

# Natural Heritage Plan 2007



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**

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**State of Washington  
Natural Heritage Plan 2007  
September 2007**

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STATE OF WASHINGTON

# Natural Heritage Plan 2007



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**  
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

# Contents

5 Greetings from the Commissioner of Public Lands

## **PART I.**

- 7 **INTRODUCTION**
- 8 Natural Area Preserves Act
- 8 Natural Heritage Program
- 9 Natural Heritage Plan
- 9 Going Beyond Natural Areas

## **PART II.**

- 11 **THE CASE FOR CONSERVATION**
- 11 Washington has a rich natural heritage
- 12 Our ecosystems and species matter
- 13 Our ecosystems and species are under siege
- 15 We can make a difference
- 16 Objective, scientific information is needed
- 16 We've got the tools

## **PART III.**

- 17 **THE WASHINGTON  
NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM**
- 17 The Natural Heritage Network—NatureServe
- 17 Natural Heritage Methodology
- 19 Classification: Identifying and Assigning Conservation Priorities  
to the Components of Biodiversity
  - How are species priorities determined?
  - How are ecosystems priorities determined?
- 24 What information does the Natural Heritage Program manage?
  - Site-specific Information
  - Species and Ecosystem-Specific Information
- 25 Where does the Information come from?
- 26 Who uses Natural Heritage Information?
- 26 What is the conservation impact of the Natural Heritage Program?
  - Acquisition / designation of natural areas
  - Public agency policies
  - Laws and regulations
  - Ecosystems management and restoration
  - Education

**PART IV.**

- 29 **WASHINGTON'S STATEWIDE  
SYSTEM OF NATURAL AREAS**
- 30 What are the benefits of Natural Areas?
- 31 What are the different types of natural areas recognized in this Plan?
- 32 How are potential new natural areas identified?
- 34 What is the role of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council?
- 35 What is the process for designating Department of  
Natural Resources Natural Areas?  
Public Hearings and the Commissioner of Public Lands  
DNR's Special Lands Transactions Acquisition Program  
DNR's Natural Areas Program
- 36 What is the process for designating Department of  
Natural Resources Natural Areas?
- 36 Current Status of the Statewide System of Natural Areas
- 37 Washington's Natural Areas

**PART V.**

- 39 **NATURAL HERITAGE PLAN  
IMPLEMENTATION**
- 40 2007-2009 Statewide Priority Projects and Activities
- 43 2007-2009 Statewide Conservation Accomplishments
- 45 **ECOREGIONS OF WASHINGTON STATE**
- 46 Washington's Ecoregions Map
- 47 Washington's Land Ownership Map
- 48 **Northwest Coast Ecoregion**
- 52 **Puget Trough Ecoregion**
- 56 **North Cascades Ecoregion**
- 60 **West Cascades Ecoregion**
- 64 **East Cascades Ecoregion**
- 68 **Okanogan Ecoregion**
- 72 **Canadian Rockies Ecoregion**
- 76 **Blue Mountains Ecoregion**
- 80 **Columbia Plateau Ecoregion**

**APPENDIX I.**

- 85 **ASSIGNING PRIORITIES TO SPECIES  
AND ECOSYSTEMS**

**APPENDIX II.**

- 89 **CHANGES IN SPECIES  
AND ECOSYSTEMS PRIORITIES**

- 97 **ACRONYMS**

Aspens near Washington Pass



## GREETINGS FROM THE COMMISSIONER

I am pleased to present the 2007 Natural Heritage Plan. It is an important tool to help guide conservation in our state. As citizens of Washington, we are rich with an incredible diversity of natural resources: ocean waters, conifer-covered slopes, volcanic peaks, shrub-steppe and grasslands, deep coulees and more. As stewards of this incredible natural heritage, it is our responsibility to retain it for future generations, so that they, too, can learn from it and enjoy it.

The theme that runs through this year's plan is one of amplifying our impact through partnerships — statewide and national, public and private. This edition of the Natural Heritage Plan illustrates what we do and how we do it and shows the many different ways the information, expertise, and resources within the Natural Heritage Program can and are being used.

Through partnerships, we are able to influence significantly the full spectrum of conservation action, from good land stewardship to dedication of natural areas. Some highlights of those partnerships include:

- ▶ The Natural Heritage Program has played a key role in providing scientific support and information to the Washington Biodiversity Council as the council works toward developing a 30-year strategy for the conservation of Washington's biodiversity. Natural Heritage Program staff prepared a report for the council regarding the status of, and trends relating to, Washington's biodiversity.
- ▶ The Washington Natural Heritage program was selected as one of five states nationwide to pilot a project with National Geographic and NatureServe. The project will develop a website to inspire conservation action and provide information about the nation's remarkable natural places. This is a recognition of our state's national leadership in conservation work.

You will also find many examples of the work our Natural Heritage and Natural Areas Programs accomplished in adding ecologically important lands to the statewide system of natural areas and conducting research on how to successfully protect rare species and high quality ecosystems.

Looking ahead, the plan identifies our priorities for taking action in the next two years for potential new natural areas, and inventory and research projects. Through science, high quality data, partnerships, and leadership, we can accomplish much more in preserving the best of our natural heritage.



DOUG SUTHERLAND  
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS



Golden sedge (*Carex aurea*), one of more than 130 species of sedge known to occur in Washington.

## PART I

# Introduction

**W**ashington has a remarkably rich natural heritage, rivaled by few places in the world. From pounding surf to alpine meadows, from ancient rainforest to sagebrush desert, our state boasts an incredible diversity of ecosystems, each featuring unique assemblages of plant and animal species. This rich natural heritage is a primary reason that people visit and move to our state. However, recent population growth has created acute threats for many species and ecosystems that are native to Washington, whether through direct loss of habitat or as a result of changes which have been facilitated by growth, such as an increase in invasive species. To ensure the long-term persistence of our uniquely rich natural heritage, it is imperative that we take bold conservation steps, guided by sound policy and science.

- 8 Natural Area Preserves Act**
- 8 Natural Heritage Program**
- 9 Natural Heritage Plan**
- 9 Going Beyond Natural Areas**

Chopaka Mountain  
Natural Area Preserve  
(NAP)



DNR PHOTO

To ensure the long-term persistence of our uniquely rich natural heritage, it is imperative that we take bold conservation steps, guided by sound policy and science.

### **NATURAL AREA PRESERVES ACT**

The Washington State Legislature took the first bold step thirty-five years ago by passing the Natural Area Preserves Act (RCW 79.70). The Legislature recognized that our natural heritage (i.e., the native species and ecosystems of the state) was potentially at risk and that there were benefits to retaining unaltered ecosystems and the plant and animal species living within those ecosystems. With the passage of the Natural Area Preserves Act, the Legislature created a cornerstone policy regarding conservation of our natural heritage. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was authorized to establish and manage a statewide system of natural areas through cooperation with federal, state and local agencies, private organizations and individuals.

### **NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM**

To go along with the policy of establishing a statewide system of natural areas, the Legislature recognized the need for providing an objective, scientific approach to guide the process of identifying candidate sites. In 1981, the Legislature amended the Natural Area Preserves Act and established the Natural Heritage Program within DNR. The Natural Heritage Program had actually been formed in 1977 as a cooperative effort of the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Ecology, the State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation and the Washington field office of The Nature Conservancy. The program was developed to provide an objective, scientific approach to setting conservation priorities. By formally establishing the Natural Heritage Program within a state agency, the Legislature brought science and policy together.

## NATURAL HERITAGE PLAN

The 1981 amendment to the Natural Area Preserves Act also required the Natural Heritage Program to develop a plan each biennium regarding the Act's implementation. Specifically, the purpose of the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan was to identify:

- ▶ Priority species and ecosystems to be considered in the selection of potential natural areas and
- ▶ The criteria and process by which natural areas are selected.

The criteria and process are more fully described in Part III. In brief, selection of candidate sites is driven by the presence of priority ecosystems and species. The process of setting these priorities is described in Part III and in Appendix I. Current lists of priority species and ecosystems are available on the Natural Heritage Program's website at: <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/nhp/refdesk/plan/index.html>.

In addition to the lists of priority species and ecosystems and the documentation regarding criteria and process for selecting natural areas, the Natural Heritage Plan identifies the contributions to the statewide system of natural areas that are made by federal, state and local agencies as well as private conservation organizations.

## GOING BEYOND NATURAL AREAS

The statewide system of natural areas is critical to the long-term persistence of our unique natural heritage. But the overall conservation need is much greater than can be provided by simply acquiring and designating sites as natural areas. Use of the full set of conservation tools, from acquisition to easements to good stewardship, is required. And behind the application of all conservation tools or mechanisms is a need for objective information and sound science.

The Natural Heritage Program has been compiling, analyzing and sharing objective information about Washington's biodiversity for 30 years. The information has been used in a number of ways to help achieve conservation. But we believe that we can, and must, do a better job of making biodiversity information available if we are to be successful at ensuring the long-term persistence of our rich natural heritage.

The Washington Biodiversity Council, established by a Governor's Executive Order, is currently looking 30 years into the future, developing a strategy for the conservation of Washington's biodiversity. The implementation of the strategy will require objective, comprehensive information. We believe that the Natural Heritage Program has a critical role to play in that effort. To that end, the 2007 State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan has been prepared with an eye toward making the information that we manage both more accessible and understandable. We hope to encourage all who are engaged in land-use planning and decision-making, from developers to conservation activists, to make use of the best available information and expertise, including that which is available from the Natural Heritage Program.

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,  
CHAPTER 79.70  
(NATURAL AREA  
PRESERVES ACT)



**Current lists of priority species and ecosystems are available online. Visit <http://www.dnr.wa.gov> and search for the Natural Heritage Program web page.**



Tweedy's lewisia,  
known primarily  
from the Wenatchee  
Mountains.