

HABITAT CONSERVATION AREAS & MIGRATION CORRIDORS

Why are habitat conservation areas & migration corridors being protected?

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (Habitat Conservation Areas) are managed to maintain populations of species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distribution to ensure that the habitat available is sufficient to support viable populations. Habitat Conservation Areas are one of the five types of critical areas that are required to be protected under the Growth Management Act (GMA).¹

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Corridors (Habitat Corridors) provide vital connections between habitat areas, which prevent the isolation of subpopulations of animals.

What is protected within habitat conservation areas & migration corridors?

Habitat Conservation Areas are designated to protect important habitats, especially for species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since habitats are located in and around various wetlands, streams, and lakes, areas that provide safe passage from one habitat to another are essential for animal populations to maintain a healthy genetic diversity and meet all their life cycle needs. Connections between aquatic and terrestrial habitats are particularly important.

How are habitat conservation areas & migration corridors defined?

Habitat Conservation Areas are defined as critical habitats for species that are federally and/or state-listed as endangered, threatened, or sensitive. These also include wetlands, streams and lakes, state natural area preserves, natural areas managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and fish and wildlife habitat corridors.²

Habitat corridors are areas that connect habitats on development sites that have highly rated streams or wetlands within 200 feet of each other.³

How are habitat conservation areas & migration corridors currently protected?

Habitat Conservation Areas and associated habitat corridors are managed in the City of Sammamish with development standards. A critical areas study and habitat management plan consistent with the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s guidance is required when a protected habitat or species are identified on or near a project site. Management measures may include buffers, seasonal restrictions, habitat corridor or conservation area establishment, and retention of habitat features, such as snags and large woody debris.⁴

¹ [RCW 36.70A.030\(11\)](#)

² [SMC 21.04.040.B.134](#)

³ [SMC 21.04.040.B.135](#)

⁴ [SMC 21.03.020.Z](#)

Using Best Science Available (BSA), how should habitat conservation areas & migration corridors be protected?

To protect species and habitats present in the city, the Habitat Conservation Area definition could be expanded to include a City-specific list of species and habitats of local importance. The Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) list includes habitats and species that are considered vulnerable and of local importance within Washington State. Climate change resiliency can be improved by broadening Habitat Conservation Area management to include species of local importance within Sammamish. Adopting a list of habitats and species of local importance would be consistent with the definition of Habitat Conservation Area under state law.⁵

Additionally, habitat within areas that are potential corridors should be enhanced to fill gaps, allowing for safer passage of animals. The City could adopt policies as part of the Comprehensive Plan update to acquire property or easements to maintain and improve corridors.

How are habitat conservation areas & migration corridors currently identified in the field, as well as on a map?

The City does not currently provide maps of Habitat Conservation Areas or habitat corridors in their GIS mapping tool or published critical area maps. Best professional practices include reviewing other online data sources, such as PHS on the Web and King County iMap, to determine if an Endangered Species Act (ESA) -listed species is likely to occur on or near a study site. A qualified professional then field-verifies the presence or absence of ESA-listed species. Sites with wetlands and streams are also reviewed for the potential presence of a wildlife habitat corridor as defined under the City code. These assessments and findings are typically reported in a project-specific critical areas report and if warranted, a habitat management plan.

Using BSA, how should habitat conservation areas & migration corridors be identified in the field and on a map?

The City’s current definition of fish and wildlife habitat corridors is limited to high-quality habitats with specific characteristics. This definition is considered too constrained and does not support landscape-scale planning for migration corridors through an urban environment.

Some best management practices recommended for urban areas are to minimize the intensity of human activities within a corridor, maintain and re-create natural connections, buffer human land uses, provide wildlife crossings at barriers, and encourage community stewardship.⁶ Both habitat areas and corridors should be identified by the presence of habitat-specific features.

The City could use mapping and identification of existing and potential habitat corridors to aid in the planning and management of proposed development projects. This could be achieved through spatial modeling inventories and expert review. Once established, these corridors could be added to the City's interactive GIS tool for ease of use. Maps should be advisory only.

⁵ [WAC 365-190-030\(6\)](#)

⁶ Gregory, A., Spense, E.; Beier, P.; Garding, E. 2021. Toward Best Management Practices for Ecological Corridors. *Land* 2021, 10:140. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10020140>

How would a habitat conservation areas & migration corridor map be updated?

Parcel-specific Habitat Conservation Area studies are typically kept on file with the corresponding permit application. The City does not currently publish maps for Habitat Conservation Areas or habitat corridors.

If the City does issue maps for Habitat Conservation Areas and habitat corridors in the future, these maps should be advisory only. GIS data should include a buffered area around streams, wetlands, and other identified habitat areas, with potential areas of connection to create an advisory map.

Who would be responsible for updating the map for habitat conservation areas & migration corridors?

Habitat corridor maps would be the result of a spatial analysis and would be considered advisory only. If the City issues maps for these critical areas, updates may be completed periodically or reviewed during mandated critical area ordinance updates.

**Summary of Habitat Conservation Areas & Migration Corridors
Changes Being Considered**

CATEGORY 1 – No Action Needed; Changes Integrated into Draft Code Amendments

Changes required by the Growth Management Act, clarifications, and other minor changes.

- Consider including a definition for Habitat Conservation Areas consistent with the WAC definition.
- Include definitions for Habitat Corridor and its features.
- Review and edit the code section for clarity.

CATEGORY 2 - Requires Planning Commission & City Council Direction for Code Amendment Integration

Changes don't impact the project timeline, require additional budget, or require further policy/impact analysis.

- Consider including specific designation criteria that list the types of areas designated as Habitat Conservation Areas. The list of designation areas should be prepared based on the list in [WAC 365-190-130.2](#) to ensure all intended areas are included.
- Consider developing a list of species and habitats of local importance.
- As a strategy to manage climate change impacts on Habitat Conservation Areas, it is recommended to consider updating and maintaining regulations for habitats and species of local importance.
- Recommend revising the definition of fish and wildlife habitat corridor to be more inclusive and support landscape-scale planning.

- Provide regulations for tree removal in relation to the Migratory Bird Act and include additional considerations for nesting restrictions.
- Review and revise regulations for Habitat Conservation Area buffers and provide additional standards for best management practices of activities near and adjacent to Habitat Conservation Areas (e.g., lighting, fencing).
- Review and revise regulations to improve protection of habitat corridors.
- Consider language to regulate the creation of or protection of corridors between various types of habitats. Include properties with or near migration habitat/corridor and/or features that must be protected or maintained.
- Consider how to allow development without losing function through preservation/enhancement of vegetation, habitat features, and forested areas; buffering; limitation on encroachments and light glare; installation of split-rail fencing
- Consider how corridor boundaries could be modified to encourage connectivity

CATEGORY 3 - Requires Planning Commission & City Council Direction for Future Workplans

Changes may impact stakeholders and/or require additional budget and staff time.

- Consider providing mapping resources to help identify the locations of potential habitats and species requiring protection and management. The City may invest in a mapping assessment to identify existing and potential habitat corridors to aid in the planning and management of proposed development projects. This could be achieved through spatial modeling inventories and expert review.
- If created, habitat corridor maps could be added to the City's interactive GIS tool for ease of use. Maps should be advisory only.
- Provide additional maps or GIS layers to illustrate the relationship between the movement of wildlife and locations of habitat.