,083,387	\$10,972,906	\$1,226,789	\$38,894,477

* 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.



Metro Council, from left: Councilors Bob Stacey, Christine Lewis, Juan Carlos González, Metro Council President Lynn Peterson, Councilors Shirley Craddick, Sam Chase and Craig Dirksen

2020 parks and natural areas levy

Promised to voters



Actual levy spending THROUGH JUNE 2020



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