

Protecting land and water for wildlife and people

By actively managing lands, restoring habitats, and preserving wild places, we serve as stewards and guardians for Washington's natural places and wildlife by:

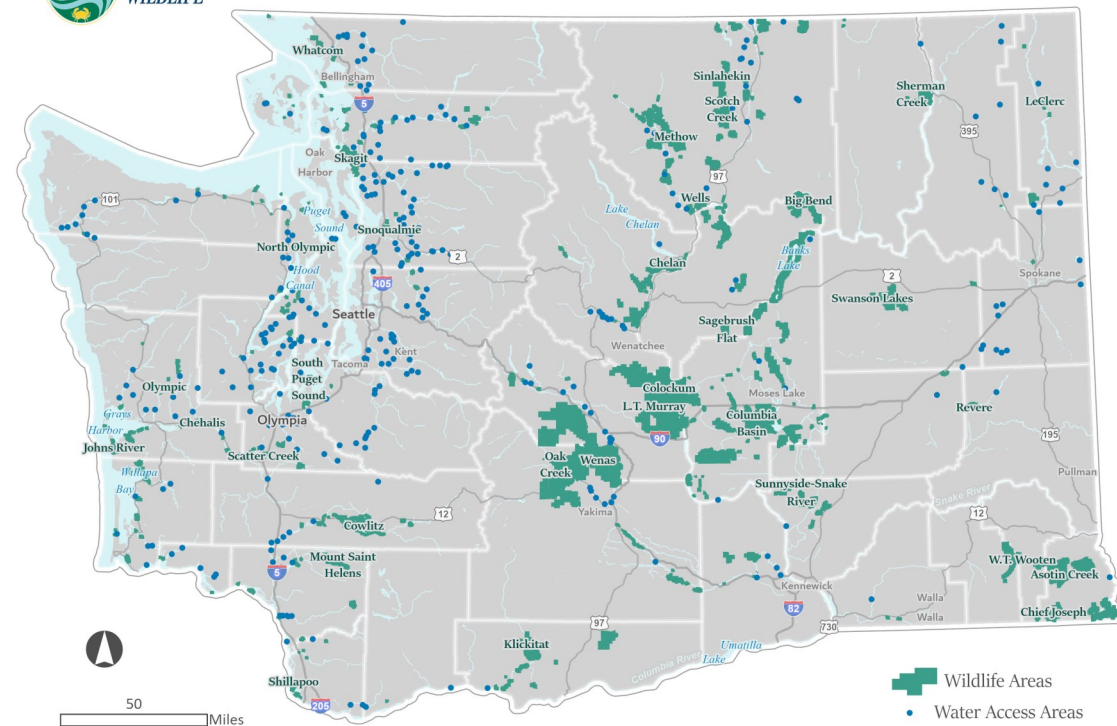
- Preserving natural and cultural heritage,
- Providing access for hunting, fishing, and wildlife-related recreation, and
- Fostering experiences and exploration.



Staff members had been hauling truckloads of trash away from sites such as Heller Bar and the Wooten campgrounds.



WA Department of Fish and Wildlife Managed Lands



WDFW's 33 wildlife areas cover over one million acres of public land in Washington.

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More info: wdfw.wa.gov/about/wdfw-lands

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Meeting Recreation Needs on WDFW-managed lands



Managing land, water, and wildlife to make amazing memories and experiences available for everyone

More than 90% of Washingtonians recreate outside today.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, public lands use has increased dramatically. Pre-pandemic, WDFW estimated annual visitation at 18.5 million visits to water access areas and 4.7 million visits to wildlife areas. During COVID, estimated visits have increased in some places by more than 100%.

There were an estimated 32 million visits to WDFW-managed lands in 2020, and the Department strives to provide a positive experience for everyone.

As the state population increases, WDFW anticipates continual increased demand for recreation opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. WDFW's capacity must expand and adapt to meet the needs of current and future recreationists while also meeting its core mission of conserving wildlife and habitat. Key investment areas for supporting outdoor recreation on WDFW-managed lands include planning, management, infrastructure, and constituency building.

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Decision Package Highlights

- \$3.5M ongoing to increase the Lands Recreation work unit efforts and to hire 17.3 FTEs (12 regional FTEs and 5 statewide FTEs)
- \$350K to provide 108 miles of road grading and graveling to account for increased traffic
- \$20K to remove and dispose abandoned vehicles
- \$25K ongoing for water access area leases
- \$473K ongoing to improve infrastructure including kiosks, signs, fences, gates, equipment, access area maintenance, loading float deployment, and replacing broken or stolen facilities
- \$790K ongoing in infrastructure and program support costs

Operating and Maintenance (O&M) funding to support recreation on WDFW-managed lands is vastly and chronically under-resourced

In 1991, Operation and Maintenance (O&M) on WDFW-managed lands was funded at only 35% of the recommended service level to water access areas. WDFW continues to spend the same amount on water access areas more than 30 years later (Figure 1).

With increasing visitation and demand, the same funding challenge can be observed with underfunded wildlife areas. An internal analysis demonstrated the average per acre need on WDFW-managed lands is \$52/acre. From 2014-2018 the estimated average cost of operating wildlife areas was \$13/acre.

O&M gaps hurt the visitor experience, degrade facilities, and increase the risk of permanent damage to state lands and the state's reputation. This package addresses the most current, emergent needs as a first step.

2022 Recreation Decision Package

This decision package invests in existing state resources, rather than the acquisition of additional lands.

Improved access to recreation areas

WDFW owns 1,752 miles of road and trail used for both administration and recreation. The bulk of these are only moderately maintained due to lack of funding.

- 266 miles of "orphan roads" are severely degraded, but could be restored for motorized and/or nonmotorized recreation use, and
- 190 miles of "abandoned roads" could be restored for nonmotorized use.

Improvements for popular recreation areas

WDFW manages an entire system of over 500 water access areas with 16 staff. Additionally, each of the six Regional offices only have one to three staff to cover each region. Additional staffing and contracting would allow for:

- Clean, safe, and sanitary water access areas,
- Cleaner toilets and rest areas,
- The removal of trash and dumping, and
- Pride in Washington's recreation infrastructure.

Further improvements regarding clarity of statewide recreation rules would provide clear and consistent direction to the public.

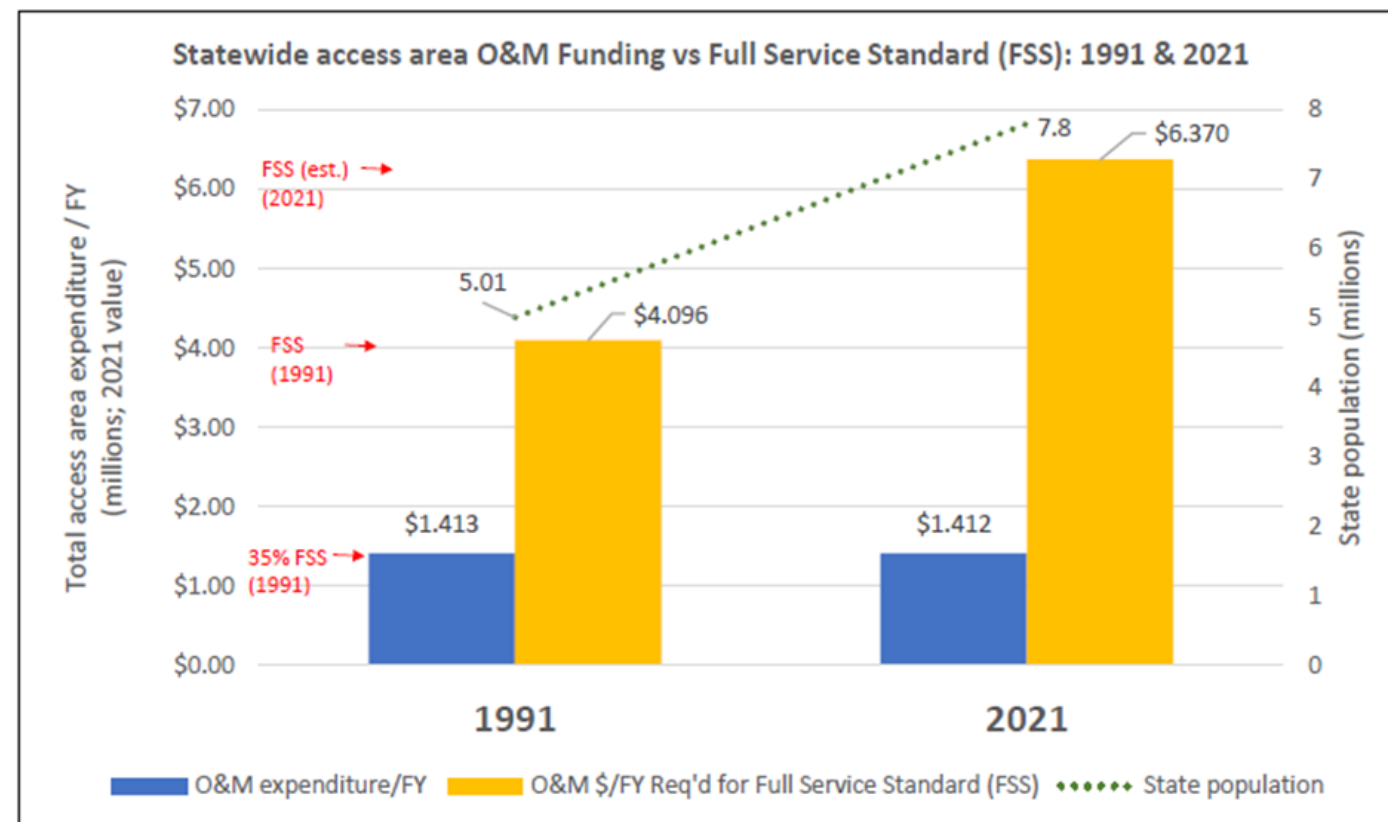
Increased capacity for managing recreation

This decision package also covers two recreation coordinators—one each for the east and west sides of the state. These coordinators would support community and partner outreach and engagement, including developing recreation and stewardship volunteer opportunities with school districts.



A four-year old fills two bags full of garbage collected from the LT Murray Wildlife Area in May 2020.

Figure 1. Statewide access area O&M funding in 1991 and 2021. All 1991 values are adjusted for inflation.



WDFW staff members arrived at the Methow Shooting Range to find piles of trash left outside the dumpster. (August 2020)



Statewide Recreation Strategy

WDFW is due to release a much-anticipated Statewide Recreation Strategy for WDFW-managed Lands in the fall of 2021. The Strategy will outline both an approach and a set of initiatives that will protect natural and cultural resources while enhancing recreation. The initiatives include

- Use and Impact Monitoring
- Recreation Planning
- Rulemaking
- Travel Management
- Education and Engagement
- Capacity and Funding

The Strategy represents an opportunity to dramatically improve the experience of recreationists visiting WDFW-managed lands. Successful implementation of the strategic initiatives will require new agency funding to meet existing Operating and Maintenance funding gaps and expand capacity to better serve the recreating public.

A current estimate of the cost for full phased implementation is \$30-40 million per fiscal year over the next decade.

This decision package represents an initial investment towards the full need in the two main categories of staffing and infrastructure.