The Landscape: 40 Mile Loop & Regional Trails: Park it Here

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early a hundred years ago, landscape architect John Charles Olmsted formulated a vision for Portland's parks that has endured until today. The Portland Parks Board invited Olmsted to propose a park system as part of the planning for the upcoming Lewis and Clark Exposition. His report recommended "scenic reservations, parks, parkways and connecting boulevards" creating a citywide system of parks.

Portland's well-known 40 Mile Loop - a trail system connecting many of the City's parks - stems from Olmsted's 1903 vision. Today, planners imagine a Loop far beyond the original length; it is expected to be more than 150 miles long when completed. But the Loop's trails and parks are embedded within a larger network of regional and local trails.

Metro's 1992 Metropolitan Greenspaces Master Plan describes "a vision of a cooperative regional system of parks, natural areas, greenways and trails for fish, wildlife and people." In 1995 voters approved a $135.6 million bond measure that has enabled Metro to purchase nearly 7,000 acres of natural areas and greenways throughout the region. In 1998, Metro acquired 44 acres constituting a three-mile rail corridor along the east bank of the Willamette River in Portland. The rail operator has agreed to relocate the track to accommodate a trail on the riverside. This parcel is a critical piece of the trail that connects OMSI and the east end of the Hawthorne Bridge to the Springwater Corridor. Trail construction is set to begin this summer. When completed, it will be the only "Rails with Trails" project in the state.

A major southeast segment of the 40 Mile Loop, the Springwater Corridor reaches from the eastside industrial district in Portland to the city of Boring, nearly 17 miles away. It offers a paved trail fit for a variety of users including walkers, joggers, hikers, and bicyclists while also providing access to wheelchairs. The trail passes through wetlands, buttes, agricultural fields, and residential neighborhoods and connects important parks and open spaces including Tideman Johnson Nature Park, Beggars-tick Wildlife Refuge, Leach Botanical Garden, Powell Butte Nature Park, and Gresham Main City Park.

Currently the three-county metropolitan area enjoys over 3,000 parks, trails and open spaces. In Portland alone, parks total over 10,000 acres, nearly 11% of the city's total area. Metro park planner Mel Hui says that the long-term vision is to connect every city in the three counties and the two states through trails, parks, and open spaces.
Metro's open spaces bond measure provides $25 million for the provision of local parks. This money supports open space acquisition, enhanced public access, and improvement projects. More than 100 "local share" projects have been funded to date. Figure 1 depicts the allocation of "local share" funds by county.