

Date: May 6, 2024  
To: Jon Blasher, Director, Parks and Nature  
From: Karissa Lowe, Program Manager, Nature in Neighborhoods Community Grants  
Elizabeth Guzman Arroyo, Community Investments and Partnerships Team Manager  
Subject: Recommendation for funding: 2023 Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration grants review

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The purpose of this memo is to summarize the recommendation for funding from the grant review committee for the 2023 Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration grants.

The 2023 Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration grants review committee met February 20, 2024 and again on April 23, 2024. They reviewed 42 pre-applications totaling \$3,361,521 in funding requests, and 16 full applications totaling \$1,395,220 in funding requests. The review committee selected **9 proposals which are the strongest fit for this funding opportunity's criteria** to recommend for funding a total of **\$750,000** to the Metro Council.

Metro received many strong grant proposals. The review committee determined which most strongly met the grant program's purpose and goals based on the information submitted, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. The review committee included local experts in habitat restoration, natural area land management, conservation planning, mentorship and job skill development, diversity equity and inclusion, community partnership development, philanthropy, and grant management.

In the first round of the renewed natural areas levy grants, the review committee valued the diverse types of organizations, robust partnerships, and the wide range of projects represented in the pre-applications submitted. Proposals recommended for funding show strong evidence of involvement from BIPOC groups in proposal planning and development, and a clear path forward for their continued involvement in project execution. The review committee members were impressed with proposals that focused on work done by and with BIPOC communities, rather than for them, and which were clearly grounded BIPOC perspectives, traditions, and ways of knowing.

Committee members also noted that many proposals meaningfully incorporated opportunities to introduce youth to green career opportunities and/or created skill building and career development opportunities for early career professionals in the environmental sector.

Committee members were impressed by how many applications were strong on all three of the program goals. Proposals came from both culturally specific organizations and conservation focused organizations and included both organizations familiar to this program and many first time applicants.

The review committee identified compelling projects which offer opportunities to participate in hands on outdoor STEM education, gain habitat restoration skills and experience, address career pathways in the environmental field, remove barriers for marginalized communities to enter that field, and help BIPOC youth and adults become lifelong environmental advocates. They emphasized the importance of projects that combined boots-on-the-ground restoration with opportunities to build community power and voice to create lasting holistic impact. The committee discussed the

history and contemporary presence of Indigenous people in the Portland Metro Area, and the importance of applicants partnering with both local Tribes and intertribal urban Native organizations. The committee appreciated proposals that incorporated Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge alongside western restoration science and methods.

The review committee valued projects which aligned with the Nature in Neighborhood grant goals, individual organizations' plans or priorities, and state, regional or local conservation strategies. They found proposals stronger when they demonstrated longstanding and holistic partnerships with communities and community-specific organizations. They also found it compelling when applicants that partnered with Tribes and/or the intertribal urban Native community talked about going beyond the land acknowledgement and deepening engagement with the community.

For the most part the review committee was pleased with how applicants addressed their diversity, equity, and inclusion experience, and this was especially true for organizations that submitted full applications. They noticed that the applicant organizations were all on different parts of their equity journey but most of them were very transparent and authentic about who they were and where they are headed. They found compelling projects that made clear connections between conservation and restoration, where applicable, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. They appreciated projects that acknowledge that communities' relationship with and access to nature is both critical and complicated, and projects that explore new ways for communities to interact with nature at a neighborhood scale and beyond.

Finally, the review committee valued authentic and holistic long-established or newer partnerships. They particularly noted partnerships that included clear plans to integrate historically marginalized communities' priorities and center BIPOC voices. The committee acknowledged the difficulty of establishing true, long-term partnerships between larger, complex organizations and historically and systemically marginalized communities. The committee appreciated applicants' efforts to embrace the challenge and create such partnerships regardless of the difficulties faced along the way.

### **Recommended for funding**

The 2023 Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration grants review committee recommends the following 9 proposals for funding to the Metro Council. The Metro Council makes all final grant decisions and is scheduled to decide final grant awards on May 23, 2024.

#### **7 Waters Canoe Family Restoration**

**Recipient:** 7 Waters Canoe Family

**Grant amount:** \$75,000

**Project Partners:** 7 Waters Canoe Family; Portland Parks and Recreation; Metro; Multnomah County; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife; Columbia Slough Watershed Council; Mad Bears LLC; 1855 Plants; SymbiOp Landscaping; Nesika Wilamut; and Future Generations Collaborative

**Program summary:** This project will uplift and revitalize traditional Indigenous canoeing practices and Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Practices. Project activities include restoration work done in riparian areas accessible by canoe, public volunteer days for plantings and clean ups, educational hikes and nature walks, and a Fire Summit that will be co-hosted with Nesika Wilamut.

### **Oleson Woods Habitat Restoration and Environmental Engagement**

**Recipient:** Community Partners for Affordable Housing, Inc.

**Grant amount:** \$75,000

**Project Partners:** Community Partners for Affordable Housing, Inc.; Home Building Foundation; and Tualatin RiverKeepers

**Program summary:** Oleson Woods is an affordable housing property in Tigard with a wetland and forest on site. This project will restore the wetlands and forest habitats on the property; restore the walking path through the natural area; engage with diverse resident households about the benefit of stewarding the natural environment that surrounds the property; and provide hands-on, free educational STEM programming to resident youth who attend CPAH's no-cost summer youth programs. This project provides the community with essential and precious resources: deeply affordable housing, an urban native habitat, and resident and youth services.

### **Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Stewardship at the Sandy River Delta**

**Recipient:** Confluence

**Grant amount:** \$98,270

**Project Partners:** Confluence; Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership; Indigenous Traditional Ecological & Cultural Knowledge keepers; and MAD Bears LLC

**Program summary:** Today, Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge specialists are helping to resurrect, reestablish, and reclaim ways of knowing and caring for place that can only add to any efforts to restore and protect our environment. Confluence and its partners seek to elevate this cultural and environmental memory to augment restoration strategies based in traditional western scientific knowledge and restoration models at the Sandy River Delta. This funding will support work to conduct the next First Foods and Cultural Materials Inventory and Stewardship Implementation Plan for the Sandy River Delta.

### **Morningstar Church Nature Space**

**Recipient:** Depave

**Grant amount:** \$75,000

**Project Partners:** Depave; Morning Star Church; Pequeñitos Childcare; Oromo Seventh Day Adventists; Learning Landscapes Design; GPT Construction; UWD Pre-Build; POIC-RAHS; All Natural Additions; Friends of Trees; Mudbone Grown; PCEF; BES Percent for Green; and Multnomah County Drainage District

**Program summary:** Depave will transform 18,000 square feet of pavement into a new greenspace with food gardens, trees, native landscaping, and a nature playground at Morning Star Church to mitigate flooding and urban heat island effects, sequester carbon, and benefit diverse communities. The Church hosts two African American congregations and Pequeñitos Childcare, a subsidized Spanish immersion preschool, but has limited capacity to lead a project to revitalize its grounds. These funds will help fund Depave to plan and execute the new Morning Star Nature Space to remedy these needs, and improve access to nature for a diverse set of beneficiaries.

### **Friends of Trees' Community Tree Care and Mentorship with Youth and Adult Interns**

**Recipient:** Friends of Trees

**Grant amount:** \$74,950

**Project Partners:** Friends of Trees; Connecting Canopies (via The Intertwine Alliance); Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center; The Blueprint Foundation

**Program summary:** Youth and adult interns with Friends of Trees, Connecting Canopies, The Blueprint Foundation, and Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center's workforce programs will partner to assess and care for hundreds of young trees in East Multnomah County. These funds will support all interns' participation in summer pruning/tree health assessment training/events,

Adult Urban Forestry/Connecting Canopies interns' participation in general Friends of Trees planting, pruning, and tree health trainings and events, plus intern-specific trainings/events.

### **Ecological and Cultural Restoration at Tryon Creek State Natural Area**

**Recipient:** Friends of Tryon Creek

**Grant amount:** \$100,000

**Project Partners:** Friends of Tryon Creek; Oregon State Parks; The Blueprint Foundation; Tryon Creek Watershed Council; Oregon State Parks; and M.A.D. Bears Environmental Restoration LLC

**Program summary:** This project will improve fish and wildlife habitat at Tryon Creek State Natural Area, guided by a new Cultural Restoration Plan based on Indigenous knowledge and practice and fostering Indigenous cultural revitalization. This work will be implemented with the help of Indigenous practitioners, community members, and will offer ecocultural restoration experience for the early career and BIPOC green workforce and increase engagement from diverse communities at Tryon Creek State Natural Area, building our next generation of leaders.

### **From Basic Blacktop to Green Schoolyard**

**Recipient:** Peninsula Elementary School

**Grant amount:** \$75,000

**Project Partners:** Peninsula Elementary School (Portland Public Schools), DePave, Harpers Playground, Elbow Room, National Wildlife Federation (ECHO), and Eco-School Network

**Program summary:** This project will create a green schoolyard by removing pavement from an underused portion of the blacktop and replacing it with a schoolyard habitat and an accessible green STEAM lab and nature play area. Harpers' Playground will consult to support an accessible configuration of the nature play area and green STEAM lab. Artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities from Elbow Room will create designs inspired by students, decorating, and activating the accessible nature space. The project will engage the school and neighborhood community around design, building the site, planting the habitat, creating artistic elements and ongoing stewardship.

### **Verde Urban Habitat Program**

**Recipient:** Verde

**Grant amount:** \$76,780

**Project Partners:** Verde; Backyard Habitat Certification Program; Columbia Slough Watershed Council; Reynolds MYC; Taking Ownership PDX; Connecting Canopies Coalition; and Greening Wilkes Coalition

**Program summary:** Verde will install rain gardens and naturoscapes and will offer education and maintenance support for low-income/BIPOC homeowners in North Portland. This project will continue to address critical, interconnected social and conservation issues through additional naturoscape installations, environmental education, opportunities to acquire hands-on experience, and further developing maintenance resources for previously installed naturoscapes to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of the work.

### **Restoration Planning at Public Access Site for Willamette Falls**

**Recipient:** Willamette Falls Trust

**Grant amount:** \$100,000

**Project Partners:** Willamette Falls Trust; Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation; Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians; Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; City of West Linn; and Portland General Electric

**Program summary:** This project encompasses the creation of a habitat restoration plan informed by deep community engagement, particularly with Indigenous communities, as Willamette Falls

Trust and partners develop a public gathering space at Willamette Falls. Funds from this request will support the engagement of technical, design, and cultural experts to complete this work.

**Attachment A:** List of all applicants and their status throughout the review committee recommendation process