



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION

Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

Pesticide Free Parks Trial Program

To become a volunteer or for more information about this program, call 503-823-1636.

Overview

In the fall of 2004, Portland Parks & Recreation and the Pesticide Free Parks partners began a three-year trial of pesticide-free park management at three sites – Lair Hill Park in southwest Portland, Sewallcrest Park in southeast, and Arbor Lodge Park in north. During the trial process, no pesticides of any kind will be used in these parks. Instead, volunteer work parties will hand weed, mulch, and control weeds in other ways. Although PP&R's current integrated pest management program already uses many non-pesticidal methods to control pests in parks, in these designated "Pesticide Free" sites pests are to be controlled only by these practices. PP&R will also continue to use various kinds of integrated pest management methods in these parks, such as mulching of shrub beds and aeration and overseeding of the park turf. In addition, various outreach events will take place, and examples of non-pesticidal weed suppression practices will be demonstrated as part of this program.

The purpose of the trial is to determine if volunteer-driven pesticide free parks are viable and sustainable options for maintaining Portland's parks. Public participation, outcomes, and impacts of the PFP program are being carefully documented and will be evaluated at the end of the trial period to assess how successful the program is in meeting PP&R goals and responsibilities. Important criteria for success include support of general and recreational park uses and bureau priorities, sustained volunteer involvement, fulfillment of user group needs, and fiscal feasibility.

Portland Parks & Recreation worked with partners to document and communicate acceptable park maintenance standards to assure these sites fulfill all park needs. The partners have coordinated the large volunteer labor effort necessary to control weeds in the parks, and PP&R staff members continue to work with these volunteers as part of the PFP administration. A Memorandum of Understanding has been completed and signed by PP&R and the partners outlining program goals, partner responsibilities, evaluation criteria, maintenance standards and practices, and volunteer coordination.

Pesticide Free Parks Partners

Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides
Oregon Sierra Club
Portland Audubon Society
Willamette RiverKeepers
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Oregon Chapter
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Association of Environmental Health Academic Programs
Oregon Center for Environmental Health
Oregon Wildlife Federation

Trial park selection criteria

PP&R and the partners worked to select the three trial park sites, using the following criteria:

Park size – Not overly large and burdensome for the trial program
Location – Well distributed geographically
Access – Reasonable public access to the site
Support – Surrounding population adequate in size and interest
Amenities – Typical array of neighborhood park amenities
Pest pressure – Average to low pest pressure
Noxious weed removal projects – No anticipated projects
Safety issues – No special pest related safety issues
Undeveloped parks – No undeveloped parks or sites under construction

Pesticide Free Trial Park Amenities

	Acreage	# Tree Rings	Shrub Beds	Basketball Courts	Play areas	Handball Court	Tennis Courts	Ball Fields	Soccer fields	Horseshoe pits	Gravel parking	Paved Paths	Dog Off Leash Area
Sewallcrest	5.09	51		1	1			1	1			✓	✓
Lair Hill	3.24	62	✓		1	1	1					✓	
Arbor Lodge	8.40	105	✓		1		2	2		2	✓	✓	✓

Ongoing trial process

Three key positions in the program are:

- Volunteer Coordinator – recruits, trains, and supervises key volunteers, participates in monthly work parties, does community outreach, publicizes the program, and attends a quarterly park walk-through.
- Key Volunteer at each of the three parks – who is responsible for identifying needed park work, notifying and supervising neighborhood volunteers, arranging for any needed tools and supplies, completing volunteer forms, and attending quarterly park walk-through.
- Program Coordinator – PP&R horticulturist who coordinates the program for Portland Parks & Recreation, facilitates supply of materials, and acts as PP&R liaison.

Maintenance at each park is jointly evaluated, using a Check List for Park Maintenance, by zone and program staff, the volunteer coordinator, and the key volunteer on a quarterly basis. For the past two years, volunteer work parties have taken place the first weekend of most months of the year.

Information and data collection for evaluation

A variety of inputs are being tracked for final program evaluation by PP&R, including volunteer and staff hours, equipment and supply costs, PP&R staff time, propane use for flame weeding, and adherence to park maintenance standards.

Examples of ongoing issues

The amount of volunteer work party-based hand, tool, and flame weeder labor in the trial parks is considerable, with 635 hours per year being a preliminary total. Volunteer recruitment is essential to program success, and neighborhood support is a vital component in providing adequate long-term labor required to maintain weed removal efforts.

Baseball field maintenance is a time consuming part of the program. Hand weeding and flaming of skinned field areas has required augmentation by an increased level of PP&R staff time to drag and groom them to a usable condition.

A propane flame weeding tool has been used for weed control at all three locations, although suitable target sites are limited to bare soil areas and some hard surfaces. While flaming temporarily reduces weed growth, the plants typically grow back from protected growing points, requiring repeated treatment. Due to the safety issues involved in use of flame weeders, a limited number of volunteers are certified to use this method. Flame weeding is discontinued after July due to the danger of igniting dry grasses.