WILDLIFE HABITAT COUNCIL℠

HABITAT

Landscaping Project Guidance

Introduction

Broadly defined, landscaping consists of vegetation planted in a formal arrangement, with the intent of making the site more visually appealing to employees, visitors and passersby.

Landscaping is generally considered part of the built environment, rather than a “natural” habitat. However, when designed with biodiversity in mind, it can make valuable contributions to conservation efforts. Landscaping designed to include a diversity of native plant species can benefit a variety of wildlife including butterflies, native bees and songbirds. Landscaping can also reduce irrigation and fertilizer needs, and benefit water and air quality.

From an educational standpoint, landscaping provides many opportunities for learning. Learning can occur both through planning and choosing the best plants and techniques for the specific location, and through employee and community visits to the landscaped areas.

For the purposes of WHC Conservation Certification, landscaping projects should provide a direct benefit to biodiversity. This may involvethe use of native plant species that will benefit a target species or group of species in the area. *Please note: projects that provide only indirect benefits to biodiversity will not be considered for Conservation Certification.*

Building Your Program

Projects are divided into four categories: **Habitat**, **Species Management**, **Education and Awareness** and **Other Options.** You can build a program with more than one of each category but you must associate your program with at least one habitat. This Landscaping Project Guidance is in the **Habitat** category. You will be able to associate your landscaping project with **Education and Awareness** projects, as well as with **Species Management** projects like those focused on pollinators and birds.

- **Habitat** – Projects that focus on conservation actions to protect, restore and manage different habitats.
- **Species Management** – Projects addressing the conservation needs of targeted wildlife species or groups of species.
- **Education and Awareness** – Projects to improve awareness, understanding and skills relating to conservation and the environment.
- **Other Options** – Specialized projects that add value to your conservation efforts.

Browse the Project Guidance library at ***wildlifehc.org/pg***.

What Do Landscaping Projects Look Like?

Landscaping projects can either be new installations of landscaping, or existing landscaping updated to benefit biodiversity. Landscaping projects stand apart from most habitat projects in that they have a formal, defined and often manicured appearance. Most commonly, landscaping projects will consist of formal gardens. Other types of landscaping projects could include rain gardens, demonstration areas, manicured tree islands, living fences or native groundcover instead of turf grass.

Considerations for Corporate Lands

Projects implemented on corporate-owned lands have different circumstances and challenges to those on public lands, protected lands or wild lands.

Which types of corporate lands are best suited for landscaping projects?

Landscaping projects are suitable for a wide variety of corporate properties in rural, suburban and urban settings. They will generally be found in areas that are visible to employees and passersby, such as near building entrances, site entrances and roads, and outdoor gathering areas.

Addressing challenges

The corporate context presents certain challenges for implementing landscaping projects. Understanding these concerns and potential ways to overcome them can help your project succeed in the long term.

Concern	Response
Landscaping crews may not be used to keeping detailed records about landscaping installation and maintenance.	*Teams can provide landscaping crews with simple activity logs, cameras or other tools to help them easily document their activities.*
There may be aesthetic concerns that native plants look weedy or plain.	*WHC staff or other partners can work with the site to help develop an aesthetically-pleasing plant mixture with blooms across many seasons and help create a more structured design.* *Signage can also be installed to inform people about the project and its benefits to biodiversity.*
There may be concerns about the typical height of native plants, which can be taller than many non-native ornamental species.	*In a landscaping context, native plants will not need to grow as tall because there will be decreased competition for space and light. Species with a lower average height profile can also be selected to conform to aesthetic preferences.*

Concern	Response
Some sites may encounter resistance to creating habitat that attracts bees due to concerns about stinging insects.	*Teams can educate and use appropriate siting and signage to assuage concerns.*
It can sometimes be difficult to find sources of native plants.	*Internet databases of native plant nurseries and native seed suppliers can assist teams with identifying reputable, local sources for native plants.* *If local genotypes and non-cultivar plants are desired, local native plant experts can help teams locate reputable sources for these species.*

Getting Started with Landscaping Projects

For a project to qualify toward Conservation Certification, you must be able to answer "yes" to five questions.

1. Is the project locally appropriate?
2. Does it have a stated conservation or education objective?
3. Does it provide value or benefit to the natural community?
4. Have outcomes been measured and is there supporting documentation?
5. Does it exceed any pertinent regulatory requirements?

Conservation and education objectives

It is a requirement of Conservation Certification that landscaping projects be designed to meet one or more conservation objectives. Objectives can guide the direction of the project, help motivate others to participate and provide a basis for evaluation.

The following are suggested objectives for landscaping projects. Your team may choose one or more of these objectives, or develop your own relevant objectives.

- Installing new landscaping or updating existing landscaping that provides habitat:
  - for a specific or rare species
  - for a group of species such as pollinators or songbirds
  - for an ecological community
  - to address a local conservation or social need
- Using landscaping as a demonstration of the species in a local plant community or ecosystem and their importance
- Using landscaping to facilitate conservation education
- Contributing to a citizen science project related to landscaping

The following strategies are recommended to strengthen the conservation impact of your project:

- Establish native vegetation with a range of bloom times, such that there are flowers in bloom throughout the growing season
- Conduct a site analysis that evaluates soil, sunlight, etc. to provide information to help guide plant selection
- Be implemented as part of a scalable plan to establish native landscaping on various company properties, or establish native landscaping outside the property on connected or community lands
- Be carried out in partnership with a respected landscaping-focused organization that furthers the stated conservation objective of the project
- Include credible monitoring that contributes to a citizen science project
- Engage employees or community members in all aspects of the project
- Include artificial or manufactured structures that meet a conservation or education outcome
- Implement a scientifically-rigorous monitoring plan that establishes a baseline and monitors outcomes
- Demonstrate an understanding of why each species was chosen for the planting list, including wildlife benefit, soil and light requirements, or its role in the natural community being demonstrated
- Be meticulous about sourcing native plants and other engineering materials
- Identify and control invasive species, and replace with native species, as part of landscaping maintenance
- Use the landscaping as a focal point for education about related topics such as soil, native plants, medicinal plants, growing food, historical landscaping plants, etc.
- Communicate the purpose and the outcomes of the landscaping project to the community
- Educate the community about how to replicate the landscaping project in their home garden

Partnerships

Landscaping projects implemented on corporate lands can benefit from partnerships with groups that have established conservation or education objectives related to landscaping and gardening. A team can use such a partnership to help design, create, or monitor its landscaping project and provide educational opportunities for employees and community members. Partners may also be able to assist the team with obtaining funding for the project, and identify learning links to other conservation priorities in the region.

Resources

Your project may benefit from online or printed resources available for your region to support the design, delivery, maintenance and monitoring of landscaping projects.

A search for "landscaping" in the Conservation Registry returns over 250 projects implemented through WHC's certification program. This is a great place to find inspiration for your project and see what others are doing in and around your location.

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme. Including information about the location such as state/province or city will assist with finding locally-appropriate information.

landscaping
garden
native plants
native vegetation
vegetables
horticulture
botanical
backyard habitat
backyard conservation
native plant nurseries
native groundcover
ornamental plants
wildlife gardening
native gardening
native landscaping
rain garden
tree island
living fence
compost
natural mulch

Understanding the Application Process

Documentation

When applying for Conservation Certification, you will provide documentation of the planning, implementation, maintenance and monitoring of your landscaping project. The following is required documentation for landscaping projects; however, you may also submit additional supporting materials.

Planting plan/design for all plantings that have been done, or any planting that has been done since the program last achieved Conservation Certification. Recommended items to include in the planting plan are:

- Planting list with information about function that includes:
  - Name of plant (common and scientific names)
  - Blooming time
  - If the species is native to the region; if not, please provide reasoning for choosing it
  - What habitat/life cycle needs it provides, such as berries or seeds for forage or larval host for butterflies
- Planting/landscaping plan that shows appropriate location choice for the project, clumping and spacing, planting times, etc.
- Creation of artificial structures or movement of earth for specific habitat needs such as:
  - Bee nesting blocks
  - Insect hotels
  - Micro-topo changes for puddling areas or other water features
- Any additional steps taken to ensure success of the implementation, including irrigation, soil tests, soil prep, and revision of the plant list by a technical expert

Map/image of the project area, showing the relative size and approximate location of the project (other relevant information can be shown in the map as well, but is not required).

Photographs or videos that depict the progress of the project implementation and management.

Maintenance plans that demonstrate appropriate activities that meet the needs of the habitat to fully support the target species and support the conservation and education objectives.

Baseline data that provides a biological baseline upon which post-implementation monitoring can be based and used to evaluate the progress of the project and determine next steps.

Monitoring logs that show the frequency, type, and results of monitoring of the project, whether in an informal manner or a scientifically rigorous manner. At a minimum, monitoring of landscaping projects should include survival of plantings and evidence of use by wildlife.

Examples of technical advice utilized in the project, such as consultants, guidebooks, websites, journal articles, etc.

Application questions

As you complete the application online, you will be asked the following questions about your landscaping project. These questions will help us understand and evaluate your project.

	Question	Why this question is important
Objective	What are the project's conservation objectives?	*Having a conservation objective is a requirement for certification.*
Overview	What is the total size of the landscaped area managed for this project?	*This provides us with a description of your project to allow us to assess it.*
	Describe the structure and relative location of the landscaped area.	
	Describe any artificial features of note if applicable.	
	Give a brief description of the vegetation types found in the habitat and list several of the common plant species.	
	Briefly summarize activities taking place to manage the targeted habitat.	
	Upload a map showing the location and photos showing the landscaped habitat.	
	When did work on the ground begin?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Habitat Creation or Expansion	Give a brief description of the vegetation types found in the habitat and list several of the common plant species.	*For habitat, size and location are important factors that determine success and ecological benefit.*
	Upload a dated list of current plant species in the habitat including common and scientific names and whether the species is native to the region.	
	Is this a new project not presented in previous applications?	
	Does it replace a habitat with less ecological value?	
	Describe the habitat prior to your project.	
	Describe any design or plant selection considerations that were part of this new project.	
	Upload documentation of the specific considerations.	
	Since the last application, have you expanded the size of your landscaped area or the area being managed?	
	What is the size of the landscaped area that has been added since the last application?	
	Does the expansion replace a habitat with less ecological value?	
	Describe the habitat present prior to your project.	
	Describe any design or plant selection considerations that were part of this project expansion.	
	Upload documentation of the specific considerations.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Management	How is the area maintained?	*Appropriate management policies and practices are also important to achieve the conservation objective.*
	Describe the steps taken to maintain the habitat.	
	Provide a timeline of maintenance and other completed activities.	
	Upload documentation of these activities.	
Monitoring	Was baseline data collected for this project?	*Monitoring is essential to understand the impact of the project and to be able to adapt the project develops.*
	Describe the types of baseline data collected.	
	Upload the baseline data.	
	Select each type of monitoring that is being carried out.	
	List each type of monitoring, including the frequency and list any plans or protocols used.	
	Upload the monitoring protocols, if applicable.	
	Upload the monitoring data and any analysis, if applicable.	
	Provide a brief summary of results from monitoring.	
	Evaluate the success of the project. If there were any concerns, what are the plans to address them in the future?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Employee Participation	Do employees actively contribute to the project?	*Employee participation can strengthen a project and secure its future.*
	How many employees participate in the project on a regular basis?	
	How many employee hours were spent on the following activities each year? Planning and Implementation	
	Describe how employees are involved in this project.	
Other Participants	Do any groups or individuals outside of your company actively contribute to the project on a regular basis?	*It is not always possible to recruit outside groups to a project. Conservation and education partners can strengthen a project and provide different audiences to use it for lessons or recreation, thus broadening its reach.*
	Select the types of groups.	
	List the names of the groups you work with.	
	Describe their involvement in this project.	
	How many hours were spent by the groups on the following activities each year? Planning and Implementation	
	If you work with a native landscaping specialist and have a current letter of support from them, upload it here.	
	List additional sources of technical advice (e.g. website, guidebook, etc.) and describe how they were used.	
Regulatory Requirements	Are any aspects of the project done in relation to regulatory requirements?	*Going beyond compliance is a requirement for certification.*
	Explain how the project exceeds requirements.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Connectivity	Does the project connect with other native landscape habitats on neighboring land?	*Connectivity onsite and across fence lines helps to decrease fragmentation, one of the leading causes of habitat loss.*
	Describe how the project connects with the other native landscaped habitats.	
	Describe any coordinated management efforts with other native landscaped habitats.	
Alignment	Does the project align with any larger scale initiatives? (e.g. corporate strategy, regional conservation plan, migratory pathway, watershed plan, etc.)	*Aligning conservation efforts with large-scale conservation plans and other regional conservation initiatives allows a site-based activity to support a landscape scale objective.*
	Is the project part of a corporate level commitment to native landscaping?	
	Upload documentation of your corporate commitment to native landscaping.	
	Does the project align with an existing conservation plan or other large-scale initiative?	
	List the conservation plans or other large-scale initiatives the project aligns with and provide website links, if available.	
	How does your project align with these large-scale initiatives?	
Existing Certifications	Does this project have third party related certification?	*Other certifications or recognitions illustrate strong efforts and commitments.*
	List the certifications and provide a website link if available.	

Content development for Conservation Certification

To inform the development of Conservation Certification, WHC analyzed the projects it was recognizing through its certification program to assess whether they were aligned with contemporary conservation and education priorities.

Following this assessment and using information from it, WHC convened Advisory Committees around many of the conservation and education themes to develop the content that would guide practitioners and applicants in the future. Some themes, including landscaping projects, that have not yet been informed by external stakeholders, are presented to allow applicants to receive recognition. WHC plans to have all themes informed by stakeholders.

More information can be found about this process in the "Our Impact" section of ***wildlifehc.org*** under "Commitment to Transparency."

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The WHC Strategy and Planning team can help you build a successful project by identifying needs, making connections with partners and resources, and providing strategies that meet business and conservation goals. Contact us today.

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Every act of conservation matters.