

GREAT BLUE HERON MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Background & Purpose:

Great blue herons can be vulnerable because of their tendency to aggregate during the breeding season. They are colonial breeders that nest in a variety of deciduous and evergreen tree species. Nests are usually constructed in the tallest trees available, presumably to reduce the risk of predation by mammals. The availability of suitable great blue heron breeding habitat is declining as human population increases. Great blue heron nesting colonies are listed as a Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Priority Species.

Statewide Recommendations

Statewide, WDFW recommends a permanent, year-round buffer of 60 meters (197 feet) from the perimeter of the great blue heron nesting colony for urban areas as defined by WDFW. Additional management recommendations include a seasonal buffer of 200 meters (656 feet) for loud noises and 400 meters (1,320 feet) for extremely loud noises such as blasting. The seasonal buffers are measured from the outside edge of the year-round buffer. These management recommendations can be found in the 2012 Washington's Priority Species, Great Blue Heron, prepared by WDFW. This can be viewed by going to <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01371/> or by contacting WDFW.

Local Recommendations

The WDFW recommends that local land use planning should, when possible, protect existing great blue heron colonies using colony site-specific management plans that consider the colony size, location, relative isolation and the degree of habituation to human disturbance. Typically in Olympia it is difficult to restrict development within larger buffer areas due to existing development and buildable lots in close proximity to colonies. Therefore, and because heron colonies within the City of Olympia are in part habituated to urban conditions and WDFW did not establish smaller seasonal buffers for urban areas, the City has established a 200 foot year-round buffer and an additional 300 foot seasonal buffer for great blue heron nesting colonies in both the West Bay and East Bay areas. Development conditions for proposed development within or near a Great Blue Heron Management Area are contained in OMC 18.32.327.

Definitions

Great Blue Heron Nesting Season means February 1 through August 31

Great Blue Heron Nesting Colony means the area inside the line created when the outermost nesting trees are connected. This line is the nesting colony boundary of two or more nests.

Great Blue Heron Core Zone means the area consisting of a great blue heron nesting colony and its 200 foot year-round buffer.

Great Blue Heron Management Area means the area consisting of a great blue heron nesting colony, the 200 foot year-round buffer, and the 300 foot seasonal buffer.

Screening Tree means a tree that is within the direct line of sight between the structure(s) or development and the nesting area, and/or a tree that blocks the visibility of the nesting colony from the structure(s) or development during any part of the year, and within the great blue heron management area.

Great Blue Heron Pre-nesting Area means an area less than 1 kilometer (.62 miles) from a great blue heron nesting colony where male birds congregate prior to occupying the nests.

Measurements

Year-round buffer: The 200 foot year-round buffer is measured from the nesting colony boundary.

Seasonal buffer: The additional 300 foot seasonal buffer is measured from the great blue heron core zone.