

### Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia



*Are you planning any development on your property? If your property includes, or is near to, nest trees or feeding grounds of Great Blue Herons, this fact sheet will provide you with important information about complying with the law, protecting these birds and enhancing enjoyment of your property.*

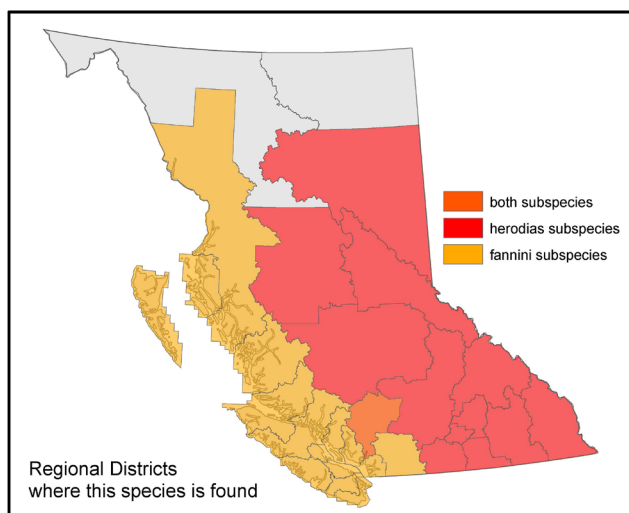
Great Blue Herons are found throughout British Columbia, near lakes and coastal areas. They may nest individually, or in heronries (colonies) with tens or sometimes hundreds of birds, and typically return to the same nesting areas year after year. Herons lay 2–5 eggs, usually between February and April, which hatch in about 30 days. The parents share the duties of incubating the eggs and feeding the young. At two months old the young are able to fly and seek food. A heron's diet consists mainly of small fish, but they will also eat shellfish, insects, rodents, amphibians (mostly frogs), reptiles, and small birds. Herons may live to be 17 or more years old.

#### AT RISK

Great Blue Herons are a **Blue-listed** species; considered vulnerable to disturbance by Bald Eagles and humans. Urban and rural development results in the loss of suitable nesting areas and disturbance to birds during their breeding season. Especially during the early stages of nesting, unusual events and loud noises such as mechanical chippers, chainsaws, and large trucks may cause the herons to abandon their nests.

#### LEGALLY PROTECTED

It is an offence to possess, take, injure, molest, or destroy a bird or its eggs, or the nests of birds when occupied by a bird or egg. The nests and nest trees of herons are protected year-round, whether or not the nest is currently active (B.C. Wildlife Act, [Section 34](#)). Herons and their active nests are also protected under the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act. 'Molestation of wildlife' is an offence under the Wildlife Act, and even walking near the nest or loud noises from equipment may be considered 'molestation' if this causes the birds to abandon active nests. In addition, the Coastal (*fannini*) subspecies is listed under SARA as 'Special Concern', and both subspecies are listed as Identified Wildlife. If you wish to remove or modify heron nest trees, you must obtain a permit from [FrontCounter BC](#) AND check with [Environment Canada](#) to see if a federal permit is required under the Migratory Birds Convention Act regulations.



## DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

More detailed guidelines for protecting the birds and their environment are provided in *Develop with Care 2014: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia*.

☑ Identify and mark out a buffer area around the heronry where there will be no activities (not even recreational trails). Naturally vegetated buffers help to shield the nests and young from human disturbance and predation by Bald Eagles, crows, and ravens. The Province recommends a buffer of at least 300 m in undeveloped areas, 200 m in rural areas, and 60 m in urbanized areas. An additional 200 metre 'no disturbance' buffer is recommended during the nesting season, especially for colonies not previously accustomed to people and their activities.

☑ Blasting or similarly excessive noises should not occur closer than 1000 m from a colony during the nesting window.

☑ Design and locate developments to avoid disturbing heronries and feeding areas. Talk to the local government about ways to concentrate development in areas with lower environmental values—for example through density bonusing or clustering development.



☑ Time construction carefully. Avoid any new disturbance between January 15 and September 15 when herons are nesting. Early in the season, herons are particularly susceptible to disturbance.

☑ Protect feeding and perching areas. Avoid draining or filling wetlands or coastal marshes, and maintain shoreline habitats in a natural condition. Protect communal roosting (perching) sites such as jetties, log booms and coniferous trees.

☑ Check with your local government to see if they have a Development Permit Area (DPA) or other bylaw that protects nest trees and buffer zones in your area.

### For more information:

*Develop with Care 2014: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia*  
<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/bmp/devwithcare/>

**FrontCounter BC** (<http://www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca/>) or contact 1-877-855-3222

**Environment Canada** <http://www.ec.gc.ca/nature/default.asp?lang=En&n=C7564624-1>