

SEPA ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

Purpose of checklist:

Governmental agencies use this checklist to help determine whether the environmental impacts of your proposal are significant. This information is also helpful to determine if available avoidance, minimization or compensatory mitigation measures will address the probable significant impacts or if an environmental impact statement will be prepared to further analyze the proposal.

Instructions for applicants:

This environmental checklist asks you to describe some basic information about your proposal. Please answer each question accurately and carefully, to the best of your knowledge. You may need to consult with an agency specialist or private consultant for some questions. You may use "not applicable" or "does not apply" only when you can explain why it does not apply and not when the answer is unknown. You may also attach or incorporate by reference additional studies reports. Complete and accurate answers to these questions often avoid delays with the SEPA process as well as later in the decision-making process.

The checklist questions apply to all parts of your proposal, even if you plan to do them over a period of time or on different parcels of land. Attach any additional information that will help describe your proposal or its environmental effects. The agency to which you submit this checklist may ask you to explain your answers or provide additional information reasonably related to determining if there may be significant adverse impact.

Instructions for Lead Agencies:

Please adjust the format of this template as needed. Additional information may be necessary to evaluate the existing environment, all interrelated aspects of the proposal and an analysis of adverse impacts. The checklist is considered the first but not necessarily the only source of information needed to make an adequate threshold determination. Once a threshold determination is made, the lead agency is responsible for the completeness and accuracy of the checklist and other supporting documents.

Use of checklist for nonproject proposals:

For nonproject proposals (such as ordinances, regulations, plans and programs), complete the applicable parts of sections A and B plus the [SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET FOR NONPROJECT ACTIONS \(part D\)](#). Please completely answer all questions that apply and note that the words "project," "applicant," and "property or site" should be read as "proposal," "proponent," and "affected geographic area," respectively. The lead agency may exclude (for non-projects) questions in Part B - Environmental Elements –that do not contribute meaningfully to the analysis of the proposal.

A. Background [\[HELP\]](#)

1. Name of proposed project, if applicable: Reclassify the western gray squirrel from Threatened in the state of Washington in WAC 220-200-100 to Endangered under WAC 220-610-010.
2. Name of applicant: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Taylor Cotten

3. Address and phone number of applicant and contact person:

Taylor Cotten

P.O. Box 43141, Olympia, WA 98504-3200

t.cotten@dfw.wa.gov

Cell: 360-701-8787

4. Date checklist prepared: 8/17/2023

5. Agency requesting checklist: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

6. Proposed timing or schedule (including phasing, if applicable):

Anticipate briefing the Fish and Wildlife Commission at the September 2023 commission meeting. We expect for the commission to vote on and potentially adopt the change during the October Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting with rule change finalized following revisions with the code revisor. The Periodic Status Review summarizing the information for this species has received and incorporated prudent public comments as part of a 90 day public comment period, and a preliminary briefing in front of the Fish and Wildlife Commission in June of 2023. WDFW expects the rule change will become permanent in summer of Fall 2023.

7. Do you have any plans for future additions, expansion, or further activity related to or connected with this proposal? If yes, explain. No

8. List any environmental information you know about that has been prepared, or will be prepared, directly related to this proposal.

The 2023 WDFW Periodic Status Review for western gray squirrel provides biology, range, and threats for the species. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02410>

9. Do you know whether applications are pending for governmental approvals of other proposals directly affecting the property covered by your proposal? If yes, explain. No

10. List any government approvals or permits that will be needed for your proposal, if known.

Fish and Wildlife Commission approval is required for this new listing and changes to WAC 220-200-100 as well as WAC 220-610-010. Authority and process for changes to the list of Threatened and Endangered species is described in 220-610-110

11. Give brief, complete description of your proposal, including the proposed uses and the size of the project and site. There are several questions later in this checklist that ask you to describe certain aspects of your proposal. You do not need to repeat those answers on this page. (Lead agencies may modify this form to include additional specific information on project description.)

We are proposing to reclassify the western gray squirrel from Threatened in the state of Washington to Endangered under authority described in WAC 220-610-110.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife bases its proposal to reclassify western gray squirrel to Endangered on scientific information contained in its report *Periodic Status Review for the Western gray Squirrel*. This report summarizes evidence that the western gray squirrel population is threatened with extinction in the state with more than 20% habitat decline in the core of its range since it was originally listed as Threatened. The report recommends that the species be reclassified as an Endangered species.

The Western Gray Squirrel is one of three native tree squirrel species in Washington. It was historically distributed at low elevations from Pierce County southward to Clark County, through the Columbia River gorge, and in low to mid-elevations along the eastern Cascade Mountains from Klickitat to Okanogan counties. Current distribution in the state is now primarily limited to three areas: the Klickitat region (Klickitat, southern Yakima, and southeastern Skamania counties); the North Cascades (Okanogan and Chelan counties); and the southern Puget Trough (Joint Base Lewis-McChord and small areas off-base in Pierce and Thurston counties).

Although not well documented, Western Gray Squirrels were probably once uncommon to locally common across much of their range in Washington. The species was in decline by the late 1800s and was considered rare by 1970. In 2007, the statewide population was estimated to be between 468 and 1,405 squirrels ($937 \pm 50\%$) based on data from 1994-2005. Populations have not been estimated since, but occupancy surveys were conducted 2018-2020 to establish a baseline for monitoring trends in coming years.

In the past decade, the southern Puget Trough population may have increased somewhat due mainly to habitat work and augmentation of the squirrel population on Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) in 2007-2012. Research and local surveys in the North Cascades since that time suggested the population was higher than the 2007 estimate, but likely declined following wildfires in 2014, 2015, and 2021. An assessment of change in availability of Western Gray Squirrel primary habitat between 1993 (listing) and 2017 found gains from successional processes (e.g., tree recruitment and tree growth) did not compensate for habitat loss. Estimated net loss of habitat totaled 20.8% for the North Cascades and 21.2% for the South Cascades (Vander Haegen and others 2022). Wildfire was the dominant disturbance in plots examined in the North Cascades while timber harvest predominated in the South Cascades.

Known threats important to Western Gray Squirrel populations in Washington are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; small population size and isolation; disease; and highway mortality. The factors most linked to habitat loss for Western Gray Squirrels include logging, wildfire, land conversion, and fire exclusion. Climate change is both a current and potential future threat to habitat through increased size and/or frequency of stand-replacement fires, changes in resulting stand composition and ongoing effects on food supply such as production of fungi and seeds.

Although the southern Puget Trough population may have increased slightly since the recovery plan was completed in 2007, it is very limited in size and constrained by the area and fragmentation of its habitat. Because of the species' relatively small total population size throughout the State, isolation of the three populations, continuing threats of wildfires and timber harvest, and a likely decline in primary habitat of >20% in both the North Cascades and Klickitat regions it is recommended that the Western Gray Squirrel be uplisted to endangered in Washington.

12. Location of the proposal. Give sufficient information for a person to understand the precise location of your proposed project, including a street address, if any, and section, township, and range, if known. If a proposal would occur over a range of area, provide the range or boundaries of the site(s). Provide a legal description, site plan, vicinity map, and topographic map, if reasonably available. While you should submit any plans required by the agency, you are not required to duplicate maps or detailed plans submitted with any permit applications related to this checklist. Current distribution in the state is now primarily limited to three areas: the Klickitat region (Klickitat, southern Yakima, and southeastern Skamania counties); the North Cascades (Okanogan and Chelan counties); and the southern Puget Trough (Joint Base Lewis-McChord and small areas off-base in Pierce and Thurston counties), however historical records include Kittitas, Clark, Cowlitz, Lewis, Douglas, and Snohomish Counties.

B. Environmental Elements [\[HELP\]](#)

1. Earth [\[help\]](#)

a. General description of the site:

(circle one): Flat, rolling, hilly, steep slopes, mountainous, other ___hilly and mountainous

b. What is the steepest slope on the site (approximate percent slope)? Potentially very steep, the species occurs at along the east slope of the cascades, but predominantly inhabitat wooded and parkland habitat dominated by oak/conifer woodland that varies over the squirrel's range

c. What general types of soils are found on the site (for example, clay, sand, gravel, peat, muck)? If you know the classification of agricultural soils, specify them and note any agricultural land of long-term commercial significance and whether the proposal results in removing any of these soils.

Varies over the squirrel's range

d. Are there surface indications or history of unstable soils in the immediate vicinity? If so, describe.

Varies over the squirrel's range

e. Describe the purpose, type, total area, and approximate quantities and total affected area of any filling, excavation, and grading proposed. Indicate source of fill.

Not applicable

f. Could erosion occur as a result of clearing, construction, or use? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

g. About what percent of the site will be covered with impervious surfaces after project construction (for example, asphalt or buildings)? Not applicable

h. Proposed measures to reduce or control erosion, or other impacts to the earth, if any:

Not applicable

2. Air [\[help\]](#)

a. What types of emissions to the air would result from the proposal during construction, operation, and maintenance when the project is completed? If any, generally describe and give approximate quantities if known.

Not applicable

b. Are there any off-site sources of emissions or odor that may affect your proposal? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control emissions or other impacts to air, if any:
Not applicable

3. **Water** [\[help\]](#)

a. Surface Water: [\[help\]](#)

- 1) Is there any surface water body on or in the immediate vicinity of the site (including year-round and seasonal streams, saltwater, lakes, ponds, wetlands)? If yes, describe type and provide names. If appropriate, state what stream or river it flows into.

Varies over the squirrel's range

- 2) Will the project require any work over, in, or adjacent to (within 200 feet) the described waters? If yes, please describe and attach available plans.

Not applicable

- 3) Estimate the amount of fill and dredge material that would be placed in or removed from surface water or wetlands and indicate the area of the site that would be affected. Indicate the source of fill material.

Not applicable

- 4) Will the proposal require surface water withdrawals or diversions? Give general description, purpose, and approximate quantities if known.

Not applicable

- 5) Does the proposal lie within a 100-year floodplain? If so, note location on the site plan.

Not applicable

- 6) Does the proposal involve any discharges of waste materials to surface waters? If so, describe the type of waste and anticipated volume of discharge.

Not applicable

b. Ground Water: [\[help\]](#)

- 1) Will groundwater be withdrawn from a well for drinking water or other purposes? If so, give a general description of the well, proposed uses and approximate quantities withdrawn from the well. Will water be discharged to groundwater? Give general description, purpose, and approximate quantities if known.

Not applicable

2) Describe waste material that will be discharged into the ground from septic tanks or other sources, if any (for example: Domestic sewage; industrial, containing the following chemicals. . . ; agricultural; etc.). Describe the general size of the system, the number of such systems, the number of houses to be served (if applicable), or the number of animals or humans the system(s) are expected to serve.

Not applicable

c. Water runoff (including stormwater):

1) Describe the source of runoff (including storm water) and method of collection and disposal, if any (include quantities, if known). Where will this water flow? Will this water flow into other waters? If so, describe.

Not applicable

2) Could waste materials enter ground or surface waters? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

3) Does the proposal alter or otherwise affect drainage patterns in the vicinity of the site? If so, describe.

Not applicable

d. Proposed measures to reduce or control surface, ground, and runoff water, and drainage pattern impacts, if any:

Not applicable

4. **Plants** [\[help\]](#)

a. Check the types of vegetation found on the site:

___deciduous tree: oak, alder, maple, aspen, other

___evergreen tree: fir, cedar, pine, other

___shrubs

___grass

___pasture

___crop or grain

___ Orchards, vineyards or other permanent crops.

___ wet soil plants:

___ water plants:

___ other types of vegetation

All of these types of vegetation could occur within the areas where squirrels are found.

b. What kind and amount of vegetation will be removed or altered?

Not applicable

c. List threatened and endangered species known to be on or near the site.

Varies across squirrel's range, may include: Showy Stickweed, Golden Paintbrush, and Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow all of which may occur in historical range.

d. Proposed landscaping, use of native plants, or other measures to preserve or enhance vegetation on the site, if any:

Not applicable

e. List all noxious weeds and invasive species known to be on or near the site.

Varies across squirrel's range

5. **Animals** [\[help\]](#)

a. List any birds and other animals which have been observed on or near the site or are known to be on or near the site.

Examples include:

birds: hawk, heron, eagle, songbirds, other:

mammals: deer, bear, elk, beaver, other:

fish: bass, salmon, trout, herring, shellfish, other _____

Varies across squirrel's range

b. List any threatened and endangered species known to be on or near the site.

Varies across squirrel's range, may include: Gray wolf, Lynx, Northern Spotted Owl, Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly, Mazama Pocket Gopher, Streaked Horned Lark

c. Is the site part of a migration route? If so, explain.

Varies across squirrel's range

d. Proposed measures to preserve or enhance wildlife, if any:

Not applicable

e. List any invasive animal species known to be on or near the site.

Varie's across the squirrel's range

6. **Energy and Natural Resources** [\[help\]](#)

- a. What kinds of energy (electric, natural gas, oil, wood stove, solar) will be used to meet the completed project's energy needs? Describe whether it will be used for heating, manufacturing, etc.

Not applicable

- b. Would your project affect the potential use of solar energy by adjacent properties? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

- c. What kinds of energy conservation features are included in the plans of this proposal? List other proposed measures to reduce or control energy impacts, if any:

Not applicable

7. Environmental Health [\[help\]](#)

- a. Are there any environmental health hazards, including exposure to toxic chemicals, risk of fire and explosion, spill, or hazardous waste, that could occur as a result of this proposal? If so, describe.

- 1) Describe any known or possible contamination at the site from present or past uses.

Not applicable

- 2) Describe existing hazardous chemicals/conditions that might affect project development and design. This includes underground hazardous liquid and gas transmission pipelines located within the project area and in the vicinity.

Not applicable

- 3) Describe any toxic or hazardous chemicals that might be stored, used, or produced during the project's development or construction, or at any time during the operating life of the project.

Not applicable

- 4) Describe special emergency services that might be required.

Not applicable

- 5) Proposed measures to reduce or control environmental health hazards, if any:

Not applicable

b. Noise

- 1) What types of noise exist in the area which may affect your project (for example: traffic, equipment, operation, other)?

Not applicable

2) What types and levels of noise would be created by or associated with the project on a short-term or a long-term basis (for example: traffic, construction, operation, other)? Indicate what hours noise would come from the site.

Not applicable

3) Proposed measures to reduce or control noise impacts, if any:

Not applicable

8. Land and Shoreline Use [\[help\]](#)

a. What is the current use of the site and adjacent properties? Will the proposal affect current land uses on nearby or adjacent properties? If so, describe.

Not applicable

b. Has the project site been used as working farmlands or working forest lands? If so, describe. How much agricultural or forest land of long-term commercial significance will be converted to other uses as a result of the proposal, if any? If resource lands have not been designated, how many acres in farmland or forest land tax status will be converted to nonfarm or nonforest use?

Not applicable

1) Will the proposal affect or be affected by surrounding working farm or forest land normal business operations, such as oversize equipment access, the application of pesticides, tilling, and harvesting? If so, how:

Not applicable

c. Describe any structures on the site.

Not applicable

d. Will any structures be demolished? If so, what?

Not applicable

e. What is the current zoning classification of the site?

Not applicable

f. What is the current comprehensive plan designation of the site?

Not applicable

g. If applicable, what is the current shoreline master program designation of the site?

Not applicable

h. Has any part of the site been classified as a critical area by the city or county? If so, specify.
Varies across the squirrel's range.

i. Approximately how many people would reside or work in the completed project?

Not applicable

j. Approximately how many people would the completed project displace?

Not applicable

k. Proposed measures to avoid or reduce displacement impacts, if any:

Not applicable

l. Proposed measures to ensure the proposal is compatible with existing and projected land uses and plans, if any:

Not applicable

m. Proposed measures to reduce or control impacts to agricultural and forest lands of long-term commercial significance, if any:

Not applicable

9. **Housing** [\[help\]](#)

a. Approximately how many units would be provided, if any? Indicate whether high, middle, or low-income housing.

Not applicable

b. Approximately how many units, if any, would be eliminated? Indicate whether high, middle, or low-income housing.

Not applicable

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control housing impacts, if any:

Not applicable

10. **Aesthetics** [\[help\]](#)

a. What is the tallest height of any proposed structure(s), not including antennas; what is the principal exterior building material(s) proposed?

Not applicable

b. What views in the immediate vicinity would be altered or obstructed?

Not applicable

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control aesthetic impacts, if any:

Not applicable

11. Light and Glare [\[help\]](#)

a. What type of light or glare will the proposal produce? What time of day would it mainly occur?

Not applicable

b. Could light or glare from the finished project be a safety hazard or interfere with views?

Not applicable

c. What existing off-site sources of light or glare may affect your proposal?

Not applicable

d. Proposed measures to reduce or control light and glare impacts, if any:

Not applicable

12. Recreation [\[help\]](#)

a. What designated and informal recreational opportunities are in the immediate vicinity?

Not applicable

b. Would the proposed project displace any existing recreational uses? If so, describe.

Not applicable

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control impacts on recreation, including recreation opportunities to be provided by the project or applicant, if any:

Not applicable

13. Historic and cultural preservation [\[help\]](#)

a. Are there any buildings, structures, or sites, located on or near the site that are over 45 years old listed in or eligible for listing in national, state, or local preservation registers? If so, specifically describe.

Not applicable

b. Are there any landmarks, features, or other evidence of Indian or historic use or occupation? This may include human burials or old cemeteries. Are there any material evidence, artifacts,

or areas of cultural importance on or near the site? Please list any professional studies conducted at the site to identify such resources.

Not applicable

- c. Describe the methods used to assess the potential impacts to cultural and historic resources on or near the project site. Examples include consultation with tribes and the department of archeology and historic preservation, archaeological surveys, historic maps, GIS data, etc.

Not applicable

- d. Proposed measures to avoid, minimize, or compensate for loss, changes to, and disturbance to resources. Please include plans for the above and any permits that may be required.

Not applicable

14. Transportation [\[help\]](#)

- a. Identify public streets and highways serving the site or affected geographic area and describe proposed access to the existing street system. Show on site plans, if any.

Not applicable

- b. Is the site or affected geographic area currently served by public transit? If so, generally describe. If not, what is the approximate distance to the nearest transit stop?

Not applicable

- c. How many additional parking spaces would the completed project or non-project proposal have? How many would the project or proposal eliminate?

Not applicable

- d. Will the proposal require any new or improvements to existing roads, streets, pedestrian, bicycle or state transportation facilities, not including driveways? If so, generally describe (indicate whether public or private).

Not applicable

- e. Will the project or proposal use (or occur in the immediate vicinity of) water, rail, or air transportation? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

- f. How many vehicular trips per day would be generated by the completed project or proposal? If known, indicate when peak volumes would occur and what percentage of the volume would be trucks (such as commercial and nonpassenger vehicles). What data or transportation models were used to make these estimates?

Not applicable

g. Will the proposal interfere with, affect or be affected by the movement of agricultural and forest products on roads or streets in the area? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

h. Proposed measures to reduce or control transportation impacts, if any:

Not applicable

15. Public Services [\[help\]](#)

a. Would the project result in an increased need for public services (for example: fire protection, police protection, public transit, health care, schools, other)? If so, generally describe.

Not applicable

b. Proposed measures to reduce or control direct impacts on public services, if any.

Not applicable

16. Utilities [\[help\]](#)

a. Circle utilities currently available at the site:

electricity, natural gas, water, refuse service, telephone, sanitary sewer, septic system, other _____

Not applicable

d. Describe the utilities that are proposed for the project, the utility providing the service, and the general construction activities on the site or in the immediate vicinity which might be needed.

Not applicable

C. Signature [\[HELP\]](#)

The above answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that the lead agency is relying on them to make its decision.

Signature: _____ *Taylor Cotten* _____

Name of signee _____ Taylor Cotten _____

Position and Agency/Organization _____ Conservation Assessment Section Manager _____

Date Submitted: 8/17/2023 _____

D. Supplemental sheet for nonproject actions [\[HELP\]](#)

(IT IS NOT NECESSARY to use this sheet for project actions)

Because these questions are very general, it may be helpful to read them in conjunction with the list of the elements of the environment.

When answering these questions, be aware of the extent the proposal, or the types of activities likely to result from the proposal, would affect the item at a greater intensity or at a faster rate than if the proposal were not implemented. Respond briefly and in general terms.

1. How would the proposal be likely to increase discharge to water; emissions to air; production, storage, or release of toxic or hazardous substances; or production of noise?

Not applicable

Proposed measures to avoid or reduce such increases are:

Not applicable

2. How would the proposal be likely to affect plants, animals, fish, or marine life?

This proposal does not directly affect any plants, animals, fish, or marine life other than western gray squirrel. There is no direct effect on the western gray squirrel population, as this action is necessary to move towards recovering the species' populations. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife bases its proposal to reclassify western gray squirrel from Threatened to Endangered based on scientific information contained in its report *Periodic Status Review for Western Gray Squirrel*. This report summarizes evidence that the western gray squirrel habitat has declined >20% since initial listing as a Threatened species and with continued threats is seriously threatened with extinction within its remnant range in the state. The report recommends that the species be reclassified as an Endangered species. Given the species is already classified as Threatened in Washington, the direct affects would be minimal. There is a small change in penalty for take of individual animals if the species were to be reclassified as Endangered.

Under Washington state law (described in WAC 220-610-110), western gray squirrel would be classified as Endangered Wildlife. RCW 77.15.120 outlines that Endangered wildlife shall not be hunted, fishes for, possesses, maliciously harasses, kills, nor shall their nests be possess or destroyed. Western gray squirrel would also remain on the list of Priority Habitats and Species (PHS).

Proposed measures to protect or conserve plants, animals, fish, or marine life are:
Reclassifying western gray squirrel as Endangered wildlife.

3. How would the proposal be likely to deplete energy or natural resources?

Not applicable

Proposed measures to protect or conserve energy and natural resources are:

Not applicable

4. How would the proposal be likely to use or affect environmentally sensitive areas or areas designated (or eligible or under study) for governmental protection; such as parks, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, threatened or endangered species habitat, historic or cultural sites, wetlands, floodplains, or prime farmlands?

Proposed measures to protect such resources or to avoid or reduce impacts are:

Not applicable

5. How would the proposal be likely to affect land and shoreline use, including whether it would allow or encourage land or shoreline uses incompatible with existing plans?

Not applicable

Proposed measures to avoid or reduce shoreline and land use impacts are:

Not applicable

6. How would the proposal be likely to increase demands on transportation or public services and utilities?

Not applicable

Proposed measures to reduce or respond to such demand(s) are:

Not applicable

7. Identify, if possible, whether the proposal may conflict with local, state, or federal laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

While not a true conflict with any local, state, or federal laws, if the western gray squirrel is reclassified as Endangered, the state status will be different than the federal status. Western gray squirrels are not protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.