

Programmatic Plan for Management of King County-owned Ecological Lands

January 2004



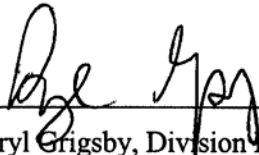
King County

Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Water and Land Resources Division

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King County Water and Land Resources Division



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Alternate formats available
296-6519 or TTY Relay: 711

Ecological Programmatic Plan_Final_January 2004.doc



Acknowledgements

Natural Resource Lands Program, WLRD

Connie Blumen, Natural Resource Lands Management Program Coordinator
Ingrid Lundin, Natural Resource Planner

Watershed Stewardship Program, WLRD

Clint Loper, Watershed Stewardship Unit Manager
Robin Heyduk, Watershed Stewardship Staff

Additional acknowledgement is due to contributors to “King County Water and Land Resources Division Ecological Lands Handbook,” which influenced the development of this document.

Recommended Citation:

King County. 2004. King County Water and Land Resources Division Programmatic Plan for Management of King County-owned Ecological Lands. King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources Division. Seattle, Washington.

This document outlines policies that guide the management of King County’s Ecological Lands. Ecological Lands are a category of King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) properties managed to protect their ecological value, while accommodating appropriate public use and interpretive opportunities. Management responsibility for Ecological Lands lies with the Natural Resource Lands Management (NRL) group of the Office of Rural and Resource Programs, within the Water and Land Resources (WLR) Division.

King County Ordinance 14199 guides the designation of Ecological Lands as sites “that serve important natural resource functions, including but not limited to benefiting and protecting natural drainage systems, drainage basins, flood control systems, ecological systems, water quality, ground water, fisheries and wildlife habitat, and other natural resource purposes.”¹ The Ecological Lands comprise more than 5500 acres as of October 2003, located primarily in unincorporated areas between the Urban Growth Boundary and the Forest Production District boundary in east King County. These properties range in size from less than one acre to several hundred acres. Many sites have been in the King County inventory for decades; others have been acquired in recent years primarily through funding for habitat conservation efforts.

The policies contained in this document have been developed from the 2000 King County Comprehensive Plan as amended, the 1996 King County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan,² guiding documents and ordinances establishing the NRL Program, and policy review that was conducted during development of the Ecological Lands Handbook. The Ecological Lands Handbook was written by NRL and WLR Watershed and Ecological Assessment staff (with the participation of other DNRP sections) to guide the writing of site management guidelines for Ecological Lands.

Goals for Ecological Lands

- **The goals for Ecological Lands are to conserve and enhance ecological value and to accommodate appropriate public use that does not harm the ecological resources on site.**

These goals, as presented in the Ecological Lands Handbook, are in accordance with the management priorities for open space lands in the following King County Comprehensive Plan Policy:

P—103 King County shall lead in the provision of regional open spaces and manage access to open space lands to ensure ecological sustainability and prevent conflict with natural resource goals. The primary purpose of open space lands is to conserve the natural ecosystem. Secondary goals include providing opportunities for passive or low-impact outdoor recreation, education and interpretation, offering scenic views and protecting cultural or historic resources and sustainable forestry.³

Ecological Value

- **Ecological Lands should be managed in a way that both assures the greatest protection of ecological processes and native species on these lands, and assures the highest possible contribution of these lands to ecological protection at larger scales.**

Ecological Lands will be managed for their ecological value, where *ecological value* is defined as biological diversity and ecosystem integrity. Ecological Lands provide an opportunity for the County

¹ Section 14, lines 841-845

² These two plans are being updated at the time of writing. Policies cited in this document may change in the 2004 updates and should be subsequently revised within this document. Policies generally referred to “open space land” rather than to the various categories of land currently under DNRP management, and therefore may not be entirely applicable to Ecological Lands.

³ While policy P-103 addresses goals for regional open spaces, including Ecological Lands, it should not be inferred that sustainable forestry is a secondary goal for these lands. However, forestry practices may be suitable as a tool to accomplish specific restoration/management objectives on these lands, provided such forestry is conducted for the clear purposes of ecological restoration rather than revenue generation.

to maintain and enhance the ecological value of the region because of the ability afforded to preserve, protect, and enhance ecological processes and habitat features.

King County Comprehensive Plan policy direction for a natural system focus can be found in:

P – 115 King County shall recognize and protect natural systems for their natural character on properties owned by King County. These systems are important in preserving wildlife habitat, rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological sites or features of scientific and educational value. Development and use may be limited to preserve the natural state and limit disturbance of the natural system. There may be little or limited public access to these sites.

- **The conservation principles presented in the Ecological Lands Handbook provide broad guidance for land managers to refer to when making conservation-based management decisions for Ecological Lands, including public use recommendations.**

The Ecological Lands Handbook provides nine conservation principles developed from King County’s Draft Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS). Based on conservation ecology, the ACS identifies basic scientific principles to be considered when planning, designing, and implementing any County action.

Public Use

- **King County supports public use on Ecological Lands so long as the use does not degrade a site’s natural systems.**

Public use will be thoughtfully and sustainably integrated into each site through an evaluation of historic and current public use patterns and the identification of those portions of the site that require maximum protection from human impacts. Appropriate levels of public use on Ecological Lands will vary from site to site. These properties will accommodate public use as long as the site’s ecological functions are not significantly diminished.

Appropriate public use is in accordance with the land management priorities identified in the following King County Comprehensive Plan Policy:

P – 128 Lands preserved for public parks or open space should provide multiple benefits whenever possible.

- **Ecological Lands may be used for passive recreational activities.**

Examples of appropriate low-impact passive recreation activities for Ecological Lands include walking, hiking, picnicking, outdoor education, interpretation, and nature observation. In some cases more intensive uses may occur that might require the preparation of a more detailed public use plan. Interpretive and environmental education and outreach strategies often contribute to increased public appreciation of ecological resources, citizen involvement in site stewardship activities, and community enforcement of site regulations. Site management guidelines will identify appropriate levels of public use for each site.

Ecological Lands may require limited facilities and infrastructure to support appropriate levels of public use, to ensure public health and safety, and to minimize degradation to a site’s ecological functions. Regular maintenance needs may include site inspections, vegetation control, litter collection, facility or infrastructure maintenance, and project maintenance, among other activities.

Activities may occur on Ecological Lands that present a risk to public health and safety, and impact the site’s ecological value. Where these problem activities occur, they should be identified in site management guidelines as part of the existing conditions and/or analysis. Recommendations should be made to address these activities on Ecological Lands.

Policy direction can be found in the following King County Comprehensive Plan Policies:

P – 110 King County shall offer educational, interpretive and aquatic programs that further the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural resources.

P-- 138 Decisions on acquisition and development of park, open space and trail sites should consider funding needs for long-term maintenance and operations.

Revenue generating opportunities should not be precluded on Ecological sites as long as they are consistent with the management goals for these lands and do not negatively impact the ecological integrity of the site.

Site Management Guidelines

- **To guide the short and long term management of Ecological Lands, the Natural Resource Lands Management program will write site management guidelines for each property.**

Guiding documents for the Natural Resource Lands Management Program direct that site management guidelines for Ecological Lands “will identify the resources and values on the sites and recommend actions to conserve [and] restore...the resources. Public access, interpretation value and recreation will be addressed on every site, and be accommodated where appropriate.”⁴ NRL leads site planning, working with key stakeholders to gather information, make recommendations, and review each set of guidelines.

King County Comprehensive Plan Policies related to this can be found in:

E – 105 Environmental quality and important ecological functions shall be protected.... through.... park master plans.

- **The Ecological Lands Handbook provides guidance for writing site management guidelines, and applying conservation theory and public use considerations when planning for these sites. Site management guidelines will contain recommendations for short term and long term stewardship of Ecological Lands.**

There are three ways in which the conservation principles will influence the site management guidelines: (1) to identify information about the site, its surrounding landscape, and associated ecological relationships; (2) to identify areas of concern and opportunity from these site and landscape relationships; (3) to set objectives, recommendations, and projects for site management that will address the concerns and opportunities highlighted by information analysis. The conservation principles may help to guide staff when evaluating whether projects and recommendations adequately address the concerns and opportunities of the site, its surrounding landscape, and associated ecological relationships. Site management guidelines will provide guidance as to how to accommodate public use without diminishing the site’s ecological functions.

Recommendations contained in site management guidelines indicate in general terms what work should be done on these lands. The recommendations should outline regular maintenance responsibilities at the site, and should indicate future restoration needs. Where possible, specific restoration projects will be included in site management guidelines; however staffing limitations may prevent the development of projects during the writing of site management guidelines. In these cases, restoration plans may be developed subsequent to guideline adoption, as the recommendations are prioritized and funded by DNRP management. In all cases, restoration projects should be consistent with management objectives and approaches described in the site management guidelines. The recommendations may provide a basis for creating future work plans for various DNRP staff.

⁴ “Budget, Customer Service, and Natural Resources Report,” 10/15/01, p. 13

The Director of the Water and Land Resources Division will review and approve site management guidelines.

- **NRL staff will review site management guidelines on a 5-year cycle and revise the documents to reflect any new relevant information, additional land purchases or modifications to management recommendations.**

Plan revision may be more frequent when new information from site monitoring programs and other initiatives indicate a need for a change in management strategies.

Management Responsibilities

- **NRL is the primary land manager responsible for coordinating DNRP and public activities on Ecological Lands.**

NRL is responsible for setting policy, developing site management guidelines, and for coordinating management of the lands. When developing plans and making management decisions, NRL staff coordinate with appropriate staff within DNRP.

NRL staff will be responsible for coordinating activities on Ecological Lands in order to carry out recommendations from site management guidelines, as prioritized and funded by DNRP and its respective sections.

Routine management and maintenance activities are the responsibility of the Resource Coordinator and Property Management staff in the Parks and Recreation Division, under the guidance of NRL. Land acquisition is primarily proposed by Basin Stewards in the WLR Land and Watershed Stewardship Services Section. Project actions, such as restoration, are primarily proposed by Resource Coordinators or Basin Stewards; projects should come from the recommendations that are part of site management guidelines or be consistent with management approaches and goals established by the guidelines.