

WASHINGTON APA'S GAME CHANGING INITIATIVE  
RESTORE AND PROTECT ECO-SYSTEMS WORKING GROUPS

# Learn More: Restore and Protect Ecosystems



Restore and Protect Eco-Systems Group

## Challenges to Restoring and Protecting Eco-systems

Washington State is home to rich and diverse biological areas, ranging from arid shrub-steppe to the marine environments of the Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound. Most of us are aware of our state’s natural beauty, but have you ever thought about how these areas provide us with services that benefit our social and economic well-being?

These services, commonly called ecosystem services, are the processes by which the environment produces resources including clean water, timber, pollination of native and agricultural plants, and reduction or elimination of flooding and pollution. Often, natural systems can provide essential services more cheaply than engineered systems. Proper planning is critical to ensure that our state’s ecosystems continue to provide us with a bounty of resources and services.



Considering the needs of ecosystems and wildlife in context with other community development needs and property rights is an ongoing challenge for Washington planners. In many cases, environmental goals and regulations are in uncoordinated ‘silos’, such as the historic problems in coordinating the Shoreline Management Act and the Growth Management Act, or in assuring that watershed planning is also reflected in critical areas regulations. Unless developments are carefully planned and managed, valuable ecosystem services and wildlife will continue to be impaired or destroyed.



## Actions to Address Restoring and Protecting Ecosystems

Through the development and implementation of comprehensive plans, development regulations, and incentives programs, planners can minimize the impacts of development on ecosystems and wildlife. Unfortunately these efforts rarely reverse existing damage to natural systems or improve their ability to provide essential services.

The Restore and Protect Eco-Systems working group is part of the Washington APA's Big Ideas Initiative and is working to develop an approach that assures natural systems are evaluated and coordinated on a landscape level and the value of the services that they provide is defined beyond those currently recognized by the Growth Management Act. This includes fostering changes in our planning laws to recognize that many systems do not coincide with the political boundaries of cities, counties, or states, and protecting them requires coordination among these jurisdictions. Recognizing that there are economic benefits from resource lands, the group is also considering how best to change the requirements for resource lands to ensure that use of these resources does not occur at the expense of the environment and ecosystems services they provide.

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