

# Planning for Habitat Connectivity

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Habitat Program



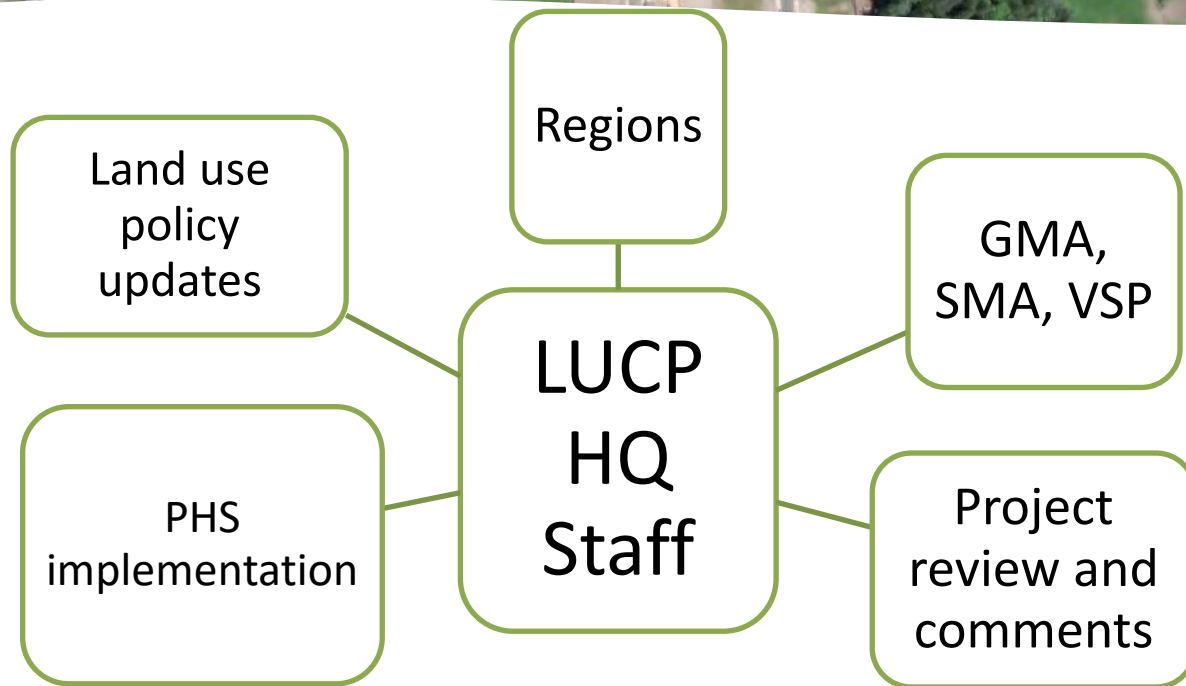
April 1, 2025

# Overview

1. WDFW's Land Use Conservation and Policy Section
2. Planning for Connectivity
3. Existing Resources and Tools



# WDFW Land Use Conservation & Policy Section





# Land Use Planning Conservation Priorities

Priority Habitats  
and Species  
(PHS) Program

Riparian  
Standards and  
Mapping

Salmon  
Recovery

No Net Loss of  
Critical Area  
Functions

Habitat  
Connectivity

Climate  
Resilience



# Why is habitat connectivity important?

- #1 recommendation for climate resilience
- Help meet different land use planning requirements





# How does land use planning help?



# Planning for Connectivity

## Local Policies, Regulations, and Plans

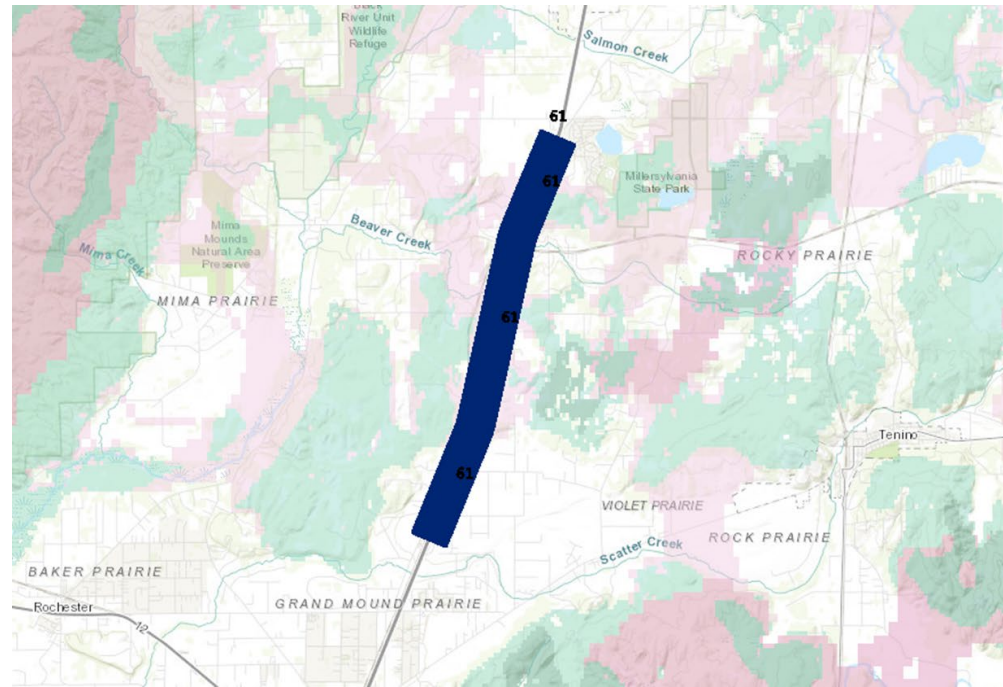
Comprehensive Plans

Zoning & Subdivision Codes

Critical Areas Ordinances

Coordination within and  
between Counties

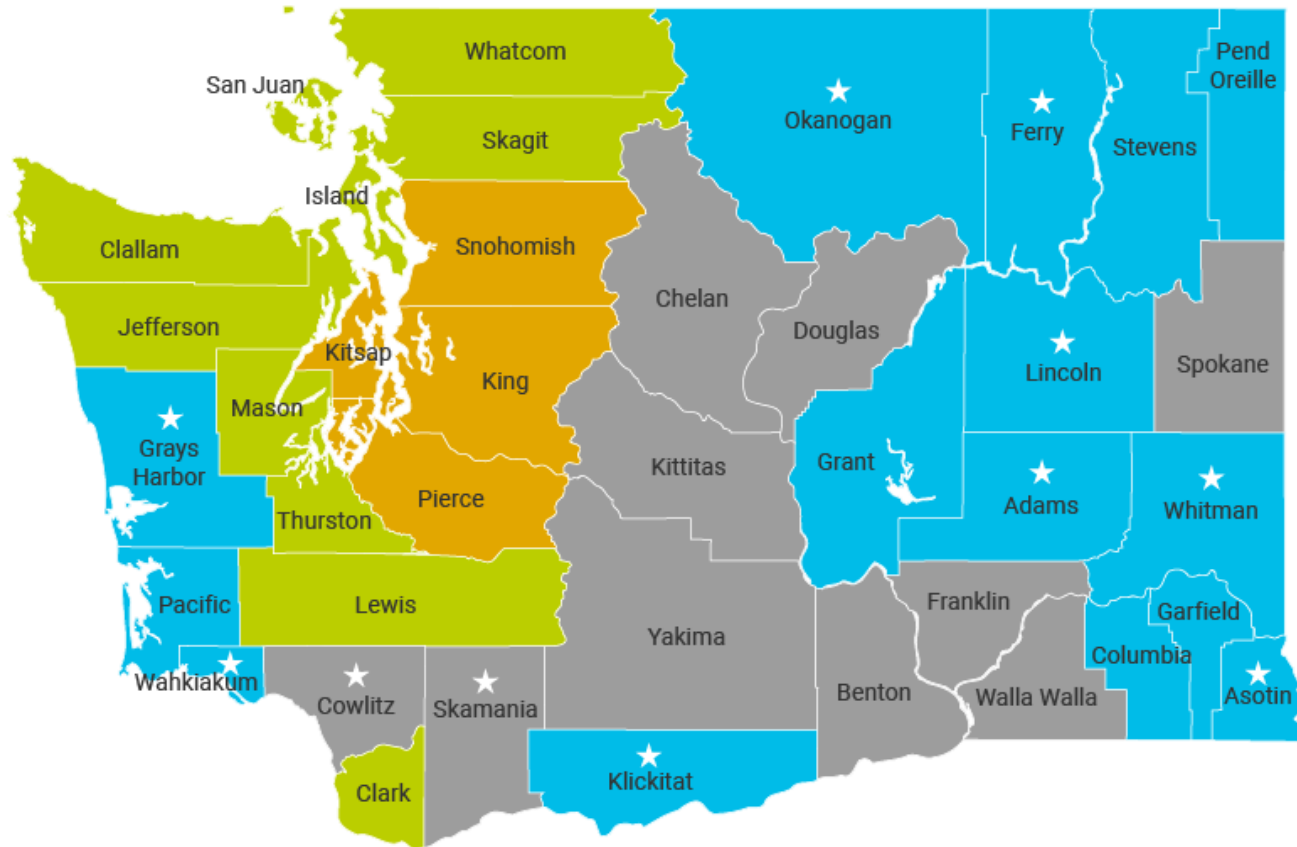
Parks, Recreation, and Open  
Space Plans



Voluntary Incentives



# Growth Management Act Periodic Update



**2024** Due December 31<sup>st</sup> **2025** Due June 30<sup>th</sup> **2026** Due June 30<sup>th</sup> **2027** Due June 30<sup>th</sup>







# Comprehensive Plans

## Goals of Comprehensive Plans

- encouraging growth in urban areas,
- reducing sprawl,
- retaining open space and recreation,
- protecting the environment, and
- climate change and resiliency



# Comprehensive Plans

## Land Use Element

- Distribution, location, and extent of uses of land for:
  - Ag, timber, and mineral production
  - Open spaces





# Open Space Corridors

Each county and city that is required or chooses to prepare a comprehensive plan is required to identify open space corridors within and between urban growth areas (UGAs). They shall include lands useful for recreation, **wildlife habitat**, trails, and connection of critical areas.

**(RCW 36.70A.160)**





# Identification of Open Space Corridors

WAC 365-196-335

- Identify open space corridors when reviewing and updating Urban Growth Areas, critical areas designations, and the land use element
- Consider and state the various purposes and uses of identified corridors
- Consider how identified corridors exist in relationship to designated critical areas and natural resource lands



# Identification of Open Space Corridors

WAC 365-196-335

- Plan an integrated system that uses corridors to link established large areas of parks and recreational lands, resource lands, greenbelts, streams, and **wildlife corridors to help protect fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas.**





# Open Space Corridors

- WAHCAP cores and corridors
- Include identified corridors on the:
  - Future land use map
  - Official zoning map



# Comprehensive Plans

## Climate Element

- Resiliency Sub-element

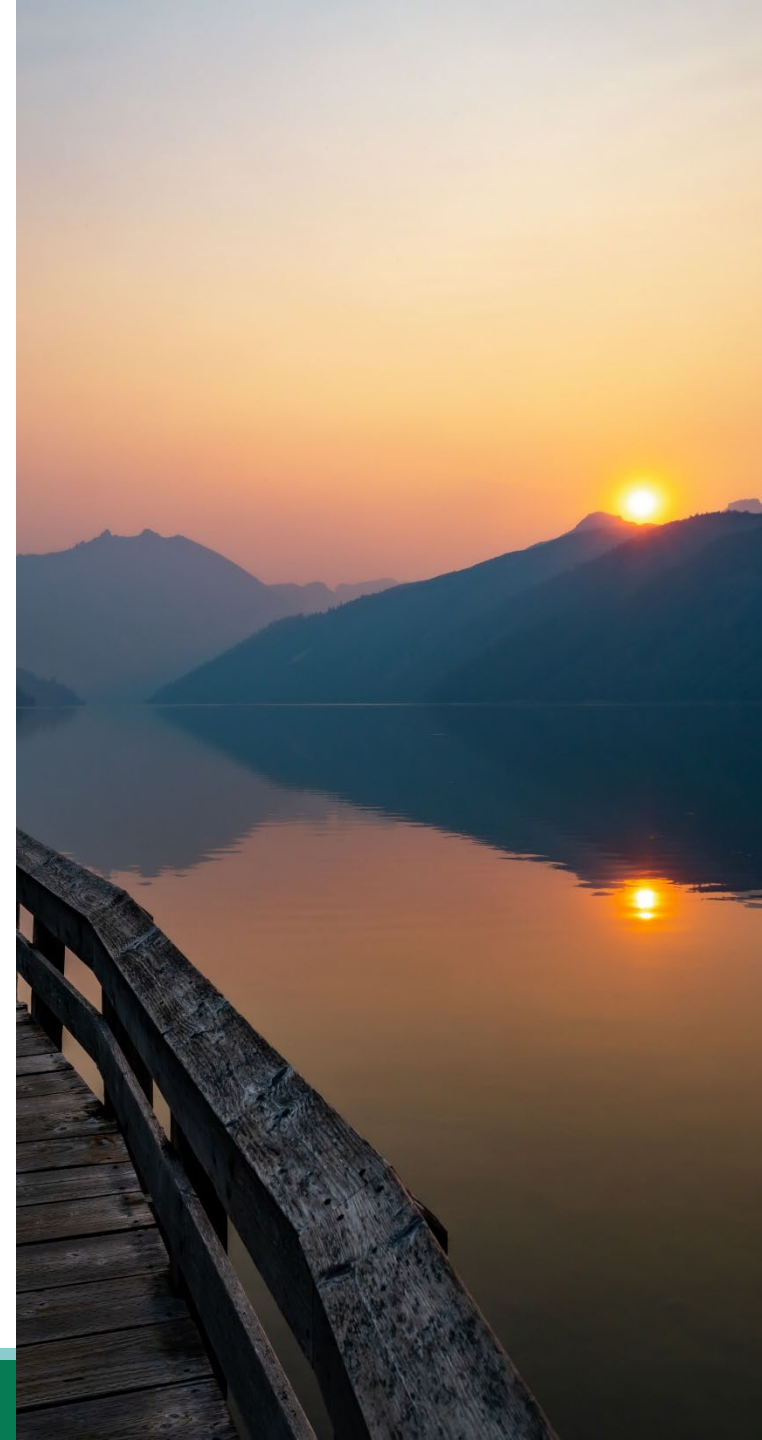
Within RCW 36.70A.070

requires that the goals, policies, and programs of the climate element resiliency sub-element identifies, protects, and enhances natural areas to foster resiliency to climate impacts, as well as **areas of vital habitat for safe passage and species migration.**



# Climate Policy Explorer

- ~250 goals and policies jurisdictions can adopt or revise
- WDFW supplied measures for habitat connectivity



# Climate Policy Explorer

## Habitat Connectivity

### Policy Examples

Take inventory of and protect climate refugia and habitat connectivity needs for species under stress from climate change.

Identify opportunities to expand habitat protection and improve habitat quality and connectivity to foster climate resilience using conservation area designations, buffers, and open space corridors.





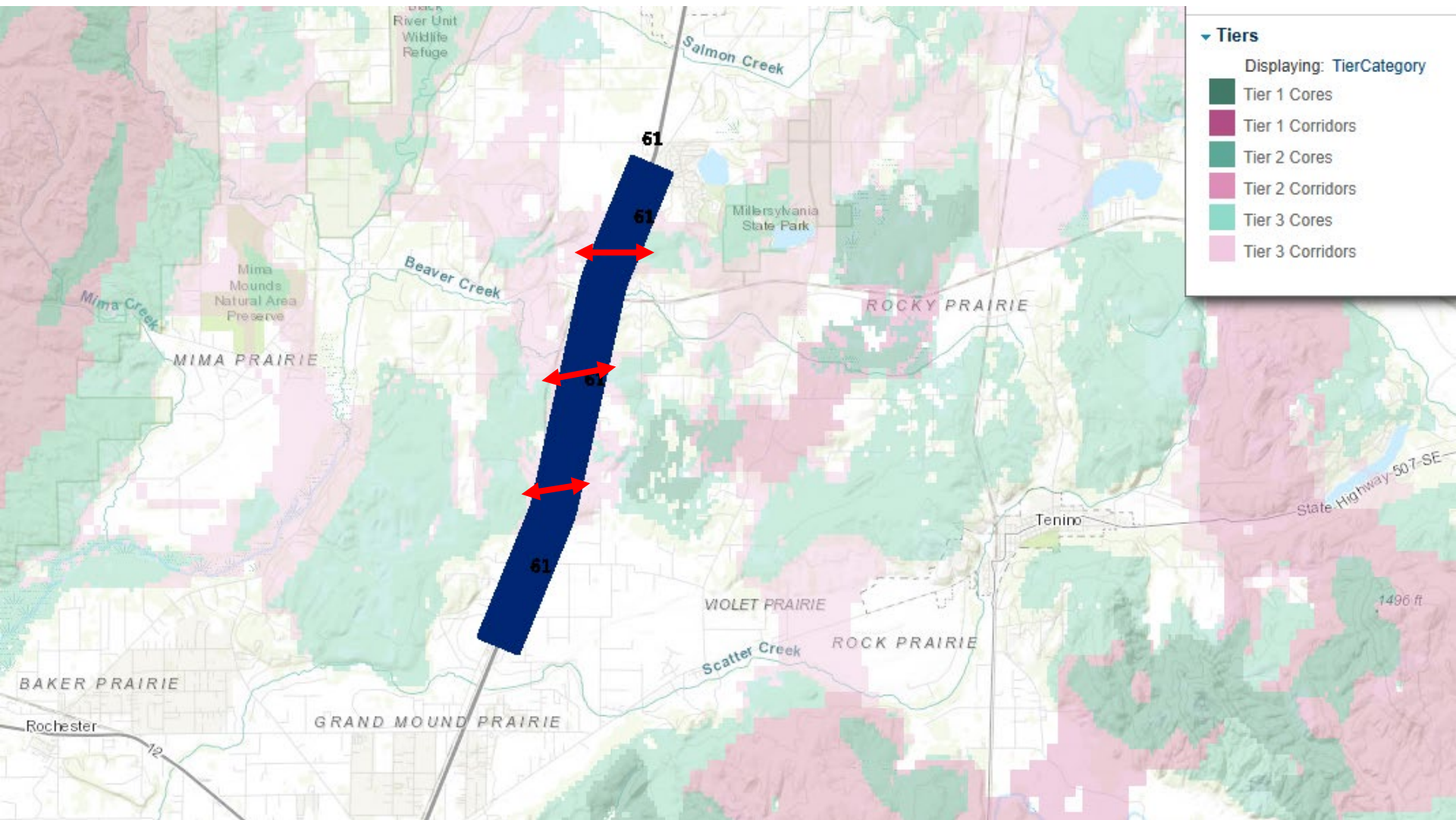


# Transportation

- Undercrossings
- Overcrossings
- Land Use around these locations



# Transportation – WAHCAP Maps



## Regional projects



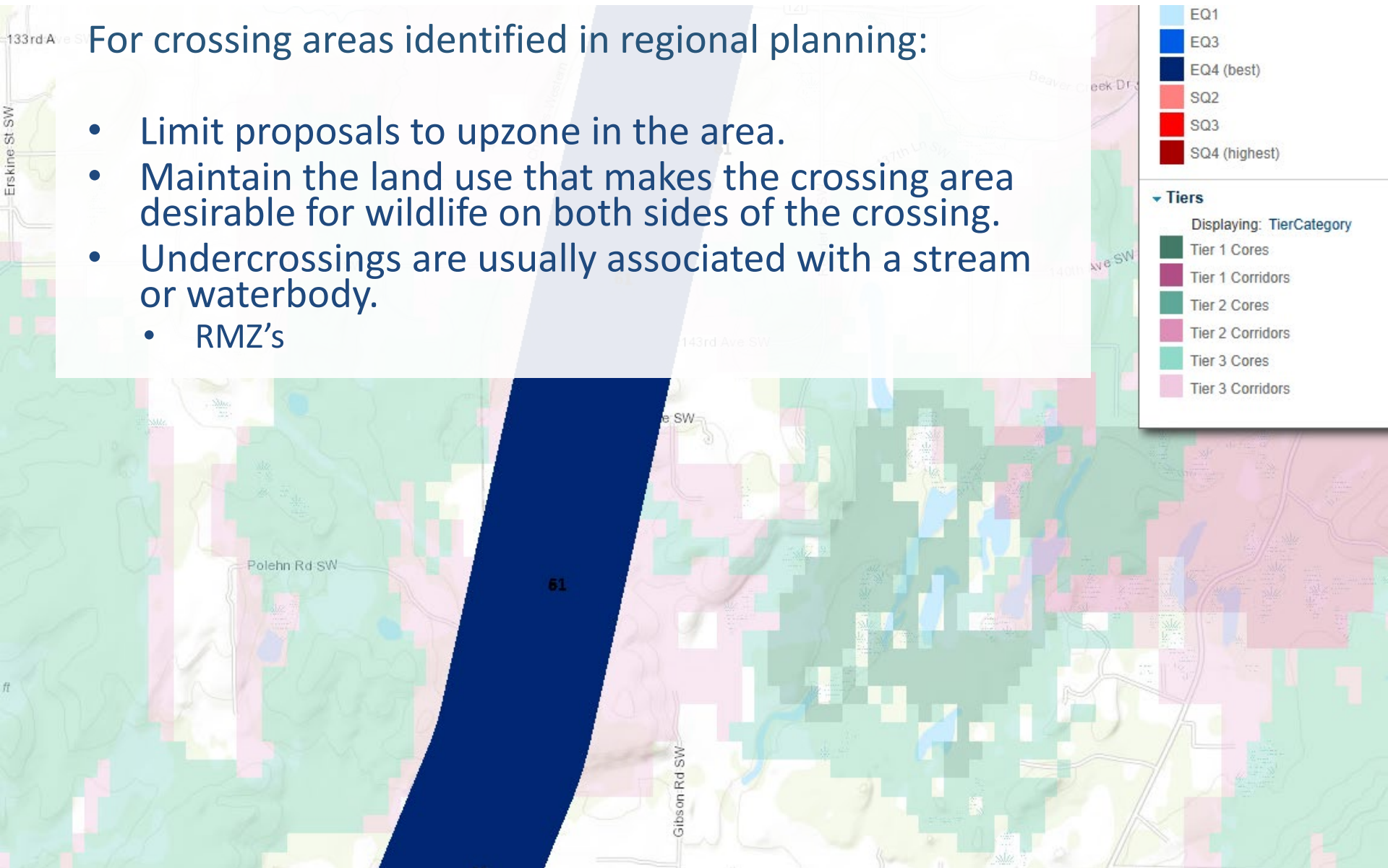
Include undercrossing retrofits and overcrossings






## For crossing areas identified in regional planning:

- Limit proposals to upzone in the area.
- Maintain the land use that makes the crossing area desirable for wildlife on both sides of the crossing.
- Undercrossings are usually associated with a stream or waterbody.
  - RMZ's





# Zoning & Subdivision Codes

## Conservation Development

Identification and conservation of the most ecologically important habitat within a local jurisdiction, and the siting of housing and other development away from these areas





# Zoning



# Zoning

- Set and enforce protections for critical areas and other sensitive lands including cores and corridors.
- Zoning can be used to prevent fragmentation caused by development.
- Adopt zoning designations that support compatible land use for wildlife in cores and corridors.







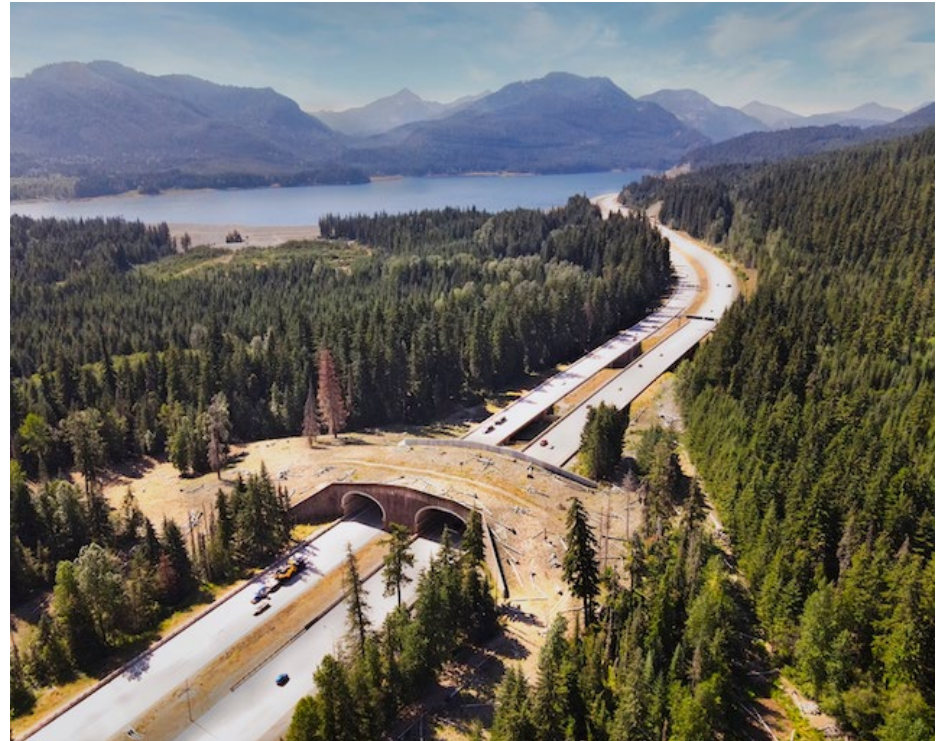
# Zoning

- Fencing
- Landscaping
- Environmental performance standards for light and/or noise
- Open space
- Overlays

# Zoning

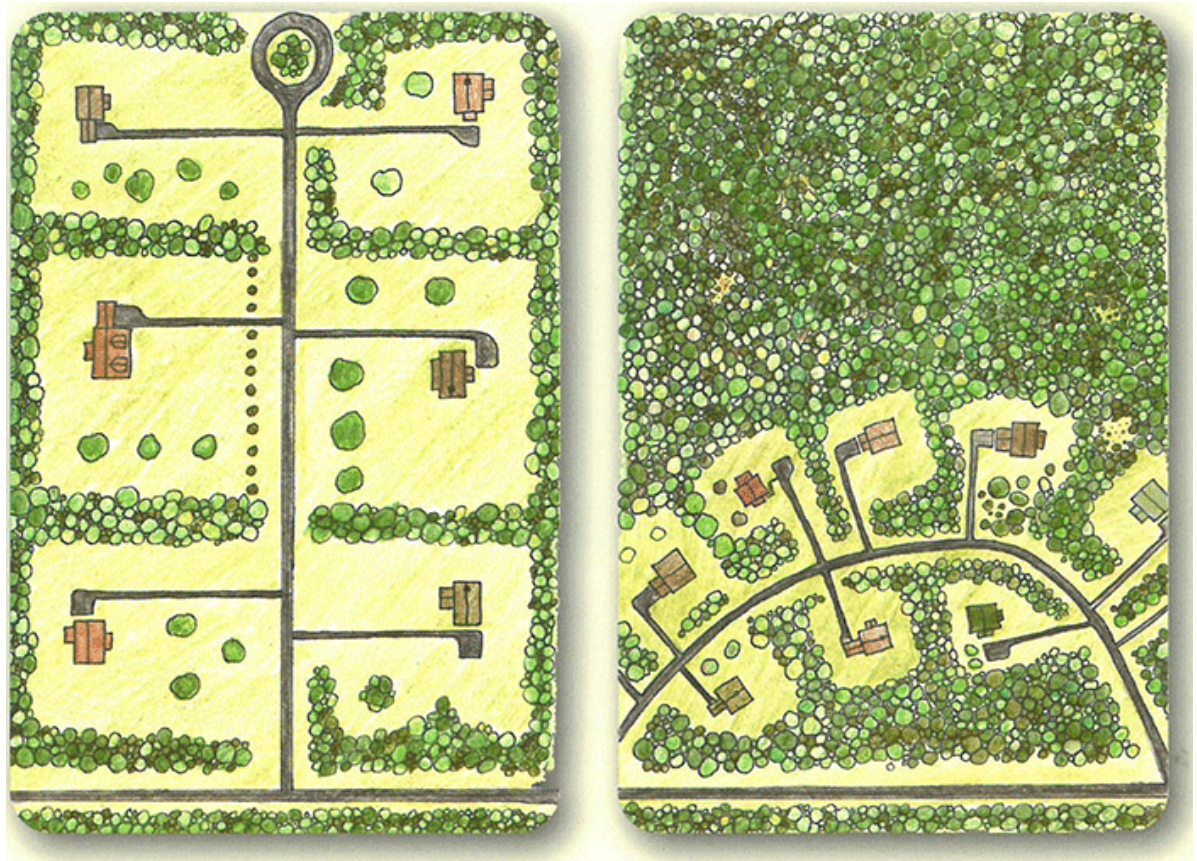
Intent or purpose statements in zoning codes should be consistent with planning policies and comprehensive plans.

Reflect a commitment to incorporate habitat connectivity considerations into the planning process.





# Subdivision Code



Courtesy Wildlife Conservation Society, Adirondack Program

Conservation subdivisions are intended to proactively identify areas of high habitat value as open space and plan a **connected network** of undeveloped land.





## Incentivizing

- Change the subdivision approval process to favor conservation subdivisions over conventional subdivisions
- Density bonuses







# Critical Areas Ordinances

- Designate and protect critical areas
- Allow no net loss of ecosystem functions and values
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCAs) with special consideration of anadromous fisheries
- Support **viable, connected populations** over the long term
- Include the best available science (BAS)



# Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

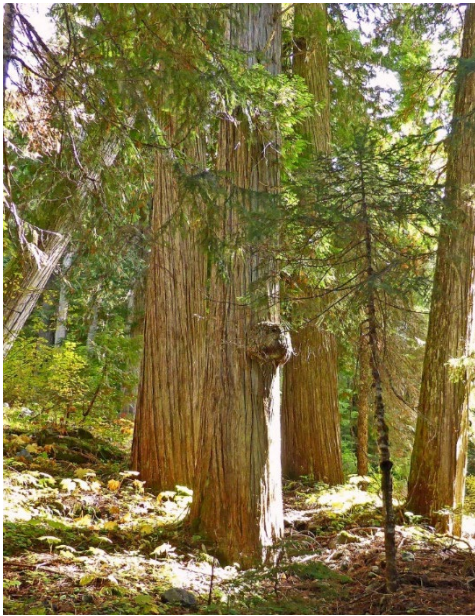
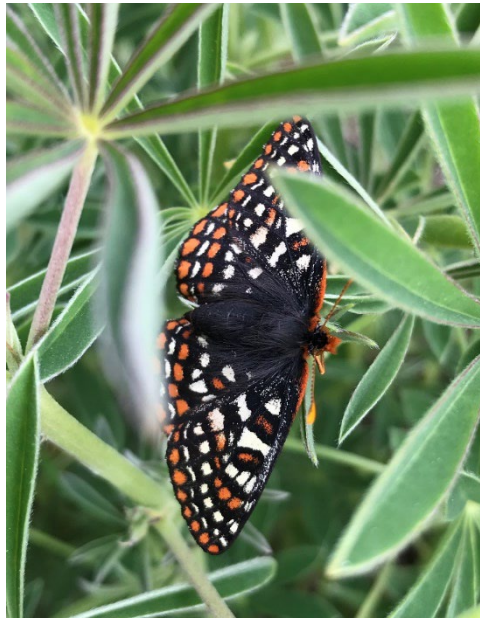


- Include seasonal ranges, breeding habitat, winter range, and **movement corridors**.
- Maintain populations within their **natural geographic distribution**...so isolated subpopulations are not created.





# Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas



- Ecosystems that **transcend the boundaries of individual parcels and jurisdictions**, so that protection of their **functions and values** should be **considered on a larger scale** [WAC 365-196-830(6)].





# Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

## Examples

- Spokane County - wildlife corridors and linkages named in their FWHCA CAO
- City of Tacoma - PHS Biodiversity Areas and Corridors named in their FWHCA CAO & performance standards





# Riparian Areas & Connectivity

- Linear interconnected networks
- Connects low and high-elevation habitat, especially important for climate change
- Already incorporated into land use planning!





# Wetlands & Connectivity

- Ecology's [Wetland Guidance for CAO Updates](#)
  - Buffers and connectivity corridors for wetlands
  - Taking a landscape-based approach







# Countywide Planning Policies

- Opportunity to include habitat connectivity policies in CPPs.
- Mapping connectivity within the county and cities.





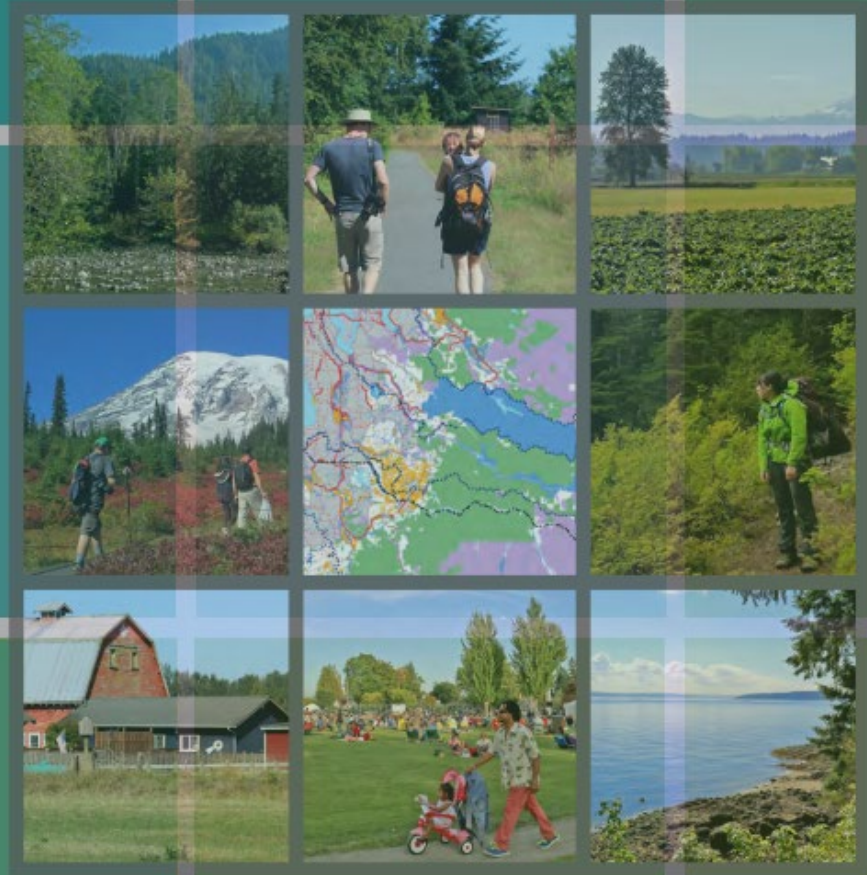
# Coordination between Counties

Groups of counties can  
work together on  
habitat connectivity  
using the WAHCAP  
Maps.



Regional Open Space  
Conservation Plan

– June 2018



Department of Fish and Wildlife



Puget Sound Regional Council



# Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plans

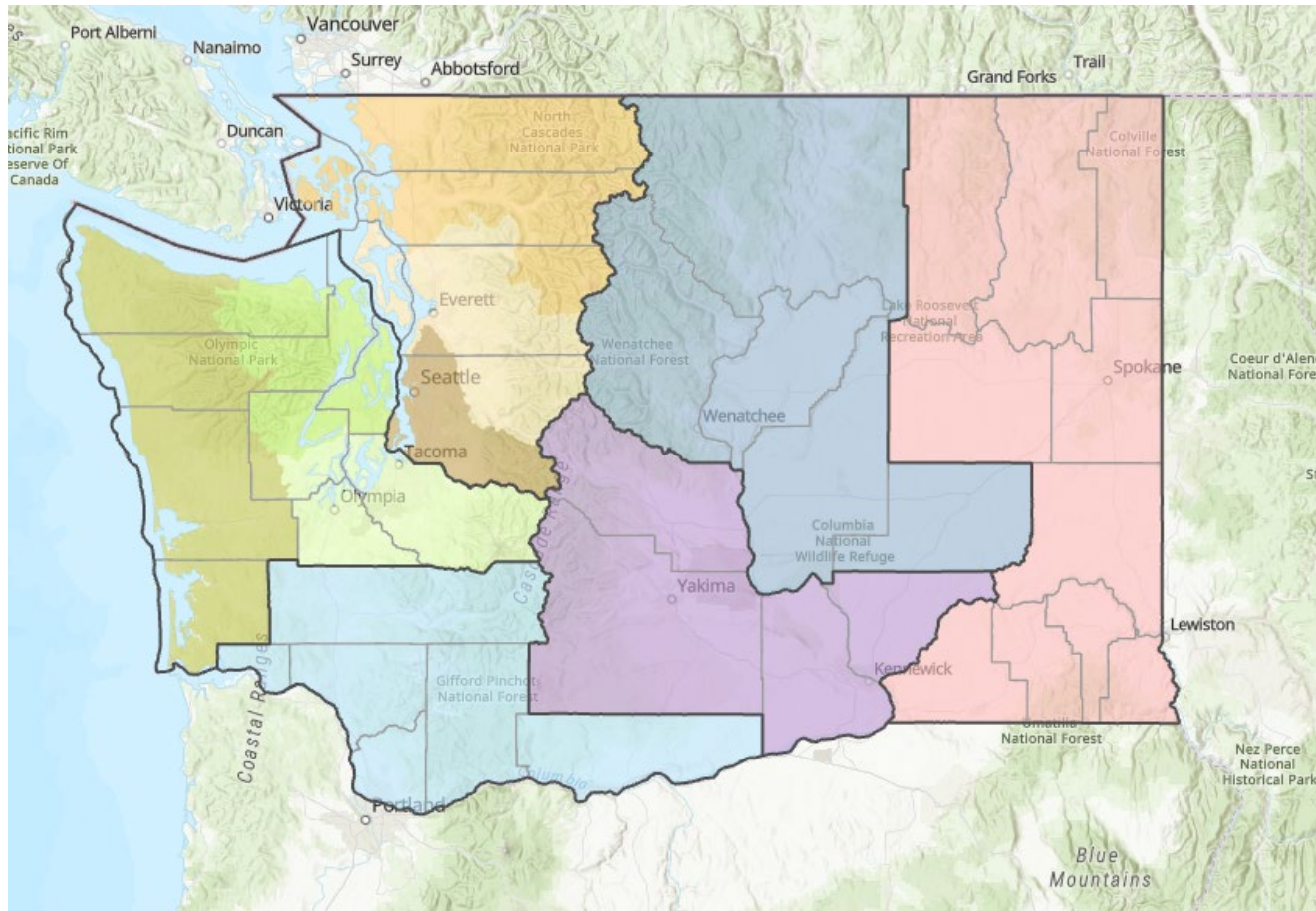
Include habitat connectivity considerations when updating parks, recreation, and open space plans.





# How to Contact WDFW

Contact the regional land use planner using this [webmap tool](#)





# Resources

- [Land Use Conservation & Policy](#)
- [WDFW Region Staff Contact](#)
- [Commerce Climate Program](#)
- [Priority Habitats and Species](#) (PHS)
  - [PHS Management Recommendations](#)

