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Forest Park: Our much-loved but at-risk treasure

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**Guest Columnist**

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We share a commitment to protecting our region's natural areas for future generations. None is more important than Forest Park, with more than 5,100 acres of trees, trails and wildlife that contribute to our clean air, clean water and quality of life.

The City Club of Portland, which helped create the park 60 years ago, just released a report on the current state of Forest Park. The report concludes that the park is at risk and calls for a renewed commitment -- from the city of Portland and its regional partners. We agree.

Forest Park is much loved, but its popularity comes with a price. As the region's population has grown, so too have the impacts and recreational demands on the park. It is threatened by invasive species, which strangle native plants and increase the potential of wildfires.

Forest Park is part of Portland's larger parks and recreation system, which has suffered budget cuts five of the last seven years. During these tough times, the city relies more than ever on public-private partnerships. These include corporate partners such as The Standard and nonprofit partners like the Forest Park Conservancy. Collectively we invested almost \$1 million last year in the park.

Forest Park is not the only natural area at risk. There are more than 30,000 acres of natural areas in the Portland metropolitan region, and each of them faces similar ecological threats.

We support the City Club's call for a dedicated source of funding, regional in scope, to protect and care for Forest Park. Regardless of the level of funding, no one agency or organization can provide all of the resources, staff and expertise that the park requires.

That's why the city of Portland, Metro and the Forest Park Conservancy have joined with a broad coalition of public and private partners to create the Intertwine Alliance, a regional organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of natural spaces like Forest Park. The Intertwine Alliance is an essential first step on the path to the regional funding of natural spaces recommended by the City Club.

Oregon is a special place where individuals can still make a difference. Whether you volunteer time or contribute financial support, or simply take some time to enjoy the park, we need everyone in our region to become a

champion for Forest Park. Previous generations of Portlanders had the foresight to create the park. Working together, it is now our responsibility to protect this legacy for our children and grandchildren.

Nick Fish is a Portland city commissioner who oversees city parks. David Bragdon is president of the Metro Council. Michelle Bussard is executive director of the Forest Park Conservancy.

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