

Natural Areas Program

Agency	Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Year Established	1972
Relevant Statute	RCW 79.70.010
Program Goal	To protect rare plant and animal habitat, native ecosystems, scenic landscapes, as determined by the Washington Natural Heritage Plan criteria.
Agency Summary	<p>DNR's Natural Areas Program manages a statewide system of natural areas that are designated based on scientific research. DNR manages two kinds of natural areas: Natural Areas Preserves and Natural Resource Conservation Areas. Natural Area Preserves (NAPs) protect the best remaining examples of many ecological communities, including rare plant and animal habitat. Natural Resource Conservation Areas (NRCAs) protect outstanding examples of native ecosystems, habitat for endangered, threatened and sensitive plants and animals, and scenic landscapes and provide recreation opportunities.</p> <p>Lands for potential NAPs are identified and designated through the Natural Heritage Plan, which uses scientific methods to gather ecosystem data and help prioritize conservation needs. The program is part of the broader NatureServe network and uses scientific methods to catalog species and ecosystems and prioritize their conservation needs.</p> <p>The Transactions section of DNR's Conservation, Recreation and Transaction Division is responsible for purchasing land that has been approved for Natural Area Preserve (NAP) and Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) status. Upon acquisition, the lands involved are considered part of the natural areas system and become the management responsibility of the Natural Areas Program.</p>
Existing Outcome Measures	<p>DNR does not actively monitor and report outcome information for Natural Areas. Technical Reports of species and ecosystems are available on DNR's website.</p> <p>A DNR report states that 400+ research projects have taken place on Natural Areas land by universities and colleges, state agencies, high schools, volunteers, non-profits, and other entities. Project topics vary but mostly focus on species inventory, monitoring and recovery, and habitat restoration.</p>
Other benefits identified by agencies	<p>Community: educational opportunities, volunteerism, public access, recreation opportunities, scientific research</p> <p>Environment: protecting biodiversity, species conservation, open space, habitat connectivity</p>