



**WILDLIFE HABITAT**  
for development proposals in  
**UNINCORPORATED KING COUNTY**

The regulations described in this fact sheet are effective as of January 1, 2005.

**BACKGROUND**

The Growth Management Act requires King County and other counties and cities to designate and protect Critical Areas, including Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas. The [King County Comprehensive Plan](#) addresses this requirement through policies that require the County to protect certain species. See, [King County Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 4, Policies E-165 through E-179](#).

Aquatic species are generally protected through application of King County's existing and proposed regulations for streams, wetlands, and marine shorelines. The Critical Areas Ordinance, approved by the Metropolitan King County Council on October 25, 2004, provides similar protections for terrestrial species such as birds and mammals.

**WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION AREAS**

The Critical Areas Ordinance requires the protection of breeding sites for all species that King County is required to protect under the Comprehensive Plan. These areas are called Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas. For ten terrestrial species that are most commonly encountered during review of proposed developments in unincorporated King County, the ordinance package includes specific standards to protect their nesting sites or breeding areas. These species include: Bald Eagle, Great Blue Herron, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Townsend's Big Eared Bat, Vaux's Swift, Red-tailed hawk, and the Goshawk.

For other species that the Comprehensive Plan requires King County to protect, if the breeding site of the species is discovered during project review, the department will establish appropriate protection standards based on management guidelines published by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

King County Comprehensive Plan also encourages the County to protect other species. For those species, the Critical Areas Ordinance requires the breeding site to be protected while it is occupied.

Some animal species have adapted to more intense development. For example, a Great Blue Heron colony may be located close to an existing subdivision and the colony may be adapted to the activity of that subdivision. In these circumstances, the applicant for a new development may be able to show that the species have adapted to a developed environment and that a smaller protection area is acceptable.

### **WILDLIFE HABITAT NETWORKS**

Wildlife habitat networks are made of natural vegetation linking wildlife habitat with critical areas, their buffers, priority habitats, trails, parks or open space. These networks provide for wildlife movement and alleviate the effects of habitat fragmentation.

[King County Comprehensive Plan](#) policies require the designation and mapping of habitat networks for threatened, endangered, and priority species. A map of potential linkages is included in the Comprehensive Plan. See, Wildlife Habitat Network and Public Ownership 2000 Map. Proposed subdivisions, short plats, and development on lots created prior to 1995 that are along the designated wildlife habitat corridor must place the area of the corridor that crosses the property in a separate tract or a conservation easement. The corridor should be 300 feet wide, although it may be reduced to 150 feet where necessary.

Within designated wildlife habitat networks, recreation, forestry, and other uses that are compatible with preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat value of the corridor are allowed. The activities must be developed through an approved management plan, however.

### **ALLOWED USES WITHIN WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION AREAS**

Many of the activities allowed in other critical areas are also allowed within Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas. In most cases, there are seasonal restrictions on some activities that may disturb active nests. Allowed uses include:

- Maintenance activities;
- Utilities, if another location is not available;
- Surface water discharge from an appropriate facility;
- Public and private trails;
- Crossings under limited circumstances;
- Enhancement and restoration activities;
- Cutting limited amounts of timber for firewood and clearing brush to enhance tree growth; and
- Reconstruction, remodeling, or replacement of a legal structure with conditions.

**Agriculture and Rural Residential Property.** The Critical Areas Ordinance provides alternative ways for rural property owners to protect wildlife habitat conservation areas. For new or expanded agricultural activities, a farm plan is required to expand into what would otherwise be a wildlife habitat conservation area. See the [Agriculture Fact Sheet](#) for more information. Rural residential property owners who prepare a Rural Stewardship Plan may be able to modify the wildlife habitat conservation area requirements. (See the Rural Stewardship Plan Fact Sheet for more information).

To learn more, access the following Web site:

<http://www.metrokc.gov/ddes/cao>