

**4. WASHINGTON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY –
BRIEFING**

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“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: March 7-8, 2008

Agenda Item 4: Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy – **Briefing**

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Background:

The Washington Biodiversity Strategy consists of a comprehensive set of recommendations. While the Council recommends phased action on all recommendations, three broad initiatives form the heart of the strategy, and taken together, offer a bold new approach to defining priorities, fostering widespread landowner engagement, and measuring our progress.

The strategy proposes:

- **A new unified landscape approach to guide investments and actions**, so that we will indeed conserve our most important biodiversity where we work, play, and live. The Biodiversity Council developed a tool to classify lands based on their biodiversity significance and the risks from growth and development. Regional maps were created to identify priority lands for conservation and a range of possible strategies for all areas on the maps. With the state’s technical and financial support, local governments, state agencies, and others can use this tool to adopt a landscape approach to conservation. This approach fosters efficiency, better integration, and improved outcomes.
- **Better incentives and markets for landowners to provide tangible benefits for conservation on working lands and open spaces.** Simply put, the goal is for landowners to increase their income through conservation actions. Now is the time for the many organizations engaged in conservation to offer landowners an expanded, integrated suite of incentives and market-based opportunities. Programs should be easily accessible and make voluntary stewardship and conservation a practical and rewarding option. These incentive programs must be structured to encourage investment in high-priority landscapes, so that we save our natural heritage and keep working lands working .
- **Citizens and scientists working together to inventory and monitor Washington’s biodiversity.** This initiative seeks to unleash the potential inherent in a vibrant citizen science network. Such a network engages adults and students, working under the guidance of scientists, to count and catalogue biodiversity resources in the streams, forests, and fields near where they live, work, or go to school. A Science Panel charged to help coordinate biodiversity-related research efforts is needed to spearhead this effort. This initiative offers the promise of building knowledge and tracking progress at a fraction of the cost of traditional approaches.

The strategy also includes recommendations to provide support for local governments, to ensure consistency and compliance with existing laws, to educate citizens and students about biodiversity, and to implement regional pilot projects that foster innovation. In addition, recommendations are set forth to ensure leadership, accountability, and adequate funding, so that investments deliver a real return to Washington taxpayers over time.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Integration and coordination with the Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and ongoing conservation planning efforts by WDFW (CWCS, Wildlife Action Plans, and Salmon and Steelhead 21st Century).

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

In the course of developing this strategy, the Council conducted background research on critical issues and consulted with groups of experts and stakeholders from a variety of disciplines, including educators, scientists, landowners, business interests, and environmentalists. The Council also funded two pilot projects, which explored education and incentive based approaches to conservation, and met frequently with project participants to discuss findings. The Council itself met many times, and engaged in vigorous discussions as it developed a framework for the strategy and worked through a multitude of issues. Council members participated in workgroups and technical committees involving outside experts.

The Council and its staff met formally and informally with many stakeholders, sharing early recommendations and listening to issues, concerns, and new ideas. Collectively, these conversations served to identify new directions and highlight priorities for the Council. They have played a critical role in shaping this document. In particular, the Council worked with a number of partners to host the Washington Forum for Conservation Incentives in January 2007. This event drew an over-capacity crowd and featured working sessions on specific issues and opportunities in the area of advancing incentives and markets for private landowners. The results of these working sessions helped to frame a number of the Council's strategies and recommendations. Full proceedings from the Forum can be found on the Washington Biodiversity Project website (<http://www.biodiversity.wa.gov>) and are listed in Chapter 5 of the report.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only. This is a Commission request from the December 7-8, 2007 Commission meeting.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

Briefing only.
