



## Washington Register of Natural Areas

Washington State is a land of rich variety. Its natural environments include dry open grasslands, dark evergreen forests, miles and miles of marine shorelines, and hundreds of lakes and waterways. The land rises from deep river valleys to towering peaks too high for trees to grow. All of this variety creates perfect conditions to support a huge number of different species of trees, wildflowers and grasses and an abundance of varying kinds of fish, birds, insects and other wildlife. This natural diversity is under constant pressure from human interventions: growing cities, expanding transportation systems, and land uses that make it hard to maintain the nature around us. In recognition of these challenges, the State Legislature created the Washington Register of Natural Areas to identify and protect the native plants and animals that call Washington home.



### What is it?

The Washington Register of Natural Areas is a voluntary conservation program that provides protection for some of the rare and vanishing native species of the state while recognizing and honoring private landowners for their good stewardship. The program relies on citizen-based action and the willingness of landowners to voluntarily safeguard the best that remains of our natural world.

### How does it work?

The program is operated by the Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program (NHP) whose job is to gather, manage and distribute information about the rare plants, animals and native ecosystems of the state. Some areas of land with rare plant or animal communities are recommended for protection in the statewide system of natural areas as either a natural area preserve or a natural resources conservation area. Other areas may be better conserved through cooperating with individual landowners for the long-term management of these biologically unique lands.



By informing owners of the biological importance of their lands and working with them regarding voluntary management strategies, the Washington Register of Natural Areas reduces the chance that significant natural areas might inadvertently be destroyed. Registry is also an opportunity for private conservation organizations, like land trusts, to be acknowledged for the statewide significance of the lands they protect.



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### **How does an area qualify for registry?**

To qualify for the Register of Natural Areas a property must include at least one of the following natural features that have been identified in the state of Washington Natural Heritage Plan:

- Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive plant or animal species,
- Native plant communities or ecosystems considered rare or that are in really good natural condition,
- Outstanding natural features such as unusual wetlands or geologic formations.

### **Is the commitment to register a natural area binding?**

No. The agreement may be cancelled by either party at any time. Registering a natural area acknowledges a landowner's sincere intention to protect the natural features but it is not legally binding and does not transfer if the land is sold. It also does not subject the area to any new regulatory authority or requirements. If changes occur that reduce the site's ecological value, it may be removed from the Register by the Natural Heritage Program.

### **Are there any financial advantages?**

The landowner does not receive or provide funds for registering a site. There may, however, be other programs that a registered site may be eligible for that can offer tax benefits or management assistance to the landowner.

### **What are the benefits of the program?**

The Register of Natural Areas is an acknowledgement of the statewide significance of a natural feature on the land. The landowner receives a certificate of recognition and the site becomes part of the overall efforts to maintain a legacy of our natural heritage for future generations. The landowner may also receive management advice, if they desire, and, potentially, help to identify other qualified assistance. Land trusts may find that registry, which indicates the statewide importance of a site, provides a benefit in fundraising or when applying for grants. And participants have the satisfaction of joining other select Washington landowners in a voluntary program to protect the rich natural diversity of our state.

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