



# WILDLIFE HABITAT AND SPECIES LISTINGS

Updated June 21, 2012

## A 2012 CRITICAL AREAS UPDATE FACT SHEET

### WILDLIFE HABITAT IN THURSTON COUNTY

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Thurston County's forested uplands, beaches, and nearshore waters are nurseries, refuges and feeding areas for countless species. Each species is part of our complex and delicately balanced ecosystem; the endangerment or loss of a species can set off a chain reaction affecting many other areas of the ecosystem.

The Washington State Growth Management Act requires Thurston County to protect habitat areas needed by threatened or endangered plant and animal species, or species that are candidates for listing under those definitions. Sometimes it is the habitat itself that is in crisis.

Plant and animal species as well as rare habitats are identified by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other state and federal agencies. Much of the information provided by these agencies has changed since Thurston County's existing Critical Areas Ordinance was adopted in 1994. In 2009, for example, Thurston County enacted an interim ordinance to protect prairie and Oregon white oak habitat for prairie-dependent

species that are candidates for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act or that have already been added to the federal and state lists of endangered or threatened species.

Many local governments – Thurston County among them – also identify and protect species of local importance through their critical areas ordinances, with the goal of protecting the species before they end up on a threatened or endangered species list. Once species and habitats are listed by the state and federal governments, more restrictive regulations are often placed on local governments and their residents.



A list of species and habitats addressed in potential Critical Areas Ordinance amendments will be available on the Thurston County Planning Department's website: [www.ThurstonPlanning.org](http://www.ThurstonPlanning.org) (click the "Critical Areas Update" link).

### IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

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- The potential amendments would add new species and habitats to be protected. Many updated provisions are already in effect for prairie habitat under an interim ordinance that was passed by the Thurston County Board of Commissioners in 2009 (Ordinance No. 14260), and which was renewed in 2010 (Ordinance No. 14380). For a companion fact sheet on this subject, visit [www.ThurstonPlanning.org](http://www.ThurstonPlanning.org) and click the "Critical Areas Update link."
- Under the existing Critical Areas Ordinance, a property owner who wishes to develop land that contains an important habitat may need to provide a habitat management plan during the land-use review/permitting process. The same requirement may be applied to those who wish to develop land within 600 feet from the point location of an important species, even if that location is on another property. These requirements are not proposed to change.

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

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Buffers are established on a case-by-case basis according to the habitat management plan or critical area report, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) management recommendations for Washington's priority habitats and species, and consultation with WDFW or others with expertise.

## BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE

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- The potential amendments are based on scientific information that is already deemed Best Available Science by the state and federal governments, Growth Management Hearings boards, courts, and other western Washington counties. A list of sources is posted on the "Critical Areas Update" link of [www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org).

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