

## STAFF REPORT

### DISCUSSION ON PARKS AND NATURE LOCAL OPTION LEVY

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Date: 5/5/2022

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting Date: 5/19/2022

Presenter(s): Mychal Tetteh, Scotty Ellis, Beth Cohen

Length: 45 minutes

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### 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 the acquisition and restoration of large-scale conservation of natural areas close to urban settings typically beyond the reach of local jurisdictions.

The [Parks and Nature System Plan](#), which describes the department's mission, strategies and priorities and the [Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan \(REDI plan\)](#) 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.

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. A renewal of the parks and nature local option levy wouldn't increase taxes. 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**

At the May 19 meeting, Parks and Nature staff will provide a more detailed update on the parks and nature local option levy and recent work to develop a draft framework for potential levy renewal. Staff are hoping to preview and hear feedback on the draft desired outcomes in the framework as they relate to advancing forward each goal within the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

### **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 the recent parks and nature bond, the development of various programs such as the connect with nature program, and the development of the department's racial equity and other 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 and commitment to elevating the needs and aspirations of communities of color, and who have an interest in connecting their communities to the outdoors.

*Articulating outcomes for 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. Parks and Nature staff have been building on this reporting work to develop tools that help articulate the broader impacts of parks, trails and natural areas investments on communities across the region. Staff have recently launched a process to develop an outcomes framework to measure the impact of investments from the 2019 parks and nature bond on communities in the region.

This bond outcomes framework is being developed in parallel with a set of desired outcomes that will be part of the potential levy renewal framework. The desired outcomes statements are meant to be high level descriptions of the impacts that Metro, with its community and regional partners, is intending to make through the levy investments. The outcomes outline what the intended success of the levy will look like and act as guideposts for staff to evaluate whether the levy work is on path to reach the desired outcomes. Once approved by Council, the desired outcomes will be inserted into the Council adopted levy renewal framework and will allow for more coordinated reporting across the bond and the parks and nature local option levy.

## **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 potential parks and nature levy renewal framework advances almost all of the goals of the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. In addition, at the May 19 meeting, Parks and Nature staff will describe for CORE's review the work to align outcomes in the draft levy renewal framework with 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 Parks and Nature department's distribution of grant funding and allocations to the region's park providers and conservation and community organizations enables collaboration and shared learning around advancing racial equity through parks and nature projects. For example, the 2019 parks and nature bond local share program supports the region's 27 park providers in identifying and funding priority parks, trails and natural areas projects in their communities, which will need to address the bond criteria of racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience. In addition, Metro acts as a convener of conservation partners and an anchor organization for complex restoration and climate resiliency projects, which community members.

### **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 by centering 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.

Parks and Nature staff worked to strengthen and nurture an ongoing authentic partnership with urban Indigenous community cohort throughout the bond development and implementation process. In addition, the bond funded 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, education and stewardship programs offer hands-on experiences that allow people to learn more about the natural world while also fostering the next generation of leaders. Partnerships with culturally specific organizations help 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 funds 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](#)





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# Parks and Nature overview at CORE

May 19 2022



# Today, we hope to discuss with you



Follow up on presentation from April CORE meeting

Provide a more detailed update on the parks and nature levy and potential renewal

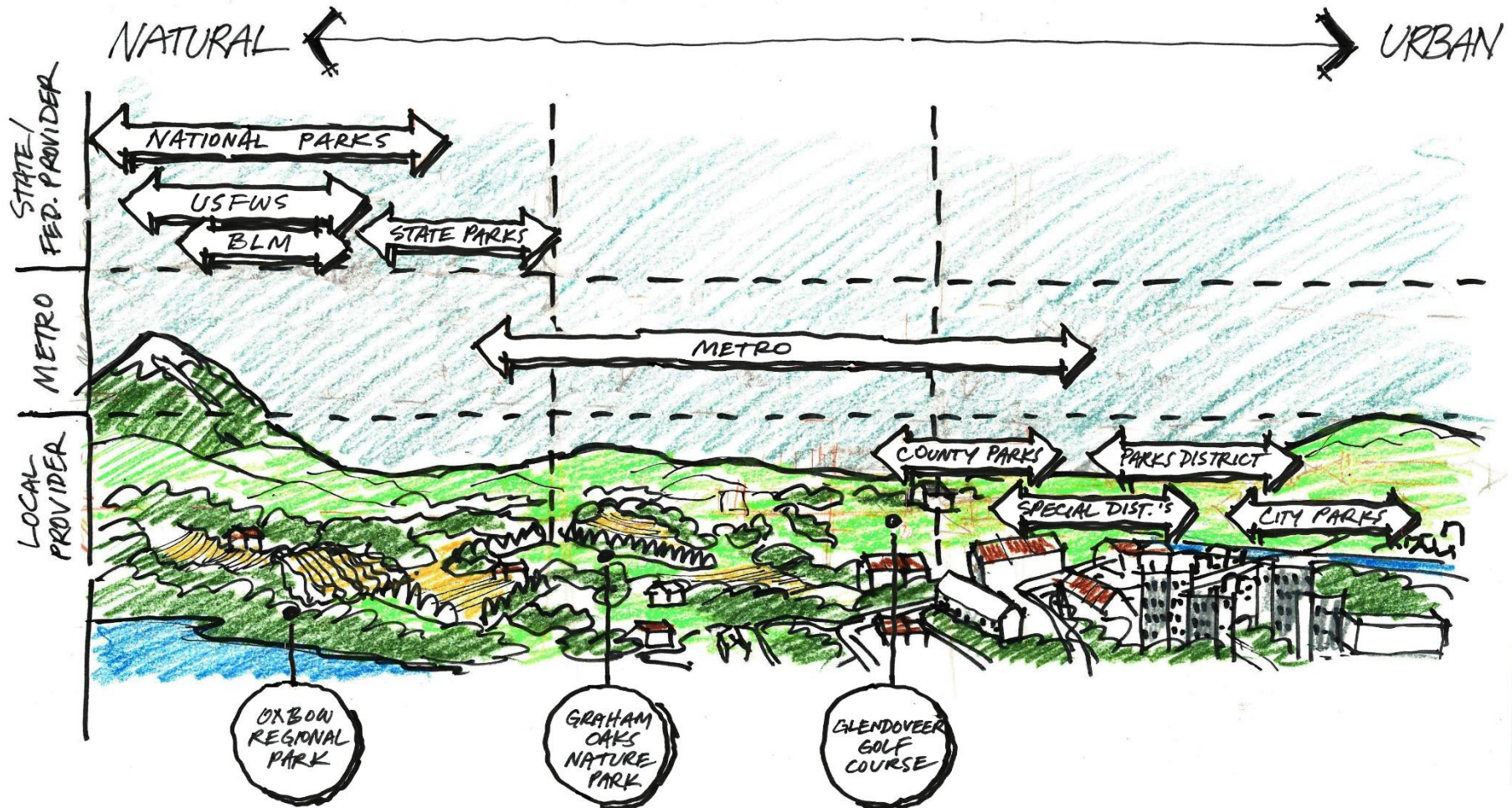
Hear your feedback on alignment with strategic plan to advance racial equity



# Metro Parks and Nature's role in the region



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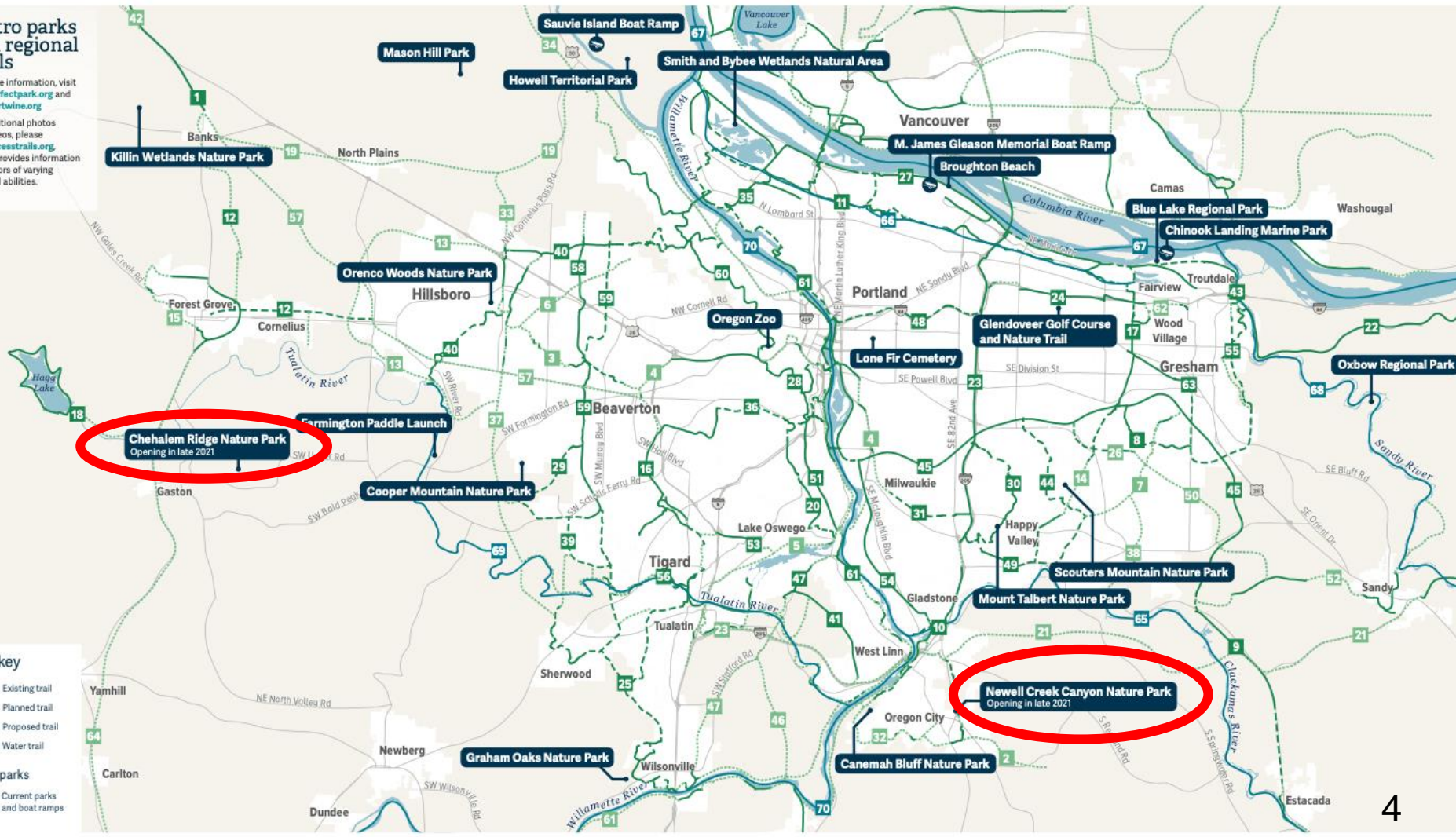
# Unique system with nature at its heart



## Metro parks and regional trails

For more information, visit [yourperfectpark.org](http://yourperfectpark.org) and [theintertwine.org](http://theintertwine.org)

For additional photos and videos, please visit [access trails.org](http://access trails.org), which provides information for visitors of varying physical abilities.



## Map key

- Existing trail
- Planned trail
- Proposed trail
- Water trail

## Metro parks

- Current parks and boat ramps

# Advancing racial equity across the portfolio



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





# Three decades protecting what makes this place special



- **Natural area land acquisition**
  - 15,000+ 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





# Bond and levy maximize impacts for climate, accessibility and health



# 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

More info at  
[oregonmetro.gov/futurefunding](https://oregonmetro.gov/futurefunding)





# Levy impact examples



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# Levy impact examples



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# Levy impact examples



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# Potential levy renewal

- Same cost to taxpayers
- 3 main categories of work  
1) restoration, 2)  
operations, 3) community-  
led investments and  
education
- Prioritization of racial  
equity and climate  
resilience
- Describes work types and  
desired outcomes



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# How community and partners have shaped this work



Leveraging what we've heard in bond development and refinement over the last year

Levy programs shaped by community input over the years

- Grants, partnerships and sponsorships
- Connect with Nature
- Community Education and Stewardship

Opportunities to help prioritize future levy funded projects in a potential renewal

# Draft desired outcomes in levy framework



- High level descriptions of impact
- Act as “guideposts”
- Specific to levy expenditures
- Coordinated with bond impacts



# Questions for you



1. Which outcomes resonate the most with you?
2. Is anything missing?
3. Do the draft desired outcomes in the framework align with each goal within the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion? Is there anything missing?



# Outcomes focused on Goal A: Metro convenes and supports regional partners to advance racial equity



**Climate leadership:** Collaborate with partners to plan for and make strategic decisions related to conservation priorities across the region for broader, more impactful action for climate change adaptation and resilience.

# Outcomes focused on Goal B: Metro meaningfully engages communities of color



**Engagement and accountability:** Serve communities through inclusive, transparent and accountable engagement.

**Native plants:** Protect and restore culturally significant native plants in partnership with greater Portland's Indigenous community and tribes.

**Education:** Work with historically marginalized educators to design collaborative and culturally relevant education that lifts up multiple ways of knowing.



# Outcomes focused on Goal C: Metro hires, trains and promotes a racially diverse workforce



**Workforce equity:** Increase the prosperity of historically marginalized workers and communities through levy investments.

# Outcomes focused on Goal D: Metro creates safe and welcoming services, programs and destinations



**Accessibility:** Ensure that Metro's parks are more accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

**Inclusion:** Ensure that Metro park users of all backgrounds can access a variety of nature experiences to strengthen their relationship to the natural world.



# Outcomes focused on Goal E: Metro's resource allocation advances racial equity



**Contractor equity:** Built capacity and experience of historically marginalized contractors through projects at/with Metro.

**Workforce equity:** Increase the prosperity of historically marginalized workers and communities through levy investments.

# Questions?



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