



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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March 7th, 2024

City of Stevenson Planning
Department 7121 E Loop Road, PO
Box 371 Stevenson, Washington
98648

Re: City of Stevenson Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

Dear Mr. Shumaker:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **the City of Stevenson Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan**. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) reviewed this proposal and offer the following for your consideration.

WDFW commends the City of Stevenson for developing their first Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. We extend our support in adopting this plan, aimed to improve existing parks, trails, and expanding recreational opportunities for the people of Stevenson.

WDFW is supportive of the new park classifications and the recognition that additional habitats are protected under the critical areas ordinance, which may provide additional open space opportunities.

Inventorying existing parks and open spaces, and determining how the land is being utilized, is an important foundational step. It is encouraging to learn that community members have a preference for recreation areas with “views of wildlife, nature, or water” and would like the city to “consider sustainability and impacts on wildlife”. Integrating open space and corridor planning has many public benefits including increased opportunity for positive human-wildlife interactions, and more certainty for the local community where habitats will be protected long term. This aligns with WDFW’s mission: *preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish, wildlife, and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational opportunities*, and elements of this are reflected in this plan.

As goals are achieved during implementation, we hope the city will update this document to identify new goals and objectives. Areas to expand upon are integrating WDFW’s Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) list and habitat enhancement into future iterations of the PROS Plan. WDFW recognizes that PHS is regulated through the local critical areas ordinance, but by

including PHS into the PROS Plan, there is a unique opportunity to strategically plan and consider landscape-level connectivity and function, including habitat connectivity and corridors. Additionally, enhancing existing habitat by increase diversity of abundance of native vegetation will benefit wildlife and potentially increase wildlife viewing opportunities. Below, we expand upon these key considerations.

Habitat Connectivity

Habitat connectivity is critical for maintaining viable populations of plants and animals. Factors to consider for wildlife:

- Keeping large, connected patches of undeveloped native vegetation intact.
- Encouraging and maintaining low zoning densities within and immediately surrounding high-value habitat areas and encouraging maintenance of native vegetation.
- Planning open space to incorporate high-value habitat and corridors for animal movement.

Protecting habitat patches and connecting corridors of undeveloped land, including parks and open spaces, can help species that are locally important to urban communities. The PROS Plan mentions *“incorporating underutilized space, purchasing easements to connect existing parks and trails... and spaces such as underutilized areas, vacant lots, rights-of-ways, and utility corridors that hold significant potential to contribute to the parks and recreation goal”*. **This is a great opportunity to preserve connectivity of habitat areas and identify potential open space corridors.** Planning for open space corridors that are permanently protected from development will help facilitate wildlife movement through an urban landscape.

Planning a corridor

In future iterations of the PROS Plan, we encourage the city to evaluate if the following landscape features can become connected through parks and open space:

- Aquatic features such as streams, wetlands, lakes, marine shorelines and the associated riparian areas.
- Ridgelines.
- Large undeveloped habitat patches and open space areas, including those in public ownership.
- Locations of WDFW’s Priority Habitats and Species (PHS).

Incorporating PHS can lessen adverse impacts to biodiversity and habitat connectivity as land uses change. Considering PHS in strategic plans, such as the PROS Plan, creates opportunities for planners and biologists to work proactively to plan for designated open spaces and corridors to protect and perpetuate habitats that support wildlife on the landscape. **We look forward to working with the City of Stevenson to implement these recommendations into future land use planning efforts.**

Habitat enhancement

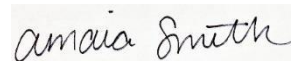
Enhancing existing habitat does not require landscape-level strategic planning and can occur at any stage in this process. We encourage the city to consider existing the habitat within existing parks and open space by increasing habitat complexity to benefit wildlife and increase viewing opportunities. Ways to enhance habitat include:

- Planting a diversity of native species that contribute to wildlife food and shelter resources.
- Adding nest boxes (birds, bats).
- Creating wildlife snags where they are not a risk to recreation or infrastructure.

Additionally, habitat enhancement may create a unique opportunity to partner with local groups and organization who are supporting the implementation of this PROS Plan. As the city implements Goal 1.3 *Facilitate partnerships with other agencies and organizations to share maintenance resources and costs*, we encourage consideration of habitat enhancement opportunities.

WDFW has resource available upon request and welcome additional discussion to explore how wildlife and habitat opportunities can be represented and implemented in the 2024 PROS Plan or future iterations.

Thank you for your consideration,



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