

South Ridgeline Habitat Study Task Group

SUMMARY OF THE TASK GROUP PROCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

January 2008

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the City of Eugene completed an inventory of undeveloped upland habitat near the ridgeline of the South Hills area, entitled the South Ridgeline Habitat Study, and conducted six public workshops to showcase the study results and obtain public input on habitat conservation. Beginning in August 2007 a diverse group of nine Eugene citizens met to consider the question of habitat preservation in the South Ridgeline area. The structure and representation on the Task Group was approved by the Eugene Planning Commission, and members of the group were drawn from a broad range of communities-of-interest, including property owners, developers, business owners, environmental and recreational advocates, and citizens-at-large. Specifically, the Task Group was chartered with addressing the following questions:

- Are there important public values associated with habitat conservation in the South Ridgeline area? If “yes”:
- How much habitat should be conserved?
- Which specific habitat areas should be conserved?
- What conservation measures should be applied to which sites?

While group members were encouraged to contribute their perspective based on their individual interests and areas of expertise, each agreed, as part of the charter and working agreements of the group, to seek approaches to habitat conservation on the South Ridgeline with the potential to achieve general consensus on the issue among Eugene residents.

The Task Group received in-depth briefings on the South Ridgeline Habitat Study, basic principles of biodiversity, map data illustrating the study area and types, size and quality of existing habitat, potential economic and social costs associated with habitat conservation, and the results of previous public workshops and input.

Equipped with this information, the Task Group considered the ecological, social, economic and recreation needs and interests of the City and its residents, and established principles and criteria for the types and amount of habitat to conserve in the study area. With the assistance of City staff, the Task Group mapped the study area sites that met the criteria, and identified a tiered suite of conservation recommendations.

The Task Group completed its work and submitted recommendations in late November 2007.

CONSERVATION CRITERIA

Upon consideration of the study information and the public comment on the study, the Task Group agreed that conservation of additional habitat in the South Ridgeline area is warranted, noting that in addition to conserving biological diversity (including rare species and habitats), conservation of habitat also contributes to recreational values and to other ecological values, such as stormwater management. The Task Group agreed, however, that the direct and indirect costs of conservation, such as acquisition costs, loss of build-able lands, and potential restrictions on property owners, must be carefully weighed and factored in to decisions regarding which habitat, and how much habitat, to conserve.

In balancing these diverse City values and costs, the Task Group established the following criteria for determining conservation priorities:

1. Biodiversity:
 - Habitats that are rare, and/or are host to, or have the potential to host, rare species.
 - Habitats that are of high quality, or have the potential to be restored to high quality, and can be maintained as high quality habitat.
 - Habitats that are of a size/scale such that they are viable conservation areas (20 acres or larger, or are within or contiguous to a currently protected natural area thereby creating a sum of 20 acres or larger.)
2. Stormwater system quality and quantity benefits:
 - Habitats containing direct surface water connections with currently protected natural resource sites, or where there are open streams that flow inside the urban growth boundary with minimal piped sections or large undeveloped areas in the stream drainage basin.
3. Recreational values:
 - Task Group members agreed that citizens will be most likely to value and support resources they are able to see and experience, and recommended that priority be given to high and medium quality habitats that contribute to the recreational experience.

Based on these criteria, the Task Group participated in several mapping exercises illustrating the results of applying the criteria to the study area. Because the study data pertains to habitat types and quality, the mapping was most precise with regard to the biodiversity criteria. Mapping to illustrate stormwater-related and recreational criteria was less precise due to limited specific and map-able data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Task Group members were mindful of the array of City of Eugene priorities and the scarcity of municipal resources. Therefore the Task Group recommendations are tiered according to priority.

The Task Group wishes to note and highlight its strong belief that preservation of habitat in the South Ridgeline area will contribute significant natural scenic value to the City. However natural scenic values cannot be used to precisely identify specific habitat sites, because no data evaluating that value exists. The Task Group would support the City should it elect to conduct new studies to enable precise identification of sites that contribute most significantly to natural scenic values. In the absence of data on natural scenic values of the remaining undeveloped habitat in the South Hills area, the Task Group established the following recommendations based on biodiversity, recreational, and stormwater management values.

Tier One

Objective: Preserve habitats that contribute the most to biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity values: Habitats with:

1. A rarity score ≥ 5 ¹;
2. A quality score ≥ 5 ;
3. Viability/size that is at least 20 acres; or that due to adjacency to other high quality habitat or currently protected natural area will result in at least 20 acres of high quality habitat.

Conservation measures:

- Plan for new funding, and actively pursue acquisition from willing owners, parcels containing Tier 1 habitats, and undeveloped (habitat or non-habitat) connections between Tier 1 parcels and/or to other protected habitat areas.

¹ Score values were drawn from the South Ridgeline Habitat Study data.

- Use conservation easements or other mechanisms to ensure conservation in perpetuity for areas that contain Tier 1 habitats that are currently in public ownership or are acquired in the future. Limit uses to: 1) habitat enhancement and maintenance (including restoration of historic habitat types, 2) construction and maintenance of low impact recreation and mountain biking facilities, and 3) repair and maintenance of existing utilities and stormwater facilities.
- In cases in which acquisition is not feasible:
 - Provide incentives and voluntary participation support such as 1) biodiversity stewardship and restoration education; 2) biodiversity stewardship and restoration technical support, 3) recognition program for exemplary biodiversity conservation on private land, and 4) State Wildlife Habitat Tax Incentive Program.
 - No new regulation, but revise existing conservation provisions in South Hills to maximize biodiversity conservation by aligning habitat conservation requirements with the South Ridgeline Habitat Study inventory and assessment priorities and add requirements for clustering of subdivision and PUDs above 500 feet in the SRHS study area in order to preserve biodiversity values in Tier 1 habitat areas.ⁱ *(Note: There is not full Task Group consensus on this recommendation re regulation. Please see the endnote for details.)*

Tier Two

Objective: Preserve habitats that have moderate-to-high biodiversity values and that enable trails and connectivity for recreational purposes.

Biodiversity values: Habitats with:

1. A rarity score ≥ 2 ; and
2. A quality score ≥ 3 ; or
3. Meets Tier 1 Biodiversity criteria 1 and 2 and is contiguous with another parcel that meets Tier 2 Biodiversity criteria 1 and 2; or

Trail and/or connectivity values:

4. Is contiguous with a parcel that contains an existing or planned trail; or
5. Is undeveloped habitat within the study area within direct view of an existing or planned trail; or

Stormwater management values:

6. Has direct surface water connection to protected natural resource sites; or
7. Contains gaps in surface connection < 250 feet; or
8. Has 50% of its sub-basin within the SRHS study area.

Conservation measures:

- Directed acquisition is not specifically recommended for Tier 2 habitats in acknowledgement of fiscal constraints, however the Task Group is strongly in favor of acquisition of Tier 2 habitats should the City have the resources to do so. The Task Group is also in favor, as fiscal resources allow, of acquisition of undeveloped parcels (habitat and non-habitat) that connect Tier 2 parcels.
- Use conservation easements or other mechanisms to ensure conservation in perpetuity for areas that contain Tier 2 habitats that are currently in public ownership or are acquired in the future. Limit uses to: 1) habitat enhancement and maintenance (including restoration of historic habitat types, 2) construction and maintenance of low impact recreation and mountain biking facilities, and 3) repair and maintenance of existing utilities and stormwater facilities.
- Provide incentives and support for voluntary participation such as 1) biodiversity stewardship and restoration education; 2) biodiversity stewardship and restoration technical support, 3) recognition program for exemplary biodiversity conservation on private land, and 4) State Wildlife Habitat Tax Incentive Program.
 - No new regulation, but revise existing conservation provisions in South Hills to maximize biodiversity conservation by aligning habitat conservation requirements with the South Ridgeline Habitat Study inventory and assessment priorities and add requirement for clustering of subdivision and PUDs above 500 feet in the SRHS study area in order to preserve biodiversity values in Tier 2 habitat areas.ⁱⁱ *(Note: There is not full Task Group consensus on this recommendation re regulation. Please see the endnote for details.)*

Tier 3

Objective: Provide opportunities for preservation for any existing habitat within the study area.

Biodiversity values:

1. Existing undeveloped habitat, regardless of quality, within the SRHS Study area, with an emphasis on parcels that provide connectivity between, or enhance and protect the biodiversity values of, Tier 1 and Tier 2 habitat and other natural areas currently in public ownership or under active private stewardship.

Conservation measures:

- No directed acquisition is recommended, however should the opportunity arise the City should consider acquisition of undeveloped habitat in the study area that, regardless of its quality as an isolated unit, would enhance overall habitat connectivity or protect the biodiversity values of Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 parcels.
- In cases in which Tier 3 habitats have been acquired (or are already in public ownership) as a means to enhance and protect Tier 1 and Tier 2 habitat or other publicly-owned natural areas, use conservation easements or other mechanisms to ensure conservation in perpetuity.
- Provide incentives and voluntary participation support such as 1) biodiversity stewardship and restoration education, 2) biodiversity stewardship and restoration technical support, 3) recognition program for exemplary biodiversity conservation on private land, and 4) State Wildlife Habitat Tax Incentive Program.

Task Group Members

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ⁱ There is not full agreement among Task Group members regarding the recommendation to add no new regulation, but to revise existing conservation provisions in South Hills to maximize biodiversity conservation, by aligning habitat conservation requirements with the South Ridgeline Habitat Study inventory and assessment priorities, and, to add requirements for clustering of subdivision and PUDs above 500 feet in the SRHS study area in order to preserve biodiversity values in Tier 1 and Tier 2 habitat areas. One member of the group is concerned that existing regulations do not provide adequate habitat protections and believes that addition regulation should be considered. One member is concerned that the recommendations on clustering of future development in the South Hills area are too restrictive and should allow greater flexibility, particularly in Tier 2 habitat areas.

ⁱⁱ Same as above.