

Environmental Considerations & Endangered Species in the proposed South Sound Logistics Center property

“One of the rarest ecosystems in the country, these open savannas were created by retreating glaciers 15,000 years ago.” “South Puget Sound prairies are unique to the northwest.” These quotes are from [South Puget Sound Prairie Landscape Working Group](http://www.southsoundprairies.org/) (<http://www.southsoundprairies.org/>), which includes members from public agencies and private organizations, with knowledge and expertise in natural area management and planning, whose main focus is the preservation and restoration of Puget Sound prairies.

According to a survey done by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the entire area in the proposed SSLC contains wetlands, riparian, native outwash prairie and oak woodland habitat which house and feed many different species, some of which are endangered or threatened. Wetlands, a portion of native outwash prairie and three stands of Oregon Oak woodlands are on, or bordering, the Port’s property.

Native outwash prairie is defined as “open areas of excessively drained soil...greater than five acres in size that are covered with native drought-resistant species of grasses, lichens, mosses and forbs. The topography may be flat or mounded.” [TCC Chapter 17.15 Table 8] There are only 3% of native prairies remaining in Washington State.

Native outwash prairie is an extremely rare and endangered habitat with only 20 extant areas in the world. It is protected as an “important habitat” by the Thurston County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO). [TCC 17.15.700] There is a portion of native outwash prairie located in the northeastern boundary of the site, bounded by the railroad on the north.

This site is one of only two remaining sites in the Puget Trough that has been known to support all prairie “specialist” butterflies including the state *endangered* and federal “candidate” species, Taylor’s (or Whulge) Checkerspot, and Mardon Skipper (as identified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.) The butterflies identified as inhabiting the property generally tend to inhabit the native outwash prairie areas and use native plants as host and nectar plants. Unlike other butterfly species that relocate during their life-cycle stages, the species listed below live out their full life cycle on this prairie!

Howellia, a state and federally **endangered** plant -- an aquatic, winter annual with submerged and floating stems -- is found in wetlands that typically flood from snowmelts and spring rains, and dry out during the growing season. Water *Howellia* plants were found in shallow margins around the edges of some of the property’s wetlands.



Picture of blue prairie specialist butterfly

The site also supports the state *endangered* Oregon spotted frog and Olympic mudminnow, several state candidate species, including the Puget blue butterfly and the Oregon vespar sparrow, and the state sensitive white top aster. The property is considered prime habitat for the federally *endangered* Golden Paintbrush and the bald eagle, and has been assessed as an excellent re-introduction site for the Mazama pocket gopher and the state *endangered* western pond turtle and streaked horn lark.

Two salmon-bearing streams run through the property. The Port's portion is the headwaters for these streams. (See [Water/Headwaters of Salmon-Bearing Streams – http://www.friendsofrokyprairie.com/water.shtml](http://www.friendsofrokyprairie.com/water.shtml).)

Three stands of Oregon White Oak woodlands are found on the property in the north central, southwestern and eastern part of the property. Although these stands don't fit the legal criteria of "important habitat" due to their size (less than 5 acres each) they are still considered very important for supporting diverse wildlife populations. All areas described in the Habitat Management Plan were excluded from development by the former owners.

In a letter written by Sue Danver of the Black Hills Audubon Society concerning the proposed quarrying project for the site, she writes, "The proposed site is one of the last remaining large tracts of native prairie within the South Sound. Therefore, BHAS would prefer to conserve the intact prairie, existing prairie isolates and the areas in between. We currently view the groundwater issue as the most critical issue. There are significant concerns about the hydro geological regime at the site, and how it will be impacted and what impacts this will have on the wetlands, streams and groundwater at the site."

- *Can endangered species, in sensitive habitat areas, complete their biological life cycles amidst 24-hour industrial operations, artificial lighting, noise disturbance, air pollution and excessive activity?*
- *What is the potential for spills, run off and contamination? With industry, comes risk.*

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**Washington Department of Ecology news release  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Jan. 16, 2008  
08-015**

### ***State updates Aquatic Noxious Weed Control Permit***

A January 16 Washington Department of Ecology news release about noxious weed control stated that invasive species threaten Washington's agricultural base, rangelands, waterways, tidelands, parks, wildlife, property values, public health and safety, and the ecological health and diversity of our native ecosystems. The economic effects of noxious weeds on agriculture are enormous, but their effects on the natural resources and ecological diversity of the state compound these losses. Noxious weed infestations are the second leading cause of wildland habitat loss. These resources, once destroyed, are irreplaceable. Insects are not the only *hitchhikers on foreign cargo entering our ports*. Exotic plant seeds can also be enclosed in shipping containers, even within the shrink-wrapped packaging inside the containers.

Eric LaGasa Washington State Dept of Agriculture

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The species list below easily fits 8 ½ x 11 paper for printing. It was compiled from the sources noted and has recently been updated based on current listing status. However, the number and variety of species are not complete as WDFW has barely begun to survey the area again after a long lapse. They suspect rare plant species exist that have not yet been classified.

Endangered, Sensitive or Threatened Species of Rocky Prairie

1. Prairie Specialist Butterflies – According to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), West Rocky Prairie is **one** of only **two** remaining sites in the Puget Trough that has been known to support *all* of the prairie specialist butterflies (and an incredible 45 of the 53 Thurston County species) including:
 - a. Taylor's (or Whulge) Checkerspot – *federal candidate & state endangered*
 - b. Mardon Skipper – *federal candidate & state endangered*
 - c. Valley Silverspot – *federal species of concern (FSC) & state candidate*
 - d. Puget Blue – *state candidate*
 - e. Sonora Skipper – *state CWCS*: species of greatest conservation need (SGCN)*
 - f. Oregon Branded Skipper – *SGCN*
 - g. Coastal Woodland Skipper
 - h. Juba Skipper
 - i. Dunn Skipper
 - j. As well as the oak specialist, Propertius' Duskywing – *SGCN*
2. Olympic Mudminnow – *state endangered* – “The extensive wetland riparian complex supports 1 of 3 known populations of the endangered Oregon spotted frog and the Olympic mudminnow.”
3. Oregon Spotted Frog – *federal candidate & state endangered* – Identified on adjoining WDFW property, and assumed to be in the wetlands and streams on the Port of Tacoma property.
4. Oregon Vespar Sparrow – *FSC & state candidate*
5. White Top Aster – *state sensitive*
6. Water Howellia – *federally and state endangered* – This water plant was found on the adjoining southern property owned by WDFW. In all probability, the plant exists on the Port of Tacoma property though it has not yet been confirmed. The same is true for any of the “water related” species listed.
7. Oregon Oak Woodlands – Three areas are on, or bordering, the Port of Tacoma property. Groves less than 5 acres in size are not considered “significant” (NS), however, the previous owners planned to preserve all of the groves. The areas are: Area Two *2.1 acres*, Area Three *.72 acre*, and Area Four *2.3 acres*.
8. Bull Trout (*federally threatened & state candidate*), Cutt-throat Trout and Coho Salmon – WDFW indicated a high probability of these in the streams located immediately adjacent to Port's property. Residents confirmed.
9. Native Outwash Prairie and Wetlands – Both are located on the Port of Tacoma property. There are only 3% of native prairie lands remaining in Washington.
10. Bald Eagles – Rocky Prairie is regarded as an excellent site for this specie.
11. Rocky Prairie has been assessed as an excellent site for the reintroduction of: The *federally endangered* Golden Paintbrush; the *federal candidate & state threatened* Mazama Pocket Gopher; the *FSC & state endangered* Western Pond Turtle; the *federal candidate & state endangered* Streaked Horn Lark; and the *FSC & state threatened* Western Gray Squirrel.

Rocky Prairie “represents one of the last opportunities to protect a large piece of functioning prairie/oak/wetland landscape in the Puget Trough and is one of only about 5 remaining high quality examples of glacial outwash prairie landscapes.” The site “contains about 300 acres of mounded prairie, 360 acres of wetlands and riparian systems, 40 acres of oak woodland and 300 acres mixed forest.”

Sources:

*CWCS: *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy*
WA State Department of Fish and Wildlife
Thurston County Development Services, Planning and Environmental Section & Report
Thurston County Hearing Examiners Report
Re-Issuance Of Mitigated Determination Of Non-Significance
Washington Department of Natural Resources

Updated 9/21/07