



**NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®**  
*People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance*

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## **Tukwila Certified As Community Wildlife Habitat**

Leading a nationwide trend in community concern for habitat loss, the city of Tukwila was officially designated as a Community Wildlife Habitat on Saturday, the first in Washington and only the fourth in the country to receive such an honor. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) commends the dedicated residents of Tukwila and the Tukwila Wildlife Habitat Project (TWHP) for their wildlife conservation efforts and for coming together for a common purpose – to create a community where people and wildlife can flourish.

Tukwila, with a population of 17,000 and located just 10 minutes from Seattle, could be considered the poster child for communities everywhere suffering from rapid growth and unchecked development. However, despite the odds, Tukwila retains important stretches of wildlife habitat. Running the length of Tukwila is the Duwamish River, which plays a vital role in the salmon recovery effort underway throughout the Northwest.

In presenting the certification to the Tukwila Habitat Committee, Craig Tufts, NWF Chief Naturalist, said, "It is inspiring to see people join together and work hard to develop a whole community which welcomes wildlife. Tukwila has set an excellent standard for other communities throughout the country. The residents of Tukwila have proved that nature and suburbia can truly coexist."

The Community Wildlife Habitat project is part of the NWF's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program. Since 1973, NWF has provided millions of people with the basic guidelines for making their landscapes more wildlife-friendly. There are over 30,000 certified backyard habitats nationwide, 995 in Washington state, 480 in King County.

During Saturday's celebration, several local dignitaries were on hand to offer their congratulations to the residents of Tukwila. Margarita Prentice, Washington State Senator, said she was pleased to have such an exemplary community within her constituency. She thinks the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program should serve as an inspiration to other communities in Western Washington.

To qualify as a certified Community Wildlife Habitat, Tukwila, encompassing about 8.6 square miles, had to certify a minimum of 150 residential backyard habitats, as well as

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Schoolyard Habitats in all five Tukwila schools, 10 apartment complexes/multi-unit sites, and public places such as the Tukwila Community Center.

“Creating a community habitat is something all local residents can work toward with a sense of accomplishment and pride,” said Tukwila Mayor Steve Mullet. “One of the great treasures of our community has always been the devotion and ambition of many citizens who take that extra step to make Tukwila a better place to live. While some struggle with Tukwila’s identity within the region, the volunteers on the Tukwila Wildlife Habitat Project are clear in their commitment to make Tukwila a city that embraces the best of the urban experience. Not only have they helped to identify the need to provide habitat for wildlife, but their efforts have also helped to showcase Tukwila regionally as a city committed to our environment and our quality of life.”

Ironically, the certification comes just when the state department of agriculture has announced that it will cut down numerous trees in Tukwila to prevent the spread of the Asian Citrus Longhorned Beetle, which was accidentally brought into this country in wood shipping pallets from China. This invasive exotic insect has the potential to wipe out large areas of hardwood trees throughout the state and the West Coast if it is not brought under control. By managing the problem now, widespread devastation can be prevented in the future. Fortunately trees are just one element of the Tukwila habitat and removing some of them will make room for new environmental niches (meadow, grasslands, shrub, and second growth woodland), all of which provide productive and valuable habitat. NWF believes that now that the citizens of Tukwila are educated about the benefits of wildlife habitat they will work even harder to replant and restore any habitat areas that have been lost due to the beetle invasion.

The genesis of the Tukwila community habitat project began about three years ago when Michelle Roedell, project organizer, researched ways to engage her community in a large-scale wildlife habitat project. She learned about the NWF program and approached Tukwila’s Parks and Recreation Department about receiving support for the project. After putting together a dynamic habitat team made up of Tukwila homeowners and community leaders, energy for the project exploded.

“This project has been a great way to meet my neighbors and to connect with people concerned about protecting the environment,” said Roedell. “Excitement for this project just grew and grew. People jumped on the bandwagon and were committed to helping us accomplish our goal of making Tukwila the first Community Wildlife Habitat in Washington state.”

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Tukwila's goals include several firsts: 100% school district participation, 100% city leadership participation (Mayor, entire City Council, City Administrator), participation by the mayor of Tukwila's Sister City, Ikawa-Cho, Japan. The certification goals - along with impressive supporting projects such as putting on an annual regional Backyard Wildlife Fair, networking with wildlife habitat organizations and agencies, sponsoring Habitat Stewards trainings and other educational workshops, subsidizing low-income residents, plus numerous other examples - makes Tukwila's Community Wildlife Habitat Project one of the most ambitious to date.

Pam Linder, a member of Tukwila's City Council, has been an active supporter of the project from the start. "This project has neighbors talking to neighbors over the fence or through the hedge about what different birds they've seen lately. School children and seniors alike are learning and enjoying together." She noted that this project provided a meaningful sense of community and civic pride.

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell sent along her congratulations. "By receiving this distinctive honor, the City of Tukwila has become a leader in our region by creating a model for protecting wildlife right in our own backyards. Tukwila has shown that developing a community habitat is something all local residents can work toward with a sense of accomplishment and pride. Protecting the environment has always been one my top priorities. I applaud the Tukwila Wildlife Habitat Project and residents of Tukwila for partnering with the National Wildlife Federation to make environmental protection one of your priorities."

Observing that the Tukwila Wildlife Habitat began with the certification of just one backyard, NWF Board Member Thea Levkovitz commented that, "Thanks to a contagious idea that grew and grew, local wildlife that would have been pushed to ever-shrinking wild areas now can share space with Tukwila citizens. The knowledge and inspiration that this project has generated will lead Tukwila residents and visitors to take better care of their natural world both close to home and far away."

The nation's largest member-supported conservation advocacy and education group, The National Wildlife Federation unites people from all walks of life to protect nature, wildlife and the world we all share.

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