Councilors:

As you begin planning and implementation of the 2019 Metro Parks & Nature bond measure, we are writing to encourage you to consider the Beggars-Tick Wildlife Refuge as an opportunity for investment in our regional greenspace network.

Since 1994, Metro has owned the BTWR, which was constructed in 1992 by Multnomah County. Metro has left Portland Parks & Recreation to manage the site for decades; however, PP&R lacks the resources to properly manage the site.

The current state of the BTWR is neither conducive to the community nor the environment. Areas of the refuge are filled with illegal dumps and debris. Entire vehicles have been found in the refuge. Parts of the refuge have been trampled by off-trail visitors. The site contains no information on the current environmental context, nor the historic human context of the Johnson Creek area.

Furthermore, the one authorized access to the site is impractical for area residents. While the refuge itself abuts several residential properties, formal access to the site is 1,600 sidewalk-free feet from the nearest home. Some residents whose homes abut the refuge have more than a mile to walk to get to the entrance.

The area surrounding the BTWR has a significant BIPOC population for the Portland area; nearly 8% of the residents of the BTWR census tracts are reported to be Black; 16% are Asian, and another 16% are Latinx; hundreds of area residents report themselves as Indigenous. One-quarter of the 9,500 residents of those tracts were born in another country. One-fifth of the area’s residents had income below the poverty line in 2018. (Source: 2018 5-year ACS)

The area was identified in the Lents Stabilization and Job Creation Collaborative as a project of statewide importance for a variety of reasons, including job creation, housing stabilization and access to nature.

We believe that the BTWR provides a unique opportunity for Metro to increase access to nature in an already-urbanized area. Therefore, we call on Metro to use its 2019 bond measure for the following:

* Assume management of the BTWR from Portland Parks & Recreation
* Regularly manage and maintain the site to improve its current state
* Begin a master planning process to improve community access to the site with a particular focus on BIPOC communities, integrate with adjacent open space properties, coordinate with other publicly owned properties in the area, and consider significant open space improvements that would increase compatible uses while decreasing nuisance use.
* Set a goal of opening an improved BTWR by 2025.