



Washington's
Comprehensive
Wildlife
Conservation
Strategy



WASHINGTON'S
COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION STRATEGY

FINAL DRAFT

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WASHINGTON CWCS



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Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Personnel

Development of the CWCS was a high priority for WDFW, and many technical experts from the agency were enlisted to help with its development. Wildlife taxa experts from both Olympia headquarters staff and WDFW's six administrative regions participated in agency workshops to rank fish and wildlife species for the Species of Greatest Conservation Need list, as well as various other parts of the CWCS. Other technical staff, as well as fish, habitat and wildlife managers from around the state, were consulted in reviewing the discussions of species and habitats, problems and conservation actions, especially at the ecoregional scale. WDFW regional directors and regional wildlife staff also assisted in setting up and conducting public meetings around the state in June, 2005. Many of the WDFW staff who helped with developing the Species of Greatest Conservation Need list are included in Appendix 11; many of the regional meetings with WDFW staff are included in Appendix 15.

Natural Heritage Program, Washington Department of Natural Resources

Technical advice and hands-on assistance provided by managers and staff of the Washington Natural Heritage Program staff was invaluable in developing the CWCS. We consulted with WNHP staff throughout the CWCS process and they helped us in many ways, from participating in ranking wildlife species for the Species of Greatest Conservation Need list to helping us compare and crosswalk various habitat classification systems for the CWCS. We also want to acknowledge the importance of DNR documents as major sources of information for the CWCS, including the *Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, *Our Changing Nature* and *Changing Our Water Ways*. These documents were consulted early and continually throughout the development of the CWCS. Because the Washington Natural Heritage Plan was updated in 2003 and again in 2005, the plan provides an excellent summary of current problems affecting wildlife habitat, native plants, and other elements of biodiversity, at both statewide and ecoregional scales. Because it is beautifully designed and illustrated, the Natural Heritage Plan was also an inspiration to WDFW staff to try produce a CWCS document that is attractive and readable for the public.

CWCS Advisory Committee

This advisory committee was made up of representatives from other state and federal agencies, as well as business and stakeholder groups with an interest in helping WDFW develop the Washington CWCS. The committee met on an ad hoc basis in 2004 and 2005 and advised WDFW staff on various issues related to the CWCS. We especially want to thank The Nature Conservancy of Washington and Defenders of Wildlife for their intense level of involvement and their interest in helping us develop the best possible comprehensive wildlife strategy. We also appreciate the time spent by members of WDFW's standing Game, Wildlife Diversity, and Lands Management citizen advisory committees in meeting with WDFW staff and reviewing the draft CWCS. A list of these advisory committees is included as Appendix 11; a running account of our various meetings and planning workshops is included in Appendix 15.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A. Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy



Background

Since the 1970s, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has gone through a significant evolution. Its overall mission has expanded from primarily managing the harvest of game and commercial fish and shellfish species, to the protection and management of all fish and wildlife species and their habitats. The regulation of hunting and fishing remains an important role of WDFW and the Fish and Wildlife Commission. Growing public interest in the protection and enjoyment of all wildlife species, plus the advent of laws such as the federal Endangered Species Act, has caused WDFW to become broader in its management scope and much more concerned with the protection and management of essential habitat and biodiversity than it was 30 years ago. Across the nation as well as in Washington, state wildlife agencies have shifted program emphasis and available funding to meet these new demands.

In 1980, WDFW published its first Nongame Wildlife (now Diversity) Plan and hired its first nongame wildlife biologists. In 1980, Congress also recognized this shift in public awareness and interest in broader wildlife programs by passing the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, also known as the "Nongame Act". This act authorized financial and technical assistance to the states for the development, revision and implementation of conservation plans and programs for nongame fish and wildlife. However, federal funding to assist with conservation of non-hunted wildlife lagged far behind resource needs and public demand, and it was not until 1994 that the states collectively approached Congress with a serious proposal to provide matching funds to conserve all those species and their habitats not covered by previous funding programs for game and commercial species.

In 1998, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA), in partnership with WDFW and other state wildlife agencies, initiated Teaming With Wildlife, a national campaign to document the need for additional wildlife funding and secure a reliable source of federal matching funds for species and habitat conservation. The original source of revenue investigated for the campaign was a new federal excise tax on outdoor equipment, similar to taxes imposed on fishing tackle and firearms and administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. However, in 1999 the Teaming with Wildlife campaign became part of a much larger effort to restore and expand funding from offshore oil and gas revenues for a range of conservation, outdoor recreation and historic preservation programs. Although this expanded effort, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999 (CARA) was not passed by Congress as proposed, it did result in significant additional funds from the federal budget for certain programs such as a new State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program to assist state wildlife agencies with the conservation of species and habitats of greatest conservation need.

The first Congressional SWG appropriations were made in 2001, and both planning and implementation grants have been made to state wildlife agencies since that first appropriation. Funds are allocated according to a formula based on the size and population of each state.

All State Wildlife Grants funded by Congress are predicated on the completion and acceptance of state Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) by October 2005. Acceptance of the Washington CWCS by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will satisfy the funding requirements of the current planning grants and establish eligibility for further funding of Washington wildlife conservation programs under the SWG program.

Eight Essential Elements

To meet the requirements for future State Wildlife Grants, state Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies must adequately address eight essential elements established by Congress. This Washington Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy meets or exceeds the requirements of these eight essential elements:

Element 1. Include information on the distribution and abundance of priority wildlife species that reflect the diversity and health of state wildlife.

Element 2. Identify the extent and condition of wildlife habitats and community types essential to the conservation of priority species.

Element 3. Identify problems that may adversely affect priority species or their habitats.

Element 4. Determine actions to be taken to conserve priority species and their habitats.

Element 5. Provide for periodic monitoring of priority species and habitats, as well as the effectiveness of conservation actions.

Element 6. Coordinate all stages of the CWCS with federal, state tribal and local agencies.

Element 7. Incorporate opportunities for public involvement into the development, revision and implementation of the CWCS.

Element 8. Provide for review of the CWCS and appropriate revision at intervals of not more than 10 years.



Guiding Principles

The State Wildlife Grants program and the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy present the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife with an opportunity to expand beyond traditional fish and wildlife management and consider other concepts such as biodiversity. Consequently, the following six Guiding Principles were adopted to direct the development of our Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy:

Guiding Principle 1: "Leave no species behind." Address the conservation of wildlife species and associated habitats with identified greatest conservation need, while recognizing the importance of keeping common species common.

The intent of Washington's CWCS is to build on current efforts to protect fish and wildlife species included on state and federal endangered and threatened species lists. This will include identifying species and their associated habitats for which we do not have adequate information, as well as protected species that could be in trouble in the future if steps are not taken now to conserve them. Washington's list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need is included as Appendices 1 and 2. The criteria used to evaluate over 700 fish and wildlife species is included as Appendix 3.

Guiding Principle 2: "Build a plan of plans." Construct the Washington CWCS from a large body of existing work, including nine ongoing ecoregional assessments.

WDFW and its public and private conservation partners are involved in a number of collaborative conservation planning efforts for species and habitats. These planning efforts are being conducted at many scales and levels of detail, from statewide to regional to county scales. The CWCS, for the most part, is not an original planning document but rather a summary of the goals and strategies articulated in other plans produced or influenced by WDFW. A more complete listing and description of these major planning efforts is included in Chapter III, State Overview.

Guiding Principle 3: "Strengthen conservation partnerships." Expand existing partnerships and create new opportunities to cooperate with other conservation agencies, local governments, Indian tribes, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector.

Development and implementation of the Washington CWCS provides a good opportunity for WDFW to engage with a range of public and private conservation partners and stakeholders. An active, three-phase outreach program was initiated in 2003 to inform partners about the CWCS and to later solicit their input on the draft CWCS. Implementation of many of the conservation actions included in the CWCS will require the involvement of conservation partners, including other state, federal and tribal agencies, colleges and universities, conservation and outdoor recreation groups, local governments and private landowners. WDFW's CWCS Outreach Plan is included as Appendix 4.

Guiding Principle 4: "Emphasize biodiversity conservation." Promote the long-term conservation of Washington's biodiversity and coordinate development and implementation of the CWCS with the Washington Biodiversity Council.

In 2002 Washington became one of the first states to articulate a state policy on biodiversity when the Washington State Legislature passed legislation calling for and partly funding the development of a state framework for biodiversity conservation. In 2004 the Washington Biodiversity Council was established by Governor's Executive Order to establish a 30-year vision for conserving the state's biodiversity, primarily through locally driven, nonregulatory, incentive-based programs on both private and public lands.

WDFW participates in the Washington Biodiversity Council and has joined with The Nature Conservancy and Washington Department of Natural Resources in a partnership to produce nine ecoregional assessments, which classify and prioritize

biodiversity across Washington's landscapes. These assessments may serve as a landscape focus for an overall state biodiversity strategy. The ongoing ecoregional assessments (EAs) are discussed in more detail in Chapter VI, Washington's Ecoregional Conservation Strategy and in Volume Two, Approach and Methods.

Guiding Principle 5. "Inform the public." Create a document that is concise, readable, informative and available to a wide range of publics and stakeholders.

The CWCS has been organized and written so that the both the general public and the conservation and wildlife recreation community can gain a good understanding of the wildlife species, habitats and conservation actions that will guide fish, wildlife and biodiversity conservation in Washington for at least the next 10 years. The main report, Volume One, describes nine ecoregions and includes discussions of wildlife species and their habitats of greatest conservation need, as well as conservation problems, strategies and actions. The section documenting the Approach and Methods, which may not be important to the casual reader, is included as Volume Two. Detailed appendices have been included in a single CD-ROM. The Washington CWCS will be available on WDFW's website (www.wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/cwcs) with appropriate links to other plans and partners. The web-based strategy and appendices will be updated as often as appropriate and necessary.

Guiding Principle 6. "Inform decision makers." Use the CWCS to draw attention to important wildlife conservation issues—for Congress, the Washington Legislature, local decision makers, the media and the public.

The challenges of maintaining a healthy economy, accommodating growth, and conserving the state's wildlife, habitats and biodiversity can be met only through strong public awareness and support from a broad spectrum of publics and decision makers. Narrative and data in the CWCS will help meet that challenge.

WDFW and its conservation partners will use the CWCS, ecoregional assessments and other plans and assessments on which they are based to raise public awareness and gain support for conservation measures necessary to sustain fish and wildlife populations, habitat and biodiversity. Ecoregional assessments and other data sources will be used to develop county-level habitat assessments and other tools to better inform public and private landowners, and to help local decision makers and planners administer the Growth Management Act and other local conservation programs.

B. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mission Statement**

Sound stewardship of fish and wildlife; protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities.

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Strategic Goals**

- ❖ *Healthy and diverse fish and wildlife populations and habitats*
- ❖ *Sustainable fish and wildlife-related opportunities*
- ❖ *Operational excellence and professional service*

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is one of the largest and most diverse state wildlife agencies in the country, with almost 1,800 employees working in six regional offices and the Olympia headquarters. The Washington State Legislature created WDFW in 1994 by merging the existing departments of Wildlife and Fisheries, both of which had been separate agencies since the 1930s. The WDFW Director is appointed by a nine-member Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Governor appoints commission members to six-year staggered terms.

WDFW is responsible for the protection and management of all marine, anadromous and freshwater fish; shellfish; and terrestrial wildlife—thousands of animal species statewide. WDFW regulates all legal harvest of commercial fish, sportfish and wildlife, enforces wildlife protection laws, and manages about 840,000 acres of land. More than half of these managed lands are owned by WDFW. The remainder is leased from other state and federal agencies, including the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

WDFW's conservation mission is administered through three resource management programs: Wildlife, Fish, and Habitat. On-the-ground implementation of these conservation programs is directed from the Olympia headquarters and accomplished through six Regional Offices, located in Spokane, Ephrata, Yakima, Mill Creek, Vancouver and Montesano (Figure 1).

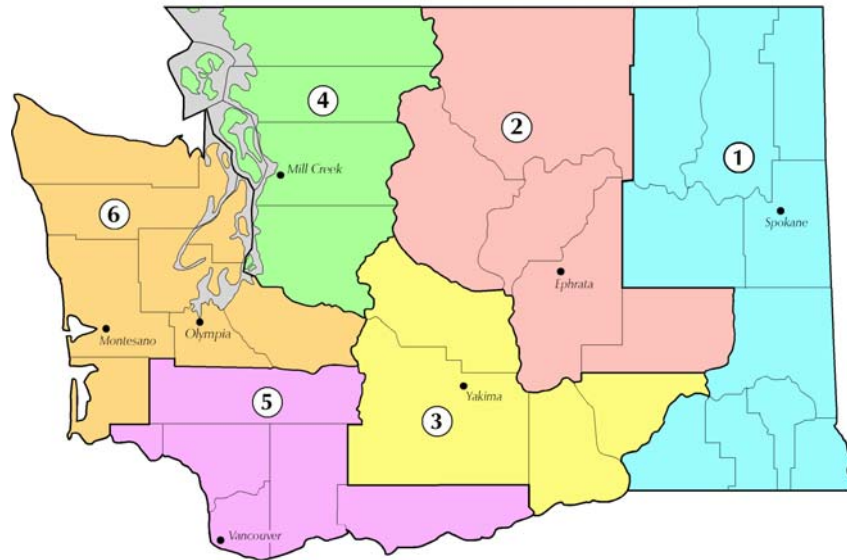


Figure. 1. Locations of WDFW Olympia headquarters and regional offices.

C. Major Conservation Partners and Programs

Conservation of fish and wildlife in Washington is primarily the responsibility of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, although it requires the cooperation and active participation of many other public and private partners, including federal, state and tribal agencies, local governments, private landowners, commercial fish and shellfish harvesters, and nonprofit conservation and wildlife recreation organizations.

Many of WDFW's most important governmental conservation partners own and manage large blocks of public land and wildlife habitat, including the USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Defense, National Park Service, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. Others such as the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Puget Sound Action Team do not directly manage wildlife or habitat, but establish policies, administer programs and regulations, or direct funding to conservation of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Washington's treaty Indian tribes, many of which have been designated as co-managers of the state's fish resources by the federal courts, also own and manage large blocks of reservation lands as habitat. The Tribes exercise considerable influence over the protection, management and harvest of fish and wildlife, both on and off their reservations. Much of Washington's forested land base is in private ownership and managed for timber and wood products; these landowners are also important partners of WDFW in protecting and managing the state's wildlife and other natural resources.

The potential role of many of WDFW's major conservation partners in implementing the Washington CWCS is discussed again in Chapter V, Implementation. Many of these major partners are listed in Appendix 5.