DIRECTOR'S INTERPRETATION: HABITAT ASSESSMENT TOOLS

City of Sammamish
Community Development
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REQUEST SUMMARY

How will the City of Sammamish use the Functional Assessment Model (FAM) and Habitat Corridor Advisory Map in reviewing development applications under the City's existing critical areas regulations?

Specifically, how will these tools be used to identify potential habitat resources, determine when additional habitat assessment may be necessary, and evaluate potential development impacts on fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas and corridors?

INTERPRETATION

The City will utilize the Habitat Corridor Advisory Map as an administrative screening tool during development permit to identify potential habitat resources and connections that may warrant additional site-specific evaluation. The map will inform staff's determination of whether additional habitat information is necessary based on the location and characteristics of a property, the proposed development activity, and applicable critical areas regulations. The map is advisory and does not independently establish regulated critical areas, habitat corridors, development restrictions, or required buffers.

Where a habitat assessment is required under SMC 21.03.020, the Functional Assessment Model (FAM) will be used to inform the evaluation of habitat functions and potential development impacts. The FAM provides a standardized method for documenting habitat characteristics and landscape connectivity. A qualified professional, as defined under SMC 21.04.040.B, must interpret the assessment results in conjunction with site-specific observations, species-specific information, and professional judgment. Numerical scores generated by the FAM provide supporting information and do not independently establish regulatory thresholds or determine the presence of regulated habitat conservation areas.

Information developed through these tools will inform the City's review of proposed development, including the evaluation of impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures and, where applicable, habitat management plans. Determinations regarding regulated habitat areas, buffers, development standards, and mitigation requirements will continue to be based on site-specific findings and the applicable provisions of SMC 21.03.020. Neither tool establishes new development regulations or modifies existing critical areas protections.

Related Code References

SMC 21.03.020

SMC 21.030.20.I

SMC 21.03.020.W

SMC 21.04.040.B

Resources

Sammamish Municipal Code

Questions?

Submit Project Guidance

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David Pyle

David Pyle, Director of Community Development

CONTEXT, FACTS, AND FINDINGS

SMC 21.01.070 authorizes the Director to interpret the City's development regulations, including provisions governing environmentally critical areas. SMC 21.04.040.B defines Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas and Fish and Wildlife Habitat Corridors, while SMC 21.03.020.W establishes requirements for their designation and protection, including habitats of local importance and qualifying habitat corridors. SMC 21.03.020.I authorizes the City to determine when critical areas reports are necessary and to establish their scope based on potential impacts. Additionally, SMC 21.03.020.W.2 provides authority to require habitat-related reporting and habitat management plans when warranted by habitat conditions, species, or proposed development. Together, these provisions establish the regulatory framework for requiring and evaluating habitat assessments during development review.

On April 14, 2026, the City Council directed staff to proceed with the development of an advisory habitat corridor map and additional administrative tools to improve the identification and evaluation of habitat resources. In response, the City worked with FACET NW to develop the Habitat Corridor Advisory Map and establish a methodology for using the Bellevue Urban Wildlife Habitat Functional Assessment Model (FAM). These tools are supported by existing scientific research, the City's 2023 best available science and existing conditions reports, and FACET's September 28, 2026, technical memorandum. Their implementation is intended to improve consistency and effectiveness in applying existing critical areas regulations without establishing new regulatory requirements.

The Habitat Corridor Advisory Map was developed using land-cover data, aerial imagery, available spatial information, local knowledge, and professional review. It identifies core habitat areas, potential wildlife corridors, and associated review areas, including a 200-foot screening area around preliminary corridor alignments. The FAM provides a standardized, scientifically informed method for documenting habitat functions and evaluating potential development impacts. The model considers landscape connectivity, habitat patch characteristics, native vegetation, structural diversity, water sources, and other habitat features.

Properties within or near mapped habitats or corridors, properties containing or adjacent to designated habitat conservation areas, and properties with 50 percent or less impervious surface coverage may

warrant particular consideration. These factors inform staff's determination of whether additional assessment is necessary but do not independently establish regulated critical areas, buffers, or mandatory assessment requirements. Where a habitat assessment is required, the FAM provides supporting information for evaluation by a qualified professional, who must consider site-specific conditions, species-specific information, and field observations. The model's numerical scores do not independently determine regulatory applicability or establish development restrictions. Rather, the assessment informs the City's evaluation of project design, impact avoidance and minimization, and any necessary mitigation or habitat management measures. All regulatory determinations remain subject to the applicable provisions of SMC 21.03.020 and site-specific findings.

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