

Forest Park Conservancy Strategic Direction 2020-2023



Forest Park Conservancy



A healthy forest is a magical place. We know that a healthy and diverse forest fosters a vibrant, more sustainable community. It gives sanctuary to native plants and wildlife, but also people from all walks of life. It instills peace, wonder and has championed a healthy Forest Park for all to enjoy. We will be steadfast in our mission to ensure Forest Park is restored, protected and resilient, as we face the most dramatic climate change impacts the world has ever seen.

As we move into this next decade, we know there will be expected and unanticipated challenges. We also know that the Forest Park community, together, will help us get through these challenges and realize our vision, of a “Forest Park for All”. Where over time we will become a reflection of the diverse communities we aim to serve, where barriers to accessing this magical place have been eliminated and Forest Park will be protected, restored and loved through the eyes of many cultures in so many unique ways.

THE FUTURE OF FOREST PARK: A FOREST FOR ALL

Forest Park provides a massive green backdrop which contributes to Portland's reputation for livability while ensuring access to recreation and the natural environment. More than 112 bird and 62 mammal species call Forest Park home!

Today, the future of Forest Park is in flux. Progressing climate change, trail degradation from increased use, pollution, and invasive plant species all threaten the long term health of Forest Park.

For 32 years, the Forest Park Conservancy has served as the leading nonprofit organization that works to protect Forest Park from these threats. As we celebrate the work of those who have come before us, we also need to look towards the future and plan for how to take on these increasingly difficult challenges. We are committed to ensuring that Forest Park continues to provide an essential connection to nature for families, a quiet respite to improve health and wellness, outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all backgrounds, and a habitat for native wildlife and plants.

We envision a future where all walks of life have access to the benefits that Forest Park provides and will care for and steward it for generations to come.

Currently, these amazing benefits are not accessible to everyone. Numerous barriers that limit access to Forest Park for communities of color, low income and historically marginalized communities pose a threat to the long term care and health of Forest Park and these communities, because we look towards the future and the changing demographics of our region, we want to ensure that both the users and stewards of Forest Park reflect these demographic changes and that all communities have access to the benefits that Forest Park provides. We are also committed as an organization, to actively working towards a staff, board and volunteer program that reflects these changing demographics.

The mission of the Forest Park Conservancy is to maintain trails, restore native habitat, and inspire community appreciation for our greatest regional treasure.



CORE VALUES

Inclusive: Forest Park Conservancy, as a steward of a public land will be more successful and Forest Park will be better protected if FPC's organizational culture including leadership, staff and volunteers come from "all walks of life". FPC has a responsibility to deepen its understanding of inclusiveness in all its forms. We recognize the impacts of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, culture, religion and ethnicity (this is not a complete list). Ultimately, we aim to create an organization where individuals can bring their whole selves to their interactions with FPC, whether in leadership, partnership, as a volunteer or donor, or as a park user. This emphasis on authentic relationships will build trust and increase the diversity of the community dedicated to ensuring a resilient Forest Park.

We believe wholeheartedly that this endeavor will benefit not only the resiliency of our organization but also the well-being of our community.

Community: FPC believes a robust, diverse and inclusive Stewardship Program encourages community engagement and a connection to nature. Community engagement, in its many forms, plays a critical role in ensuring the long-term care and health of Forest Park. We are committed to providing numerous diverse ways to engage with FPC, that are inclusive, culturally relevant and help build a connection and sense of place to Forest Park.

Resilience: We believe that resilient forests and ecosystems play a critical role in mitigating the impacts of climate change on our communities. Forest Park, due to its size and location provides numerous ecosystem services to local communities, including clean air and water and cooler summer temperatures. By protecting, restoring and creating a resilient Forest Park for generations to come, we are also helping to create communities that are more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

CONSERVATION GOALS

We believe that one organization cannot do it alone. It takes the passion and dedication of numerous organization and partners to have long term collective impact.

Our strategy, called the Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative (GFPCI), is based on environmental science studies that identify the biggest threats faced by Forest Park and its surrounding ecosystem, and outlines specific actions needed to bring Forest Park back to health and protect it for current and future generations.

At its core, the GFPCI is a 20-year collaborative strategy that prioritizes programs and projects that will have the greatest positive impact on improving the health of Forest Park. Public and private partners (known as the Forest Park Alliance) have committed to work together to achieve the goals of the program and address critical ecosystem threats facing Forest Park and the greater Forest Park ecosystem, including: infestation of invasive species and non-native plants (understory and canopy weeds); climate change (increased temperatures, wildfires, droughts, runoff conditions changes); and wildlife habitat fragmentation (effects on connectivity and species diversity). The initiative does much more than just guide the Conservancy's work in helping to restore and protect Forest Park. It is a visionary effort to look not just within but also beyond the boundaries of the park, to consider how Forest Park benefits from and contributes to the ecological health of our region, and to marshal the forces necessary to work at that scale. The collaborative work accomplished in the Greater Forest Park region is now considered a model for how to find balance between a rapid urban development and protecting a fragile natural environment through collaborative conservation.

Goal 1: Ecosystem Health and Resiliency

A healthy and resilient Forest Park ecosystem helps to protect both wildlife and human communities from the impacts of climate change. Continuing to work towards improving the overall health of Forest Park through various conservation efforts will be a perpetual priority for FPC.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Build capacity and engagement in the Forest Park Alliance to successfully implement the GFPCI Five Year Strategic Action Plan.
2. A renewed sense of ownership will be established amongst partners that promotes increased communication, coordination and engagement over the long-term.
3. Collaborate with Portland Parks and Recreation and successfully fund and implement Restore Forest Park (a long-term plan to transform the park's ecological health by removing invasive species and replanting native plants).
4. Foster partnerships with BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) organizations to support FPC's conservation work and provide economic, social and ecological benefits to those communities.
5. Launch and secure funding for our Land Trust Program to secure long-term protection of critical wildlife habitat between Forest Park and the Oregon Coast Range.

Goal 2: A robust and successful Green Jobs Internship Program

In 2018 FPC decided to bring an overarching equity lens to the GFPCI. Traditionally, there have been barriers for BIPOC seeking a career in natural resources. Although local programs exist that seek to introduce people from all backgrounds to the industry, many do not currently provide enough experience to improve the chances of employment for their participants.

The greater Forest Park ecosystem is the perfect place to match these needs by engaging diverse partners, increasing conservation efforts that enhance landscape resiliency and provide social and economic benefits to these communities. Participants in this program earn a living wage, gain on-the-job training, build leadership skills and serve as interns with GFPCI partners to explore natural resource careers and develop their skills, with the goal of creating a pathway for young adults coming out of this program to gain full-time employment in natural resources careers.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Building capacity in the Green Jobs Internship Program that results in increased partner participation, a long-term, reliable revenue stream and engagement from a larger number of potential destination employers.
2. Generate expanded funding opportunities through a business sponsorship framework to specific to the Green Jobs Internship Program.
3. Successfully help participants find pathways into the conservation and environmental job sector by contributing to the on-going break down of barriers keeping BIPOC from finding careers in the natural resource field.
4. Increase participant access to professional and technical training and certifications.





STEWARDSHIP

The work we do to protect and restore Forest Park, including our work to help maintain its extensive trail network, educational hikes on the wonders of its natural and cultural history and building awareness through our Volunteer Ambassador Program, happens year round, rain or shine.

Forest Park Conservancy works closely with Portland Parks & Recreation to maintain and improve 47 miles of soft surface trails in Forest Park. Trail maintenance and improvement projects require a significant amount of time from volunteers, volunteer crew leaders, our Green Jobs Team and full-time staff. This investment in the stewardship of our trails, ensures Forest Park's trails are safe and accessible and providing the critical, mental and physical health benefits to our community.

Our vision, is a diverse community of stewards that will help us accomplish this work for generations to come. To achieve this vision, we will be intentional and fearless in working towards both internal and external cultural changes to ensure all our programs are inclusive, diverse and accessible to all.

Goal 1: A diverse, inclusive and well trained volunteer base that increases our capacity to adequately maintain and improve Forest Park's extensive trail system.

FPC coordinates a robust Stewardship Program that encourages diverse and inclusive opportunities for community engagement and a connection to nature.

An essential and fundamental part of our stewardship work is our trails program. Continuing to build and grow a strong trails program will allow us to enhance the mental and physical benefits our trails provide by ensuring safe and accessible recreation for all to enjoy.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Enhancing internal processes for collecting and tracking data to better understand progress and accurately plan and fund future projects.
2. Strengthening relationships with existing and new culturally diverse organizations to host and co-host volunteer opportunities that are culturally relevant.
3. Increase public awareness and support for FPC's work and mission by increasing the number of new and diverse volunteers and volunteer crew leaders.
4. Invest in professionalizing our volunteer program and provide opportunities for volunteers to build their technical skills and experience personal and professional growth.
5. Increase financial capacity of the trails programs.

Goal 2: Build awareness around responsible recreation and the important connection between people and nature.

FPC engages and inspires people by involving the community to have a broader impact. With such a populated urban center, we believe we can leverage Forest Park to help the community better understand responsible recreation and conservation, and increase the level of community stewardship and proper use of public land. It is increasingly important to protect public lands and understand how to create a healthier environment and make all people feel welcome and safe.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Increasing capacity in our Volunteer Ambassador Program to provide the critically needed education by providing knowledge about the cultural and natural history, creating a safe and welcoming environment at trailheads and by teaching Leave No Trace principles to help promote responsible recreation.
2. Collaborate with partner organizations led by BIPOC to recruit volunteers that can bridge the gap and help eliminate barriers between these communities and Forest Park by providing a culturally relevant, safe, experience in Forest Park with Ambassadors from their own community.
3. Increase capacity in our Discovery Hikes Program to reach and educate more people about the cultural and natural history of Forest Park, thus fostering a deeper connection between participants and Forest Park.

Goal 3: Equitable Access

At 5,200 acres, Forest Park accounts for more than half of the total number of natural area acres in Portland. But even at this size, it is still inaccessible for many people. As an organization, we will hold ourselves accountable and work towards breaking down barriers to access to achieve our vision of a "Forest Park for All"

We are committed to working towards:

1. Trailhead improvements and signage that welcome diverse community groups and can be universal understood.
2. Identify alternative transportation options, including increased public transportation to trailheads and/or shuttle service.
3. Provide opportunities and events for BIPOC to recreate and volunteer in a safe culturally relevant manner.

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Healthy, sustainable growth requires adequate financial resources to effectively and efficiently implement programs and realize our long-term vision. It also necessitates a culture that promotes individual and organization growth where staff are valued and provided the adequate tools and resources to fulfill their roles and meet their responsibilities. The long term health, sustainability and growth of our organization and level of impact we have on Forest Park depends on ensuring all these key elements of organization growth are met.

Goal 1: Build capacity through increased philanthropic giving to meet the growing needs of Forest Park.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Building our donor base and increasing retention of existing donors.
2. Work towards securing a long-term revenue stream through an endowment and/or capital campaign.
3. Nurture a high-performing organizational culture that prioritizes fundraising by all staff and cultivates individual staff commitment to the greater good of the organization.
4. Increase performance of our development program by providing staff the appropriate technology, strategies and support to fully implement the organization's existing fundraising plan.
5. Develop a membership framework that is valued by both individual and business sponsors.
6. Secure the financial resources to adequately staff programs and create a culture of individual and organization growth without consistently compromising capacity.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

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Goal 1: Continue to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion as an overarching lens through which we plan, develop and implement all FPC programs.

We are committed to working towards:

1. Increase the opportunities for BIPOC to participate in leadership positions at all levels of FPC.
2. Better understanding of our role as land stewards in recognizing our place in co-creating a more just and equitable world.
3. Empowering more young diverse leaders through our Discovery Hikes, Volunteer Ambassador and Volunteer Crew Leader Programs.
4. Increase the level of culturally specific programming in the park.
5. Increase collaboration with BIPOC organizations to build, expand and/or change existing programs in a way that is culturally relevant and serves a broader community.

Goal 2: Promote a sense of responsibility to deepen our understanding of systems of oppression in order to work against them at every level of the organization.

1. Providing additional DEI training on a yearly basis for all staff and board.
2. Create a more inclusive stewardship culture by creating multiple levels of DEI workshops available to volunteer crew leaders, ambassadors and hike leaders.
3. Requiring volunteer crew leaders to attend training in DEI in order to maintain good standing.





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