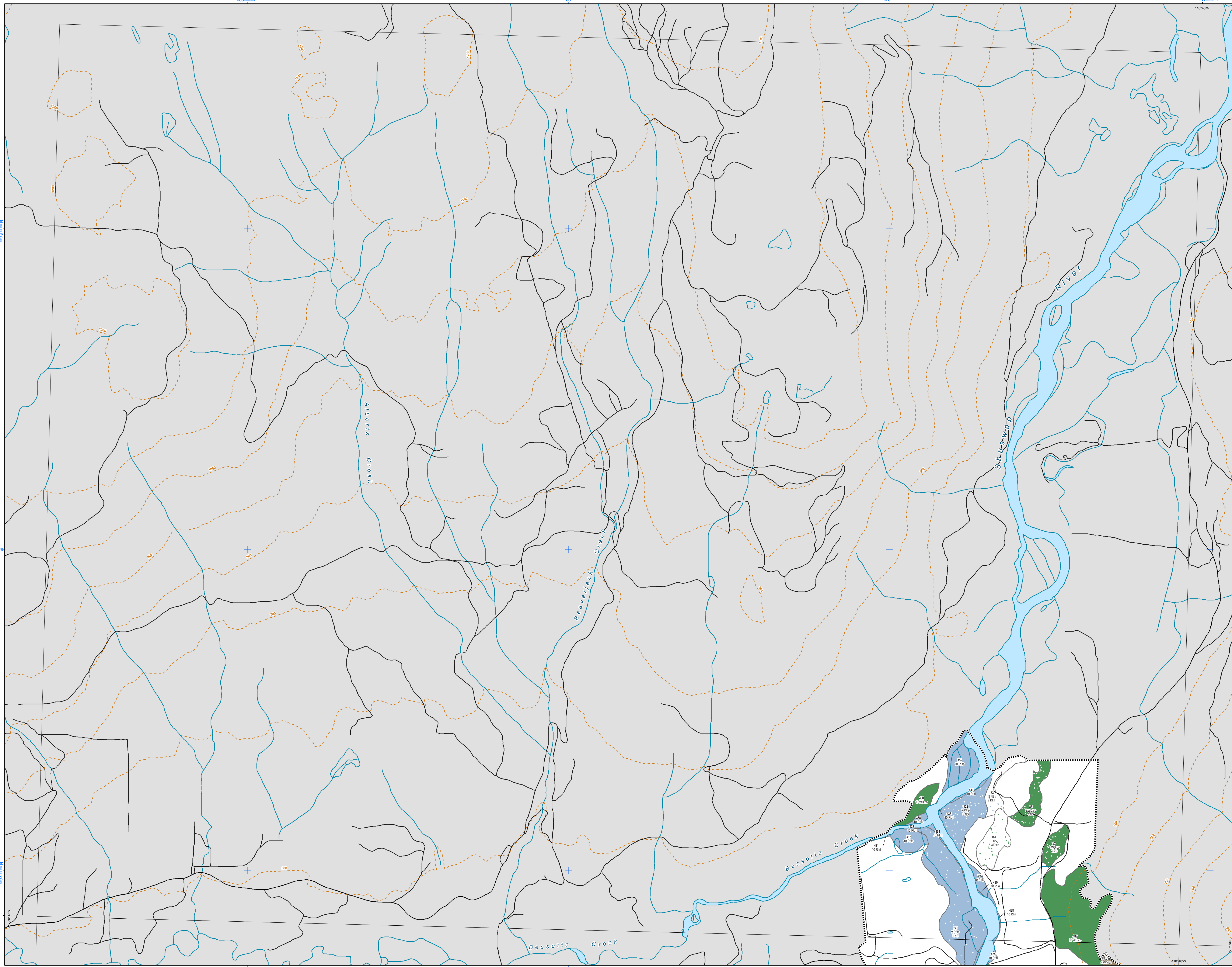




Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory: Middle Shuswap River - 2011



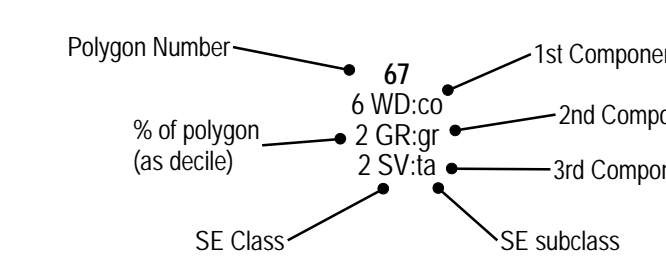
82L.036.2

WHAT IS A SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEM?

For the purpose of this study, an ecosystem considered to be a portion of the landscape with relatively uniform dominant vegetation.

- Map Symbols**
- Polygon Boundary
 - Study Area Boundary
 - Roads
 - Rivers
 - Lake/Major River
 - Areas Outside the Study Area
 - 100m contours

Sensitive Ecosystems (SE) Label



The example label above indicates the SE attributes mapped for polygon 64. 60% of the polygon is WDC - Coniferous Woodland, 20% is CRG - Grassland, 20% of the polygon is SVV - Sparsely Vegetated talus slope.

Ecosystem Components

- The base colour represents the first ecosystem component.
- Coloured dots overlaid upon the base colour indicate a second ecosystem component.
- Two colours of dots indicate a second and third ecosystem.

Note: The actual placement of the dots has no significance; they are randomly placed within each polygon.

Rationale

The Middle Shuswap River study area contains extensive riparian floodplain habitats, areas of coniferous woodlands, grasslands, mature forests, and sparsely vegetated ecosystems. The area is under pressure from agricultural and residential development, logging, recreation, and intensive domestic grazing. High ecological values, combined with human pressure on the landscape, underscore the need for careful, conservation-based land use decision making.

An ecosystem, for the purpose of this inventory, is a portion of the landscape with relatively uniform vegetation and soils. Sensitive ecosystems are those that are ecologically fragile and/or at risk. Criteria for ecological sensitivity include: the presence of shallow soils; susceptibility to soil erosion; vulnerability to hydrological changes; sensitivity to the introduction and spread of invasive plants; and sensitivity to recreational activity and other human disturbances.

The Middle Shuswap River valley is characterized by complex terrain including gently rounded uplands and moderately steep to steep valley sides. The Shuswap River has carved a path through a series of terraces and benches that stretch about a kilometre across the valley bottom.

The soils that support plant communities within the study area vary in thickness. The thicker soils tend to occur on gentle terrain and on lower slopes. Soils tend to become thinner on the upper slopes and where slopes are steeper. There are scattered rock outcrops throughout the study area. Soil texture varies throughout the study area where common textures include sand, sand and gravel, mixed sand, silt and gravel, and a combination of silt, fine sand and clay.

The ecosystems mapped in this project are ecologically significant because of their rarity and fragility and also for the important ecosystem services they provide, such as climate regulation, water filtration, productive soil, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, pollution, wildlife habitat and more. Sensitive ecosystems must be considered in the context of the overall landscape, which includes other ecosystems that also contribute to ecosystem services.

The purpose of this SEI is to aid land use planning and to encourage landscape-level conservation planning. The project presents the SEI maps with a Terrain Resource Information Mapping (TRIM) base. The project report (see References section) details the methods used, study results, descriptions of the ecosystems, and conservation tools for management.

The SEI was developed by first understanding Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping (TEM) provided the foundation for the SEI thematic mapping, and the TEM units were analyzed for at-risk status and ecological sensitivity. Sensitive ecosystems were grouped using the Ecosystem-based Resource Mapping (ERMR) table tool. This tool allows SEI classes and subclasses to be assigned to each TEM unit.

For more information about different projects and the methods used, please see the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory: Middle Shuswap River, 2011. Methods, Ecological Descriptions, Results and Conservation Tools. (To access SEI data see the References section).

Many of the sites identified by the SEI are at high risk of conversion to other land uses or further degradation. Within the study area, 27.3% was mapped as Sensitive Ecosystems (SEI) and 4.8% fell into the Other Important Ecosystems category (see Legend). The inventory results indicated that wetlands, grasslands and sparsely vegetated ecosystems were extremely rare, covering just 5% of the study area. There were no old forests remaining in the study area except within riparian ecosystems. Although areas of riparian and coniferous woodlands ecosystems remain, many have been altered significantly and therefore few high quality sites remain. The study found many SEIs that have been degraded by fragmentation, forest harvesting, human use, livestock grazing, and alien species.

The services and benefits SEIs provide and the wildlife species they support are critically important to the quality of life in the Shuswap River valley. With so few at-risk and fragile ecosystems remaining, it is essential that each site be carefully considered and all land use options be fully evaluated prior to initiating any changes in these areas.

The SEI information is intended to alert local and regional decision-makers to the presence of sensitive and other important ecosystems and ecological values. The SEI mapping does not replace the need for on-site assessments in areas where land use changes are proposed. The accuracy of polygon boundaries is limited by the scale (1:15,000) and date of the orthophotos (2007) used for the final mapping (i.e., change may have taken place since the photos were taken). It is recommended that digital data not be enlarged beyond the scale of the photos, as this may result in unacceptable distortion and faulty registration with other datasets. The ability to see specific disturbances (e.g., invasive plants) is limited when interpreting air photos, and field sampling is needed to supplement the interpretation. It can also be difficult to delineate small sensitive ecosystems. In many cases, these ecosystems are captured as a small component of a larger polygon that is dominated by another ecosystem.

It is important to remember that a polygon may contain a complex or mosaic of ecosystems, and sensitive ecosystems may only occupy a portion of that polygon.

The large variety of ecosystems in the Middle Shuswap River valley provides for diverse habitat needs of many wildlife and plant species, including a number of at-risk animal species. Many of these species rely on the habitat values found only in the at-risk and sensitive ecosystems of the valley.

Species at Risk: The large variety of ecosystems in the Middle Shuswap River valley provides for diverse habitat needs of many wildlife and plant species, including a number of at-risk animal species. Many of these species rely on the habitat values found only in the at-risk and sensitive ecosystems of the valley.

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Base Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping: Poly Umita, P. Goo, (Plan Geoservices Ltd.) and Kristi Vernon, R.P. Bio, (Vernon & MacKenzie Biological Consulting Ltd.), with draft ecosystem mapping by John Grods (Makins Consulting Ltd.).

Base Mapping Data: selected digital layers are from the Terrain Resources Information Mapping (TRIM) Program, Base Mapping and Geomatics Services Branch, Integrated Land Management Bureau, Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations.

Photographs: A number of local photographers have allowed the use of their photos for this project. Credits are provided beside each photo. See also the electronic atlas for fauna in B.C. at the following website: www.faua.ca/bcc

Financial or in-kind support for the projects was provided by: The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program, BC Hydro Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program Coastal (on behalf of its program partners BC Hydro, the Province of B.C., and Fisheries and Oceans Canada who work together to conserve and enhance fish and wildlife impacted by the construction of BC Hydro dams); Regional District of the North Okanagan and the Splish First Nation.

The Toolkit contains practical examples of bylaw provisions currently in use in B.C., including model provisions for Regional Growth Strategies, Official Community Plans, Development Permit Areas, Zoning, Use Exemptions, Environmental Assessment, Stormwater Management and other regulatory tools. It includes several examples and case studies of successful green infrastructure projects and bylaws.

Species at Risk: For more information on Species at Risk, visit the following web sites: B.C. Species and Ecosystems Explorer, www.enr.gov.bc.ca/atrisk/ebexplorer.html, Species at Risk Act, www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), www.cosewic.gc.ca, Species at Risk & Local Governments: A Primer for British Columbia, www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca

Climate Change: Wilson, S.J. and R.H. Hebb. Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change Through the Conservation of Nature. Available at: http://www.landstudies.kit.edu/cas/conserv.htm

Develop with Care: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia, B.C. Ministry of Environment, http://www.enr.gov.bc.ca/indocuments/bmpd/wilwh/care2006/develop_wilwh_care_1000.html

Sensitive Ecosystems Legend

Sensitive ecosystems are fragile and/or rare, or are ecologically important because of the diversity of species they support and the ecosystem services they provide. Some at-risk wildlife are associated with Sensitive Ecosystems, and are listed below. Species at Risk are those species which are considered Endangered, Threatened or of Special Concern. Please note that many of the species listed in this map can be found in other sensitive ecosystems as well as non-sensitive ecosystems found throughout the Middle Shuswap River valley.

Note: Information on Species at Risk is located in the map legend to highlight the species habitat values of the sensitive ecosystems. This map series does not include the actual mapping of species locations. For information on species location mapping see the B.C. Conservation Data Centre reference below.

Grasslands (GR):



Grassland ecosystems occupy areas that are generally too hot and dry for forests to establish, and are dominated by bunchgrasses (grassland GR-gr), low shrubs (shrubland GR-sh) and disturbed grasslands dominated by invasive alien plants (GR-ig). Given the very limited extent of grasslands, these are important sites for grassland restoration, soil conservation, and maintenance of many other grassland values, including habitat for many at-risk and endangered species.

Grassland ecosystems provide the following services:

- Carbon storage
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Pollination
- Pest regulation
- Food production
- Erosion control
- Sediment retention

Some at-risk species associated with Grassland ecosystems are:

- Western Skink
- Northern Rubber Boa
- American Badger
- Leaven's Woodcock
- Common Nighthawk

American Badger (Photo: Environment Canada)

Common Nighthawk (Photo: Alan Schow)

Sparsely Vegetated (SV):



Sparsely vegetated ecosystems are sites where rock (angular rock fragments) limits vegetation establishment, vegetation cover is discontinuous and interspersed with boulders or blocks of rock. Sparsely vegetated ecosystems are subdivided into Talus Slope (SV-ts) and Rock Outcrop (SV-ro) ecosystems. The coarse or shallow soils of these ecosystems make them sparsely vegetated and prone to soil erosion.

Sparsely vegetated ecosystems provide the following services:

- Fresh water
- Drought recovery
- Storm protection
- Drainage and natural irrigation
- Fresh water
- Filtration and pollution control
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Climate regulation
- Soil and nutrient disposition
- Pollination
- Pest regulation
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Sparsely Vegetated ecosystems are:

- Northern Rubber Boa
- Western Skink

Northern Rubber Boa (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Western Skink (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Coniferous Woodlands (WD):



Coniferous Woodlands are open stands of Douglas fir, sometimes with ponderosa pine (WD-co), often on shallow soils, with grass and shrub-dominated understoreys. They most commonly occur on steep warm slopes and on rocky knolls with very shallow soils. Numerous sites have been altered by forest harvesting, growth of trees associated with fire exclusion, domestic livestock grazing, and other human disturbances.

Coniferous woodland ecosystems provide the following services:

- Climate regulation
- Air quality
- Erosion control
- Sediment retention
- Carbon storage
- Pest regulation
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Pollination
- Pest control
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Coniferous Woodland ecosystems are:

- Northern Rubber Boa
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Leaven's Woodcock
- Flammulated Owl
- Common Nighthawk

Northern Rubber Boa (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Leaven's Woodcock (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Riparian (RI):



Riparian ecosystems are rivers, streams, diverse and gully ecosystems or sites with significant seepage, includes ecosystems on floodplains and benches along creeks and rivers (bench, RI-b), ecosystems in gullies, often with creeks (gully, RI-g), fringe ecosystems associated with significant seepage (fringe, RI-f), and the river bed of large systems (river, RI-r). These sites frequently form natural corridors through the landscape, connecting other ecosystems and providing passages for animals. Damming and diversions have seriously affected many riparian ecosystems.

Riparian ecosystems provide the following services:

- Fresh water
- Flood control
- Drought recovery
- Storm protection
- Drainage and natural irrigation
- Fresh water
- Filtration and pollution control
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Climate regulation
- Soil and nutrient disposition
- Pollination
- Pest regulation
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Riparian ecosystems are:

- Western Stream Owl
- Western Painted Turtle
- Western Screech Owl
- Grizzly Bear
- Mountain Caribou (Historically)

Western Stream Owl (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Western Painted Turtle (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Grizzly Bear (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Wetlands (WN):



Wetland ecosystems occur on sites where the water table is at, near, or above the soil surface for a sufficient period of time to influence soil and vegetation development, includes marshes (WN-m) and shallow open water (WN-w) ecosystems. They are typically associated with old back channels of the Shuswap River. They are extremely important because of their natural riparian values and the critically important ecosystem services they provide.

Wetland ecosystems provide the following services:

- Fresh water
- Storm protection
- Drainage and natural irrigation
- Fresh water
- Filtration and pollution control
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Silt storage
- Climate regulation
- Pollination
- Pest regulation
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Wetland ecosystems are:

- Western Toad
- Western Painted Turtle

Western Painted Turtle (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Western Toad (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Other Important Ecosystems

Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Fields (FS):



Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Fields ecosystems are cultivated fields that flood most years, providing important migration and wintering habitat for birds. They provide important habitat for amphibians, waterfowl and other bird species, small mammals, and many types of predators. They are located along low-lying areas or floodplains that have been flooded and planted. In some cases, these areas could be restored to Wetland or Riparian ecosystems if natural flood regimes and vegetation are re-established.

Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Fields provide the following services:

- Flood control
- Drought recovery
- Storm protection
- Drainage and natural irrigation
- Fresh water
- Carbon storage
- Maintenance of productive soils
- Pest regulation
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Fields are:

- Western Toad
- Barn Swallow
- Common Nighthawk
- American Badger

Barn Swallow (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

American Badger (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Mature Forest (MF):



Mature Forest ecosystems are dominated by mature trees, including coniferous (BF-co) forests and mixed BF-m) deciduous and coniferous forests, however it includes mature riparian forests, and mature coniferous woodlands. Mature Forests are important buffers to sensitive ecosystems. They provide recruitment for Old-Forest ecosystems which have been eliminated from the upland portion of the study area. Mature forest ecosystems have many important structural attributes, including some remaining large, old trees.

Mature Forest ecosystems provide the following services:

- Climate regulation
- Carbon storage
- Air quality
- Erosion control
- Sediment retention
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Flood control
- Pest regulation
- Pollination
- Pest control
- Food production

Some at-risk species associated with Mature Forest ecosystems are:

- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Flammulated Owl
- Yellowthroat
- Mountain Caribou (Historically, in old-growth)

Olive-sided Flycatcher (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Flammulated Owl (Photo: Special Concern Photo by Kristi Vernon)

Non-sensitive Landscapes (NS): (Areas not mapped as sensitive or other important ecosystems are depicted in white)

Non-sensitive Landscapes are modified areas not occupied by sensitive or other important ecosystems. They include disturbed natural landscapes, agricultural areas and young forests. Disturbed natural areas can be interspersed with range, farmland and native vegetation, or cultivated crops. Young forests have an age range between 0 and 80 years. Non-sensitive landscapes are shown in white in the areas that are not designated by a sensitive ecosystem. In addition, many sensitive ecosystem polygons, close to urban or disturbed areas, may have a modified landscape interspersed with the sensitive ecosystem(s). In such cases, the sensitive ecosystem(s) are depicted as NS (non-sensitive) on the map.

