

Cedar River Watershed

The Cedar River Watershed provides two-thirds of the drinking water for nearly 1.4 million residents in King County while also providing critical summer base flows to high value wetland and creek habitats in the area and serving as the largest and cleanest source of water for Lake Washington, contributing almost 50% of the lake's total inflow. In addition, the Cedar River Watershed contains much of the best remaining aquatic habitat in the Lake Washington ecosystem and shelters Chinook salmon, Coho salmon, sockeye salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, bull trout, marbled murrelet, bald eagle, Rocky Mountain elk and black bear. Several of the fish and wildlife species in the watershed are protected by the Endangered Species Act, and their long-term viability is at risk partly from widespread habitat degradation. It is imperative to improve ecological processes and riparian conditions essential to salmonid spawning and rearing.

As a party to the Cedar River Watershed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the City of Seattle has made a commitment to contribute specified amounts of money to acquire, restore, enhance and/or protect high quality spawning, rearing or refuge habitat for anadromous fish species, and the natural features and processes sustaining such habitat, along the mainstem of the lower Cedar River below Landsburg Dam until the expiration of the HCP on December 31, 2050. The City has contracted the Cascade Land Conservancy to assist with real property and easement acquisitions along the Lower Cedar River and to assist them with long-term restoration and stewardship activities at each site. So far CLC has helped the City to acquire 10 parcels, from seven different landowners, totally more than 32 acres.

The original HCP project has expanded to a long-term partnership between Seattle Public Utilities, King County, Cascade Land Conservancy, Friends of the Cedar River Watershed and the watershed community who are working together to restore riparian ecosystems in the lower river on both public and private property. As part of this partnership, and with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and King Conservation district we are focusing on expanding community education, on-the-ground habitat restoration, and landowner participation in activities that will contribute to these watershed enhancement efforts.

The primary long-term objective of this program is to improve the ecological processes that develop over time as the result of establishing a mature, diverse and continuous native riparian corridor along the lower Cedar River. Long-term improved ecological processes will include:

- Increased quantity and frequency of large woody debris and improved channel complexity;
- Increased sediment transport and fine gravel recruitment;
- Increased shade resulting in decreased water temperature;
- Increased nutrient delivery to aquatic ecosystems;
- Increased food and cover resources available for native fish and wildlife;
- Reduced introductions of fine sediments and pollutants through run-off;
- Enhanced movement and migratory habitat available to native birds, mammals, amphibians.

The second long-term objective of this project is to develop a critical mass of landowners throughout the watershed who routinely implement beneficial land stewardship practices, and who are supported by a well-established community network that provides information and resources to encourage sustainable land management practices. Successful development of this secondary outcome is critical to maintaining the success of the primary ecological outcome for decades into the future.

Please contact Judy Blanco, the CLC Cedar River Restoration Coordinator, for more information or to get involved. judyb@cascadeland.org