

Natural Heritage Advisory Council



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Peter Goldmark - Commissioner of Public Lands



Washington's Natural Area 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." 79.70.010 RCW

In 1972 the Washington State Legislature passed the Natural Areas Preserves Act that established a statewide system of natural areas. The Natural Heritage Advisory Council plays a key role in selecting sites for designation and in approving how each site will be managed. The Council has directly helped in the protection of Washington's rarest plant and animal species and our highest quality ecosystems. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) through the department's Natural Areas Program, manages natural area preserves and natural resources conservation areas across the state. This system of natural areas, one of the best in the country, protects some of the most vulnerable and best representatives of Washington's native plants, animals and ecosystems on more than 150,000 acres in 90 sites and helps conserve our natural heritage for scientific research, environmental education and public enjoyment now and for generations to come.

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

The Natural Heritage Advisory Council (NHAC) was created to advise the Washington DNR, Department of Fish and Wildlife and the State Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the designation of state natural areas. The council was established in 1981 in the Natural Area Preserves Act, 79.70 RCW, which further describes the council's makeup, duties, advisory capacities and other aspects of council work. The council is supported and administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The council is composed of 15 members, 10 of whom are voting members appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands, who is the head of the department. Five non-voting members are representatives of state natural resources agencies: the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), State Parks, Department of Ecology (DOE), the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and DNR.

Washington Natural Heritage Program

The Washington Natural Heritage Program, a statewide resource based in DNR, is responsible for collecting, analyzing and distributing scientific information regarding the rare plants, animals and ecosystems native to the state. The program compiles the information from a number of sources and uses it to establish conservation priorities for all of these natural heritage "features." The Natural Heritage Program is the only source for this comprehensive statewide scientific data. The conservation priorities set by program scientists in consultation with other experts are reviewed and updated every two years and are used to identify areas important for adding to the natural area system.



NHAC Role

The NHAC interacts with staff of the Natural Heritage Program and Natural Areas Program and is active in continually influencing conservation in the state. The council:

- approves the biennial State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan;
- advises DNR (as well as the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the State Parks and Recreation Commission) regarding natural areas' selection and management;
- recommends sites to the Commissioner of Public Lands for designation as natural area preserves, natural resources conservation areas or a combination of both designations;
- reviews and approves management plans for natural area preserves managed by DNR and
- recommends policies and advises DNR regarding rules and regulations necessary to carry out the requirements of the act.



The Council

The ten voting members are appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands. Five of the members are to be scientists recognized as experts in fields such as plant ecology, zoology, geology, botany, wildlife biology, or similar scientific disciplines. Of the remaining five positions, one is to be filled by a timberland owner (or a representative thereof), one is to be filled by an agricultural landowner (or a representative thereof) and three are citizens-at-large. There are no specific requirements or qualifications for the citizen-at-large positions.



NHAC Participation

Council membership includes attending an average of four meetings per year. Meetings may be in person or through remote access (teleconference or web access). Meeting length varies with the number of agenda items but range from 2 hours to a full day. One meeting a year is typically two days with a field trip to a natural area (or proposed natural area) during one of the days. The meetings are generally scheduled for January, March, May or June, and October.



Council work may include serving on ad hoc committees to review natural area proposals or work with staff on development of the Natural Heritage Plan. Natural area proposals also provide an opportunity for a field trip to the area under consideration. There are materials regarding various council actions, such as a natural area site or expansion recommendation, that require review in advance of council meetings. Council members have also acted as on-the-ground advisors for proposed management activities on existing natural areas.



Since being established as a state institution, the Natural Heritage Advisory Council has been instrumental in growing the natural area system. In 1981 the system included 12 natural area preserves and about 2,000 acres. Today DNR manages 55 natural area preserves, totaling more than 37,000 acres, and 35 natural resources conservation areas, with an additional 113,000 acres. The NHAC is playing an active role in conserving Washington's native species and ecosystems, today and for future generations.

To find out more about the Natural Heritage Advisory Council and their important work, please contact Pene Speaks, Assistant Manager, Conservation Recreation and Transactions Division at: pene.speaks@dnr.wa.gov or (360) 902-1916.