

Habitat Atlas for Wildlife at Risk in the South Okanagan

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ABSTRACT

In 1990, with increasing concern over the rapid loss and fragmentation of habitats in the South Okanagan, provincial and federal environment ministries, along with non-government agencies and foundations, established the South Okanagan Conservation Strategy (SOCS), a five-year program designed “to prioritize management activities for the conservation of natural habitat.” The Wildlife Habitat Atlas for the South Okanagan is an initiative of SOCS, coordinated by the British Columbia Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks, Penticton office. The atlas, as well as a web-site, is designed to provide information on wildlife at risk and their habitats in the South Okanagan. In the past, information about wildlife was not easily available. This lack of information has often meant that land use decisions were implemented without consideration for the habitat requirements of wildlife species. The atlas is a distillation of many years’ work in habitat inventory and ecosystem mapping in the south Okanagan and lower Similkameen valleys. Using Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping (TEM), a large database has been generated detailing ecosystems and potential wildlife use within them. The atlas is a tool for local governments and planners to use in making land-use decisions and in designating environmentally sensitive areas requiring Impact Assessments for proposed developments. The atlas focuses on 35 species considered “at risk” in the South Okanagan-Similkameen and designated by the provincial government as endangered, threatened or vulnerable to drastic population decline or disappearance in our province. Part I of the atlas presents an assessment of the South Okanagan and how past human activity has affected our valley’s ability to support wildlife within a healthy ecosystem. The maps and information show where “at risk” wildlife species can live, breed, and hibernate, along with the geographic distribution of these wildlife habitats. The information in 35 species profiles and accompanying maps can help determine the extent of habitat needed for conservation. Part II concentrates on the opportunities we have for conservation and stewardship on public and private land, from provincial conservation initiatives, to land use regulations, community stewardship, and efforts by individual landowners. We hope this atlas will be used by everyone involved in land use decisions from homeowners to planners, developers and people in local government.
