



# Washington butterfly assessments

## A WDFW wildlife diversity grant project

Butterflies are an important component of Washington's biodiversity, acting as both herbivores and pollinators of native plants in every ecosystem across the state. Insect species are in overall decline across the western United States, and most species face multiple threats including habitat loss, climate change, and pesticide exposure.

Protecting insects like butterflies requires, among other things, an up-to-date understanding of their population trends and the threats they face. Many butterfly species in Washington were last assessed a decade ago or more, and new research suggests many species may be imperiled. This project uses the latest scientific data to assess various butterfly Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and aid WDFW and partners in conserving their populations.



Credit: Xerces Society

**Project name:** Washington butterfly assessments

**Primary species benefitting:** Butterfly SGCN

**Grant total:** \$82,691

**Grantee & associated entity:** Candace Fallon, The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

**Webpage:** [xerces.org](http://xerces.org)

Statewide butterfly species assessments are the foundation for prioritizing their conservation and management. Butterfly assessments include information on current species locations, where species have experienced loss, and threats that imperil populations. Species are then ranked based on population declines, small geographic ranges, or immediate threats. These assessments combine occurrence data and the latest scientific research to determine which species are most imperiled at the state level. This information allows wildlife agency staff to use their limited time and resources most effectively to conserve butterfly populations across the state.



Credit: WDFW





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## Project goals and outcomes

The project’s main goal is to provide WDFW with the most up-to-date information and NatureServe assessments for Washington’s most imperiled butterfly species. This includes 21 updated species ranks for all WDFW Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and Priority Species in the state, including spatial data and supporting references.

The agency will have the latest information on population trends, occurrence data, and threats for all 21 butterfly species, allowing staff to prioritize conservation and management efforts. If time and funding allows, Xerces will continue reassessing additional Washington butterfly species to inform the 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan.

## Better preparation for conservation action

A recent study found that the abundance of butterflies across the west is declining by between one and two percent each year. Additional analyses suggest there are approximately 15-20 western butterfly species in Washington experiencing rates of decline similar to or greater than that undergone by the monarch butterfly. Most of these species are not currently federally listed under the Endangered Species Act, nor are they recognized as imperiled by states.

In addition, several of these species occur in habitats that are under pressure from particular land uses or resource management. If these declines continue, additional species may go extinct, with potentially negative impacts on the ecosystems they support. By updating assessments for Washington’s at-risk butterfly species, land managers in the state will be better prepared to act to prevent these declines.



Credit: Xerces Society

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