

## Conservation at Risk Deschutes River, McAllister Spurgeon, Chambers, and Woodland Basins

Photo Credit: Olympia Ecosystems



The Thurston Central Alternative (TCA) and the surrounding development would cause irretrievable habitat loss not only within the “six-mile circle” but also throughout these and adjacent basins.

### Critical Habitat

Critical Habitat are “specific areas...that contain the physical or biological features that are essential to the conservation of endangered and threatened species.” The TCA would impact Critical Habitat for steelhead, Mazama pocket gopher, and Oregon spotted frog.

### Imperilled Habitat

Thousands of acres of imperilled prairie, oak, and grassland habitat would be lost. Several hundred acres of wetland and rare plants at risk of extirpation would be lost within the TCA footprint and hundreds of acres more in adjoining areas would be at risk.

### Protected Areas

The TCA would destroy lands already acquired to protect critical and imperilled habitat, and to provide linkages among high integrity habitats. Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Fish and Wildlife Service, WaDFW, and WaDNR have conservation areas which, along with those owned by Capital Land Trust, Nisqually Land Trust, and Olympia Ecosystems protect thousands of acres in the basins impacted by the TCA.

v. 1/23/23

### The WASP Environmental Impact Scoring is Incorrect

The Screening Evaluation used to select the TCA did not take a hard look at potential environmental impacts. The WASP only considered the direct environmental impacts of airport layouts, not the indirect or cumulative impacts of associated infrastructure development. They did not consider all the environmental impacts that could occur and, for those they do evaluate, they employ an arbitrary scoring system. They did not consider all the data available to them. A different outcome should have come from an impact evaluation.

### Section 4(f) Resources are Missed

This regulatory requirement is intended to address recreation resources and wildlife refuges. The WASP scored the TCA “green.” But the evaluation did not consider:

- The Chehalis-Western Trail, a popular Thurston County recreation trail that runs north-south through the middle of the six-mile circle.
- Protected lands on JBLM and those owned by land trusts within the circle and other abutting state, federal and private conservation lands.
- Reserve Priority Areas designated under the Thurston County Habitat Conservation Plan.

The environmental impact would be “significant.”

### Protected Species Impacts are Minimized

The highest an impact to protected species could score in the WASP is “yellow.” The WASP scores TCA “green.” How can that be the case when one considers the TCA would impact:

- Significant portions of the total designated critical habitat for pocket gopher and Oregon spotted frog.
- Significant portions of Reserve Priority Areas designated under the Thurston County HCP.
- Known occurrences of state listed plant species.

The TCA endangers the viability and recovery of protected species. The environmental impact would be “significant” and in violation of the Endangered Species Act.

### A Unique Landscape is Imperilled

The TCA is home to a mosaic of wetlands, prairies, and forests molded by the retreat of the glaciers of the last ice age. Within these basins are “mounds” like those at Mima Mounds and a mix of oak woodlands, grasslands, springs, fens, and glacial relics found nowhere else in the world. State, federal, tribal, and private entities recognize this and have invested heavily in their protection. The TCA would undo all of it—the WASP did not consider this significant impact.

### A Vital Linkage Would be Severed

Recent habitat connectivity mapping analysis done by the Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group has identified the “greenfield” where the airport would be built in one of only two wildlife corridors that connect the Cascades to the Coast and cross I-5. Any large development in this region would fragment this vital and shrinking wildlife corridor. Fragmenting this corridor would limit the ability for species to adapt to climate change and to ensure resilient populations into the future. Diminishing this ecological corridor would have long-lasting negative impacts.