

 **Metro** | *Agenda*

Meeting: Metro Council Executive Sessions & Work Session  
Date: Thursday, August 16, 2012  
Time: 1:30 p.m.  
Place: Council Annex

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**1:30 PM EXECUTIVE SESSIONS HELD PURSUANT WITH ORS 192.660 (2) (h).  
TO CONSULT WITH COUNSEL CONCERNING THE LEGAL RIGHTS  
AND DUTIES OF A PUBLIC BODY WITH REGARD TO CURRENT  
LITIGATION OR LITIGATION LIKELY TO BE FILED.**

**2 PM WORK SESSION**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**2. PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS FUNDING CITIZEN PANEL  
RECOMMENDATION - INFORMATION / DISCUSSION**

**Bennett  
Cassin**

**3. ADJOURN**

Agenda Item No. 1.0

**PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS FUNDING  
CITIZEN PANEL RECOMMENDATION**

Metro Council Work Session  
Thursday, August 16, 2012  
Metro, Council Annex

# METRO COUNCIL

## Work Session Worksheet

Presentation Date: August 16, 2012 Time: 2:30 pm Length: 60 min

Presentation Title: Parks and Natural Areas Funding Citizen Panel Recommendation

Service, Office, or Center: Sustainability Center

Presenters: Martha Bennett to make the presentation  
Mary Anne Cassin, staff, x1854

### ISSUE & BACKGROUND

Twice voters have approved funding measures to protect our most important natural assets through a successful land acquisition program. Today, Metro is responsible for managing more than 16,000 acres of land – more than a third of all the public parks and natural area lands in the region.

The Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Portfolio Report, presented to Council in November 2011, presented the opportunities and challenges of caring for these important and special places and highlighted the need for additional investment. The Council has determined that failure act now means it will cost more to do so in the future.

The Council authorized the COO to recruit a citizen advisory panel to look at these issues and come back with a recommended course of action. The panel has completed their work and delivered a letter to the COO.

### OPTIONS AVAILABLE

The panel recommends: *"a long-term solution is needed to ensure ongoing maintenance and operations of these regional assets. Given the challenges in finding a long-term solution, we recommend that the Metro Council refer a five-year levy to voters to restore natural areas, maintain and operate parks, engage the community and improve access so people can safely use more of Metro's properties."* The Council can agree or reject these recommendations in whole or in part.

### IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

If the Council wants to continue exploring the idea of asking voters to approve a five-year levy, the next step is to seek input from the public about such a request. Staff will provide recommendations for public involvement and outreach activities through the end of the calendar year. A budget amendment is required to cover required outside expenses.

### QUESTION(S) PRESENTED FOR CONSIDERATION

- Does the Council agree with the panel's recommendations?
- Does the Council wish to pursue a broader public involvement process for the fall?
- If yes, how much does the Council want to spend?

**LEGISLATION WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR COUNCIL ACTION**  Yes  No  
**DRAFT IS ATTACHED**  Yes  No

Materials following this page were distributed at the meeting.

# NATURAL AREAS FUNDING ADVISORY PANEL

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July 30, 2012

Martha Bennett  
Chief Operating Officer  
Metro  
600 NE Grand Avenue  
Portland, OR 97232

Dear Ms. Bennett:

On June 26, 2012 you charged our panel with examining the challenges facing Metro's natural areas and parks. Following voter support of bond measures in 1995 and 2006, Metro's portfolio of land has grown rapidly over the past two decades. While acquisition and basic preservation of land to date has been the objective, now the key challenge is to continue to maintain the land, protect natural resources for the long term, and give people opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

The panel was asked to respond to four key questions:

1. Given the current service delivery model, increase in acquired land and lack of sufficient funding, should Metro seek a new funding source?
2. What level of funding is necessary to support key services?
3. Is now the right time for a funding measure to come before voters?
4. What is the long-term solution for funding natural areas?

The panel met three times and discussed the work to date in acquiring and restoring land and providing regional parks. We looked at the funding challenges facing Metro. We reviewed the spring 2012 voter opinion survey, which gauged public support for protection of natural areas in general as well as a specific scenario for a five-year levy.

**Based on these meetings, we have reached consensus that a long-term solution is needed to ensure ongoing maintenance and operations of these regional assets. Given the challenges in finding a long-term solution, we recommend that the Metro Council refer a five-year levy to voters to restore natural areas, maintain and operate parks, engage the community and improve access so people can safely use more of Metro's properties.**

It is clear that a permanent solution is needed to effectively manage Metro's portfolio of land. We recommend that the Metro Council actively pursue a long-term solution, working with the Oregon Legislature to amend state laws. Funding challenges face not only Metro, but other park and natural areas service providers in the region. They too have an interest in long-term financing. The panel recommends that Metro convene a panel to work on a permanent solution.

A five-year levy is a reasonable first step in addressing a longer-term problem. Passing a levy would provide a window of opportunity to build consensus around a long-term, regional solution. The panel recommends carefully prioritizing spending to maximize effectiveness and be sensitive to the

“sixth-year challenge,” or what happens in the years after funds from a levy have been expended. Without assured, continued funding, expenditures that significantly increase long-term operating costs should be minimized. If a five-year levy passes, the program should be structured to track and clearly communicate results in a way that builds support for the next five-year funding source, or a more permanent solution.

The magnitude of funding recommended is between 10 and 12 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, which would generate about \$10-12 million per year. While respecting the region’s economic challenges, this funding level will make a difference and show visible results on the ground. Metro could consider a larger request; the panel suggests that the final amount align with any additional polling results and the resources available outside Metro to organize a strong campaign.

At this stage, the panel reviewed programs and their historic results and a list of potential expenditures. If the funding measure moves forward, we recommend that it be as specific as possible so voters know how money would be spent and what results to expect in their geographic area. There is great potential for investments throughout the region. As you further define the projects to be funded, be as specific as possible and use geographic equity as a guiding principle.

Further, we support using the following criteria to evaluate potential investments:

- **Resource protection**

Funding protects natural resources, helping ensure a healthy future for people, fish, and wildlife. Ensuring water quality in regional streams, restoring and protecting wildlife habitat, and removing weeds that threaten the health of natural areas are high priorities with voters. Restoration work needs to continue on properties that have been acquired and improved, and extend to as much of the portfolio as possible. Funding should focus on habitat restoration work that protects resources and reduces future funding needs.

- **Taking care of assets**

The investment supports regional parks and takes care of these assets as a legacy for future generations. As indicated in the opinion survey, seven in 10 voters rated preserving the quality of the region’s natural areas as a high or medium priority. In the related Opt-In survey in May 2012, the top priority for investment went to general maintenance to keep parks safe and enjoyable for visitors. Taking care of what we have needs to be a high priority.

- **Equity**

Levy funding is an opportunity for underserved communities to benefit. Be intentional in designing the levy projects to address barriers that affect historically disadvantaged communities in the use and benefits of Metro’s natural areas.

- Provide access to natural areas that are near underserved communities. Access relates to physical facilities as well as consideration of cultural barriers and barriers that prevent people from enjoying the resources.
- Be inclusive by way of contracting and jobs, environmental education and stewardship opportunities, partnerships and collaboration in public decisions. For more detail see *Equity and Potential Funding Measure Programs*, attached.

- **Access and public safety**

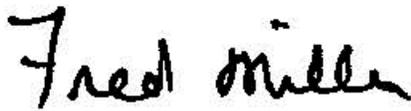
The opinion survey highlighted the importance of public use. Access to parks and natural areas close to home and across the region are both important, supporting the interconnected network of The Intertwine. With a five-year levy, capital-intensive projects with significant, new ongoing costs should be minimized. However, investments that improve access and remove safety hazards should be a higher priority.

Based on the spring 2012 opinion survey by Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, it is clear that an effective campaign is needed for a levy to succeed. To this end, we recommend that the earliest timing for a vote should be May 2013. We anticipate the Metro Council taking a strong role in the leadership of the campaign.

Finally, a five-year levy should go exclusively toward natural areas, parks and trails and not toward other Metro programs or services. Similar to other government agencies, Metro is likely to face budget cuts over the next five years and we would expect a reduction in parks and natural areas funding as Metro faces this challenge. However, we do not want to see a disproportionate cut in these programs due to the availability of new levy funding.

This panel has completed its discussions on the four questions posed and reached a consensus on the above recommendations. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional perspective on the panel's deliberations.

Sincerely,



Fred Miller, Chair

**Panel members**

Josh Alpert, Marcelo Bonta, Tom Brian, Craig Dirksen, Stacey Dycus, Donita Fry, John Griffiths, Lori Luchak, Mike Miller, Wilda Parks, David Pollock, Jazzmin Reece, Stephanie Routh, Pam Wiley

**Attachments**

Situational Analysis, June 2012

Metro Budget Overview, June 2012

Natural Areas Opinion Survey Summary, July 2012

Potential Restoration Priorities, July 2012

Equity and Potential Funding Measure Programs, July 2012

Access to Natural Areas, July 2012



## SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

JUNE 2012

The Portland metropolitan area is well on its way toward realizing a vision of preserving water quality, protecting the region's most important natural resources and allowing people to explore them. Over the course of two voter-approved bond measures, Metro has strategically acquired 16,000 acres, creating a legacy of special places. Metro has identified resources to begin restoring this land, but the existing financial model is not sustainable. In addition to the natural areas acquired with bond measure funding, Metro was given management of some of the region's greatest natural assets in the early 1990s – Smith and Bybee Wetlands in North Portland and Multnomah County's large regional parks, including Oxbow and Blue Lake. These parks successfully draw visitors from around the region.

Metro's portfolio of land continues to grow, while the general fund resources needed to support it are decreasing. The region has no stable, near- or long-term funding source to restore, maintain and invite people to enjoy the places that voters have protected.

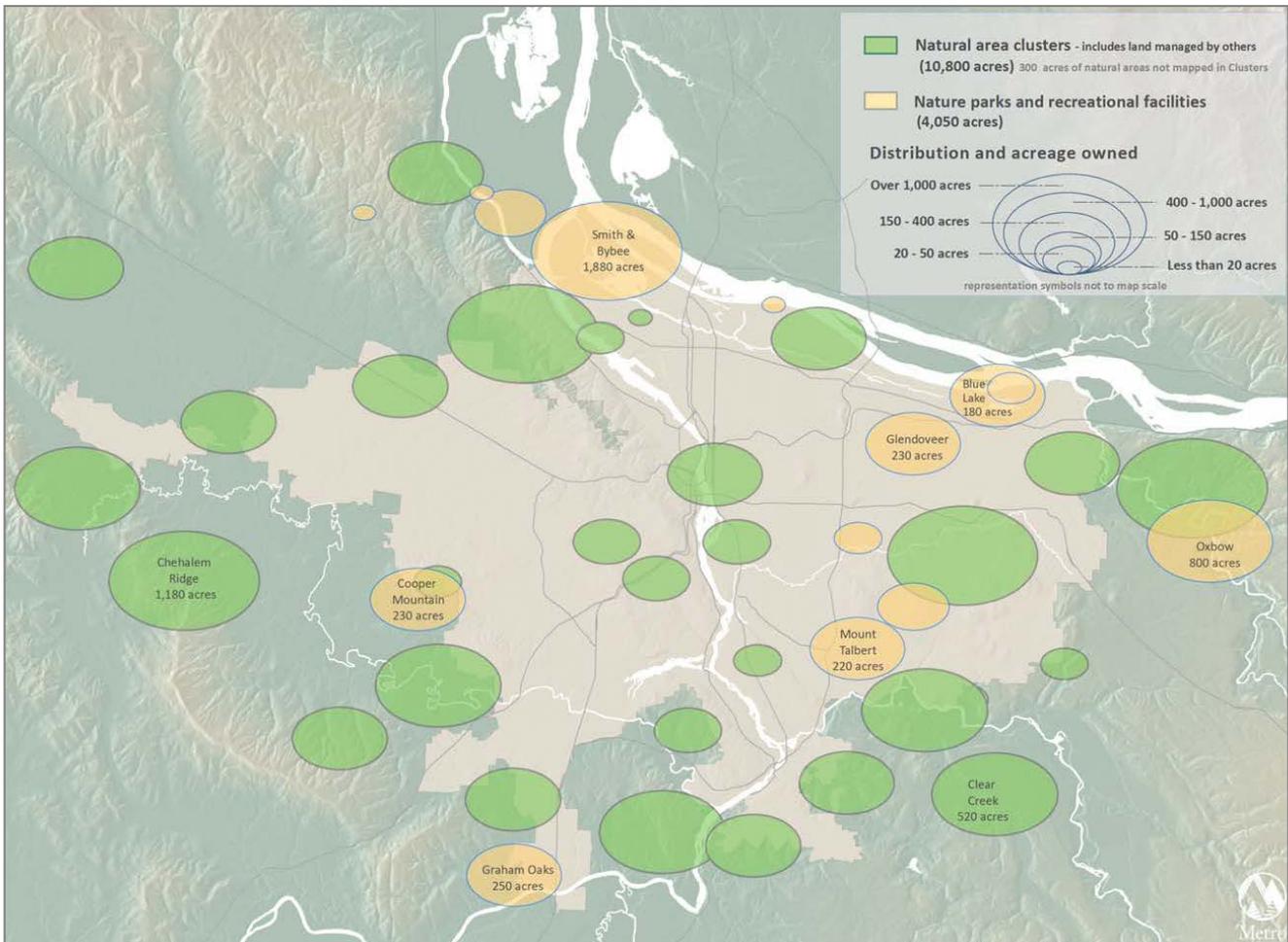
Maintaining high quality wildlife habitat, clean water and park facilities requires active, long-term stewardship. A recent City Club of Portland report identifies invasive weeds as a primary threat to the health of Forest Park. In Metro's natural areas, invasive weeds pose a similar threat to the health of native species and water quality. Left unattended, this trend will mean a more daunting task and higher costs in the future. Similarly, park facilities that provide access to nature require sufficient funding and reinvestment to maintain what we have. Is now the time to build on the positive progress of two bond measures and establish a funding source to protect our region's assets?

### What has been accomplished?

Just over two decades ago, Metro didn't own a single park or natural area. Today the agency is the largest owner of parks and natural areas in the Portland metropolitan area. The highlights are:

<b>1990</b>	Metro takes lead in managing Smith and Bybee Wetlands.
<b>1992</b>	Metro Council adopts Metropolitan Greenspaces Master Plan.
<b>1992</b>	Greenspaces bond measure fails with 44 percent approval.
<b>1995</b>	Voters approve \$135.6 million bond measure for Metro to buy natural areas.
<b>Mid-1990s</b>	Natural areas, parks and trails protection is included in Metro's long-range land use plans, including the 2040 Growth Concept and the Regional Framework Plan.
<b>2002</b>	Metro Council increases solid waste excise tax to help fund parks.
<b>2004</b>	Metro Council extends and increases solid waste tax to develop new nature parks and help pay for restoration and maintenance.
<b>2006</b>	Voters approve \$227.4 million bond measure to continue protecting land for water quality, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities.
<b>2007</b>	Metro Council "undedicates" solid waste tax, opts to pay for park development with bond measure proceeds.
<b>2010</b>	Approximately 1 million visitors are counted at park facilities.
<b>1995-2010</b>	1.7 million trees and shrubs planted in Metro natural areas.

Metro is now responsible for more than 16,000 acres of natural areas, nature parks and recreation facilities. The natural areas have diverse habitat types, sizes and locations, from the large and forested Chehalem Ridge Natural Area on the west side of the region to a collection of properties along the Sandy River Gorge on the east side.



**What’s been done and what’s needed?**

Metro’s mission includes the protection and enhancement of the region’s natural assets along with the provision of recreation opportunities. Over the past twenty years a lot has been accomplished as Metro restores and maintains parks and natural areas. Stepping back from the day-to-day work and examining the entire portfolio of property, analysis reveals that with current levels of funding we are missing out on important opportunities to achieve our mission. At the same time the amount of land is growing and funding sources are flat or in decline. Should additional funding be secured and, if so, what are the activities that are most important to fund? Following is a short description of the key activities related to parks and natural areas, including what is currently funded and what is needed.

Fundamentally, Metro’s work in natural areas involves two spheres: active stewardship of the land and access to nature. These are both important aspects of Metro’s work and represent two of the strongest values held by people who live in the region. In March 2012 the Metro Council commissioned DHM Research to conduct a survey of likely voters within Metro’s service area to test support for a potential

funding measure dedicated to parks maintenance and natural area habitat preservation. Across all three counties, support was high.

- **86%** felt that having parks, trails and natural areas was very or somewhat important.
- **71%** indicated that preserving the quality of the region's natural areas rated as a high (36%) or medium (35%) priority.
- **66%** felt that increasing people's access to natural areas to do a variety of activities was rated a high (30%) or medium (36%) priority.

## **Stewardship**

Through the above and previous surveys, we know that people in the region value the protection of natural resources, especially for water quality and wildlife habitat. As the region accommodates more and more people, wildlife habitat is threatened, making stewardship of protected land especially important. Good stewardship is necessary to preserve the best remaining habitat and, in many cases, help important plants and animals make a comeback. For Metro, buying a new natural area isn't an ending: it's an opportunity to begin the process of protecting and restoring some of western Oregon's most important natural resources. Key activities that support stewardship include:

### **Natural area management**

Natural area management at Metro includes propagating and planting native species, removing invasive plants, monitoring the effectiveness of these projects and restoring wetlands, oak savanna and prairies through re-establishing fire and flooding and the use of selective tree removal. Metro's several thousand acres of young conifer forest also require professional forest management, including forest thinning, underplanting for diversity and road maintenance. Cost projections based on 20 years of experience and a growing portfolio of protected land indicate a need to invest at least \$28 million over the next several decades to meet restoration goals on all of Metro's properties.

### **Provide opportunities for volunteers**

An important component of stewardship is to involve people in caring for the land. More than 2,500 people volunteer at Metro parks and natural areas every year, often participating through a business or nonprofit group. Currently, demand for volunteer opportunities exceeds the capacity of the staff.

### **Make grant funds available to neighborhoods for stewardship**

For nearly two decades, Metro has provided grant funding to neighborhoods and community groups, nonprofit organizations, schools, cities, counties and public park providers for habitat restoration, environmental education and other nature-related projects. Requiring a 1:1 match, grant funding from Metro leveraged a total investment estimated at \$8 million since 2006, involving more than a hundred partner organizations and generating an estimated 100,000 volunteer hours. Continuation of this grant program will require sustained funding.

### **Stewardship of park facilities**

Stewardship of park facilities includes maintaining facilities as well as the land. Nature parks and other more developed sites offer important access to nature for the region's citizens and support regionally important natural habitats. Funding is set aside for major maintenance, but capital replacement funds are also needed and lacking at this time.

See Metro's *Portfolio of Natural Areas, Parks and Trails: Opportunities and Challenges* (November 2011), Chapter 4, page 41 and Chapter 6, page 63 for more information.

## **Access to Nature**

In addition to stewardship, people in the region value connecting with nature. Being outdoors in natural areas provides physical, mental and spiritual benefits for the Portland metropolitan area's 2 million residents, giving them respite from urban life. As Metro's portfolio of property grows, so does the potential to let people explore these special places. Currently, less than half of Metro's property is accessible to the public. Key activities that support access to nature include:

### **Maintain and operate parks and recreational facilities**

More than 1 million visitors reach Metro's 14 developed park sites each year. Park users enjoy bird watching, canoeing, golfing, hiking, camping, boating, fishing, picnicking, weddings and special events. As facilities such as restrooms and picnic shelters age, they will reach the end of their useful life and need to be replaced. Without funding, these facilities eventually will need to be shut down or removed. Costs of maintaining aging facilities will continue to increase and, without additional funding, services will need to be reduced – which could lead to more limited hours or a smaller staff at parks.

### **Safe public access to natural areas**

Approximately one-third of Metro's property, about 4,000 acres, has formal access for the public, such as Blue Lake Regional Park or Graham Oaks Nature Park. More than fifty percent of the properties have "informal" access, meaning people can find a way to walk into the property on informal trails or old logging roads. People who find these access points are on their own; these destinations aren't supported by staff or signage. Metro staff has identified opportunities to formalize and expand access at appropriate sites for a modest initial investment.

### **Support conservation education**

Metro's education and interpretive programs connect people with the parks and natural areas they are visiting. These programs served 14,000 people last year. More than half of Metro's programs target elementary school children, many of whom are from Title I schools. Currently, Metro's school field trip programs are available at Smith and Bybee Wetlands in North Portland and Oxbow Regional Park on the Sandy River.

See Metro's *Portfolio of Natural Areas, Parks and Trails: Opportunities and Challenges* (November 2011), Chapter 5, page 51 for more information.

## **Issues to be aware of**

### **Acquisition capital and operating funds**

During the last 15 years, there has been a sense of urgency to acquire and protect valuable natural resource property. Especially during periods of strong economic growth, acquisition of properties has been a top priority with voters. Properties have been protected throughout the region, and the goal to "protect and connect the best" is being realized.

At the time property acquisition measures were passed, decision-makers were aware that the associated operating costs would need a funding source, but that wasn't the urgent action needed at the time. For

good reasons, the two bond measures concentrated on acquisition. Public sentiment centered squarely on securing land before it was lost to development.

By design, the bond measures provided capital rather than operating dollars. Without additional voter-approved funding, Metro will be able to continue only basic maintenance and limited habitat improvements. Now the region's legacy of protected land requires a close look at long-term care.

### **The path we're on**

What would result if we do nothing and keep going as we are? This question would be answered incrementally by the Metro Council as they weigh reduced funding and competing priorities each year. The "thinning of the soup" is likely to result in some of the following:

- Less acres being restored and more invasive weeds impacting natural resource values on properties.
- Facilities such as restrooms and picnic shelters becoming worn and going longer between repair and replacement.
- Increased security and safety risks based on informal access to property.
- Reduced partnerships and outside funding associated with diminished planning.
- Fewer volunteer opportunities and outdoor classes available.
- Loss of momentum both with on-the-ground work and technical expertise.

### **Upfront restoration costs save future expense**

Restoring and caring for natural habitat comes with a price tag – but so does waiting. Many habitat types cost less to maintain after they're restored. Fighting weeds at a degraded site year after year ultimately takes more money than planting trees now to shade out the weeds. Beyond the potential for reducing future costs, failing to act means we don't receive the many benefits of well-cared-for land and are at risk of losing rare species and habitats.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers may seem like an attractive solution to lower restoration costs, but managing their work can take more time and money than hiring a contractor for the same task. Of course, the strategic use of volunteers provides other important benefits: engaging people in the land they've helped protect and building a stewardship ethic. Metro is pushing its capacity to effectively engage volunteers with existing staff levels.

### **Equity lens**

Metro's natural areas programs and services generally are found where there are significant resources to protect or where regional parks have been inherited. Does this pattern of services have an unintended bias for disadvantaged populations? Services to consider with the equity lens include access to natural areas, access to environmental education programs, and distribution of community grants which energize projects throughout the region. An additional consideration is the diversity of Metro employees and firms or individuals working under contract on Metro property.

### **Natural areas preservation can be in conflict with access by people**

Visitors to Metro's natural areas share some of the best remaining habitat in the region with wildlife that depends on it. Public access, especially if it isn't properly planned and managed, can harm water quality and wildlife habitat. Informal use of property puts people and wildlife at risk. Currently, resources go where there is a problem to solve, rather than systematically where access may be needed.

### **Regional planning supports projects on the ground**

The Greenspaces Master Plan, adopted in 1992, provides a framework for the region's interconnected system of parks, regional trails and natural areas. Ongoing regional planning focuses on building partnerships and leveraging multiple funding sources, which are key to the success of most regional-scale projects. The work of regional planning and collaboration is primarily supported by Metro's general fund and may decline over the next five years.

### **Uncertainty of long-term funding**

The long-term funding picture for parks, trails and natural areas is uncertain for both Metro and other park service jurisdictions. Across the region, park funding relies on repeatedly going to voters for bond measures and operating levies. Joining together to address this dilemma, park directors from across the region have discussed the potential for a regional, long-term funding source. There is a sense that this is not the right time for such a bold move, with compression issues, a slow economy and continuing school-funding crises across the region. The Metro Council is fully aware of this long-term issue, as well as the immediate issue to address funding for operations specifically on Metro's 16,000-acre portfolio of lands.

### **Potential voter support**

In the 2012 DHM survey mentioned above, voters were asked at the beginning, and again at the end after hearing more information, whether they would support a \$.10/\$1,000 levy for natural areas. Support increased from 48% to 57% once voters heard more information about the importance, purpose and potential uses of the levy. Just telling voters more about the financial impact of the levy (that it would cost \$20 a year to a property tax assessed at \$200,000 a year), increased support for the measure to about 56%. Support was 50% or better across all three counties, with Washington County voters registering the strongest support at 62% in favor.

With this background in mind, we'd like you to reflect on the panel's key questions. The portfolio of property and associated services has grown up quickly.

- What is the path forward in terms of funding and key services?
- Is this the right time to go back to the voters?
- Should we seek an immediate solution, knowing there is a long-term issue?

At the first meeting we'll review this information and dive into your questions and discussion.



## METRO BUDGET OVERVIEW

JUNE 2012

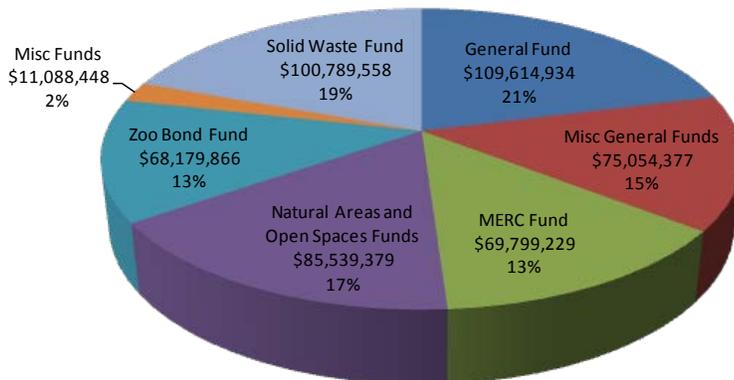
This document is intended to provide background information on Metro's budget and answer four questions for the advisory panel:

1. Where do Metro's general fund resources come from?
2. What problems does the general fund face?
3. What does the general fund pay for?
4. How does the Natural Areas bond play into this?

### Where do Metro's general fund resources come from?

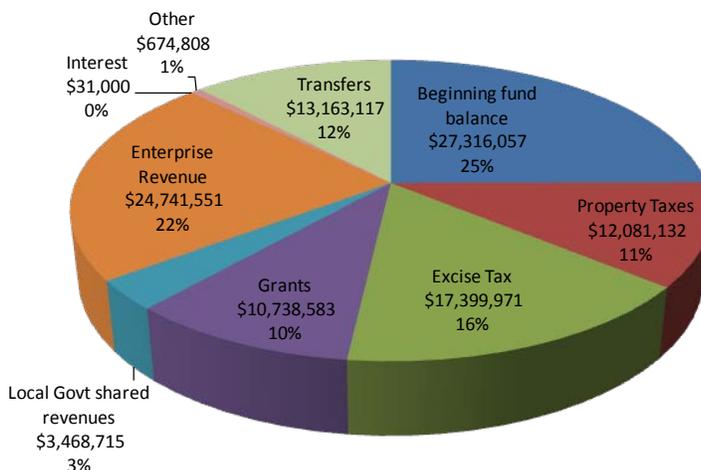
For the new fiscal year starting July 1, 2012, Metro's total budget will exceed \$500 million for the first time. That number includes all of Metro's activities – from natural areas maintenance to the solid waste transfer stations and the visitor venues. The chart below shows how that budget is allocated.

#### Metro FY 2012-13 total budget



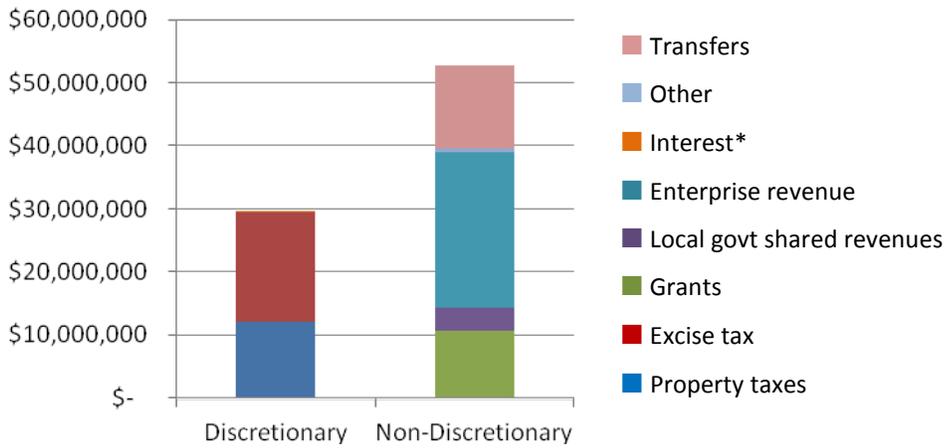
The general fund is approximately 21% of the \$520,065,791 total budget. That \$109 million general fund comes from a variety of sources. The chart below shows the major categories of general fund resources.

#### Metro FY 2012-13 general fund resources



Many of the resources in the general fund are not truly “general” – meaning that they are not available for general use by the government because they are restricted in some way. For instance, much of the grant revenue in the general fund is legally dedicated to planning projects. Discretionary general fund resources are the most scarce, in part because they are the most flexible.

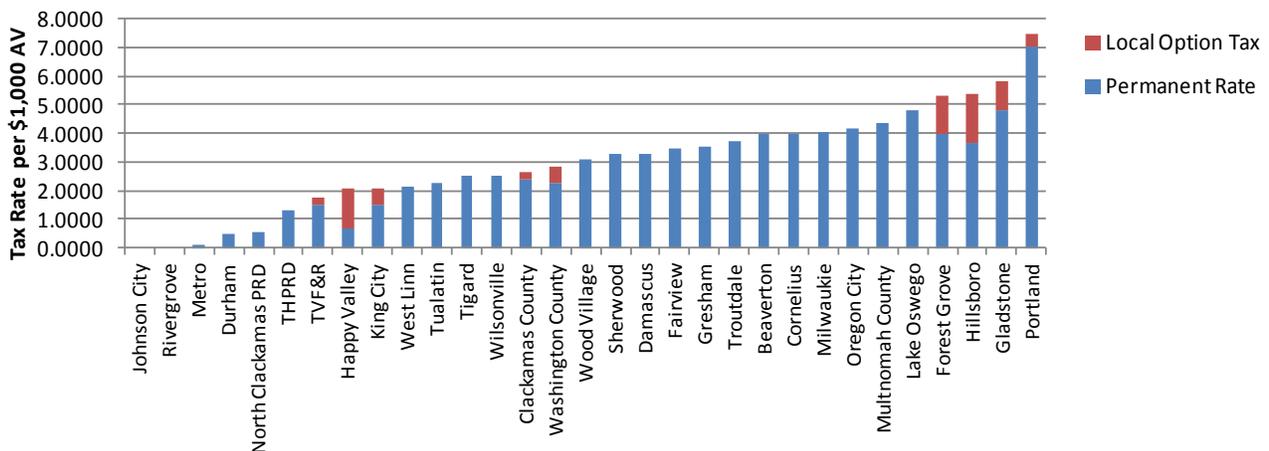
### FY 2012-13 general fund operating revenues



\* Because interest earnings for FY 2012-13 are only projected to be \$31,000, the line is not visible on the chart. Interest earnings are considered discretionary revenues.

As the chart above shows, Metro’s primary sources of discretionary general fund revenue are property taxes and excise taxes. Metro receives property taxes from a levy originally approved by voters for Oregon Zoo operations in May 1990. Ballot Measure 50, approved by the voters in May 1997, converted the tax levy to a general operating permanent rate levy. Metro’s permanent rate is \$0.0966 per \$1,000 of assessed value and cannot be increased even by the voters. This chart shows the permanent rates and local option taxes for each jurisdiction in the Metro boundary for FY 2011-12.

### Property taxes in the Metro region



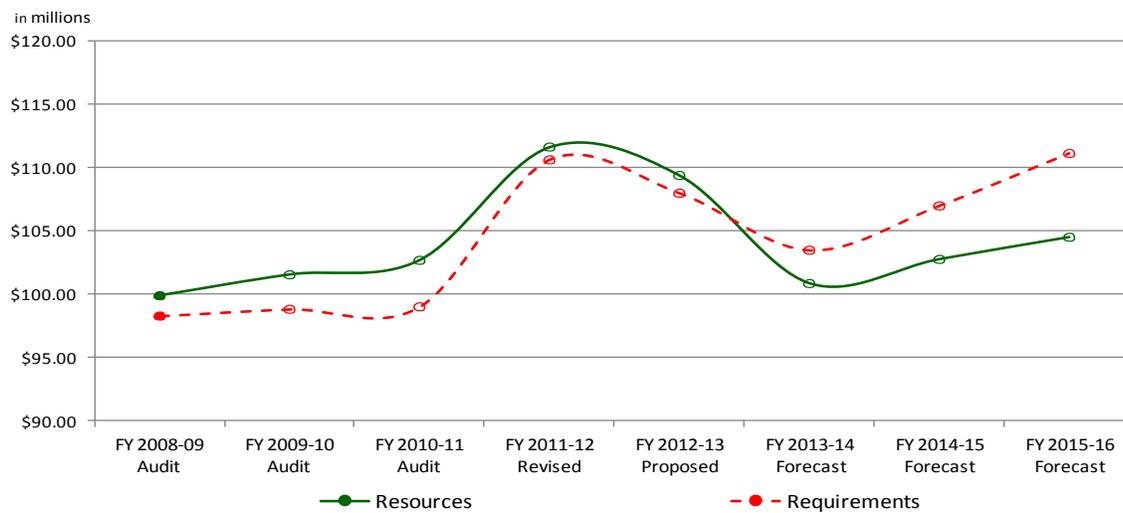
Metro’s permanent rate is very low relative to the rest of the region and will generate approximately \$12 million in FY 2012-13.

The excise tax is levied as a flat rate per-ton tax on solid waste disposal and as a percentage of all other authorized sales and services. The excise tax is estimated to raise \$15.6 million in FY 2012-13. By Metro Code, the amount of the per-ton tax may be increased annually based on the Consumer Price Index.

### What problems does the general fund face?

Like most public agencies across the United States, Metro has been affected by the national recession since 2008. Operating revenues have been generally slow-growing or flat while costs have continued to increase. While Metro has been successful in blunting the rise in labor costs, the agency still faces significant fiscal challenges. Metro’s five-year forecast shows revenues continuing to grow more slowly than expenses, resulting in significant potential deficits in the next five years. This is due to Metro’s revenues tending to increase at about the rate of inflation while major expenses (particularly pension healthcare costs) are rising at a higher rate.

### Five-year forecast – FY 2011-12 through 2015-16 general fund: resources vs. requirements



Natural areas and parks restoration and maintenance is affected by the challenges facing the overall general fund. But the program has specific challenges as well. In 2002, the Metro Council approved an increase in the excise tax to fund maintenance and operations of natural areas. By 2004, the excise tax had been raised again and was generating \$1.8 million annually. In 2006, as part of a change to the structure of the excise tax, those dedicated, specific components of the excise tax were phased out.

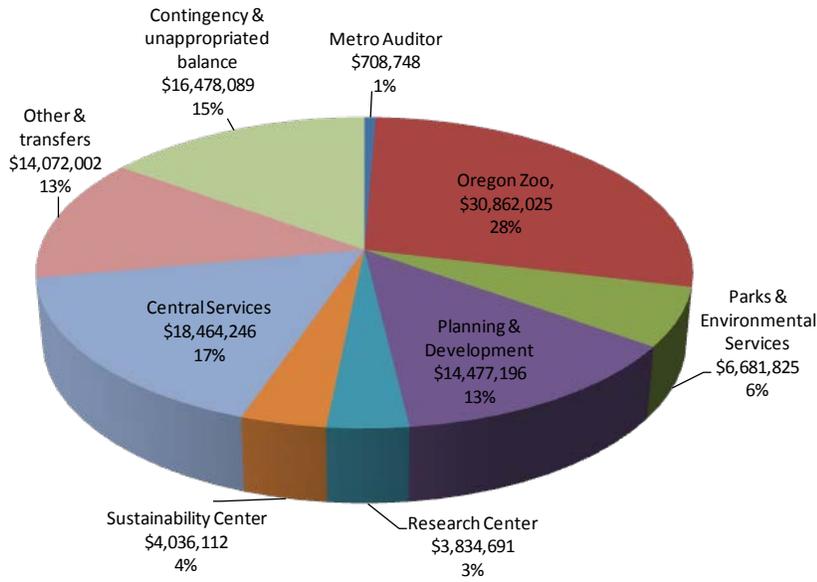
After the change, parks and natural areas continued to receive funding from the excise tax; however, the funding allocations were determined by the Metro Council in the budget process rather than specified in the code.

That dedicated excise tax built up a reserve between 2002 and 2006 when it was phased out. That reserve has been used since 2006 to keep funding for the natural areas program level. However, the last of those reserve funds will be used in FY 2012-13. The end of that reserve account means the natural areas program is facing a likely budget cut of at least \$200,000 in FY 2013-14.

## What does the general fund pay for?

The general fund includes the operational costs for all of Metro’s general government activities. It does not include costs for business-like activities such as solid waste operations or the Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (MERC) visitor venues (Oregon Convention Center, Portland Expo Center and the Portland Center for the Performing Arts). The chart below shows the current breakdown.

### FY 2012-13 general fund expenses



Expenses for natural areas and parks maintenance and operations are budgeted primarily in the Sustainability Center budget, but also in the Parks and Environmental Services Department budget. The Sustainability Center includes expenses for three primary workgroups that support natural areas: Natural Areas Land Management, Parks Planning and Development, and Science and Stewardship. The Sustainability Center budget also includes an administration division that tracks general department activities as well as some activities that cross the other programs and divisions.

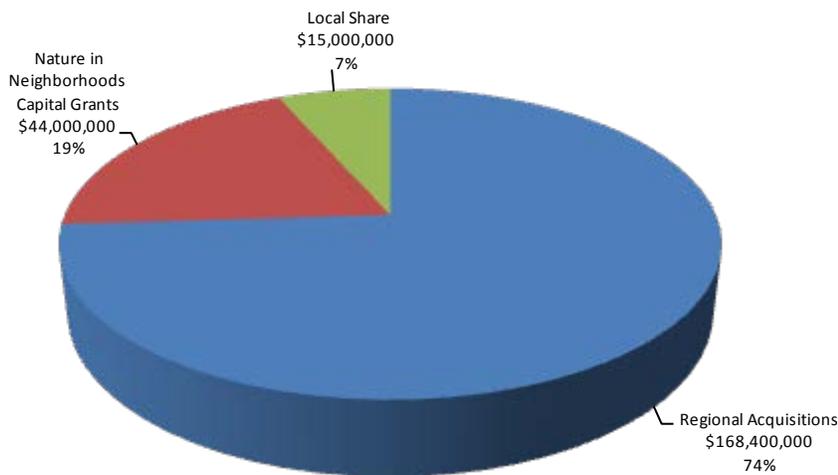
Division	Budget
Administration	\$992,846
Natural Areas Land Management	\$917,014
Parks Planning & Development	\$694,233
Science & Stewardship	\$1,432,019
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,036,112</b>

The general fund also includes expenses for natural areas and parks and conservation education in the Parks and Environmental Services and the Oregon Zoo budgets. Within Parks and Environmental Services, the Parks and Visitor Services division budget is \$2,484,500. That budget supports Metro’s developed parks such as Blue Lake and Oxbow regional parks and Cooper Mountain Nature Park. The Conservation Education program is budgeted in the Oregon Zoo’s budget. For FY 2012-13, the Conservation Education program is budgeted at \$390,052.

## How does the Natural Areas bond play into this?

In November 2006, voters in the Metro region authorized sale of \$227.4 million in general obligation bonds for the purpose of preserving natural areas and stream frontages, maintaining and improving water quality and protecting fish and wildlife habitat. Under Oregon law, general obligation bond proceeds can only be used for acquiring or constructing capital assets. That means bond proceeds cannot be used for maintenance or operations. Metro is also required to follow the outline for the program provided to the voters in the original explanatory statement and Metro Council resolution that authorized placing the bond measure on the ballot. The program was designed with three major components:

### Natural Areas bond programs



While the Natural Areas Bond Program will continue to acquire new land and ultimately require additional maintenance and operations, it does not provide financial resources for those needs. The focus on acquisition of land was an intentional strategy following passage of the 1995 and 2006 bond measures.

### Next Steps

It was clear from the time the Metro Council referred the first bond measure in 1995 that acquisition was the imperative and that while long-term maintenance funding needed to be identified and set aside, the Metro Council and the region's voters prioritized land acquisition. The problems Metro face in the general fund and even maintaining the current level of funding for natural areas and parks have further highlighted the need for stable long-term funding for maintenance and operations of natural areas and parks.



## NATURAL AREAS OPINION SURVEY SUMMARY

JULY 2012

In March 2012, Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc. (DHM Research) conducted a scientific telephone survey of likely voters in the Metro service territory to assess their support for a potential levy to continue preserving natural areas. The sample was stratified over three counties (200=Clackamas, 200=Washington, 200=Multnomah) to permit a more statistically reliable assessment of attitudes in each area.

Eighty-six percent (86%) rated having natural areas, parks, and trails in the region as “very” (54%) or “somewhat” (32%) important. In open-ended responses, voters were split between using the areas and maintaining them as the most important thing to them.

Seven in ten voters rated preserving the quality of the region’s natural areas as a high (36%) or medium (35%) priority. Increasing people’s access to natural areas to do a variety of activities was also rated a high (30%) or medium (36%) priority. Although medium/high ratings were similar for both issues, voters were almost three times as likely to rate preserving these areas as an urgent priority.

Voters were told that a natural areas levy could fund a number of improvements to these areas. They were then asked to rate each using a scale of 1 to 10. While almost all of the eight improvements were given above average importance ratings, three rose to the top as the most important.

**Ensuring water quality in regional streams is good enough for salmon and other native fish** was given a top importance rating (8-9-10) by 62% of voters (mean: 7.6).

**Restoring and protecting wildlife habitat** was of top importance to 53% of voters. Ratings were similar by county and age. Women (63%), democrats (67%), and independents (47%) were more likely to rate this at the top of the scale than men (42%) and republicans (32%).

**Removing invasive weeds and plants that threaten the health of natural areas and choke out plants that wildlife use for food and shelter** was rated third at 50% (mean: 6.9). Again, top ratings were similar by age and county.

Voters were also read reasons why people may support or oppose the natural areas levy and were asked how each influenced their own opinion, or if it made no difference in how they would vote.

The top reasons to support the natural areas are as follows. Each of these statements had similar impacts by age group and county of residence. Democrats, independents and women were more likely than republicans and men to have said each makes them more likely to vote for the measure.

**Our natural areas have something for everyone – natural beauty, scenery and easy access to nature and recreation. We need to preserve them for people who live here now and for future generations** (62% more likely to vote for).

**In these hard economic times, we need to have low-cost recreational opportunities close to home where families can experience nature** (55% more likely to vote for).

**Natural areas in the region increase the area’s livability and residential property values; it’s important we continue to preserve and enhance the natural environment of these areas** (54% more likely to vote for).

**It is worth \$2.00 a month to continue to take care of the thousands of protected natural areas in the region** (54% more likely to vote for).

**Having a large well-maintained parks and natural areas system makes our region unique, attracts tourists and businesses and helps our economy** (53% more likely to vote for).

**This levy makes sense. We need to take care of these natural areas now instead of letting them deteriorate and spending much more in the future to restore them** (54% more likely to vote for).

Voters were also read reasons why some people may oppose this levy. Reasons to oppose the levy did not resonate as strongly as did the reasons to support it. The best rated reasons to oppose the levy were related to the economy and the belief that there are other priorities, although less than one-half rated these as reasons they would be more likely to oppose. Findings for each argument were similar by age, gender and county. Republicans and independents were more likely than democrats to say these reasons may hinder their support.

Support for both concepts increased once voters heard more information about the importance, purpose and potential uses of the levy. Support was highest for the protection only measure, compared to the measure that said it would also increase recreation.

Voters were asked at the beginning of the survey, and again at the end after hearing more information, whether they would support a levy for natural areas. To get a sense of community priorities, a split sample was asked about caring for natural areas and increasing recreation, while another split sample was only asked about caring for natural areas.

In addition to the 9-point increase (from 48% to 57%), between the first test (protection) and second test (recreation), there was notable increase in support among every demographic group:

<b>Clackamas County</b>	<b>47% to 50%</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>46% to 50%</b>
<b>Multnomah County</b>	49% to 57%	Female	50% to 63%
<b>Washington County</b>	49% to 62%	Democrats	67% to 74%
<b>18-34 years</b>	55% to 68%	Independents	46% to 51%
<b>35-54 years</b>	56% to 64%	Republicans	17% to 33%

It is also important to note that when voters knew more about the financial impact of the levy (that it would cost \$20 a year to a property assessed at \$200,000 a year for tax purposes), support for the measure increased across the board.

Additionally, DHM Research conducted an online survey among Opt In members to assess their opinions about and priorities for natural areas in the region. Between May 10 and 22, DHM Research emailed Opt In members living the tri-county region – a total of 11,421 people when the survey was launched. A total of 3,497 members (31%) participated in the survey.

Results from the Opt In panel generally validated results from the March 2012 telephone survey; in general, Opt In panel members were even more strongly in favor of efforts to preserve natural areas and invest in their ongoing care and maintenance.

More than 9 in 10 members in all three counties said regional parks, trails and natural areas were important to them. When asked to prioritize preserving the quality of natural areas or increasing access, 8 in 10 (79% average across all three counties) prioritized preserving the quality of natural areas.

When dedicating tax dollars to increase access to nature, adding trails (mean rating: 6.6) and neighborhood connectivity to natural areas (mean rating: 6.6) were rated the most important.

When members were asked to budget \$100 on different restoration efforts, a third of their money (average of all three counties: \$32.50) went to general maintenance to keep parks safe and enjoyable for visitors. Next was preserving and improving fish and wildlife habitat.

**View the complete results of the research at:**

**<http://library.oregonmetro.gov/editor/metro-natural-areas-survey-march.pdf>.**

For more information, contact Heather Nelson Kent: [heather.kent@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:heather.kent@oregonmetro.gov), 503-797-1739.



## POTENTIAL RESTORATION PRIORITIES

JULY 2012

Consistent with our current approach, restoration priorities with new funding would focus on habitats such as wetlands, oak and prairie and riverine areas that support regionally rare or declining species or provide important water quality benefits. Prioritization criteria also include issues such as economic leverage and partnership opportunities, ability to maintain our investment over time, optimizing long-term benefits and distributing benefits geographically throughout the region. Although some project types occur throughout the Metro region, each sub-region offers special habitat and partnership opportunities.

The following list provides categories of priority actions by geographic region and examples of project types we would pursue with funding support from the proposed levy. Regions include the Tualatin River Basin, Clackamas River, East Buttes and Johnson Creek, Sandy River and the Greater Willamette Greenway. Following the projects by geographic region is a description of the range of services that accompany restoration work.

### Tualatin River Basin

#### Project priorities

The Tualatin River Basin has the most extensive floodplains in the region. As a result, many of our focal projects center on floodplain prairie and wetlands, where restoration can yield benefits to many rare or declining species as well as provide important ecosystem services such as flood control and water quality improvement.

#### Project examples

Restoration of prairies at Gotter, Gotter West and Penstemon Prairies. Wetland restoration at Killin Swamp and Dairy-McKay Creek.

#### Costs

Prairie restoration can range from \$2,500 to \$12,500 per acre. Wetland/floodplain restoration has a similar range, but the necessity for capital investment such as water control structures can add \$100,000 or more per project.

#### Partners

Partners such as the Tualatin Riverkeepers, Washington County's Clean Water Services and Ducks Unlimited (through North American Wetlands Conservation Act Funding) can provide significant leverage for Metro investments through funding, project management and community outreach.

### Sandy River

#### Project priorities

The Sandy River Basin is a focal sub-basin for salmon recovery in the Lower Columbia River system, offering a habitat corridor connecting the Columbia River with Mount Hood, and is an important recreation resource for the metropolitan area. Metro will invest in riverine and riparian restoration

projects to enhance salmon and steelhead habitat in the Oxbow Regional Park area, as well as early detection and rapid response to invasive species to protect a valuable large block of low-elevation forest habitat.

**Project examples**

Re-opening or enhancing side-channels of the Sandy River on Metro holdings at Oxbow Regional Park and other natural areas. Controlling invasive species and restoring riparian and floodplain forest.

**Costs**

Costs can range from \$300 to \$12,000 per acre or more depending on the need for and cost of capital projects like water control or fish passage structures or deconstructing levies and berms.

**Partners**

The Sandy River Basin Partnership is a 15-year-old coalition of more than 20 organizations committed to cooperative landscape-level conservation action. Member organizations can offer significant project development, volunteer recruitment and project management capacity.

**Clackamas River**

**Project priorities**

The Clackamas River and its major tributaries, Deep Creek and Clear Creek, offer substantial opportunities for rare species conservation, salmon habitat and water quality restoration. Clear Creek Natural Area, one of the gems of our system, offers a unique combination of prairie, wetland and riverine habitat.

**Project examples**

The greater River Island area, highly altered by a history of gravel mining and the 1996 floods, is a rich opportunity to integrate salmon and turtle habitat restoration with water quality enhancement work through a multi-year, multi-site project. Clear Creek Natural Area offers rich partnerships to accomplish meaningful restoration on a remarkable diversity of habitat types including one of the best examples of prairie in eastern Clackamas County.

**Costs**

Riparian forest restoration costs range from \$2,300 to \$9,220 per acre.

**Partners**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife considers the River Island area to be a keystone for salmon recovery; Portland General Electric, the Clackamas River Basin Watershed Council and the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District are willing partners.

**East Buttes and Johnson Creek**

**Project priorities**

The East Buttes are one of three large expanses of low elevation forest within the core metropolitan area. They are the headwaters for several stream systems and represent a special opportunity to protect our area's archetype Douglas fir forest system. Johnson Creek is a 20-year developing success story of cooperative conservation work among several jurisdictions and non-profits and the region's most popular trail, the Springwater Corridor.

**Project examples**

Work in the East Buttes will continue to emphasize stitching together healthy upland and riparian forest. Work in Johnson Creek adds floodplain and riverine habitat restoration for salmon recovery in an area rich with outreach opportunities.

**Costs**

The upland forest projects typically span 3-7 years and cost \$2,800 to \$7,550 per acre, improve wildlife habitat and visitor experience, and reduce long-term maintenance costs.

**Partners**

The City of Gresham, the City of Portland and the Johnson Creek Watershed Council are active stakeholders within the area.

**Greater Willamette Greenway****Project priorities**

The Willamette River is an iconic feature bisecting the Metro area and offers several regionally important opportunities for oak, floodplain and wetland restoration. The Willamette Narrows complex, along with Canemah Bluff across the river, offers the region's most extensive remaining oak habitat. Multnomah Channel is one of the region's largest restored wetlands.

**Project examples**

Solidifying and capitalizing on current oak release efforts at the Willamette Narrows will require five years of work controlling invasive species and replanting natives. Re-connecting Multnomah Channel and its restored floodplain offers significant water quality and fish habitat benefits.

**Costs**

Oak woodland restoration costs range from \$1,200 per acre on simple conifer removal in oaks stands to \$15,000 per acre factoring in multiple prescribed fires over one or two decades. Long-term management costs are high due to the need for active management, especially invasive species control – although they taper somewhat at 5-10 years. For prairie and savanna restoration, costs range from \$2,500 to \$12,500 per acre, with substantial long-term maintenance typically tapering somewhat at 5-10 years.

**Partners**

Ducks Unlimited, through the North American Wetland Conservation Act, supports Metro's regional wetland restoration efforts with funding and project development capacity. Metro's Native Plant Center provides vital support for oak restoration and volunteer opportunities through seed collection and plant materials production. The West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District and several watershed councils can also provide some capacity support.

**Other projects of note****Graham Oaks and Cooper Mountain Nature Parks**

These two high-visibility sites have remarkable restoration efforts underway. Continued development of these projects focuses mostly on oak and prairie over the next five years and will offer significant habitat and outreach benefits.

### **Newell Canyon**

This developing partnership between Metro, the Greater Oregon City Watershed Council, the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District and private landowners at this nearly 400-acre site offers hope of a large block of healthy forest, improved salmon habitat and water quality and new regional recreation opportunities

### **Clackamas River Uplands**

Several upland forest sites in the Clackamas target area offer opportunities for improving forest health and reducing future maintenance costs.

### **Coffee Creek Basin**

While true wetland restoration of this area depends on additional land acquisition, enhancement of 45 acres currently dominated by weeds would offer substantial habitat benefits and great leverage with grant funds.

### **Native Plant Center**

Many of our projects rely on re-establishing native species that are not available from private nurseries. Metro's Native Plant Center provides coordination and production of rare and unusual plants while leveraging Metro resources through native volunteer and partner support.

### **Program activities that support restoration**

**Natural areas maintenance** addresses issues where increased yet still relatively modest investment over 5-10 years can put these areas onto a path for achieving their long-term desired future condition and reduce future maintenance costs. Actions include intensive treatment of invasive species and replanting of native species, infra-structure repair (trails, access roads, and fences) and completing boundary surveys to improve property delineation.

**Infrastructure improvement projects** address needs for investment that exceed basic site maintenance, such as road construction or retirement, building construction or modification (office, equipment storage, chemical storage) and signage, fence or trail construction or improvement efforts.

**Planning and assessment** projects develop the information necessary to make strategic decisions about use of resources on both a regional and site basis and provide transparency and documentation about our work. Projects may include assessment of wildlife barriers and potential connectivity corridors, additional capacity to developing site-based conservation plans, biological assessments and mapping of habitats of concern.

**Natural areas public involvement** addresses outreach to targeted communities and recruiting for citizen committee members and volunteers in specific areas. Such efforts can increase public participation in site-planning efforts as well as increase public understanding of natural resource science and the benefits of our work.

**Staff capacity** addresses the need to manage or implement projects. Although some of the program's limitations can be addressed with additional materials and services funding, aggressive pursuit of maintenance and restoration goals would require strategic increases in staffing to ensure effective project management. Key needs are likely to include enforcing Metro regulations to protect natural resources on newly opened natural areas, increasing Native Plant Center capacity, increasing capacity for biological monitoring, and project management capacity at a regional scientist level.



## EQUITY AND POTENTIAL FUNDING MEASURE PROGRAMS

JULY 2012

The equitable distribution of public services and benefits is a key issue today, as we see the results of inequity from our past. The environmental movement generally has not had a focus on equity, despite the clear change in demographics.

As of July 1, 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there were over 100 million people of color living in the U.S. We are doing a poor job of connecting them to our cause even though numerous polls and surveys show that people of color support environmental issues, in many cases, at a higher level than the general public.

*Diversity and the Future of the Environmental Movement, Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan*

As we consider asking voters for funding, what and where are the focus areas where new or additional funding could better serve people of color and directly benefit disadvantaged populations? How do the parks and natural areas programs today address this topic and can we increase the effectiveness with additional funding? These questions were raised by the panel in the first meeting.

### **Note from panel discussions, July 25, 2012**

*This memo was distributed to the panel for the second meeting and the panel wove the topic of equity into discussions over the course of three meetings. By the third meeting the panel clarified that “underserved communities” should be very inclusive. Communities of color, people with low income, people with disabilities and people with languages other than English are all included in the panel’s definition of underserved communities. It is the panel’s intention that a funding measure benefits these historically disadvantaged populations.*

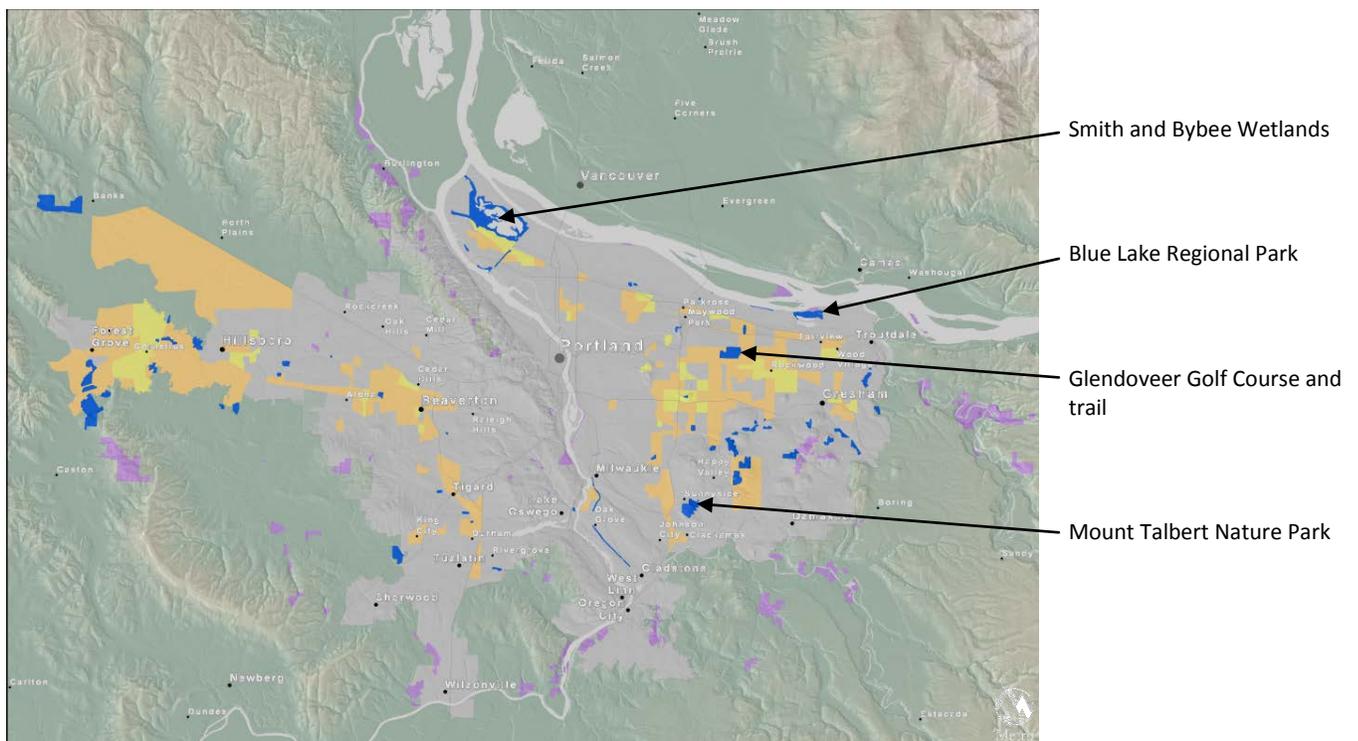
*The program areas described in this memo are all important, including access, environmental education, grants and contracts. Among these topics, access to natural areas for underserved communities is of particular importance. The panel noted that physical access with paths and signage that is in close proximity to underserved populations is important. They also noted that social and cultural barriers to access need to be overcome. This includes making sure that underserved communities know about, feel welcome and are acknowledged at the natural areas. Proximity is important to access but not sufficient and overcoming barriers requires being proactive.*

To date, four program areas have been identified that could directly benefit minority populations. There may be additional ideas, but this is a starting point.

### **Access to parks and natural areas**

Do parks and natural areas with access serve people of color in the region? The location of Metro’s current portfolio of parks and natural areas has been determined one of two ways. First, land is acquired where the best remaining natural resources occur. Secondly, the portfolio includes parks that were inherited from Multnomah County. Neither of these involves a conscious effort to engage to disadvantaged communities. That said, there are currently some good relationships.

- Blue Lake Regional Park, located in Fairview, draws visitors from the eastern part of the region who are diverse in ethnic heritage, age and income.
- Glendoveer Golf Course, located in Northeast Portland, is centrally located for disadvantaged or underrepresented populations. The perimeter trail receives 177,000 visitors annually.
- Smith and Bybee Wetlands, one of the region’s treasures, is located in North Portland, close to disadvantaged populations. Admission to the natural area is free, and served by free parking, bus and pedestrian and bicycle access via the 40 Mile Loop/Marine Drive trail.
- Mount Talbert is one of three new nature parks developed by Metro and partners. It is located in northern Clackamas County, identified on the map as an area with a high percentage of disadvantaged population.



There is potential to provide more access to natural areas proximate to diverse populations. In the first meeting we reviewed the map above. Approximately one-third of the portfolio is within one mile of disadvantaged populations – an easy walk, bicycle trip or drive. Currently many of these properties don’t have access points with signs, parking or soft-surface trails. Additional funding is an opportunity to consider increasing access.

Proximity to parks and natural areas increases property values. What are some considerations about gentrification and out-pricing people of color? Research in the Portland area and nationally shows that increased property values occur close to parks, mostly between 500-600 feet from the park. The 2000 study by B. Bolitzer and N. Netusil here in the Portland region found increased values within 1,500 feet and especially where there is a passive park without sports fields. The increased sale price was between \$845 and \$2,262 in 2000.

This a consideration as we discuss providing access to natural areas that are proximate to housing. Whereas the majority of Metro property is located on the edge of suburban areas without adjacent housing, under those circumstances where gentrification could occur, the community could be engaged to discuss the pros and cons. In many circumstances, the benefits of providing a place to be outdoors does outweigh property value increases if they are minor.

### **Conservation education**

Conservation education provides important opportunities for young people of color. These opportunities are important to develop a diverse environmental community for generations to come. Many studies show that education in natural settings has important values, and today's programs on conservation education for children have been inspired by Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

Currently, our two main education sites are Smith and Bybee Wetlands and Oxbow Regional Park. Metro educators do not track ethnicity or socioeconomic demographics of participants, but do track Title I schools where 40% of total enrollment comes from families with low-income. The numbers are as follows for spring 2012:

- Smith and Bybee: 8 of 17 field trips were with Title I students
- Oxbow: 5 of 15 field trips were with Title I students.

With current school programs concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the region there is an opportunity with additional funding to increase programs, especially in the western and southern portions of the region. Funding for transportation to programs is also an area where increased funding would be beneficial.

### **Grant program**

For nearly two decades, Metro has provided grant funding for habitat restoration, environmental education and other nature-related projects. The Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement grants have supported many programs serving the needs of school children from low-income homes and in more recent years have awarded funding to programs serving, specifically, minority communities.

Grants have resulted in 100,000 volunteer hours to restore local rivers and streams, fight invasive weeds, and provide trips into nature for children and service learning opportunities for all ages. Although there have been accomplishments, addressing communities of color has not been one of the program's stated goals.

Non-profit and environmental organizations have been core supporters of this program, and more than 40 signed an April 2012 letter requesting its continued funding in the Metro Council's FY 2012-13 budget. The letter also suggested including social equity in the program's stated goals. The opportunity exists to make this a core aspect of this continued (or a new) grant program.

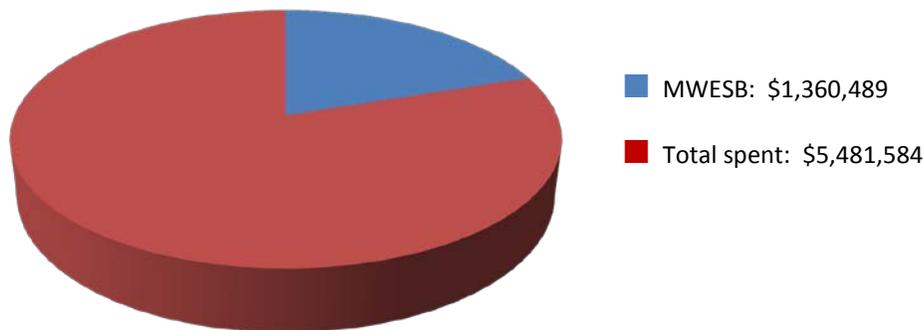
### **Parks and natural areas spending**

Within the parks and natural areas programs, there are two areas to consider regarding equity.

Contracting for operations, maintenance and restoration work is an important activity and currently Metro has policies in place to support contracting with minority/women/emerging small businesses (MWESB). For purchases under \$50,000, Metro requires that bids are solicited from one minority-owned business, one women-owned business, and one emerging small business. Construction projects under \$50,000 are solicited only from qualified MWESB contractors. These requirements can only be waived when no qualified MWESB bidders respond. For all major construction projects, prime bidders are required to demonstrate a good faith effort in inviting MWESB firms to bid on subcontracts.

The chart shows that for fiscal years 2011 and 2012 approximately 25% of contracts were awarded to MWESB contractors. The MWESB program is part of Metro’s procurement code, approved by the Metro Council and applies to all spending at Metro, including any potential spending from a new funding measure.

**MWESB spent in natural areas and park (FY 2011 and 2012)**



In addition, Metro has made significant efforts to diversify our workforce and to develop the next generation of environmental stewards in the region. One potential new opportunity would be to use levy funds to support local organizations and programs that focus their efforts on diversifying the environmental field by hiring and training high school aged individuals in environmentally related careers such as parks and recreation management, natural areas restoration, forestry, agriculture and wildlife management. The work performed by these programs benefits many regional natural areas and parks that could not afford to do all of their work without support from these programs. The young people performing this work gain valuable hands-on experience, making them competitive for higher-level positions at Metro and other organizations.

A concluding thought is that partnerships and collaboration are key to addressing equity in parks and natural areas. This suggests working with people who are new to us, listening carefully, and being inclusive in public communications. Four program areas have been suggested to increase participation in any new funding measure. Whereas we have done some good work being inclusive, there is room for improvement. Back to our beginning reference:

It is time to move from inaction to action. We owe it to ourselves, the environmental movement, and the American people to get it right. The future of environmentalism and our future generations are at stake. If nothing else, we need to remind ourselves of one thing – 100 million people . . . and counting.

*Diversity and the Future of the Environmental Movement, Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan*



## ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS

JULY 2012

### Activity description and outcomes

Enjoying the outdoors and connecting with nature provides physical, mental and spiritual benefits for the Portland metropolitan area's two million residents, giving them respite from urban life. Of the 16,000 acres in Metro's portfolio, approximately 5,000 have formal access, such as Blue Lake Regional Park and Graham Oaks Nature Park. "Informal" or un-guided access to another 8,400 acres means there is a way to walk into the property via informal trails or old logging roads. There are 1,500 acres where access is intentionally limited because rare species or habitat exists on the site or because the location or topography of the site does not allow for easy access. A sampling of annual visitor counts range from 1.2 million on the Springwater Corridor; 330,000 at Blue Lake Regional Park; and 33,000 at Mount Talbert Nature Park.

### Current funding and vulnerability

In most cases informal or visitor-created trails, often referred to as "demand trails," are unplanned and difficult to maintain. These trails often take the path of least resistance and cut through sensitive habitat. In extreme cases, rogue users cut mature trees to create bridges across streams or to clear the way for additional trails. Continued use of demand trails can trample native vegetation, damage adjacent streams and spread weed seeds. Such routes often degrade rapidly and are abandoned in favor of adjacent new routes, which unnecessarily magnify the extent and severity of trampling damage. Currently a small percentage (~10% or less) of land management staff time is available to manage and maintain formal and informal access systems and ensure that visitors are safe and using the system properly.

As Metro acquires additional property and as the public discovers these high quality natural areas that are now in public ownership, the need to manage and direct access to protect the natural resources will increase. Metro staff identified opportunities to formalize and expand access at appropriate sites while writing the November 2011 *Metro's Portfolio of Natural Areas, Parks and Trails: Opportunities and Challenges* report.

### Risks of doing less or nothing

There are circumstances where informal access is problematic and may cause sites to deteriorate. For example, informal trails near fragile soil types, unique habitats or critical wildlife areas degrade the resources we're protecting. There are also properties where illegal camping poses security and health risks. Without managed access, on some sites neighbors build their own trails. In other cases, cars line the streets next to natural areas adjacent to popular recreation areas like the Clackamas River, creating safety issue for the visitors and impacts to the natural resources.

Formalizing or improving access to natural areas will not necessarily decrease long term maintenance costs. Improved access infrastructure, such as defined parking lots and soft surface trails, requires ongoing maintenance to keep them safe and in a condition that protects the natural resources around

them. Access improvements to natural areas will allow Metro to focus available funding on maintaining signage and parking that support safe and directed access to natural areas and well-built trails that protect natural resources, instead of using that same funding to repair damage that occurs from trails cutting through sensitive habitat and other damage caused by undirected uses.

**Potential criteria to assist in prioritizing access improvements**

- Elimination of trails at sites where safety, security or fragile habitat areas are currently impacted.
- Formalize or modify existing trails to help Metro protect natural resources and facilitate additional safe access to nature.
- Ability to develop soft infrastructure improvements (gravel parking, portable restrooms and directional/rule signage) that are relatively low-cost, easy to remove or modify, in areas where current use is impacting user safety and natural resources. Infrastructure improvements will also allow Metro to involve more volunteers and students on these sites if that is desired.
- Potential for development of new trail systems to better direct high-demand recreational opportunity users for activities such as fishing, birding, swimming, kayaking or similar to channel these activities to appropriate sites and potentially relieve pressure from sites with higher natural resource values.
- Add staff to monitor the access and enforce regulations and to maintain the access infrastructure.
- Opportunities to improve the equitable distribution of access to nature across the region.

Metro, when possible, would explore opportunities to partner with non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and local municipalities to maintain any improvements to access infrastructure.

Potential examples of access improvement sites	Potential examples of access improvements
Newell Canyon Natural Area ~220 acres	Add trailhead parking and formalize trails to reduce sedimentation into Newell Creek and its tributaries. Add additional access for staff and police to address illegal uses.
Canemah Bluff Natural Area ~270 acres	Add trailhead parking on Hwy 99 and formalize trails to improve access to the south part of the natural area.
Agency Creek ~320 acres McCarthy Creek ~400 acres	Add trailhead parking and trails to address high demand for mountain biking access and relieve pressure on higher quality habitat in Forest Park.
North Logan Natural Area ~195 acres	Add trailhead parking and improve access to the Clackamas River where high demand for fishing and rafting access are causing some safety issues and habitat damage.
River Island Natural Area ~230 acres Springdale Natural Area ~214 acres	Add trailhead parking and improve access to the Clackamas and Sandy rivers where high demand for fishing and rafting access are causing some safety issues and habitat damage.
Killin Wetland Natural Area ~589 acres	Add trailhead parking and improve access to the wetlands where a high demand for birding access is causing safety issues and habitat damage.
Multnomah Channel ~278 acres	Add trailhead parking off Hwy 30 and formalize trails to improve access and safety for birders and hikers and reduce impacts to the natural area.
East Buttes ~60 acres	Formalize a trail system north of Butler Road where the demand for access to the natural areas results in unplanned trails that cause habitat damage. Formalizing one or more trails and trailheads would allow for citizens who live a modest distance from the natural areas to park bicycles or cars and then go for a hike.