

Cedar River Watershed - Land and Forest Management

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The Cedar River Municipal Watershed, a major headwater area within the Lake Washington Basin, supports a variety of fish and wildlife species that are at risk in the region, largely as a result of habitat degradation and loss. Management of this 90,546-acre watershed affects not only the habitats and species found within its boundary, but also has regional significance because of north-south and east-west habitat linkages within the Cascades, and especially via the contiguous riparian corridor of the Cedar River linking the upper watershed with Lake Washington, and ultimately Puget Sound. The City's efforts to sustain and restore more natural functioning of the target biological communities, habitats and ecosystems in the municipal watershed – aquatic, riparian, late-successional and old-growth forest, and special habitats – are being accomplished by a combination of three community-based conservation and mitigation strategies for the 83 species addressed in the HCP: (1) the commitment not to harvest timber for commercial purposes – a commitment that places watershed forests in reserve status; (2) commitments to active intervention to restore previously disturbed aquatic and terrestrial habitats; and (3) commitments to management guidelines designed to protect species and habitats.

Fourteen species of “greatest concern” designated in the HCP include avian and mammalian species, northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, northern goshawk, gray wolf, and grizzly bear associated primarily with upland, late-successional and old-growth forest habitats, bald eagles associated with both late-seral upland and riparian habitats, and peregrine associated with “special” landscape features (e.g. rock cliffs and outcrops). Viable populations of adfluvial bull trout and pygmy whitefish inhabit the Chester Morse Lake/Masonry Pool reservoir complex, spawning in major streams (Cedar and Rex rivers) and several of their smaller tributaries during late fall. Common loons have traditionally utilized the reservoir complex both during seasonal migration and as reproductive habitat. Three mated pairs have consistently been present on the reservoir system during the breeding season for at least the last 13 years and have frequently produced offspring. The City is seeking to develop an informed system of reservoir management that will accommodate human demand on the water supply system, meet the diverse needs of resident fish and wildlife species in the reservoir complex, and provide flow requirements for anadromous species both within the municipal watershed (after completion of the fish passage facilities at Landsburg; chinook, coho, steelhead) and downstream throughout the Cedar River corridor (e.g., sockeye).

A “phased” program of monitoring and research, much of which will be “experimental”, forms an integral part of the HCP, designed specifically to support the multiple programs and objectives of the 50-year plan. Important features of the monitoring and research program include: commitments to long-term funding and data collection; commitments to improve the quality and quantity of baseline information; commitments to track key species and habitats; and commitments to use the results of this program to provide feedback to the other management components of the HCP through an adaptive management approach. Toward these goals, the City encourages the cooperation and participation of outside agencies, educational institutions, research institutions, and independent researchers in the design, implementation, analysis and funding of such cooperative research. Several monitoring and research projects have been initiated directly under HCP or HCP-related programs during 2000-2001. Several of these projects, those most closely related to aquatic ecosystems, will be the focus of this presentation.