Natural Environment

Statement of Intent
The objective in designating a Natural Environment is to preserve or restore to a natural character those resource systems existing relatively free of human influence. Policies to achieve this objective should aim to regulate all potential developments degrading or changing the natural characteristics which make these areas unique and valuable.

Designation Criteria
The primary determinant for designating an area as a Natural Environment is the actual presence of some unique natural features considered valuable in their natural or original condition which are relatively intolerant of intensive human use. The relative value of the resources is to be based on county-wide citizen opinion in the case of shorelines, and the needs and desires of all the State's citizens in the case of shorelines of statewide significance.

Areas to be designated in the Natural Environment should possess one or more of the following criteria:

A. General:
1. Areas where human influence and development are minimal.
2. Areas capable of easily being restored to a natural condition.
3. Areas having a high scenic value and a high value for low-intensity recreational use in their natural state.
4. Salt marshes.
5. Class I accretion beaches.
6. Areas designated should be large enough to protect the value of the Natural Environment.

B. Wildlife habitats:
1. An area utilized by rare or endangered species* that provides food, water, cover and/or protection.
2. A significant fish and wildlife habitat for threatened, candidate, or sensitive species.*
3. A major seasonal haven or constricted migration route for animals or birds.
4. Unique wildlife habitat within urbanized areas.
5. Small areas of original habitat remaining within urbanized areas.

*As listed on the U.S. Department of Interior Register of Diminishing and Endangered Species.

C. Scientific value:
1. Areas considered to represent the basic ecosystem and geologic types.
2. Areas representing deviation from the basic ecological and geological norms, but which are of particular scientific interest.
3. Areas which best represent undisturbed natural conditions.
4. Established natural science research areas or areas having a long history of such use.
5. Areas which contain unique and scientifically important features, which are especially amendable to manipulation, which are isolated for hazardous studies, or which contain important rare and/or endangered species.
6. Areas possessing any of the above-mentioned characteristics which are located near major population centers and important educational facilities.

D. Ecological balance:
1. Areas which play an important part in maintaining the ecological balance of the region's basic natural systems.
2. Areas rich in quality, quantity and variety of life forms.
3. Areas important to the maintenance of the natural quality and flow of the water.

Management Policies
1. Prohibit development which will degrade the actual or potential value and character of the Natural Environment.
2. Allow only changes which would not be detrimental to the forces which created and now maintain the existing environment.
3. Apply severe restrictions to the intensity and type of uses allowed in order to maintain the natural systems and the resources of the Natural Environment in their natural state.
4. Allow limited access of a compatible nature to those areas in the Natural Environment which have significant recreational value as long as it does not adversely affect the environment.
5. Permit limited access to natural areas for scientific, historical or education purposes as long as there is no substantial alteration of the environment.
6. Prohibit uses or activities requiring permanent installations which would permanently deplete or consume the physical and biological resources found in the Natural Environment.