ConCord



FOREST PARK

CASE STUDY

Pacific Northwest NATIONAL LABORATORY

U.S. DEPARTMENT of ENERGY

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PNNL-38859

Forest Park Case Study

Delivering ecological value through low-growing, pollinator-friendly vegetation

April 2026

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the U.S. Department of Energy
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Cover Page: Transmission infrastructure and right-of-way in Forest Park (Photo by Rebecca O'Neil)

Summary

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), created in 1937, delivers and sells power generated from federal hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River and its tributaries to customers throughout the Pacific Northwest. Much of BPA's transmission infrastructure was constructed between the 1940s and 1960s to power the Pacific Northwest's wartime industries (e.g., shipping, aviation, aluminum) and to support rural electrification. Today, BPA owns and operates one of the country's largest transmission systems, providing roughly one-third of the Pacific Northwest's power (Bonneville Power Administration n.d.).

Interests in transmission rights-of-way (ROWs) as pollinator habitat gained momentum following national concern over pollinator decline, underscored by a 2014 Presidential Memorandum that established a Pollinator Health Task Force to create a national strategy for promoting the health of pollinators (Pollinator Health Task Force 2015). Inspired by this, BPA became increasingly interested in opportunities to integrate pollinator-friendly practices into their vegetation management plans. BPA ROWs within Forest Park were seen as an opportunity to evaluate how integrated vegetation management (IVM) within transmission corridors could help to control invasive species while promoting native, pollinator-friendly vegetation.

In response to growing interest in ecological conservation, BPA launched the North Forest Park Pollinator Powerline Project (P3 Project) in 2016 in collaboration with Portland Parks & Recreation and Metro, a regional government agency. This initiative aimed to enhance pollinator habitats within a transmission corridor in Forest Park by managing vegetation in a way that ensured both safety and ecological health. The project introduced low-growing, pollinator-friendly vegetation, providing vital resources for pollinators while maintaining reliability standards for transmission infrastructure.

By the late 2010s, the P3 Project successfully restored 67 acres of early successional and open meadow habitat, supplying essential foraging and nesting opportunities for pollinators. In 2023, the project received national recognition through the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign's Pollinator Electric Power Award, in partnership with the Electric Power Research Institute highlighting the project as a replicable model for co-managing reliability and habitat outcomes in utility corridors (Pollinator Partnership 2023).

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BPA – Bonneville Power Administration
EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
FERC – Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
IVM – Integrated Vegetation Management
MOU – Memorandum of Understanding
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
P3 Project – Park Pollinator Powerline Project
PGE – Portland General Electric
PP&R – Portland Parks & Recreation
ROW – Right(s)-of-way

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1.0 Connecting Transmission Corridors Initiative

The Connecting Transmission Corridors (ConCord) Initiative seeks to characterize the benefits of multifunctional transmission corridors, with a specific focus on recreation, conservation and restoration, and wildfire mitigation. This initiative outlines options and identifies best practices for providing public benefits in transmission corridors while also identifying models, tools, and resources for evaluating benefits in existing and future transmission infrastructure and transmission planning paradigms.

Case studies serve as informative examples of multi-functional transmission corridors and provide valuable lessons learned on land and vegetation management. The Forest Park Case Study is one of several completed within the ConCord Initiative to highlight and characterize existing efforts within transmission corridors. These case studies focus on land and/or vegetation management to enhance ecosystem services as well as recreation and the development of multi-use trails within transmission corridors. Each case study was developed through a combination of desk-based research and interviews with key informants affiliated with the project. In the following sections, background information on the North Forest Park Pollinator Powerline Project (P3 Project) is presented, as well as details on project development and key takeaways. There are also three appendices that detail the measures implemented, the spatial scale, and timeline for the project.

2.0 North Forest Park Pollinator Powerline Project

2.1 Background and Context

Located in Portland, Oregon between the Willamette River and the Tualatin River Valley, Forest Park spans roughly 5,200 acres and forms one of the largest urban forests in the United States (Figure 1). The forest is predominantly made up of Douglas fir, Bigleaf Maple, Western Red Cedar, and Western Hemlock trees that create a dense canopy. This forested habitat supports abundant wildlife, making it a vital refuge within an urban environment. In total, there are 100 species of birds, 50 species of mammals, and 400 species of invertebrates. The park also serves as an important link between the Willamette Valley ecoregion and the Coast Range.

This treasured urban forest came about following a long civic history with local naturalists and local leaders lobbying for permanent protection. The park's dedication in 1948 came at a time when the city had undergone major industrialization, and it received broad public support as it was seen as an opportunity to connect to nature. While the park is an ecological refuge, it hosts recreational facilities as well as utility corridors, pipelines, and access roads. Some of this infrastructure dates back to the early twentieth century, and in some instances, may pre-date the dedication of the park.

Both Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and Portland General Electric (PGE) operate and maintain transmission lines that run through Forest Park. BPA routed high-voltage transmission lines through the park beginning in the mid-twentieth century, connecting Columbia River hydropower to Portland's urban load and industrial centers. NW Natural Gas also has a pipeline that passes through the park. Since this infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance or upgrades, there can be impacts to natural resources in the park.

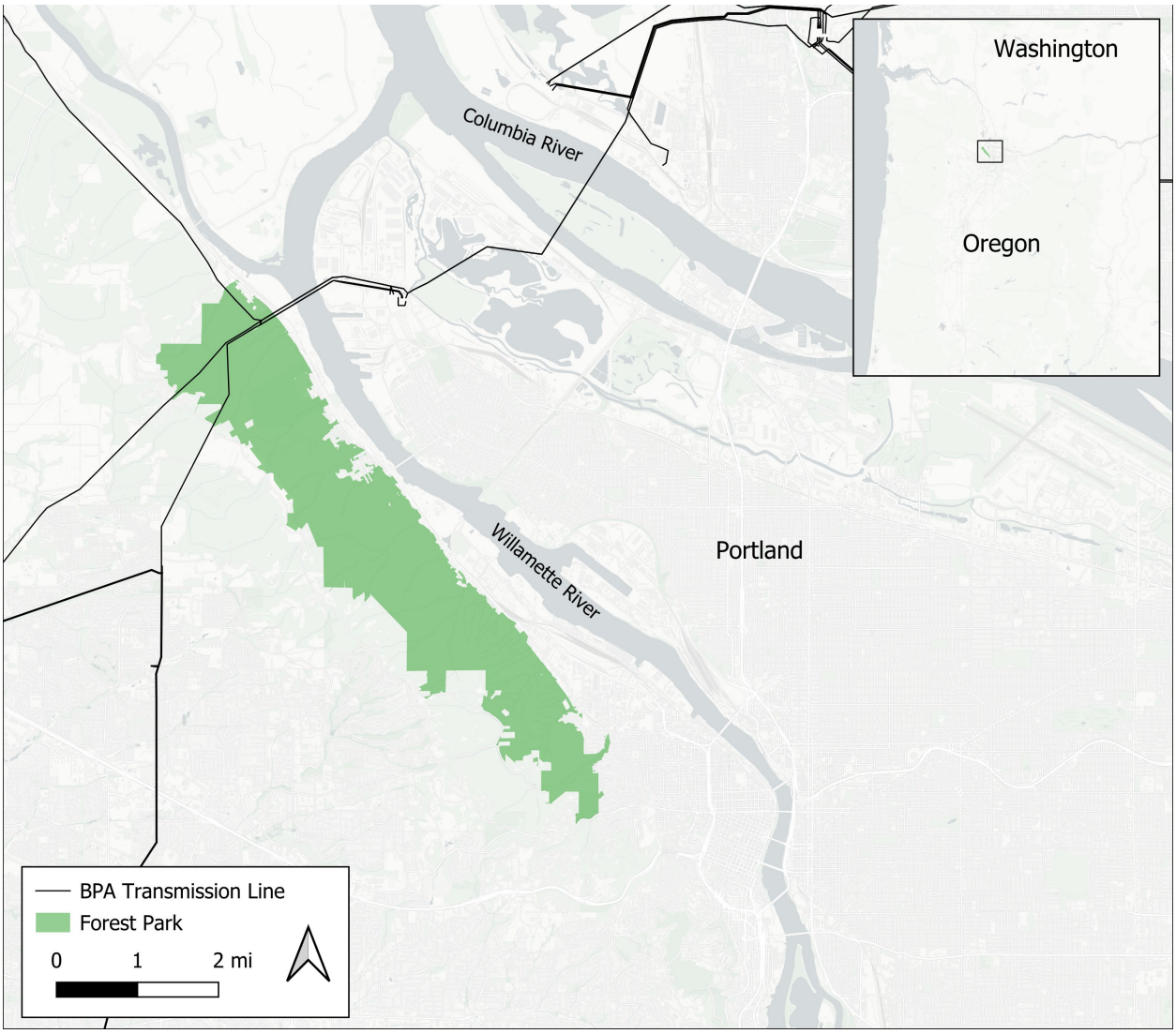

Figure 1. BPA transmission lines pass through Forest Park in Portland, Oregon and present opportunities to demonstrate IVM and benefits to pollinators. Data on transmission lines are from BPA.

Up until the early 2000s, vegetation management within transmission rights-of-way (ROW) was heavily reliant on traditional approaches (e.g., mechanical clearing, mowing, broad herbicide application) that further contributed to ecological disturbances. After the extensive 2003 Northeast blackout, integrated vegetation management (IVM) went from being more of a niche idea, mostly within the ecology community, to more of a mainstream practice to support grid reliability. In 2013, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved Reliability Standard FAC-003-2 (Transmission Vegetation Management), which encourages active vegetation management and IVM as opposed to clear-cutting. IVM emphasizes targeted, ecologically sensitive treatments rather than broad removal.

The shift to IVM and intentional establishment of pollinator habitat aligned with conservation interests and was welcomed by organizations such as the Forest Park Conservancy that had been pressing for invasive species control and habitat restoration since the early 2000s. Invasive plants are a defining challenge in Forest Park, with species like Himalayan blackberry

(*Rubus armeniacus*) and Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) spreading aggressively across utility corridors. This creates dense thickets that crowd out native vegetation and increase fire risk. One interviewee recalled that “the corridor was full of invasives before we cleared it,” underscoring how degraded conditions framed the opportunity for restoration (interview, September 19, 2025).

As the national conversation around vegetation management in ROWs was evolving, there was also a push from the federal government to support pollinator conservation. A 2014 Presidential Memorandum called on federal agencies to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators, placing pollinator decline on the national agenda (The White House (Archived) 2014). This created both political support and rationale for projects like the P3 Project, where utility corridors could be reframed as ecological “opportunity corridors” capable of supporting biodiversity while fulfilling their operational function. This federal initiative also motivated BPA to form a pollinator workgroup and to contribute to the foundation of EPRI’s Power-in-Pollinators Initiative.

2.2 Objectives and Scope

The primary motivation for the P3 Project was to implement IVM approaches in BPA’s transmission corridors to encourage low-growing pollinator-friendly native flora while removing invasive plant species and noxious weeds. BPA’s immediate objective was to reduce invasive plant cover while ensuring that vegetation within the corridor remained compatible with electrical safety standards.

The geographic scope of the project was a 67-acre section of BPA’s transmission corridor that cuts through the northern portion of Forest Park (Figure 2). This area had been in a degraded ecological condition due to the presence of invasive Scotch Broom and Himalayan blackberry and was deemed a promising location to demonstrate the effectiveness of IVM at controlling unwanted invasive plant species. The area was also of interest due to its visibility to park visitors and was seen as an opportunity to educate the public about native plants and pollinators. Metro and Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) contributed site preparation and planting expertise, while BPA oversaw the vegetation management and maintained responsibility for ensuring system reliability. Interviews described the core goal succinctly: “the plan for the corridor was to stay low and compatible with the lines, but if it can provide habitat at the same time, that’s even better” (interview, September 19, 2025).

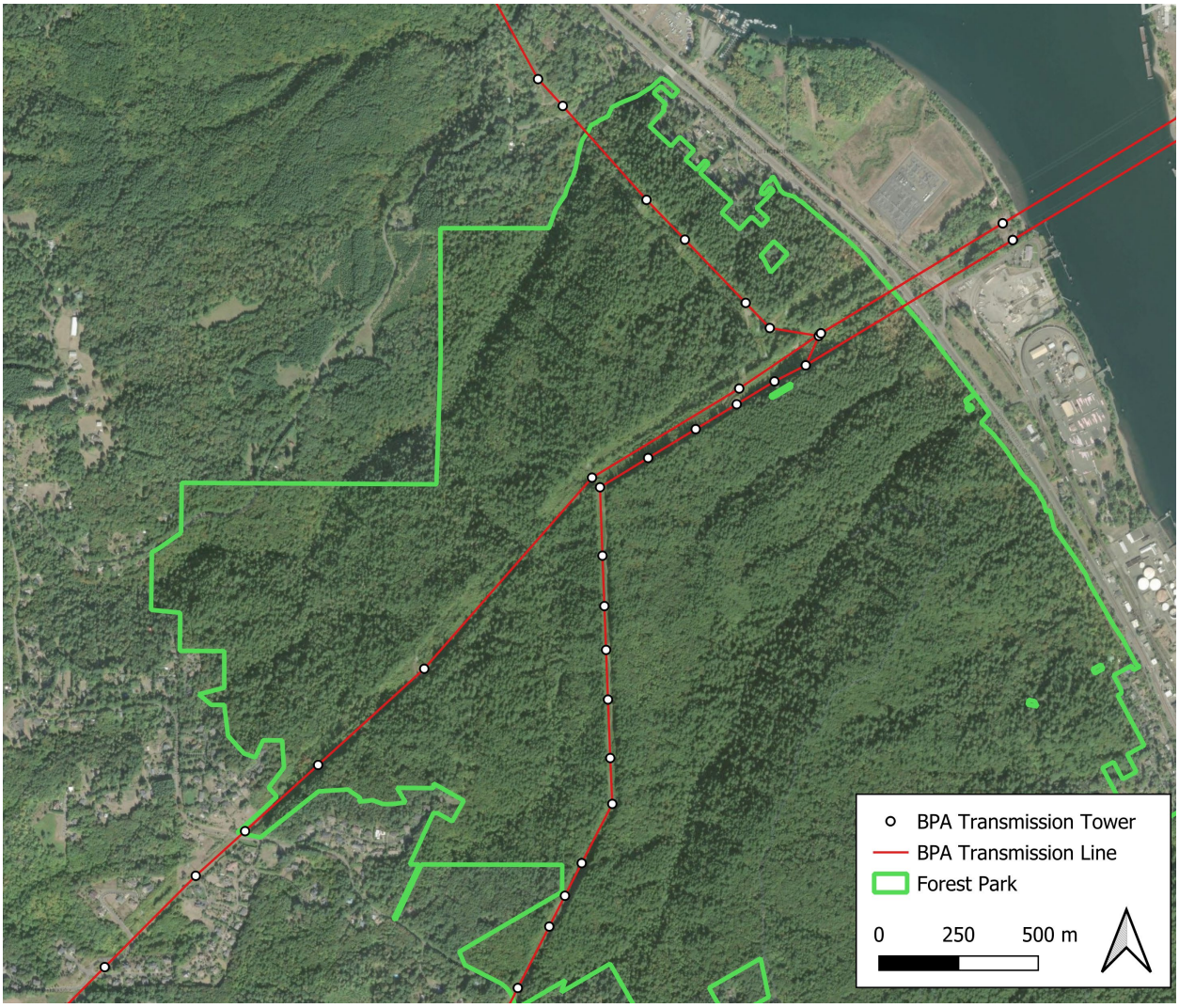

Figure 2. Location of the BPA transmission towers and lines that pass through North Forest Park, where the P3 Project is located.

Functionally, the scope was bounded by BPA's operational standards. All vegetation had to remain at least 25 feet below the lowest conductor and 50 feet from poles, structures, or guy wires. Roads, underground utilities, and pipelines crossing the corridor were required to meet HS-20 federal highway loading standards to ensure that heavy maintenance vehicles could access the line safely. These technical parameters defined what was permissible on the site and ensured that habitat enhancements would not compromise access or safety. Within these boundaries, however, the project aimed to maximize ecological value by seeding 250 pounds of native wildflowers and grasses and planting 6,000 shrubs, creating a continuous low-profile mosaic that supported pollinators while keeping the corridor compatible with transmission operations.

2.3 Governance and Setting

Forest Park is owned by the City of Portland and managed by PP&R, which oversees ecological stewardship, public access, and long-term maintenance. Running through this landscape are eight utility easements for electricity, oil, and gas pipelines. Within these, BPA owns and

operates high-voltage transmission infrastructure, and for decades, BPA has been responsible for ensuring that its ROWs remain accessible and safe. All corridors west of the Cascade Range are managed on a three-year vegetation cycle.

The governance arrangement for the P3 project reflected a clear division of roles. For this project, BPA conducted all the site preparation and management (interview, October 17, 2025). BPA was responsible for preparing and clearing the ROW and ensuring compliance with electrical safety and reliability standards. Metro and PP&R financed and implemented the habitat work through tax funds, focusing on invasive species control and the establishment of pollinator-friendly vegetation. Metro, in particular, had extensive expertise in pollinator habitat and restoration and informed much of the habitat design and site selection within the corridor.

Given the number of entities involved in the project, it was important for all participants to share different perspectives on best management practices and other ideas (interview, October 17, 2025). A formal agreement between BPA and the City of Portland outlined responsibilities for each party: BPA retained authority for corridor-wide vegetation management, while PP&R took on targeted invasive species removal in designated areas.

When activities are proposed inside the ROW, they are evaluated through a standardized submission and review process. As one interview noted, “this is called ‘Land Use Review Requests’, everyone analyzes it to make sure it’s compliant” (interview, September 24, 2025). These reviews determine whether planting, access, or trail connections are compatible with clearance, load bearing, and access requirements in an active transmission corridor.

Both federal and local requirements inform what regulatory actions are needed. At the city level, non-park use permits may be required for construction, staging, or vehicle access within managed areas. At the federal level, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies when projects have a federal nexus, such as when work occurs on federal land or involves action by a federal agency such as BPA. BPA maintains a Vegetation Management Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), supplemented with site-specific analyses for sensitive areas. Interviews emphasized that NEPA “is what’s needed typically,” and that supplemental analyses are used to address sensitive locations (interview, September 19, 2025).

Coordination extends across multiple jurisdictions and landowners. BPA has general memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with federal and state agencies that outline the agencies’ respective roles in transmission corridor management. For example, BPA has a MOU with the U.S. Forest Service, *Regarding Transmission Facilities and Access to Those Facilities on National Forest System Lands.* This MOU defines the agencies’ respective roles in planning and review of activities in transmission corridors in National Forests, including vegetation management. While these MOUs are meant to be broadly applicable, project-specific agreements are still required to execute field work (interview, September 26, 2025). Participants noted that regulatory interpretations can vary, particularly around sensitive species, seasonal timing, or archaeological resources, which can add to permitting delays (interview, September 26, 2025).

These governance layers defined how the Forest Park pollinator project moved forward: a balance between city ownership, regional funding, and federal compliance, with BPA positioned as both steward of transmission reliability and a gatekeeper for what can be done inside its ROWs.

2.4 Project Development and Implementation

The P3 Project began in 2016, and work was divided into three phases: site preparation, planting, and establishment and maintenance (Blackburn and Hatfield 2020). Initial work centered on corridor preparation and vegetation removal, focusing on invasive species that had overtaken much of the understory, including Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry (Figure 3). This first phase of the project to prepare the site took about two to three years, from 2016 to 2018 (Blackburn and Hatfield 2020).

Partners from Metro and PP&R developed plans to restore the land by planting native seed mixes suitable for low-growing conditions beneath transmission lines. By 2018, the project reached its first major milestone with the seeding of approximately 250 pounds of native grass and wildflowers across a 67-acre stretch of the corridor (Blackburn and Hatfield 2020). In early 2019, this was supplemented with the planting of around 6,000 native shrubs to diversify habitat structure and extend flowering resources across seasons (Bonneville Power Administration 2016). Shorter-stature trees and shrubs were also planted in areas where the distance to the overhead powerlines was greater (interview, October 13, 2025). Phase three, establishment and maintenance, started in May 2019 and involved targeted herbicide treatments on invasive plant species throughout the project area (Blackburn and Hatfield 2020).



Figure 3. Scotch broom (*left*) and Himalayan blackberry (*right*) are invasive plants in Forest Park targeted through IVM. Photo credits: Anne Tanne (*left*) and Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board (*right*).

Monitoring was incorporated during the first years of the project. Partners worked with the Xerces Society, an invertebrate conservation organization, to assess early ecological outcomes. Transmission corridors managed by PGE, where there were no plans for restoration, served as control sites to compare against BPA's transmission corridor where habitat had been restored (Figure 4). While these corridors were in the same general vicinity, they had different management strategies, allowing for an assessment on the effectiveness of IVM. Data were collected in year one from June to September 2016 and in year two from May to September 2017 (Blackburn and Hatfield 2020). Monitoring continued from 2018 – 2020, and during that time, vegetation largely held its profile and provided visible forage structure (interview, September 19, 2025). While there was a big push for environmental monitoring in the first five years, it was not maintained long-term.

Project implementation required adherence to compliance and permitting processes. NEPA reviews were handled through BPA's Vegetation Management Environmental Impact Statement and site-specific supplements. Interviews noted that seasonal restrictions for endangered species and archaeological reviews sometimes extended timelines for vegetation work, even when the field activities were brief (interview, September 26, 2025). These factors required phasing flexibility and, in some cases, modifications to habitat treatments.

By 2023, the project was nationally recognized with the Pollinator Electric Power Award from the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign, marking a symbolic endpoint to its development phase (Pollinator Partnership 2023). For the agencies involved, however, the more meaningful outcome was the demonstration that a utility corridor could be managed in a phased, adaptive way that delivered both operational reliability and ecological value.

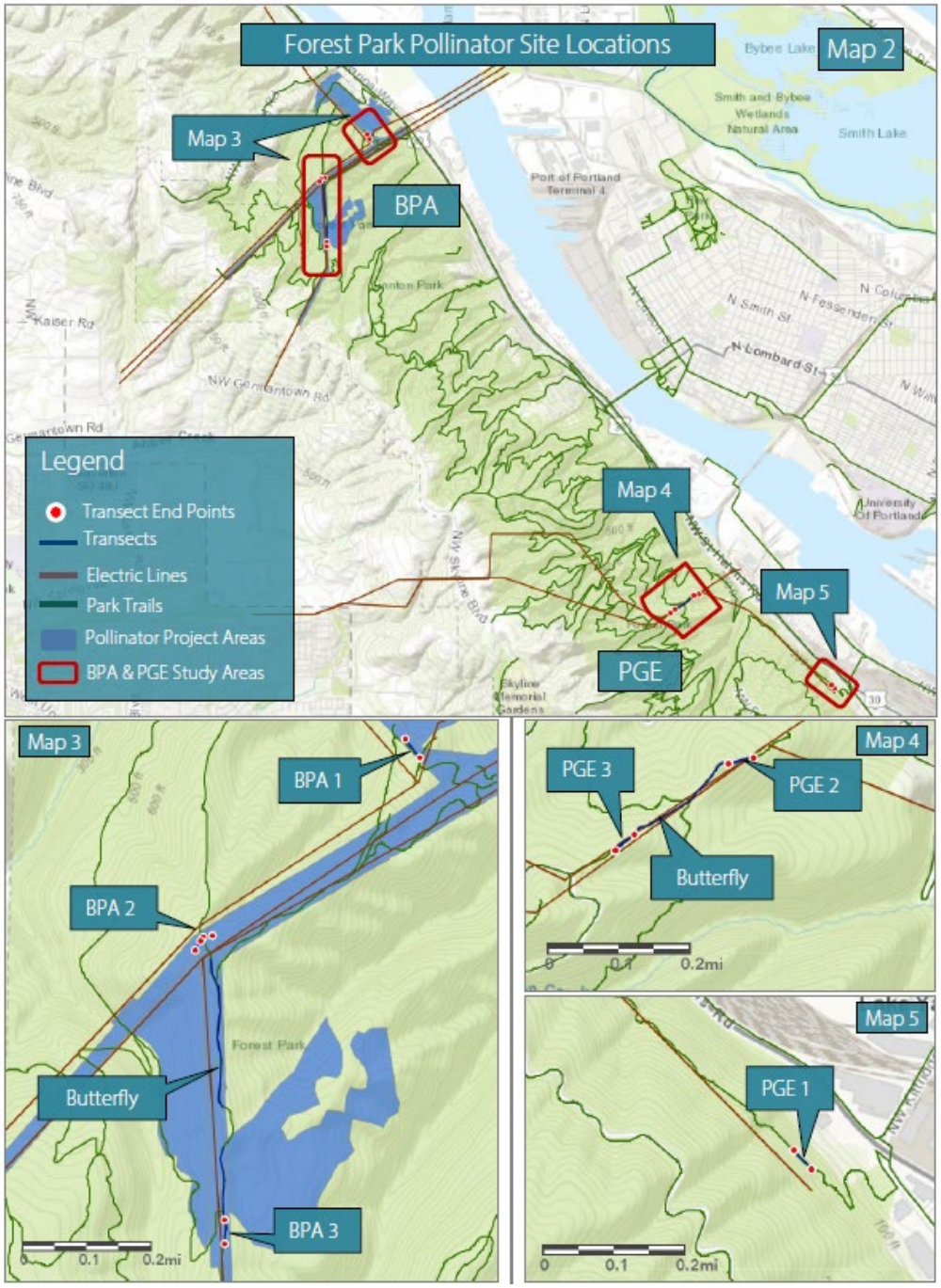

Figure 4. The location of pollinator project areas within the P3 Project. This figure is from Blackburn and Hatfield (2020). PGE sites served as control sites for this past study.

3.0 Barriers and Constraints

The P3 Project advanced within parameters that were defined as much by perception and interpretation as by technical rules. From the outset, clearance requirements and access needs established fixed limits on what could be planted in the ROW. These standards did not change, but the coordination required to ensure compliance meant that any new habitat proposal triggered multi-unit internal review (interview, September 24, 2025). This added process time even when the ecological intent was straightforward.

The more variable constraints came from regulatory interpretation. While NEPA provided a consistent federal framework, interviews described how endangered species timing windows or cultural resource reviews could delay brief vegetation treatments for weeks or months (interview, September 26, 2025). These constraints did not prohibit work but created uncertainty in scheduling, requiring partners to plan adaptively.

Public perception emerged as another layer of constraint. Interviewees noted that invasive plant removal and pollinator habitat creation were generally welcomed, while tree removal was more contested. Vegetation work linked explicitly to wildfire risk was more readily accepted, whereas other removals prompted questions about necessity (interview, September 24, 2025). Similarly, the public response to herbicides was strong, with concerns about broad herbicide application, and there was a misunderstanding between that type of herbicide application and the selective herbicide application employed at the site. This concern was especially true for communities near residential and agricultural areas and stems from a misunderstanding between broad application of herbicides and selective herbicide application.

These constraints mattered not because they blocked the project but because they shaped how it was implemented. The work proceeded by distinguishing between fixed requirements, like clearance rules, and interpretive factors, like regulatory timing or public concern. The project thus illustrated that the primary challenge in co-managing infrastructure and habitat is not the technical feasibility of planting but the negotiation of compliance and perception across multiple stakeholders.

4.0 Outcomes and Impacts

The Forest Park project demonstrates how habitat restoration can be treated as a design choice within the routine cycles of utility maintenance. By sequencing invasive species removal and seeding or planting native flora, partners showed that biodiversity goals need not conflict with clearance standards but can be achieved inside them. The experience also highlighted how external constraints can inform project design and implementation. Seasonal windows, cultural resource reviews, and jurisdictional differences all shaped timing, yet the project advanced because compliance was integrated into planning from the outset. This suggests that the viability of similar projects depends not on avoiding regulation but on adapting work cycles to it.

There were also lessons more specific to supporting pollinators. While the project involved removing or treating invasive species, sequencing these activities such that not all invasive plant species were removed at once was important. Although Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry were targeted for removal, they provided nectar and pollen resources to pollinators, and their complete removal would have eliminated an important interim food source before native wildflowers became more established. A lesson applied in this project was to clear target plant species gradually to ensure not all pollinator habitat was removed at once (interviews, October 13, 2025, and October 17, 2025). This is especially important for meadow habitats enclosed within a forest, where source populations of pollinators, especially insects, might otherwise be scarce.

As far as public reception, pollinator-friendly vegetation generated little controversy, while tree removal and herbicide use drew scrutiny. The project's alignment with national concern over pollinator decline helped position it within a familiar public narrative, reducing the likelihood of widespread pushback. The addition of educational signage near the corridor led by PP&R provided valuable information on the importance of pollinators, pollinator habitat, and the potential of transmission corridors to provide pollinator habitat.



Figure 5. Signage in Forest Park highlights the importance of native plants and pollinators, as well as efforts to restore pollinator habitat in transmission corridors.

5.0 Key Takeaways

The Forest Park project shows that pollinator habitat can be established inside transmission corridors when sequencing, compliance, and communication are treated as integral parts of design. Habitat work proceeded not by adding new programs, but by aligning invasive removal, native planting, and clearance rules into one operational cycle. The P3 Project, as noted by one of the interviewees, highlights transmission ROWs as “opportunity corridors,” places where careful vegetation choices can enhance biodiversity without undermining system operations (interview, September 24, 2025).

Overall, this collaborative partnership across BPA, PP&R, and Metro shows how ecological enhancements in ROWs succeed not only through technical design but through alignment of objectives with operational standards, of schedules with compliance processes, and of public interpretation with broader environmental agendas. The experience further demonstrates that the long-term viability of such project’s rests on adaptive planning and public framing. Compliance requirements shaped schedules but did not prevent progress when treated as predictable design constraints. Public concerns about tree removal and herbicide use highlighted the importance of transparent explanation, while the connection to broader pollinator health initiatives provided a shared reference point. In this way, the project offers a replicable model for balancing infrastructure reliability with ecological restoration in other urban and regional corridors.

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Appendix A – Measures Implemented

Table 1. Measures implemented to prepare, restore, and maintain the Forest Park transmission corridor as pollinator habitat.

ID	Measure	Description
M1	Integrated vegetation management	BPA and PP&R applied an integrated vegetation management plan to maintain low-growing, compatible plant cover within the transmission corridor.
M2	Invasive species removal	Invasive plants such as Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry were cleared from the ROW to prepare the site for restoration.
M3	Establish pollinator habitat	Metro and PP&R selected and planted native species, 250 pounds of wildflower and grass seed, followed by 6,000 shrubs, to establish pollinator habitat.

Appendix B – Spatial Scale

Table 2. Project footprint and context on adjacent infrastructure. Note that linear corridor length is not specified in project materials and is a rough estimate.

Item	Value
Corridor length affected	~1.5 miles: Approximate based on project footprint and reported acreage; exact linear measurement not specified in available sources.
Habitat restored	67 acres
Key assets affected	High-voltage transmission facilities; access roads/gates; adjacent park trails (no new trail construction as part of this project)

Appendix C – Timeline

Table 3. Timeline of key milestones, from project approval through implementation and current operational status. Details on project phases are described in Blackburn and Hatfield (2020).

Milestone	Date	Attribution
Approval/decision	2016	Project concept approved Partnership between BPA, PP&R, and Metro confirmed
Site preparation	2016 – 2018	Initial site preparation, including removal of invasive Scotch broom and treatment on blackberry and non-native grasses in 2016 Site preparation treatments continued through 2018
Major phase(s)	2018	Broadcasting 250 lbs of native wildflower and grass seed beneficial for pollinators
	2019	Planting of 6,000 native shrubs Focused herbicide treatments on Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry, non-native grasses, and weeds growing near the planted shrubs
Current status		The project received the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign Pollinator Electric Power Award in 2023 The site remains in routine vegetation management cycle

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