



SOUND
NATIVE
PLANTS

Priority Species

The statewide Growth Management Act guides planning and development in Washington state. This act requires local jurisdictions to protect priority habitats and species determined by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). A set of these regulations is usually called a Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO). WDFW identifies priority species based upon population status and response to disturbance. The Priority Species List includes all state threatened, endangered, sensitive and candidate species and species of commercial, tribal or recreational importance that have the potential to decline.

A full list of the WDFW priority habitats and species is available at wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phslist.htm. High profile priority species include the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), bald eagle (*Columba facia*) and Western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), as well as salmon species. Other animal species include cavity nesting ducks, the great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) and the spotted frog (*Rana pretiosa*). These lists do not include specific plants at this time.

CAOs protect specific habitat types and areas by regulating and limiting impacts in order to maintain sustainable populations of important or priority species that occur within each jurisdiction. CAOs may also adopt a policy of non-regulatory action whenever possible, promoting habitat protection through public education and conservation easements. Many CAOs formally adopt WDFW-developed management recommendations for priority species (available at wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phsrecs.htm). See our Priority Habitats information sheet for more information on CAO regulations and restrictions on actions performed on private lands. In general, protecting rare animals necessitates protecting habitat; therefore the regulations usually protect the state-listed associated plant communities.

The federal Endangered Species Act protects federally listed plant and animal species, but there is no similar protection for state-listed plant species. Washington's Growth Management Act authorizes local governments to protect "fish and wildlife habitat", but local jurisdictions have been slow to enact protections for specific plants. The WA Natural Heritage Program (WNHP), a branch of the WA Department of Natural Resources, was established in 1982 to monitor struggling plant and animal populations and make recommendations to ensure their conservation. The WNHP maintains an excellent website (www.dnr.wa.gov/nhp/index.html) compiling rare plant and animal lists, plant association descriptions, and the latest edition of the Natural Heritage Plan. Golden paintbrush (*Castilleja levisecta*), frigid shootingstar (*Dodecatheon austrofrigidium*), and pale larkspur (*Delphinium leucophaeum*) are examples of species currently of highest priority to conserve and protect. Other species include small-flowered trillium (*Trillium parviflorum*) and white-top aster (*Aster curtus*).

At present the onus of responsibility for protecting Washington's rare and special plant species falls on the property owner. In certain situations, a local regulatory agency may require conservation measures for particular species, necessitating a vegetation survey and potentially limiting impacts. In any event, good land stewardship practices such as limiting disturbance, controlling exotic and invasive weeds and planting native plants whenever possible goes a long way to safeguard habitat for both plant and animal priority species.

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