

## Natural Areas Category

“Natural Areas” means areas that have, to a significant degree, retained their natural character and are important in preserving rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological, natural, historical, or similar features of scientific or educational value.<sup>87</sup>

Natural Areas Category Evaluation Summary		
Criteria	Evaluation Elements	Possible Points
<b>Unscored</b>		
Project Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project goals and objectives</li> <li>• Location maps</li> </ul>	Not scored
<b>Scored by the Advisory Committee</b>		
1. Ecological and Biological Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bigger picture</li> <li>• Uniqueness or significance of the site</li> <li>• Statewide significance</li> <li>• Species or communities</li> <li>• Quality of habitat and natural features</li> </ul>	20 points
2. Species and Communities with Special Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threat to species or communities</li> <li>• Importance of acquisition</li> <li>• Ecological roles</li> <li>• Taxonomic distinctness</li> <li>• Pollinator habitat</li> </ul>	10 points
3. Manageability and Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediacy of threat to the site</li> <li>• Consideration of a conservation easement</li> <li>• Long-term viability</li> <li>• Enhancement of existing protected land</li> <li>• Ongoing stewardship</li> </ul>	15 points
4. Public Benefit and Community Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community support</li> <li>• Educational and/or scientific value</li> </ul>	5 points
5. Multiple Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation uses</li> <li>• Resource uses and management practices</li> </ul>	3 points
<b>Total Points Possible</b>		<b>53</b>

<sup>87</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.010(6)

## Detailed Scoring Criteria for Natural Areas Category

### Project Introduction

This is an opportunity to set the stage for the project. Provide a broad overview of the site and the project's goals and objectives.

### Project Goals and Objectives

Briefly introduce the site and the project's goals and objectives. The following criteria will provide an opportunity to describe the project in more detail; however the intent here primarily is to help orient the evaluators to the project.

### Statewide, Vicinity, and Site Maps

Locate the project on statewide, vicinity, and site maps to help orient the evaluators to the project site.

In order to demonstrate how the project supports connectivity to other important landscapes please include on a map other sites in the area with similar habitat components.

▲ Project introduction is not scored.

## 1. Ecological and Biological Characteristics

Why is the site worthy of long-term conservation?<sup>88</sup>

"Paint a picture" of the project for the evaluators—the what, where, and why. This is the heart of the presentation and evaluators will draw conclusions based on the information presented about the *quality and function of the plant community*, *habitat* or other unique geological or natural historical features and the *demonstrated need to protect* it.

### The Bigger Picture

- How is this project supported by a current plan (i.e., Natural Heritage Plan, habitat conservation, local, watershed, statewide, or species/community management or recovery plans) or a coordinated region-wide prioritization effort? What is the status of the plan?
- Does this project assist in implementation of a local shoreline master program updated according to Revised Code of Washington 90.58.080 or local comprehensive plans updated according to Revised Code of

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<sup>88</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(iii, v-vii, xi); (6)(b)(ii)

Washington 36.70A.130? What process was used to identify this project as a priority? What specific role does this project play in a broader watershed or landscape picture? Is it part of a phased project? Is it a stand-alone site or habitat?

- For Water Resource Inventory Areas 1-19, how is the project referenced in the *Action Agenda* developed by the Puget Sound Partnership? The [Action Agenda](#) can be found on the Puget Sound Partnership's website. Evaluators should ignore this question for projects outside Water Resource Inventory Areas 1-19.

### Uniqueness and Significance

- Explain how the site is unique or significant on a global, regional, state, ecosystem, and/or watershed level.
- How unique is the site in relation to habitat quality, connectivity, diversity, and rarity?
- How is the site important to the target species and/or communities? Are the target species and/or communities geographically isolated to this particular site?
- How does this site compare to others of the same type?

### Statewide Significance

What is the statewide significance of the project site? Does it meet priorities identified in a state plan? What elevates this site to a state significance level in addition to needs identified for the local community?

### Species or Communities

- What significant species and/or communities currently exist on or use the site? Which, if any, are the target species and/or communities? (*Target species or communities may or may not be special status species.*)
- Describe the community type(s) and explain the relative condition of the population of target species and/or communities.
- Which species and/or communities have the potential and likelihood to use the site in the future and will reintroduction occur naturally or otherwise?

### Quality of Habitat or Natural Features

- Describe the ecological and biological quality of the site and how it supports the species or communities present.
- Describe how this site represents a native ecosystem or its rarity in relation to other types. Describe how this site has retained, to a significant degree, its natural character.
- Are the size, quality, and other site characteristics adequate to support the target species or communities within the context of the project area?
- Has the habitat or characteristics of the site been identified as limiting factors or critical pathways to the target species/communities?

▲ Point Range: zero to twenty points

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## 2. Species or Communities with Special Status

What is the significance of each species or community listed on the required Species or Communities with Special Status table (see appendix A)?<sup>89</sup>

This question's intent is to determine the significance of the species or communities with special status and how they may benefit from the project. Some special status species or communities may benefit on a more passive basis, while others may benefit directly. *In the interest of space consider addressing only the species or communities that benefit the most from this project.*

### Threat to the Species and Communities

Describe the immediacy of threat to the species or community (e.g., imminent danger of extinction or extirpation; threatened in the foreseeable future, or concern because of current trends; population stable, but catastrophic event could threaten; no foreseeable threat).

### Importance of Acquisitions

- Describe how this acquisition contributes to the conservation of these species or communities with special status.
- Describe the distribution or range and, if known, the abundance of the species or community.

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<sup>89</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(iv, ix, xiii)

- Identify any recovery plans, conservation strategies, or similar plans that include reference to this site.
- How does this project assist with recovery efforts for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species?

### Ecological Roles

How will these communities or species benefit from this project?

- Describe how this project will provide ecological support for the communities or species with special status.

### Taxonomic Distinctiveness

How evolutionarily distinct is the species in question (is it recognized as the only species in its genus, is it one of ten species in the genus, is it only recognized at the subspecies level, i.e., as a variety or subspecies)?

Example: Water howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) is the only recognized species in the genus *Howellia*, whereas Buxbaum's sedge (*Carex buxbaumii*) is a member of a very large genus, consisting of more than one thousand recognized species. Presumably, the genetic material of water howellia is more distinctive from all other living species than is Buxbaum's sedge. Some scientists believe that more evolutionarily distinct organisms should have a higher priority for protection. Based on this assumption, if all else is equal, it would be more important to conserve water howellia than Buxbaum's sedge.

### Pollinator Habitat

Describe how the site supports the feeding, nesting, and reproduction of pollinator species (bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, etc.)?<sup>90</sup>

▲ Point Range: zero to ten points

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## 3. Manageability and Viability

What is the likelihood of the site being viable (functioning) over the long term and why is it important to secure it now?<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (5)(a)(xvii).

<sup>91</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(ii, iv, viii, x)

This question's intent is to determine whether the site can be managed, and how it will be managed, to protect the target species, communities, or natural features.

### **Immediacy of Threat to the Site**

What, and how imminent, are the threats to the site (i.e., inherent, ecological, human, conversion, abatable or non-abatable threats)?

- Are these new threats or ongoing? How do or will these threats affect the function of the site?
- How will protection of the site affect these threats? What steps already have been taken to secure the land or reduce the threats?

### **Consideration of a Conservation Easement**

Would a conservation easement provide an appropriate level of protection for this habitat? If yes but fee-simple acquisition is the preferred approach, describe the reasons why a conservation easement is not being pursued.

- Characterize the components of the easement under consideration and state why and how those components provide adequate conservation of the site and its features.

### **Long-term Viability**

What regulatory protections already are afforded the site (county comprehensive plan, critical areas ordinances, zoning, development regulations, shoreline management rules, forest practice rules including landowner landscape plans, habitat conservation plans, etc.)?

Demonstrate how the site will be managed over time to maintain the desired characteristics.

- Who will maintain it and what human and financial resources are available to do it? What management needs are there? What restorative efforts, if any, are needed or planned?
- What is happening across the landscape or watershed that may affect the viability of the site?
- Describe any long-term site monitoring plans and identify who will implement monitoring.

### Enhancement of Existing Protected Land

Are there other lands (public and private) near this site that have complimentary or compatible land uses for the target species or communities?

- Are they managed in a manner consistent with the needs of the target species or communities?
- Is this site part of a larger ownership? If so, describe the connectivity and management of the other land.

### Ongoing Stewardship

Describe the ongoing stewardship program for the project area including the estimated costs of maintenance and operation and the control of noxious weeds, detrimental invasive species, etc.

- What is the source of funding for this stewardship work?

▲ Point Range: zero to fifteen points

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## 4. Public Benefit and Community Support

To what degree do communities, governments, landowners, constituent groups, or academia benefit from, or support, the project?<sup>92</sup>

This question's intent is to find out what the *unique* public benefits are of the project. Public benefit should not be equated with "public access." The question is not meant to discount projects for *not* having overwhelming support or educational opportunities. It may be that the project has one or the other qualities and not both. The answer will be scored on those unique qualities and how they are appropriate for, or of benefit to, the project.

### Community Support

Describe the support or partnerships with the community including local citizens, local organizations, local elected officials, interest groups, volunteers, public agencies, etc. How have these groups been involved in project development? Explain any known opposition to the project.

- Describe and document other monetary means that have been secured to help cover the costs for the project, such as grants, donations, in-kind contributions, etc.

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<sup>92</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(i, xii)

### Educational and/or Scientific Values

Describe the scientific and educational values of the site.

- Is there an identified research or educational need documented in a management plan, thesis, or scientific journal related to the habitat, species, or communities at the site? How likely is it that these opportunities will come to fruition? How accessible is the site for these activities?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points

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## 5. Multiple Benefits

### Recreational Uses

Does the project area include recreational uses that are compatible with habitat conservation?

Explain these recreational uses and how they are compatible with the habitat conservation objectives of the project.

- Provide an evidenced based explanation of compatibility.
- Explain how recreational uses are managed on the landscape and balanced with habitat conservation.
- Discuss the quality of the recreational experience.

### Resource Uses and Management Practices

Does the project area include resource uses or management practices that are compatible with and provide the ability to achieve additional conservation benefits?

Describe the resource uses or management practices and explain how they are compatible with conservation and achieve additional conservation benefits.

- Provide an evidenced-based explanation of (1) compatibility with conservation and (2) achieving additional conservation benefits.
- How will these resource uses and management practices be managed?
- Describe how the local or regional communities and their leaders value these resource uses or management practices.



Evidence provided by the sponsor showing local support for conservation due to the applicant continuing a compatible historic use or practice that would otherwise be threatened may be considered as meeting the criteria of achieving additional conservation benefits.

Scoping the project to avoid impairing a locally preferred resource use or management practice may be considered as meeting the criteria of achieving additional conservation benefits.

▲ Point Range: zero to three points

Zero points	No multiple benefits provided, or multiple benefits are not compatible with or achieve additional conservation benefits.
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One to three points	More points shall be given to the extent multiple benefits exist, recreational uses are compatible with conservation, resource uses and management practices achieve additional conservation benefits.
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# Appendix A: Species and Communities with Special Status

## Species, Community, or Habitat Type

List each species, community, or habitat type with special status that can be found **on the property or in the work site.**

## Occurrence

For special status animal species, indicate whether the occurrence of the species on the property or in the work site is “breeding, feeding, migrating, resting, perching, roosting, wintering, rearing, spawning, year-round resident, individual occurrence, future recovery area, or unknown.”

For special status plant species, communities, or habitat types, indicate whether the species, communities, or habitat types are present, part of a future recovery area, or unknown in the occurrence column.

## Status and Source

Indicate the status of the species and the source used for the information. A source must be included for each species listed. The following may provide federal and state status and source information:

### Federally Listed Species

- [Resident fish and wildlife](#), Endangered Species Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lacey, (360) 753-9440

- [Pacific salmon species](#), National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Regional Office, (503) 230-5400

**State Listed Species and Candidate Species**

- [Species of Concern Section](#), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, (360) 902-2515

**Priority Habitats and Species**

- [Priority Habitat and Species Program](#), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, (360) 902-2543

**State Listed Plant Species and Communities**

- [Natural Heritage Program, Recommended Guidance for Providing Natural Heritage Data](#), Washington Department of Natural Resources, (360) 902-1667

**Other Sources**

If species information came from a source other than the sources above (such as a consultant or local biologist), please include reference information on the form.

**Federal Status**

FE	Endangered
FT	Threatened
FP	Proposed for threatened or endangered
FC	Candidate for listing status review
FSC	Species of concern

**State Status**

SE	State endangered
ST	State threatened
SS	State sensitive
SC	Candidate for listing status review
PS	Priority species, non-listed but vulnerable
PH	Priority habitat
P1, P2, P3	Priority 1, Priority 2, and Priority 3 (plants)

**Property or Work Site**

For each species listed, indicate the property or work sites where each species occurs. Work sites may be identified by either a geographic boundary or by an ecologic function, such as habitat type or topography (riparian area, hillside, etc.). For landscape level projects, indicate which species occur within each of the identified work sites.

**Example Table-Species and Communities with Special Status**

<b>Species, Community or Habitat Type</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Property or Work Site: Indicate All That Apply</b>
Douglas Fir/Western Hemlock/Sword Fern Community	Present	P 2	Washington Natural Heritage Program	Property A and B, work site 1
Brown Pelican	Foraging, resting	FE, SE	Priority Habitat and Species Program	Property A and C, work site 1
Thompson's Clover	Unknown	P 2	Washington Natural Heritage Program	Property A, B, and C, work site 1
Chinook Salmon	Rearing	FE	National Marine Fisheries Service; SSHIAP*	Property A, C, and E, work site 1
Western Pond Turtle	Year-round resident	FSC, SE	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; John Smith field survey April 2010	Property D and E, work site 2
Riparian Area	Present	PH	Priority Habitat and Species Program	All properties, all work sites

\*SSHIAP=Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Program (Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)

A downloadable [table](#) is available on the RCO website.