

RCW 79.70.110 Important bird areas. (1) The program may use information collected by a qualifying nonprofit organization to recognize important bird areas. The program should, to the greatest extent possible, coordinate with and use internationally agreed-upon, scientific criteria and protocols developed by a qualifying nonprofit organization to officially recognize these sites throughout Washington. Prior to using information collected by a qualifying nonprofit organization, the program must verify that the information was collected by individuals trained in scientific data collection, wildlife biology, or ornithology.

(2) When the program recognizes an important bird area, that information will be included in the program's data bank. An important bird area shall not be designated as a natural area or a natural area preserve unless that area satisfies the substantive and procedural requirements for becoming a natural area or natural area preserve under this chapter.

(3) The qualifying nonprofit organization that collected the information used to recognize important bird areas should be available to work with interested landowners, businesses, and state and local governments to identify ways to maintain or enhance the important bird areas.

(4) The recognition of private property as an important bird area under this chapter, or the inclusion of private property in the program's data bank, does not confer nor imply any rights of access or trespass onto the important bird area without full knowledge and consent of the owner pursuant to any state statutory and common laws dealing with trespass and access to private property.

(5) Recognition of an important bird area does not require or create critical area designation under chapter 36.70A RCW. [2004 c 180 § 2.]

Intent—2004 c 180: "Washington has a rich variety of birds, wildlife, and fish that its citizens and visitors enjoy. With over three hundred sixty-five bird species, Washington can use this natural asset to attract nature tourists and sportsmen from all over the country and the world. According to a United States fish and wildlife service report, thirty-six percent of Washington's residents currently participate in bird watching, and the watchable wildlife industry brings nearly one billion dollars per year into the state's economy. The economic benefits delivered to rural economies in Washington by those choosing to recreate by hunting waterfowl or upland game birds is equally as impressive.

The legislature has long recognized the important role of waterfowl and upland game bird hunting and other sporting pursuits in both the state's economy and the quality of life for Washington residents. Additionally, the 2003 legislature recognized the economic value of promoting watchable wildlife and nature tourism when it required the departments of fish and wildlife and *community, trade, and economic development to host a watchable wildlife and nature tourism conference and write a statewide strategic plan. The 2002 legislature recognized the value of identifying and conserving our state's biodiversity for future generations when it created the biodiversity task force and required a plan be developed to recommend ways to conserve biodiversity. Furthermore, over the past fifteen years, the legislature has recognized the important contributions volunteers and nonprofit organizations have made in restoring and

monitoring salmon and wildlife habitat. Therefore, it is the goal of the legislature to promote: Partnerships with volunteers; rural economic development; nature tourism; and conservation of biodiversity by encouraging partnerships between state government agencies, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations to designate and conserve natural assets that attract nature tourists and bird watchers to Washington's rural areas.

To accomplish this goal, the legislature recognizes the scientific work by volunteer organizations to use internationally recognized scientific criteria and protocols to identify, conserve, and monitor areas of the state that are important for migrating and resident birds. Scientists, ornithologists, and qualified volunteers have identified important bird areas. Wildlife conservation organizations and their volunteers are working to develop mutually agreed-upon bird conservation plans and monitoring plans in cooperation with public land managers and private landowners. Volunteers and scientists in more than one hundred countries around the world have already completed identification of fourteen thousand two hundred sixty sites that qualify as important bird areas.

Qualified volunteers and scientists have already successfully used the international criteria to identify fifty-three sites important for birds in Washington. Following the final round of site selection, volunteer organizations plan to work with landowners, businesses, and local and state governments to develop plans to maintain or enhance sites that will then become destinations for nature tourists to promote rural economic development. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to have Washington participate in the recognition portion of the important bird area program by directing the natural heritage program at the department of natural resources to officially recognize important bird areas." [2004 c 180 § 1.]

***Reviser's note:** The "department of community, trade, and economic development" was renamed the "department of commerce" by 2009 c 565.