

## 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>100</sup>

### Natural Areas Category Evaluation Criteria Summary

Criteria	Evaluation Elements	Points
<b>Unscored</b>		
Project Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope</li> <li>• Project goals and objectives</li> <li>• Location maps</li> </ul>	
<b>Scored by Advisory Committee</b>		
1. Program Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscape significance</li> <li>• Native ecosystems</li> <li>• Special status species</li> <li>• Landscape features</li> </ul>	25
2. Science and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	5
3. Manageability and Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threat</li> <li>• Restoration and management</li> <li>• Stewardship</li> <li>• Nearby lands</li> <li>• Conservation easement</li> <li>• Regulatory protections</li> </ul>	10
4. Partnerships and Community Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> </ul>	5
5. Public Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Resource uses</li> <li>• Ecosystem services</li> </ul>	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>

<sup>100</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.010(6)

## Detailed Scoring Criteria for Natural Areas Category

**Project Introduction.** Set the stage for the project and orient evaluators to the project site. This introduction should include the following:

- **Scope.** The type of acquisition, number of acres, any proposed development, and connection to past or future phases if applicable.
- **Goals and Objectives.** A brief overview of the project's goals, objectives, target ecosystems,<sup>101</sup> species, and/or landscapes, as well as environmental benefits.
- **Location Maps.** Statewide and vicinity maps, as well as site maps that demonstrate how the project is connected to other important landscapes and show nearby sites with similar habitat components.

▲ Project introduction is not scored

### 1. Program Priority<sup>102</sup>

What features make this a priority site for protection as a natural area? How is this need demonstrated through current plans, such as the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, and other analyses or prioritization efforts?<sup>103</sup> A complete response should address the following as applicable:

- **Landscape Significance.** The uniqueness and significance of the site in the broader landscape, watershed, or statewide picture, and its importance for overall ecosystem function and impact to other project phases.
- **Native Ecosystems.** The presence of ecologically intact, functional native ecosystems on the site, and the extent to which these ecosystems are unique and prioritized for conservation at local,

<sup>101</sup>Ecosystem is defined as a community of organisms that share the same ecological space on the landscape. An ecosystem is a result of the interactions between biotic (organisms) relationships and abiotic processes and disturbances. The ecosystem concept does not have a fixed scale in its general usage and has been used to characterize areas that vary in size from an individual stand of trees to large landscapes.

<sup>102</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (5)(a)(v, vii, viii, ix, xi, xv, xiv, xvi)

<sup>103</sup>Examples include the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, *Priority Habitat and Species*, *State Wildlife Action Plan*, *Puget Sound Action Agenda*, local land-use plan, local comprehensive plan, local shoreline master plan, watershed plan, statewide recreation or resource plan, habitat conservation plan, species recovery plan, limiting factors or critical pathways analysis, other coordinated regionwide prioritization effort.

state, national, and global levels.

- **Special Status Species.** How the proposed project supports native biodiversity by protecting populations of special status plant and animal species, or by integrating with recovery efforts for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species.
- **Landscape Features.** The presence of rare or vanishing geological or historical landscape features of public interest (lava tubes, inland dunes, waterfalls, fossil sites, coulees, etc.).

▲ Point Range: 0-10 points, which are multiplied later by two and a half

## 2. Science and Education

To what extent does the site provide significant scientific and educational opportunities, and how likely are these opportunities to come to fruition? A complete response should address the following, as applicable:

- **Science.** How the proposed project would directly support a documented research need in a management plan, thesis, or scientific journal related to the ecosystems, landscape features, or species at the site.
- **Education.** How the proposed project would directly support youth education through an existing or planned partnership or secure a unique and accessible opportunity for public appreciation of natural history.

▲ Point Range: 0-5 points

## 3. Manageability and Viability<sup>104</sup>

To what extent can the site be managed to protect the target ecosystems, species, and/or landscape features long-term and why is it important to secure it now? A complete response should address the following:

- **Threat.** How protection will address threats to the site (i.e., inherent, ecological, human, conversion, abatable or non-abatable threats).

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<sup>104</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (5)(a)(ii, iv, vi, x, xii)

- **Restoration and Management.** Planned near-term restoration or management to support desired ecosystem and habitat function and how they will be funded.
- **Stewardship.** The stewardship program for the site (annual maintenance and operations, noxious weed and invasive species control, site monitoring, etc.) and how they will be funded.
- **Nearby Lands.** How nearby protected lands (public and private) will help support efficient and effective management and stewardship of the site.
- **Conservation Easement.** Whether a conservation easement provides an appropriate level of protection for this habitat, and if not used, explain why.
- **Regulatory Protections.** Regulatory protections already afforded the site (critical areas ordinances, zoning, development regulations, shoreline management rules, forest practice rules, habitat conservation plans, etc.).

▲ Point Range: 0-10 points, which are multiplied later by one and a half

#### 4. Partnerships and Community Support<sup>105</sup>

To what degree do the community (local residents, local organizations, local governments and elected officials, or others) and Tribal governments support and benefit from the project? A complete response should address the following:

- **Engagement.** Which people most impacted by the project were engaged, how they were engaged, and how local input influenced the project scope and approach.
- **Partnerships.** Any partnerships that are supporting the project through financial, in-kind, project delivery, or other means, and the significance of the partnerships in the local community or region.

▲ Point Range: 0-5 points

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<sup>105</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (5)(a)(iii)

## 5. Public Benefits<sup>106</sup>

What additional public benefits will the site provide when protected as a natural area? A complete response should address the following as applicable:

- **Recreation.** How recreational uses will be managed, the quality of the recreational experience, and an evidence-based explanation of compatibility with the conservation objectives of the project.
- **Resource Uses.** Resource uses or management practices compatible with the conservation objectives of the project that provide the ability to achieve additional conservation benefits.
- **Ecosystem Services.** Ecosystem services such as aquifer recharge, flood control, or habitat benefits for the feeding, nesting, and reproduction of pollinators.

▲ Point Range: 0-5 points

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<sup>106</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (5)(a)(i, xiv, xvii)