Habitat Corridors

Date for discussion: July 31, 2012

Currently the Comprehensive Plan and land use practices focus on protecting the most significant natural resources in the city. Lower-quality resources – including degraded or isolated patches of natural resources – are a lower priority for protection or enhancement and can face further degradation during development. Yet, natural resources such as streams, wetlands and other habitats function better when they are connected and well cared for (much like other infrastructure such as streets and sewer pipes).

All species depend on or fare better with access to connected habitats. Biodiversity is enhanced by removing stream barriers, replanting stream banks, reducing invasive plants, restoring floodplains and wetlands, and preserving upland tree groves. Even backyards, city parks and street trees provide habitat for hummingbirds, hawks, and songbirds, tree frogs, butterflies and native bees.

Habitat corridors are places to connect with nature – for rest, wonder, recreation, and rejuvenation. Natural areas help protect homes and businesses from landslides, floods or other hazards—something that will be even more important as we deal with the impacts of climate change. And a lush urban forest helps neighborhoods be cooler, healthier places to live.

The Comprehensive Plan update could set policies that call for reconnecting natural resource corridors – habitat for wildlife and for people – and provide direction for how land use tools, capital investments and community-based approaches would be used to establish habitat corridors within the urban setting. The Comprehensive Plan could include aspirational maps of Habitat Corridors and other City GreenWays (e.g. trails and green streets) that weave nature and the city. Those maps could show where corridors would be most beneficial for wildlife. The Comprehensive Plan projects list could identify priority City investments to help reconnect natural resources.

Questions for discussion:

- Do the proposed policies (see below) provide appropriate guidance for reestablishing habitat corridors?
- How should the Comprehensive Plan provide guidance about habitat corridors in developed areas and industrial areas? Would the policies call for corridors having a different character in these areas?
- o How should equity be considered in setting priorities for reconnecting habitats?
- o What principles should be used to map where habitat corridors should be reestablished?

Definitions:

For purposes of the PEG discussion, habitat corridors include existing anchor habitats – such as Forest Park, Oaks Bottom, Smith and Bybee Wetlands, and riparian corridors – and interconnected patches of trees and vegetation. They include diverse habitats – rivers, wetlands, floodplains, forests, woodlands and grasslands – and support a diversity of native plant and animal species. They also include areas of dense tree canopy in parks, along streets or in developed areas that provide important flyways, nesting, feeding and rest stops for birds and pollinators.

Proposal:

Policies (from Draft Comprehensive Plan Topic: Watershed Health and Environment)

- 1. Land, Water and Wildlife Resources:
 - a) Protect, enhance and restore:
 - the quantity, quality, connectivity, complexity, and natural functions of rivers and streams;
 - the quantity, quality, connectivity, complexity, and natural functions of upland natural resources.
 - vegetation in and between riparian corridors, wetlands, floodplains and upland areas;
 - a diversity of critical habitats including native tree groves, native forests, oak woodlands and remnant native meadows;

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b) Maintain and reestablish functioning habitat corridors by protecting, and enhancing existing habitat, restoring degraded habitat, reconnecting anchor habitats and improving accessibility to habitat.

2. Design with Nature:

 g) Support the incorporation of bird and pollinator habitat in landscaping and sustainable stormwater facilities.

3. Access to Nature:

- a) Ensure that all Portlanders have convenient and equitable access to parks, natural area, and opportunities for recreation opportunities in their daily lives.
- b) Create an accessible system of habitat corridors, neighborhood greenways and civic corridors.
- c) Identify corridors where human access and activities are discouraged to protect public safety and ecosystem functions.

Maps

Map desired habitat corridors, as part of City GreenWays network, drawing from:

- The City's draft Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)
- Stream and river buffers
- Floodplain
- Low-quality natural resources adjacent to or potentially connecting higher value resources
- Priority acquisition areas, as identified by Parks, Environmental Services or Metro
- The Terrestrial Ecological Enhancement Strategy (TEES)

Map a desired tree canopy network using the following:

- Existing tree groves or canopy corridors (especially mature natives like oak, Douglas fir and maple)
- Parks and open spaces with or near areas with extensive tree canopy
- Potential tree canopy links between natural areas

Capital Projects

- Continue to acquire key natural resource areas, especially those that protect habitat for sensitive species, reduce risks of natural hazards or connect key habitat areas
- Continue to promote tree planting, targeting areas where tree canopy can connect key flyways

Follow-up Projects

- Continue efforts to update existing plans and programs such the Willamette Greenway Plan and regulations.
- Promote the use of suitable native plants on ecoroofs

Background resources: (e.g. Vision PDX; Portland Plan; Existing policies or initiatives)

- 1. **Comprehensive Plan** (2006), pg. 8-2. **Policy 8.10 Drainageways E. Wildlife.** Conserve and enhance the use of drainageways where appropriate as wildlife corridors which allow the passage of wildlife between natural areas and throughout the city, as well as providing wildlife habitat characteristics including food, water, cover, breeding, nesting, resting, or wintering areas.
- 2. **Comprehensive Plan** (2006), pg. 8-5. **Policy 8.16 Uplands Protection C. Wildlife Corridors.**Conserve and enhance drainageways and linear parkways which have value as wildlife corridors connecting parks, open spaces, and other large wildlife habitat areas, and to increase the variety and quantity of desirable wildlife throughout urban areas.
- 3. **Portland Plan** (2011), pg. 88. **Guiding Policy H-25.** Preserve and restore habitat connections and tree canopy to link stream and river corridors, landslide-prone areas, floodplains, wetlands and critical habitat sites into a system of habitat corridors. This provides connections for wildlife, supports biodiversity, improves water quality, reduces risks due to flooding and landslides, and supports Portland's adaptation to climate change.
- 4. **TEES Summary and Update** (2011), pg. 20. **Concept 4.** Protect, enhance, and restore corridors to connect anchor and patch habitats to each other and to streams.
- 5. *River Renaissance Strategy* (2004), pg. 3-4. *Policy* 6. Establish ecologically viable corridors for migratory fish and birds and other wildlife through habitat protection and restoration.(RR Strategy)
- 6. *Pleasant Valley Plan District* (2004), pg. 22. *Policy* 7. Increase quantities and diversity of upland habitats by creating larger, more diverse, connected habitats in the uplands.
- 7. **Pleasant Valley Plan District** (2004), pg. 22. **Policy 10.** Fish passage, where current passage is blocked, shall be restored. Barriers to wildlife habitat corridors, such as bridges and roads, shall be designed to provide proper opportunities for wildlife migration.