

6. Critical Areas and Species Protection

Response to public comments regarding the City's approach to wildlife species protection.

Summary of Comments

General comments emphasized 'protect the natural environment and increase open space;' specific comments expressed a desire for updated and stronger policy language on preserving wildlife habitat:

- Protect/acquire more wildlife and wildlife habitat than is currently being done;
- Protect priority species and locally important species and their habitat (e.g. herons and heron rookeries) like Thurston County;
- The Wildlife Habitat Study that formed the basis for the draft policy is outdated
- Update the 'Open Space' Map to reflect best available science; and
- Reexamine the habitat value of the forested areas surrounding LBA Park

Comments received on this issue were often in combination with those regarding issue **#5 Wildlife Habitat**.

Council Direction of August 12, 2014

Council directed staff to provide clarification on the protection of priority species and habitat; specifically, what actions may be taken to address this issue apart from the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Staff Analysis

The Olympia critical areas ordinance (CAO) is one of the development regulations that implements the comprehensive plan, and addresses five types of environmentally critical areas including fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. The regulations can be found in the Olympia Municipal Code (OMC), Chapter 18.32 Critical Areas.

One of the purposes of the current Olympia CAO is to protect:

Important habitats and species known to occur within Thurston County and which may be found within the City of Olympia and which are not receiving habitat protection by another critical area category (e.g. Streams, Wetlands, or Landslide Hazard Areas) in this Chapter and:

A. Are designated as endangered or threatened species identified under the Endangered Species Act; or

B. Are state designated endangered, threatened, or sensitive species identified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the habitat primarily associated with those species (OMC 18.32.305).

The City of Olympia has been protecting critical areas for many decades, and with each update, the regulations have continued to evolve in scope; the extent of what species and habitats have been included has varied.

In 1985, the CAO addressed wildlife habitat to the extent that protected areas were defined as:

...those areas which are visited by native animal species with unusual frequency, density or diversity; or by those plant and animal species identified as either endangered, threatened, sensitive, or monitored by the [State].

With implementation of the 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA), Olympia was required to incorporate critical areas into our comprehensive planning. The resulting update to the CAO in 1992 provided that Olympia would:

...protect the habitat of animal species which are considered to be priority species and thereby maintain and increase their populations within the City of Olympia...

When a development proposal was submitted that contained a significant upland habitat area, or a local or state priority species, protection of the area was addressed on a case-by-case basis with a Habitat Management Plan. However, it wasn't until the CAO was amended again in 1996, that a specific process was articulated for anyone who wished to nominate a locally important species for which a Habitat Management Plan would be required.

The last major update to the CAO was in 2005. It resulted in continuing to protect species designated as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and those designated as endangered, threatened, or sensitive by the state, plus the habitat primarily associated with those species.

The current CAO no longer includes a process for adding locally-important species and their habitat. City staff consults with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to receive data and technical guidance when there are development projects proposed for areas with known or suspected state-listed priority habitats and species.

Thurston County recently updated their CAO in 2012 to include required identification and protection for species of local importance. The goal is to protect species before they are threatened or endangered. In addition, much of the best available science and

plant, animal, and rare habitat identified for protection by state and federal authorities has changed since their last major update in 1994.

The state Growth Management Act (GMA) requires the city to review its CAO for consistency with the GMA every eight years, with the next review due by June 30, 2016. Currently, that review is scheduled to be completed by the City in 2015. Staff proposes that the protection of wildlife species and habitat is addressed through this process.

Text of Public Hearing Draft

Protection of wildlife species is not addressed specifically in the Draft Comprehensive Plan; however, the preservation of land for upland wildlife habitat is addressed in the Natural Environment Chapter:

Policy PN2.6 Conserve and restore wildlife habitat as a series of separate pieces of land, in addition to existing corridors.

See **#5 Wildlife Habitat** for a proposed revised Policy PN2.6.

The Natural Environment Chapter also addresses the protection and restoration of aquatic habitat in GN6 and subsequent policies PN6.1-PN6.8.

Proposed Clarification

None; Staff proposes that the protection of wildlife species and habitat be addressed through a review of the Critical Areas Ordinance.

Alternative(s)

Add a new policy to the Draft Comprehensive Plan that specifies the City will protect locally important wildlife: *PN2.# Protect wildlife species of local importance.*