

May 6, 2026
Thurston County Planning
Commission

CAO Update: Terrestrial Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas BAS and Concepts

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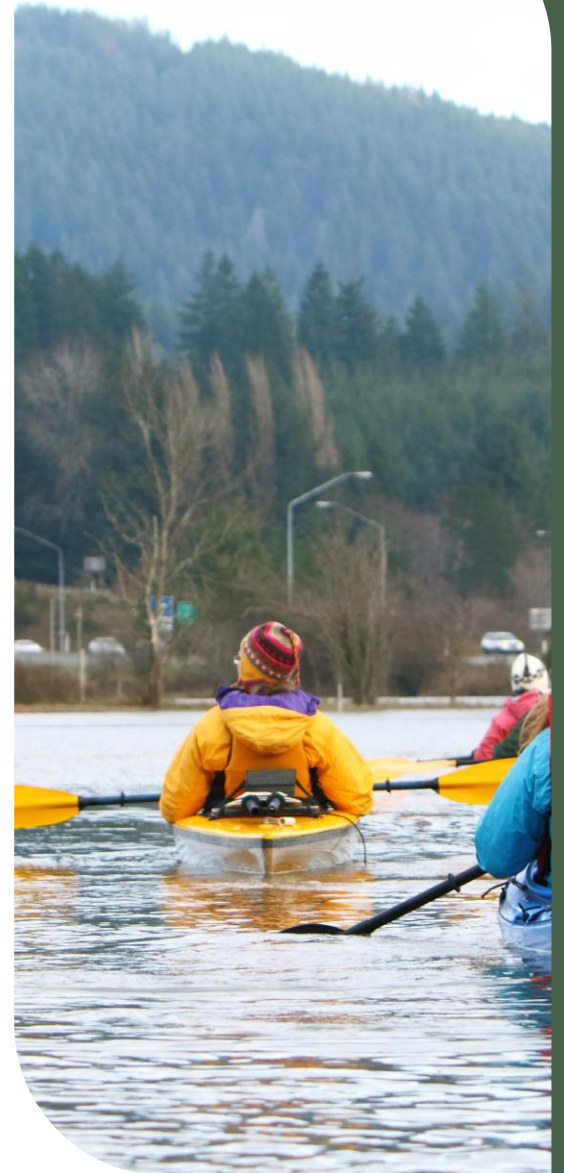


Presentation Outline

- Introduction and Definition
- Functions and Values
- Climate Change
- Protection Strategies
- Discussion



2 Intro



FWHCAs Definition – WAC 365-190-030

"Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas" are areas that serve a critical role in sustaining needed habitats and species for the functional integrity of the ecosystem, and which, if altered, may reduce the likelihood that the species will persist over the long term. These areas may include, but are not limited to, rare or vulnerable ecological systems, communities, and habitat or habitat elements including seasonal ranges, breeding habitat, winter range, and movement corridors; and areas with high relative population density or species richness. Counties and cities may also designate locally important habitats and species."

"Habitats of local importance" designated as fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas include those areas found to be locally important by counties and cities.

"Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas" does not include such artificial features or constructs as irrigation delivery systems, irrigation infrastructure, irrigation canals, or drainage ditches that lie within the boundaries of, and are maintained by, a port district or an irrigation district or company.



State-Listed Terrestrial Habitats

- Aspen Stands
- Biodiversity areas and corridors
- Herbaceous Balds
- Old Growth/Mature Forest
- Oregon White Oak Woodlands
- West Side Prairie
- Caves
- Cliffs
- Snags and logs
- Talus



Additional Habitats of Local Importance

- Oregon White Oak Savannahs, stands, or individual trees with particular habitat value
- Cottonwood floodplains
- Springs and seeps

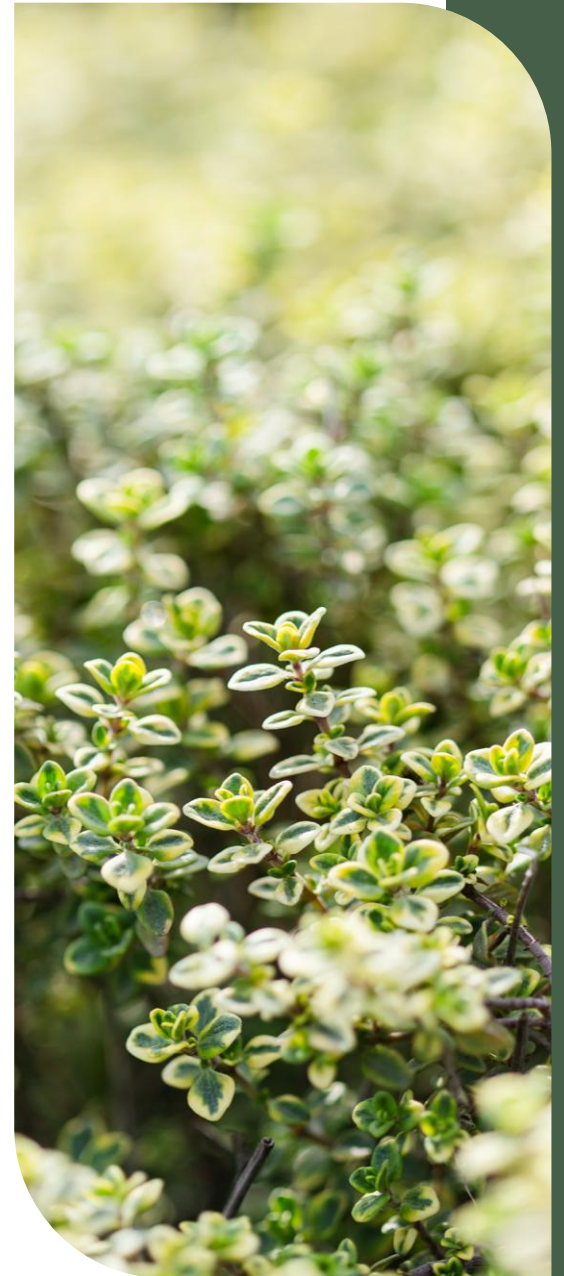


Functions and Values

- Each habitat type has specific values
- Listed habitats generally provide:
 - Shelter or refuge
 - Food
 - Breeding or nesting areas
 - Water quality
 - Shade



6 Functions and Values



Protected Species

- Most terrestrial state- or county-listed species in Thurston Co. rely on prairie habitat or mature forests
- CAO covers Class IV forestry and COHP in tandem with the Forest Lands Conversion Ordinance
 - See also: State Fire Practice Rules and Forest Practices Habitat Conservation Plan



7 Functions and Values

Protected Species

- Many rare or threatened species rely on prairie habitat
 - 3/4 HCP species are prairie species
- Prairie is a state-listed habitat, and prairies have been lost as a result of colonization, land use changes, and human development in the region
- Doug fir forests have encroached prairies, in part due to loss of indigenous controlled burning practices



8 Functions and Values

Climate Change and Human Impact

- Many protected species have become threatened or endangered due to habitat loss
- Trees and forests are younger now due to massive harvesting by early European settlers
- Prairies maintained from time immemorial have been encroached by Doug Fir-dominant forests with the loss of indigenous management practices
- Biodiverse habitat has been lost to monoculture lawns and impervious surfaces
- Connectivity has been disrupted by development and infrastructure

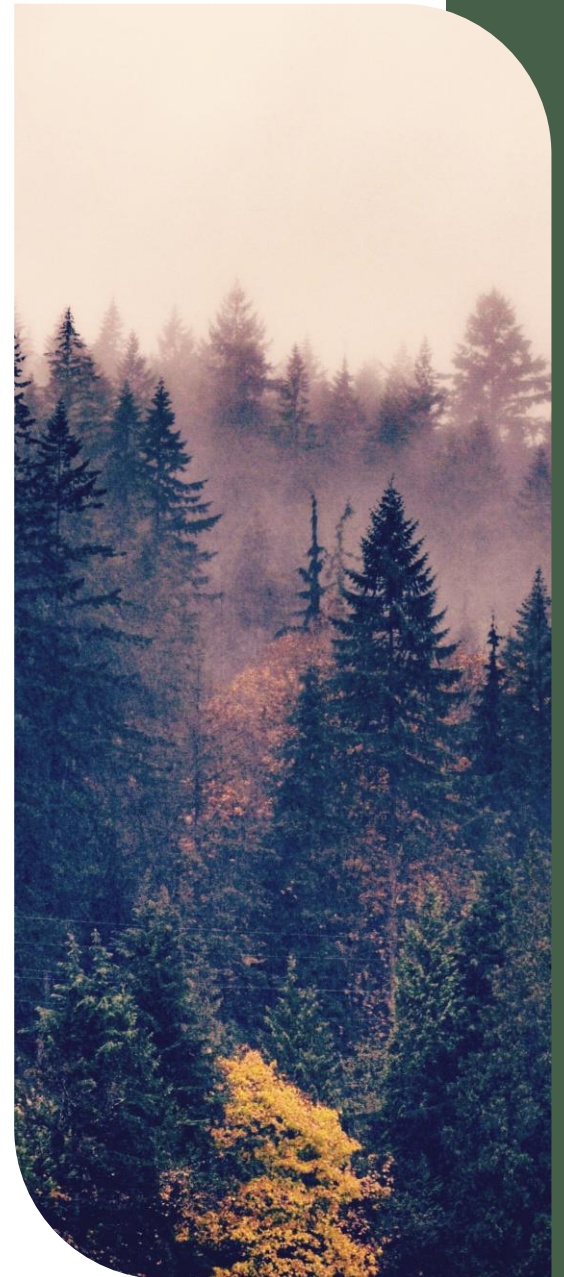


Protection Strategies

- Vary for each species or habitat
- Generally follows framework:
 - Designate and screen
 - Verify and delineate
 - Prescribe protections (following mitigation sequencing)
- Consider performance standards, minimization options, and conservation incentives



10 Protection Strategies



Discussion

- Should the county designate any additional species or habitats of local importance?
 - Mima mounds?
- How could we incentivise protection?
- What process steps could ease administrative burdens, both for staff and applicants?





4/1/26	Wetlands
4/15/26	Wetland and Hydrologic FWHCAs
5/6/26	Dryland Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas
5/20/26	Presentation on SMP and HCP integration
6/3/26	Invite DFW to present on FWHCAs
6/17/26	GHA Gap Analysis and Feedback Incorporation
7/1/26	CARA Gap Analysis and Feedback Incorporation
7/15/26	FFA Gap Analysis and Feedback Incorporation
8/5/26	Wetland Gap Analysis and Feedback Incorporation
8/19/26	FWHCA Gap Analysis and Feedback Incorporation
9/2/26	Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands code presentation
9/16/26	Revisit Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands
October 2026	Final review, public hearing, and recommendation

“Permit Processes” will also include other general standards chapters like definitions and nonconforming structures

Schedule

Questions and Comments

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Find future project updates at ThurstonCriticalAreas.org.

