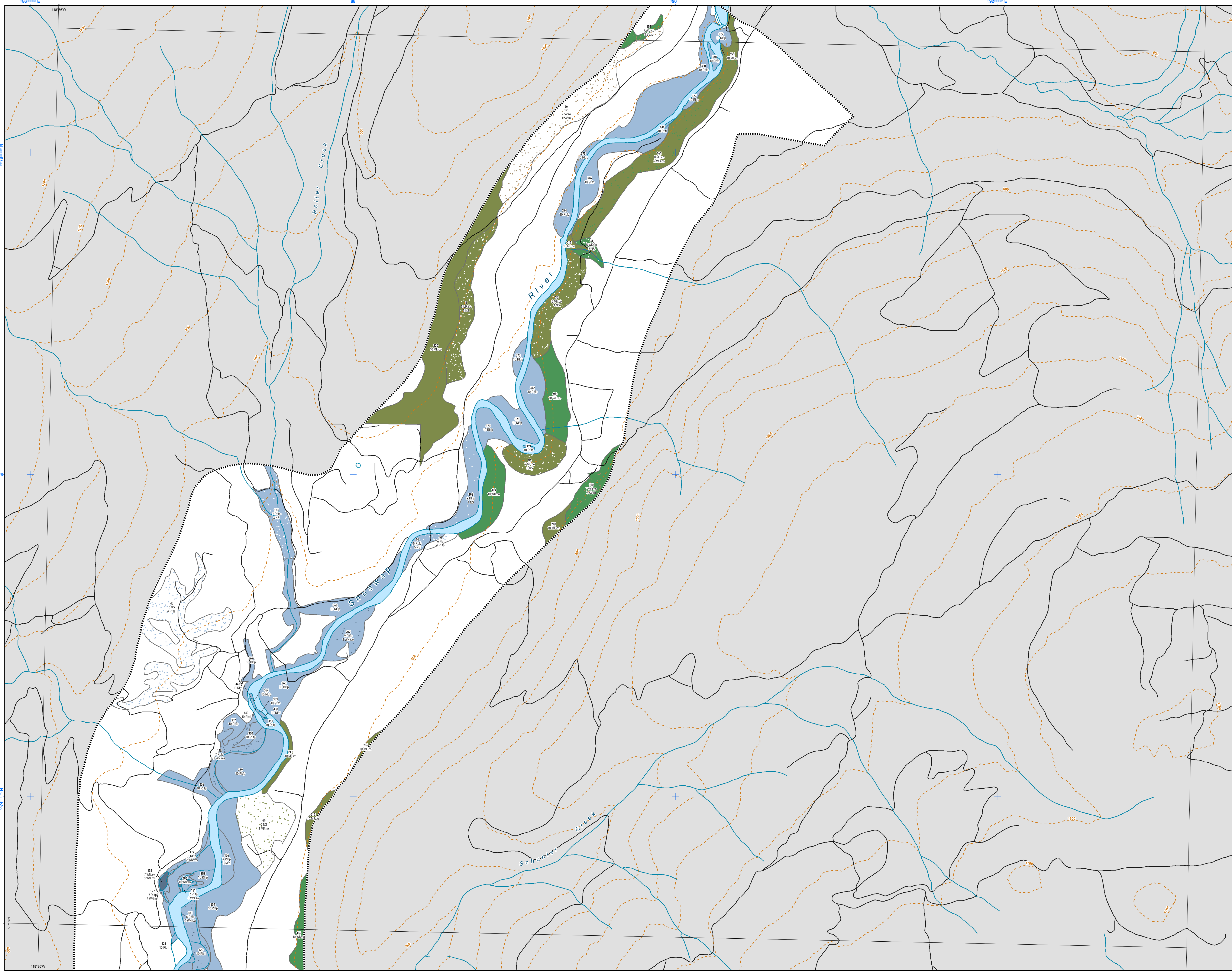




# Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory: Middle Shuswap River - 2011



82L.038.1

### WHAT IS A SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEM?

For the purpose of this study, an ecosystem is considered to be a portion of the landscape with relatively uniform dominant vegetation. Sensitive Ecosystems are ecosystems that are ecologically sensitive and/or at risk in the landscape.

The soils that support plant communities within the study area vary in thickness - the thicker soils tend to exist on gentler 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.

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).

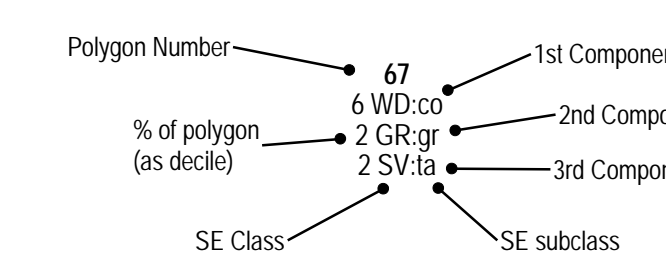
It is important to remember that a polygon may contain a complex or mosaic of ecosystems, and sensitive ecosystems may only occupy a portion of that polygon.

**Base Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping**  
Poly Umlir, P. Cox (Pinar Geosystems Ltd.) and Kristi Vernon, R.P. Bio, Iverson & Mackenzie Biological Consulting Ltd., with draft ecosystem mapping by John Grods (Makins Consulting Ltd.).

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.

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

### Sensitive Ecosystems (SE) Label



The example label above indicates: The SE attributes mapped for polygon 64, 50% of the polygon is W0.00 - Coniferous Woodland, 20% of the polygon is SVA - Sparsely Vegetated talus slope. NO are modified (non-sensitive) landscapes. Please refer to the legend for more information about these areas. More than one site unit can be considered a SE class and subclass. Polygon labels on the map do not include the site units.

### Ecosystem Components

This cartographic product uses Dot Density to indicate where more than one ecosystem class is mapped in a polygon. The number of dots indicates the proportion of the polygon represented by the 2nd and 3rd component. The colour of the dots indicates the 2nd and 3rd ecosystem class.

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

### Rationale

The Middle Shuswap River valley is both ecologically and biologically diverse and is home to many at-risk species and ecological communities. Upland old forest ecosystems, once well-represented, have been eliminated from the study area.

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, pollination, 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. Healthy, functioning natural ecosystems play an important role in adapting to, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The SEI is intended to provide a tool that uses scientific information and mapping to encourage local government, landowners, developers, and other citizens to become involved in protecting, conserving, and restoring sensitive ecosystems. Conservation of these ecosystems is increasingly important as population growth continues to cause fragmentation, degradation, and loss of sensitive ecosystems.

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. Within the province, at-risk status for species and ecological communities is determined by the B.C. Conservation Data Centre (CDC), a member program of the International NatureServe network. The CDC list of Ecological Communities can help to determine if a particular ecosystem is representative of an at-risk ecological community.

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 Management (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. It is flexible and can be completed in a short time with limited funding when necessary, or expanded to incorporate more information for advanced conservation planning and sustainable development.

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 3% 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.

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Within the province, species are assessed by the B.C. Conservation Data Centre. At-risk species are identified on the B.C. Red and Blue Lists. Red-listed species are extirpated, endangered, or threatened; blue-listed species are of special concern due to low or declining populations and are sensitive to human activities or natural events.

**Species at Risk**  
The large variety of ecosystems in the Middle Shuswap River valley provide 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.

Nationally, at-risk species are ranked by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern. Endangered species face imminent extirpation or extinction. Threatened species may become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed. Species of Special Concern are particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events. Endangered or Threatened species that have been included in Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act are afforded protection on federal lands, and the B.C. Wildlife Amendment Act will protect their populations and habitats on provincial lands. Protection of Species at Risk and their important habitats on private lands is primarily achieved through careful land use planning and municipal bylaws. For more information on Species at Risk, see Species at Risk Section in Related Publications and Links.

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**Base Mapping Data:** selected digital layers from the Terrain Resources Information Management (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: <http://www.eatlas.bc.ca>

**Full report on this SEI project:** Iverson, K. E. 2011. Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory: Middle Shuswap River, 2011. Methods, Ecological Descriptions, Results and Conservation Tools. Available at [www.gov.bc.ca/cecoloc](http://www.gov.bc.ca/cecoloc) (type in SEI Shuswap as keyword).

**Related Publications and Links**  
Green Bylaws Toolkit for Conserving Sensitive Ecosystems and Green Infrastructure  
[www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca)

**Species at Risk**  
For more information on Species at Risk, visit the following web sites:  
• B.C. Species and Ecosystems Explorer  
[www.gov.bc.ca/bcattr/001/001.html](http://www.gov.bc.ca/bcattr/001/001.html)  
• Species at Risk Act [www.sar.gov.ca](http://www.sar.gov.ca)  
• Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) [www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)  
• Species at Risk & Local Governments: A Primer for British Columbia [www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca](http://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.landstrat.gov.bc.ca/cscs/050806.htm>

**Develop with Care**  
Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia, B.C. Ministry of Environment  
[http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/edocuments/bmp/bmpwithcare2006/develop\\_with\\_care\\_1010.html](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/edocuments/bmp/bmpwithcare2006/develop_with_care_1010.html)

**To access SEI data:**  
For more detailed information, go to EcoCat: <http://100.gov.bc.ca/cecoloc/public/welcome.do> and search on Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory and the project area name, e.g. Shuswap.

## 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 the 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 included 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 (GR-gr), low shrubs (shrubland) (GR-sh) and disturbed grasslands dominated by invasive alien plants (GR-rip). 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 Woodpecker
- Common Nighthawk

American Badger (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Chris Lyle

Common Nighthawk (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Ken Schwab

### 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-t) and Rock Outcrop (SV-r) ecosystems. The coarse or shallow soils of these ecosystems make them sparsely to disturbed and soil erosion.

Sparsely Vegetated ecosystems provide the following services:

- Erosion control
- Nutrient cycling and maintenance of productive soils
- Pollination
- Food production
- Soil formation

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

- Northern Rubber Boa
- Western Skink

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

Western Skink (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Greg Smith

### 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 Woodpecker
- Flammulated Owl
- Common Nighthawk

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

Leaven's Woodpecker (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Greg Smith

### 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
- 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
- Grassy Owl
- Mountain Caribou (Historically)

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

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

Grassy Owl (COSEWIC: 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 are critically important ecosystem services they provide.

Wetland ecosystems provide the following services:

- Drought recovery
- Flood control
- 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 Painted Turtle
- Western Skink

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

Western Skink (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Greg Smith

## 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 riparian vegetation is 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 (COSEWIC: Special Concern) Photo by Kristi Vernon

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

### Mature Forest (MF):



Mature Forest ecosystems are dominated by mature trees, including coniferous (MF-co) forests and mixed (MF-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 recreation for Old-Forest ecosystems which have been eliminated from the upland portion of the study area. Mature forest ecosystems have 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
- Western Skink
- Western Toad
- Western Painted Turtle
- Mountain Caribou (Historically)

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

Flammulated Owl (COSEWIC: 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 interpreted as 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.

