



COUNCIL POLICY C-CS07

Environmentally Significant Areas Policy

PREPARED BY:	Agriculture and Environment Services	COUNCIL APPROVAL DATE:	June 10, 2025
EFFECTIVE DATE:	June 10, 2025		
REFERENCES:	Nature Policy Framework Environmental Conservation Master Plan Biophysical Assessment Policy – C-CS01	PREVIOUS REVISION DATE:	NEW
FUNCTION:	Agriculture and Environment Services	LS REVIEW DATE:	April 16, 2025

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the following:

- 1) That the natural features and functions within the County's Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) can continue to provide the Beneficial Ecosystem Services needed and desired by residents, businesses, and visitors.
- 2) That protection of Environmentally Significant Areas is integrated into nature-positive planning, subdivision and development.
- 3) That development proponents have clarity on the limitations, requirements and opportunities associated with development within or adjacent to Environmentally Significant Areas.

POLICY STATEMENT

Ensuring natural systems are protected from being degraded, destroyed, or fragmented is one of the County's core values. Maintaining and protecting the function of natural features and systems within Environmentally Significant Areas is key to achieving this core value. The County is committed to ensuring that growth and development of the community is nature-positive and does not impair Environmentally Significant Areas and the Beneficial Ecosystem Services they provide.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms as defined in the Nature Policy Framework apply in this policy:

1. Beneficial Ecosystem Services
2. Biophysical Assessment
3. Conservation Reserve
4. Environmental Conservation Master Plan
5. Environmental Reserve

6. Environmental Reserve Easement
7. Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs)
8. Innovative Conservation Approach
9. Natural Buffers
10. Natural Features
11. Natural Functions
12. Nature Positive

SCOPE

This policy applies to all activities proposed within or adjacent to Environmentally Significant Areas.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Director of Agriculture and Environment Services is responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of this policy. Responsibilities of departments include:

1. The Director of Planning and Development is responsible for ensuring implementation throughout the planning and development process.
2. The Director of Engineering Services is responsible for ensuring implementation during capital projects.
3. The Director of Growth and Strategy is responsible for ensuring implementation during capital projects.
4. The Director of Road Maintenance and Drainage is responsible for ensuring implementation during maintenance and aggregate extraction activities.

STANDARDS

Identification and Delineation

1. Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) in the County shall be identified and catalogued in the Environmental Conservation Master Plan (as amended), and shall include for each ESA:
 - a. Its spatial extent;
 - b. The Natural Features and Functions that contribute to its significance, sensitivity, and/or value; and
 - c. Recommendations for the sensitive management of activities in or near to it.
2. The catalogue of ESAs shall be updated every 5 years.
3. The details of specific ESAs may be updated
 - a. When new information becomes available;
 - b. By a site-specific Biophysical Assessment; and/or
 - c. When significant land use, subdivision, planning, or development activities are proposed which may affect the ESA.

Conservation

1. The management goal of any ESA shall be for it to remain in a natural state to support its identified Natural Features and ultimately its Functions.
2. The County shall designate natural features within identified ESAs as Environmental Reserve, Environmental Reserve Easement, Conservation Easement, or Conservation Reserve during the subdivision process wherever possible.
3. The County shall prioritize ESAs for conservation and/or restoration activities when opportunities arise to do so.

4. Activities within ESAs must protect and enhance Natural Functions and the Beneficial Ecosystem Services they provide to the community through incorporation of nature-positive options and use of Innovative Conservation Approaches.
5. Activities within ESAs must maintain landscape connectivity and wildlife corridors as identified by Parkland County.
6. Major energy development and heavy industrial development must be sited away from ESAs.
7. Development of new roads should limit the disturbance and fragmentation of ESAs.
8. Trails in ESAs should be located, designed and constructed to minimize disruption to the ESA. OHV trails will not be permitted on County owned land in ESAs.
9. The County will provide conservation, restoration, and ecological enhancement incentives and/or education for landowners, farmers and businesses within ESAs.
10. The County's conservation, restoration, stewardship and ecological enhancement programs will prioritize ESAs for resource allocation.

Planning, Subdivision and Development

1. Development within or adjacent to ESAs shall be Nature Positive and follow the avoid, mitigate, offset hierarchy outlined in the Nature Policy Framework.
2. Activities proposed in or adjacent to ESAs shall be subject to additional development requirements including, but not limited to, those detailed in the policies listed within the Nature Policy Framework.
3. Development in or adjacent to an ESA must complete a Biophysical Assessment as determined by the County.
4. If the potential negative impacts on an ESA's Natural Features and/or Functions from a proposed activity are deemed to be in conflict with the intent of this policy, the Subdivision and/or Development Authority may:
 - a. Disallow the proposal;
 - b. Require mitigative actions; and/or
 - c. Require the use of an Innovative Conservation Approach.
5. Area Structure Plans containing ESAs should define outcomes, development limits, and carrying capacities to manage cumulative effects.

Mitigative Actions

1. Based on the Biophysical Assessment and the recommended management practices for the ESA identified in the Environmental Conservation Master Plan, mitigation measures may be required by the Subdivision or Development Authority, and may include, but are not limited to those listed in the Nature Policy Framework.