

Measure 26-203

Ballot Title: Bonds to protect water quality, fish, wildlife habitat, natural areas

Question: Shall Metro protect clean water, natural areas, access to parks and nature; issue bonds estimated to maintain current tax rate?

Financial Impact: This measure authorizes Metro to issue \$475 million in general obligation bonds. If the bonds are approved, they will be payable from property taxes that are not subject to property tax limitations imposed by Article XI of the Oregon Constitution. Therefore, tax funds available to schools and local government would not be reduced by this measure. Bond costs are estimated at \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value annually. However, Metro also estimates that tax rates will not increase, because these bond costs will be offset by a tax decrease that will occur due to the retirement of similar bond measures passed in 1995 and 2006.

Probable Results of a "Yes" Vote: If this measure passes, Metro's property tax rate would remain the same. Property taxes in the amount of \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation (or \$47.50 per year for a home with a \$250,000 assessed value) would continue to be levied to support Metro's regional system of parks and natural areas through

- Purchasing, protecting and restoring lands
- Supporting local projects
- Providing Nature in Neighborhood capital grants
- Improving infrastructure and accessibility
- Creating trails for walking and biking
- Funding projects to address community issues

Probable Results of a "No" Vote: If this measure fails, the \$475 million from the bonds will not be available for improving the Metro regional park system. Taxes paid by homeowners within Metro's boundaries in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties would decrease by about \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation as previous park bonds authorized by voters are retired.

Background: This measure was placed on the ballot by the Metro Council.

Metro manages more than 17,000 acres of parks and natural areas in and around the greater Portland region including wetlands, stream and river frontage, prairies, forests and trails. Most of these were acquired over the last 20 years due to voter approval of bond measures of \$135 million in 1995 and \$227 million in 2006. These funds were used to acquire undeveloped land. Other lands were acquired by transfer from other government agencies. According to Metro, 1.3 million people visit the parks every year. This measure will provide funds for capital projects to purchase land and provide infrastructure for existing and new Metro parks and natural areas.

This bond measure is different from, and additional to, the five-year operating levy of \$0.096 per \$1,000 of assessed value passed by the voters in 2013 and renewed in 2016 at the same rate. The

operating levies provide maintenance and operating funds in support of the properties acquired under the bond measures. The bond proceeds cannot be used for maintenance, operations or programming, which are addressed by the operating levy.

Summary of Measure: If voters approve the parks and nature bond measure, Metro would distribute money to six funding areas:

- Land purchase and restoration: \$155 million to improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat.
- Metro park improvements: \$98 million to complete nature parks such as Chehalem Ridge in Washington County, increase access for people with disabilities and maintain water systems, trails, bathrooms and other amenities at parks such as Oxbow and Blue Lake.
- Nature in Neighborhoods grants: \$40 million for capital projects to purchase land, restore fish and wildlife habitat and/or provide access to nature. Priority would be given to projects that reduce the impacts of climate change and implement Metro's Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- Local parks and nature projects: distribute \$92 million to cities, counties and park providers across greater Portland to purchase land, restore fish and wildlife habitat and build and maintain parks in local communities.
- Walking and biking trails: \$40 million to secure rights to build new trails and construct missing sections, completing projects identified in a regional plan for a network of walking and biking paths.
- Complex community projects: \$50 million to provide funding for public projects that also address other community issues such as jobs, housing and transportation. This program area would include \$20 million to help provide public access to Willamette Falls in downtown Oregon City.

Expenditures would be reviewed by an independent community oversight committee with annual reports and audits.

Supporters Say:

- This measure will preserve our region's water quality, forests, open spaces, and areas at risk from development.
- This measure will ensure that all kids—regardless of zip code or income—have great places to play by improving access and facilities at regional parks and in communities.
- This will be one of the most collaborative and equity-driven measures ever put before Oregon voters
- This measure would only continue a present tax at the same rate. It adds no new tax; it does not reduce school funding

Opponents Say:

- Metro should not be raising money to buy more land. It already has more land than it can manage. The only focus for the next decade should be on making current lands available for public use

- Too many projects are loaded into this measure. Metro should narrow its scope and ask for less money.
- Detail about projects is lacking and there is too much overlap with other government entities.
- Metro's natural areas program is taking away land that is needed to deliver more housing.

