



## **M E M O R A N D U M**

**Date:** January 23, 2025

**To:** Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners

**From:** AP Diaz, Superintendent

**Subject:** Native Plant Policy Briefing & Public Meeting

### **Requested Board Action**

This briefing will provide background and an opportunity for questions. SPR seeks input to finalize the policy and present it for a vote at the next Board meeting.

### **Project or Policy Description and Background**

Starting a few years ago, staff from SPR's Natural Resources Unit requested a review and updating of the Native Plant Policy, which is now 15 years old. An internal team of subject matter experts (ecologists, arborists, gardeners, landscape architects, etc.) identified the need to update many elements of the policy and incorporate equity and climate change considerations, in particular. The current draft is the result of this collaborative work.

Native plants are a key part to the health of our local ecosystem and provide a sense of place for our residents. For 15 years SPR's policy has been to achieve 80% native plants in our parks, and 100% in our natural areas, yet this policy has been intermittently followed due to practical limitations and inconsistent staff awareness and accountability. A renewed policy allows for a reinvigoration of our prioritization of native plants in both policy and practice and aligns with current local, regional, national and international commitments on ecosystem restoration, biodiversity support, and climate resiliency.

In addition to updating references, definitions, exemptions, and staff responsibilities, the renewed policy shifts from a percentage goal to a focus on prioritization of native plants where possible. In addition, it aligns with best science on plant selection in response to climate change. Due to the multi-year process and significant changes in wording, a red-lined version of changes to the policy is not available, yet changes will be described in the presentation.

### **Public Involvement Process**

SPR engaged with board members from the Washington Native Plant Society (Aug 2023) and presented to the Indigenous Advisory Board (July 2023) to discuss the Native Plant Policy. Internally, the policy was presented to ProView (Nov 2022), the Central Policy Advisory Team (April 2024), and the Leadership Team (Jan 2025).

### **Parks Board Action**

Presentation and Public Hearing (1/23) and possible vote (2/13).

### **Additional Information**

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**Attachments**

- Current Native Plant Policy
- Updated Native Plant Policy



Your City, Seattle

## Department Policy & Procedure

Subject: Native Plant Policy		Number 060-P 5.9.1
		Effective June 1, 2009
		Supersedes N/A
Approved: 	Department: Parks & Recreation	Page 1 of 4

### 1.0 PURPOSE

As a steward of Seattle's park land and an environmental role model to Seattle's community, Seattle Parks and Recreation aims to provide landscapes for park patrons to enjoy that are sustainable in their design, construction, and maintenance practices. Sustainable landscapes using native plants conserve plants and trees that are native to the Cascadia region; protect and provide wildlife habitat and a healthy ecosystem; achieve utility conservation; and demonstrate sustainable landscape management practices to the greater community.

### 2.0 ORGANIZATIONS/INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED

- 2.1 Staff who design, construct, and maintain Seattle Parks and Recreation landscapes.
- 2.2 Consultants, landscape architects, and park designers hired by the Department to design park landscapes.
- 2.3 Citizens, horticultural, botanical and park advocate organizations.

### 3.0 POLICY

- 3.1 Seattle Parks and Recreation will strive to achieve sustainability in all landscape design, construction, and maintenance in order to:
  - i. Help balance human and ecological interests;
  - ii. Fully use a diversity of native plant species that are naturally adapted to local climate and soils, and that provide beauty and year-round interest;
  - iii. Mitigate the loss of ecosystem services such as stormwater filtration, flood control, and carbon sequestration caused by urbanization;
  - iv. Improve and enhance habitat for and conservation of indigenous plant and animal communities;
  - v. Contribute to the Northwest's natural beauty and sense of place;

- vi. Promote integrated pest management and reduce the use of pesticides in public landscapes;
- vii. Provide an educational forum for understanding ecological value in natural and developed landscapes

#### 4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 Native plants are defined as those existing in landscapes prior to European settlement and those plants originating in the Cascadia Bioregion (see map and description, Attachment 1). The Cascadia Bioregion (also referred to as the Pacific Northwest Bioregion) encompasses all or portions of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta. The Cascadia Bioregion claims the entire watershed of the Columbia River (as far as the Continental Divide), and the Cascade Range from Northern California into Canada and Alaska.

#### 5.0 RESPONSIBILITY

- 5.1 Each Parks division that designs, constructs, or maintains landscapes shall provide targets and objectives annually to the Superintendent that demonstrate the division's commitment to increasing the use of native plants in developed parks and natural areas, and the benefits of using native plants.

#### 6.0 PROCEDURE

- 6.1 Seattle Parks and Recreation aims to achieve landscapes with 80% native plantings in developed parks and/or landscape areas through all design, construction, and maintenance. with the following exceptions:
  - 6.1.1 athletic fields and developed turf areas,
  - 6.1.2 designated community and horticultural gardens (e.g., P-Patches and Japanese Garden),
  - 6.1.3 parks and arboreta with horticultural plant collections and interpretive displays,
  - 6.1.4 significant floral displays (e.g. "showcase" floral beds or borders), and historic and cultural landscapes such as Olmsted parks,
  - 6.1.5 parks with vegetation management plans not conducive to a native vegetated landscape, or
  - 6.1.6 other parks as approved by the Superintendent.
- 6.2 Parks shall continue to use and maintain 100% native species for plantings in natural area design, construction, restoration, and rehabilitation, and will use and acquire only species native to Puget Sound lowlands, wetlands, forests, and grasslands, as appropriate to the site conditions.



- 6.3 Native plantings will consist of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, bulbs, and ferns in any combination. The 80% percent target will be determined, on a site by site basis, through analysis of the available planting areas excluding designed hardscapes and turf areas, and shall typically be expressed as a percentage of the total plants in a park or site renovation area. Species composition will be temporally dependent as landscapes change over time, requiring adaptive management for aspects of the site including sun, shade, slope, canopy coverage, and other factors.
- 6.4 Native plant selection will be appropriate for site conditions, including but not limited to aspects of the site including sun, shade, slope, soil structure, and available moisture from rainfall or irrigation.
- 6.5 Native plants used in landscapes will be obtained from local propagators and nurseries, if feasible.
- 6.6 For horticultural projects designed and/or constructed, the applicability of Parks Design Standard 02950-01 "The Design of Sustainable Plantings within Functional Landscapes" will be reviewed.

## 7.0 APPENDICES

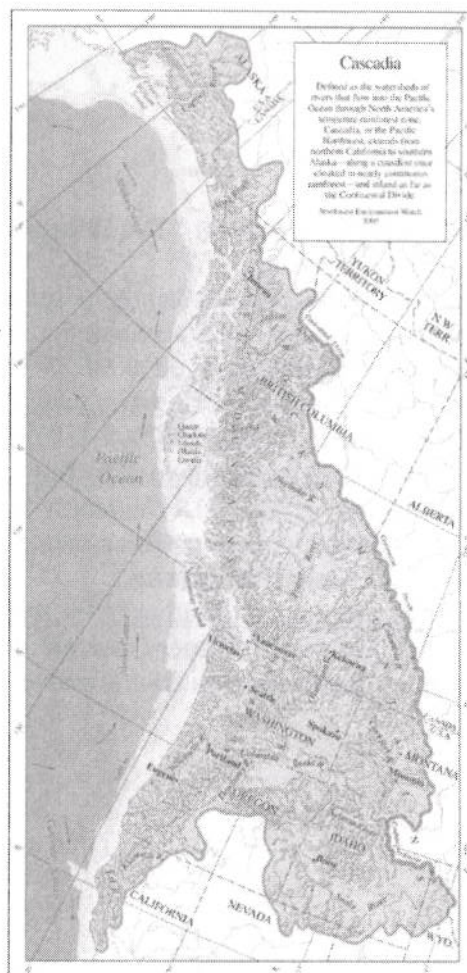
- 7.1 Reference: Parks Design Standard 02950-01 "The Design of Sustainable Plantings within Functional Landscapes"  
(<http://www.cityofseattle.net/parks/projects/standards/specs.asp>)
- 7.2 Native Plant Information, References and Stakeholders
  - 7.2.1 Washington Native Plant Society, 6310 NE 74<sup>th</sup> St., #215E, Seattle, WA. 98115, 206-527-3210, [www.wnps.org](http://www.wnps.org)
  - 7.2.2 Northwest Horticultural Society, PO Box 4597, Rolling Bay, WA. 98061, 206-780-8172, [www.northwesthort.org](http://www.northwesthort.org)
  - 7.2.3 Seattle Urban Nature Project, 5218 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105, 206-522-0334, [www.seattleurbannature.org](http://www.seattleurbannature.org)
  - 7.2.4 King County, WA: Native Plant Guide, <http://green.kingcounty.gov/GoNative/Index.aspx>
  - 7.2.5 Washington State University Master Gardener: Northwest Native Plant Guide, <http://gardening.wsu.edu/nwnative/>

## Attachment 1

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cascadia>

### **"As an ecological bioregion**

The concept of Cascadia is closely identified with the environmental movement. To counter what some environmental movements see as improper stewardship of the land, they have defined what is called the Cascadia Bioregion (also referred to as the Pacific Northwest Bioregion). This area would encompass all or portions of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta. Bioregions are geographically based areas defined by land or soil composition, watershed, climate, flora, and fauna. The Cascadia Bioregion claims the entire watershed of the Columbia River (as far as the Continental Divide), as well as the Cascade Range from Northern California well into Canada. The delineation of a bioregion has environmental stewardship as its primary goal, with the belief that political boundaries should match ecological boundaries. Environmental sustainability appears to be a central tenet. "





Subject: <b>Native Plant Policy</b>	Number: 060-P 5.9.1.2
	Effective: [insert date]
	Supersedes: 5.9.1
Superintendent Approval: [signature]	Page 1 of 3

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

- 1.1** Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) seeks to provide a robust urban ecosystem that supports healthy people, a thriving environment, and vibrant communities for current and future generations. SPR manages nearly 12% of Seattle's property. This positions SPR to make a significant contribution to the establishment and maintenance of resilient ecosystems that ensure native species can thrive in an urban environment. To address decades of habitat loss and degradation in Seattle, SPR will prioritize the use of native plants as one method to improve the structure and ecological function parks and green spaces.
- 1.2** As a steward of Seattle's parkland and an environmental role model to Seattle's community, SPR aims to provide landscapes for park visitors to enjoy that support local ecosystems through the responsible and sustainable use of native plants. For millennia, native plants have evolved in this region and have been cared for by Tribal communities. In recognition of local indigenous stewardship, SPR seeks to restore the prevalence of native plants throughout all Seattle's parks. In addition, native plants provide for the needs of local and visiting wildlife. It is the purpose of this policy to ensure native plants are prioritized in the design, construction, and maintenance of Seattle's parklands.

## **2. ORGANIZATIONS OR INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED**

- 2.1 Seattle Parks and Recreation:** Staff who plan, design, review, grow, construct, and maintain SPR landscapes.
- 2.2 Consultants and Contractors:** Consultants, landscape architects, and park designers hired by SPR to plan and design park landscapes.
- 2.3 Suppliers:** Nurseries and other vendors that provide seed stock, seedlings, and other plant material.
- 2.4 Community Organizations:** Organizations or individuals who support maintenance or development of landscapes in Seattle's parks.
- 2.5 Local Tribes:** Native American sovereign Tribes that have a unique and vested interest in the health of local ecosystems.

## **3. REFERENCES / SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

- 3.1** SPR Design Standard 32 93 00: Landscape Planting Design
- 3.2** Green Seattle Partnership Strategic Plan
- 3.3** Seattle Climate Action Plan
- 3.4** SPR Climate Resiliency Strategy
- 3.5** SDCI Green Factor (DR 11-2020)
- 3.6** LEED v5

### 3.7 King County Native Plant Guide

### 3.8 SITES v2

### 3.9 North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA)

## 4. POLICY

- 4.1** SPR will prioritize the use of native plants in all landscape design, construction, and maintenance in order to:
- 4.1.1** support the ecological health of SPR parklands, including mitigating the prevalence of non-native weed species; and
  - 4.1.2** use plant species that provide beauty, year-round and seasonal interest, and contribute to the Northwest's sense of place; and
  - 4.1.3** contribute to stormwater filtration, water quality, air quality, flood control, and carbon sequestration; and
  - 4.1.4** improve and enhance habitat for native plant, fungus, insect, and animal communities, including providing conservation pathways as part of climate adaptation and mitigation efforts; and
  - 4.1.5** prioritize ethnobotanical and cultural values of native plants in park landscapes.
- 4.2** Seattle Parks and Recreation will prioritize native plants in developed parks and/or landscape areas through all design, construction, and maintenance, with the following exceptions:
- 4.2.1** athletic fields, golf course fairways, trees and greens, and developed turf areas; and
  - 4.2.2** specialty gardens and other parks with horticultural plant collections and interpretive displays; and
  - 4.2.3** food production gardens (e.g., orchards, p-patches, and food forests); and
  - 4.2.4** constrained urban environments determined unsuitable for native plants by SPR staff, such as small planting beds in between roads and buildings or plazas;
  - 4.2.5** significant floral displays such as showcase floral beds or borders; and
  - 4.2.6** sites with current Vegetation Management Plans and/or Landmark status that dictate a non-native plant palette; and
  - 4.2.7** other parks or sites as approved by the Superintendent; and
  - 4.2.8** trees in Developed parks and Parks-managed rights-of-ways where a wider species diversity is required- to address canopy diversity and allow for climate resiliency in alignment with the Urban Forest Management Plan.
  - 4.2.9** where geographic overlap exists between exempt landscape areas and environmentally critical areas, including creek drainage basins, governed by local, state and/or federal regulations or Tribal Treatys, environmental regulations shall prevail.
- 4.3** SPR shall continue to use and maintain 100% native species for plantings in natural area design, construction, restoration, and rehabilitation, and will use and acquire only native species, as appropriate to the site conditions.
- 4.4** Native plants include trees, shrubs, forbs, graminoids and ferns and can come in several forms including seeds, container material, bulbs, bareroot, cuttings, etc.
- 4.5** Native plant species selection will be appropriate for site conditions, including sun exposure, slope, soil conditions, soil moisture, utility and safety considerations.
- 4.6** Native plant species composition will be temporally dependent as landscapes change over time, requiring adaptive management for aspects of the site including sun, shade, slope, canopy coverage, and other factors.
- 4.7** Native plant materials will be obtained from local propagators and nurseries, if feasible, to support local businesses (particularly Tribal enterprises and women and minority-owned businesses).
- 4.8** Plant material shall be procured following North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA) Certified Weed Free Products Program, or similar.
- 4.9** For horticultural projects designed and/or constructed, the designer and consultants will reference and follow SPR Design Standard 32 93 00: Landscape Planting Design.
- 4.10** Sourcing native plant material should consider information on geographic origin. Assisted population migration, (the transfer of native plants within the wider species range) may support



genetic diversity and adaptation for future climate conditions. This may include planting material from other climatic zones that are expected to be well adapted to current and future climate in Seattle. Planting projects will use available tools to determine plant source options (e.g., use of the Seed Lot Selection Tool or Climate Smart Restoration Tool).

- 4.11** When native plants are deemed inappropriate (per Section 4.2), species from the Pacific coastal forest zone of the Western Temperate Forest Region should be considered as a next priority for selection.

## **5. DEFINITIONS**

- 5.1 Native Plants:** vegetation, including trees, comprised of plant species that are indigenous and noninvasive, naturalized to the Puget Sound region and that reasonably can be expected to naturally occur on a site. Native vegetation does not include noxious weeds. [per SMC 25.09.520]
- 5.2 Western Temperate Forest Region:** This geologically- and ecologically-defined forest region includes a large diversity of vegetation conditions which include numerous forest types, including portions of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta.
- 5.3 Natural Area:** A park or portion of a park where the assemblage of species and ecological functions are comparable to other undeveloped habitats. Natural areas in the Seattle Parks and Recreation system still include developed features, like trail systems and other infrastructure, and see regular maintenance actions.
- 5.4 Developed Park Area:** Developed Park Areas are city-owned parks that contain passive and/or active improvements such as turf, picnic areas, landscaping, multi-purpose fields, play structures, or buildings.

## **6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 6.1** It is the responsibility of SPR's Crew Chiefs, Senior Gardeners and Gardeners to ensure that all vegetated landscapes are maintained following SPR best management practices and to train all SPR Grounds Maintenance staff in best management practices.
- 6.2** It is the responsibility of SPR's Crew Chiefs, Gardeners, Lead Grounds Maintenance workers, and Grounds Maintenance staff to maintain vegetated landscapes for the benefit of people and the local ecosystem according to this policy and to assess landscapes for adherence to this policy prior to any additions or removal of plants.
- 6.3** It is the responsibility of SPR's Green Seattle Partnership Team, Natural Area Crew, and Trails Program to identify, select, and install native plants in SPR's natural areas according to this policy.
- 6.4** It is the responsibility of SPR's Urban Forestry Team to identify, select, and install native trees, where reasonable and practical, in coordination with SPR's Landscape Architects according to this policy.
- 6.5** It is the responsibility of SPR's Landscape Architects to review and/or design landscapes in developed parks that align with this policy.
- 6.6** It is the responsibility of SPR's Greenhouse Supervisor to work with Gardeners and other staff to propagate and source plants to support this policy.
- 6.7** It is the responsibility of SPR's Senior Training and Development Coordinator, in partnership with the Parks and Environment Division Director, to ensure relevant staff listed above receive training in support of this policy.