

Land Management Designations: Their Role in Protecting Natural Biological Diversity in Washington

The following list of management designations illustrates the role that many state, federal and private agencies have had to date in protecting Washington's elements of natural diversity. For each management designation, the administering agency and purpose of the designation are included. To summarize the role that each designation plays in protection of elements, three criteria are considered:

1. **Designation Security** - refers to the relative degree of permanency associated with a particular designation. A "secure" ranking which provides an assurance of long-term protection of the element(s) is high because the management designation cannot be readily changed or removed.
2. **Protection Adequacy** - refers to the ability of the designation to assure the survival of the various elements into the foreseeable future. "Adequate" protection means that all elements will typically be assured survival into the foreseeable future. Note that protection may be adequate for some elements and not others under a particular designation.
3. **Selection Criteria** - refers to the degree to which the management designation is equivalent to or consistent with the criteria for natural area selection.

State Agencies

Biological Study Area (BSA)

Administering Agencies:	Washington State University, University of Washington
Designation:	variable, potentially secure
Protection:	inadequate
Selection Criteria:	different

Purpose: (1) To protect examples of undisturbed terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, rare plant and animal species, and unique geologic features; (2) to serve as gene pool reserves; (3) to serve as baselines against which the influences of human activities in similar, disturbed ecosystems may be compared; and (4) to provide outdoor laboratories for scientific research and education.

Heritage Area

Administering Agency:	Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Designation:	potentially secure
Protection:	potentially adequate, depending on use.
Selection Criteria:	variable, but potentially consistent, especially for geological features

Purpose: Designated for preservation, restoration and interpretation of unique or unusual archaeological, historical, scientific and/or cultural features and traditional cultural properties, which are of statewide or national significance (WAC 352-16-020(4)).

Marine Biological Preserve

Administering Agency: University of Washington, director of the Friday Harbor Laboratories
Designation: secure
Protection: not adequate
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: To preserve marine biological materials useful for scientific purposes. The preserve consists of the saltwaters and the beds and shores of the islands constituting San Juan County and of Cypress Island in Skagit County. (RCW 28B.20.320).

Note: Gathering of marine biological materials, except when gathered for human food, and except, also, the plant nereocystis (kelp) is prohibited, except upon permission first granted by the director of the Friday Harbor Labs (RCW 28B.20.320 and RCW 28B.220.322). Violators shall be guilty of a misdemeanor (RCW 28B.20.324).

Natural Area

Administering Agency: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Designation: potentially secure
Protection: potentially adequate, depending on use
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: Designated for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural processes and/or features of significant ecological, geological or paleontological value while providing for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities as subordinate uses. (WAC 352-16-020(3)).

Natural Forest Area

Administering Agency: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Designation: potentially secure
Protection: potentially adequate, depending on use
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: Designated for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural forest processes while providing for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities as subordinate uses, or which contain (WAC 352-16-020(5): (a) Old-growth forest communities that have developed for one hundred fifty years or longer and have the following structural characteristics; large old-growth trees, large snags, large logs on land, and large logs in streams, or: (b) Mature forest communities that have developed for one hundred fifty years or longer; or (c) Unusual forest communities and/or interrelated vegetative communities of significant ecological value.

Natural Area Preserve (NAP)

Administering Agencies: Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
Designation: secure
Protection: adequate
Selection Criteria: equivalent

Purpose: To provide for the protection of natural lands, together with the plants and animals living thereon in natural ecological systems, which are valuable for the purpose of scientific research, teaching, as habitats of rare and vanishing species, as places of natural historic and natural interest and scenic beauty, and as living museums of the original heritage of the state (RCW 79.70.010):

Note: NAPs administered by State Parks and the Dept. of Wildlife are registered and committed through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Natural Resources pursuant to Chapter 79.70 RCW, WAC 322-60-140, WAC 35-16-020(9) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Natural Area Preserve administrative land classification.

Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA)

Administering Agency: Washington Department of Natural Resources
Designation: secure
Protection: potentially adequate, depending on management plan
Selection Criteria: Similar but more inclusive

Purpose: To protect (1) Lands identified as having high priority for conservation, natural systems, wildlife, and dispersed recreational values; (2) prime natural features of the Washington landscape or portions thereof, inland or coastal wetlands, significant littoral, estuarine, or aquatic sites or important geological features; (3) examples of native ecological communities; and (4) environmentally significant sites threatened with conversion to incompatible or ecologically irreversible uses.

Note: Four sites have been designated as NRCAs by the legislature: Cypress Island, Dishman Hills, Woodard Bay, and Mt. Si. An additional 16 have been administratively designated by the department as the result of the Special Lands (Trust Land Transfer) Program funded by the legislature.

Registered Natural Area

Administering Agency: Washington Department of Natural Resources
Designation: not secure
Protection: variable, depending on landowner actions and commitment. Not long-term protection.
Selection Criteria: equivalent

Purpose: The protection, by voluntary commitment of a landowner, of a specific element (or elements) (as listed in the Natural Heritage Plan) located on the landowner's land (WAC 332-60-050).

Wildlife Area

Administering Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Designation: secure
Protection: not adequate
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: To protect and improve lands and water habitats to assure optimal numbers, diversity and distribution of wildlife for the welfare of the people of Washington State.

Federal Agencies

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Administering Agency: USDI Bureau of Land Management
Designation: variable, potentially secure
Protection: variable, potentially secure
Selection Criteria: much broader, may be equivalent in specific cases

Purpose: An area within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and to prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

Note: Elements contained within ACECs may be considered adequately protected in this Plan if site-specific management plans are sufficiently restrictive to protect them. Each site must be evaluated separately under this designation.

National Estuarine Sanctuary Research Reserve (NERR)

Administering Agencies: Washington Department of Ecology, U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
Designation: secure
Protection: variable, potentially adequate
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: To establish a network of sanctuaries that represent the diversity of estuarine ecosystems within the United States for education and scientific research.

National Natural Landmarks

Administering Agency: USDI National Park Service
Designation: not secure
Protection: inadequate
Selection Criteria: consistent, but more general

Purpose: To encourage the preservation of areas that illustrate the ecological and geological character of the United States, to enhance the educational and scientific values of the areas thus preserved, to strengthen cultural appreciation of natural history, and to foster a wider interest and concern in the conservation of the Natural Landmarks Program's natural heritage.

Note: Designation of a National Landmark carries with it no restrictions on management or use of the site that are binding on the landowner. This program is roughly equivalent to the state Registry Program.

National Parks and Monuments

Administering Agency: USDI National Park Service
Designation: secure
Protection: potentially adequate, depending on management
Selection Criteria: similar, but more inclusive

Purpose: National Parks are managed to preserve the outstanding natural, historical and recreational resources of the United States.

Note: Elements within National Parks are considered adequately protected if they are included within a management plan compatible with natural area values. Research Natural Areas are one means employed within National Parks that assure adequate protection of natural heritage elements.

National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Administering Agency: USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
Designation: secure
Protection: not adequate
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: To provide, preserve, restore and manage a national network of lands and waters sufficient in size, diversity and location to meet society's needs for areas where the widest possible spectrum of benefits associated with wildlife and wildlands is enhanced and made available.

Note: Establishment of Research Natural Areas with specific management plans within refuges is considered adequate protection for elements in this plan.

Outstanding Natural Areas (ONA)

Administering Agency: USDI Bureau of Land Management
Designation: potentially secure
Protection: potentially adequate
Selection Criteria: similar, but not equivalent

Purpose: An area of unusual natural characteristics where management of recreation activities is necessary to preserve those characteristics.

Research Natural Area (RNA)

Administering Agencies: USDA Forest Service, USDI National Park Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Energy
Designation: secure
Protection: adequate
Selection Criteria: equivalent (in most cases)

Purpose: (1) To preserve examples of all significant natural ecosystems for comparison with those influenced by humans; (2) to provide educational and research areas for ecological and environmental studies; (3) to preserve gene pools of typical and endangered plants and animals.

Special Interest Area

Administering Agency: USDA Forest Service
Designation: variable, potentially secure
Protection: potentially adequate
Selection Criteria: similar, but not equivalent

Purpose: To protect, and where appropriate, foster public use and enjoyment of areas with scenic, historical, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological or other special characteristics. To classify areas that possess unusual recreational and scientific values so that these special values are available for public study, use or enjoyment.

Note: These areas are managed for “. . . recreational use substantially in their natural condition,” which may result in variable protection of natural heritage elements. Also, salvage logging may be allowed in certain instances.

Wild and Scenic River

Administering Agencies: Several agencies, especially the U.S. Department of the Interior
Designation: secure
Protection: inadequate
Selection Criteria: different

Purpose: Primary emphasis is given to protecting the river's aesthetic, scenic, historic, archaeological and scientific features.

Note: Management plans result in varying degrees of protection of elements, based upon the special attributes of the area. Salvage logging and grazing are not necessarily excluded from this designation.

Wilderness Area

Administering Agencies: USDA Forest Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management
Designation: secure
Protection: variable
Selection Criteria: not equivalent

Purpose: "Wilderness Areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use."

Note: Certain activities which are incompatible with natural area management, such as heavy recreation use, domestic livestock grazing, mining and development of water resources are allowed in Wilderness Areas. For this reason, elements contained within Wilderness Areas are not considered adequately protected in this plan. They may be considered adequately protected in the future if site specific management plans for their protection are developed.

Private Organizations

Natural Area

Administering Agency: The Nature Conservancy
Designation: secure
Protection: adequate
Selection Criteria: equivalent

Purpose: (1) To protect examples of undisturbed terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, rare plant and animal species and unique geologic features; (2) to serve as gene pool reserves; (3) to serve as baselines against which the influences of human activities in similar, disturbed ecosystems may be compared; and (4) to provide outdoor laboratories for scientific research and education.

Note: Purpose and management are equivalent to the Department of Natural Resources Natural Area Preserves.

International Organizations

Biosphere Reserve

Administering Agencies: UNESCO, United Nations
Designation: secure
Protection: potentially adequate
Selection Criteria: consistent, but more general

Purpose: To conserve for present and future use the diversity and integrity of biotic communities of plants and animals within natural ecosystems, and to safeguard the genetic diversity of species on which their continuing evolution depends.