

Functions and Values of Critical Areas: Overview

Environmentally critical areas perform a variety of valuable and beneficial biological and physical functions. Some types of critical areas may also pose a threat to human safety or to public and private property if improperly developed. Designation and protection of critical areas is required by the Growth Management Act. Critical areas include: wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, frequently flooded areas, aquifer recharge areas, and geologically hazardous areas. A discussion of geologically hazardous areas is included separately in this element. The functions and values of other environmentally critical areas are listed as follows.

Wetlands

- Help maintain water quality.
- Store and convey stormwater.
- Recharge ground water.
- Provide habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Provide areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

- Help maintain water quality.
- Store and convey stormwater.
- Recharge ground water.
- Provide habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Provide areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.
- Provide food, cover, nesting, breeding, and movement for fish and wildlife.
- Maintain and promote diversity of species and habitat.
- Control erosion.

Frequently Flooded Areas

- Store and convey stormwater.
- Recharge ground water.
- Provide riparian habitat.
- Provide areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.

Aquifer Recharge Areas

- Provide source of potable water.
- Contribute to stream discharge during periods of low flow.

Protection, enhancement, and management of these critical areas will help maintain or improve quality of life for the future.