

STAFF REPORT

OVERVIEW OF METRO'S PARKS AND NATURE DEPARTMENT AND VOTER APPROVED INVESTMENT MEASURES

Date: 3/8/2022

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting Date: 3/17/2022

Presenter(s): Jon Blasher

Length: 30 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metro's Parks and Nature mission is to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and connect people with nature close to home. Metro's Parks and Nature department 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. Metro is uniquely focused on acquisition of large-scale conservation of natural areas close to urban settings typically beyond the reach of local jurisdictions. Metro purchases and restores land to protect priority habitat and provide environmental benefits to the region's wildlife and residents. Metro also welcomes almost 2.5 million visitors a year at nature parks, boat launches and cemeteries from Blue Lake Park to Broughton Beach to Cooper Mountain Nature Park, providing a crucial public service that many people have relied more heavily on throughout the pandemic. Finally, Metro provides support to the region's park providers and community organizations through a range of programs, grants and partnerships.

The [Parks and Nature System Plan](#), which describes the department's mission, strategies and priorities and the [Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#) aimed at improving economic, environmental and cultural equity in alignment with Metro's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, govern the department's work. The department's REDI Action Plan ensures that everything the department does helps advance racial equity through specific actions around 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 in the region's parks and nature system.

At the heart of Metro's parks and nature work are the investments that voters have made. The policy direction and practical impact of these voter approved investment measures is a helpful lens to communicate about Parks and Nature's overall work. Over the last 25 years, voters have supported Metro's Parks and Nature department with three bond measures and a local option levy that work together to maximize impact. Bond dollars must be spent on work that creates capital projects, like a land acquisition or park amenities, which are only effective if they are maintained, operated and have ongoing staff support.

In November 2019, Greater Portland voters overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million Metro parks and nature bond measure to further protect water quality, restore fish and

wildlife habitat and connect people with nature. The 2019 parks and nature bond builds on the legacy of natural areas bond measures approved by voters in 1995 and 2006 that enabled the acquisition of over 15,000 acres of natural areas and for the first time, prioritizes racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience. In 2019, voters chose to focus the bond so it would prioritize projects and needs identified people of color, Indigenous people, people with low incomes, people with varying abilities and other historically marginalized groups who have not been served equitably by past investments.

The Parks and Nature five year local option levy, first approved by the region's voters in 2013, plays an essential role in making our region's system of parks, trails and natural areas possible. About half the levy restores habitat at Metro owned natural areas and funds regional conservation efforts across the greater Portland region. The other half of levy funding supports park operations, improves public access at Metro sites, expands nature education and volunteer programming, and provides grants for community nature projects and partnerships. The levy raises over \$16 million a year while only costing a typical taxpayer approximately \$20 a year. Voters later approved a five-year renewal of the levy in 2016, and funding is now set to run out in June 2023.

COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

The Metro Council direction and guidance has helped shape Parks and Nature's overarching policy direction through the Parks and Nature System plan and the Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan as well as the direction captured in the 2019 Parks and Nature bond. As part of the process in 2018 and 2019 to develop a bond measure to refer to the region's voters, Parks and Nature staff updated and consulted with CORE.

Last year, the Metro Council directed staff to develop a potential levy renewal package for Council consideration at the same rate, to build off the current levy framework and categories, and to prioritize racial equity and climate resilience. Since then, Metro staff has been working with partners and community members to develop a potential levy renewal for the Metro Council to consider in 2022 later this year.

QUESTION(S) for CORE

The presentation planned for the March 17 meeting is intended to provide background and context on Metro's Parks and Nature department for a second discussion planned with CORE on April 19 that will involve a more detailed discussion and opportunities for CORE to review and weigh in on potential draft levy renewal framework.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Ongoing opportunities for community to shape Parks and Nature's work—Over the past couple of years, our department has done deep engagement with community during the development and implementation of our recent parks and nature bond, the development of various programs such as our connect with nature program, and the development of policies such as our racial equity policies. Parks and Nature staff work to build long term relationships with partners and community members to co-create education and

restoration activities at Metro sites and to shape planning of Metro sites like the newly opened Chehalem Ridge Nature Park, south of Forest Grove.

In addition, the Metro Parks and Nature Equity Advisory Committee meets monthly to help shape the department's planning processes and policy formation. The committee has and will continue to ensure that parks and nature programs and projects supported by the bond and levy improve access to nature for communities of color. In the selection of the equity advisory committee, Metro seeks representatives who have long-term connections to local communities of color, expertise in elevating the needs and aspirations of communities of color, who bring a commitment to environmental, economic and cultural equity, and who have an interest in connecting their communities to the outdoors.

Articulating and measuring outcomes from Parks and Nature's work—Metro's Parks and Nature department reports annually to the Metro Council and the public on investments in the regions' parks, trails and natural areas and has experience collecting a robust set of data to quantify our work. Building on this work, Parks and Nature staff have recently launched a process to develop a framework to measure the impact of investments from the 2019 parks and nature bond measure through the life of the bond on communities in the region. This framework includes an articulation of the outcomes Council is aiming for with the bond measure and also allows for more coordinated reporting across the bond and the parks and nature local option levy on an annual basis.

RELEVANCE TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The work to develop and implement the 2019 parks and nature bond and the parks and nature levy advances almost all of the goals of the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. A few relevant examples are listed below:

Goal A. Metro convenes and supports regional partners to advance racial equity.

The local share program within the 2019 parks and nature bond is designed to support the region's 27 park providers in identifying and funding priority parks, trails and natural areas projects in their communities. The projects funded through the parks and nature bond's local share program will need to address the bond criteria of racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience and Metro staff have built a set of resources and materials to support the region's park providers in meeting these criteria including hosting roundtables to share lessons learned about topics such as community engagement and contract and workforce equity.

Goal B. Metro meaningfully engages communities of color.

Meaningful engagement with communities of color over the last several years has shaped the development and implementation of the 2019 parks and nature bond and the local option levy. The work to launch programs within the 2019 parks and nature bond measure is governed by a community engagement framework and set of strategies and tactics designed to center the voices of Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ community

members, immigrants and refugees and other marginalized communities by increasing access to and shifting decision-making to community. For example, funded through the 2019 bond measure, Metro's Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants pilot is utilizing a novel approach called participatory budgeting that gives community members a direct voice in choosing which projects in their communities to recommend up to \$4 million in funding to the Metro Council. Staff are continually reflecting on lessons learned and what we can do better. Finally, to ensure that staff are not returning to community and asking the same questions in search for similar input, Parks and Nature staff are continually referring and incorporating the guidance we've already received.

Goal D. Metro creates safe and welcoming services, programs and destinations

Every day, we're working to create safe and welcoming spaces for people to be healthy and outdoors. The overlapping crises of the last year underlined access to nature as an essential service that is crucial to their physical, mental, and emotional health. Through the last two years, Metro's parks remained open to the public and saw significantly more visitors.

Accessibility is more than just being able to physically access a site and Parks and Nature invests in community grants, partnerships and sponsorships that reduce barriers to learn about, care for and enjoy natural spaces around the region. For example, the education and stewardship programs funded by the levy offer hands-on experiences that allow people to learn more about the natural world while also fostering the next generation of leaders. Partnerships funded by the levy with culturally specific organizations like Camp ELSO, Centro Cultural, Adelante Mujeres, Get Hooked, Self Enhancement Inc., and other groups helped break down barriers to nature that communities of color, immigrants, refugees, low-income families and others have long experienced.

Finally, Parks and Nature has an ADA transition plan and has designated bond money to help invest in accessibility improvements at our sites across the region. Staff are working to partner with members of the disability community to help shape these improvements.

Goal E. Metro's resource allocation advances racial equity.

One way Metro Parks and Nature is working toward economic equity is to support minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses and workers when we spend money on contract work. There is currently a 20 percent floor for COBID contracting over the life of the 2019 parks and nature bond measure and stated goals for COBID contracting as part of our current levy framework. Metro staff tracks the participation of COBID contractors in contracts funded by the bond and levy annually and is working to evaluate how to increase participation over time. In addition, the 2019 parks and nature bond measure incorporates the requirements of Metro's Construction Career Pathways framework on bond funded projects at Metro facilities.

ATTACHMENTS

- [Parks and Nature Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan Executive Summary](#)
- [Parks and Nature levy fact sheets by county](#)
- [2019 Parks and Nature bond overview sheet](#)



Investing in parks and nature

Help put the 2019 parks and nature bond to work

In November 2019, voters approved a \$475 million bond measure to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home.

Through the bond's investments, Metro is working to ensure that parks and nature across greater Portland benefit people of color, Indigenous people, people with low incomes, people with disabilities and others who have not benefited equitably from past investments.

The bond measure also funds climate resilience projects. Climate change is already affecting greater Portland, and it disproportionately harms people of color, people with low incomes and other historically marginalized groups. The bond measure will help prepare the region to face this crisis.

members, community organizations and government agencies to create greater racial equity and improve the region's resilience to climate change, with a focus on the communities most impacted.

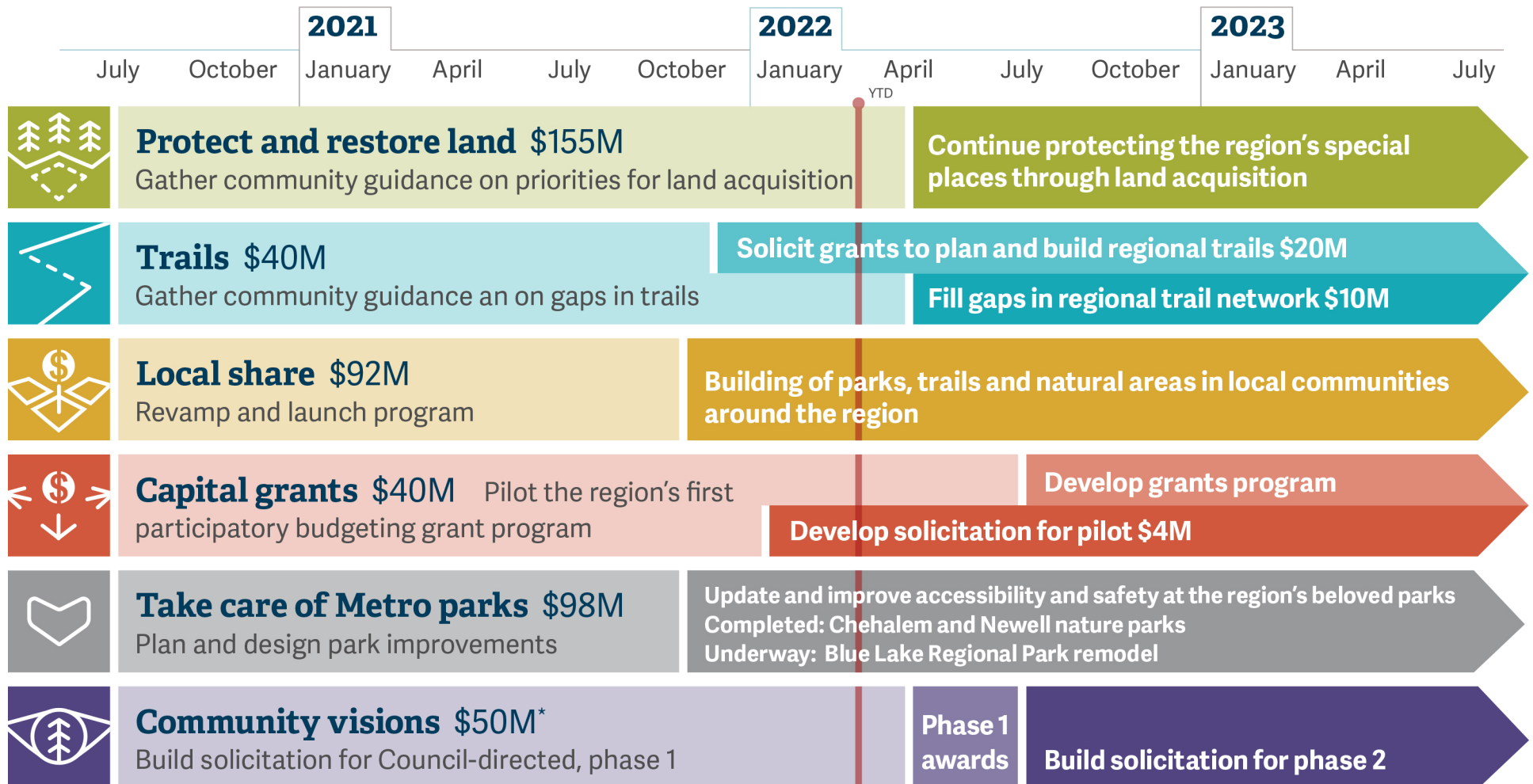
The bond's six program areas

- Land investments and restoration, \$155 million
- Metro park improvements, \$98 million
- Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants, \$40 million
- Local parks and nature projects, \$92 million
- Walking and biking trails, \$40 million
- Large-scale community visions, \$50 million

Learn more and sign up for bond updates:
oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturebond

Beth Cohen
Strategic funding project manager
parksandnaturebond@oregonmetro.gov

Metro parks and nature bond refinement to implementation



*Minus \$20M for Willamette Falls Legacy Project (WFLP)

Updated March 2022

To find out more visit <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/public-projects/parks-and-nature-bond-measure/bond-progress>



Metro

A camper walks through the Ancient Forest in Oxbow Regional Park during the summer 2018 session of Camp ELSO, an environmental education nonprofit that works primarily with children of color, .

PARKS AND NATURE

RACIAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

2018-2022 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Creating an equitable parks and nature system

Metro's parks and nature mission is to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for people to experience nature close to home. Thanks to two decades of voter investments, Metro manages more than 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across every community in greater Portland – from Chehalem Ridge on the west to the Sandy River Gorge on the east, from Blue Lake and Smith and Bybee Wetlands on the north to Graham Oaks on the south.

The Parks and Nature Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan brings together parks and nature's mission with Metro's commitments to improve racial equity in the region. The document sets down dozens of specific actions parks and nature will undertake over the next five years to increase racial equity, diversity and inclusion in its work and at its sites.

These actions strive to make sure people of color feel safe and welcome when they visit Metro parks and natural areas. Others will create job training and mentoring for people of color so parks and nature's workforce looks more like the people it serves. Several actions build on past work to serve greater Portland's Native American community and their use of cultural resources on Metro properties.

Throughout the plan, the actions build the systems and the culture required to make racial equity how parks and nature fulfills its mission.

Download the parks and nature action plan: oregonmetro.gov/equity

Metro recognizes racial equity as the backbone of good governance to ensure the success of everyone

Metro acknowledges that people of color across the region experience the most disparate outcomes in nearly every category of social well-being including housing, transportation, access to nature, education and health. Metro has identified racial equity as its strategic direction to eliminate the disparities that people of color experience (regardless of race or background) especially in areas related to Metro's policies, programs, services and destinations. Focusing on racial equity will result in all people in the region having the opportunity to thrive in all aspects of social well-being.

The Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion directs all Metro departments to develop equity action plans to achieve Metro's five strategic goals through the department's programs, services,

projects and plans. Parks and nature's plan illustrates the department's commitment to Metro's racial equity strategy through actions that make racial equity how the department does business.



Parks and nature director Jon Blasher with staff.

Five strategic goals to achieve an equitable and prosperous region

The Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion identifies five long-term goals to direct Metro in creating specific objectives, actions and measures of evaluation and accountability as the agency works to help greater Portland reach an equitable and prosperous future.

Goal A

Metro convenes and supports regional partners to advance racial equity.

Goal B

Metro meaningfully engages communities of color.

Goal C

Metro hires, trains and promotes a racially diverse workforce.

Goal D

Metro creates safe and welcoming services, programs and destinations.

Goal E

Metro's resource allocation advances racial equity.

Desired outcomes and 12 objectives

Economic equity: Communities of color prosper economically from the business of parks and nature in greater Portland.

Environmental equity: Communities of color in greater Portland enjoy the benefits of conserving land, air and water and equitable access to safe and welcoming parks, trails and natural areas.

Cultural equity: People of all cultures, races and traditions connect with nature and with one another in the region's parks and nature system.

Goal A objectives

- Contribute to increasing the diversity of people and perspectives in the conservation movement
- Plan the regional system of parks, trails and natural areas with a racial equity lens

Goal B objectives

- Strengthen internal communications, transparency and accountability
- Meaningfully engage communities of color in policy and investment decisions
- Honor Indigenous and community connections to land

Goal C objectives

- Invest in continuing education and inclusive staff culture

- Build career pathways for youth and communities of color

Goal D objectives

- Deliver relevant and inclusive programs and services for people of color
- Manage and operate a safe and inclusive system of parks, natural areas and trails

Goal E objectives

- Build department capacity for equitable community engagement and partnerships
- Remove barriers for people of color in contracting and grant programs
- Equitably plan for and invest in Metro's and the region's system of parks, natural areas and trails

The power of partnerships

From designing parks to teaching youngsters to fish to restoring habitat through traditional ecological knowledge, partnerships with organizations led by people of color have become important for many parks and nature projects. The racial equity action plan calls for even greater use of partnerships, moving from discrete projects to institutionalizing partnerships as the norm for parks and nature.

Partnerships with community organizations have been key to parks and nature developing the knowledge, systems and capabilities it needs to implement this plan. As a government committed to advancing racial equity, it is important to listen to the diverse needs of our communities and create opportunities for community voices to drive parks and nature's work.

Whether a partnership removes barriers to accessing decision makers or develops programs that reflect a specific community or cocreates policies, programs and processes that improve racial equity, a broad spectrum of partnerships allows for an exchange of knowledge and builds access and understanding for community and staff alike.

It's important work that we have to take on individually and collectively.

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 and addressing historic wrongs.

– Jonathan Blasher,
parks and nature director



A staff-led plan

More than 30 staff members from across parks and nature came together to create this plan. These staff members led their work teams in discussions and reviews of the plan throughout the process.

The plan relies on staff's clear understanding of the parameters and possibilities of their jobs and community members' clear demands for what racial equity, diversity and inclusion look like. It lays out the specific actions needed to build the systems, the culture and the accountability required to establish institutional racial equity in parks and nature.

The vast majority of the plan's actions came from people of color in the region and from the department's staff – the people the plan is made to benefit and those who will implement it.

A living plan

This plan is a living document. Throughout its five years, the plan will be reviewed, adjusted and improved regularly in partnership with community members. New opportunities will appear and new directions will need to be taken, and the plan is built to make those changes.

Madelyn Joe runs the trails at Mount Talbert Nature Park.



During a picnic at Oxbow Regional Park cohosted by the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and Metro, a young visitor gives Metro nature educator Renee Robinson a high five.

Change is already underway

Even as the action plan was being created, parks and nature staff continued and started projects that placed racial equity front and center. The examples and lesson from these projects influenced and became part of the racial equity plan.

Here are examples from the past few years:

- In collaboration with greater Portland's Native American community, Metro developed a culturally appropriate process for Native Americans to access land for cultural events, culturally significant plant material harvesting or ceremony space.
- Nature in Neighborhoods grants redesigned its criteria for 2018 to reflect the action plan's three racial equity outcomes: economic, environmental and cultural equity. Staff provided examples to applicants from past grants that met the criteria and worked with the review committee to use racial equity as it evaluated grants.
- Parks and nature changed its contracting practices so that it hired more minority-owned businesses for nature restoration projects.
- The Connect with Nature program created a model of partnering with community organizations to plan future parks that better serve people of color.

Hello, we're Metro.

Metro brings people together to shape the future of greater Portland and provides places, services and tools that work best at a regional scale. Led by an elected council, this unique government gives Oregonians a voice in their community.

Parks and nature

Metro protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat, and connects people to nature across 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas – and the Oregon Zoo.

Land and transportation

Metro plans for new homes, jobs, transportation options and access to local businesses and parks.

Garbage and recycling

Metro manages the garbage and recycling system and is a resource for information about safe disposal and ways to reduce waste.

Arts and events

Metro runs the Oregon Convention Center, Portland Expo Center and Portland's Centers for the Arts.

Questions

parksandnature@
oregonmetro.gov
503-797-1545



Arts and events
Garbage and recycling
Land and transportation
Oregon Zoo
Parks and nature

oregonmetro.gov



PARKS & NATURE SYSTEM PLAN

WINTER 2016



Metro

Nature makes this place feel like home

No matter where you stand in the greater Portland area, nature is never far. With 17,000 acres, Metro manages parks and natural areas across every community in the region – from Chehalem Ridge on the west to the Sandy River Gorge on the east, from Blue Lake and Broughton Beach on the north to Graham Oaks on the south.

This portfolio of land represents both a big opportunity and a big responsibility. Voters have trusted Metro to wisely spend the money they've invested through two regional bond measures and a levy – more than \$400 million – to protect and care for these special places, while also creating opportunities for people to enjoy them.

In 2015, Metro celebrated its 25th year as a parks provider. This milestone comes at a time of tremendous growth, with new destinations, programs and partnerships taking root. A strong plan is needed to guide future decision-making and investments, building a world-class Parks and Nature system that will serve the region's residents for another quarter century and beyond.

Metro's flourishing network of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and cemeteries supports the agency's broader mission: making a great place. As Metro invests in livable communities, connections with nature are as critical as homes, jobs and transportation. A successful Parks and Nature system protects water quality and vanishing wildlife habitat. It increases housing values and attracts employers to the region, providing welcome access to the great outdoors for people who live in urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Perhaps most importantly, Oregonians' sense of place is rooted in the forests, rivers and meadows that Metro protects. Nature makes this place feel like home.

The Parks and Nature System Plan lays out Metro's mission and role, the state of the portfolio today, trends that will shape this work and a slate of strategies to guide the future. By providing clarity on Metro's direction, the plan is intended to support Metro's partners and strengthen relationships – complementing the broader regional

network of parks, natural areas and trails. This plan also provides a framework for future decisions about the funding needed to sustain Metro's portfolio of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and cemeteries.

Metro's vision will succeed only if it benefits diverse communities across our region. Too often, parks and nature investments have focused on people who are already engaged, and already have access to the outdoors. Woven throughout the Parks and Nature System Plan, Metro makes commitments to doing a better job serving people of color and low-income communities. Making a difference will take resources, planning, collaboration, careful listening – and time.

The parks and system plan will play out on the ground in many tangible ways, from prioritizing restoration efforts to helping shape the look and feel of future destinations. Ultimately it elevates Metro's stunning landscapes, popular destinations and fun programs to more than individual successes, tying them together as part of a world-class Parks and Nature system.



Read the full Parks and Nature System Plan
online at oregonmetro.gov/nature

MISSION

Metro's Parks and Nature mission

"It is our assertion that if we are to have parks and open space areas in the future, we need to reposition our planning and funding priorities now to reflect the importance of greenspaces in our urban fabric. The protection, acquisition and active stewardship of greenspaces must become just as important as planning highways, transit, water and sewer lines, and other basic services."

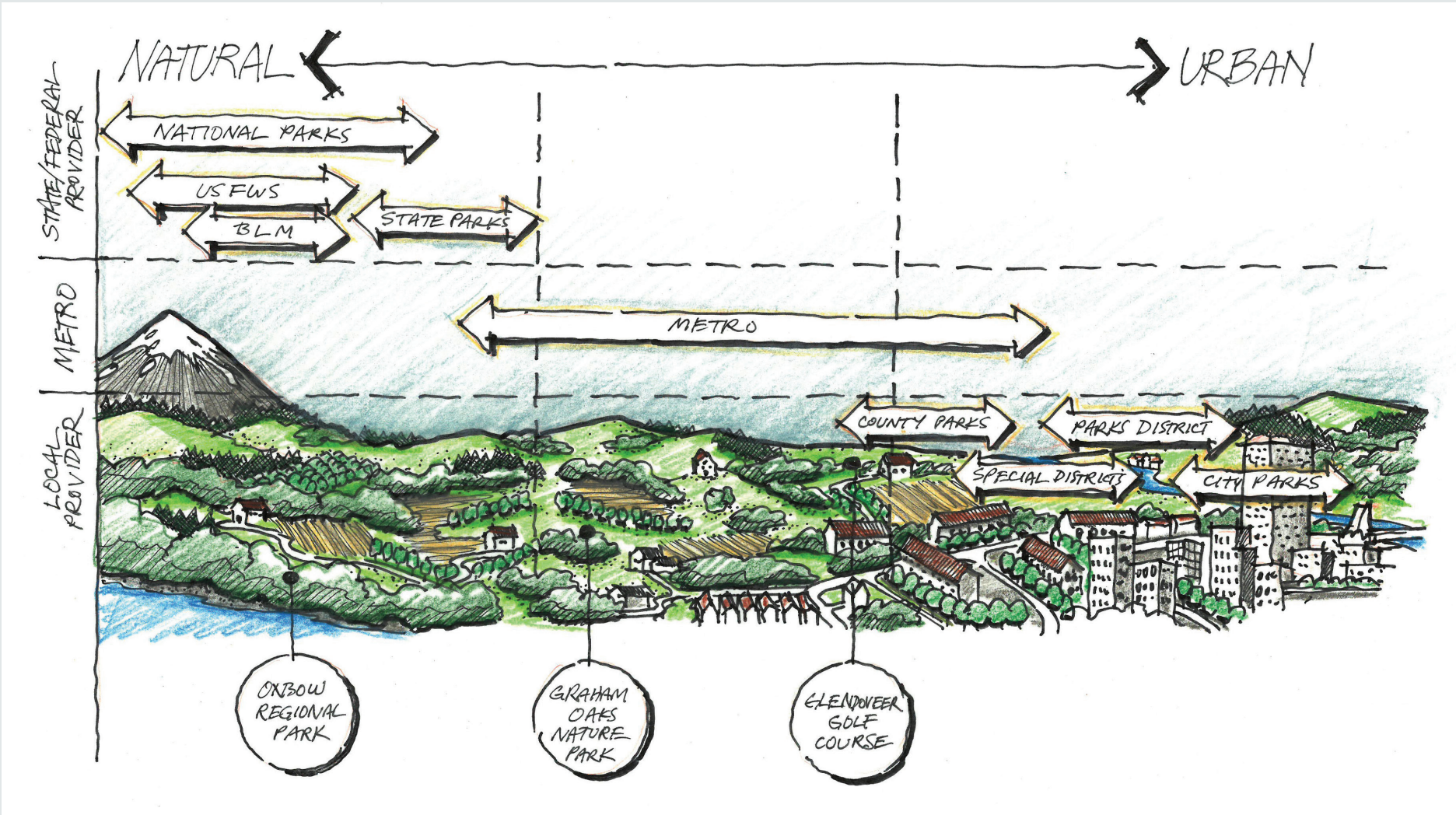
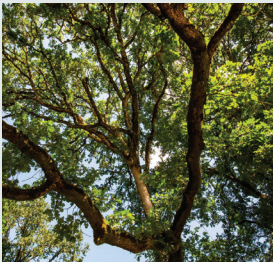
METROPOLITAN GREENSPACES
MASTER PLAN, 1992

This call to action in the 1992 Greenspaces Master Plan helped spur remarkable investment in the greater Portland region's parks and natural areas over the last two decades. It also started Metro's transformation into one of the largest land managers in the region. Metro's mission as a provider of parks and natural areas has been shaped by two bond measures, the 2013 local option levy and regional planning efforts such as

the Regional Conservation Strategy for the greater Portland area.

METRO MISSION STATEMENT

Metro Parks and Nature protects water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and creates opportunities to enjoy nature close to home through a connected system of parks, trails and natural areas.



Metro's role in the region

More than 20 years of policy, voter investment and community support have established Metro as a provider of parks, trails and natural areas. The system plan clarifies Metro's role, particularly its niche relative to other park providers. Metro's work is built on partnerships with local governments, which are strongest when parks systems complement – rather than compete with – one another.

When you arrive at a Metro destination, you'll have a front-row view of some of the most spectacular habitat in the greater Portland area. Across its portfolio Metro leads science-based restoration, provides nature education and volunteer programs, invests in community nature projects

and plays a key role in convening local, regional, state and federal partners to plan and develop parks, natural areas and regional trails.

It is just as important to be clear about what Metro doesn't provide. In general, Metro does not operate local and neighborhood parks, sports complexes, indoor or developed swimming facilities or indoor recreation centers.

The greater Portland region has a strong network of local park providers and an excellent system of protected state and federal land. However, Metro is one of just a few agencies focusing on large-scale conservation of natural areas close to home in an urban setting. Metro can acquire and

provide access to large sites that typically are beyond the reach of local jurisdictions, but closer to population centers than those managed by state and federal providers. Metro's resources also provide unique support to regional partners through grants and partnerships.

While growing in its role as a major park provider, Metro remains a committed leader in advancing regional initiatives to protect, restore and connect people with nature. Metro will continue to take a collaborative approach, working with The Intertwine Alliance, local park providers, community-based organizations and other partners.

NATUREHOODS

Metro’s Parks and Nature portfolio: a collection of ‘naturehoods’

In the greater Portland region, nature creates a backdrop for family photographs, weekend walks, computer screensavers, tourist guidebooks and national news coverage – in other words, it’s a big part of who we are. Metro’s Parks and Nature properties reflect the region’s unique natural environment, from the ancient forest at Oxbow Regional Park to the languid flow of the Tualatin River beside a future boat launch, from wetlands in North Portland to towering oak trees along the curves of the Willamette Narrows in West Linn.

To organize its Parks and Nature portfolio, Metro has defined 11 “naturehoods” named for their unique geographic and ecological identities. For example, in the Tonquin Naturehood, large boulders and scoured ponds tell the tale of historic floods that ripped through the area – and set the backdrop for today’s Graham Oaks Nature Park and Ice Age Tonquin Trail. In the Clackamas River Naturehood, the namesake gives life to nearby Christmas tree farms, as well as native turtles, salmon and other wildlife. Each naturehood provides a new way of thinking about where you live, just as meaningful as your neighborhood or the Pacific Northwest.

Within each naturehood, Metro manages a variety of properties along the spectrum from popular destinations to sensitive habitat where humans rarely set foot. However, up to this point, Metro has not established definitive criteria for classifying its inventory. The way sites were named has evolved over time, starting with the transfer of Multnomah County properties such as Blue Lake Regional Park, Chinook Landing Marine Park and Howell Territorial Park. Through the 1995 and 2006 bond measures, properties acquired for habitat protection typically were assigned as natural areas with a few key sites selected for development as nature parks.

After 25 years of exponential growth, Metro’s Parks and Nature portfolio needs a classification system to help focus planning, development and management. The new system outlined in the system plan describes the primary characteristics and values of each type of place, from regional recreation areas to habitat preserves. Using this system as a guide, Metro can ensure consistency across the region when planning for natural resource protection, park development, amenities and programming.



FIND YOUR NATUREHOOD
Read the full system plan to discover – or rediscover – voter-protected land in your part of the greater Portland region.

- Clackamas River
- Columbia River and Willamette Lowlands
- Dairy, McKay and Rock creeks

- East Buttes and Johnson Creek
- Greater Willamette Narrows
- Lower-Tualatin
- Mid-Tualatin
- Sandy River
- Tonquin
- Tualatin Mountains
- Upper Tualatin



ON THE GROUND

Putting the system plan on the ground

As the greater Portland region continues to grow, Metro’s Parks and Nature Department will play a critical role in protecting the natural environment and serving the people who treasure it.

The system plan outlines strategies that provide a roadmap for improving on successful places and programs, developing new and innovative approaches, and strengthening relationships with partners. Each strategy lays out not only what Metro Parks and Nature will do, but also how. What does success look like? And what are the most important actions to get started?

Six mission-critical strategies come first, because they are the highest priorities for advancing Met-

ro’s Parks and Nature work on behalf of the region. Some mission-critical strategies are threaded through many program areas, while others describe distinct efforts. The common thread: Each mission-critical strategy is deeply embedded in Metro’s Parks and Nature mission. These strategies deserve extra resources and scrutiny.

MISSION-CRITICAL STRATEGIES

- Use science to guide Metro’s Parks and Nature portfolio.
- Ensure that Metro Parks and Nature programs and facilities support the needs of underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income communities and young people.
- Develop a stable, long-term funding source to support Metro’s Parks and Nature portfolio.

- Ensure that parks, trails, natural areas and cemeteries managed by Metro are knit together into an integrated system.
- Diversify the businesses and people who do contracted work for Metro Parks and Nature.
- Build, sustain and leverage partnerships to advance the region’s shared commitment to an interconnected system of parks, trails and natural areas.

The remaining strategies – which represent a large, important body of work – are organized by five broad categories that guide Metro’s portfolio going forward.

- Protect and Conserve Nature
- Create and Maintain Great Places
- Connect People to Nature
- Support Community Aspirations
- Convene, Plan and Build a Regional Trail System



The system plan is a natural evolution and a critical step in Metro’s 25-year journey as a parks provider. It is a major milestone, and it represents the beginning of a new phase.

Strategies and actions in the system plan set out an ambitious work program. Focusing on conservation science, securing long-term funding, developing and operating welcoming and inclusive parks and incorporating equity across the Parks and Nature portfolio are key to the long-term success of the program. Just as Metro did not get to this point without the help of a diverse group of partners, the body of work laid out in the system plan cannot be completed without the continued partnership of the local governments, residents and community organizations that supported the creation of the system.

A brighter, wilder future

From preserving farmland to brewing beer, Oregonians do a world-class job at the things we love – and protecting nature towers near the top of that list.

Over the last quarter-century, voters have supported investments to build a regional park system that spans 17,000 acres and touches every community in the greater Portland area. Metro is proud to serve as steward of the forests, savannas, wetlands and riverbanks that make this region unique.

Our landscape creates a stunning place to call home, and a lot of opportunities to explore. By protecting nature, we keep our air and water clean. We secure the future of native fish, wildlife and plants. We make our communities more resilient, and more fun. We attract businesses and tourists who seek out a beautiful, healthy, playful destination.

After 25 years of investment, Metro owes it to Oregonians to make the most of the land they’ve protected. Very few metropolitan areas have the opportunity before us: leveraging our natural setting to create a brighter, wilder future. That’s why we’re crafting a Parks and Nature System Plan to guide the next generation of decisions and investments.


A plan can be a powerful tool. We’ve seen proof in the 1992 Greenspaces Master Plan, which charted a vision and galvanized support to bring it to life. Back then, our natural setting was a palette waiting to be protected. Today, that plan has translated to a big portfolio of parks, trails, natural areas, nature programs and historic cemeteries. What we need is an overarching strategy to protect, care for and connect people with these special places.

While laying out Metro’s mission, role and priorities, the system plan also promises to make

sure that nature benefits our whole community. Sparkling water, soaring birds and family picnics belong to every Oregonian – including people of color and low-income residents, who have often been left behind by public investments. It is Metro’s responsibility, and our honor, to build an equitable Parks and Nature system.

We have all the right ingredients: A landscape worth protecting. People who love it. A track record of innovation and investment. And, now, a plan to guide our efforts over the next 25 years and beyond.

Let’s get started.



Metro Council President Tom Hughes

Metro Council President
Tom Hughes

Metro Councilors
Shirley Craddick, District 1
Carlotta Collette, District 2
Craig Dirksen, District 3
Kathryn Harrington, District 4

Auditor
Brian Evans

Thanks to voters, Metro Parks and Nature protects clean water, healthy wildlife habitat and opportunities to connect with nature on 17,000 acres across the greater Portland region. Explore news, photos and events at oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturenews



Metro's parks and natural areas levy

Making a difference in Clackamas County

Across greater Portland, Metro's parks and natural areas levy protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat and connects people with nature close to home.

Voters first approved the levy in 2013 and then renewed it through June 2023. It raises approximately \$16 million a year and supports restoration and maintenance, park operations, public access improvements, nature education and volunteer programs, and community grants and sponsorships.

Since 2013, the levy has made a significant difference across Metro's 17,000 acres of parks, natural areas and trails – and a number of community nature projects and programs.

River Island Natural Area

(pictured above)

Metro worked with partners on a major restoration at River Island, where record flooding devastated a 240-acre former gravel mine on the Clackamas River. A more natural habitat with logs in the water and native plants support wildlife, birds, turtles, and endangered salmon and steelhead. Reconnecting Goose Creek to the Clackamas River now provides cooler water and access to better habitat for fish.

For more information on voter investments, visit oregonmetro.gov/nature

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Restoration and maintenance

Clackamas River

Salmon, steelhead and lamprey of the Clackamas River are a major focus of restoration efforts. Metro and our partners are implementing a series of projects on the Clackamas River and key tributaries (Clear Creek and Deep Creek) and streams (Newell Creek and Abernethy Creek) to enhance fish habitat and improve water quality. These projects include reopening side-channels, improving fish passage and restoring native plants.

Diversifying restoration workforce

With the latest round of restoration contracts, Metro worked to make the bureaucratic process of government contracts more accessible to diverse business owners, including people of color, women, veterans and emerging small businesses. The latest process included interviews with potential contractors so people could talk more freely rather than relying on the traditional request-for-proposals process that emphasizes writing skills. The effort supports economic equity for people who plant native trees and shrubs, remove invasive weeds, and help improve water quality and restore habitat.

Park operations

More than 1.7 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, canoeing, camping, bird watching, and fishing, in addition to family and community events. The levy allows Metro to operate, maintain, and upgrade Metro sites so that they are safe, welcoming and inclusive, including at places like Scouters Mountain and Mount Talbert nature parks and the future Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park.



Public access improvements

Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park

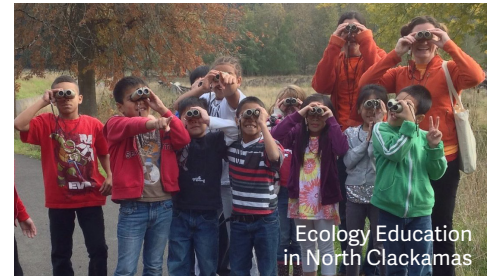
Located in Oregon City, Newell Creek Canyon spans 300 protected acres. Community members have worked with Metro to define a vision for Newell Creek Canyon, shaping the landscape for decades to come. This collaborative work has taken shape in the Newell Creek Canyon Access Master Plan and the nature park is anticipated to open in fall 2021.

Canemah Bluff Nature Park

Canemah Bluff is located just upriver from Willamette Falls. Thanks to the nearby falls and a natural harbor with deep, placid water, Canemah was a major canoe landing and continues to be a significant gathering location for Native Americans. The nature park includes more than a mile of unpaved trails through habitats that include rare Oregon white oak and Pacific madrone trees as well as heartier and faster-growing Douglas fir, maple and alder.

Nature education and volunteer programs

Metro offers school field trips, drop-in nature activities and volunteer opportunities, with a focus on serving people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other underserved groups. Programming in recent years have included education and stewardship activities at Scouters Mountain such as youth camps, pre-kindergarten family trips, and family nature walks hosted by the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization. The Oregon City Service Learning Academy participated in multiple stewardship activities at Canemah Bluff Nature Park and Metro's Native Plant Center such as invasive species removal, mulching and transplant, as well as visits to surrounding historic cemeteries.



Community grants and partnerships

Ecology Education in North Clackamas

The grant for this two-year program supported 1,200 third- through fifth-grade students and 40 teachers each year at five Title I elementary schools in the North Clackamas School District. Each year, every classroom received four ecology lessons and a service-learning field trip thanks to the \$57,700 grant.

McLoughlin-to-Canemah Trail plan

Oregon City received a \$25,000 grant to help with planning for a crucial, one-mile portion of the Oregon City Loop Trail connecting the McLoughlin neighborhood with Canemah Bluff Nature Park. The plan for this trail was completed and is now part of Oregon City's adopted Trails Master Plan and the proposed Oregon City Loop Trail.

Sieben Creek landowner stewardship engagement project

A grant to the Clackamas River Basic Council helped restore a riparian area and provide stewardship education at the Clackamas River Community Cooperative, a nonprofit, resident-owned manufactured home community along the Clackamas River in Happy Valley. The project involved hands-on learning, nature walks, community outreach, invasive plant removal, trash pickup and gardening with native plants.



Metro's parks and natural areas levy

Making a difference in East Multnomah County

Across greater Portland, Metro's parks and natural areas levy protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat and connects people with nature close to home.

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Since 2013, the levy has made a significant difference across Metro's 17,000 acres of parks, natural areas and trails – and a number of community nature projects and programs.

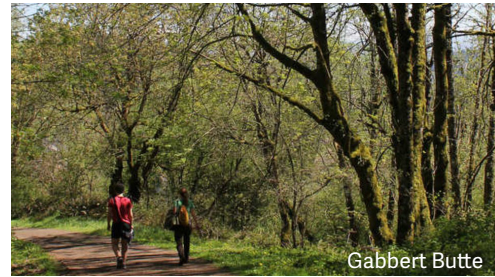
Oxbow Regional Park *(pictured above)*

Two nature play areas opened at Oxbow in May 2019, giving kids opportunities to connect with nature on a deeper level. Planners enlisted the help of community organizations and parents of children experiencing disabilities to ensure the popular play areas are inclusive for children of varying abilities.

For more information on voter investments, visit oregonmetro.gov/nature

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Restoration and maintenance

East Buttes natural areas

The East Buttes natural areas form large patches of upland forest from Gresham to Happy Valley. Within the East Buttes, red alder trees are experiencing high levels of decline likely exacerbated by unusually hot and dry summers. The levy enabled Metro to conduct forest health assessments in the East Buttes and identify strategies to improve and protect forests, such as planting native trees and shrubs to replace the declining alder canopy.

Diversifying restoration workforce

With the latest round of restoration contracts, Metro worked to make the bureaucratic process of government contracts more accessible to diverse business owners, including people of color, women, veterans and emerging small businesses. The latest process included interviews with potential contractors so people could talk more freely rather than relying on the traditional request-for-proposals process that emphasizes writing skills. The effort supports economic equity for people who plant native trees and shrubs, remove invasive weeds, and help improve water quality and restore habitat.

Park operations

More than 1.7 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, canoeing, camping, bird watching, and fishing, in addition to family and community events. The levy allows Metro to operate, maintain, and upgrade Metro sites so that they are safe, welcoming and inclusive, including at places like Blue Lake and Oxbow regional parks.

Public access improvements

Gabbert Butte

Natural areas in the East Buttes area protect the headwaters of many tributaries of Johnson Creek. Large tracts of forests preserve core habitat for wildlife. Working with the community, Metro and the City of Gresham developed the Gabbert Butte Nature Park master plan to create more welcoming entrances, visitor amenities and trails.

Nature education and volunteer programs

Metro offers school field trips, drop-in nature activities and volunteer opportunities, with a focus on serving people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups. Recent programming has included stewardship programs with Blind Ambition pulling ivy at Glendoveer Golf and Tennis, and educational walks through the ancient forest at Oxbow Regional Park with students from groups like Camp ELSO, which teaches nature-based education and more to Black and Brown youths.

Programming at Blue Lake Regional Park has included land stewardship, medicine making, basket weaving and nature survival skills with Morrison Family Services, family picnics with the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and a partnership with Get Hooked to support fishing and water safety for children and families.

Partnerships have also included nature walks with Self Enhancement Inc. at Smith & Bybee, supporting Latino Network through stewardship work in Council Creek and programming with Hacienda CDC around pollinators at Howell Park on Sauvie Island.

Community grants and partnerships

Environment 2042 Emerging Leaders (E4EL) Program

A \$60,000 grant supported a leadership development program that identifies and develops 18- to 25-year-olds to build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environmental movement. It exposes emerging leaders to experiences and coaching that gives new perspectives, including those from rural Oregonians and First Nations.

Depave the Centennial School District

The \$42,000 grant to Depave helped to develop and implement community-led re-greening projects at Title 1 elementary schools in the Centennial School District. Students and visitors now enjoy 10,000 square feet of new greenspaces with 800 native plants, nature play and on-site stormwater management elements.

Restoring public land through Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The \$75,000 grant to Wisdom of Elders created a collaborative approach to improving local habitats. Members of Indigenous groups mentor students from Portland Public Schools in Traditional Ecological Knowledge while meeting the restoration needs of public lands.

Advancing cultural and environmental equity for API Communities

The \$30,000 grant connected Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) members with parks and natural areas and offered leadership development opportunities to advance environmental equity in East Portland neighborhoods. This program also included camping trips – the first camping experience for half of the participating youth and chaperones.



Metro's parks and natural areas levy

Making a difference in Multnomah County

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St. Johns Prairie

(pictured above)

A years-long effort has been underway to transform the 240-acre former St. Johns Landfill into a prairie full of native plants to attract western meadowlarks, streaked horned larks, western painted turtles and other wildlife. The site is part of Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area, one of America's largest urban wetlands.

For more information on voter investments, visit oregonmetro.gov/nature

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Restoration and maintenance

Multnomah Channel Marsh

Metro has been working to improve connectivity between the wetlands at Metro's Multnomah Channel Marsh, a narrow area of more than 300 acres just across from Sauvie Island. This project has made it easier for juvenile salmon, steelhead, trout, and lamprey to swim into the marsh, a crucial habitat with abundant food and few predators, boosting the health of the fish before their journey to the ocean.

Diversifying restoration workforce

With the latest round of restoration contracts, Metro worked to make the bureaucratic process of government contracts more accessible to diverse business owners, including people of color, women, veterans and emerging small businesses. The latest process included interviews with potential contractors so people could talk more freely rather than relying on the traditional request-for-proposals process that emphasizes writing skills. The effort supports economic equity for people who plant native trees and shrubs, remove invasive weeds, and help improve water quality and restore habitat.

Park operations

More than 1.7 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, canoeing, camping, bird watching, and fishing, in addition to family and community events. The levy allows Metro to operate, maintain, and upgrade Metro sites so that they are safe, welcoming and inclusive, including at places like Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area, Chinook Landing Marine Park and Broughton Beach.

Public access improvements

North Tualatin Mountains

Just north of Forest Park, a collection of four voter-protected properties form the North Tualatin Mountains Natural Area. Metro is actively restoring this former timber land to a diverse native habitat. The levy supported community engagement efforts to develop a master plan for multi-use trails and other visitor amenities to provide future public access.

Gabbert Butte

Natural areas in the East Buttes area protect the headwaters of many tributaries of Johnson Creek. Large tracts of forests preserve core habitat for wildlife. Working with the community, Metro and the City of Gresham developed the Gabbert Butte Nature Park master plan to create more welcoming entrances, visitor amenities and trails.



Oxbow Regional Park

Two nature play areas opened at Oxbow in May 2019, giving kids opportunities to connect with nature on a deeper level. Planners enlisted the help of community organizations and parents of children experiencing disabilities to ensure the popular play areas are inclusive for children of varying abilities.

Nature education and volunteer programs

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Programming at Blue Lake Regional Park has included land stewardship, medicine making, and nature survival skills with Morrison Family Services, family picnics with Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and a partnership with Get Hooked to support fishing and water safety for families.

Community grants and partnerships

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Restoring public land through Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The \$75,000 grant to Wisdom of Elders created a collaborative approach to improving local habitats. Members of Indigenous groups mentor students from Portland Public Schools in Traditional Ecological Knowledge while meeting the restoration needs of public lands.

Portland harbor access and cultural ties to the river

A \$30,000 grant to Portland Harbor Community Coalition supported work to connect and re-connect youth and adults to the Portland Harbor through culturally-specific events and outings.



Metro's parks and natural areas levy

Making a difference in Washington County

Across greater Portland, Metro's parks and natural areas levy protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat and connects people with nature close to home.

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Since 2013, the levy has made a significant difference across Metro's 17,000 acres of parks, natural areas and trails – and a number of community nature projects and programs.

Chehalem Ridge Nature Park *(pictured above)*

This new 1,250-acre nature park is scheduled to open in late 2021, providing visitors with 10 miles of new trails to hike, bike and ride horses and four all-abilities trails. Levy money supported the community planning process for the park, including a partnership with Centro Cultural de Washington County to engage the county's growing Latinx community.

For more information on voter investments, visit oregonmetro.gov/nature

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Maroon Ponds

Restoration and maintenance

Maroon Ponds

A few miles south of Forest Grove, an emergent wetland with sedges, rushes and fallen logs now allow water from nearby springs and creeks to flow into a large pond where turtles gather near the Tualatin River. In partnership with Clean Water Services, Metro removed a manmade dam, tires, car batteries and asphalt to bring back wetlands and riparian forests and improve water quality and habitat.

Diversifying restoration workforce

With the latest round of restoration contracts, Metro worked to make the bureaucratic process of government contracts more accessible to diverse business owners from diverse communities, including people of color, women, veterans and emerging small businesses. The latest process included interviews with potential contractors so people could talk more freely rather than relying on the traditional request-for-proposals process that emphasizes writing skills. The effort supports economic equity for people who plant native trees and shrubs, remove invasive weeds, and help improve water quality and restore habitat.

Park operations

More than 1.7 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, canoeing, camping, bird watching, and fishing, in addition to family and community events. The levy allows Metro to operate, maintain, and upgrade Metro sites so that they are safe, welcoming and inclusive, including at places like Killin Wetlands and the future Chehalem Ridge Nature Park.



Killin Wetland Nature Park

Public access improvements

Killin Wetlands Nature Park

Killin Wetlands is a 25-acre nature park that is located west of Banks. Formerly a dairy farm, this park offers visitors the opportunity to explore the nature trails, view rolling hills, enjoy a picnic from the scenic lookout deck and delight in searching for beavers, river otters, wetland birds and elk. The area is rich with rare plants including Geyer willows.

East Council Creek

East Council Creek Natural Area sits along Northwest Hobbs Road in Cornelius and protects portions of Council Creek and provides habitat for fish and wildlife. Working with community members, Metro has created plans for potential public access to the 33-acre natural area with possible amenities including picnic facilities, interpretive signage, nature trail, and places to play.



Orenco Woods Nature Park

Orenco Woods Nature Park

Orenco Woods, a 42-acre park that was once home to the Oregon Nursery Company, sits nestled along Northwest Cornelius Pass Road. The park was created in partnership with the City of Hillsboro and includes a number of trails, viewpoints, picnic tables and play areas. Restoration work at the park has included building log jams in the Rock Creek floodplain to provide fish habitat and planting native trees, shrubs and flowers to provide wildlife habitat.

Nature education and volunteer programs

Metro offers school field trips, drop-in nature activities and volunteer opportunities, with a focus on serving people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups. Programming in recent years has included bilingual programs with Centro Cultural to co-develop training programs for their staff and community members to lead nature tours and with Adelante Mujeres to support their Beyond Trauma adult education program through dance and nature walks at Orenco Woods and Cooper Mountain nature parks.

In addition, the ongoing restoration work at Chehalem Ridge in partnership with a wide range of organizations including Adelante Mujeres, Forest Grove High School, Latino Network, Centro Cultural, Forest Grove Community School, Youth Works and Rotary Forest Grove underscores the importance of this site across Washington County.

Community grants and partnerships

Nature experiences and workforce training

In partnership with Adelante Mujeres and the Beaverton School District, a \$90,000 grant to Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District provided after-school nature programming for Latinx audiences and expanded a multiyear, workforce development program focusing on Latinx students.

Accessible trail maps

Access Recreation received two grants totaling \$75,000 to create online trail maps, descriptions, photos and videos so people of all abilities know whether a regional trail will meet their abilities and expectations before they arrive at the trail. A number of Washington County destinations are featured, including Jackson Bottom Wetlands, Tualatin Hills Nature Park, Lowami Hart Woods and Metro's Cooper Mountain Nature Park.



Metro

Parks and Nature overview at CORE

March 2022

Today, we hope to share with you



Intro to Metro's Parks and Nature department

The policies that guide Parks and Nature's work

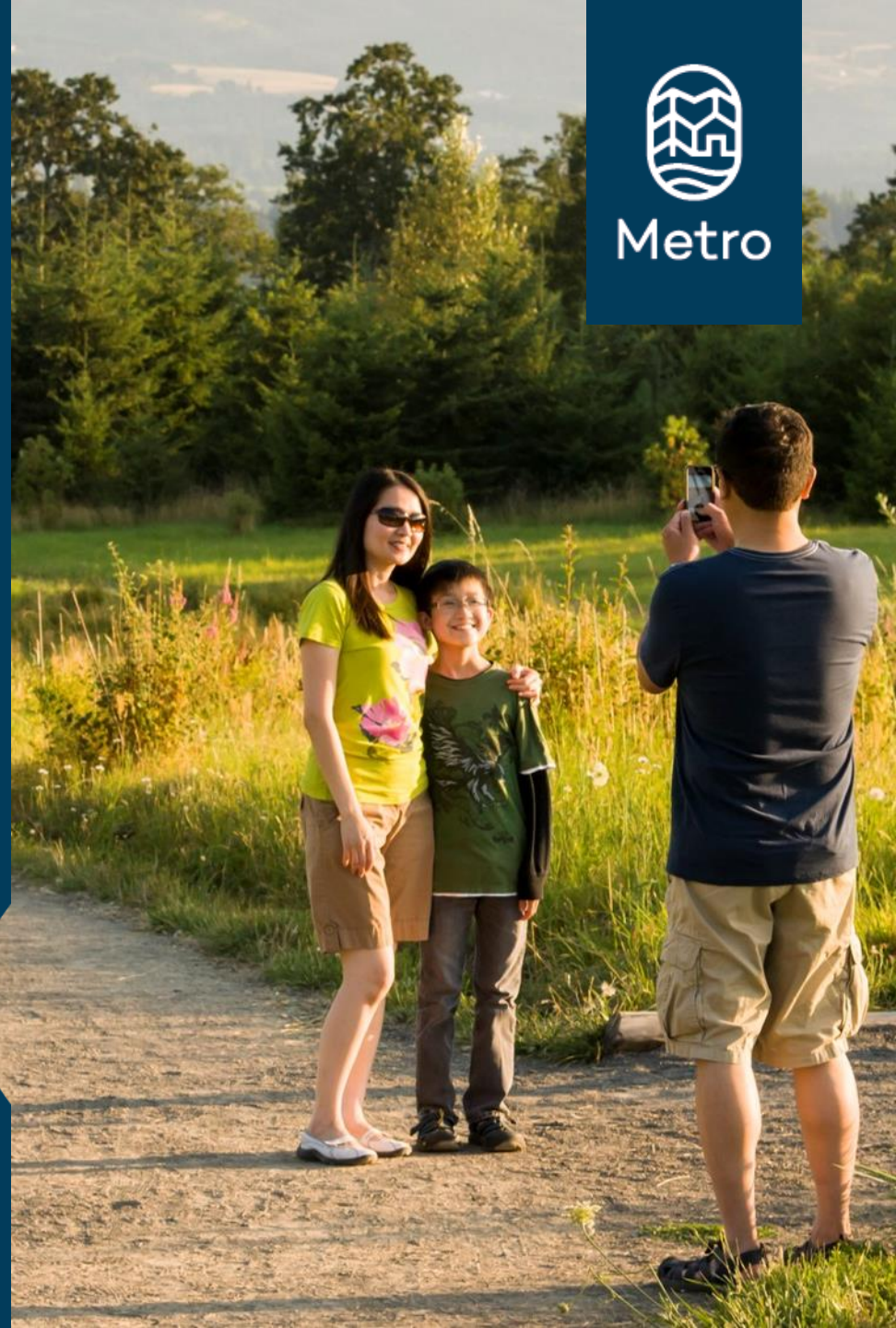
Major funding sources for the work



Clean water,
healthy habitat,
happy people



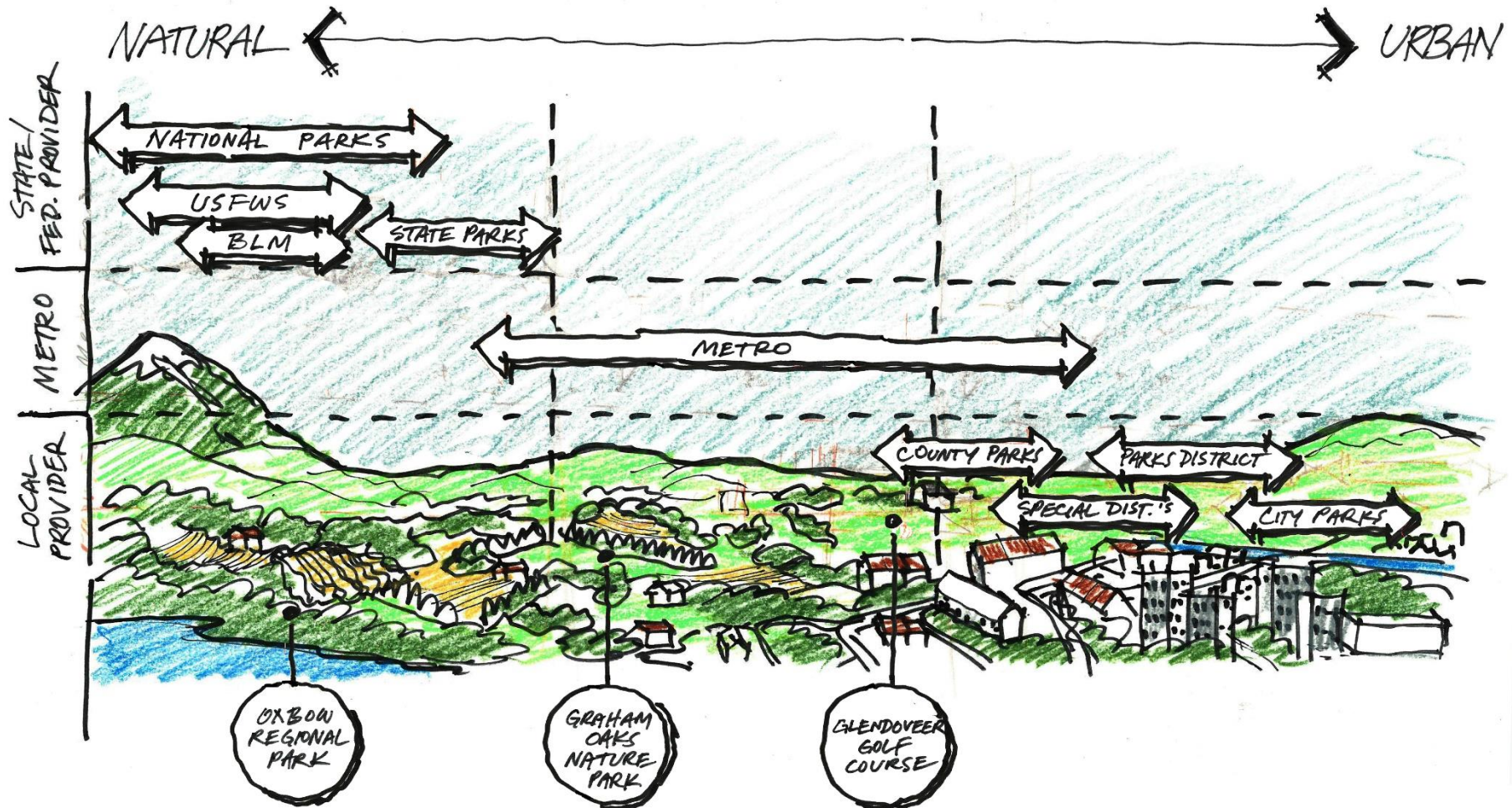
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Metro Parks and Nature's role in the region



Metro



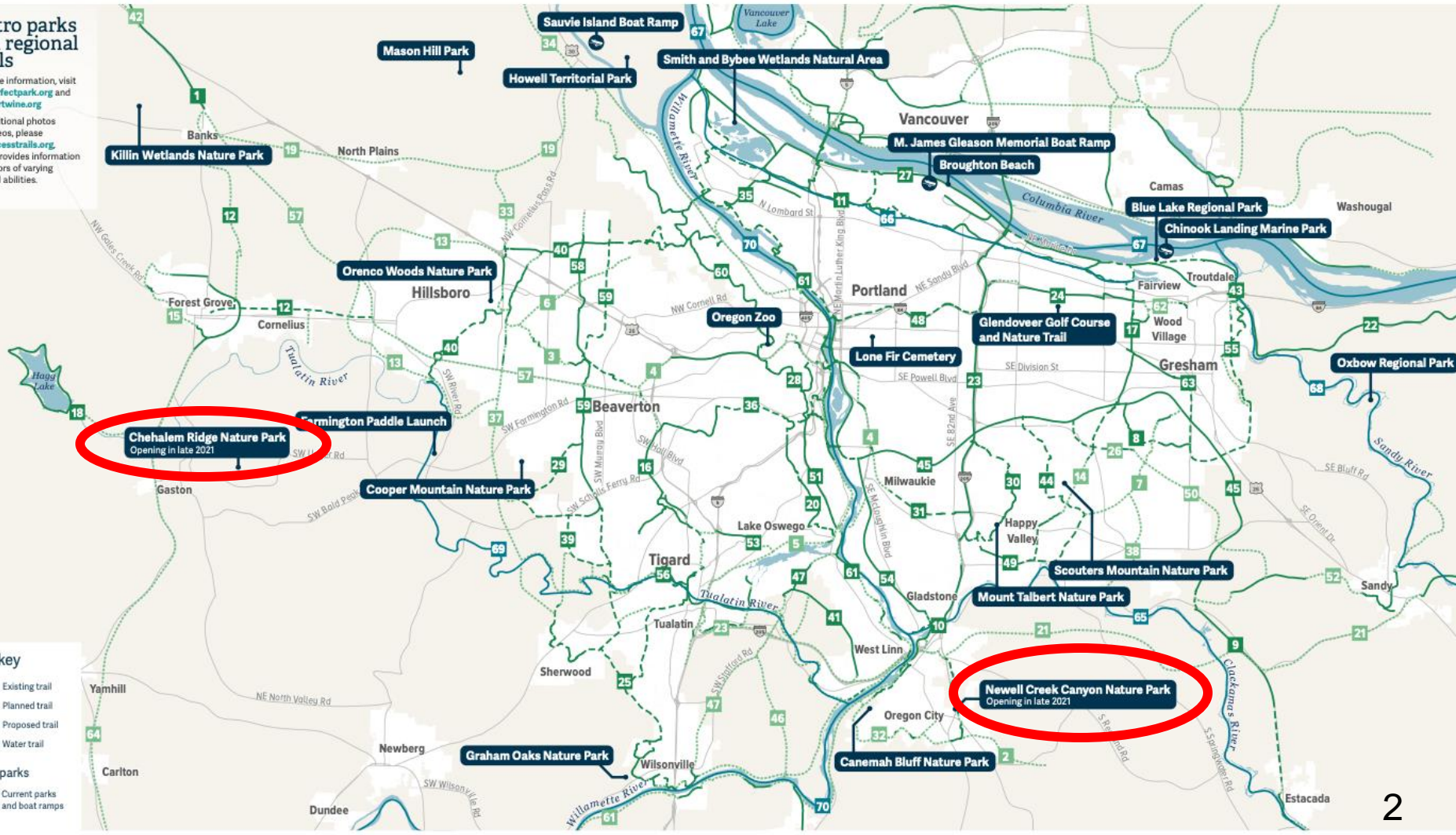
Unique system with nature at its heart



Metro parks and regional trails

For more information, visit yourperfectpark.org and theintertwine.org

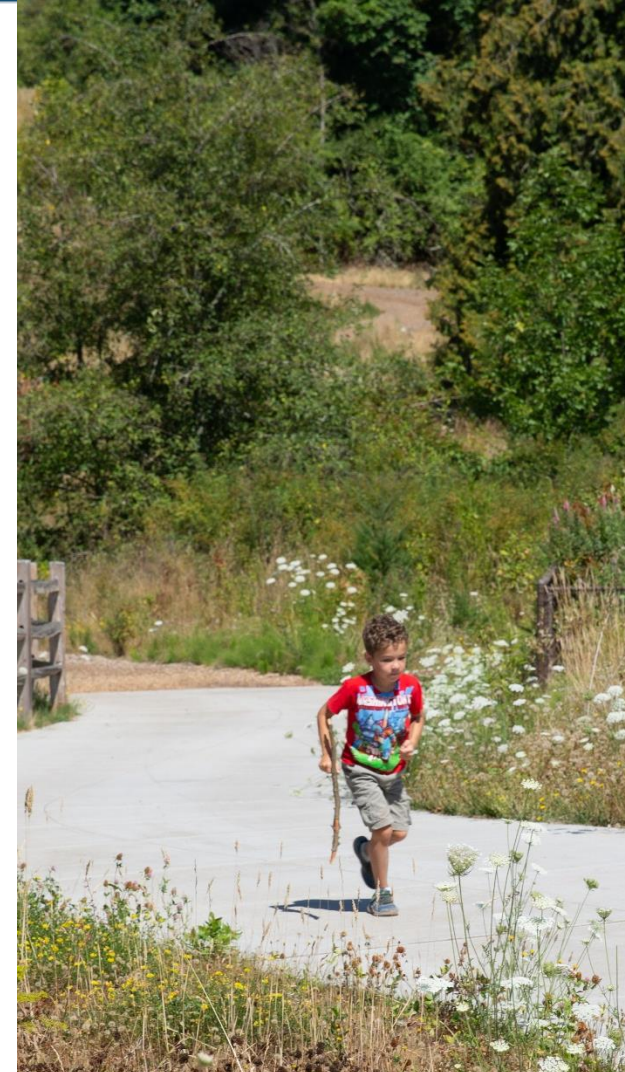
For additional photos and videos, please visit access trails.org, which provides information for visitors of varying physical abilities.



Advancing racial equity across the portfolio



- Using meaningful engagement to shape our work at each step
- Nature for nature's sake resonates broadly across all communities
- Reduce barriers to access at Metro parks and natural areas
- Goals for contracting and workforce



Three decades protecting what makes this place special



- **Natural area land acquisition**
 - 14,000+ acres
 - 100 miles of streams
- **Local community investments**
 - Nature in Neighborhood grants
 - Local parks, trails and natural areas
- **Metro capital projects**
 - Nature parks (Graham Oaks, Cooper Mountain)
 - Regional trail projects
 - Fish habitat restoration



\$475 million to
improve water quality,
protect fish and
wildlife and connect
people to nature

1. Protect and restore land
2. Local park projects
3. Community grants
4. Metro park improvements
5. Walking and biking trails
6. Large-scale community
visions

oregonmetro.gov/parksandnaturebond



Metro



Bond criteria set
this measure
apart

Advance
racial equity

Prepare for climate
change

Conduct meaningful
engagement



Metro



Highlights of 2019 bond to date



Chehalem Ridge and
Newell Creek

Capital grants participatory
pilot

Local priorities in parks,
trails and natural areas

Health, safety and
accessibility improvements
at Blue Lake and Oxbow



Background: Parks and Nature levy



5-year levy supports:

- Restoration and maintenance
- Park operations
- Public access improvements
- Nature education and volunteer programs
- Community grants and partnerships



Levy impact examples



Metro



Levy impact examples



Metro



Levy impact examples



Metro



Using what we've learned



- Broad and strong support for continuing regional investments in parks, trails and natural areas
- Strong support for continued restoration activities
 - Priority focus on habitat for native fish and wildlife including salmon, trout, steelhead and lamprey
- Increasing usage of parks and need to support park operations and access
- Getting out into parks, trails and natural areas have been critical to community health, especially during the pandemic
- Community investments need to be flexible

Questions?



Metro



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