



Metro

Parks and Nature

2021–22 Annual Report

During a challenging year, Metro opened two new nature parks and conserved hundreds of acres of natural areas

Back in 1995, voters had just said yes to a Metro bond that would create a system of greenspaces across greater Portland. The idea was that Metro would purchase properties from willing sellers that held important habitats – like oak forests and savanna, wetlands, prairies – and create natural areas that would protect clean water and support plants and wildlife. Among the first properties Metro bought was a set of parcels in Newell Creek Canyon, a deep, wide ravine that hugs the eastside of Oregon City.

Jump to April 2022, and a crowd of more than 400 cheered on a group of young mountain bikers rolling through a ceremonial ribbon to make the first official bike ride through the trails at Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park.

Since voters approved that first bond, they went on to pass bonds in 2006 and 2019 and a local option levy in 2013, renewing it in 2016 and again in 2022. During this time, Metro bought more properties in Newell Creek Canyon, slowly stitching together about 240 acres of land into a contiguous natural area.

Extensive restoration work removed weeds and strengthened the forest of big-leaf maples and western red cedar.

The bond measures, including the current \$475 million bond, allowed Metro to turn the natural area into a nature park with 2.5 miles of hiking trails and 2 miles of dedicated mountain biking trails. Plenty of parking, picnic benches and restrooms welcome visitors. The local option levy pays the operating costs to keep the park tidy and maintain the trails and facilities. The levy also funds ongoing restoration work in the canyon.

“When cutting the ribbon at Newell Creek Canyon, I was reminded it took 30 years from when the first measure passed to where we are today, having gathered enough parcels and then being able to invest in trail access and bike access,” Metro Councilor Christine Lewis said. “I want us to keep in mind how long some of this work takes, and we can only achieve it if we have a very clear and well-articulated North Star.”

Voters have given Metro that North Star, and then renewed their commitment to creating a parks and nature system that serves everyone in the region. Because of that direction, Metro manages more than 18,000 acres of parks, trails, natural areas and historic cemeteries.

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.

Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park is just one of the projects Metro delivered on in fiscal year 2021–2022. Learn more about how your tax dollars were spent from July 2021 to June 2022.

Get the whole report online with more photos, stories and details at oregonmetro.gov/parksandnature2022

Connecting people with nature

Metro opened two new parks during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park lies in the heart of Oregon City, offering a respite for neighbors and visitors from across greater Portland. Chehalem Ridge Nature Park, just south of Forest Grove, provides more than 10 miles of trails, including three miles of trails for all ages and abilities.

When voters passed the 2019 parks and nature bond, Metro promised to take care of what we already have. Renovation and renewal work at Blue Lake Regional Park moved forward throughout the year, setting the stage for big changes community members will help direct in coming years.



Restoration roadmap

Protecting and restoring land remains at the core of Metro's parks and nature mission, and with direction from the 2019 parks and nature bond, that work is being done with greater input from community members. The bond provides up to \$155 million for land for natural areas from willing sellers and for large-scale restoration projects.

As staff developed the road map to guide future purchases, greater Portland's Indigenous community provided foundational insights

that shaped the plan. For instance, the road map places greater priority on cultural resources held in natural areas and looks for opportunities to restore streams diverted into pipes. The roadmap was adopted by the Metro Council in spring 2022.

Several properties were purchased with guidance from the roadmap, even as it was being developed, including 52 acres at Killin Wetlands Nature Park and 32 acres at the confluence of the Clackamas River and Deep Creek.

Habitat restoration

FY 2022



126

Habitat and water improvement projects

4,673

Acres with restoration projects underway

Plantings and weed control

FY 2022



51

Planting projects

76

Weed treatments

Ongoing commitment to equity

As a park provider with three boat ramps and multiple parks featuring lakes or rivers, water safety is a priority for Metro. Life jackets are on display and free to borrow at the entrance to Broughton Beach and Blue Lake Regional Park's swim beach. At Oxbow, the easiest way to find a good spot to access the Sandy River is to look for the colorful life jacket stands on the side of the road. These free-to-use life jackets help ensure everyone taking a dip at a Metro park can do so safely.

To make life jacket access equitable, Metro needed to go a step further. Drownings happen disproportionately to people of color. In part, that's because Black and Brown communities have less access to outdoor gear. Over the summer of 2021, Metro purchased 500 life jackets and worked with community organizations to get life jackets to their community members. Building on that success, Metro distributed 3,500 over the 2022 swim season.

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 means working with community organizations to get people of color life jackets.



Building Blue Lake better

Renovations at Blue Lake Regional Park began earlier this year, with crews preparing to install a new water line needed to boost fire safety. Now preparations are underway for the next phase of improvements at the park, starting with the demolition of several old buildings and the modernization of the building that serves as the home base for most of Metro's park maintenance operations.

It's a big step forward for the renovations plan, and an even bigger step forward for Metro. This project will be the first at Metro to employ the Construction Career Pathways framework, a plan to increase access to the trades for women and people of color in greater Portland.

"We launched the Construction Careers Pathways Project to make a leap forward for an equitable economy while supporting our construction industry," said Metro Council President Lynn Peterson. "We're excited to see that work get underway."

The Construction Careers Pathways Program is important for Oregon's economy for several reasons. About a fifth of the region's skilled trades workers are nearing retirement age. The region is expected to need about 15,000 more construction jobs in the decade to come. Breaking down barriers to employment for women and people of color and helping them grow trade careers will make it easier for greater Portland construction companies to keep pace with the region's growth.

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.

Gresham was the first city to put its local share dollars to work. Community members around Grant Butte had organized to protect an 8-acre stand of trees on the slope of the butte. "Our community was very, very clear in making their voices heard," said city councilor Eddie Morales, "We hadn't seen this kind of mobilization. It was from a diverse set of communities: Latinos, Black, AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander)."

The city's \$2.45 million in local share funds were used to purchase the property, adding it to a complex of Metro and City of Gresham properties on the butte and surrounding wetlands.

In fall 2021, the Metro Council awarded nine grants totaling \$700,000 for projects that improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, create and deepen partnerships between community institutions and organizations, and address racial inequities in the conservation movement.

These grants supported projects that will create community gardens, restore creeks and other habitats, re-green concrete spaces and support STEM education for children of color and children of families with low incomes. The grants are funded by the parks and natural areas local option levy.

"Funding [went to] projects designed to support the needs of communities of color with an emphasis on building transformational partnerships for the future and more diverse conservation workforce and leaders," said Mychal Tetteh, community services director of Metro's parks and nature department.



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 three levies.

The very last 2006 natural areas bond measure’s funds were spent this year, putting an end to a tax-payer investment that achieved far more than it was expected to. The \$475 million 2019 parks and nature bond measure now fully holds the legacy of continuing investments to protect land, improve parks and natural areas and support community projects. All six of the 2019 bond measure’s program areas are operating at full speed.

Metro’s bond work is overseen by the Metro Council and the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee. The committee provides critical community oversight and ensures Metro fulfills the promises made to voters.

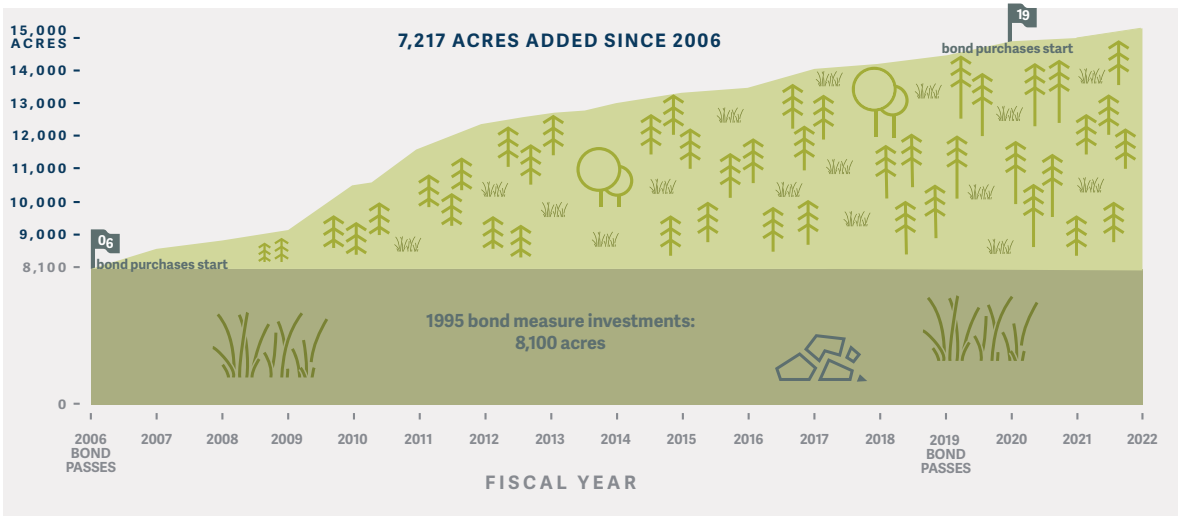
The Metro Council placed a high priority on creating a committee that reflected the diversity of greater Portland as well as formal expertise and expertise from lived experiences.

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: On left, Metro Council President Lynn Peterson. Top row: Councilors Shirley Craddick and Christine Lewis. Middle row: Councilors Gerritt Rosenthal and Juan Carlos González. Bottom row: Councilors Mary Nolan and Duncan Hwang.

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.

The last of the funds from the 2006 bond were spent or set aside for specific projects in fiscal year 2021-2022. In 2006, Metro’s goal was to purchase 4,000 acres with the \$168 million allotted to the acquisition program. Because of its outstanding credit rating, Metro was able to provide the program \$210 million, which was used to acquire more than 6,800 acres. The 2019 parks and nature bond measure continues the work of the 2006 bond measure. Over the past year, Metro has added 240 of acres to its portfolio of natural areas.

Parks and Nature spending* FY 2022

	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	\$652,734	\$5,106,547	\$0	\$0	\$5,759,281
Access to nature	\$50,000	\$454,518	\$417,128	\$2,696,302	\$3,617,948
Park improvements and operations	\$2,643,393	\$2,864,695	\$0	\$1,299,355	\$6,807,443
Cemeteries	\$1,541,813	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,541,813
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$0	\$1,006,863	\$0	\$0	\$1,006,863
Community investments	\$0	\$952,768	\$(52,928)	\$3,179,875	\$4,079,715
Land acquisition and associated costs/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$548,969	\$6,423,520	\$6,972,489
Administration**	\$485,246	\$6,011,414	\$916,337	\$4,071,612	\$11,484,609
Total	\$5,373,186	\$16,396,805	\$1,829,506	\$17,670,664	\$41,270,161

* 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.

2022 parks and natural areas levy

Promised to voters



Actual levy spending THROUGH JUNE 2022

