

# **Chapter 3:**

## **CAO PLANNING PROGRAMS**

### **AND INCENTIVES**

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# **Chapter 3: CAO PLANNING PROGRAMS AND INCENTIVES**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION – OPTIONS FOR CAO COMPLIANCE**

The proposed CAO is designed to simplify compliance and provide choices for property owners applying for a change of land use. Depending on proposed land use activities or property location, three options to meet the overall goals of the CAO will be available to landowners: (1) fixed regulations, (2) rural stewardship planning, or (3) farm management planning. A landowner applying for a building or, clearing and grading, permit within the Rural Area or, unincorporated areas within the UGAs could comply with the CAO by following the fixed regulations as described in Chapter 2 of this report or by enrolling in one of the planning programs below that allow flexibility in the standards.

This chapter provides assessments for farm planning standards and rural stewardship planning standards for critical areas where these programs are applicable. Incentive programs for wildlife are also discussed. For further information on incentive programs, such as the Public Benefit Rating System below, see listings in this report, Chapter 5 Institutional Context, section 5.2.

## **3.2 FARM PLANNING**

A landowner on a non-forested site who proposes new or expanded agricultural activities in the Agricultural Production District, agricultural zoned property, or rural residential zoned property can choose the option to develop a farm management plan to meet the requirements of the CAO instead of implementing the fixed regulations. New or expanded agriculture activities on forested sites would have to comply with the fixed regulations. A farm management plan would include appropriate BMPs and performance standards, land use and implementation plans, and a long-term commitment to agriculture.

Farm management plan BMPs would address, as relevant, (1) horticulture, (2) livestock, (3) site planning for new structures, and (4) fish and wildlife protection. The farm plans would be approved by the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, and filed and enforced by the Department of Development and Environmental Services. Various incentives, including flexibility, cost sharing, and technical assistance would be offered.

### 3.2.1 Flood Hazard Areas Assessment

Under the proposed CAO, livestock flood sanctuaries and manure storage facilities are allowed, but only through the review and approval of a farm management plan. The farm management plan will assure that these facilities are properly located and constructed to assure that they do not increase the risk to people and property from flooding and do not result in water quality problems.

#### **Standard -- Livestock Flood Sanctuaries and Manure Storage Facilities:**

*Specific standards are established for livestock flood sanctuaries and livestock manure storage facilities. There is an added requirement that they be reviewed and approved through a farm management plan. The proposal prohibits livestock flood sanctuaries and manure storage facilities in the FEMA floodway.*

#### **Assessment:**

FEMA does not address these types of facilities at all in their standards. King County recognizes the value of agriculture to the region's economy but also recognizes that provisions must be made to protect people, livestock, and habitat. Therefore King County's standards exceed the National Flood Insurance standards and most other jurisdictions in the region.

### 3.2.2 Aquatic Areas Assessment

#### **Standard – Best Management Practices:**

*Site specific performance standards and best management practices to protect and enhance critical areas and their buffers, and maintain and enhance native vegetation on the site. This includes BMPs for the installation and maintenance of agricultural drainage.*

See Appendix A, The Effects of Agricultural Operations on Critical Areas.

#### **Assessment:**

Based on analysis in Appendix A, the farm planning element departs from Best Available Science because it does not provide for the greatest probability of protection of a critical area, equal to a "no net loss" standard for functions and values.

#### ***Risk to Functions and Values***

Appendix A (Table A-1) notes that the present condition of the agricultural landscape in King County imposes considerable risk on most of the functions and values associated with the critical areas found in those landscapes. Table A-1 of Appendix A provides detailed assessment of

functions under current, five-year and twenty-five year timeframes for existing, new, expanded agriculture (forested or non-forested settings), and agricultural ditch maintenance.

### **3.2.3 Wildlife Areas Assessment**

#### **Standards:**

*Summary: Alterations to fixed critical areas will be allowed for new and existing agricultural activities under certain conditions. Forested areas cannot be cleared to facilitate new or expanded farming. A farm management plan will need to be developed that identifies appropriate Best Management Practices, including those that provide an appropriate level of protection for wildlife species.*

#### **Assessment:**

The conclusion drawn from the analysis of agricultural operations on critical areas, including wildlife areas, is that a farmed landscape is so altered from its native condition and imposes so many disturbances on the functions of wildlife areas, that best available science becomes inapplicable. For the complete analysis including assumptions and definitions, please see Appendix A, “The Effects of Agricultural Operations on Critical Areas.”

The wildlife functions affected by agricultural operations, which are inconsistent with BAS recommendations, include habitat complexity, species diversity, spatial diversity, population support, connectivity, and sensitive species.

#### ***Level of Risk to Functions and Values***

The affected wildlife functions, for the most part, will be impacted less severely in the long term if farm plan BMPs are implemented across the landscape. And therefore, in most cases the level of risk is estimated to be able to be reduced through the use of farm planning.

For most functions, risk to wildlife functions as a result of agricultural activities in non-forested areas are estimated to be high in the short term and moderate in the long term. Risk estimations for agricultural operations were made relative to a fully functional critical area. The reason that risk estimates drop from high to moderate in the long term with farm planning in non-forested areas is because over time, the farm plans are intended to improve the functions associated with wildlife.

When agriculture is moved into currently forested areas, with a farm plan the risk to wildlife area functions is estimated to be moderate in the short and long term for habitat complexity, species diversity, spatial diversity, population support, and connectivity. For sensitive species, risk is estimated to change from high in the short term to moderate in the long term as farm planning works to strengthen this function over time.

For the complete assessment of risk associated with departures from wildlife best available science regarding agricultural operations and farm planning, please see Appendix A, “The Effects of Agricultural Operations on Critical Areas.”

### ***Level of Uncertainty***

Because risk determinations are more difficult to make in the long term (because more time has passed and more factors may have influenced events), uncertainty as a result of environmental variability associated with agricultural operations changes from low in the short term to moderate in the long term for habitat complexity. Similarly, uncertainty is low in the short term for species diversity, but moderate to high in the long term because of environmental variability. For species diversity, uncertainty is low because in agricultural landscapes, fragmentation and edge effects (see BAS Volume I, Chapters 2 – Scientific Framework and 8 – Wildlife Areas) serve to homogenize habitats, and that in turn reduces spatial diversity across the landscape. For population support, uncertainty is moderate because population variability over large areas complicates risk assessment from local effects. Uncertainty is low for connectivity and sensitive species. For further explanation of uncertainty in the risk assessment of agricultural operations, please see Appendix A.

## **3.2.4 Wetlands Assessment**

### **Standard – Best Management Practices:**

*Site specific performance standards and best management practices to protect and enhance critical areas and their buffers, and maintain and enhance native vegetation on the site. This includes BMPs for site development, horticultural practices, livestock management and the installation and maintenance of agricultural drainage.*

### **Assessment:**

Agricultural practices such as ditching, draining, irrigation, farming and grazing have historically occurred within wetlands, buffers, and adjoining areas. These activities have directly altered wetlands or indirectly influenced the processes that regulate wetland functions. As the benefits of wetlands became recognized through BAS, many wetland functions and values were noted as incompatible with agricultural practices as they were practiced. Consequently, with the exception of existing tilled and grazed wet meadows farming and grazing are prohibited in wetlands and their buffers in King County.

The timing of horticultural practices and grazing pressure can significantly increase the risk to wetlands and wet meadow functions. Risks from both of these activities may be controlled by the proposed BMPs. Therefore, the risk from tilling, planting, treating and harvesting of crops can be minimized by targeted, site specific practices. High livestock numbers can result in high nutrient concentrations within the meadow and in runoff, potentially causing large algal blooms, anoxic conditions (of detriment to macrophytes, invertebrates, waterfowl and other taxa) and other eutrophic situation in nearby wetlands and other aquatic areas. Overgrazing may also lead to the reduction of vegetation cover with greater soil compaction, soil erosion and other disturbances leading to higher sediment runoff. Livestock impacts however, may be lowered if grazing pressures are appropriate for the site.

The development and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) represents the BAS for protecting wetland functions and values from the potential detrimental effects of agricultural

activities because they are site and practice specific. BMPs can also readily be adapted between years in response to shifting farm practices and products and therefore be more responsive to protecting wetlands and wet meadows. BMPs can also provide the flexibility in response to changing wetland conditions and wildlife use. For example, if wetlands or wet meadows are used for nesting or foraging by wildlife, grazing may only be permitted at times when wildlife is not present or at locations where livestock will not harm wildlife. Consequently, grazing is not totally restricted as may have happened with fixed regulations. BMPs are tailored to sites and agricultural practices, and therefore potentially offer the greatest wetland protection with minimal impact to farming and grazing (See Appendix C: The Effect of Agricultural Operations on Critical Areas). BMPs would protect most wetland functions and comply with BAS.

### ***Levels of Risk to Functions and Values***

In general, farming imposes a high risk to many wetland functions when compared to pristine wetland and floodplain conditions. However, compared to other land uses such as urban and industrial developments, agriculture may pose less risk to wetland functions. Agriculture may provide benefits to wetlands including enhanced hydrologically based functions such as flood attenuation and groundwater recharge. Also farmlands may demonstrate positive wildlife functions such as providing grains, grasses, and invertebrates for migrating waterfowl and waterbirds.

Compliance with BMPs would provide important certainty to protecting against overgrazing and other detrimental agricultural effects to wetlands and wet meadows. Storage sheds barns and additional residences may be built on wet meadows reducing or eliminating the functions wet meadows may have been serving.

BAS suggests the development of BMPs, as proposed in the CAO, is the best method of managing wetlands and protecting their functions. BMPs can lower the risks to wetland functions although the reduction depends on the initial wetland condition and extent to which the diverse functions are currently being carried out. With implementation of BMPs risk values for water quality and specifically sedimentation, can decline from being originally high to low within relatively few farming cycles. BMPs that target runoff can also reduce pollutants and nutrient risks to wetlands. Again, these could be achieved in relatively few years if BMPs are carefully implemented. Finally, BMPs targeting the protection of habitat, thereby lowering the risk for species declines and the continued loss of biodiversity can increase the wildlife benefits of farms. Active farming will always pose some level of risk to the functions of wetlands on or adjoining farms because many functions are influenced by the larger landscape which farming may impact. Risks also continue when farming activities are altered and BMPs must be developed to address such new conditions.

### ***Level of Uncertainty***

Agricultural activities are protected in the APD, thereby providing certainty in the generalized farming and grazing activities allowed within these areas. Specific agricultural activities and farming practices may change in response to consumer demands, and other social and economic considerations. Consequently, there may be little long-term certainty of wetland hydrology and performance levels of other wetland functions because of changing adjoining area and landscape condition. The protection of wetlands and their buffers by agricultural BMPs is in response to this changing landscape. It provides greater flexibility than fixed regulations for responding to

changes in agricultural practices thereby enabling better protection and reducing uncertainty. In summary, compliance with BMPs provides a high level of certainty to the ongoing beneficial uses and functions of wetlands and wet meadows.

## **POLICY DISCUSSION:**

The Growth Management Act encourages innovative and flexible approaches to preserving resource industries.

*WAC 365-190-040*

*(h) Use of innovative land use management techniques. Resource uses have preferred and primary status in designated natural resource lands of long-term commercial significance. Counties and cities must determine if and to what extent other uses will be allowed. If other uses are allowed, counties and cities should consider using innovative land management techniques which minimize land use incompatibilities and most effectively maintain current and future natural resource lands.*

*Techniques to conserve and protect agricultural, forest lands, and mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance include the purchase or transfer of development rights, fee simple purchase of the land, less than fee simple purchase, purchase with leaseback, buffering, land trades, conservation easements or other innovations which maintain current uses and assure the conservation of these natural resource lands.*

*Development in and adjacent to agricultural and forest lands of long-term commercial significance shall assure the continued management of these lands for their long-term commercial uses. Counties and cities should consider the adoption of right-to-farm provisions. Covenants or easements that recognize that farming and forest activities will occur should be imposed on new development in or adjacent to agricultural or forest lands. Where buffering is used it should be on land within the development unless an alternative is mutually agreed on by adjacent landowners.*

*Counties and cities planning under the act should define a strategy for conserving natural resource lands and for protecting critical areas, and this strategy should integrate the use of innovative regulatory and nonregulatory techniques.*

In addition, King County has a long history of agricultural land preservation through land-use designation and zoning, acquisition, and technical assistance. Innovative programs aimed at ensuring a viable agricultural community exists in King County have also been developed and implemented. The approach proposed, recognizes that protection of agriculture and stream and wetland resources can be achieved through a combination of regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms.

### 3.3 RURAL STEWARDSHIP PLANNING

A single family residential property owner may choose to prepare a stewardship plan rather than use the prescribed fixed regulations. Such a plan would include (1) appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and performance standards, (2) land use, implementation, and monitoring plans, and (3) a long-term commitment towards stewardship of the property. This option includes regulatory flexibility in that buffers and clearing restrictions could be less than they would be with the fixed regulations according to defined performance standards. Habitat enhancement or restoration would be required. Sub-basin conditions, site location, and site conditions would be considered in the application of aquatic area and wetland buffer and clearing restrictions. Flexibility in terrestrial wildlife protection requirements would be allowed for the ten protected species.

The rural stewardship planning option is intended to provide landowners flexibility in developing their property while avoiding or minimizing loss of habitat and wildlife functions and values. It is intended that over the long term, that impacts to the most valuable aquatic and wildlife habitat would be reduced. In addition to regulatory flexibility in site planning, landowners would be eligible for enrollment in the Public Benefit Rating System program and could qualify for a Surface Water Management Fee discount.

#### 3.3.1 Aquatic Areas Assessment

##### **Standard – Buffers – Variable:**

*Buffers may be reduced based on a combination of factors that include the amount of native vegetation and site location. For wetlands, the existing wetland function is also included.*

*On sites zoned RA within the area designated rural in the King County Comprehensive Plan, the minimum buffers established from the ordinary high water mark or from the top of bank if the ordinary high water mark cannot be identified may be reduced if the site is in compliance with the rural stewardship development standards in section 142 of this ordinance:*

- 1.) When the following conditions are met minimum buffer widths may be reduced as follows in Table 3.1 below;*
- 2.) Development on sites with type O aquatic areas buffers that are reduced under this section and have zero percentage maximum clearing restrictions must meet urban stormwater control requirements in accordance with K.C.C. chapter 9.04.*

**Table 3.1 Aquatic Area Buffers for Rural Stewardship Planning Program**

AQUATIC AREA	Subbasin Condition	Location in Subbasin	Buffer Condition	Maximum Clearing	Buffer Size
<b>Key:</b> Subbasin condition and location in the subbasin are on adopted maps and the criteria to determine buffer condition and maximum clearing requirements are in section 139 of the Critical Areas Ordinance.					
<b>Type S or F</b>	High	Upper	Low	25%	125 feet
	High	Lower	Low	25 %	125 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	25%	125 feet
	High	Upper	Low	15%	80 feet
	High	Lower	Low	15%	80 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	15%	80 feet
	Medium	Lower	High	50%	125 feet
	Low	Upper	High	50%	125 feet
	Low	Upper	Low	50%	125 feet
	Low	Lower	High	50%	125 feet
	Medium	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	80 feet
	Low	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	80 feet
<b>Type N</b>	High	Upper	Low	25%	50 feet
	High	Lower	Low	25 %	50 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	25%	50 feet
	High	Upper	Low	15%	30 feet
	High	Lower	Low	15%	30 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	15%	30 feet
	Medium	Lower	High	50%	50 feet
	Low	Upper	High	50%	50 feet
	Low	Upper	Low	50%	50 feet
	Low	Lower	High	50%	50 feet
	Medium	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	30 feet
	Low	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	30 feet
<b>Type O</b>	High	Upper	Low	25%	20 feet
	High	Lower	Low	25 %	20 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	25%	20 feet
	High	Upper	Low	15%	15 feet
	High	Lower	Low	15%	15 feet
	Medium	Upper	Low	15%	15 feet
	Medium	Lower	High	50%	20 feet
	Low	Upper	High	50%	20 feet
	Low	Upper	Low	50%	20 feet
	Low	Lower	High	50%	20 feet
	Medium	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	15 feet
	Low	Lower	Low	75% for first 5 acres; no more than 50% for additional acreage	15 feet

**Standard – Best Management Practices:**

*The Rural Stewardship Plan will include site specific performance standards and best management practices to protect and enhance critical areas and their buffers, and maintain and enhance native vegetation on the site. An implementation plan for performance standards and best management practices will be developed.*

**Assessment:**

The Rural Stewardship Plan sets standards based on physical and biological condition and context for a site, catchment, or shoreline reach. In this way it is consistent with BAS. It departs from BAS because it uses the same buffer standards for fixed buffers as for its highest standard (i.e., there is no provision for an increase in protection only for a decrease). This creates the same concerns about adequacy of the size of the fixed buffer widths, clearing restrictions, and for protecting microclimate and wildlife functions. It also departs because in cases indicative of poor aquatic habitat it requires no vegetation be left for wildlife needs. Also, because it sets no parcel size or absolute maximum for clearing, it leaves open the concern that large parcels would not have to leave any vegetation on site creating further concern about impacts to terrestrially based wildlife.

***Level of Risk to Functions and Values***

This standard provides greater flexibility to landowners than the fixed standards for buffers and clearing restrictions, but no greater protection of aquatic areas. In many instances, it may actually provide for substantially less protection than would the fixed standards. Thus risk to functions and biological values would be similar to or higher than for the fixed standards. Because the flexibility and reductions in buffers would be tailored to landscape, site location, condition, and biological value, the increase in risk to aquatic resources (mainly salmon) will be minimized. As with the fixed standards, this proposal is probably low risk to salmonids and moderate to high risk for species highly sensitive to pollution and changes in physical habitat (e.g., pacific giant salamanders, and freshwater mussels). It may also carry a high risk to riparian and upland wildlife because under certain conditions indicative of poor aquatic habitat no vegetation will be required to be left regardless of wildlife needs.

***Level of Uncertainty***

There is high uncertainty regarding the risk associated with this standard because the actual location and number of landowners that will opt for this approach is unknown. Further, while there is low uncertainty that a tailored approach to protection measures is consistent with BAS, there is high uncertainty about the reliability of variables and thresholds for making decisions.

### 3.3.2 Wildlife Areas Assessment

#### Standards:

*Wildlife habitat conservation areas may be modified based on an evaluation of the tolerance of the animals to the level of development proposed for the site and other measures designed to mitigate adverse impacts.*

#### Assessment:

For each situation that results in a reduction in size of a wildlife habitat conservation area, the size of the reduced area could potentially depart from those species-specific buffer widths recommended by best available science. The functions of breeding habitat in general might be negatively impacted if critical areas are reduced in size. If breeding habitat is disturbed, breeding may not be successful in a given season, or a breeding pair may abandon the area altogether.

#### *Level of Risk to Functions and Values*

When an activity is undertaken, the outcome should exceed the goal of K.C.C. 21A.24.010.A: to protect existing functions and values of critical areas. However, reductions in the size of wildlife habitat conservation areas would occur on a site-specific basis, and as such, the risks and benefits in the short and long term would be site-specific.

Restoration and enhancement will be required to some extent with Stewardship planning; whereas, without a stewardship plan (under fixed regulations), restoration and enhancement are not required. It is therefore possible that Stewardship planning will result in benefits that would not otherwise be provided, and these benefits may help reduce the risk.

For the above reasons, a general risk estimation associated with stewardship planning is difficult. For those species whose wildlife habitat conservation areas are reduced, short-term risk is estimated to be moderate to high, depending on the amount of reduction and the adjacent land use. Currently there are no criteria in the code for how to determine what habitat may be protected that will adequately mitigate for reducing wildlife habitat conservation areas. This lack of criteria contributes to the overall uncertainty and to the estimation of a high level of risk, because currently it is possible that low-quality habitat could be protected while high-quality areas are reduced. Long-term risk is estimated to be low to moderate; again, it is difficult to generalize with so many uncertainties. However, part of the purpose of Stewardship planning is to improve wildlife habitat in the long-term. Further discussion of risk determinations may be made after criteria have been established.

#### *Level of Uncertainty*

The degree of uncertainty is high. With no criteria established, it is not possible to know what type of habitats will be protected versus what types will be reduced. It is also not possible to estimate how many landowners will use stewardship planning. Monitoring plans are to be implemented to help determine the effectiveness of mitigation; however, until monitoring of sites has been on-going for a reasonable amount of time, the impacts to wildlife areas will not be known on these sites.

### 3.3.3 Wetlands Assessment

#### Standard –Buffers – Variable:

*Wetland buffers may be reduced if the site is in compliance with an approved rural stewardship plan. On sites zoned RA within the area designated rural in the King County Comprehensive Plan, the minimum buffers may be established from the wetland edge if the wetland buffer condition is classified low.*

#### Assessments:

Rural Stewardship Planning provides options for landowners applying for single-family residence permits on rural lots. The program can tailor wetland protection requirements if the landowner agrees to a long-term stewardship commitment. BAS suggests that for some wetlands, embedded in a specific condition of adjoining area and watershed, reduced buffer protection measures are feasible if (1) such reductions are offset with improved function in the remaining buffer and (2) the adjoining area or landscape conditions are improved.

Essentially the narrower and enhanced buffer, in addition to the enhancement of adjoining land beyond the buffer permitted through an approved stewardship plan, may potentially result in a net gain of many, if not all, wetland functions, depending on wetland, adjoining land, and watershed condition. The conditions under which such tradeoffs can be made are presented in Table 3.2. The County will provide education and guidance on how to protect specific wetland functions by improvements to adjoining areas and watershed as well as follow-up monitoring to assess compliance and performance with the Stewardship Plan.

#### *Level of Risk to Function and Values*

In theory, the level of risk to wetland functions is low if the Stewardship Program is carefully and rigorously applied and if sites are vigilantly monitored for compliance and performance. Nevertheless, there could be an increase in risk to wetland functions and values if the tradeoffs between narrower buffers and improved enhancement of the parcel for which Stewardship actions are carried out do not result in a net gain of wetland functions. Clearly, similar to other wetland restoration or improvement activities the likelihood of success is largely dependent on County involvement in the, planning, evaluation and oversight of specific buffer reduction and landscape enhancement projects requiring considerable investment by County staff.

**Table 3.2. Buffers reductions for wetland ratings, and wetland, and watershed condition.**

WETLAND CATEGORY	Subbasin Condition	Wetland Function	Maximum Clearing	Minimum Buffer
<b>Key:</b> Subbasin condition are on adopted maps and the criteria to determine wetland function and maximum clearing are set forth in section 139 of the Critical Areas Ordinance.				
<b>Category I</b>	High	High	15%	250 feet
	High	Low	15%	250 feet
	Medium	High	15%	250 feet
	Medium	Low	10%	200 feet

WETLAND CATEGORY	Subbasin Condition	Wetland Function	Maximum Clearing	Minimum Buffer
	Low	High	10%	200 feet
	Low	Low	10%	200 feet
<b>Category II</b>	High	High	20%	150 feet
	High	Low	20%	150 feet
	Medium	High	20%	150 feet
	Medium	Low	15%	100 feet
	Low	High	15%	100 feet
	Low	Low	15%	100 feet
<b>Category III</b>	High	High	25%	75 feet
	High	Low	25%	75 feet
	Medium	High	25%	75 feet
	Medium	Low	20%	50 feet
	Low	High	20%	50 feet
	Low	Low	20%	50 feet
<b>Category IV</b>	High	High	30%	35 feet
	High	Low	30%	35 feet
	Medium	High	30%	35 feet
	Medium	Low	25%	25 feet
	Low	High	25%	25 feet
	Low	Low	25%	25 feet

***Levels of Uncertainty***

BAS suggests that the proposed methods to increase wetland functions by decreasing buffer widths while simultaneously enhancing adjoining area and watershed condition are uncertain because historical examples are few and the percentage of successful projects remains undetermined. Nevertheless, this does not mean that improved functions cannot occur. In fact, BAS suggests that many wetland functions could benefit by targeted and comprehensive habitat enhancement in adjoining areas.

**POLICY DISCUSSION:**

The Rural Stewardship program provides flexibility with regard to fixed buffers provided the landowner completes and has approved a stewardship plan which will address a number of issues through implementation of best management practices, siting and vegetation retention. The rural stewardship approach recognizes that flexible buffers in conjunction with vegetation retention and clearing restrictions and the implementation of best management practices will provide protection for the resource. This approach also responds to the GMA and Comprehensive Plan call for innovative approaches to resource protection.

### **3.4 PBRS – AN INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

King County has adopted a Public Benefit Rating System that provides incentives to encourage private landowners to voluntarily conserve and protect land resources and open space. In return for preserving resources, the land is assessed at a value consistent with its "current use" rather than the "highest and best use." The reduction in assessed land value is greater than 50 percent and as much as 90 percent for the portion of the land participating in the program. Resources eligible for credit include wetland and stream buffers, wildlife habitat and groundwater recharge areas. Landowners who have an adopted stewardship plan for their property are eligible for participation in the PBRS program.

#### ***Wildlife Areas Habitat Protected through Incentives***

Financial incentives may be used to garner protection of priority habitats. Landowners may receive tax benefits through the Public Benefits Rating System (PBRS) program if they choose to protect priority habitats. The following priority habitats may be protected by incentives: mature forest, old growth forest, snag-rich areas, caves, and talus.