

PHS definitions

PRIORITY HABITAT:

“Priority habitat” is a habitat type with unique or significant value to many species. An area identified and mapped as priority habitat has one or more of the following attributes:

- comparatively high fish and wildlife density
- comparatively high fish and wildlife species diversity
- important fish and wildlife breeding habitat
- important fish and wildlife seasonal ranges
- important fish and wildlife movement corridors
- limited availability
- high vulnerability to habitat alteration
- unique or dependent species

A priority habitat may be described by a unique vegetation type or by a dominant plant species that is of primary importance to fish and wildlife (e.g., oak woodlands, juniper savannah). A priority habitat may also be described by a successional stage (e.g., old growth and mature forests). Alternatively, a priority habitat may consist of a specific habitat features (e.g., talus slopes, caves, snags) of key value to fish and wildlife.

PRIORITY SPECIES:

“Priority species” are fish and wildlife species requiring protective measures and/or management actions to ensure their survival. A species identified and mapped as priority species fit one or more of the following criteria:

Criterion 1. State-Listed and Candidate Species:

State-listed species are native fish and wildlife species legally designated as Endangered (WAC 232-12-014), Threatened (WAC 232-12-011), or Sensitive (WAC 232-12-011). State Candidate species are fish and wildlife species that will be reviewed by the department (POL-M-6001) for possible listing as Endangered, Threatened, or Sensitive according to the process and criteria defined in WAC-232-12-297.

Criterion 2. Vulnerable Aggregations:

Vulnerable aggregations include species or groups of animals susceptible to significant population declines, within a specific area or statewide, by virtue of their inclination to aggregate. Examples include heron rookeries, seabird concentrations, marine mammal haulouts, shellfish beds, and fish spawning and rearing areas.

Criterion 3. Species of Recreational, Commercial, and/or Tribal Importance:

Native and non-native fish and wildlife species of recreational or commercial importance, and recognized species used for tribal ceremonial and subsistence purposes, whose biological or ecological characteristics make them vulnerable to decline in Washington or that are dependent on habitats that are highly vulnerable or are in limited availability.

FEDERAL AND STATE STATUS:

The “federal and state status” describes whether a species is listed by Washington State as a Species of Concern (i.e., endangered, threatened, sensitive, or candidate), and/or is listed by the federal governments under the Endangered Species Act. For the latest Species of Concern List, call (360) 902-2515, or visit <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/endangered/>.

PRIORITY AREA:

Species are often considered a priority only within known limiting habitats (e.g., breeding areas) or within areas that support a relatively high number of individuals (e.g., regular large concentrations). These important areas are identified in the PHS List under the heading *Priority Area*. For example, great blue herons are often found feeding along shorelines, but they are considered a priority only in areas used for breeding (see [Criterion 2](#)). If limiting habitats are not known, or if a species is so rare that any occurrence is important in land use decisions, then the priority area is described as *any occurrence*.

Priority areas are described with the following terms:

- **Any Occurrence:** Applies to a priority species with limiting habitat that is not known or to a species that is so rare that any occurrence is important in a land use decision.
- **Artificial Nesting Feature:** Man-made features used for nesting (e.g., nest box, platform).
- **Breeding Area:** The area necessary to support reproduction and the rearing of young; includes breeding sites and adjacent foraging habitat, and may include a disturbance buffer.
- **Breeding Site:** The immediate area and features associated with producing and rearing young (e.g., nest tree, den). Typically, a breeding site is a point location.
- **Communal Roosts:** Habitat features (e.g., trees, caves, cliffs) that are regularly or traditionally used by a group of animals for resting, hibernation, breeding, or rearing young.
- **Foraging Area:** Feeding areas that are regularly used by an individual or a group of animals.
- **Haulouts:** Areas where marine mammals regularly remove themselves from the water for resting.
- **Lek:** An assembly area where sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse engage in courtship behavior.
- **Migration Corridors:** Areas regularly or traditionally used by animals as travel routes between seasonal ranges.
- **Occurrence:** Fish and wildlife observation from a source deemed reliable by WDFW biologists. An occurrence may represent an observation of an individual animal or a group of animals.
- **Regular Concentration:** Areas that are commonly or traditionally used by a group of animals on a seasonal or year-round basis.
- **Regular Occurrence:** Areas or features (e.g., trees, cliffs) that are commonly or traditionally used on a seasonal or year-round basis by species that do not typically occur in groups.
- **Regularly Used Perches:** Habitat features (e.g., trees, cliffs) that are regularly or traditionally used by the priority bird species for perching.

WASHINGTON DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTY:

Within each priority species and habitat description, a map is included showing where individual priority habitats and species are distributed on a county-by-county scale. It is possible for a species or habitat to be considered a priority only within certain parts of its Washington range. For example, a species may be found throughout Washington but breeds only in eastern Washington. If the priority

area for this species is only its breeding area, then the western Washington portion of its range would not be included in the map depicting the species' distribution.

Maps showing species and habitat distribution in this list were developed using pertinent sources of information including published maps, locational datasets, models (e.g., GAP vertebrate distribution maps) as well as expert opinion. Distribution maps for species show counties where each priority species is known to occur as well as counties where the likelihood is high that the species could be present where suitable habitat exists, recognizing that species may naturally change their distribution over time. Although each map represents the best information available at the time they were developed, species and habitats not identified on these distribution maps may still occur in other counties. Major sources that were used to develop distribution maps for priority habitats and species include:

- * *An Atlas of Washington Butterflies*, The Evergreen Aurelians
- * *Birds of Washington*, Oregon State University Press
- * *Game Status and Trend Report*, WDFW
- * GAP and REGAP vertebrate distribution and landcover maps
- * Individual species recovery plans and status reports
- * *Inland Fishes of Washington*, University of Washington Press
- * *Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species*, WDFW
- * Spatial databases administered by WDFW (e.g., Washington Lakes Rivers Information System, Wildlife Survey Data Management)
- * *Washington Herp Atlas*, Washington Natural Heritage Program

Distribution maps for very rare species sometimes include counties where there are no recent records. Rare priority species (e.g., Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Upland Sandpiper) may only be known from a handful of counties, an individual county, or may be presumed extirpated from the state. Given their extreme rarity, these species are often under-surveyed or are difficult to survey. Consequently, it will often be the case that these species will not be documented in a county even if they are present. Given that their distribution often includes places where they have yet to be documented, counties where suitable habitat exists have also been included on the distribution maps in this publication.

Complete county-by-county lists of priority habitats and species can be viewed by going to [Appendix 2](#).