

FINAL

State of
Washington

**Natural
Resources
Conservation
Areas**

STATEWIDE

MANAGEMENT PLAN

September 1992

Developed by
Division of Land and
Water Conservation



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

Brian Boyle - Commissioner of Public Lands
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This Statewide Plan is intended to guide the management of Natural Resources Conservation Areas within Washington State. It represents a long period of cooperation between the department, the legislature, the citizens' advisory committee, and the public.

In 1987 the legislature passed the Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act, designating four conservation areas. To date, nearly 42,000 acres are protected at twenty-one sites across the state. Each of these areas has its own significant features, and each is an excellent example of Washington's natural heritage -- representative of the natural beauty that Lewis and Clark viewed almost 200 years ago.

Conservation areas are designated to maintain, enhance or restore ecological systems and habitat for threatened, endangered and sensitive plants and animals, while providing opportunities for education and low-impact use. Maintaining exceptional scenic landscapes is also a high priority.

The benefits of maintaining these areas encompasses more than the local area that surrounds them. Therefore, in October 1991, I named an eight-member committee to advise the department on the management of these special lands. Recognizing the complexity of natural resources protection and public use issues, I chose representatives from education, conservation, recreation, local government, tribal government and industry.

The Statewide Advisory Committee was challenged with writing a plan that will implement a new approach to natural resource protection, one that includes environmental education and low-impact use, as well as stewardship activities. This plan represents the recommendations of the Statewide Advisory Committee. Input received from citizens who attended four public hearings held during the spring of 1992 and written responses to the draft plan were incorporated.

Much of our work remains ahead of us, however. The Statewide Plan sets the standard for a program which will combine site protection and low-impact public use. The next step is to develop individual site plans to implement this delicate balance.

I encourage you to stay involved as the site management plans are drafted. Together, we can meet our goals for conservation and public use and create a program that will benefit future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Boyle".

Brian Boyle
Commissioner of Public Lands

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Cover Photo: Cypress Island Natural Resources Conservation Area

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I. INTRODUCTION

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION AREAS ACT

The Washington Natural Resources Conservation Areas (NRCA) Act was created by the legislature and approved by the Governor on May 18, 1987. It codifies the creation of Natural Resources Conservation Areas (NRCAs). The Act is codified as Chapter 79.71 of the Revised Code of Washington (Appendix A).

The NRCA Act:

- Authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to acquire property by any means EXCEPT eminent domain.
- Defines the types of property to be acquired as:
 - * lands with a high priority for conservation, natural systems, wildlife and low-impact public use
 - * an area of land or water -- or land and water -- with flora, fauna, geological, archaeological, scenic or similar critically important features that retains to some degree or has reestablished its natural character
 - * examples of native ecological communities
 - * environmentally significant sites threatened by incompatible or ecologically irreversible developments
- Requires a management plan for each site that identifies:
 - *the significant resources to be conserved
 - * the areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental educational uses
 - * the types of management activities that are permitted
- Defines potential uses and management of NRCAs, which will be:
 - * to maintain, enhance or restore ecological systems -- such as aquatic, coastal, riparian, montane and geological systems -- whether or not they are typical or unique in the state
 - * to maintain exceptional scenic landscapes
 - * to maintain habitat for threatened, endangered and sensitive species
 - * to enhance sites for primitive recreational and low-impact public use
 - * to permit outdoor environmental education
 - * to allow limited management activities (permitted but not considered a purpose)
- Creates an account in the state treasury to receive funds through grants, donations, gifts, bond receipts and other means for NRCA maintenance and operations.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The NRCA program's primary purpose is to protect outstanding examples of native ecosystems and habitat for endangered, threatened and sensitive plants and animals. Areas with multiple features -- such as geologic and scenic areas, cultural resources and threatened sites -- are given priority.

There will be opportunities for environmental education and low-impact public uses where such uses do not adversely affect the resource values the area was intended to protect.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Department of Natural Resources manages approximately five million acres of timber, agricultural, commercial, aquatic and other lands. These lands are managed for various commercial and public purposes. A small part of the Department's land base includes 42,000 acres of recently acquired NRCAs. The Department also has responsibility for forest fire protection, forest practices regulation, and various other regulatory and service programs, including recreation, urban forestry, technical assistance and information.

The Department has seven regional offices around the state and a headquarters office in Olympia. The divisions in Olympia are responsible for developing policies and management directions for statewide programs and for providing resources and direction to region staffs to effectively carry out such programs.

The NRCA Program is included in the Land and Water Conservation Division. The Land and Water Conservation Division also manages several other complementary programs. These programs include technical assistance to non-industrial forest landowners (including Stewardship Forestry Assistance), Urban Forestry, Forest Health, Natural Heritage, Natural Area Preserve Management and Recreation Facility Management. The Division also acquires land for Natural Area Preserves (NAPs), recreation sites and NRCAs.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The NRCA Act requires management plans be completed for each site. For consistency between site management plans, and to develop overall statewide policies, the Division recommended a statewide NRCA plan be developed with the assistance of an NRCA citizen advisory committee.

The NRCA statewide advisory committee, appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands, has advised DNR in preparing this Statewide Management Plan. The committee will also serve as a review group for completed site management plans and advise the Division on other aspects of the NRCA program.

The DNR regional staffs, with assistance from the Division, will develop site management plans for NRCAs in their regions. Some will require local advisory committees to assist the regions. The regions also will be responsible for site maintenance before and after plan completion. Capital investments, ecological protection and management of approved uses and activities on these sites will also be the regions' responsibility.

This document shall not take the legal rights of any property owners. To the extent that any provision herein conflicts with them, the legal rights of such property owners shall be recognized.

SEPA REQUIREMENTS AND THE PUBLIC PROCESS

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), RCW 43.21C requires governmental agencies to consider the environmental impact of a proposal before making decisions. In preparing the plan, an environmental checklist and a supplemental sheet for non-project action was prepared and a declaration of non-significance issued. This information, along with the plan, was submitted for public comment in compliance with SEPA.

Four public meetings were held throughout the state: Mount Vernon, April 7; Kelso, April 9; Spokane, April 14, and Seattle, April 21, 1992. Total attendance at these meetings topped 300. Listening posts were set up and citizens were invited to voice their support or concerns regarding the NRCA Draft Statewide Management Plan. All comments were recorded by staff. Written comments were accepted through May 15, 1992.

Approximately 400 citizens submitted oral or written comments on the plan. All comments were considered by the DNR and the Statewide Advisory Committee. Based on those comments, DNR has modified the draft plan as reflected in this final document. All comments regarding SEPA were also considered. The Department will follow the appropriate requirements of SEPA as each NRCA site management plan is prepared and completed.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The Department of Natural Resources shall continue to work with local government in meeting the requirements of the Growth Management Act. The Department shall provide each local government with a copy of the NRCA site management plan when NRCAs are located within their jurisdiction, and notification when such areas are proposed within their jurisdiction.

As site plans are developed for individual NRCAs, local government shall be invited to participate as a member of the local NRCA advisory committee.

It is in the interest of the Department to have local government recognize these areas in their comprehensive plans and local ordinances as "public reserves," or "fish and wildlife and natural areas," so that appropriate unique areas or resources can be properly protected and managed by state and local governments.

The Department shall work with local government to obtain the necessary permits required to develop facilities within NRCAs, where plans call for such facilities.

ACQUISITION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION AREAS

In the 1970s, a portion of Mount Si in King County was purchased and set aside under RCW 43.51.940-945 as a conservation area. When the Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act (RCW 79.71) was passed in 1987, Mount Si was designated as an NRCA.

With the establishment of the Act, additional acquisitions followed.

The NRCA Act originally designated four sites as NRCAs:

- Mount Si in King County
- Cypress Island in Skagit County
- Woodard Bay in Thurston County
- Dishman Hills in Spokane County

To finance acquisition of new conservation areas, the legislature increased the real estate excise tax by .06 percent for two years. When the tax ended June 30, 1989, \$15 million had been collected. The money was used to buy NRCAs (about \$8 million) and NAPs (\$4 million). The remainder was placed in a stewardship account for operation and maintenance of the newly acquired lands.

During the 1989-91 biennium the legislature appropriated \$151.5 million to transfer environmentally sensitive state school trust lands to be managed as NAPs or NRCAs.

The Department of Natural Resources nominated state trust lands for potential conservation area status. Sites were selected and approved for transfer by the state Board of Natural Resources. Using the legislature's \$151 million appropriation, the transfers were completed on June 30, 1991.

In 1990 the legislature appropriated \$53 million for wildlife and recreation land acquisition projects (RCW 43.98A). The appropriation allocated \$7 million for NRCA and NAP land purchases.

To date the Department has acquired approximately 42,000 acres of NRCA lands through trust land transfers, the real estate excise tax and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. (Description of Conservation Areas in Appendix B.)

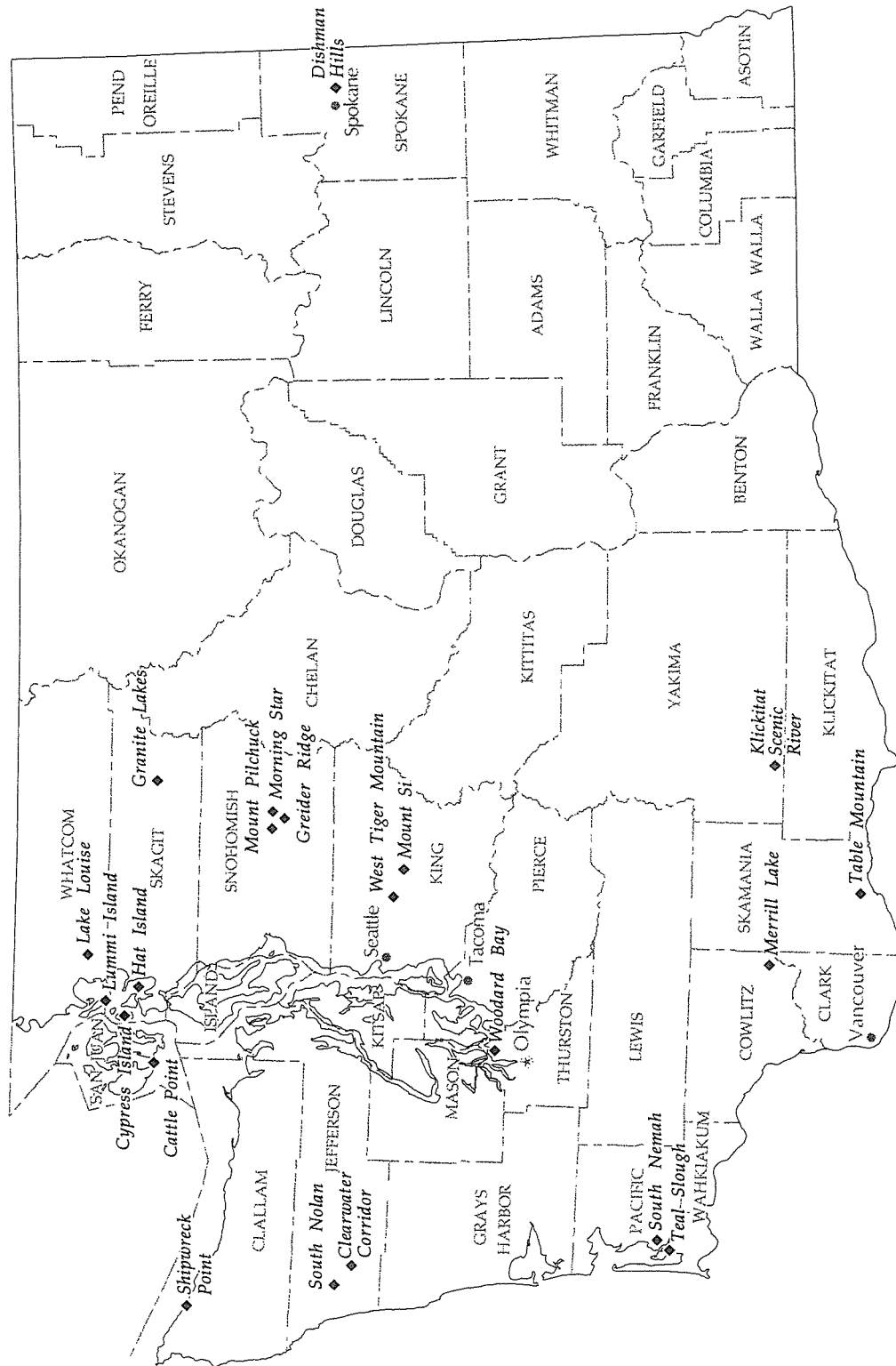
Natural Resources Conservation Areas

The state currently manages approximately 42,000 acres in 21 NRCAs.

<u>SITE</u>	<u>ACRES</u>	<u>COUNTY</u>
Cattle Point	93	San Juan
Clearwater Corridor	2323	Jefferson
Cypress Island	3500	Skagit
Dishman Hills	518*	Spokane
Granite Lakes	603	Skagit
Greider Ridge	5469	Snohomish
Hat Island	91	Skagit
Klickitat Scenic River	470	Yakima
Lake Louise	138	Whatcom
Lummi Island	661	Whatcom
Merrill Lake	114	Cowlitz
Morning Star	7837	Snohomish
Mount Pilchuck	6802	Snohomish
Mount Si	6800	King
Shipwreck Point	472	Clallam
South Nemah	1452	Pacific
South Nolan	213	Jefferson
Table Mountain/Greenleaf Peak	2197	Skamania
Teal Slough	8	Pacific
West Tiger Mountain	854	King
Woodard Bay	627	Thurston

* Joint management with Spokane County, The Nature Conservancy, and the Dishman Hills Natural Area Association

Natural Resources Conservation Areas



Resource Mapping Section

February 1992

II. NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION AREAS POLICIES

A. GUIDING PROGRAM POLICY

● PROGRAM PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the NRCA program is to protect outstanding examples of native ecosystems, habitat for endangered, threatened, and sensitive plants and animals and scenic landscapes.

There will be opportunities for environmental education and low-impact public uses where such uses do not adversely affect the resource values the area was intended to protect.

A fundamental principle of the NRCA program is that natural resource protection has the highest priority. Public use will be accommodated within conservation areas. Limited commodity-based activities may be allowed as stated in Part E. Commodity-Based Activities.

The NRCA program is a new concept: a blending of public use and natural resource protection goals. All uses directly involving people (primitive recreation, low-impact public use) and management activities will be allowed only if consistent with the NRCA Act's conservation purposes, specifically:

- * they will not adversely affect the quality of the site's natural resources
- * they are appropriate to the site's maintenance as a relatively unmodified natural setting
- * they do not disrupt long-term ecological processes

● ACQUISITION

Acquisitions are by willing seller only. Efforts will be made to include ample buffer areas within an NRCA acquisition, so as not to impact adjacent lands.

● MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS

The natural resource-oriented purposes -- protecting ecological systems, habitat, and scenic landscapes -- have priority over the public-oriented purposes, primitive recreation and environmental education. Resource conservation will always prevail in conflicts with public use.

Commodity-based management activities that are compatible with resource protection, environmental education, or low-impact public use may be allowed.

● **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATEWIDE MANAGEMENT PLAN AND SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS**

The NRCA Statewide Management Plan provides an overview of the NRCA Program. The plan's intent is to provide direction for and standardize the development of site management plans.

The Department will develop site management plans for each NRCA. The plans will specify acceptable public uses under RCW 79.71.070 and how the site will be managed. Local advisory groups will assist as needed.

B. PROTECTION/ENHANCEMENT/RESTORATION

Protection/Enhancement/Restoration of natural resources is the NRCA program's primary goal. Site inventories will be completed before site management plans are written.

Prior to identifying areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental educational uses, each site management plan shall identify the significant resources to be conserved (RCW 79.71.070) and shall address the long-term maintenance, enhancement, and restoration of these resources, and the long-term maintenance of habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, as well as scenic landscapes.

In many cases, it is possible to re-establish the "native structure, diversity and stability" once characteristic of a site. However, because each site has a unique history and original condition, a management approach specific to the area will be necessary to meet site objectives. Within each site management plan, methods for restoring historically altered areas, such as roads, mine sites and other unnatural clearings will be discussed. Methods for restoring habitat areas for plant and animal species and for enhancement of scenic/educational values will be addressed. See also sections F. Stewardship Activities, G. Other Activities -- Natural Events, and J. Monitoring.

All known significant resources shall be mapped and the sensitivity of the resources discussed in the site management plan. (See H. Cultural Resources for exception.)

The site management plans shall include as much of the following information as appropriate:

- * habitat locations for sensitive, threatened, and endangered species
- * habitat for native species not rare but needing large undisturbed areas for life cycles
- * high quality native plant communities
- * evidence of previous fires and forest practices and other development activities where relevant to the site's stewardship activities
- * bodies of water and shorelines
- * soil types

- * historically significant buildings and other structures
- * archeological sites, cultural resources (including plants and animals)
- * unique topographical and geological features
- * road systems, trails, and other points of public entry or use
- * scenic landscapes, viewpoints
- * tribal sensitive areas

C. LOW-IMPACT PUBLIC USE

Following the identification of and planning for the natural resources to be protected, site management plans shall identify those areas with potential for low-impact public uses which do not detract from long-term ecological processes.

By definition, low-impact public use activities do not adversely affect a site's resource qualities. For example, where endangered species/raptor nesting areas exist, access will be restricted or managed to protect the species.

Specifically, activities shall not compromise a site's integrity, ecological, geological, scenic, historic and archaeological values (See Section H. Cultural Resources). Such activities should leave vegetation, animal behavior, soil and water relatively unaltered; and should minimize adverse impacts on visitor experience. Each site management plan should list resources needing protection and how activity will have minimal impact on resource protection.

Where possible, low-impact public use will be clustered to avoid disturbing the entire NRCA. As much land as possible will remain undisturbed to further ecosystem protection goals.

The types of uses to be considered may include, but are not limited to:

- * hiking
- * primitive camping
- * picnicking
- * bird watching
- * interpretive tours
- * environmental education activities
- * nature study
- * photography
- * scientific research
- * other uses consistent with the conservation purposes

See section K. for conditional/excluded uses

D. OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

RCW 79.71 requires the identification of areas suitable for outdoor environmental education within natural resources conservation areas. On-site environmental education will only be allowed if it will not adversely affect the resource values, is appropriate to the maintenance of the site in a relatively unmodified natural setting, and does not detract from long-term ecological processes.

Environmental education goals include:

Create greater understanding and appreciation of natural resources conservation areas, and instill a sense of stewardship in the protection of those significant natural resources.

Provide a living classroom where interdisciplinary environmental education activities can be demonstrated.

Incorporate site restoration efforts into the education program.

Establish or join a network of community educators to teach citizens about the environment and their relationship to it.

Actively support environmental education for all citizens of Washington State, with special emphasis on the K - 12 program, consistent with the state guidelines for environmental education.

If it is determined that outdoor environmental education is allowable within a site, the site management plan shall include:

- * a boundary map, designating areas within the site having potential for outdoor environmental education
- * a monitoring plan, including contingencies if use is shown to detract from long-term ecological processes
- * inventory of existing or needed structure(s) for use as educational facility(ies) (See FACILITIES section, page 15.)
- * determination of appropriate program activities (e.g. interpretive signs/trails, "hands on" or observation only) and identification of existing outdoor environmental education curriculum and resource materials (available through the Superintendent of Public Instruction)

Site improvements may be allowed for the sake of public use, provided they are in keeping with the statewide management plan's definition of low-impact. All public facilities shall be developed with consideration given to people who are differently abled.

E. COMMODITY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Commodity-based activities may be allowed within an NRCA if they are consistent with the Act's conservation purposes and compatible with resource protection, authorized low-impact public use and environmental education.

Commodity-based activities should not compromise a site's integrity, ecological, geological, scenic, historic and archaeological values. Such activities should leave vegetation, animal behavior, soil and water relatively unaltered; and adverse impacts on visitor experience should be minimized.

Commodity-based activities include but are not limited to:

- * Agriculture and Grazing
- * Aquaculture
- * Mining

Mining activities are further clarified as follows:

● MINING AND OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION

Definition of mineral, oil and gas exploration: Examination of a site to determine its mineral potential by on-site and/or off-site geochemical, geophysical, geological or drilling methods.

Definition of mining: the removal of minerals or other valuable materials in commercial quantities or for commercial purposes from the surface or subsurface.

Proposals for exploration and development of minerals, oil and gas not owned as part of the NRCA, including trust-owned minerals, will be evaluated for environmental sensitivity and agreement with the NRCA's management policy. No open pit mines will be allowed; subsurface operations should be accessed from outside of the NRCA with little or no surface disturbance in the conservation area.

When the mineral rights are NRCA-owned, mineral leases and contracts will be issued only when no surface or no harmful subsurface disturbance can be anticipated over the project's life.

● MINING ACTIVITIES

The majority of the mineral rights on NRCAs were retained by the previous owners. State trust land owners whose lands are managed by the Department own over 41,000 acres of mineral rights on NRCAs.

● RECREATIONAL MINERAL PROSPECTING

If a site is designated by the Department of Natural Resources as a Recreational Prospecting Area, recreational mineral prospectors shall apply to the Department for a permit for such activity. Such permit shall be administered consistent with the provisions of RCW 79.01.651. Recreational mineral prospecting shall include gold panning and sluicing in accordance with applicable statutes and rules, including, but not limited to, the Hydraulics Code (RCW 75.20.100) and the Shoreline Management Act of 1971.

Designations of Recreational Prospecting Areas are made by the trusts where the trusts own the minerals.

● INCIDENTAL ROCK AND MINERAL COLLECTING

The intent of this policy is to allow individuals to collect a limited amount of rock, mineral, or fossil specimens for collection purposes as long as, based on the initial inventory, there is no noticeable disturbance to the landscape, and such activities are specifically permitted by the site management plan. The outcome of this policy will be monitored closely and additional restrictions, such as establishing volume and weight limitations, may be imposed by site managers.

As used here, " incidental rock and mineral collecting" shall mean that:

- * specimens are gathered for personal collection
- * hand tools, or no tools are used
- * no blasting occurs
- * rocks and minerals are not used for commercial purposes
- * the specific conservation area site management plan has no additional restrictions determined necessary for its protection

F. STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITIES

Activities and opportunities that enhance the protection, restoration, low-impact public use, and outdoor education of a site will be encouraged.

Stewardship activities include but are not limited to the following:

● WEED CONTROL

The integrity of native ecosystems within conservation areas is sometimes threatened by exotic weed invasion.

- * Substantial effort will be made to prevent invasive weeds from becoming established within conservation areas.
- * Mechanical controls, such as hand pulling and cutting, will be used when practical. Chemical control should be ground applied when necessary, using the lowest possible effective application rates.

● FORESTRY ACTIVITIES

Local stock of only native/endemic plants should be used in all restoration and enhancement efforts on NRCAs.

At times, in order to aid a site's ecological maintenance, restoration or enhancement, certain forestry practices may be necessary. For example, ecological thinning to promote species diversity and structural complexity within forested NRCAs may be necessary. However, in those cases, timber harvest is not the activity's objective, but is of secondary or tertiary importance to the stewardship objectives being pursued. It is probable that the cut trees' quality will not be merchantable. Any income that would be generated would be incidental to the forestry practice itself, and it is projected that most forestry practices would result in a cost being incurred by the Department.

● FIRE MANAGEMENT

Fire may be used as a tool by the Department for ecological management and restoration purposes.

- * A site fire management plan will be prepared by the Department before implementing fire as a management tool.
- * A fire management plan must evaluate:
 - other management alternatives
 - impact on adjoining landowners

- risk of escape
- cost benefit analysis
- smoke management requirements

● **FIRE PROTECTION**

In preparing management plans for each NRCA, the Department shall address programs to prevent human caused fires within the NRCA. Fire suppression strategies should also be developed for each NRCA to protect resource values and adjacent properties.

G. OTHER ACTIVITIES

Other activities, not identified as commodity based or stewardship, may be allowed if they enhance or are consistent with the NRCA Program's goals.

● **ROADS (Parking Areas)**

Most existing roads will be closed and generally new roads will not be constructed since motorized use is usually not a low-impact activity and conflicts with the statute's conservation purposes.

- * While vehicle access is not guaranteed to trailheads, new roads will only be constructed to provide access to a trailhead for low-impact public use or when needed to protect the natural resources of a site.
- * Existing roads when not closed and new roads (if any) will remain open to the general public when they meet DNR Recreation road standards for public access for safety AND
 - an existing public right-of-way already exists or
 - the road is determined as essential to the access of the site for low-impact use.
- * Existing roads may be gated and maintained for management purposes such as fire protection but will remain closed to the general public for access.
- * Rights-of-Way or Road Use Permits over existing roads will be granted only on a temporary basis when the activity does not: detract from the natural setting; risk threat to natural resources; conflict with low-impact public use; or expose the Department to unusual liability risks.
- * Existing roads within an NRCA, which will not be used for vehicles, will be abandoned or maintained as inactive roads which meet forest practices legal requirements.

● LEASES AND PERMITS

Granting licenses, leases and permits within a conservation area shall be considered only when such license, lease or permit will not conflict with program goals. Some activities may best be administered by license, permit or lease.

Leases, permits or licenses:

- * shall be on a temporary basis and subject to periodic review
- * shall not detract from a natural setting, risk threat to a natural resource or conflict with low-impact public use
- * shall not be issued for an exclusive use
- * shall be determined to be in the public interest and of public benefit

● NATURAL EVENTS (Fire, wind storm, flood)

The Department may elect to suppress or reduce the potential for naturally occurring events when there is a threat to:

- * public safety
- * adjoining landowner property
- * long-term natural resource health of a site
- * outdoor education or public use facilities

Restoration may also be used after a naturally occurring event if it is necessary to prevent significant environmental damage or maintain natural systems. Suppression or reduction methods will be the least damaging to the resource as practical.

The Department may manage selected sites without initiating reduction, suppression or restoration activities.

- * Sites shall be left in a "natural setting" including results from natural events whenever possible.
- * Attempts to prevent, suppress or restore damage from natural events shall only occur where there is an imminent threat to public safety, adjoining landowner property, long-term natural resources' health or capital improvements on a site.

● INSECT CONTROL

When consistent with the primary purpose of the NRCA program, the suppression or control of insects may occur within conservation areas. When insects are declared a public nuisance per RCW 76.06 or RCW 15.58, conservation areas may be designated as part of an infestation control district and suppression activities would be required.

● FACILITIES

Since NRCAs will be retained in a natural setting as much as possible, it is anticipated that only those structures which accommodate low-impact public uses will be constructed. Existing structures identified in the site's management plan require evaluation for protection, maintenance, enhancement or removal. Facilities will be retained only when they contribute to a program goal.

- * No new facilities will be developed unless they are shown to be essential and consistent with program goals.
- * Facilities identified as historical that can be protected and maintained shall be retained if they are consistent with the NRCA purposes.
- * All facilities accessible by the general public must be maintained in a safe manner.
- * The capability to maintain new structures must be in place prior to construction.
- * Construction of new facilities must meet the requirements of applicable laws.

H. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Site management plans will consider what cultural resources may be present, (including historic and contemporary cultural use and archaeological resources), on the NRCA and methods to protect those resources.

Affected tribes will be invited, as advisory board members, to participate in the development of site management plans within their respective ceded areas. Activities which are part of tribal cultural values and reserved Treaty rights will be addressed on a site-by-site basis.

Information will be gathered from local tribes and historians regarding these uses and the Department will consider this information in its planning. If necessary to protect these sites, the locations will remain confidential to the extent permitted by law.

As funding is available, the department is committed to conducting professional cultural resource surveys to identify all cultural resources located within a specific NRCA.

I. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR ALLOWABLE USES

Once an NRCA or areas within a NRCA have been designated as having the potential for human activities and uses, prospective uses need to be evaluated against their direct and indirect effects on resources.

All potential human activities and uses must be evaluated to ensure that they are compatible with other uses, will not exceed the site's limits of acceptable change, are realistic in view of individual site characteristics and local conditions and are compatible with overall implementation strategies and program goals.

Basically, the evaluation process consists of:

- * identifying and mapping sensitive resources
- * identifying and evaluating potential human activities
- * defining limits of acceptable change
- * implementation and monitoring

An objective evaluation of allowable uses must be completed and a determination made that the uses will not adversely affect the resource values of the site.

J. MONITORING

Site management plans must contain a process that identifies how and which resources will be monitored. Monitoring plans must be in place before stewardship prescriptions can be approved. Two types of monitoring that must be addressed in the site management plans are:

- * **Ecological monitoring**
- * **Low-impact use monitoring**

As stewardship techniques are developed to restore and maintain ecological systems for the associated public and natural resource benefits, managers will need to know how effective these strategies are for meeting conservation purposes on site. Monitoring involves selecting indicators that give managers a glimpse of the important components and processes on site.

Measurable indicators used to document the effectiveness of stewardship prescriptions and impacts from public use should:

- * be responsive enough to provide an early warning of change
- * provide a continuous assessment over a wide range of impacts
- * be easy and cost-effective to measure
- * differentiate between natural cycles and change induced by low-impact public use

Stewards may be needed for individual sites where low-impact uses have been integrated into the site management.

Funding resources and volunteer opportunities need to be pursued to do monitoring work.

K. CONDITIONAL/EXCLUDED USES

Uses -- including commodity-based management activities -- which are destructive of resources, aesthetically offensive, disruptive, incompatible with cultural values, limiting or curtailing to existing life on the site or pose health and safety concerns, will not be allowed.

In considering what activities are allowed, the site advisory committee will apply the following conditions:

- * Using motorized vehicles off road, on trails or on closed roads will not be allowed. Exceptions are limited to utilizing motorized vehicles for emergency response, management activities, stewardship activities and for use in designated areas by those who are differently abled.
- * Hunting, trapping and the discharge of firearms will only be allowed in specifically designated zones on a site-by-site basis (See H. Cultural Resources).
- * Non-motorized vehicles and horses are allowed only on specifically designated roads and trails, to be determined on a site-by-site basis.
- * Mining will not be allowed under the following conditions:
 - pit mining
 - all surface mining where NRCA ownership includes mineral rights
 - all sub-surface mining where NRCA ownership includes mineral rights, unless such mining can be accomplished without harming ecological systems
- * The collection of plants, mushrooms, or firewood without a permit will not be allowed (except as noted in Section H where tribal areas have been identified).
- * Unleashed pets will not be allowed, except in designated hunting, trapping, or firearm areas.
- * Timber harvest will not be allowed except for stewardship purposes intended to maintain or enhance resource values or when necessary for constructing low-impact public use facilities.

L. BOUNDARIES

The recommended boundary of each NRCA shall be included in the site management plan. Establishment and adjustments to boundaries require a public hearing by statute.

The area of land purchased for a conservation area is frequently determined by the ownership of the previous landowner rather than on ecological determinations. As ecological evaluations are completed, some areas may need to be expanded or changed.

- * Recommended boundaries should include additional property that should be acquired (or deleted -- property that does not meet the goals of the conservation area).
- * Recommended boundaries may include private or other government land. Conservation lands can only be acquired from willing sellers, not by condemnation.
- * Boundaries near sensitive areas should provide protective buffer areas within the NRCA.
- * State-owned aquatic lands adjacent to an NRCA may be considered for inclusion within the boundary of the NRCA, and managed according to the NRCA management plan, under one of the following:
 - A no-fee lease agreement may be considered by the Aquatic Lands Division Manager for state-owned aquatic lands used for recreation and public access, subject to the provisions of WAC 332-30-131.
 - The Land and Water Conservation Division may nominate state-owned aquatic lands adjacent to NRCAs for Reserve status, subject to the provisions of WAC 332-30-151.

M. REGULATIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Department of Natural Resources' existing Law Enforcement Policy shall be applicable to all law enforcement actions relating to NRCAs.

Uses and activities within an NRCA, not consistent with the Act's conservation purposes, shall be considered in violation of the Act. DNR's existing law enforcement policies shall apply. The Department shall comply with all applicable government regulations in the management of NRCAs and shall also cooperate with local and state enforcement agencies.

III. SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS

A. CONTENT

The NRCA statute dictates that the Department develop a site management plan for each designated area.

Each plan identifies:

- * significant resources to be conserved consistent with the purposes of the Act, and how they should be protected
- * those areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental education uses (with particular consideration for serving the needs of people with disabilities)
- * what types of management activities (revenue generating and stewardship) and public uses are permitted, consistent with the conservation purposes of RCW 79.71
- * management policies and direction, protection needs and uses (Implementation, on-site design, construction or maintenance will be addressed at the implementation stage.)
- * other agencies which may assume management or cooperate in the management of NRCAs. In these instances, management plans may be prepared through cooperative agreements
- * times when the plan or subsequent activities will be submitted for public comment in compliance with SEPA.

B. SITE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The site advisory committee's role is to:

- * provide advice on management decisions, as requested by the Department
- * identify other issues relative to site management
- * review and recommend changes to draft site management plans prepared by Department staff

Some sites may not require an advisory committee. However, a public hearing is needed for each site management plan prior to adoption.

One committee may provide guidance for multiple sites.

Advisory committees are appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands. Chairpersons and members are selected to provide a balanced outlook. Committee members may include representatives from agencies, local government (including educators), neighboring landowners, conservation/recreation organizations and affected tribes.

C. SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

The NRCA Act states that the Department shall make site management plans available for review and comment by the public and other state, tribal, and local agencies, prior to final approval by the Commissioner of Public Lands. Federal agencies will also be notified.

As a part of this process, the site advisory committee will review the draft site management plan and recommend preferred alternatives.

The Statewide Advisory Committee will review the draft site management plan for consistency with the statewide plan. Upon receiving comments from the Statewide Advisory Committee, the site advisory committee and DNR regional staff shall submit the plan for public comment in compliance with SEPA, which will include a public meeting.

The final plan with revisions incorporated from public comments will be forwarded first to the statewide committee for recommendations. Notification will be given through SEPA of any significant modifications to the plan. Then the plan will be forwarded to the Commissioner for adoption.

Following adoption, site management plans will be reviewed by the Department, the Statewide Advisory Committee and the public every five years. These reviews will enable the plans to be revised to address current management issues.

IV. FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM

As the population of Washington State grows so does the need for protection of lands appropriate for NRCAs.

The Department should plan for future growth of NRCAs to ensure that priority sites are acquired and funds are available for management, monitoring and maintenance, consistent with NRCA site management plans and this plan.

The following are future task recommendations necessary to enhance the NRCA program.

- * Develop criteria for future acquisitions that will ensure that priority sites are acquired. Developed criteria will be consistent with provisions of RCW 79.71.
- * Seek funding for additional DNR trust land transfers and for purchase of NRCAs where sites have unique ecological and public resource protection values.
- * Continue working with organizations and governmental entities on cooperative NRCA management, planning and maintenance.
- * Secure funding to provide adequate planning, management and maintenance for all existing and future NRCAs.
- * Institute a volunteer program to assist managing, monitoring and maintaining NRCAs.
- * Develop an accessible data base system for tracking information such as ownership, location of sensitive and unique resources, public use areas, monitoring information and management activities.
- * Establish a system setting restoration and enhancement priorities among NRCA sites.
- * Develop educational and informational materials about NRCAs and their unique qualities.
- * Formally review and revise the NRCA Statewide Management Plan at five-year intervals.
- * Continue to support and work with the NRCA Statewide Advisory Committee on issues affecting NRCAs.
- * Provide an understandable program of site development and management that will keep the public involved and informed.
- * Establish an effective program with local government to implement the NRCA program consistent with the Growth Management Act.

- * Consider retaining site specific advisory groups from the local community after plans are written to assist with management and user group issues.
- * Evaluate NRCA sites where law enforcement presence may be needed and secure such resources when determined necessary.
- * Develop appropriate statutes for the protection of resource values, and secure funding for regulatory enforcement.
- * Review existing RCWs and WACs to make necessary revisions to adequately protect and manage NRCAs.

GLOSSARY

Most terms in this document use standard meanings. The following definitions are intended to provide consistency and clearer understanding.

Department - the Washington State Department of Natural Resources or DNR.

implementation plan - a detailed plan for implementing site management plan guidelines -- including development plans, operation-and-management plans, budgets, schedules and responsibilities.

low-impact public use - recreational activities and improvements that preserve NRCA features, protect the relatively unmodified natural setting and do not detract from long-term ecological processes. Environmental education and research are two examples of low-impact public use.

Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) - LAC is a monitoring program designed to establish acceptable and appropriate resource and social conditions in public use settings. This program was created by the USDA Forest Service and has also been adopted by the National Park Service.

management activities - activities which generate income while observing conservation purposes. Examples include forestry, agriculture, aquaculture, mining, road rights-of-way and utility easements. Other activities may include road closures and construction.

managing entity - DNR, another public agency or private organization designated to manage an NRCA under RCW 79.71.080.

Natural Area Preserve (NAP) - an area of land and/or water predominantly in its natural state, largely undisturbed by human activity designated under RCW 79.70 and subsequent legislative actions.

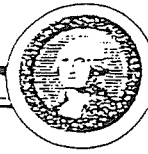
Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) or conservation area - an area of land and/or water designated under RCW 79.71 and subsequent legislative actions.

site management plan - a document outlining public use and management of an individual NRCA.

stewardship activities - restore or maintain the ecological value and habitat quality or enhance the site's public use and environmental education potential.

Washington Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act or Act - Revised Code of Washington statute governing establishment, acquisition and management of NRCAs (RCW 79.71).

APPENDIX A: Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act



CERTIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5612

52nd Legislature
1991 Regular Session

Passed by the Senate April 28, 1991
Yeas 46 Nays 1

Paul V. Hutchins
President of the Senate

Passed by the House April 28, 1991
Yeas 98 Nays 0

Jim Wain
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Approved

Governor of the State of Washington

CERTIFICATE

I, Gordon Golob, Secretary of the Senate of the State of Washington, do hereby certify that the attached is SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5612 as passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives on the dates hereon set forth.

Gordon A. Golob
Secretary

FILED

Secretary of State
State of Washington

SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5612

AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Passed Legislature - 1991 Regular Session

State of Washington 52nd Legislature 1991 Regular Session

By Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Bluechel, Snyder, Metcalf and Stratton; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

Read first time February 25, 1991.

1 AN ACT Relating to natural resources conservation areas; amending
2 RCW 79.71.010, 79.71.020, 79.71.030, 79.71.050, 79.71.060, 79.71.070,
3 79.71.080, and 79.71.090; adding a new section to chapter 77.12 RCW;
4 creating new sections; and repealing RCW 79.71.110.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 Sec. 1. RCW 79.71.010 and 1987 c 472 s 1 are each amended to read
7 as follows:

8 The legislature finds that: (1) (~~that~~) There is an increasing
9 and continuing need by the people of Washington for certain areas of
10 the state to be conserved, in rural as well as urban settings, for the
11 benefit of present and future generations; (2) (~~that~~) such areas are
12 worthy of conservation for their outstanding scenic and ecological
13 values and provide opportunities for (~~dispersed~~) low impact public
14 (~~recreation~~) use; (3) (~~that~~) in certain cases acquisition of

SSB 5612.PL

1 property or rights in property is necessary to protect these areas for
2 public purposes; and (4) ~~((that))~~ there is a need for ~~((an))~~ a state
3 agency to act in an effective and timely manner to acquire interests
4 in such areas and to develop appropriate management strategies for
5 conservation purposes.

6 Sec. 2. RCW 79.71.020 and 1987 c 472 s 2 are each amended to read
7 as follows:

8 Lands possessing the following characteristics are considered by
9 the legislature to be worthy of consideration for conservation
10 purposes:

11 (1) Lands identified as having high priority for conservation,
12 natural systems, wildlife, and ~~((dispersed recreational))~~ low-impact
13 public use values;

14 (2) ~~((Prime natural features of the Washington landscape or~~
15 ~~portions thereof, inland or coastal wetlands, significant littoral,~~
16 ~~estuaries, or aquatic sites, or important geological features))~~ An area
17 of land or water, or land and water, that has flora, fauna, geological,
18 archaeological, scenic, or similar features of critical importance to
19 the people of Washington and that has retained to some degree or has
20 reestablished its natural character;

21 (3) Examples of native ecological communities; and

22 (4) Environmentally significant sites threatened with conversion
23 to incompatible or ecologically irreversible uses.

24 Sec. 3. RCW 79.71.030 and 1987 c 472 s 3 are each amended to read
25 as follows:

26 As used in this chapter:

27 "Commissioner" means the commissioner of public lands.

28 "Department" means the department of natural resources.

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1 "Conservation purposes" include but are not limited to: (1)
2 Maintaining, enhancing, or restoring ecological systems, including but
3 not limited to aquatic, coastal, riparian, montane, and geological
4 systems, whether such systems be unique or typical to the state of
5 Washington; (2) maintaining exceptional scenic landscapes; (3)
6 maintaining habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species;
7 (4) enhancing sites for primitive recreational purposes; and (5)
8 outdoor environmental education.

9 "Low-impact public use" includes public recreation uses and
10 improvements that do not adversely affect the resource values, are
11 appropriate to the maintenance of the site in a relatively unmodified
12 natural setting, and do not detract from long-term ecological
13 processes.

14 "Management (~~(for conservation purposes)~~) activities" may include
15 limited production of income from forestry, agriculture, or other
16 resource management activities, if such actions are consistent with the
17 other purposes and requirements of this chapter.

18 (~~("Washington natural resources conservation area" is an area of~~
19 ~~land and/or water which retains to some degree or has reestablished its~~
20 ~~natural character, although it need not be completely undisturbed, or~~
21 ~~has flora, fauna, geological, archaeological, scenic, or similar~~
22 ~~features of critical importance to the people of Washington.)~~)

23 "Natural resources conservation area" or "conservation area" means
24 an area having the characteristics identified in RCW 79.71.020.

25 Sec. 4. RCW 79.71.050 and 1987 c 472 s 5 are each amended to read
26 as follows:

27 The department is authorized to transfer fee simple interest or
28 less than fee interests in trust land, as defined by Article XVI of the
29 Washington Constitution, for the creation of natural resources

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1 conservation ((management)) areas, ((~~providing there is~~)) provided the
2 owner of the trust land receives full fair market value compensation
3 for all rights transferred. The proceeds from such transfers shall be
4 used for the exclusive purpose of acquiring real property to replace
5 those interests utilized for the conservation area in order to meet the
6 department's fiduciary obligations and to maintain the productive land
7 base of the various trusts.

8 Sec.-5. RCW 79.71.060 and 1987 c 472 s 6 are each amended to read
9 as follows:

10 The department shall hold a public hearing in the county where the
11 majority of the land in the proposed natural resources conservation
12 area is located prior to establishing the boundary. An area proposed
13 for designation must contain resources consistent with ((~~the purposes~~
14 ~~of this chapter~~)) characteristics identified in RCW 79.71.020.

15 Sec. 6. RCW 79.71.070 and 1987 c 472 s 7 are each amended to read
16 as follows:

17 The department shall develop a management plan for each designated
18 area. The plan shall identify the significant resources to be
19 conserved consistent with the purposes of this chapter and identify the
20 areas with potential for ((~~primitive recreation~~)) low-impact public and
21 environmental educational uses. The plan shall specify what types of
22 management activities ((~~will be~~)) and public uses that are permitted,
23 consistent with the conservation purposes of this chapter. The
24 department shall make such plans available for review and comment by
25 the public and other state, tribal, and local agencies, prior to final
26 approval by the commissioner.

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1 Sec. 7. RCW 79.71.080 and 1987 c 472 s 8 are each amended to read
2 as follows:

3 The department is authorized to administer natural ~~((resources))~~
4 resources conservation areas and may enter into management agreements
5 for these areas with ~~((either))~~ federal agencies, state agencies, local
6 governments, and private nonprofit conservancy corporations, as defined
7 in RCW 64.04.130, when such agreements are consistent with the purposes
8 of acquisition as defined in the adopted ~~((site))~~ management plan. All
9 management activities within a Washington natural resources
10 conservation area will conform with the plan. Any moneys derived from
11 the management of these areas in conformance with the adopted plan
12 shall be deposited in the natural resources conservation areas
13 stewardship account ~~((established in RCW 79.71.099))~~.

14 Sec. 8. RCW 79.71.090 and 1987 c 472 s 9 are each amended to read
15 as follows:

16 There is hereby created the natural resources conservation areas
17 stewardship account in the state treasury to ensure proper and
18 continuing management of land acquired or designated pursuant to this
19 chapter. Funds for the stewardship account shall be derived from
20 appropriations of state general funds, federal funds, grants,
21 donations, gifts, bond issue receipts, securities, and other monetary
22 instruments of value. Income derived from the management of natural
23 resources conservation areas shall also be deposited in this
24 stewardship account. The state treasurer may not deduct a fee for
25 managing the funds in the stewardship account.

26 Appropriations from this account to the department shall be
27 expended for no other purpose than the following: (1) To manage the
28 areas approved by the legislature in fulfilling the purposes of this
29 chapter; (2) to manage property acquired as natural area preserves

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1 under chapter 79.70 RCW; (3) to manage property transferred under the
2 authority and appropriation provided by the legislature to be managed
3 under chapter 79.70 RCW or this chapter or acquired under chapter
4 43.98A RCW; and (4) to pay for operating expenses for the natural
5 heritage program under chapter 79.70 RCW.

6 NEW SECTION. Sec. 9. The balance in the conservation area
7 account is transferred to the natural resources conservation areas
8 stewardship account under RCW 79.71.090.

9 NEW SECTION. Sec. 10. Two million dollars from the existing
10 stewardship account balance shall remain in the account to create an
11 endowment.

12 NEW SECTION. Sec. 11. RCW 79.71.110 and 1987 c 472 s 11 are
13 each repealed.

APPENDIX B: NRCA Site Descriptions

Cattle Point (San Juan County): Wildlife and important plant species are found in this 93-acre area. It also features a freshwater wetland, grasslands, waterfront, mature conifer forest and outstanding views.

Clearwater Corridor (Jefferson County): The Old Growth Commission recommended this area's preservation. The 2,323-acre site represents a coastal forest of Sitka spruce, Western hemlock, red alder and bigleaf maple.

Cypress Island (Skagit County): DNR now owns approximately 3,500 NRCA acres on the island which includes miles of waterfront and excellent examples of coniferous forests and wetland ecosystems. Several rare bird species are protected on the island.

Dishman Hills (Spokane County): An example of exceptional natural history within walking distance of Spokane on 518 acres.

Granite Lakes (Skagit County): Abutting the Glacier Peak Wilderness area, this 603-acre conservation area contains 160-year-old stands of silver fir, mountain hemlock and associated plant communities.

Greider Ridge (Snohomish County): This 5,469-acre area features spectacular, mid-to high-elevation subalpine areas with many exposed rocks and cliffs. It also includes many miles of hiking trails.

Hat Island (Skagit County): DNR purchased the entire 91-acre island which is located in Padilla Bay between Anacortes and Bayview. The island has an active bald eagle nest.

Klickitat Scenic River (Yakima County): Spectacular views of the undammed and free-flowing river contribute to the value of this 470-acre area.

Lake Louise (Whatcom County): Bogs, wetlands, hardwood thickets and mixed conifer forests contribute to the exceptional diversity of this 138-acre area. Western Washington University uses it for an outdoor laboratory.

Lummi Island (Whatcom County): This 661-acre NRCA includes shoreline with steep, rocky headlands.

Merrill Lake (Cowlitz County): A forest cover of mixed conifers and hardwoods in a shoreline contributes to the statewide significance of this 114-acre area. The site is prime habitat for hawks and other birds of prey.

Natural Resources Conservation Areas

The state currently manages approximately 42,000 acres in 21 NRCAs.

	<u>Acres</u>	<u>County</u>
Cattle Point	93	San Juan
Clearwater Corridor	2323	Jefferson
Cypress Island	3500	Skagit
Dishman Hills	518*	Spokane
Granite Lakes	603	Skagit
Greider Ridge	5469	Snohomish
Hat Island	91	Skagit
Klickitat Scenic River	470	Yakima
Lake Louise	138	Whatcom
Lummi Island	661	Whatcom
Merrill Lake	114	Cowlitz
Morning Star	7837	Snohomish
Mount Pilchuck	6802	Snohomish
Mount Si	6800	King
Shipwreck Point	472	Clallam
South Nemah	1452	Pacific
South Nolan	213	Jefferson
Table Mountain/ Greenleaf Peak	2197	Skamania
Teal Slough	8	Pacific
West Tiger Mountain	854	King
Woodard Bay	627	Thurston

* Joint ownership with Spokane County and the Dishman Hills Natural Area Association

APPENDIX B: NRCA Site Descriptions -- continued

Morning Star (Snohomish County): This area's attractions are extremely steep and rugged terrain, old growth timber and numerous small alpine lakes and glaciers on 7,837 acres.

Mount Pilchuck (Snohomish County): This 6,802-acre area is home for diverse ecological communities, ranging from low-elevation to alpine forests and meadows.

Mount Si (King County): This 6,800-acre popular hiking and climbing area is only 30 miles from Seattle. It affords spectacular views of the Snoqualmie Valley and includes the entire Mount Si/Mount Teneriffe/Green Mountain ridge crest which is visible from I-90.

Shipwreck Point (Clallam County): This 472-acre site includes one of the last open stretches of beach on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

South Nema (Pacific County): This area is highly regarded as one of the last small uncut drainages in the Willapa Hills. It contains patches of 300-year-old western red cedar on more than 1,452 acres.

South Nolan Old Growth (Jefferson County): This 213-acre area is an example of old growth temperate forest with scattered wetlands. Many trees are more than 500 years old.

Table Mountain/Greenleaf Peak (Skamania County): This 2,197-acre area in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is part of a large forest ecosystem with a wetland basin, many vertical rock faces and spectacular views.

Teal Slough (Pacific County): Located near the mouth of the Naselle River, this 8-acre site supports a remnant of coastal old growth forest.

West Tiger Mountain (King County): Forested wetlands and the Talus Caves -- a massive geological structure of large, broken boulders -- are major features of this 854-acre area.

Woodard Bay (Thurston County): A hiking and nature trail and access to the shoreline are planned for this wooded 627-acre conservation area located minutes from downtown Olympia. Woodard Bay features 190 acres of tidelands and a beautiful, heavily wooded forest with old-growth cedar trees.