

BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF REFERRING TO THE	)	RESOLUTION NO. 22-5279
VOTERS OF THE METRO AREA RENEWAL	)	
OF METRO’S LOCAL OPTION LEVY FOR	)	
PROTECTING WATER QUALITY,	)	Introduced by Chief Operating Officer
RESTORING FISH AND WILDLIFE	)	Marissa Madrigal in Concurrence with
HABITAT AND CONNECTING PEOPLE TO	)	Council President Lynn Peterson
NATURE	)	

WHEREAS, clean water and air, healthy habitat, and welcoming, accessible parks are more vital than ever to the well-being of greater Portland's people, fish and wildlife;

WHEREAS, Metro has taken a leadership role in protecting water quality and natural areas in greater Portland and providing access to nature for people through an interconnected system of parks, trails and natural areas;

WHEREAS, in 1992, the Metro Council, along with the cities and counties of greater Portland adopted the Greenspaces Master Plan, identifying 57 regional natural areas and 34 regional trails and greenways requiring protection;

WHEREAS, in 1995 and again in 2006, voters of the Metro region approved two successive general obligation bond measures, directing Metro to acquire regionally significant natural area land, trails and greenways to improve water quality and protect fish and wildlife habitat;

WHEREAS, in May 2013, in the absence of a long-term funding mechanism, voters approved a five-year local option levy to pay for ongoing operation and maintenance of Metro’s portfolio of regional parks and natural areas;

WHEREAS, in February 2016, the Metro Council adopted the Parks and Nature System Plan, outlining Metro’s roles and responsibilities for managing a regional system of parks, trails and natural areas;

WHEREAS, in November 2016, voters of the Metro region renewed the initial five-year local option levy, once again providing necessary funding for the operation, maintenance, and improvement of Metro’s natural areas and parks in accordance with the Parks and Nature System Plan, and also supporting Metro’s efforts to connect people to nature through education programming and community grants;

WHEREAS, in November 2019, voters of the Metro region approved 2019 Parks and Nature Bond Measure, authorizing \$475 million in general obligation bonds to continue the region's legacy of making capital investments to protect and connect nature to people, affirmatively addressing growing concerns about hotter summers, extreme weather, and the impacts of racial inequality in the region;

WHEREAS, Metro now cares for more than 18,000 acres of parks and natural areas and 170 miles of stream and river frontage, which holdings will increase substantially as Metro implements the voter-directed programs and goals of the 2019 Parks and Nature Bond Measure;

WHEREAS, with Metro's current local option levy set to expire in June 2023, continued funding for non-capital operation and maintenance costs is critical to ensure the protection of Metro’s existing and

future portfolio of parks and natural area properties, achieving key restoration, water quality and access to nature priorities supported by the Metro region voters over the past three decades;

WHEREAS, a renewal of the local option levy at its current rate will provide stability and security for Metro's parks and natural areas, continued funding for vital restoration work, keep properties open and welcoming to the public, allow for strategic decisions about multi-year projects, and deliver on Metro's promises to the voters to continue to protect and restore nature for the benefit of human and natural communities now and for the future; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that:

1. The Metro Council hereby refers to the qualified voters of the Metro region renewal of the current five-year local option levy of 9.6 cents per \$1,000 of taxable assessed value, to be used for substantially the same purposes as the levy approved by voters in November 2016: improving water quality, protecting fish and wildlife habitat, natural areas and stream frontages, continued management of safe and welcoming parks and natural areas, and ongoing partnerships for community-led nature education and stewardship;
2. The estimated total outlay for the funds raised by the levy renewal is \$98.3 million.
3. The Metro Council hereby certifies the Ballot Title attached as Exhibit A for placement of the renewal of the local option levy on the ballot for the November 2022 General Election;
4. The Metro Council authorizes and directs the Metro Chief Operating Officer, the Metro Chief Financial Officer and the Metro Attorney, or their respective designees (each, an "Authorized Representative"), each acting individually, to file with the county elections official the Ballot Title and a related explanatory statement prepared by the Authorized Representative pursuant to Metro Code Section 9.02.020;
5. The Metro Council authorizes and directs the Authorized Representative to take all other actions necessary to place the renewal of the local option levy on the ballot for the November 2022 General Election in a manner consistent with and in furtherance of this Resolution;
6. The Metro Council further defines the general purposes, allowed uses, and outcomes for funds collected via the renewed five-year local option levy according to the 2022 Levy Renewal Framework, attached hereto as Exhibit B; and

7. Upon the passage of the renewal of the local option levy, program staff is directed to continue to produce an annual report and work plan to be approved by the Chief Operating Officer and presented to the Metro Council at the end of each fiscal year, such report to detail program expenditures by area, as well as major accomplishments, and to be made available on the Metro website and featured in other public outreach.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this 4th day of August, 2022.



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Lynn Peterson, Council President

Approved as to Form:



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Nathan Sykes, Deputy Metro Attorney

## **BALLOT TITLE**

### **Caption**

Renews local option levy; protects natural areas, water quality, fish

### **Question**

Should Metro protect water quality, fish, natural areas, parks; renew 5-year operating levy, 9.6¢ per \$1,000 assessed value, beginning 2023?

This measure renews current local option taxes.

### **Summary**

This levy does not increase tax rates. It continues the same rate previously approved by voters.

The levy protects water quality, restores fish and wildlife habitat, and connects people with nature across 18,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas. The levy funds ongoing restoration of natural areas acquired through three voter-approved bond measures. It also improves people's access to nature, by maintaining Metro parks and natural areas, providing nature education for visitors and schoolchildren, and supporting community-led nature projects and programs.

If renewed, the levy will continue to:

- Maintain and improve water quality in local rivers and streams
- Protect and restore habitat for salmon, other native fish
- Restore wetlands, forests and floodplains providing habitat for birds, wildlife
- Manage natural areas to better withstand heat, wildfire, extreme weather
- Maintain parks and trails; maintain and improve restrooms, picnic shelters, play areas, trailheads, and other visitor facilities and services
- Increase opportunities for children from low-income families and communities of color to connect with nature.

A home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$24 per year for five years.

If renewed, the proposed rate (9.6¢ per \$1,000 assessed value) will raise approximately \$18.1 million in 2023-24, \$18.8 million in 2024-25, \$19.6 million in 2025-26, \$20.5 million in 2026-27 and \$21.3 million in 2027-28.



Metro

Parks and Nature

# 2022 Levy renewal framework





## Metro's parks and nature local option levy protects clean water, restores fish and wildlife habitat, and provides access to nature close to home.

No matter where you are in the greater Portland region, nature is never far. Metro cares for more than 18,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across greater Portland – from Chehalem Ridge in the west to the Sandy River Gorge in the east, from Blue Lake and Broughton Beach in the north to Graham Oaks and Newell Creek Canyon in the south. This portfolio of land represents both a big opportunity and a big responsibility. For more than a quarter-century, voters have repeatedly asked Metro to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities to connect with nature close to home. Voters also trust and expect Metro to wisely care for these special places over the long term, while creating opportunities for people to enjoy them.

Metro's parks and nature work depends on continued voter support for a five-year local option levy, first approved by voters in 2013. At a rate of 9.6 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value – about \$25 annually for the owner of a home assessed at \$250,000 – the levy is a critical source of ongoing operating funding that complements voter-approved parks and nature bonds, which by

law must focus on capital spending such as land acquisition and major construction projects.

The levy allows Metro to improve water quality, protect culturally significant plant communities, restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat, control invasive weeds, and plant native trees and shrubs. Levy funding has also made Metro parks and natural areas more safe and welcoming by supporting park operations and improving visitor amenities at popular destinations across greater Portland, planning for public access improvements, expanding community programming, and supporting community-led projects that protect and enhance important habitat, improve water quality and strengthen people's connection to nature close to home.

Current levy funding expires in June 2023. If voters renew the levy for another five years, Metro would continue to preserve the greater Portland region's legacy of natural beauty, clean rivers and access to nature, ensuring that future generations enjoy the same benefits of nature that we do today. Levy renewal would not raise taxes.

# Levy program areas

If a five-year levy renewal is approved by voters, costs related to the following programs and activities would be eligible for levy funding beginning in July 2023.

Program area	Program area activities	Annual minimum funding allocation
<b>Habitat restoration and land management</b>	<p><b>Habitat restoration</b> – Restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve habitat quality for priority species, and improve water quality and quantity at Metro’s parks and natural areas.</p> <p><b>Natural area management</b> – Manage Metro’s parks and natural areas to maintain ecological health, restore culturally significant plant communities, and reduce the long-term costs of maintenance.</p>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Regional park operations</b>	Support visitor services, maintenance, and amenity improvements at Metro’s parks, trails, natural areas, and cemeteries so that they are welcoming, safe and inclusive, and meet or exceed standards for accessibility.	<b>35%</b>
<b>Community-led investments and education</b>	Co-create culturally specific interpretive programs, materials, and events, and provide resources (financial and programmatic) to support communities in their efforts to strengthen connections with nature. Includes, but not limited to, grant funding for community projects that advance climate resilience and racial equity, and culturally relevant nature education opportunities.	<b>15%</b>

## Accountability and impact analysis

The program allocations reflect regional priorities and ensure transparency and accountability to taxpayers. These allocations form the foundation of the annual operations budgets for the Parks and Nature department that Council considers and adopts each year as part of the Metro budget process.

The Parks and Nature Annual Report shares with the public how levy spending compares to the allocations in the levy framework. An annual financial audit that covers the local option levy

expenditures will be conducted by an independent public accounting firm, and the results published on the Metro website.

The Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee will also review progress in the implementation of any levy-funded capital projects. This committee provides the Metro Council and the people of the region with an independent review of Metro’s bond- and levy-funded capital projects and provides an annual report to the Metro Council.

# Desired levy outcomes

The parks and nature levy is a fundamental part of Metro's proactive efforts to advance racial equity and enhance climate resilience in greater Portland.

Based on community and partner engagement and input from stakeholders, the following desired outcomes articulate the long-lasting impacts that levy investments will have and will act as prioritization guidance, ensuring that racial equity and climate resilience remain core values of levy investments.

These desired outcomes are also coordinated with the outcomes established within the 2019 parks and nature bond measure, as the levy is instrumental to operate and maintain bond-funded investments in parks, trails and natural areas. This alignment is essential to ensure that the bond measure and the levy work together to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature close to home.

**Habitat:** Improve habitat and habitat connectivity for plants, fish, and wildlife at Metro's parks and natural areas.

An objective of the levy is to ensure that priority habitat for plants and animals (as identified by Indigenous communities, tribes and regional conservation strategies) is restored and protected, and invasive plant species are removed. This results in the outcomes of new anchor sites and improved habitat connectivity for native plants, fish, and wildlife, all of which contribute to climate resilience on a site and regional scale.

**Water quality:** Improve hydrologic function, and water quality and water quantity at Metro's parks and natural areas.

An objective of the levy is to ensure that priority habitat for plants and animals (as identified by Indigenous communities, tribes and regional conservation strategies) is restored and protected, and invasive plant species are removed. This results in the outcomes of improved water quality and quantity – meaning reduction of negative impacts of flooding, improved floodplain connectivity, increased late-season flow, healthier water temperatures, all of which contribute to climate resilience on a site and regional scale.



**Resilience:** Execute land management plans at Metro's parks and natural areas to reduce risk from extreme weather.

An objective of the levy is to ensure that land management plans are implemented at Metro's parks and natural areas. This results in the outcome of more resilient habitat for plants, fish and wildlife to the effects of extreme weather.

**Climate leadership:** Collaborate with local, state, federal, tribal and nonprofit partners to plan for and make strategic decisions related to conservation priorities across the region for broader, more effective action for climate adaptation and resilience.

An objective of the levy is to ensure that Metro serves as a convener and an anchor organization for complex restoration and climate resilience projects involving multiple partners. This results in the outcomes of implementation of regionally significant projects, the development and strengthening of region-wide strategies for climate resilience, and supporting conservation investments made by partners.

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

An objective of the levy is to ensure that culturally significant and keystone native plants, as identified by tribal nations and Indigenous communities, are restored and protected and cared for collaboratively. This results in the outcomes of new anchor sites and improved habitat connectivity for native plants, fish and wildlife, all of which contribute to climate resilience on a site and regional scale.



**Accessibility:** Improve the accessibility of Metro destinations for people of all ages and abilities.

An objective of the levy is to ensure that Metro visitors of all ages and abilities continue to have their immediate needs met through well-maintained and accessible amenities and signage (e.g. restrooms, areas for picnics, clear wayfinding). This results in the outcome of more universally designed, sensory-rich environments where visitors can physically, socially and emotionally connect with nature at parks, boat ramps, trails and cemeteries.

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

An objective of the levy is to ensure that the amenities (e.g. park recreation types, signage, interpretation, access points, art), services and programming at Metro destinations enable all visitors to enhance their relationship with nature in a personalized way and enjoy the full benefits of nature. This results in the outcomes of increased community health and wellbeing, sense of belonging, and stewardship at Metro sites.

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

An objective of the levy is to ensure that historically marginalized members of the workforce experience more opportunities to enter and build careers at all levels in the parks and natural area industry. This results in the outcomes of increased prosperity for historically marginalized workers and greater representation within the workforce.

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

An objective of the levy is to ensure that Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity (COBID) certified businesses experience more opportunities to work with Metro through a streamlined contracting process, and are prioritized in the process of soliciting proposals. This results in the outcome of increased benefits from the economic opportunities of gaining entry to and experience in the parks and natural area industry for historically marginalized communities.



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

An objective of the levy is to ensure that communities know how their guidance was utilized, historically marginalized communities see themselves represented through levy-funded work and know that Metro's engagement practices uplift their expertise and knowledge. This results in the outcomes of levy investments that prioritize the needs of historically marginalized communities, advance racial equity and have broader community impact, help Metro natural spaces and programming become critical community assets and increase community confidence and trust in Metro.

**Education:** Design collaborative and culturally relevant education that lifts up multiple ways of knowing by centering work with educators from historically marginalized communities.

An objective of the levy is to ensure educators, centering those from historically marginalized communities, actively participate in and are financially supported to develop culturally relevant and participatory education. This results in the outcomes of increased knowledge of the cultural and regional significance of Metro parks and natural areas and of practices to protect and steward regional lands and water, and in creating career pathways for community educators.

# Program descriptions

## Habitat restoration and land management

At least 40 percent of the proposed levy funding will pay for Metro's continued work to restore and maintain habitat on land that has been acquired over the course of three decades and through three voter-approved bond measures. These property stewardship activities ensure that Metro's parks and natural areas foster clean water, healthy fish and wildlife habitat and high-quality opportunities for people to experience nature.

Levy funding will be invested throughout Metro's portfolio of high-priority habitats (wetlands, prairies, savannas, rivers and forests) and projects informed by science and engagement with stakeholders and community members.

Levy-funded restoration and management projects will be prioritized based on their clear contribution to the protection of water quality and species or habitats identified in federal, state or regional conservation plans, including The Intertwine Alliance's Regional Conservation Strategy for the Greater Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area and the Oregon State Conservation Strategy, which

document and offer guidance for the region's highest value habitat areas. If approved, the levy would fund three main types of restoration and land management activities:

### Habitat restoration projects

The levy will fund restoration of fish and wildlife habitat at Metro's sites to significantly improve quality and function, such as improved wildlife connections and hydrologic function of rivers and streams, which are key contributors to building healthy habitat and resilience to climate change. Large-scale projects will typically involve one or more complex actions, such as reconnecting floodplains to rivers, constructing or removing structures that direct hydrology, planting or thinning large tracts of forest or establish prairie and savanna habitat to develop healthy, functional native plant communities. Metro also conducts many small-scale projects, such as removing noxious and invasive weeds to be replaced with native trees and shrubs, or strategically thinning Douglas fir trees that compete for resources with slower-growing Oregon white oaks. Both types of projects can include activities such as replacing or removing failing culverts and modifying or removing roads to prevent erosion from reaching streams and water sources.

### LEVY AT WORK

#### Habitat restoration – Multnomah Channel Marsh

There are roughly a hundred active projects working to protect clean water and restore fish and wildlife habitat across the region at places like Chehalem Ridge Nature Park and Clear Creek and Smith and Bybee Wetlands natural areas.

Metro's work to improve connectivity between the wetlands at Metro's Multnomah Channel Marsh, a narrow area of more than 300 acres just across from Sauvie Island, is one example of an active habitat restoration project. Levy funding made it easier for juvenile salmon, steelhead, trout, and lamprey to swim into the marsh, a crucial habitat with abundant food and few predators, improving the health of the fish before their journey to the ocean.



Metro will continue to seek diverse partners in planning and implementing restoration projects and create opportunities for state-certified business enterprises, including minority- and women-owned businesses, to perform work on Metro-owned properties.

### **Land management**

The levy will fund management of Metro sites to maintain ecological health and increase their resilience to extreme weather and other impacts of climate change. Management and maintenance includes suppressing weeds, reestablishing native vegetation, restoring culturally significant native plant communities, identifying and quickly treating threats from invasive species, and protecting infrastructure such as roads, trails, fences and signage. Timely management of Metro parks and natural areas will also reduce long-term costs. In the same way that addressing weed problems early is most efficient, timely action to protect infrastructure prevents sites from deteriorating and extends the useful life of the investments. The levy will ensure that Metro's sites are maintained and operated at their current high quality standard.

### **Regional conservation leadership**

With its unique role in the region, Metro serves as an anchor organization by convening multiple partners and funding sources to undertake complex and critical conservation projects, such as the restoration of River Island Natural Area along the Clackamas River and development of regional data sets that empower better conservation and infrastructure planning. Metro is dedicated to convening and collaboration with local, state, federal, tribal and nonprofit partners to make strategic decisions, in particular those related to climate adaptation and resilience.

Levy funding will enable Metro to continue to serve in this leadership role, ensuring coordination and advancement of regional conservation projects and decisions.



### **LEVY AT WORK**

#### **Land management – Graham Oaks Nature Park**

In addition to restoring forests, prairies and rivers, Metro works to maintain healthy habitat by planting native trees and shrubs, thinning overly dense forests, treating invasive weeds, and more. There are often 20 to 50 levy-funded land management projects ongoing at any given time.

At Graham Oaks Nature Park in Wilsonville, the levy enables staff to manage the landscape to create healthier habitats and to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Because of the neighborhoods nearby, a reduction of wildfire risk at Graham Oaks is critical and involves actions such as the removal of invasive species, like Himalayan blackberry, that provide quick fuel for fires, and planting native trees, grasses and flowers in their place. Metro staff also thin trees in strategic locations to help improve habitat health in addition to reducing the amount of fuel available if there were a wildfire. This includes creating fuel breaks near homes and thinning past plantings that have become overly dense. Thinning out trees also provides space for a diversity of habitats. For example, Douglas firs grow quickly, and in the absence of wildfire or active management, they crowd out the light that forest floor shrubs and flowers, or slower growing Oregon white oaks, need to survive.

## Regional park operations

Metro's parks and nature destinations offer important access to nature for people and support regionally important habitats. More than 2.5 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, bird watching, canoeing, camping, boating, fishing and picnicking, in addition to family and community events.

At least 35 percent of levy funding will support operations and maintenance to keep Metro's parks and nature destinations safe, welcoming and accessible to all members of our community. Funds from a levy renewal will continue to allow Metro to develop low-impact access to Metro sites, focusing on safety improvements and hiking, cycling and walking opportunities. These access investments support the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of our community, by enabling people to experience some of the

region's unique habitats, learn more about nature and become better stewards of the environment.

Levy funding will also allow Metro to continue making improvements and investments in operations that help knit together Metro's parks, trails, natural areas and cemeteries into an integrated system that is welcoming, safe and inclusive, and to meet or exceed standards for accessibility. Investments in operations include guest services, park rangers, cemetery services, and park maintenance and repairs on amenities such as picnic areas, signage, restrooms, public art and staff facilities.

Metro will continue to prioritize projects that make parks safe, welcoming, inclusive, and more accessible for visitors, reduce impacts on natural resources and improve the longevity of park infrastructure. Improvements for visitors at Metro's destinations are integrated with Metro's nature programs and restoration projects.



### LEVY AT WORK

#### Regional park operations – Chehalem Ridge Nature Park

More than 2.5 million visitors enjoy Metro's developed parks each year for walking, hiking, canoeing, camping, bird watching, and fishing, in addition to family and community events. The levy allows Metro to operate, maintain, and upgrade Metro sites so that they are safe, welcoming and inclusive.

Chehalem Ridge Nature Park in Gaston near Forest Grove is an example of the parks and nature bond and levy working together to create more inclusive Metro sites close to home. Bond funding allowed Metro to begin acquiring and restoring this once timber farm. After almost a decade of methodical forest restoration at Chehalem Ridge, it was time to plan the park's amenities. The levy funded the extensive community planning process for the park, including a partnership with Centro Cultural de Washington County to engage the county's growing Latinx community. As a result, inclusive amenities like space for family gatherings and trails wide enough for groups with a gentle grade suitable for kids and aging adults, art reflective of the community, and signs in multiple languages, are reflected in the final park construction.



## LEVY AT WORK

### Regional conservation leadership – River Island Natural Area

The levy allows Metro to commit staff and funding in order to serve in a critical anchor organization role for the region. In this role, Metro convenes and coordinates regional partners and multiple funding sources to tackle large-scale conservation projects.

The multi-year, large-scale restoration effort at River Island is an example of the important regional role Metro plays. River Island is a 240-acre natural area that includes wetlands, oak savanna, and upland and riparian forests, where decades of gravel mining and a major flood

in 1996 changed the course of the Clackamas River and damaged habitat for multiple species, including endangered salmon and steelhead.

Metro convened neighbors, technical experts, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and others to craft a restoration plan for River Island. Metro also connected to the project, coordinated work, and brought together funding from multiple partners including the Clackamas River Basin Council, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, and Portland General Electric. This multi-partner conservation effort was possible due to levy funding, and now River Island is returning to a natural, wilder existence and helping to improve water quality in a river that provides drinking water to nearly 400,000 people.



## Community-led investments and education

Metro is committed to furthering people's relationship with nature, whether that means a family becoming a regular at a Metro nature park, an elementary school class stewarding a local natural area, a group of youth leaders co-creating culturally relevant nature education, or a community group creating a project that helps meet a need to better connect people with nature.

At least 15 percent of levy funding will continue to support community-led partnerships, education and stewardship programs to offer hands-on experiences that allow people to strengthen their relationship to the natural world while also fostering the next generation of leaders. These programs are a critical portion of the region's conservation efforts because

they create opportunities for everyone to grow their understanding of how to become better stewards of nature. They also increase the region's collective knowledge, whether that is by increasing the cultural relevance of restoration activity, accurately sharing the natural and cultural history of a natural area, or learning from people who have been stewards of nature since time immemorial.

These programs aim to work with communities to understand what resources can best support their relationship with nature, which may look different for various partners. People connect with nature in different ways and experience different barriers and opportunities to that connection. Through community-led programming, meaningful engagement and partnerships, these programs will directly support people of color and other marginalized communities.



### LEVY AT WORK

#### **Community-led investments and education – Nature in Neighborhoods grants (Ecology education in North Clackamas and Depave the Centennial School District)**

Ecology education, scholarships for nature-focused camps, and urban forestry job training programs are just some of the projects that have received levy-funded Nature in Neighborhoods grants from Metro. These grants work to support and create partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, restore fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature.

In 2018, the North Clackamas School District was awarded a \$57,700 grant for a two-year ecology education program. This program supported 1,200 third- through fifth-grade students and 40 teachers each year at five Title I elementary schools in the district by providing every classroom with four ecology lessons and a service-learning field trip each year.

In 2019, a \$42,000 grant was awarded to Depave, an organization that empowers disenfranchised communities to overcome social and environmental injustices and adapt to climate change through urban re-greening. The grant is funding the development of new green playspaces within three Centennial School District elementary schools located within park-deficient outer southeast Portland. With the support of parents, teachers, and students, the funding is helping to create approximately 1,000 square feet of new greenspaces with more than 800 native plants, nature play and on-site stormwater elements. One of these projects is the Powell Butte Elementary nature playground that opened in June of 2022.

Metro staff and partners will use levy funding to continue investing in efforts to engage both new and returning visitors to Metro’s destinations and ensure that all visitors have the opportunity to learn and share about a site’s history, restoration activities, and regional and cultural significance. These efforts include the development of a diverse set of culturally specific interpretive programs, materials, events, and resources to support communities in their effort to further their connection with nature, such as grant funding for community projects that advance climate resilience and racial equity, nature education opportunities and student field trips.

Levy funding will also continue fostering deep partnerships between Metro staff and community leaders to strengthen connections between their communities and Metro parks and natural areas. These partnerships are critically important to foster trust and create opportunities for Metro staff to learn from community partners, integrating lessons learned into Metro’s programs, staff training and services. This reciprocal learning relationship with community will strengthen programs and materials and improve and increase the collective resources that Metro can provide for everyone to become better stewards of nature.



## LEVY AT WORK

### Community-led investments and education – Nature education and stewardship

The levy enables Metro to offer tailored nature education and stewardship activities that include school field trips, nature walks, guided tours, scavenger hunts and volunteer opportunities, with a focus on serving people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other underserved groups.

It also allows for Metro to support community organizations big and small to build community and connect people of color with nature at Metro’s parks and natural areas. These levy funded community partnerships help to organize community events, implement nature programming activities, connect communities with park planners and decision makers, explore nature-based career pathways, and offer other activities that build racial equity, diversity and inclusion in the region.

The levy supported a recent partnership with the Beaverton Black Parent Union, a volunteer-led collective of families with Black children organized to create community, advocate for culturally relevant resources, and ultimately support the success and well-being of children and families in Beaverton. In this partnership, Metro provided sponsorship funding to assist in their effort to organize the second series of Sunday Soul Strolls, designating a local park and time frame on Sunday afternoons for Black youth and families in Beaverton to walk, run, cycle, skate, or just whatever exercise they prefer – as a way to build community connectedness, awareness of local greenspaces, and reaffirm community presence in the City of Beaverton.

In a metropolitan area as big as Portland, we do a lot of things better together – like creating a unique park system with nature at its heart. Voter investments allow Metro to protect 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas, from the Chehalem Mountains on the west to the Sandy River Gorge on the east.

Count on Metro for clean water, healthy fish and wildlife habitat, and opportunities to connect with nature close to home.

**Know before you go:** Visit [oregonmetro.gov/parks](https://oregonmetro.gov/parks) for updates on new amenities and potential closures.



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

[oregonmetro.gov](https://oregonmetro.gov)



## **STAFF REPORT**

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 22-5279, FOR THE PURPOSE OF REFERRING TO THE VOTERS OF THE METRO AREA RENEWAL OF METRO'S LOCAL-OPTION LEVY FOR PROTECTING WATER QUALITY, RESTORING FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT AND CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE

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Date: July 14, 2022

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting Date: July 28, 2022

Prepared by: Beth Cohen, Parks and Nature  
Scotty Ellis, Parks and Nature, Craig Beebe,  
Government Affairs

Presenters: Jon Blasher, Director of Parks and Nature; Mychal Tetteh, Community Services Program Director

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## **ISSUE STATEMENT**

Metro depends on the Parks and Nature five-year local-option levy to protect water quality, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and connect people to nature close to home. The levy works in partnership with Metro's parks and nature bond, both serving critical and complementary functions.

Metro's bond measures are limited to capital expenditures like land acquisition, park development and major construction. Bond money cannot be used to pay for routine maintenance, supplies or general operating expenses. Since its original approval by voters in 2013, the local option levy has allowed Metro to care for, maintain and operate the regional parks, natural areas and historic cemeteries that it owns and acquires, as well as connect people to nature through safe and welcoming parks and trails, nature programming, community grants and education.

The current local-option levy is set to expire in June 2023. Renewal by the voters before that date would extend levy funding to June 2028, without raising taxes, allowing Metro to continue protecting these special natural places for current residents as well as future generations, while building climate resilience on a regional scale.

Working through Council direction, including work sessions on June 14 and July 12, as well as extensive outreach to stakeholders and partners, staff have submitted a final recommended levy renewal framework. This framework emphasizes continuity with the successes of the levy to date, greater adaptability to changing conditions and needs, and strengthening measures of accountability to taxpayers and communities. Council is now asked to consider adopting the recommended renewal framework and to consider referral of a levy renewal measure to the region's voters.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Staff recommends Council adoption of Resolution No. 22-5279 that will:

- Refer the renewal of Metro’s local-option levy to voters in the November 2022 General Election, to continue protecting water quality, restoring fish and wildlife habitat and connecting people to nature, at the current tax rate.
- Adopt the recommended levy framework, including proposed program descriptions and funding priorities for three primary levy program areas, minimum allocations and desired outcomes for the levy as a whole.

**IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES**

If a five-year levy renewal is referred by Council and approved by voters, the following programs and activities would be eligible for levy funding beginning in July 2023:

Program area	Program area activities
Habitat restoration and land management	<p><u>Habitat restoration</u> – Restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve habitat quality for priority species, and improve water quality and quantity at Metro’s parks and natural areas.</p> <p><u>Land management</u> – Manage Metro's parks and natural areas to maintain ecological health, restore culturally significant plant communities, and reduce the long-term costs of maintenance.</p>
Regional park operations	Support visitor services, maintenance, and amenity improvements at Metro’s parks, trails, natural areas, and cemeteries so that they are welcoming, safe and inclusive, and meet or exceed standards for accessibility.
Community-led investments and education	Co-create culturally specific interpretive programs, materials, and events, and provide resources (financial and programmatic) to support communities in their efforts to strengthen connections with nature. Includes, but not limited to, grant funding for community projects that advance climate resilience and racial equity, and culturally relevant nature education opportunities.

Listed below are the proposed outcomes that articulate the long-lasting impacts that the recommended levy renewal framework will have in the region. These are aligned with several key governing policy documents including Metro Council’s Strategic Framework, the Parks and Nature System Plan, and the Parks and Nature Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. These outcomes also align with the 2019 parks and nature bond measure.

Proposed levy renewal outcomes include:

- Improve habitat and habitat connectivity for plants, fish and wildlife at Metro’s parks and natural areas.
- Improve hydrologic function and water quality and quantity at Metro’s parks and natural areas.
- Protect and restore culturally significant native plants in partnership with tribal nations and greater Portland’s Indigenous community.

- Execute land management plans at Metro’s parks and natural areas to reduce risk from extreme weather.
- Serve communities through inclusive, transparent and accountable engagement.
- Design collaborative and culturally relevant education that lifts up multiple ways of knowing by centering work with educators from historically marginalized communities.
- Improve the accessibility of Metro destinations for people of all ages and abilities.
- Ensure that Metro visitors of all backgrounds can access a variety of nature experiences to strengthen their relationship to the natural world.
- Collaborate with local, state, federal, tribal and nonprofit partners to plan for and make strategic decisions related to conservation priorities across the region for broader, more effective action for climate adaptation and resilience.
- Increase the prosperity of historically marginalized workers and communities through levy investments.
- Build capacity and experience of historically marginalized contractors through projects at/with Metro.

## **STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

Metro's parks and nature local-option levy is critical to the future of the parks, trails and natural areas that Metro cares for across greater Portland. Metro is one of the largest owners and stewards of parks and natural areas in the region. A quarter-century of voter-approved investments have allowed Metro – on behalf of the public – to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities to experience nature close to home.

By approving bond measures in 1995, 2006 and 2019, voters asked Metro to acquire land, award community nature grants for capital improvements and provide money to local parks providers. As a result, Metro now cares for more than 18,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas including critical forest, river and stream, and wetland habitats. Hundreds of community nature projects have also received a boost through grants and allocations to local cities, counties and park providers.

Bond funding is limited to capital investments, such as acquiring land or major construction projects. For nearly ten years, the levy has allowed Metro to take the next step, funding restoration and management of Metro’s parks and nature system to provide benefits that extend across the region.

### *Restoring natural areas*

Amid hotter summers and other impacts of climate change, levy-funded restoration work includes the planting of more native trees and shrubs to provide shade, protection of cool rivers and streams for fish and people, and the restoration of critical wildlife habitat as well as the removal of invasive weeds.

Metro typically has between 80 to 100 restoration projects occurring simultaneously across wetlands, prairies, savannas, forests and a variety of other priority habitats throughout the region. Without the levy, the number of active restoration projects that Metro would have the ability to manage would significantly diminish to fewer than ten. A renewal of this levy for another five years

will allow Metro to continue this critical restoration and maintenance work, all of which are important contributors to climate resilience on a regional scale.

*Maintaining safe, welcoming parks, trails and natural areas for public access*

Metro operates and maintains 138 parks and nature properties, including 17 developed parks that serve some of the most diverse communities in the region. Annually, more than 2.5 million people visit these popular destinations across greater Portland, such as Blue Lake and Oxbow regional parks, Broughton Beach, Chinook Landing, M. James Gleason Memorial Boat Ramp, and Mount Talbert, Graham Oaks and Scouters Mountain nature parks. Metro recently added Newell Creek Canyon and Chehalem Ridge nature parks to the region's system in Clackamas County and Washington County, respectively.

Metro parks and nature staff, funded by the local-option levy, help visitors enjoy hiking, bird watching, canoeing, golfing, camping, boating, fishing, picnicking, weddings and special events. The levy also funds ongoing maintenance and improvements to restrooms, picnic areas, trails, nature play areas and other important park amenities. This work is vital to extending the life span of these beloved places while also continuing to make them more welcoming and inclusive for more people.

*Connecting more people to nature's benefits*

Finally, the local option levy is essential to fulfilling Metro's commitment to help people strengthen their connection to the natural world and all the benefits it can provide to health and well-being, while also fostering the next generation of conservation leaders. The levy currently funds programs designed to directly support people of color and other communities who have experienced historical barriers in strengthening their relationship with nature through community-led programming and partnership. This work, in turn, improves our region's collective knowledge whether that is by increasing the cultural relevance of restoration activity, learning from communities who have been traditional stewards of nature or by more clearly understanding how Metro parks can support and reflect the needs of everyone in our region. Crucially, the levy supports community engagement, especially with communities of color and other marginalized communities, to ensure that Metro parks support community needs and desires. For example, the levy ensured deep community engagement for the development of the recently opened Chehalem Ridge and Newell Creek Canyon nature parks.

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/INPUT**

The proposed levy renewal framework reflects and is built upon nearly a decade of community partnerships, engagement and input. . It has been updated from the current 2016 levy framework to address community input from more recent engagement efforts with partners and the public.

In the months leading up to the development of this renewal package, staff have worked with partners and community to affirm that the levy priorities still align with and meet community need. Staff applied and incorporated the feedback learned through conversations around the development, refinement and implementation of the 2019 parks and nature bond, in addition to convening more focused conversations with partners such as the urban Indigenous community, the leadership and membership of The Intertwine Alliance, the region's park providers, and the

Metropolitan Policy Advisory Committee, Metro’s Committee on Racial Equity and other leaders and stakeholders.

The recommended levy framework emphasizes continuity with regional restoration priorities and approaches, which reflects strong support from regional conservation partners for maintaining the restoration activities outlined in the current levy.

Additionally, the recommended levy framework aims to provide greater responsiveness in Metro's restoration work, park operations and community-led investments to address emerging needs amid rapid change in our human and natural communities alike – including a growing population, changing climate and continuing needs to advance racial equity. It centers a strongly expressed community desire to prioritize making current parks and natural areas more welcoming, safe and accessible for all.

## **KNOWN SUPPORT & OPPOSITION**

In recent months, Metro has heard broad support from regional partners that renewing the levy is critical for protecting clean water, restoring fish and wildlife habitat and connecting people with nature close to home, as well as appreciation for Metro's years of experience and a wide range of community and partner guidance.

Metro has conducted public opinion research to confirm that likely voters continue to strongly support investments in parks and nature as a central part of the region's legacy for future generations, including significant support for a sample levy renewal ballot question that would continue the current tax rate and funding priorities. This research demonstrated that the voters of the region value and want to continue prioritizing racial equity and climate resilience as part of such investments.

As with any measure on the ballot, there is a potential for opposition to aspects of the proposal and/or its funding mechanism. At this time staff are not aware of any organized opposition.

## **LEGAL ANTECEDENT**

### State law:

Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 250 (“Initiative and Referendum”) and ORS Chapter 280, (“Financing of Local Public Projects and Improvements”): ORS 250.035 (“Form of ballot titles for state and local measures”); ORS 250.038 (“Form of ballot title for measure authorizing imposition or renewal of local option taxes or establishing permanent rate limitation”); ORS 280.060 (“Levy of local option taxes outside constitutional limitation; duration of levy; approval of levy as approval of bonds”); ORS 280.064 (“Period for use of revenues raised by local option tax”); ORS 280.070 (“Manner of holding elections for local option tax or permanent rate limit; additional statement in ballot title”); ORS 280.075 (“Ballot statements for local option tax measures”); and ORS 280.080 (“Contents of order, resolution or ordinance calling election”).

### Metro Council Legislative History:

Metro Council Resolution No. 92-1637, "For the Purpose of Considering the Adoption of the Metropolitan Greenspaces Master Plan," adopted July 23, 1992.

Metro Council Resolution No. 94-2049B, "For the Purpose of Modifying the Submission to the Voters of a General Obligation Bond Indebtedness to Proceed with the Acquisition of Land for a Regional System of Greenspaces."

Open Spaces, Parks and Streams Bond Measure No. 26-26, approved by Metro voters in May 1995.

Metro Council Resolution No. 05-3574A, "Establishing a Regional Habitat Protection, Restoration and Greenspaces Initiative Called Nature In Neighborhoods," adopted May 12, 2005.

Natural Areas, Parks and Streams Bond Measure No. 26-80, approved by Metro Voters in November 2006.

Local Option Levy Measure No. 26-152, approved by Metro voters in May 2013.

Metro Council Resolution No. 15-4670, "For the Purpose of Adopting the Parks and Nature System Plan," adopted February 4, 2016.

Local Option Levy Renewal Measure No. 26-178, approved by Metro voters in November 2016.

Portland Metro Bonds for Water Projects and Parks Measure No 26-203, approved by Metro voters in November 2019.

## **ANTICIPATED EFFECTS**

By adopting Resolution No. 22-5279 the Metro Council would refer to Metro voters a local option levy renewal measure at the existing rate of 9.6 cents per \$1,000 assessed value, Additionally, Council would adopt the recommended framework for levy implementation between 2023 and 2028, if the renewal measure is approved by voters in .

The Metro Council will have the legal authority to establish appropriation authority related to the successful passage of the measure, once the election has been certified. It is anticipated that, upon passage of the measure, staff will work with the Metro Council to continue implementation of the levy program for an additional five years and the necessary budgetary appropriation would be approved by Resolution with the overall budget for the FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget.

Compression impacts are expected to be minimal with a potential levy renewal.

## **BACKGROUND**

Metro's parks and nature local operating levy was originally approved by the voters in 2013 to restore Metro's natural areas, maintain and operate parks, and improve opportunities for people to safely enjoy parks and natural areas. It was renewed in 2016 for an additional five years, with support from more than 74 percent of voters across greater Portland. The levy currently makes up the majority of the Parks and Nature

department's operating budget. Without it, Metro would be unable to continue many essential Parks and Nature services and programs.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Resolution No. 22-5079
- Exhibit A: Proposed Ballot Title
- Exhibit B: Recommended Levy Renewal Framework