

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies
Publications

Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies

2007

Periodic Atlas of the Metroscape: Geography of Opportunity: Maps from the Regional Atlas

Meg Merrick
Portland State University

Vivek Shandas
Portland State University, vshandas@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/metropolitanstudies>



Part of the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Citation Details

Merrick M, and V Shandas, 2007. "Geography of Opportunity", Metroscape

This Article is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies Publications by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Periodic Atlas of the Metroscape

A Geography of Opportunity

Maps from the *Regional Equity Atlas*

Published by the Coalition for a Livable Future

GIS Analysis and Maps by Ken Radin, Population Research Center, Portland State University

Text by Meg Merrick and Vivek Shandas

Of the three pillars of sustainability (ecology, economy, and equity), equity has been largely absent from regional development discussions in part because policy-makers lack a shared understanding of what equity means. In launching its regional equity initiative, the Coalition for a Livable Future (CLF) convened 100 leaders from across the region to envision what an equitable region would look like. Together, they defined an equitable region as one where:

- All residents have access to opportunities for meeting basic needs and advancing their health and well-being: good jobs, transportation choices, safe and stable housing, a good education, quality health care, parks and natural areas, vibrant public spaces, and healthful foods (CLF, 2007).

- Communities share both the benefits and burdens of growth and change (CLF, 2007).

- All residents and communities are fully involved as equal partners in public decision-making (CLF, 2007).

In partnership with Portland State University's Population Research Center (PRC) and the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies (IMS), the CLF has created a regional equity atlas. The *Regional Equity Atlas: Metropolitan Portland's Geography of Opportunity* was published in August, 2007 and is available at CLF's website: <http://www.equityatlas.org>.

This edition of the Periodic Atlas features several maps from the *Regional Equity Atlas* that begin to tell a story of the existing challenges and the highly dynamic nature of the relationships among people, place, and opportunities in the metroscape. We would like to thank the CLF for this important work and for allowing us to share these maps with our readers.

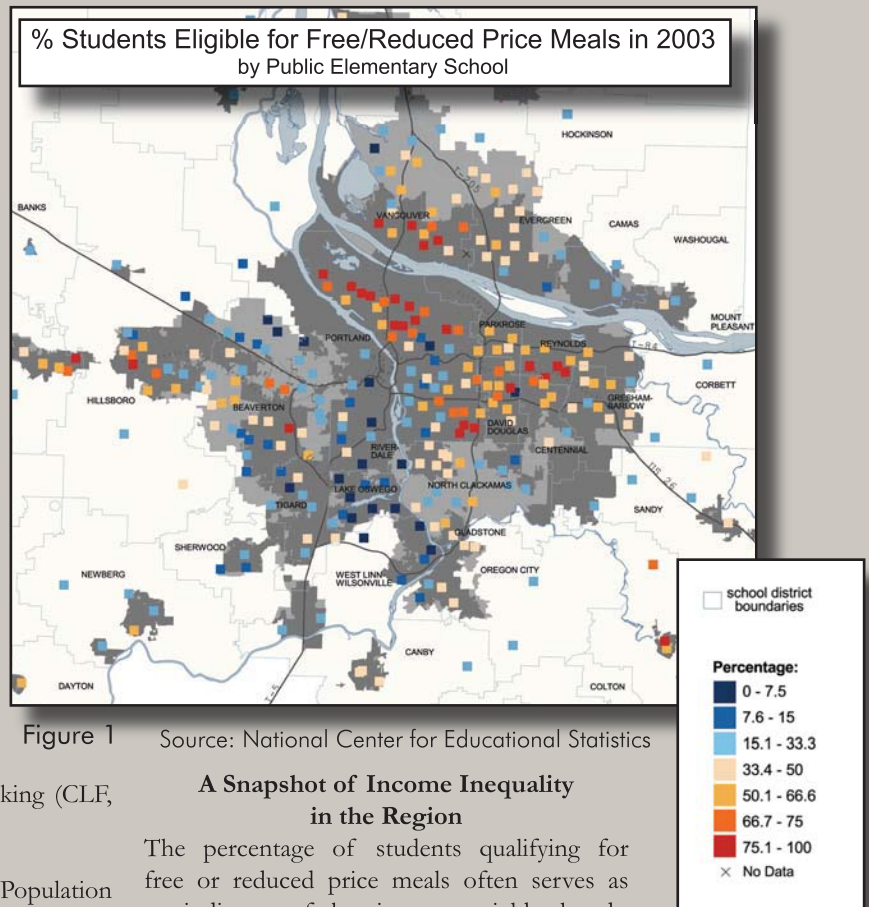


Figure 1

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics

A Snapshot of Income Inequality in the Region

The percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals often serves as an indicator of low-income neighborhoods. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of students in 2003 qualifying for free or reduced price meals in public elementary schools in the 4-county region. For example, in 2003, to qualify for the free lunch program a family of four could earn no more than \$23,920 annually according to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Dark blue squares represent schools with the lowest percentages (0-7.5%) of low income students. The red squares indicate schools with the highest percentages (75%-100%). This map shows that a large number of elementary schools exist at either extreme of this spectrum and that income disparity is an issue in both urban areas and in the suburbs.

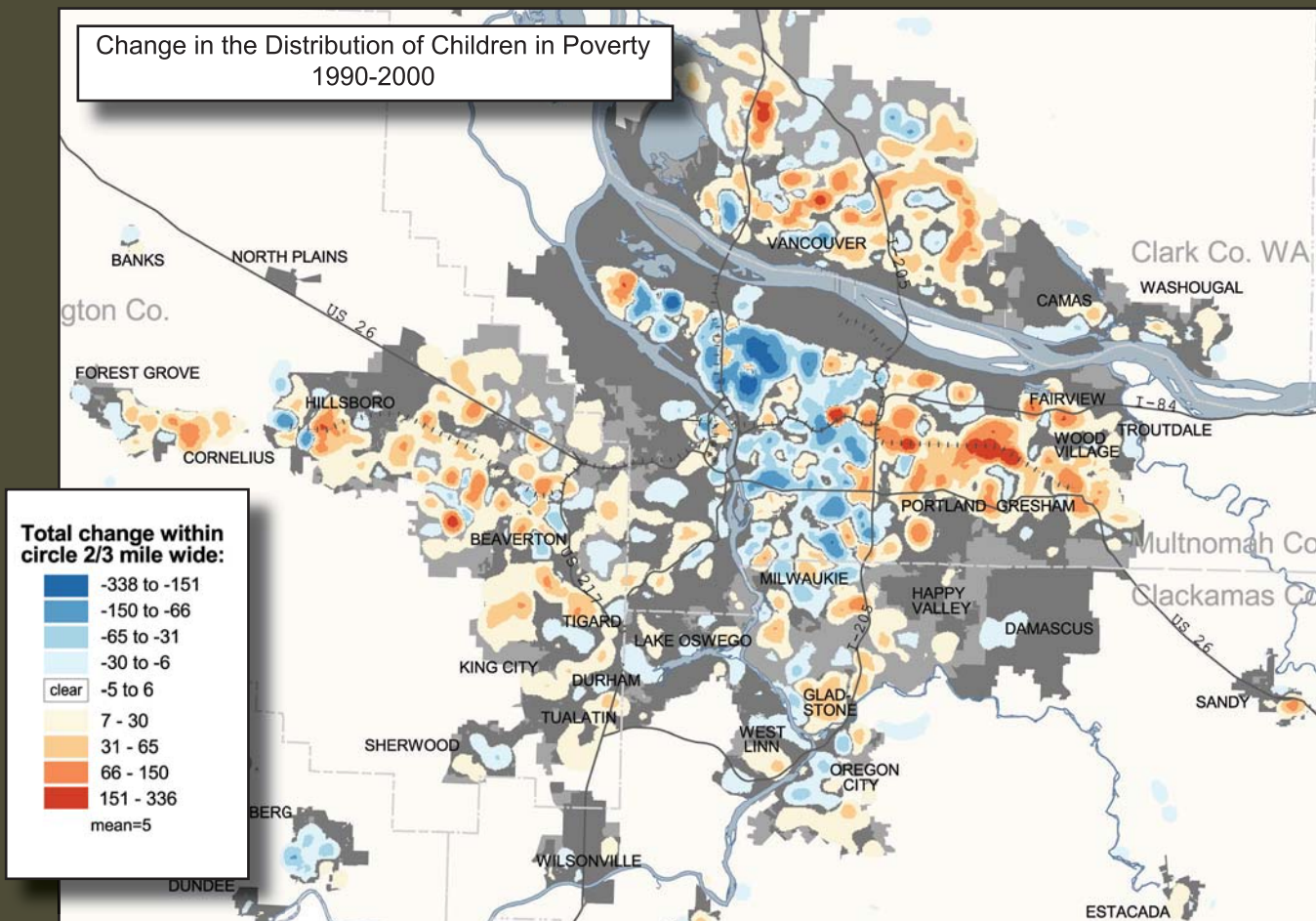


Figure 2 Source: U.S. Census

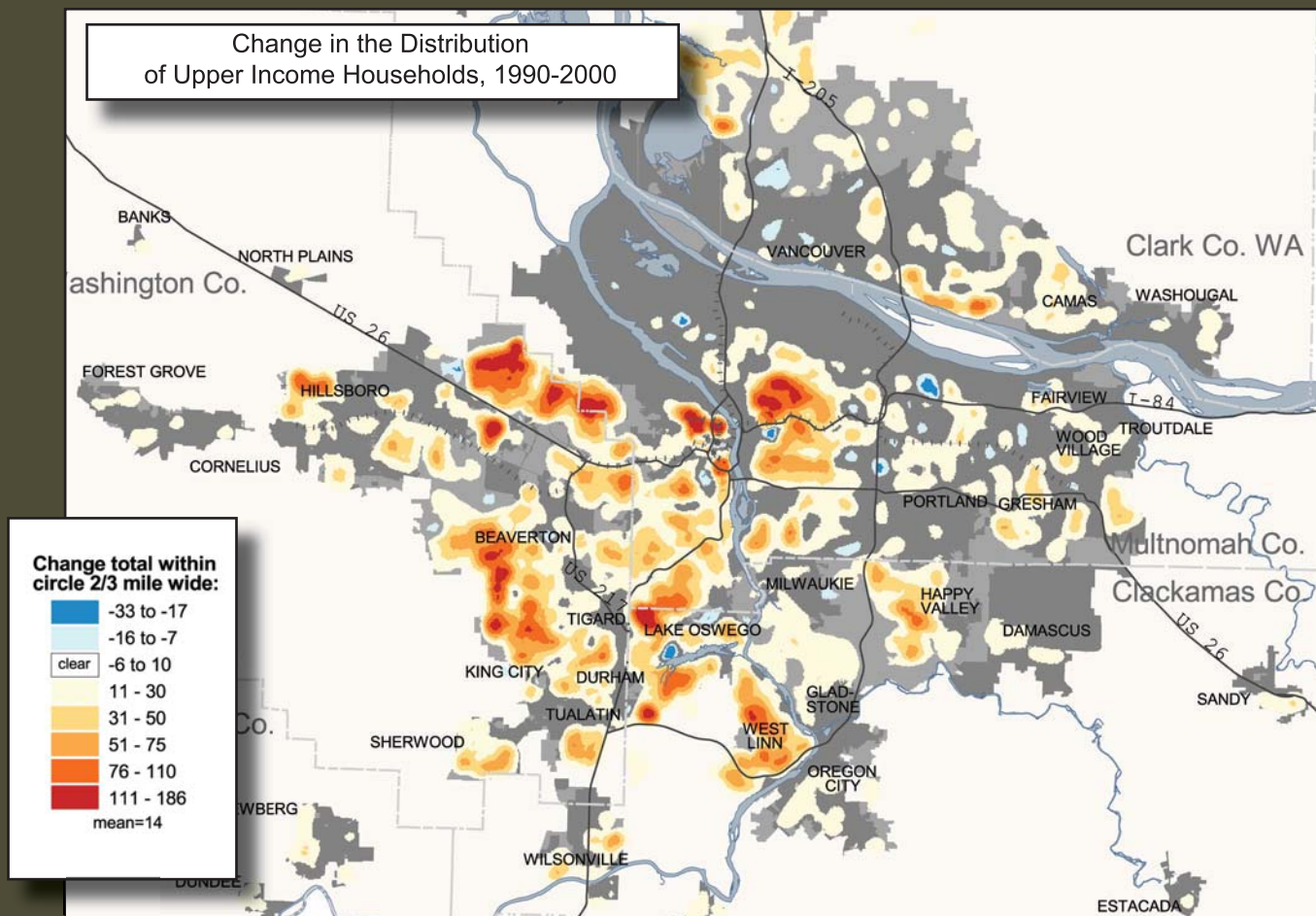


Figure 3 Source: U.S. Census

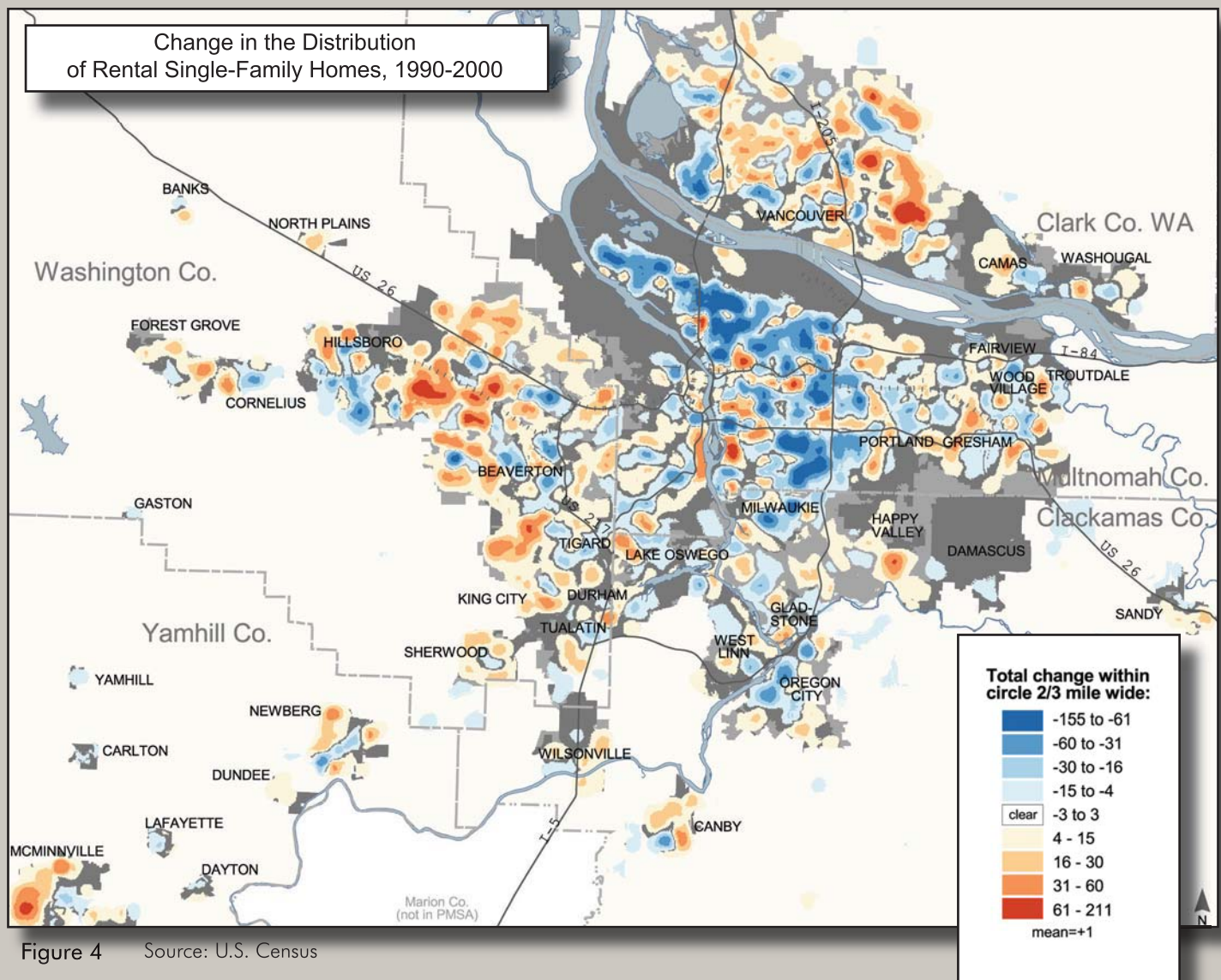


Figure 4 Source: U.S. Census

The Dynamics of Income and Housing

Figures 2 and 3 display flip-sides of income and the dynamics of change over time. Figure 2 shows the change in the number of children in poverty by location between 1990 and 2000. The blue color range from light blue to dark blue indicates a decrease in the number of children in poverty during this decade. The red color range indicates an increase in the number of children in poverty. The tremendous decrease in the number of children in poverty in northeast and north Portland is striking. The pronounced increase in Gresham and outer eastside neighborhoods also stands out. However, significant increases also occurred in some Vancouver and Beaverton neighborhoods.

Note the dramatic increase in the distribution of upper income households (households whose incomes were greater than \$125,000 in 1989 and greater than \$100,000 in 1999) in inner northeast Portland, where a decrease in children in poverty occurred during the same period (figure 3). Increases also occurred in upper income households throughout the inner eastside of

Portland, also accompanied by decreases in the number of children in poverty. While some poor families might have acquired wealth during this period, it is much more likely that middle and upper income households displaced poor families in these areas.

Given the shifting locations of households at both ends of the income spectrum that occurred between 1990 and 2000, the changes that occurred during the same period in the location of single-family rental housing are provocative (figure 4). We see losses in northeast and north Portland in the same areas where there was a decrease in children in poverty, losses in outer southeast Portland, and notable losses in Oregon City, Hillsboro, and Vancouver. The loss in single-family rental housing and the corresponding increase in upper income households in these areas may be due in part to gentrification. Large gains in rental single-family housing occurred in eastern Vancouver, Hillsboro near Intel, and McMinnville, areas that aren't necessarily providing affordable housing for the poor.

The Coalition for a Livable Future initiated and managed the production of the atlas, including providing editorial leadership. The project was completed at the Portland State University Population Research Center by Ken Radin (analysis and cartography) and Irina V. Sharkova (methodology and project oversight). CLF developed the project design and funding in partnership with the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies. Detailed information about the methodologies used to create the maps included in this atlas are available in Appendix B of the Regional Equity Atlas: Metropolitan Portland's Geography of Opportunity. The Regional Equity Atlas is available for purchase or for download at the Coalition for a Livable Future's website: www.equityatlas.org.

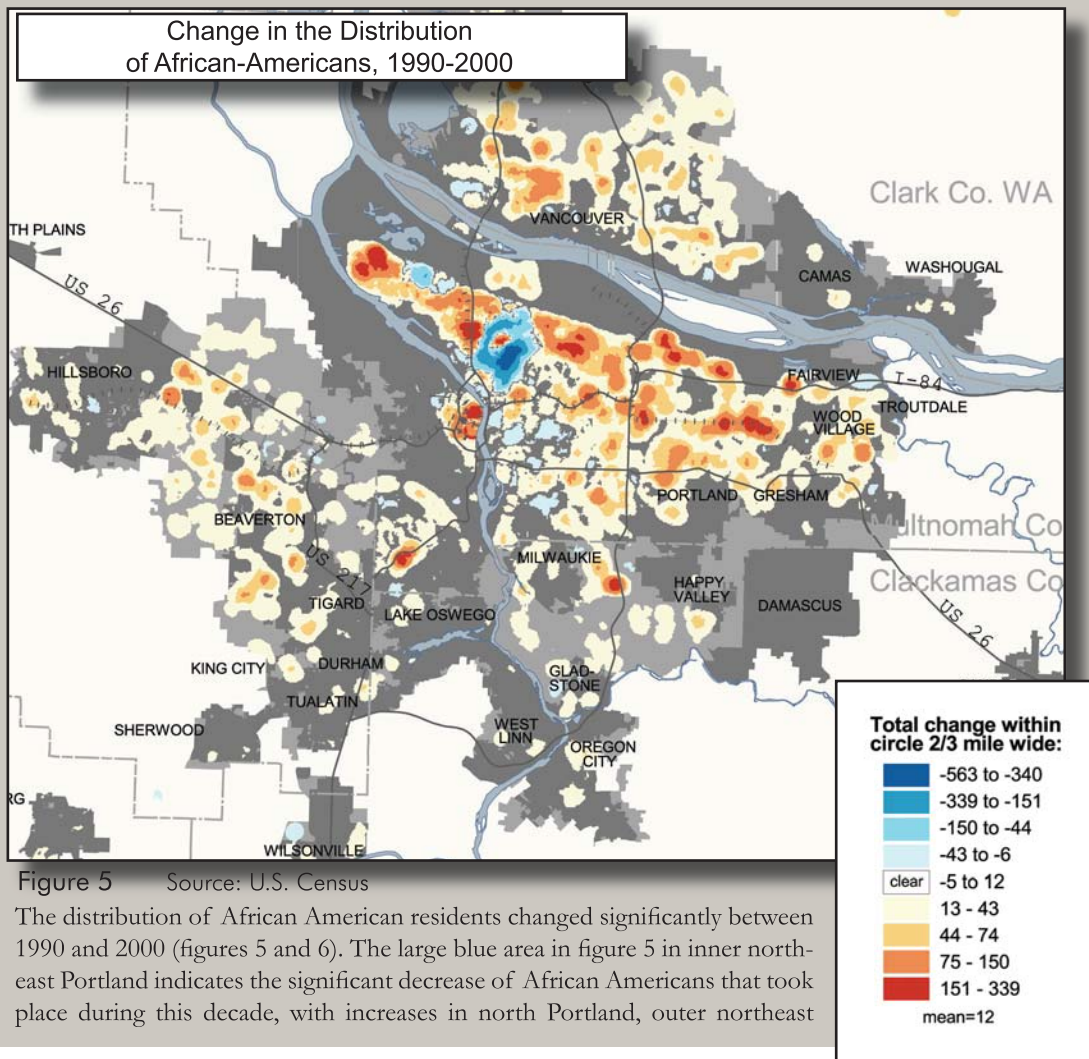


Figure 5 Source: U.S. Census

The distribution of African American residents changed significantly between 1990 and 2000 (figures 5 and 6). The large blue area in figure 5 in inner north-east Portland indicates the significant decrease of African Americans that took place during this decade, with increases in north Portland, outer northeast

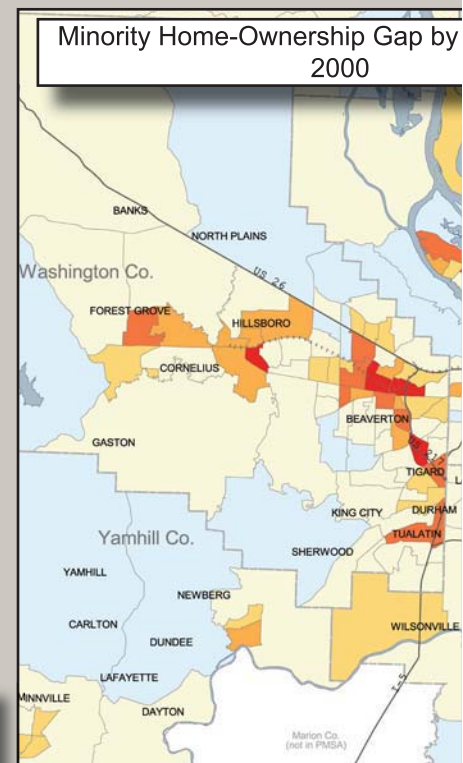
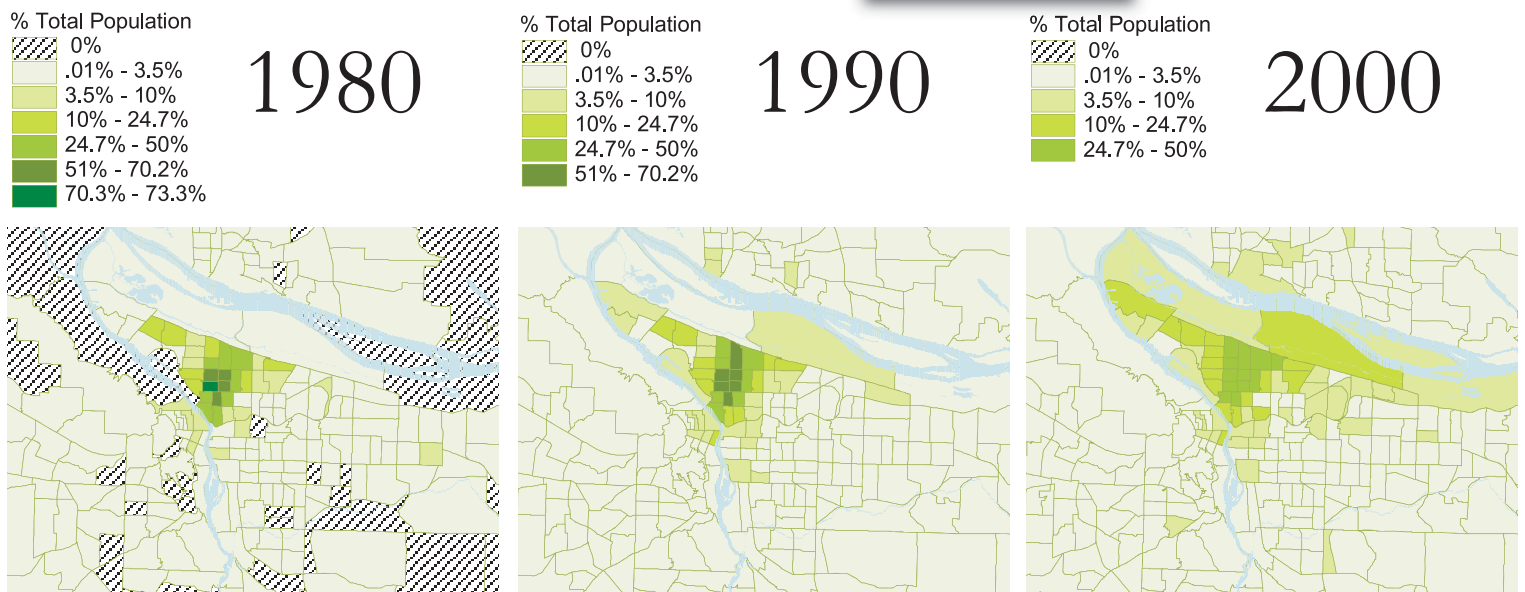


Figure 7 Source: U.S. Census

Homeownership often symbolizes the American Dream, but it also is one of the primary ways that U.S. residents can save and accumulate capital.



African-Americans: Percent of Total Population by Census Tract

Figure 6 Source: U.S. Census

Portland, and Gresham. However, in 2000, the largest concentration of African Americans in our region remained in northeast Portland (figure 6). Since 1980 the percentage of African Americans in several neighborhoods in northeast Portland has changed dramatically. In 1980, one

census tract was 73% African American, and four others were over 50% African American. In 1990, six census tracts were over 50% African American. And by 2000, only one census tract that was 50% African American.

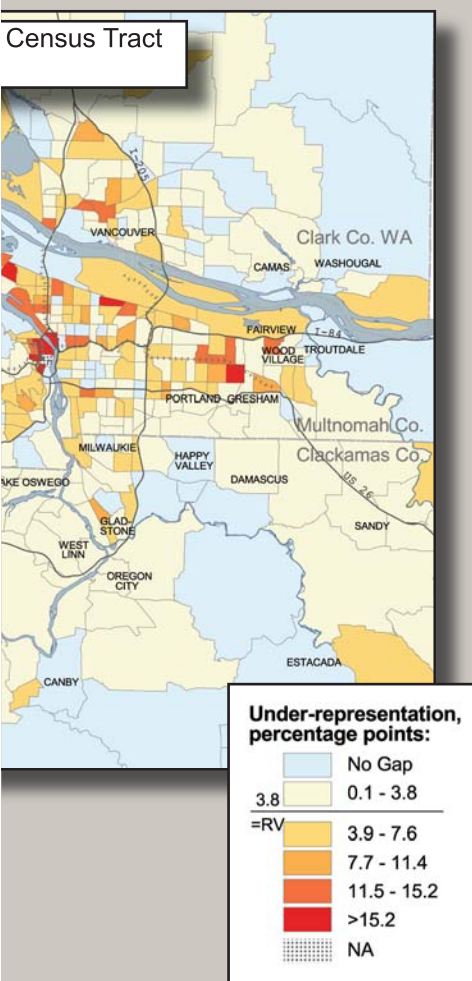


Figure 7 illustrates a profound inequity with regard to minority homeownership in the metro area. Assuming that the percentage of minority households is the same as white households in any given census tract, this analysis also assumes that the percentage of home-owning households (white and minority) should be the same (or “no gap” on this map). Any census tract that is in the yellow to red color range indicates a discrepancy between the percentage of white household home-owners and minority household home-owners.

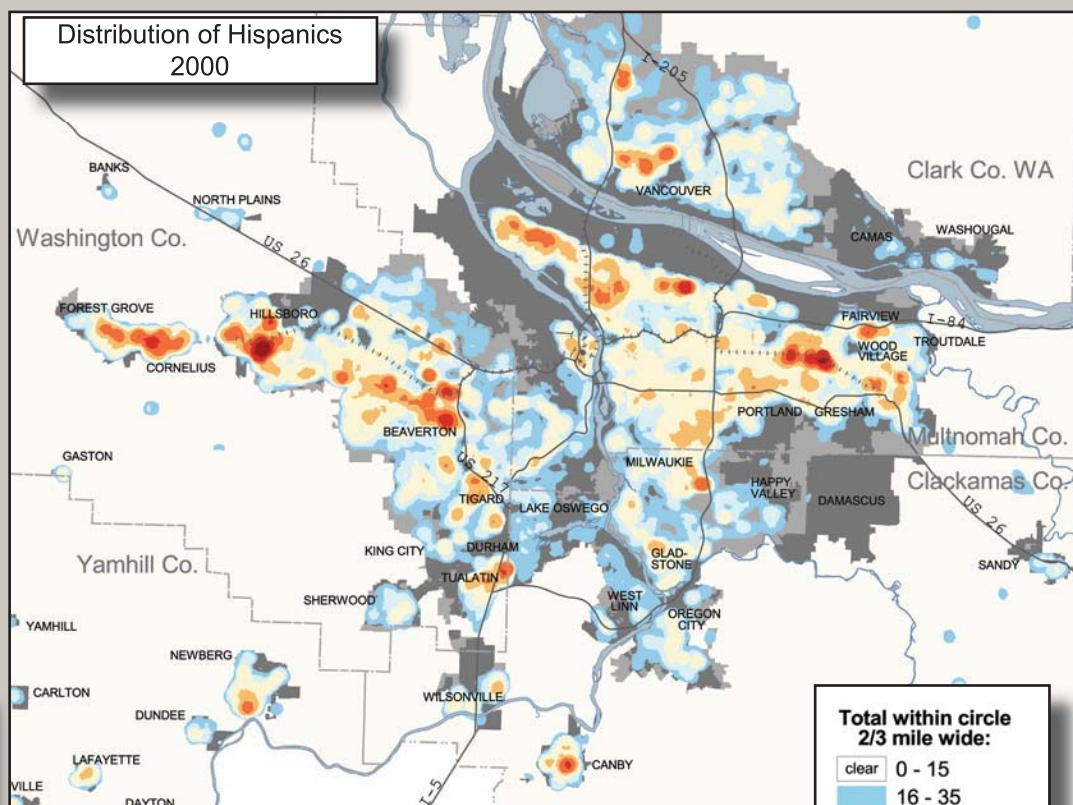


Figure 8 Source: U.S. Census

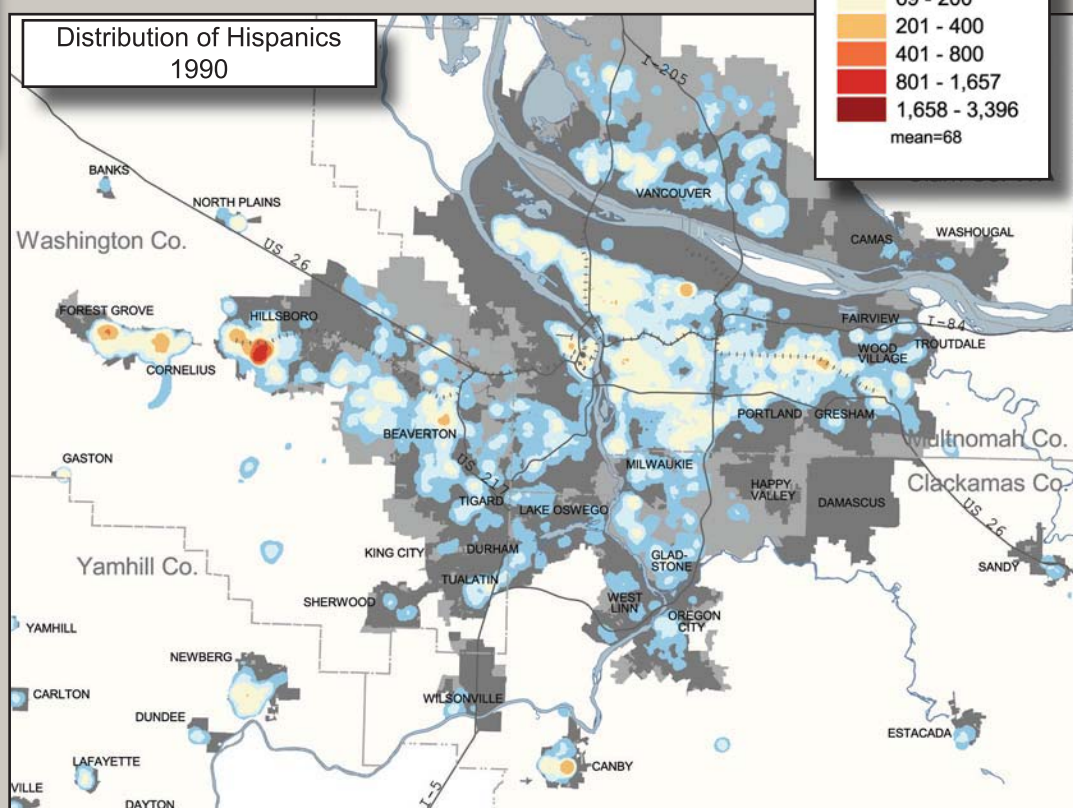


Figure 9 Source: U.S. Census

Figures 8 and 9 show tremendous growth in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000. Their numbers tended to increase in already established Hispanic communities such as Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Cornelius, and the Cully neighborhood in northeast Portland. Significant increases also occurred in Gresham, Beaverton, and north Portland in areas proximate to transportation options such as light rail and lower cost housing.

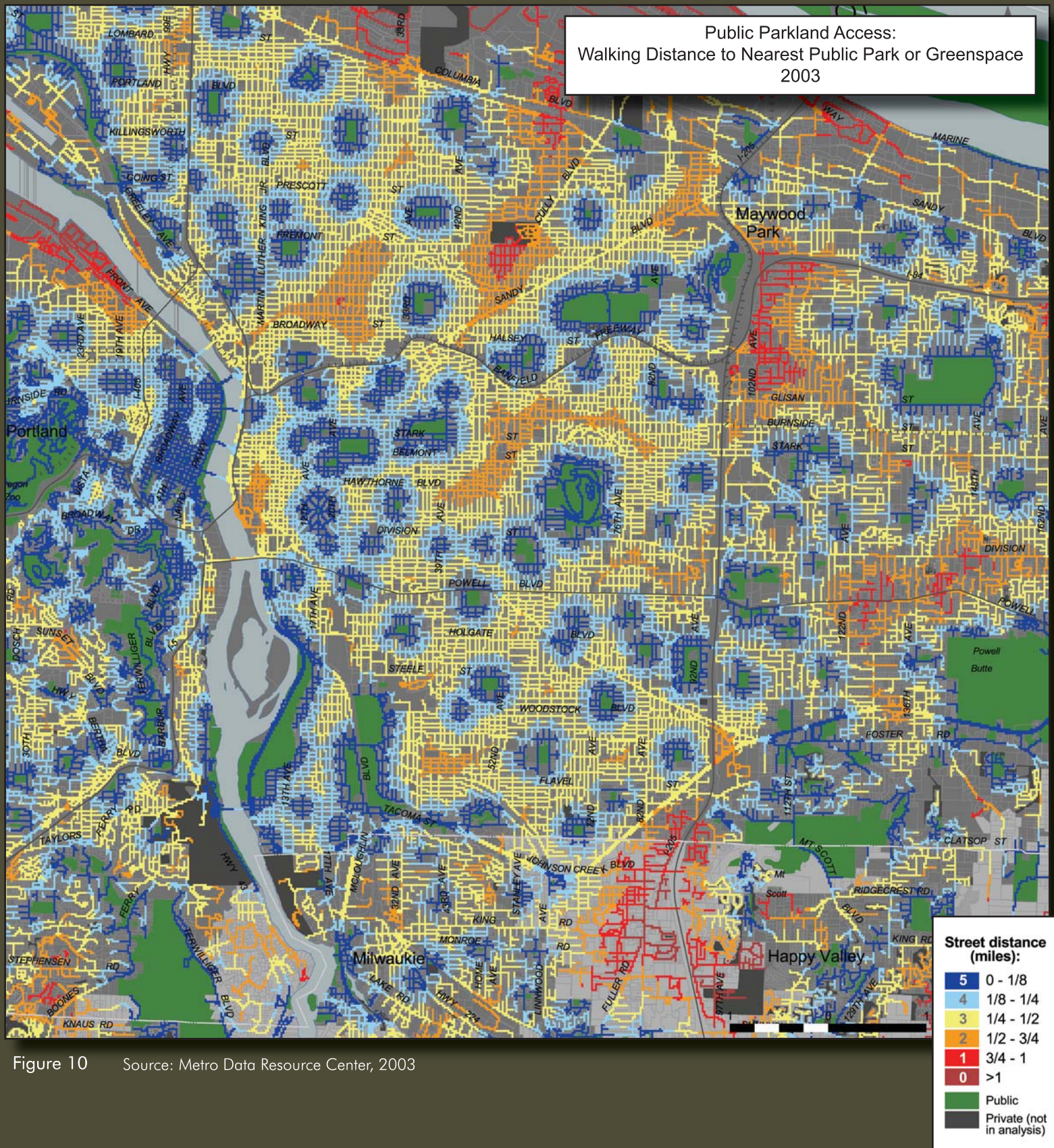


Figure 10 Source: Metro Data Resource Center, 2003

Access to Parks and Natural Habitat

As the metroscape continues to change in dynamic and unpredictable ways, the access to parks and green spaces may also change for many residents. Parks and green spaces in the metroscape provide numerous amenities and are part of a network of “green infrastructure.” This green infrastructure protects the water quality of our streams, rivers, and drinking water supplies; supports the region’s diverse plants and animals; protects air quality; and contributes to residents’ health and quality of life. Some studies even suggest that home values improve relative to proximity to urban parks and green spaces. As a result, residents’ access to green infrastructure is a critical issue in questions of equity and social justice.

Two maps illustrate green access. The walking distance to urban parks in Portland suggests that most neighborhoods are within ½ mile to a public park (figure 10). While this map doesn't indicate the recreational opportunities in these parks, it does illustrate an extensive network of urban parks. Several areas in Portland are also greater than one mile from parks, including areas west of Happy Valley and east of Milwaukie, 102nd Ave. near the I-84/I-205 interchange, and Front Avenue in the northwest Portland.

Access to habitat is distinctly different than access to urban parks. While urban parks may provide recreational opportunities for citizens, habitat is essential for maintaining healthy ur-

ban ecosystems, including flood control, native biodiversity, and cleaning air pollutants, in addition to providing recreational opportunities (such as hiking, bird watching, and environmental education). Figure 11 takes a broader perspective by looking at the percent of habitat and distances from different parts of the metroscape. The figure suggests that most of the habitat is located outside central Portland. While Forest Park is a beacon of habitat close to Portland's city center, large tracts of habitat can also be found near Cornelius, Damascus, King City, Lake Oswego, and in areas along the Columbia River.

The distribution of the green infrastructure in the metroscape raises questions about how changes in the region will impact the access to green spaces. Will increasing population reduce the amount of habitat? Will the loss of habitat mean an increase in parks and other recreational amenities? How much of the access to green infrastructure is determined by household income? Addressing these questions will require policymakers and planners to consider who is being affected and how we can improve the living conditions for the whole population.

The narrative for this edition of the Periodic Atlas was written by Meg Merrick, IMS, and Vivek Shandas, assistant professor at the Nobah A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning at PSU, in cooperation with the Coalition for a Livable Future.

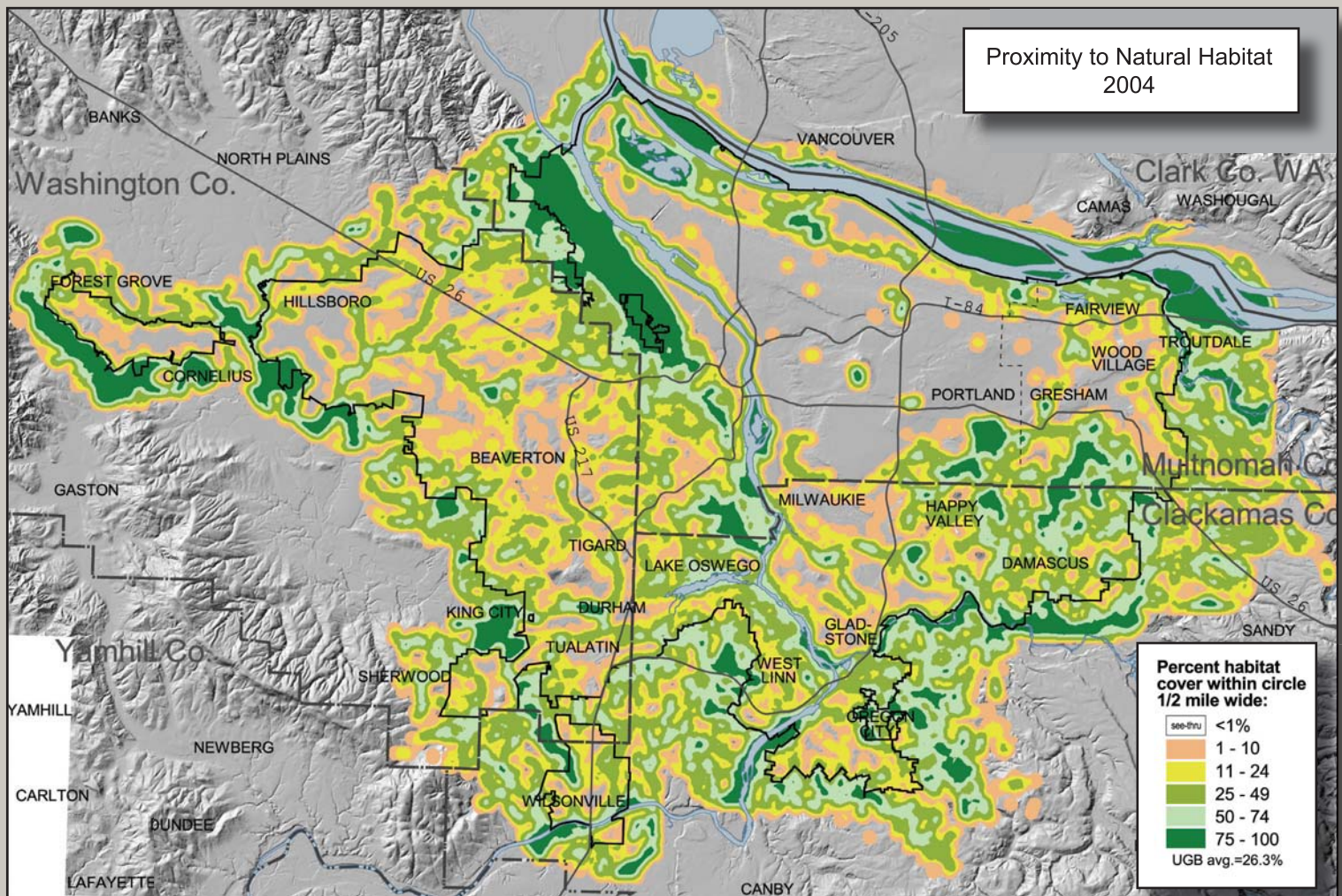


Figure 11 Source: Metro Data Service Center, 2004