

Agenda



Metro

600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232-2736

Meeting: Smith and Bybee Wetlands Advisory Committee
Date: Tuesday, November 19, 2024
Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Place: Zoom

- 5:30 p.m. Review and approve prior meeting minutes (All)
- 5:40 p.m. Budget Updates
- Smith and Bybee Fund Balance (Jonathan)
 - Project budgets (approximate) for remainder of FY25 and FY26 (Andrea)
- 6:00 p.m. Update and discussion on recruitment and SBWAC bylaws update (Jonathan, all)
- 6:30 p.m. Grants – how they work and current grants (Jonathan, all)
- 6:40 p.m. Open discussion
- TBD Presentation from Portland BES on work at nearby property.

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Meeting summary

Smith and Bybee Wetlands Advisory Committee

November 19, 2024

Committee members in attendance

Carrie Butler Port of Portland
Eric Stern Friends of Smith and Bybee Lakes
Jonathan Soll Metro
Pat Jewett 40-Mile Loop Trust
Eugenia Tam North Portland Neighbors

Committee members not in attendance

Troy Clark Oregon Bird Alliance
Daryl Houtman City of Portland, Bureau of Environmental Services
Ariana Scipioni Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Others in attendance

Andrea Berkley Metro
Sofia Bermudez-Eredia..... Metro

WELCOME

The September 2024 meeting minutes were approved.

BUDGET UPDATES

Andrea provided an update on the preliminary budget estimates for the remainder of fiscal year 2025 (FY25) and the upcoming fiscal year 2026 (FY26). She emphasized that the Metro budgeting process for FY26 is still in its early stages, so the figures presented are not yet finalized. To illustrate these estimates, Andrea shared an Excel spreadsheet that detailed budgets by funding sources, including the Smith and Bybee Fund, operating funds, and grants. The spreadsheet compared the current fiscal year's budget (left columns) with preliminary estimates for the next fiscal year (right columns).

The discussion centered on ongoing and new projects, particularly the St. John's Prairie restoration. For FY25, the three current phases of restoration are in their maintenance stages. Although funds have been allocated, they have not yet been spent due to site conditions observed this summer. Andrea explained that any unspent funds from the Smith and Bybee Fund would remain available for future use. She also noted that the FY26 budget for these phases is slightly reduced, reflecting expected cost savings from improved site conditions.

St. John's Prairie Phase 4, which covers the final 80 acres and is partially funded by an Oregon Watershed Enhancement grant, is focused on site preparation this year with minimal reliance on the Smith and Bybee Fund. The FY26 budget for this phase will increase to support ramped-up activities such as seed purchasing. Similar to earlier phases, costs are expected to decline as the site transitions from preparation to maintenance.

Jonathan reiterated that unspent funds from the Smith and Bybee Fund would carry over for future use, ensuring flexibility as weather conditions and site demands evolve. Andrea highlighted that the Smith and Bybee Fund continues to play a critical role in both ongoing and future projects, alongside Metro's broader budget.

For FY25, funding will continue to support ongoing initiatives, including St. John's Prairie Phases 1–3. While no funds have been spent yet due to favorable conditions, significant expenditures are anticipated in the spring. Looking ahead to FY26, expenditures will rise with the launch of St. John's Prairie Phase 4. This phase, primarily funded through grants and supplemented by the Smith and Bybee Fund, will emphasize seeding and site preparation. Long-term costs are expected to decrease as the project transitions into its maintenance phase.

Andrea concluded by stressing that FY26 budget figures are preliminary and will require approval from Jonathan and other Metro budget managers.

St. John's Prairie Updates

Phase 4 of St. John's Prairie was recently mowed, attracting foraging birds and marking a shift from its previously wild state. While this change offers ecological benefits, the unusual appearance of the newly mowed landscape sparked discussions among members, who reflected on its transformation over the years.

Invasive Species Control Project

Led by John Catena, the invasive species control initiative targets problematic plants such as aquatic weeds, ivy, and blackberries. Particularly significant is the control of **Ludwigia peploides** (invasive water primrose), alongside other species typical of the region. The FY25 budget of \$128,000 has been fully utilized, and costs for FY26 are expected to rise due to increasing project demands.

Forested Wetland Planting Maintenance

The maintenance of the forested wetland planting, now in Phase 3, operates with a modest budget. It is anticipated that not all FY25 funds will be used, with an estimated \$14,000 required for FY26. This conservative funding approach ensures budget flexibility for other priorities.

Sedge Meadow Maintenance

The committee reviewed two sedge meadows: one near the Interlake's Trail, which has struggled for years due to its dry, elevated location, and another near Ledbetter, which has shown promising growth. Given the ongoing poor results at the Interlake's meadow, the committee discussed potentially shifting focus to the Ledbetter meadow while considering the Interlake's area's value as a turtle nesting site.

FUNDING SOURCES

Eric raised questions about funding for Metro's site work. Andrea clarified that four primary sources fund Metro projects:

1. **Smith and Bybee Fund** – A key funding source for various projects.
2. **2019 Natural Areas Bond** – Restricted to capital projects only.
3. **Metro General Fund** – Funded by property taxes and tipping fees.
4. **Operating Levy** – Supports most parks and nature operations.

For Smith and Bybee projects, expenditures are roughly divided between Metro's operating funds (levy or grants) and the Smith and Bybee Fund. Grant funding, such as that for St. John's Prairie Phase 4, helps reduce reliance on internal funds.

CONSERVATION PROJECT UPDATES

Native Turtle Habitat

The first of two new projects in early planning focuses on improving turtle habitats by addressing critical challenges in nesting areas. These challenges include weed encroachment, where invasive plants such as cottonwood sprouts are overtaking nesting sites, and human activity, including unauthorized trails cutting through sensitive zones. Additionally, turtles lack sufficient basking structures in frequently used areas.

Proposed actions include clearing invasive vegetation, installing basking logs or platforms, and closing off unauthorized trails. A budget line item has been proposed for the next fiscal year to support these efforts, though implementation will depend on funding priorities. Further updates will be provided as the project scope is refined.

Water Management and Emerald Ash Borer

The second project examines the complex interplay between water management, aquatic weeds, and the emerald ash borer (EAB). Building on previous discussions, this initiative seeks to understand how water management at Smith, EAB impacts, vegetation dynamics, and aquatic weed control are interconnected. Potential steps include hiring a consultant to analyze these relationships, assessing how changes in water levels influence botulism risk and vegetation, and testing trial actions based on findings. Though still in the conceptual stage, this project aims to develop more effective long-term management strategies.

Nutria Management

Questions remain for some committee members regarding the goals and budget of the nutria management program. Specifically, the target nutria population levels, previously estimated at between 100 and 500, are still unclear. The \$20,000 annual budget is under review to determine whether it is sufficient to meet these goals. Feedback indicates that consistent management is essential, although annual spending may fluctuate based on progress. Andrea and Katy Weil have been tasked with reviewing next year's program to ensure alignment with resource needs and management objectives.

Project Budget and Funding

There was curiosity about the level of detail available in budget reports, such as breakdowns of specific costs (e.g., herbicide use or administrative expenses). While such granular data is not routinely reported, it can be generated upon request. The Smith and Bybee Fund budget does not include staff salaries, which are covered by other funding sources. Additionally, nearly all expenditures are subject to public records requests. The fund balance is projected to fall below \$1 million in FY25, with an ending balance expected to be just under \$800,000.

Grant Opportunities and Challenges

The committee discussed grant opportunities, emphasizing the importance of focusing on projects with regional and ecological significance. Recent successes include securing funds for Phase 4 of the Prairie Project by highlighting its value for both wildlife and broader habitat networks. However, challenges persist in obtaining grants for forested wetlands, which are often overlooked by funders due to urban biases.

Andrea shared her enthusiasm for grant writing and her strategy of aligning projects with funders' priorities, emphasizing both ecological and community benefits. The grants pursued are typically from governmental bodies, such as the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and federal

agencies like Bonneville Power. Private foundations and individual donors rarely contribute, as they often prefer to support nonprofit organizations rather than public agencies. The committee also discussed whether other organizations, such as the Friends of Smith and Bybee, could apply for grants to support conservation efforts. While Metro typically manages grant applications and funding, external collaborations could be explored if they align with project goals. The potential for donations from individuals or private foundations was raised as well. Although uncommon, there are no known restrictions on accepting such contributions. However, public agencies generally attract fewer private donations compared to nonprofits.

Collaboration is critical for securing grants. Successful projects often demonstrate partnerships, as collaborative efforts tend to yield stronger applications. Matching funds are a key requirement for many grants, and Metro typically leverages its available funds to provide a substantial match. In some cases, Metro partners with nonprofits to combine resources and strengthen applications. Andrea, who is actively involved in grant writing, ensures that the narratives reflect on-the-ground knowledge, making the applications more compelling. She offered to share examples, such as the Prairie grant, with anyone interested.

Efforts to secure grants for forested wetland projects have faced challenges, particularly with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. Initial attempts were hindered by biases against investing in urban areas and concerns related to the emerald ash borer (EAB). Through lobbying and tailoring proposals to align with regional priorities, Metro has since improved its success rate, focusing on projects like prairie restoration and those with direct salmon benefits. While the EAB continues to pose challenges, it could also provide new opportunities for future grant applications as Smith and Bybee adapt to its impacts.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The committee is at a pivotal moment, grappling with questions about its purpose, structure, and value. The current bylaws specify 14 members, but only about half actively participate. Members raised concerns about absenteeism, particularly from key stakeholders such as ODFW, the City of Portland Parks, and private landowners, while noting consistent engagement from core members like the Bird Alliance of Oregon and Friends of Smith and Bybee. Suggestions were made to reassess the bylaws to better reflect the committee's actual attendance and operations, potentially reducing the number of members required for a quorum.

Historically, the committee advised Metro on managing the \$4 million trust fund established for Smith and Bybee. However, with the fund nearly depleted, members are questioning the committee's continued relevance. Troy highlighted that several years ago, the advisory committee formally urged Metro, through a letter, to maintain \$1 million in the trust fund before the CNRP expired. He noted that Metro never responded to the letter and has yet to address the issue. In response, Jonathan committed to investigating this matter further. Metro Parks and nature formally responded on December 19th, 2024.

Several members acknowledged the committee's value in fostering communication between Metro, the Port, and the community. The Port representative emphasized the committee's origins and collaborative role but expressed openness to exploring alternative formats. Other members suggested reducing the frequency of meetings to allow for deeper discussions, broader participation, and on-site gatherings to strengthen engagement.

The group expressed a desire for Metro to clarify the committee's value in decision-making and its potential future role. Suggestions included increasing public outreach to attract more attendees, creating a more structured agenda, and exploring options for broader community involvement. Members recognized that redefining the committee's purpose would involve shifting from its historic advisory role focused on the trust fund to a broader engagement or informational platform.

The discussion remains open-ended, with members agreeing on the need for continued dialogue to determine the committee's future structure and mission. There is consensus that changes should reflect the evolving needs of Smith and Bybee while maintaining the committee's connection to the community and stakeholders.

GOALS FOR NEXT MEETING AND WRAP-UP

- Continue addressing procedural concerns regarding the Smith and Bybee Fund and exploring opportunities to strengthen funding through grants and partnerships. The discussion highlighted the importance of maintaining transparency and aligning projects with regional and ecological priorities.
- Deliberate the future direction and structure of the committee. Potential changes include reducing the frequency of meetings or holding in-person gatherings with broader community participation.
- Finalize member recommendations before the next meeting to ensure the committee remains relevant and effective.
- Consider whether reducing membership requirements or reimagining the committee's role aligns with evolving needs.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Next meeting: **January 28, 2025.**