

# Working Lands Presentation to the WDFW Habitat Committee

Chris Conklin, Habitat Program Director  
Mick Cope, Wildlife Program Deputy  
Director/Incoming Director



September 26, 2024

# Working Lands in Washington

- What are working lands?
  - Managed areas which are actively used for agricultural, forestry, or other productive purposes
  - Often form the backbone of economic activities related to food and fiber production.
  - Can be private or publicly owned
- There are many and variable examples in Washington
  - Ranching, farming, forestry, military training lands
  - Working lands occur in all regions of our state



# WDFW Values Working Lands

- Working landowners/managers support fish and wildlife by protecting habitat from development and stewarding lands to provide habitat value
  - local and landscape scales
- Examples of agency programs that engage with working lands and landowners
  - Private lands program
  - Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative
  - Voluntary Stewardship Program
  - Forest Practices, Forest Health, Shared Stewardship
  - Working lands partnerships on WDFW-managed lands
  - ESA voluntary conservation benefit agreements





# Private Lands Program

# Areas of emphasis

## Habitat Conservation

- WA State Duck Stamp
- Pheasant Enhancement
- Farm Bill Programs
- Conservation Districts
- Partner projects with NGO's

## Recreational Access

- Focus depends on local resources
- Multiple opportunities seasonally
- Wildlife Viewing
- Fishing



# Private Lands Focus Areas

## Skagit Priorities

- ❖ Seabirds/shorebirds
- ❖ Wintering Waterfowl Habitat
- ❖ Waterfowl Hunting Access
- ❖ Wetlands
- ❖ Industrial Timber Access

## Shrub Steppe Priorities

- ❖ Restoration, Protection, Improvement
- ❖ HCP Development and Implementation
- ❖ Connectivity
- ❖ Riparian Habitat

## Northeast Priorities

- ❖ Forest Management
- ❖ Wetlands
- ❖ Agricultural and Timberland Access

## South Puget Priorities

- ❖ Wintering Waterfowl
- ❖ Waterfowl Hunting Access
- ❖ Wetlands

## Southwest Priorities

- ❖ Forest Management
- ❖ Timberland Access
- Road Management

## Yakima Priorities

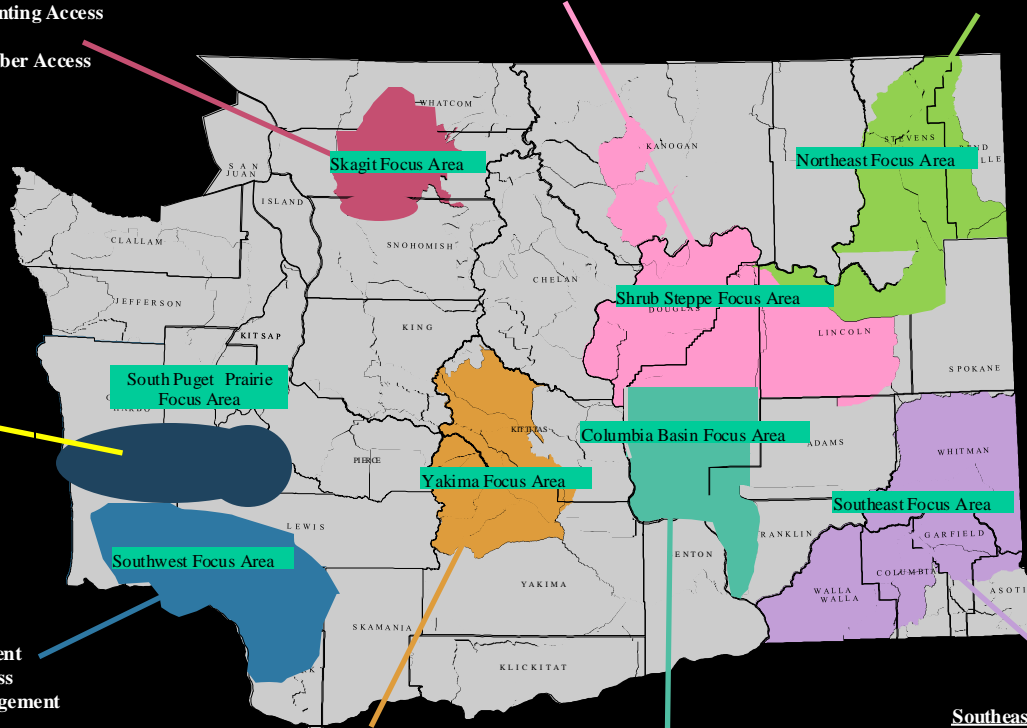
- ❖ Industrial Timberland Access
- ❖ Road Management

## Columbia Basin Priorities

- ❖ Shrub Steppe
- ❖ Wetlands/Riparian
- ❖ Wildlife Action Plan Implementation
- ❖ Waterfowl Quality Hunting Access

## Southeast Priorities

- ❖ Diverse Herbaceous Habitat
- ❖ Riparian:
  - Restoration/Improvement
  - Habitat Connectivity
- ❖ Pheasant Hunting Access



Information is subject to changes and amendments over time.

# Forage Enhancement, Pollinator and Brood Rearing Strips

- Building partnerships for collaboration
- Voluntary, Incentive-based projects
- Farm Bill Programs
- Start small, building to bigger projects



# Wildlife Program Staffing and Funding

- Private Lands Section Manager
- 12 Private Lands Biologists
- 6 Technicians
- 90% Pittman-Robertson \$



Sharp-tailed Grouse in Douglas County CRP SAFE







# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI)



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



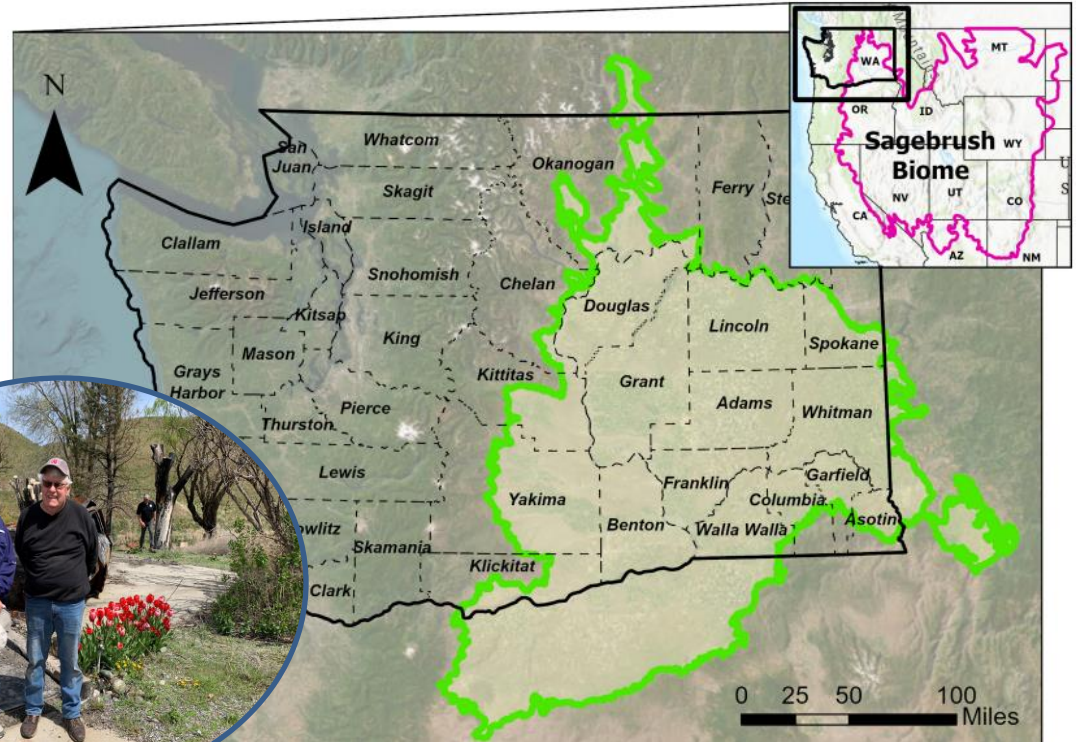
Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



Washington State  
**Conservation  
Commission**

# Washington's Shrubsteppe Landscape

Photo by J. Haug



# WSRRI is Collaborative, Strategic, Focused

Supporting wildlife and human communities in the face of increasing severity and frequency of wildland fire



Spokane Tribe of Indians



# WSRRI Shares Habitat Restoration Expertise, On-the-ground Capacity, and Materials All Land Ownerships

Photo by K.Merg



# WSRRI offers Wildlife Friendly Fencing

Traditional “hard” fence with wildlife-friendly adaptations  
Virtual Fence



# WSRRI Supports Deferred Grazing

Providing producers hay or alternative pasture rental reimbursements to allow habitat time to recover after fire



Burned – Fall 2020



Rested – Spring 2022





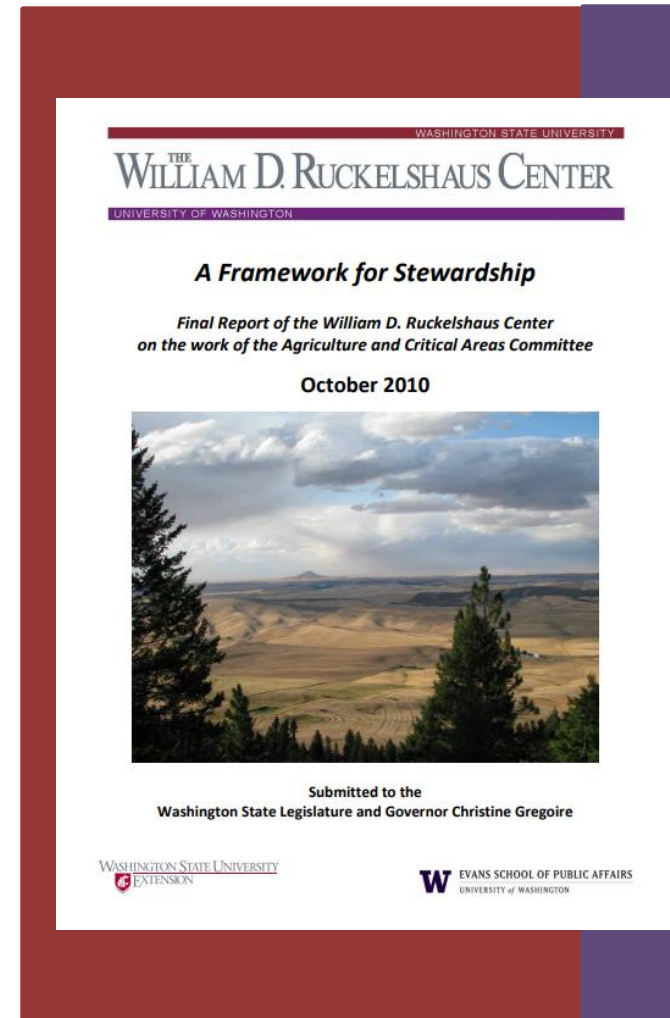
# **Voluntary Stewardship Program Support**

# Overview of VSP

Created in 2011 and administered by State Conservation Commission.

Is an alternative program for counties to **protect critical areas on agricultural lands.**

- Exempt from CAO regulations
- Rely on voluntary & incentive-based conservation measures
- Reduce regulatory burden on agricultural land





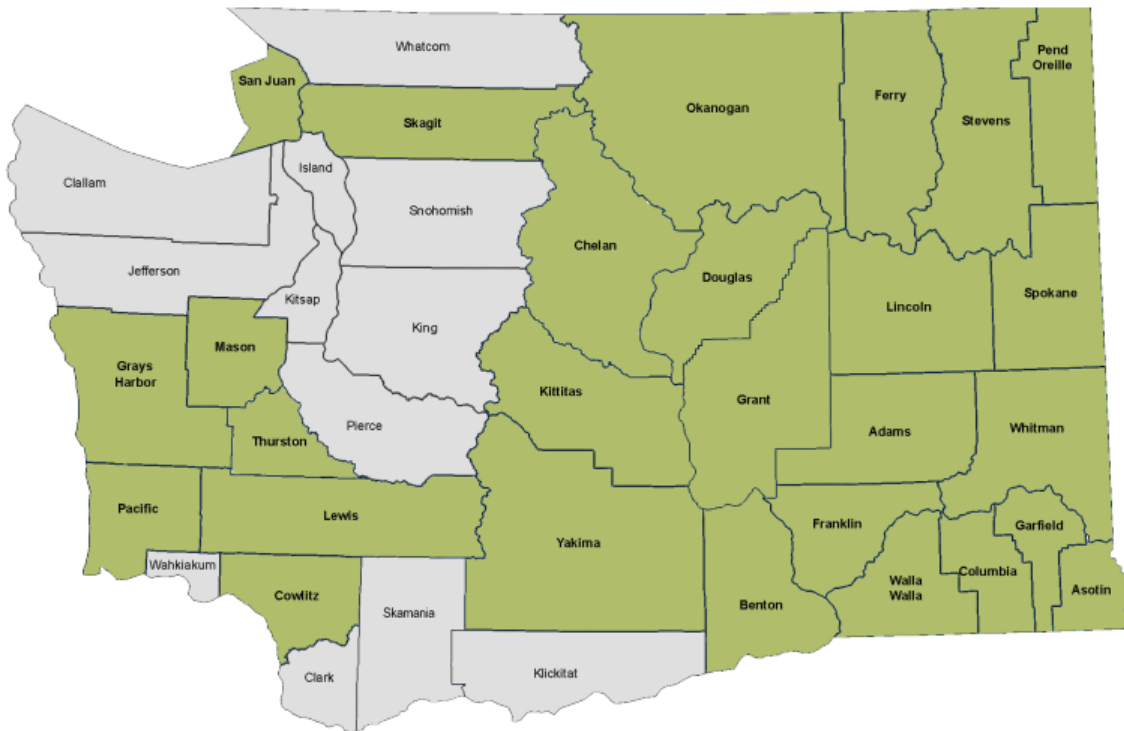
# VSP Goals

Land use program under the GMA for counties to:

- 1) **Protect *and* enhance critical area functions and values**
- 2) **Improve agricultural viability**



# VSP Counties



*27 counties are participating in the Voluntary Stewardship Program.*





# Forest Practices, Forest Health, Shared Stewardship

# Forest Practices and Forest Health

- Habitat Biologist expertise and support
- Water Typing and Riparian Protection
- Water Crossing Structures
- Forest Health Treatments and Special Considerations
- WDFW engagement in all levels of the Forest Practices Adaptive Management Program.



# Forest Habitats Wildlife Species of Interest under Forest Practices

FP Rule WAC 222-16-080 Protects Critical Habitat (state) for T&E Species:

- Marbled Murrelet
- Northern Spotted Owl
- Others e.g., Wolves, Grizzly Bear

Voluntary Protection:

- Lynx
- Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly
- Western Gray Squirrel
- Fisher (CCAA)





# WDFW Managed Lands

# Purpose of WDFW- managed Lands

Protecting Land and Water for  
Wildlife and People

*Our vision is a Washington where fish and wildlife thrive in healthy habitats, and where people experience and enjoy our state's natural gifts for generations to come.*

Many WDFW-managed lands include partnerships with private entities who provide working land expertise to benefit our mission.

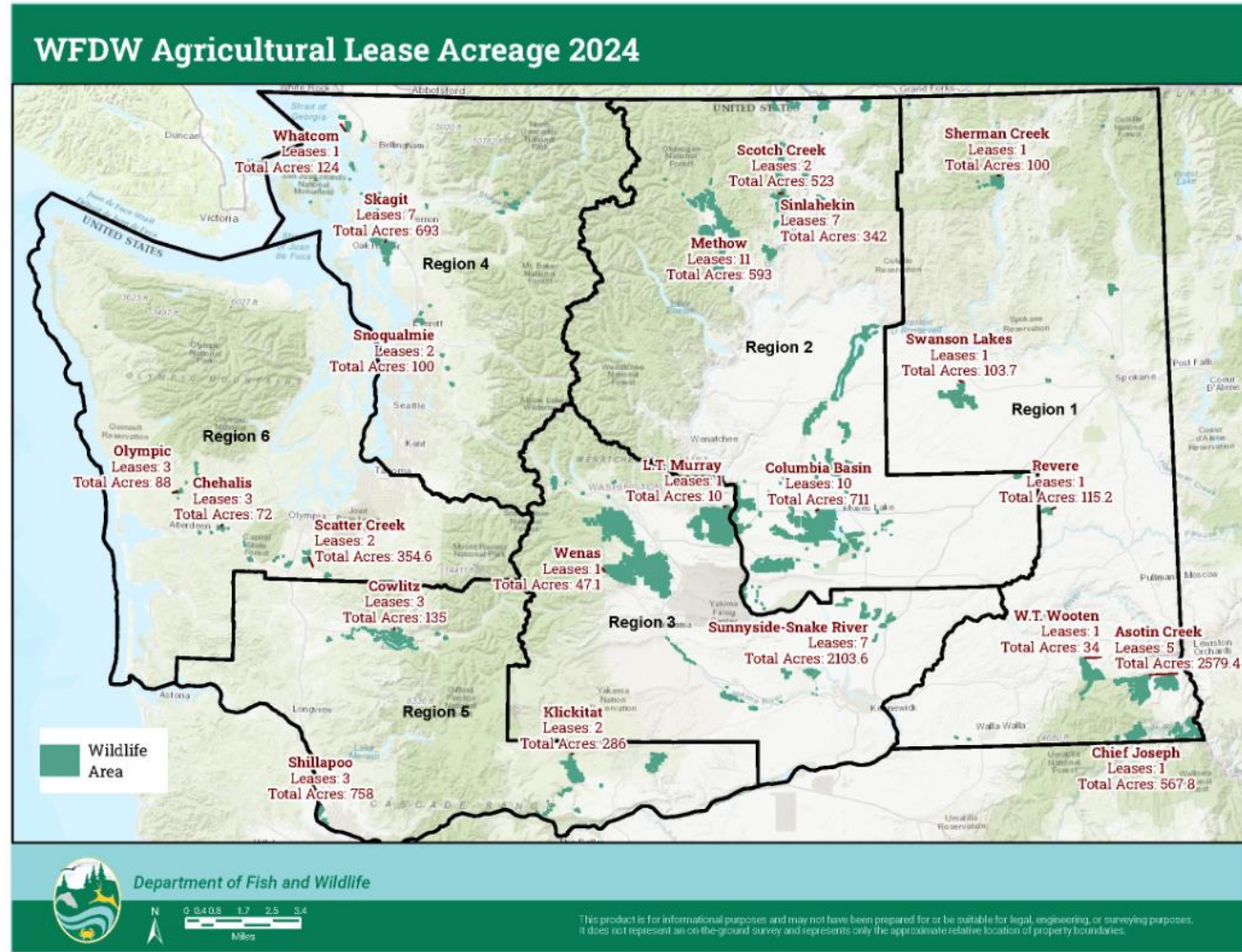


# Agriculture and Grazing WDFW-managed Lands

Two main tools  
aiding  
stewardship &  
recreation

## Agriculture Leases

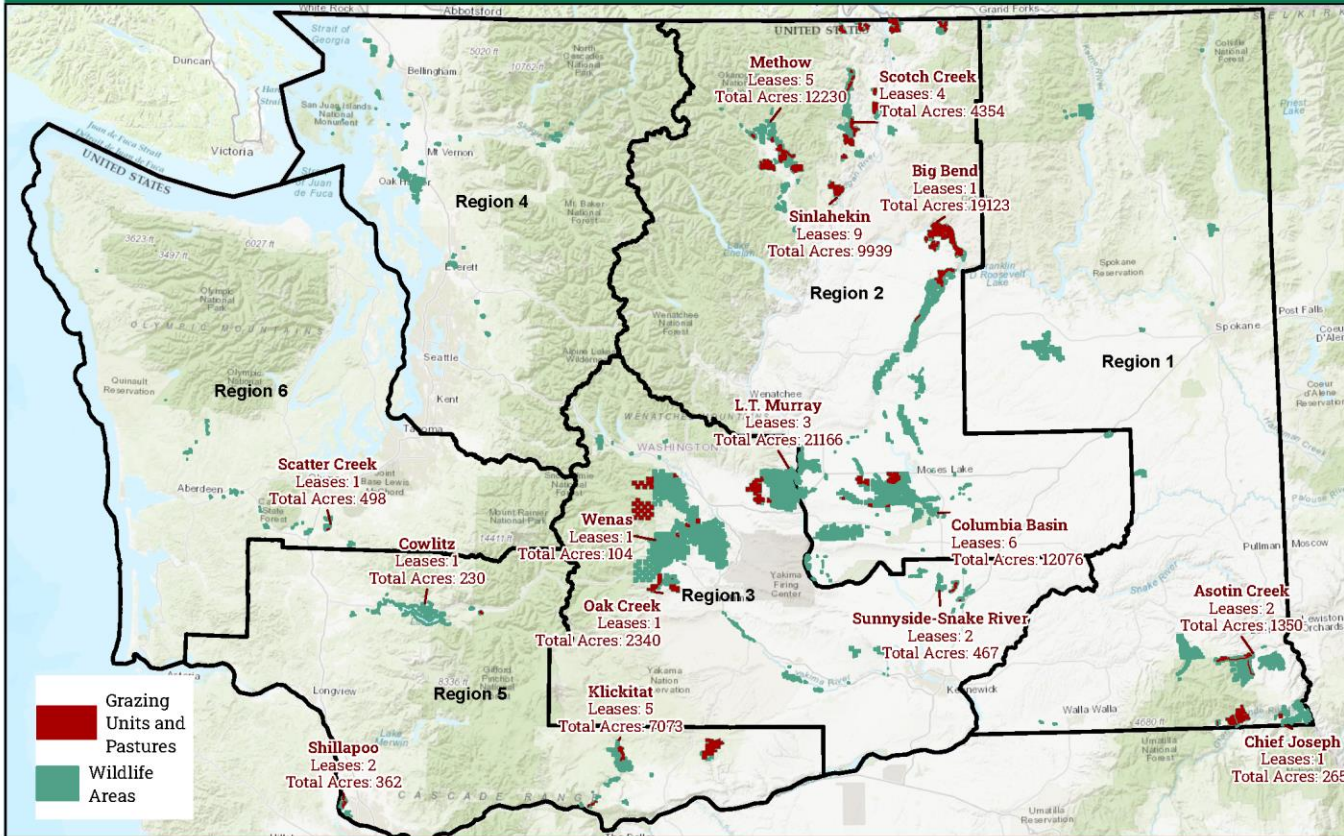
72 permits,  
 11,000 acres





# Agriculture and Grazing WDFW-managed Lands

## WFDW Grazing Permit Acreage 2024



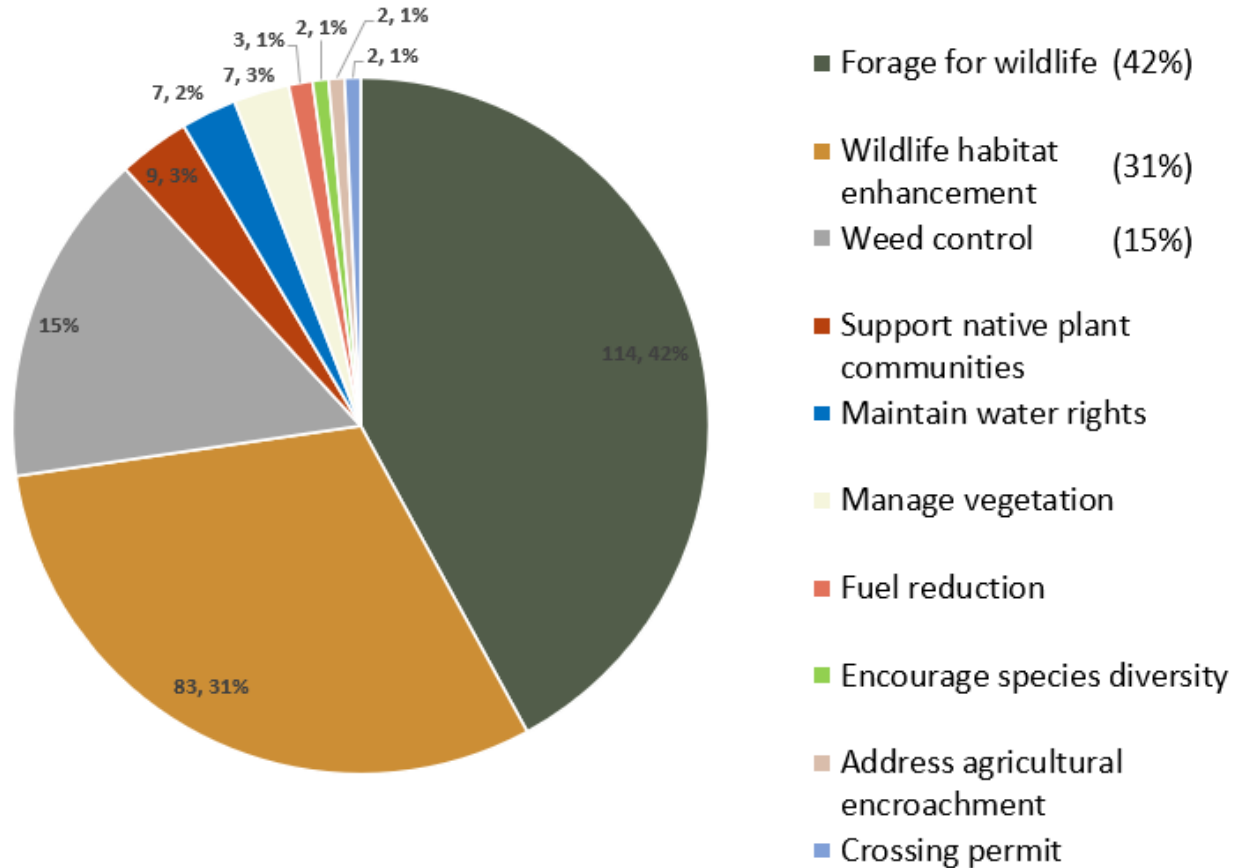
Grazing Permits:  
45 permits,  
94,441 acres



This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

# Agriculture and Grazing on WDFW-managed Lands

## Goals of Leases and Permits



# Agriculture and Grazing on WDFW-managed Lands

## SGCN Species Benefits



Sandhill Cranes, Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area, WDFW

## Habitat Benefits



Snow Geese, Skagit Wildlife Area, WDFW



Lester Range Grazing permit, Methow Wildlife Area, WDFW

## Game Species Benefits

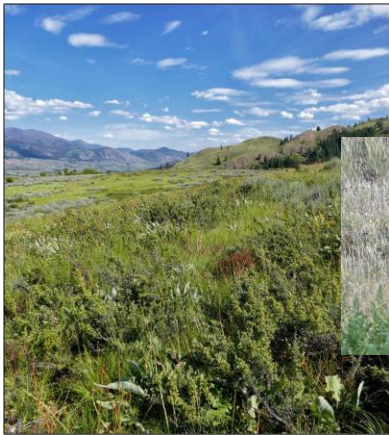
# Conservation Easements



Salmon Creek CE, R6, WDFW



Oregon Spotted Frog, R6, Alan Bauer



Gun Ranch CE, R2 WDFW



Mule Deer, WDFW

Region	Number of CEs	Percentage
1	0	0%
2	41	54%
3	6	8%
4	6	8%
5	1	1%
6	22	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100%</b>



# Endangered Species Act Voluntary Conservation Agreements

# Conservation Benefit Agreements

## (formerly Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances)

Voluntary agreement with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Non-federal landowners agree to do good things for a species – provide “net benefit”

In return, they receive coverage for incidental take of ESA species for agreed upon activities – “regulatory assurance”

Each agreement is tailored to the specifics of the species and the situation.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Safe Harbor Agreements for Private Landowners

#### What is a Safe Harbor Agreement?

A Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) is a voluntary agreement involving private or other non-federal property owners whose actions contribute to the recovery of species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agreement is between cooperating non-federal property owners and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is responsible for most listed marine and anadromous fish species.

In exchange for actions that contribute to the recovery of listed species on non-federal lands, participating property owners receive formal assurances from the FWS that if they fulfill the conditions of the SHA, the FWS will not require any additional or different management activities by the participants without their consent. In addition, at the end of the agreement period, participants may return the enrolled property to the baseline conditions that existed at the beginning of the SHA.

#### How does an SHA contribute to recovery?

Because many listed species occur exclusively, or to a large extent, on privately owned property, the involvement of the private sector in the conservation and recovery of species is crucial. Property owners are often willing partners in efforts to recover listed species. However, some people may be reluctant to undertake activities that support or attract listed species on their properties, due to concern about future use limitations related to the ESA. To address this concern, an SHA provides that future property-use limitations will not occur without the landowner's consent.

Central to this approach is that the actions taken under the SHA will provide a net conservation benefit that contributes to the recovery of the



The black-footed ferret, once thought to be extinct, is now benefitting from Safe Harbor Agreements with its ranchers in Colorado and Kansas who have volunteered to have captive-raised ferrets reintroduced onto their lands.

species included in the agreement. The contribution toward recovery will vary from case to case, and the SHA does not have to provide permanent conservation for the enrolled property. The benefit to the species depends on the nature of the activities to be undertaken, where they are undertaken, and their duration. The SHA and associated documents include a description of the expected net conservation benefit(s) and how the FWS reached that conclusion.

Examples of conservation benefits include:

- maintenance, restoration, or enhancement of existing habitats;
- reduced habitat fragmentation; increases in habitat connectivity;
- stabilized or increased numbers or distribution;
- the creation of buffers for protected areas; and

- opportunities to test and develop new habitat management techniques.

#### How does a property owner benefit?

By entering into an SHA, property owners receive assurances that they will not have to change their management activities agreed to in the SHA, even if the voluntary actions increase the number of individuals already present on their property or attract the species onto their property. The assurances are provided by the FWS through an Enhancement of Survival Permit issued to the property owner; the permit authorizes incidental take of species that may result from actions undertaken by the property owner under the SHA, which could include returning the property to the baseline conditions of the agreement.

The permit also specifies that the FWS will not require any additional or different conservation measures management activities by participants without their consent. This kind of



# WDFW supports landowners by facilitating these agreements

**Columbia Basin  
Pygmy Rabbit  
Safe Harbor  
Agreement 2006**



**Emergency listed as  
Endangered 2001**

**Pacific Fisher  
Candidate Conservation  
Agreement with  
Assurances 2016**



**Washington precluded  
from 2019 proposed listing**

**Island Marble Butterfly  
Candidate Conservation  
Agreement with  
Assurances 2020**



**Listed as  
Endangered 2020**



# Each agreement is different, but principles and approach are same

Strong collaboration between USFWS and WDFW throughout

- Development
- Adaptation
- Delivery

Include considerations of both the animals and landowners.

Associated with reintroductions

WDFW is the programmatic permit holder, enrolling landowners through certificates of inclusion

- Reduces landowner administrative burden
- Standardizes approach





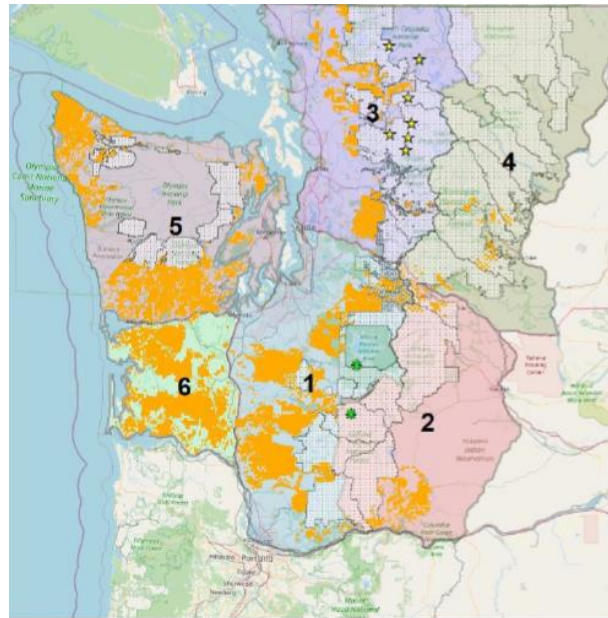
# Conservation and Partnership Success

**Columbia Basin  
Pygmy Rabbit SHA**  
156,000 acres enrolled:  
32 private landowners



Working ranch and  
pygmy rabbit SHA  
enrolled lands

**Fisher CCAA**  
3.5 million acres  
enrolled;  
60 forest landowners



Orange polygons: Fisher  
CCAA enrolled lands

**Island Marble  
Butterfly CCAA**  
1176 acres enrolled;  
32,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of habitat created;  
18 landowners



Island marble butterfly  
habitat patch on CCAA  
enrolled lands



# Working Lands Balance

## Challenges

- Striking the balance between private interest and values to fish and wildlife
- Threats from conversion to a more developed landscape
- Can be viewed as the easy place to do something different.

## Benefits

- Reduced impacts to fish and wildlife compared to other development types
- Positive outcomes for fish and wildlife while supporting private interests
- Supports rural economy
- Increased benefits to some species

