

Recommendation Memo

Urban Wildlife Alliance

To: Redmond Residents and Developers
From: Derek Held
Date: June 21, 2017
Re: Backyard Wildlife Conservation

Purpose

This memo is to discuss habitat loss in suburban Redmond and how to reduce the impact of increasing density of housing.

Summary

Increasing density in Redmond has negatively affected the local wildlife in multiple ways. It is impossible to simply freeze development and there is no desire to. I performed primary research in the form of interviews with homeowners and developers. Our secondary research focused on the resources currently available to this group, including evaluating the accessibility and effectiveness of the information. I found that people are not always aware of the simple choices that can be made and what kinds of resources are available. I was also able to locate local information for people to take advantage of. The problem is that the information needed tends to be spread across multiple websites, making it harder to access.

Introduction

The increased need for housing in Redmond has caused open areas of land to be developed to meet that need. The loss of these open areas, sometimes where native plants are thriving, is not always being offset. A common example of this in the community is larger lots being subdivided into more lots or multiple lots being combined into a single lot for development of apartments. King County lists development causing the fragmentation and loss of habitat as the #1 threat to biodiversity in the county¹. I do not wish to see development halted but there are ways that both homeowners and developers can reduce the impact of further development.

Research Methods

Resident and Builder Survey

One of the first research tasks I undertook was to find out the attitudes of homeowners and developers on the topic of wildlife conservation. These opinions are very important because they help shape the recommendations I make to keep them in line with the actions people are willing to undertake. This involved one on one conversations with people with a loosely structured format. There are several questions I made sure to ask all the individuals I spoke to:

1. Do you think there are things you can do to help local wildlife?
2. If you wanted to find information on how to have a more wildlife friendly property, where would you go?
3. Is it important to do things that help local wildlife?
4. Do you currently do things specially for local wildlife, and if so what are they?
5. If you knew of low cost ways you could help local wildlife, would you do those things?

¹ <http://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/biodiversity/threats.aspx>

Identify Current Resources

I also considered the resources currently available that can be used to help people make decisions that will provide a net gain for wildlife. I focused on local resources such as local non-profits in the county, King County conservation resources, and City of Redmond resources.

Research Recommendations

Finally, I had to research the things that people should be doing to help wildlife. This involved locating reputable resources that provide information for this exact purpose. I had to make sure the information was also useful for the people in the Redmond area. This information is important to create recommendations on how to help.

Results

Resident and Builder Survey

With exception of people who are already otherwise invested in wildlife protection, people typically were not aware of the resources available or how much of an impact actions they take could change their interaction with local wildlife. Sometimes there was an attitude of simply not caring about local wildlife. There were also cases where people who responded positively to a question of support for individual environmental custodianship weren't aware of some of the things they could be doing in their own yard.

Identify Current Resources

I found a few local resources available online if you know where to look. The City of Redmond has a page titled "Natural Gardening"² that has a few tips and links to more resources. The King County website also had a small section at the very bottom of a page titled "Wildlife in Urban and Urbanizing Areas"³ that provided a few links to outside resources.

Research Recommendations

I found several organizations that published information written to apply to a wide audience. For example, the National Wildlife Federation publishes a guide for making a "Certified Wildlife Habitat." These resources provide an overall structure of the kinds of things you need or could do but are often so generic that it requires further research.

Conclusion

In cases where people did not care about the relationship of their yard with wildlife there is not a quick way to help the person make a positive change. The most important group for inviting change are those who aren't aware of the simple things they can do but when they hear how simple it can be are willing to make the changes that help wildlife. This group is the most important group to connect to resources. They are the most likely to make recommended changes. There is also a lack of a definitive local resource for this kind of information. Much of the information is spread across multiple websites and it isn't made easy to get quickly educated on your options. Thankfully I found that the resources are out there, it just needs to be curated.

Recommendations

The crux of my recommendation is a public information campaign. Like with many issues requiring action, the hard part can be establishing awareness. Two ways that homeowners and developers can make changes are by providing green areas where there would otherwise be concrete and by landscaping with native plants. Increasing green areas is aesthetically pleasing and can be used as a selling point, like apartments that advertise having rooftop green space for tenants to enjoy. Native plant use in landscaping is important because it supports local wildlife and reduces the plantings of invasive species.

This information should be compiled onto a dedicated website that only serves to educate on this issue. This curated content serves to make self-educating and easy as possible. There are a couple ways to spread information about this website's existence. The first is to send out mailers that advertise the information and resources, hopefully prompting people to seek more information. The effectiveness of mailers is known to be low, which is why it cannot be done alone. It is also expensive. The second is to go to where the people are. Setting up information booths in public areas with very visual information and volunteers ready to have conversations. Many

² <https://www.redmond.gov/Environment/StreamsHabitat/NaturalGardening/>

³ <http://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/biodiversity/defining-biodiversity/species-of-interest/urban-wildlife.aspx>

people will probably choose to ignore but it's the act of immersing people in opportunities to seek information that will be what helps in the long run.

When it comes to developers the proposal is more straight forward. Incentivize developers to be more wildlife friendly and provide them resources on how to sell prospective buyers and tenants on the work they have done. If they can get better returns on their investment you better believe they will take advantage of it. This also could mean tax incentives to reward buildouts that help support local wildlife.