

# Natural Heritage Advisory Council



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
HILARY S. FRANZ | COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS



## Washington's Natural Areas System

"It is, therefore, the public policy of the state of Washington to secure for the people of present and future generations the benefit of an enduring resource of natural areas by establishing a system of natural area preserves, and to provide for the protection of these natural areas."

Revised Code of Washington 79.70.010

In 1972 the Washington State Legislature passed the Natural Area Preserves Act that established a statewide system of natural areas. The Natural Heritage Advisory Council plays a key role in the creation and management of natural areas, directly assisting with the protection of Washington's rarest plant and animal species and our highest quality ecosystems.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is charged with implementing the Natural Area Preserves Act and also the Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act of 1987 that expanded the mission of DNR natural areas to sites of statewide significance for conservation of natural systems and scenic, archaeological or geological features, along with opportunities for low impact recreation.

The DNR Natural Areas Program, which oversees both natural area preserves and natural resources conservation areas, manages more than 161,000 acres at 93 sites throughout Washington. In addition, formally included in the statewide system of natural areas are privately owned or other state agency natural area preserves, as well as federally designated research natural areas and areas of critical environmental concern.

DNR also houses the Natural Heritage Program which is responsible for collecting, analyzing and distributing scientific information regarding the rare plants, animals and ecosystems native to the state. Program staff use this information to establish conservation priorities within Washington state, and the data are also used by other agencies and organizations to inform policies and management intended to protect rare species and ecosystems. The Natural Heritage Program is the only source for this comprehensive, statewide scientific data.

## Natural Heritage Advisory Council

The Natural Heritage Advisory Council was created to advise Washington DNR, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the State Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the designation of state natural areas. The council includes 15 members, 10 of whom are voting members appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands, the statewide elected official who administers DNR. The five non-voting council members are representatives of state agencies, including DNR, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Ecology, State Parks, and the Recreation and Conservation Office.



Five of the 10 citizen appointees to the council are designated in statute to be scientists with expertise in plant ecology, zoology, geology, botany, wildlife biology or similar disciplines. Of the remaining five council positions, one is to be filled by a timberland owner (or representative), one is to be filled by an agricultural landowner (or representative), and three are citizens-at-large with no specific statutory requirements.

Members of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council actively participate in conservation actions, including:

- approving the biennial State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan;
- advising the state’s natural resources agencies about natural area preserve selection and management;
- recommending new sites for inclusion in the statewide system of natural areas, including state agency proposals or preserves in private organization ownership;
- reviewing and approving management plans for natural area preserves that are managed by DNR; and
- recommending policies regarding the management and protection of state-owned natural area preserves.

## Serving on the Natural Heritage Advisory Council

Council membership includes attending an average of four meetings per year. Meetings may be in person or through remote access (teleconference or web access). Meetings vary in length with the number of agenda items but range from 3 hours to a full day. One meeting a year is typically two days with a field trip to a natural area (or a proposed natural area) during one of the days. Meetings are generally scheduled for January, March, either May or June, and October.

Council work may include serving on ad hoc committees to review natural area proposals, which typically include a field visit, or working with staff on development of the Natural Heritage Plan. Council meeting materials are generally available in advance to assure thorough discussion and analysis during council meetings.

Occasionally, council members have also acted as on-the-ground advisors for proposed management activities on existing natural areas.

The Natural Heritage Advisory Council plays an active role in conserving Washington’s native species and ecosystems, today and for future generations. To find out more about serving as a council member, please contact John Gamon, Assistant Manager, DNR Conservation Recreation and Transactions Division at: [john.gamon@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:john.gamon@dnr.wa.gov) or (360) 902-1661.

