

Regional Habitat Connectivity Working Group

Strategic Action Plan 2024-2034

Executive Summary

This Strategic Action Plan, developed by the Regional Habitat Connectivity Working Group (RHCWG), is intended to increase habitat connectivity, improve ecological resilience, and support environmental justice in the Greater Portland-Vancouver Region. Over the next 10 years (2024-34), implementation of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) will enhance the network of conserved core wildlife habitats, the Habitat Connectivity Zones (HCZs) connecting them, and the communities that surround them. This effort will be coordinated and implemented by the RHCWG, a regional partnership of over 40 public agencies, academic institutions, parks districts, non-profits, consultants, watershed councils, and interested community members.

The Strategic Action Plan incorporates a racial equity and environmental justice lens by identifying and prioritizing areas with the highest levels of ecological burden and social vulnerability for connectivity initiatives and investments. To be successful, the Strategic Action Plan must reflect the needs and desires of systematically marginalized communities including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), who will be affected by implementation. This will require RHCWG members to recognize the legacy of racism within predominantly white conservation organizations, address the on-going impacts of past and current conservation work to communities, and commit to ongoing growth. Incorporating racial equity and environmental justice into this work will help repair past injustices and avoid additional marginalization to bring the region further along in reaching both conservation and community goals.

The SAP is organized into four core elements:

- Element A: Data, Research and Science strategies develop and maintain ecological and environmental justice geospatial datasets that can identify and prioritize core habitats and HCZs across the region, and identify intersections with connected communities.
- Element B: Outreach, Education, Engagement and Advocacy strategies engage systematically marginalized communities, and inform community-driven data, prioritization criteria, and community advocates on regional eco-social connectivity needs.
- Element C: Planning and Policy strategies emphasize integrating habitat connectivity and environmental justice considerations into regional policies and planning frameworks, and aligning funding programs to support these initiatives.
- Element D: Conservation, Restoration, Stewardship, and Management strategies identify and implement on-the-ground conservation projects through inclusive and collaborative processes.

The Strategic Action Plan offers a vision and framework for moving forward together to protect and restore our natural systems. These goals and strategies will facilitate the movement of species, improve ecosystem resilience, and support biodiversity conservation. These efforts will also enhance community health and well-being, create thriving landscapes by increasing access to nature, improved land management policies and practices, and fostering positive community engagement. In summary, the

Strategic Action Plan offers a holistic approach to conservation and restoration by addressing ecological, social, and environmental justice dimensions to create positive and lasting impacts on landscapes and communities.