



Metro

2020–21 Annual Report

Parks and Nature



Metro's unique parks and nature system creates connections to nature close to home

Since Metro's parks and natural areas program began in the 1990s, no other year than the last one has better shown why it's so critical voters have called on Metro to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide access to nature for communities across the region.

Late summer 2020 brought devastating wildfires, and then early summer 2021 held record-shattering high temperatures that killed nearly 100 people in Oregon. Extremely hot weather strains habitats, putting trees at risk of dying from heat stress, which in turn exposes other plants and animals to more risk from heat and catastrophic fires. Metro's conservation work helps strengthen natural areas to better withstand hotter temperatures and keep streams and rivers cool to protect salmon, lamprey, other native fish – and people.

Metro's parks have always been a refuge to people seeking the physical, mental and spiritual boosts offered by spending time in the outdoors. That's only more true during this long pandemic. Whether it's hiking Mount Talbert Nature Park, swimming at Broughton Beach, admiring prairies of wildflowers at

Cooper Mountain Nature Park, trying out disc golf at Blue Lake Regional Park, or sitting at a picnic bench at Orenco Woods Nature Park, Metro's parks provide a place nearby to drink in nature in any way a person wants.

All of this is possible thanks to voter investments. Voters renewed a local-option levy that pays for restoration, maintenance and operations at Metro's parks and natural areas through June 2023. And in 2019, voters approved a \$475 million bond measure to fund capital investments at parks and natural areas.

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 large-scale community projects.

In July 2020, Metro Council signed off on a bond framework – a road map for developing the six programs in the 2019 parks and nature bond measure. Since then, Metro has worked with community members, partner organizations, local park providers and others to implement the bond measure to achieve regional goals for clean water, habitat

protection, 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.

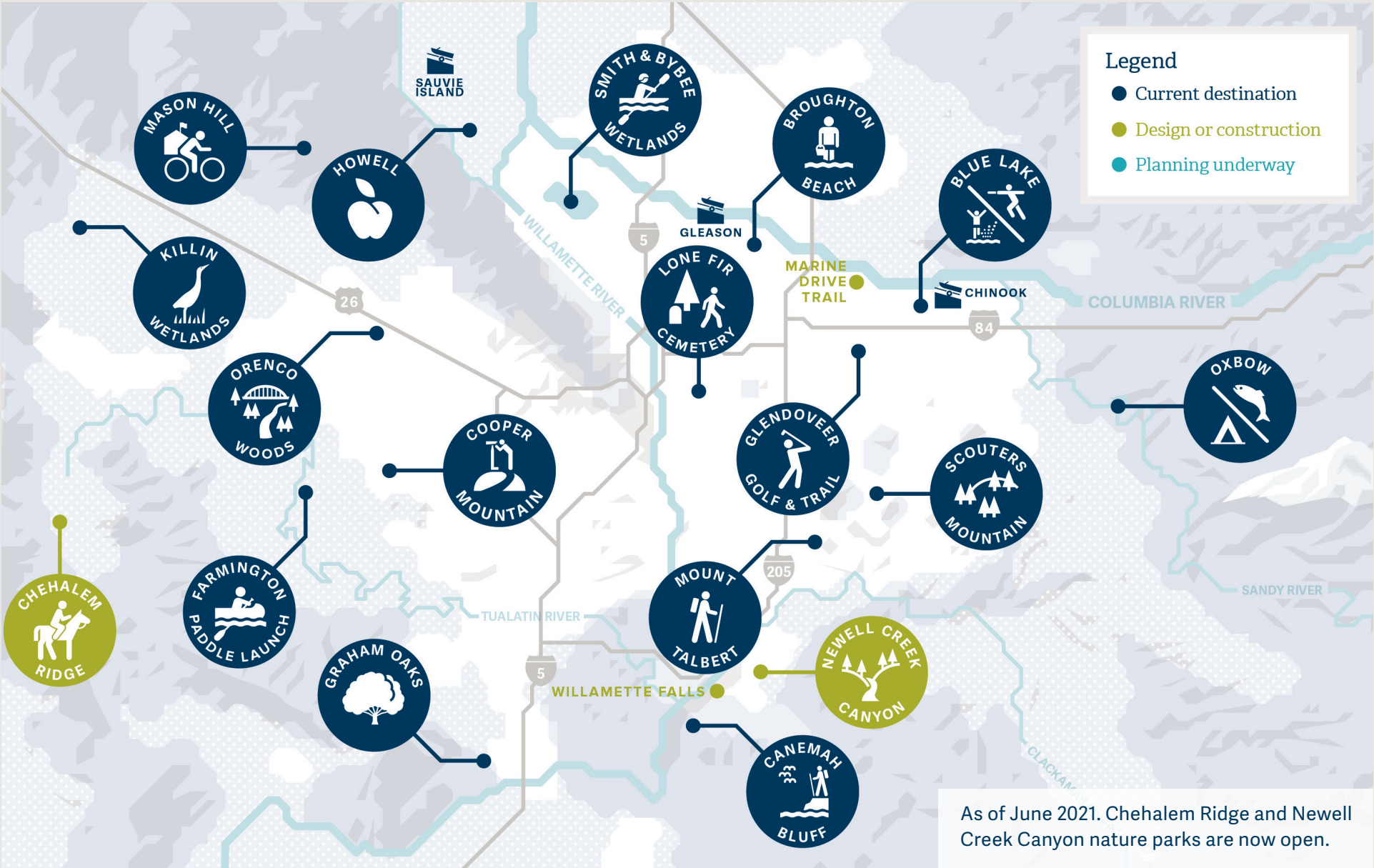
During the past year, Metro has continued to purchase land to steward as natural areas, it launched a new local share program that funds capital projects that matter to local communities, it put the finishing touches on two nature parks – Newell Creek Canyon and Chehalem Ridge – and, because of voters investing in nature and the future of this region, even more is on the way.

Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at
oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2021

Connecting people with nature

New parks provide more opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home. Throughout the 2020-2021 fiscal year, Metro built two new parks that opened in late 2021: Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park in Oregon City and Chehalem Ridge Nature Park, just south of Forest Grove.

In addition to new destinations like Newell Creek Canyon and Chehalem Ridge, Metro continues to make improvements at its 19 current parks and boat ramps. Park improvement projects aim to upgrade aging facilities, improve sustainability features and enhance safety and security, as was the case with this year's project to build new docks and a gangway at Chinook Landing Marine Park.



Restoring and maintaining natural areas

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 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 strengthening habitat for fish and wildlife.

After Metro acquires a property, a stabilization plan is drawn up. Stabilization is like the renovation process for a fixer-upper home: it's a lot of big projects to create a livable habitat. 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 and 2019 natural areas bond measures.

Habitat restoration

FY 2021

128
Habitat and water improvement projects

3,867
Acres with restoration projects underway

Plantings and weed control

FY 2021

20
Planting projects

79
Weed treatments



Making good on equity promises

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 people of color feel welcome and safe when they visit Metro destinations. It means creating job training and mentoring for people of color so the department’s workforce looks like the people it serves, which isn’t true now. It means 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.

It also means involving community members of color in decision-making processes. In 2020 and throughout 2021, Metro worked closely with members of the region’s Indigenous community

Caption: The community-based organization Latino Outdoors hosted a day in the woods at Oxbow Regional Park. The event, which included guided tours led by Metro nature educators, was supported by a grant through the Community Partnership program. The program works with community organizations big and small to build community and connect people of color to nature at Metro’s and other parks.

to change how it assesses and prioritizes land acquisitions. The trails program, which guides the distribution of \$40 million to close gaps in the regional trail system, hosted more than 100 people of color to hear what they value in the trail system and how they want projects prioritized.

In the face of the COVID pandemic, Metro’s community partnerships program acted quickly to create a capacity-building sponsorship program to support community organizations that are run by and work for communities of color. More than \$180,000 went to 36 organizations that had to expand their work to meet the needs of community members navigating COVID. Nearly \$50,000 in sponsorships supported community organizations to hold events and activities in nature over the past year.



Honoring those at Block 14

After many years of planning and collaboration with partner groups, the project to create a cultural heritage garden at Lone Fir Cemetery’s Block 14 is underway.

With input from community members, the Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Mental Health Association of Portland, Metro has dedicated \$4 million to the project from the Metro park improvements program area of the 2019 parks and nature bond measure.

Currently, Block 14 is an empty lot in the southwest corner of the tree-filled Lone Fir Cemetery. But from 1891 to 1928, more than 1,131

Chinese people were buried there. Even earlier, it is believed that more than 200 patients of the Oregon Hospital for the Insane, the state’s first psychiatric hospital, were laid to rest in various areas of Lone Fir Cemetery, including the eastern part of Block 14. Many of their names and stories have been lost to memory, but community members hope the cultural heritage garden will be a place to honor their stories.

“There’s so much history that’s left to be told,” said Marcus Lee, a member of the board of directors of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. “This is a great way to be able to share one part of that, one chapter of that history.”



Investing in community

Community investments support a variety of projects: community stewardship and restoration, nature education, outdoor experiences, land acquisition, capital improvements, visitor amenities and more. 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.

Since 1995, each of the natural areas and parks bonds have included a “local share” program that supports local park providers with parks and restoration projects that matter to their communities. Throughout 2020, the \$92 million local share program was redeveloped to include the new bond measure’s focus on racial equity and meaningful community engagement. The program launched in spring of 2021, ready to receive proposals from local park providers. Every month, Metro hosts a roundtable with the cities and parks districts that receive local share funds to discuss how to create projects that advance racial equity and are informed by meaningful engagement with community members.

Work began in fall 2020 to develop the \$40 million capital grants program in the 2019 parks and nature bond measure. The bond includes a pilot grant program of \$4 million that will be designed by community members and award grants through a participatory process. It’s a new way of distributing grants that puts more decisions into the hands of the community.

In July 2020, the Metro Council awarded 12 grants totaling \$700,000 for projects designed to increase racial equity and climate resilience in greater Portland by connecting people of color to nature.

These grants include a project that brings together Indigenous students and teachers at the Sandy River, another that provides year-round, culturally specific environmental science education, and a career mentorship program that offers youth with low incomes opportunities to learn about natural resource management as they restore local habitats. The grants are funded by the parks and natural areas levy renewal.

Racial equity criteria have guided the grant program since 2018. “One of Metro’s roles in the region is to be a convener,” said Crista Gardner, who was the program manager of Metro’s Nature in Neighborhood community grants. “Our nonprofit partners are coming together through these grant dollars, each bringing their particular skills, knowledge and abilities to the program.”



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

In late 2020, the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee wrapped up its duties on the 2006 natural areas bond measure. To continue the critical work of community oversight of Metro’s work, the Metro Council appointed a new committee that provides an independent review of the 2019 parks and nature bond measure and the capital program in the levy renewal.

The Metro Council placed a high priority on creating a committee that reflected the diversity of greater Portland as well as formal expertise and expertise from lived experiences.

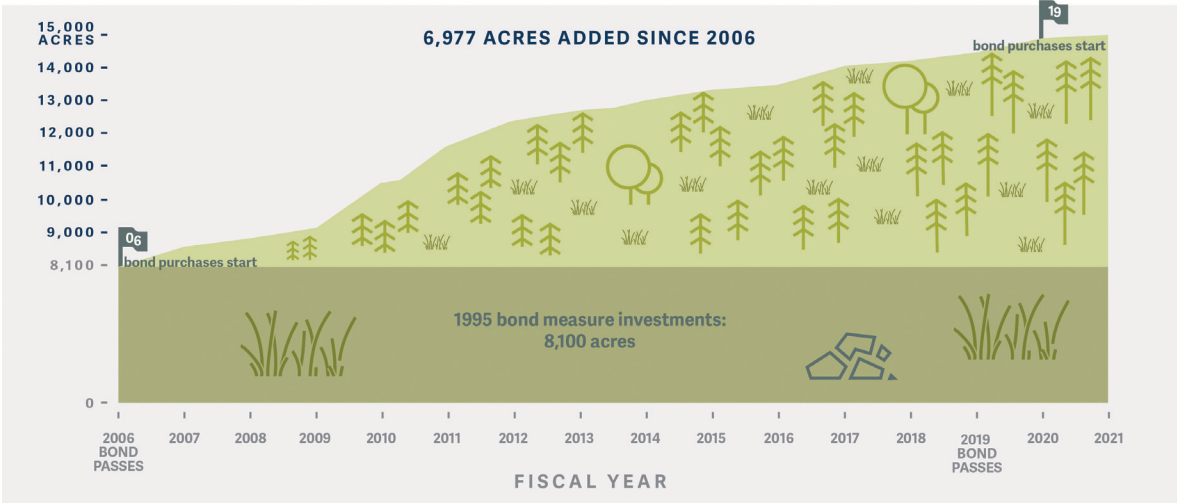
The work continues. Stay tuned for next year’s annual report to track how your tax dollars are spent to improve parks and nature throughout the region.



Metro Council, clockwise from top left:
Metro Council President Lynn Peterson, Councilors Shirley Craddick, Juan Carlos González, Gerritt Rosenthal, Christine Lewis and Mary Nolan.

To learn more about voter funding and to read the latest report from an independent oversight committee, visit oregonmetro.gov/nature
To receive updates about Parks and Nature news, fun nature classes, volunteer opportunities and events, visit oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturenews

Land acquisition with 2006 and 2019 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.

2021 was the first fiscal year money from the 2019 parks and nature bond measure was used to purchase land as part of the protect and restore nature bond program. This program continues the work of the 2006 bond measure, which acquired and protected more than 6,876 acres – significantly surpassing the original goal of about 4,000 acres. Over the past year, Metro has added 101 of acres to its portfolio of natural areas.

Parks and Nature spending*

	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	\$414,624	\$4,765,932	\$0	\$0	\$5,180,556
Access to nature	\$0	\$636,339	\$2,845,715	\$3,295,702	\$6,777,756
Park improvements and operations	\$1,721,290	\$2,697,410	\$0	\$256,836	\$4,675,536
Cemeteries	\$854,019	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$854,019
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$0	\$662,799	\$0	\$0	\$662,799
Community investments	\$0	\$1,133,253	\$1,245,626	\$406,100	\$2,784,979
Land acquisition and associated costs/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$935,341	\$1,870,957	\$2,806,298
Administration**	\$2,168,393	\$4,609,863	\$1,327,969	\$1,573,850	\$9,680,075
Total	\$5,158,326	\$ 14,505,596	\$6,354,651	\$7,403,445	\$33,422,018

* 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.

2021 parks and natural areas levy

Promised to voters



Actual levy spending

THROUGH JUNE 2021



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**