

Ecosystem Enhancement Program

Elk Valley Sub-Region Ecological Priorities

The following ecosystem priorities were identified through a review of regional plans and research and by seeking input from community groups, First Nations representatives, government agencies, and subject matter experts. Priorities are listed in random order; no ranking is intended. Species, habitats, and processes are not limited to those listed below.

Aquatic		
Conservation, restoration, and enhancement of aquatic habitat		
Priority Habitat	Priority Species	Priority Processes
- Elk River and Flathead Rivers - tributary streams that support rearing, spawning, overwintering, foraging from valley bottom to upper basin headwaters - cold water refugia - alluvial fans/creek mouths - lakes and ponds - lake foreshore - groundwater-surface water interface (warm water spring; mineral springs; cold water source)	- native fish (Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Bull Trout, Rocky Mountain Sculpin) - waterbirds (Harlequin Duck, Western Grebe, American Dipper, Cliff Swallow, Black Swift, Spotted Sandpiper) - freshwater mussels - invertebrates	- fish passage - connectivity - water temperature, water quality (nutrients, turbidity) - productivity - geomorphological function (erosion, sedimentation, large woody debris, gravel recruitment) - biodiversity - resiliency
Wetland/Riparian		
Conservation, restoration and enhancement of wetlands and riparian areas		
Priority Habitat	Priority Habitat	Priority Processes
- wetlands - floodplains - mature cottonwood forests - riparian habitats along tributaries - floodplains - breeding and nesting areas for birds - rare plant communities	- western toad - western painted turtle - Rocky Mountain tailed frog - Columbia spotted frog - migratory birds and waterfowl (Great Blue Heron, Western Screech-Owl, Swallows (all), American Bittern, Sandhill Crane) - bats - American beaver - culturally important plants - rare plants - macroinvertebrates	- landscape connectivity, valley bottom to mountain top - hydrologic processes (filtering, recharge, flooding, storage) - geomorphic processes (erosion, levees, gravel, sedimentation, woody debris) - productivity - wildlife movement and migration - breeding and nesting - biodiversity - resiliency

Terrestrial		
Protection, enhancement and identification of corridors and linkage areas • Priority: East Flathead, West Elk, Corbin Alexander, Alexander-Michel, Fording, Hwy 3 corridor, Cabin Ram, Eastern and Western slopes of Elk Valley between Sparwood and Elko		
Conservation and restoration of upland habitats that support species at risk and species of conservation concern		
<i>Priority Habitat</i>	<i>Priority Species</i>	<i>Priority Processes</i>
• low elevation grassland, brushland, open forest • mid and upper elevation grassland • old growth forest • ungulate winter range • broadleaf stands • alpine meadows and tundra • rare plant communities • nesting and/or roosting sites • burrows or denning areas • steep-sided slopes • hibernacula • wildlife trees and snags • mineral licks • huckleberry patches • calcareous rock/soils • rocky outcrops, rock caves • avalanche chutes	• grizzly bear • moose, mule deer, elk • bighorn sheep • mountain goat • wolf • bats • American badger • American martin • Canada Lynx, cougar • wolverine • Lewis' Woodpecker • Goshawk • Peregrin Falcon • Clark's Nutcracker • whitebark pine • limber pine • western white pine • huckleberry • rare plants • pollinators and other invertebrates (Gillette's Checkerspot) • fungi	• wildlife movement and migration • connectivity • food web interactions (predator-prey, seed dispersal, pollination) • natural fire regime • climate refugia • deciduous regeneration • genetic and structural diversity • resiliency
Cultural		
Protection and enhancement of Indigenous cultural values		
<i>Priority Habitat</i>	<i>Priority Species</i>	<i>Priority Processes</i>
• cultural use areas • riparian areas and wetlands • fisheries sensitive watersheds • berry habitat • old growth • grizzly bear habitat and connectivity corridors • fire maintained ecosystems • species at risk • ungulate winter range • caribou habitat • wildlife habitat areas (WHAs) and features (WHFs) • biodiversity	• culturally significant and medicinal plants • furbearers • wide ranging carnivores • ungulates • species at risk • traditional fish food sources	• Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices • Indigenous-led conservation • Cultural heritage resources • Wildlife food resource conservation • Connectivity • Bioculture connections (traditional travel and trade routes) • Maintenance of subsistence networks (hunting, trapping and fishing)

Elk Valley Subregion Emerging Issues

- Climate Change
- Invasive Species
- Emergent and persistent diseases/pests
- Imminent species/habitat decline
- Wildfire and Fire suppression
- Recreation and access management
- Decline in open canopy forest
- Human wildlife conflicts

Key References (Priorities and Emerging Issues):

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