

Purpose

The purpose of the Natural Resources Assessment is to assist the City in prioritizing resource protection efforts by:

- developing a land-scoring classification system
- identifying patterns and trends in resource distribution and relative value across the landscape
- identifying trends in resource health and needs for management

The Natural Resources Assessment represents the second step in the Natural Resources Department's five-part approach to conservation. These five steps are generally summarized as follows: perform an inventory to determine the location and character of specific resources within the City; assess those resources in terms of value to citizens; prioritize conservation efforts for resources based on citizen valuation; develop strategies to achieve the conservation priorities; and implement those strategies.

This five-part approach is meant to help the City take a more comprehensive approach to conservation of Lakeland's natural resources as the staff has been directed to do by the BOC resolution #2004/12-108. This assessment (NRA) places valuation, based on community input, for those resources that were identified in the inventory. The intent of this valuation process is to rank natural resources in terms of conservation priority. The valuation process consists of public input as to which resources are most important to the community as well as what characteristics of resources are considered most significant. Also considered is how resources are valued relative to one another in terms of priorities for conservation. The NRA will allow for the development of conservation priority maps and is planned to be used to supplement the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Natural Resources Inventory component.



Key Findings

As indicated through public surveys, public input meetings, public comments on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and various avenues of public discussion, the citizens of Lakeland have indicated that the natural resources carrying the highest value for protection are forests. Specifically oak-hickory and oak-gum-cypress forest stand groups were valued most highly with a high preference for conservation of mature hardwood stands, naturally occurring stands (as opposed to silviculturally produced), upland hardwood stands and young hardwood stands. Forest resources were followed closely in value by streams and lakes, wildlife habitat, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Natural resources in general are valued for multiple reasons including their contribution of environmental benefits, their scenic qualities, and their contribution to community character. Of specific concern were resource health, presence of native species, and connectivity of resources. All of the above have implications for conservation planning as well as for physical management to provide for sustainable ecosystems.

Introduction

The Natural Resources Assessment (NRA) is comprised of two primary sections: Forest Health and Resource Valuation. Forest health assessment was developed from information gained during the City's Natural Resources Inventory (NRI). This information was analyzed to determine the state of Lakeland's woodlands and forests. Resource valuation was developed utilizing information gained from public input during a series of public meetings regarding the NRI, the Comprehensive Plan, and from a public survey distributed during the adoption phase and immediately following adoption of the NRI. These data were analyzed and used to develop a Land Scoring Classification System (LSCS). This system is necessary to develop conservation priorities throughout the City.

For the entire NRI, there were 381 inventory plots over 5560 acres. Inventory plot distribution was separated into 3 categories; forested, non-forested, and denied access. The Natural Resources Department was denied permission to access 7% of the inventory plots; however, base level information was obtained from aerial photo interpretation and road survey. While the NRI plots focused on obtaining information regarding forest resources, data regarding other natural resources was obtained through various methods, including extensive use of agency data, as detailed in the NRI. Detailed site analysis is still recommended to establish specific resource protection efforts on case by case bases. Distribution of inventory plots by category was as follows: 90% forested; 3% non-forested; 7% denied access.

