

SWAP Background

Every U.S. state and territory has a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the federal agency responsible for State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) review and approval, develops and maintains the guidelines for SWAP creation, review, and revision as part of the Office of Conservation Investments State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG). Comprehensive information about the SWG and SWAP relationship, current revision guidance and the Eight Required Elements of SWAPs (2017), and other guidance and templates are [online](#). The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) maintains [extensive online resources about the SWAP program](#), its importance and success across the nation, progress reports, states' plans, best practices, and a SWAP learning series (AFWA n.d.).

The Washington SWAP has communicated fish, wildlife, and habitats conservation needs for more than 20 years. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has created two previous SWAPs ([2005](#) and [2015](#)); this is the third edition.

SWAP Purpose

Species and their habitats provide food and forage, cultural and spiritual touchstones, creative inspiration and well-being, clean air and water, recreation and livelihoods. Conserving [biodiversity](#) – the full range of life in all its forms, including habitats and systems – is important to all of us (WDFW 2024a). Conservation ensures that plants, fish, wildlife, and the habitats on which they depend can continue to support and inspire humans and be enjoyed by future generations, in whatever way they may legally interact with those resources.

The SWAP provides well-supported recommendations for conservation actions to improve the sustainability of ecosystems, habitats, and species based on current information and guidance. The SWAP can be used to prioritize, scope, fund, and inspire actions that address important conservation needs in our state to preserve, protect, and perpetuate plants, fish, wildlife, and ecosystems. The SWAP is not rule-making or regulatory and does not determine what is or is not legal. The SWAP enables broad engagement in implementation and creates a framework to report progress.

This plan

- guides current and future biodiversity and other sources of conservation funding;
- describes intergovernmental and international conservation relationships, statewide issues and initiatives, and ecoregional conservation needs and actions at appropriate scales to improve the status, sustainability, and resilience of systems, habitats, and species;
- provides a platform to share conservation priorities with regional and adjacent governments, including tribes;

- engages communities and conservation practitioners to garner durable support for more effective conservation progress in Washington; and,
- provides a framework to better track and report progress.

Guide Limited Conservation Funding

Back in 2000, AFWA, state fish and wildlife and other natural resources agencies, tribes, conservation organizations, recreation groups, several federal agencies, and many others were successful in getting Congress to approve State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (SWG and TWG) to conserve species and habitats before they become more rare or too costly to sustain or restore. These funds are annually appropriated at Congressional direction to the USFWS Office of Conservation Investments to manage as an annual granting program to [states](#) and [tribes](#) to implement conservation actions:

- A SWAP is required for a state to receive SWG and those funds must be used for SWAP conservation actions.
- Tribes are not required to have a wildlife action plan; instead, TWG is a competitive funding opportunity for federally recognized tribal governments (US Bureau of Indian Affairs n.d., Washington State Governor's Office of Indian Affairs n.d.) to develop and implement programs that benefit wildlife and their habitat, including species of Native American cultural or traditional importance and species that are not hunted or fished.

Each year, AFWA, state natural resources agencies, tribes, and conservation partners demonstrate the value of SWG and TWG to Congress to encourage ongoing appropriations. In federal fiscal year 2024, the total amount of SWG was \$72.38 million for all states and territories; Washington received approximately \$1.3 million (USFWS 2024).

Over the years, Washington's conservation partners have demonstrated that this need is greater than SWG, Competitive/Multi-state-SWG, and TWG can meet. Through implementation, SWAPs have grown into well-accepted guides to good conservation action, acknowledged by and invested in by other state, federal, and private funding sources and partnerships, project by project. Nationally, a broad coalition supports increased and sustained conservation funding for diverse fish and wildlife and their habitats, using SWAPs as good blueprints to deliver conservation (AFWA 2016). The Washington state Legislature responded to the conservation needs identified in the SWAP, allocating Biodiversity Conservation funding to WDFW to use and share with conservation partners for SWAP actions (WDFW 2022, 2024b). The Biodiversity Conservation funding continues to be a priority for WDFW to maintain and increase over time. While these funding sources make significant contributions to conservation progress, threats to biodiversity and conservation gain are outpacing our collective conservation efforts.

Meet the SWAP Eight Required Elements

Every U.S. state and territory has a SWAP, developed, implemented, and maintained by a state fish and wildlife agency or other state natural resources agency with fish and wildlife

conservation responsibilities. All SWAPs must meet the same basic guidelines: the [Eight Required Elements](#) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. SWAP Eight Required Elements (AFWA n.d.)

Every SWAP must meet these basic requirements, but states can organize this content in any way and expand it to communicate state-specific conservation values, needs, and actions. SWAPs can connect conservation priorities across political boundaries, include mechanisms to be nimble in the face of difficult or rapidly emerging conservation questions, illustrate best practices (AFWA 2012) and current state of conservation, and foster partnerships and funding for implementation.

Improve Conservation Communication

Our best chance of long-term, effective, and durable conservation progress is to better connect conservation with people, and people with each other. This version of the SWAP will look and feel different from the 2015 SWAP to provide easier-to-find information, to help make meaningful connections between people who want to use the SWAP and the ecologists, biologists, and communities that recognize and define conservation needs. Washington has a strong network of active conservation allies – Tribes, land trusts, hunters and anglers, resource agencies, bird and other wildlife watchers, outdoor enthusiasts, conservation organizations, communities and organizers, legislators, and more – all are tackling hard conservation questions and finding innovative solutions.

Despite the name, the SWAP isn't just limited to "wildlife." The Washington SWAP highlights information and conservation actions for wildlife, fish, plants, habitats, ecosystems and landscapes in which people live, work, and play. We are all connected by our lands and waters, a sense of place that feeds us literally and culturally, traditionally and in new ways every day. We eat, breathe, drink, and play, benefitting from all that

Washington’s natural resources offer. Much of our economy is resources-based in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, technology, green energy, open spaces and outdoor recreation (Washington Department of Commerce 2024). All of this is dependent on beneficial connections among people and biodiversity.

Relationship to WDFW Strategic Plan and Conservation Efforts

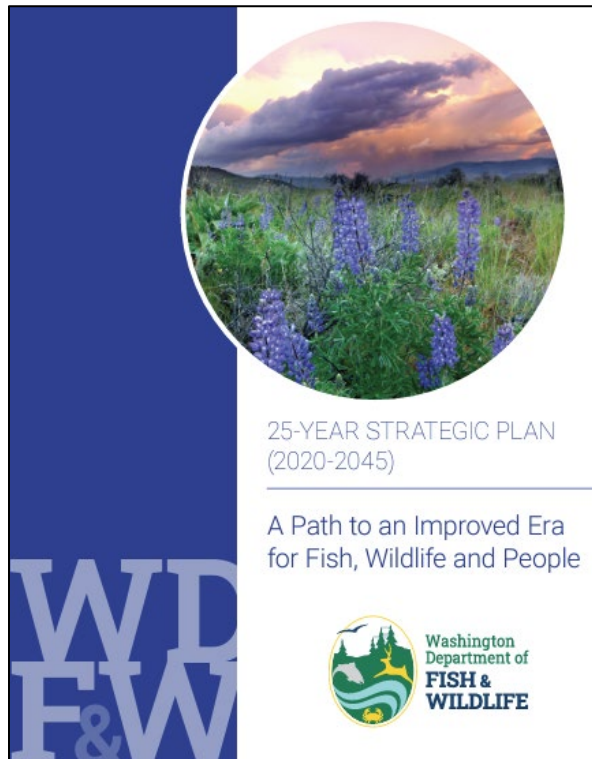


Figure 2. WDFW Strategic Plan (2020)

For WDFW, the SWAP is a tool for the agency’s 25-Year Strategic Plan (2020-2045) implementation and a framework for internal conservation work prioritization, reporting progress and success, and communicating with interested stakeholders, governments, and partners.

Beyond WDFW, the SWAP can help make connections across the vast array of conservation opportunities and partners; showcase conservation priorities from a variety of partners and perspectives; and offer an access ramp to WDFW resources (people, information, mechanisms, funding).

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