

WDFW Shrubsteppe Fire Preparedness, Response, Restoration Proviso

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How we got here





2020 Fires
600,000 acres of shrubsteppe burned





Senator Rolfes asked us:
“How bad is it, and what can
we do?”





1 of 3 pygmy rabbit
recovery areas lost



Homes and livelihoods
burned



Half the area occupied by sage
and sharptailed grouse
impacted

Well, it's pretty bad



After collecting considerable input, we made recommendations to Senator Rolfes and Senator Warnick

Implement immediate no-regret actions

Support recovery actions for species impacted by the fires

enhance capacity of trained personnel for cultural resources review, equipment operations, and actions to restore habitat

increase availability of native shrubsteppe seeds and plugs

Replace fences burned by fire with wildlife-friendly versions

Make hay available for ranchers to defer grazing and allow burned habitat time to recover



Convene a collaborative group, facilitated by a neutral third party, to develop long-term strategy for shrubsteppe conservation and fire preparedness, response, and restoration.



Shrubsteppe Proviso funded in 21-23 BN budget



Proviso Basics

- “Solely to restore shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife impacted by wildfires”
 - shared benefit with human communities
- Collaborative
 - Partnership – WDFW, DNR, SCC
 - Advised by diverse interests
- 2 components:
 - Post-fire restoration actions (near-term actions)
 - Collaborative development of long-term strategy
- On-going operating \$2.35mil/BN, One-time capital \$1.5mil/21-23BN



Proviso Part 1: Near-term Actions

Implement no-regret immediate actions that were identified in the wake of the 2020 fires to benefit wildlife on all land ownerships including:

- Expanding on-the-ground capacity
- Enhancing capacity to process cultural resources reviews and consultations
- Enhancing the availability of native plants
- Species specific recovery actions
- Deferred grazing to allow habitat time to recover
- Wildlife friendly fence



Proviso Part 2: Long-term Strategy

Collaboratively develop a long-term strategy for shrubsteppe conservation in the face of wildfire. Specific components to be addressed include:

- Landscape scale restoration
- Spatial priorities for conservation
- Filling gaps in fire coverage
- Management tools to reduce fire-prone conditions on public and private lands
- Identify and make recommendations on any other threats



What we've done so far







WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

Allen Lebovitz
Wildland Fire and
Forest Resiliency Liaison



*Washington
Department of*
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Hannah Anderson
Wildlife Diversity Division Manager



Washington State
**Conservation
Commission**

Shana Joy
Regional Manager Coordinator

Steering Committee:

Guide, with input from advisors and technical teams,
the execution of the shrubsteppe proviso



Decision-Making Process



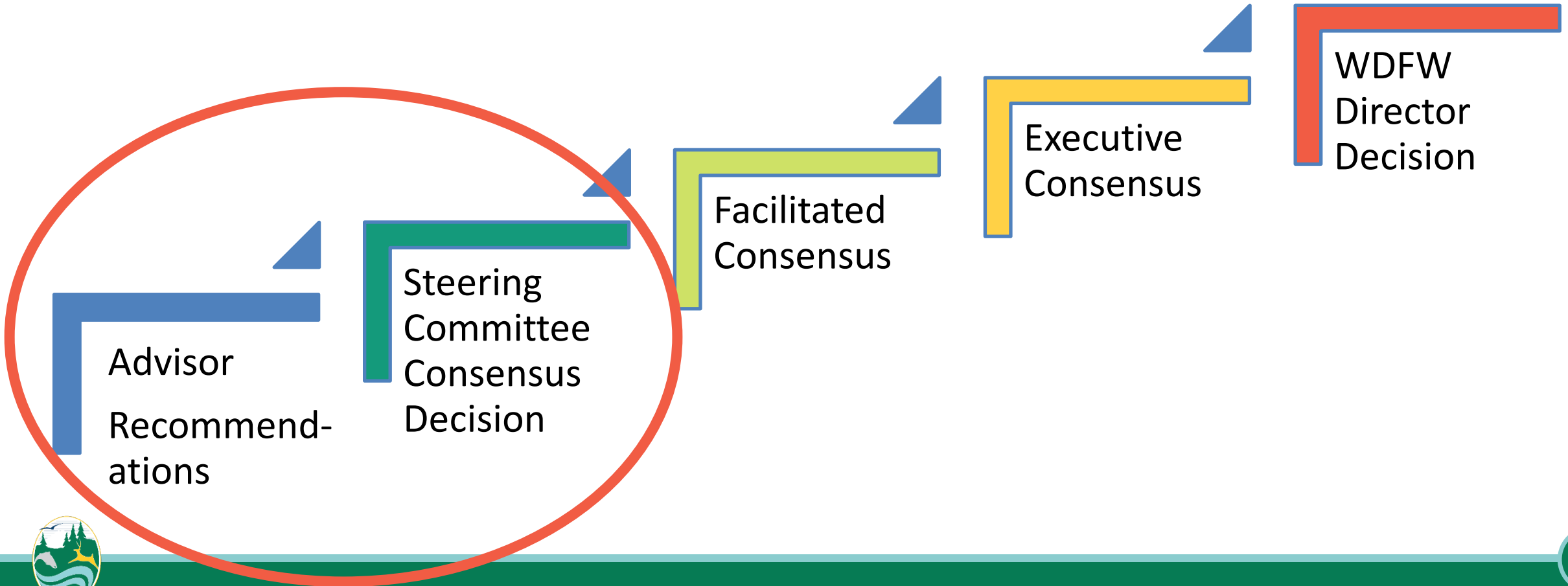
WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



Washington State
**Conservation
Commission**





Near-term Actions



Long-term Strategy

Advisory Groups

Represent diverse interests of shrubsteppe landscape

Vested and demonstrated interest in shrubsteppe

Capacity to commit to process

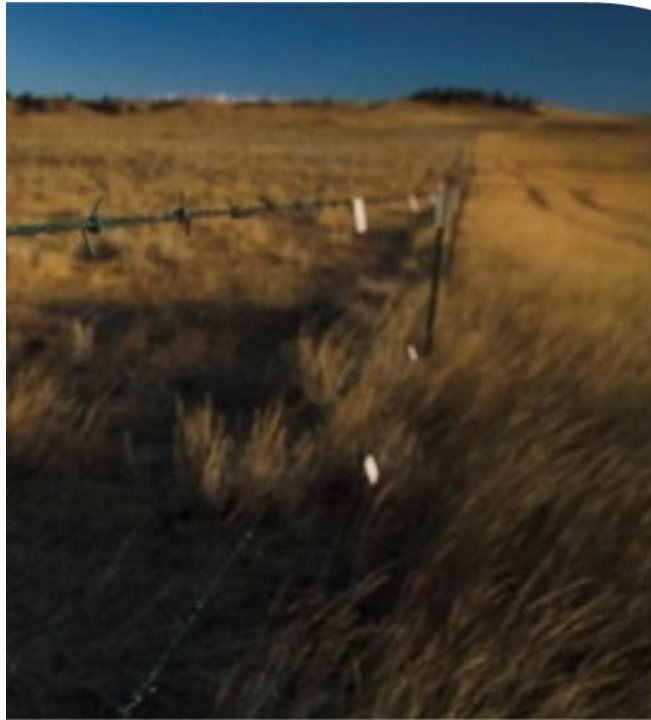




Near-term Action Technical Teams

Subject-matter experts convened to:

- Answer specific questions
- Make recommendations including
 - Geographical application
 - Optimal solution
 - Mechanism for delivery



Who's Involved

Near-term Action Advisory Group

- Bureau of Land Management
- Cattlemen's Association
- Conservation Northwest
- Foster Creek Conservation District
- Inland Northwest Wildlife Council
- Lincoln County Conservation District
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Okanogan County
- Pheasants Forever
- State Conservation Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Washington State University Extension
- Yakama Nation
- Yakima Training Center

Long-term Strategy Advisory Group

- Audubon Society
- Bureau of Land Management
- Cattlemen's Association
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Conservation Northwest
- Inland Northwest Wildlife Council
- Conservation Districts – Foster Creek, Lincoln, Okanogan
- County Commissioners – Grant, Chelan, Okanogan
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Pheasants Forever
- Private landowners
- State Conservation Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Washington Fire Chiefs
- WA Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Woodland Park Zoo
- Yakama Nation
- Yakima Training Center



Collaborative Progress & Accomplishments

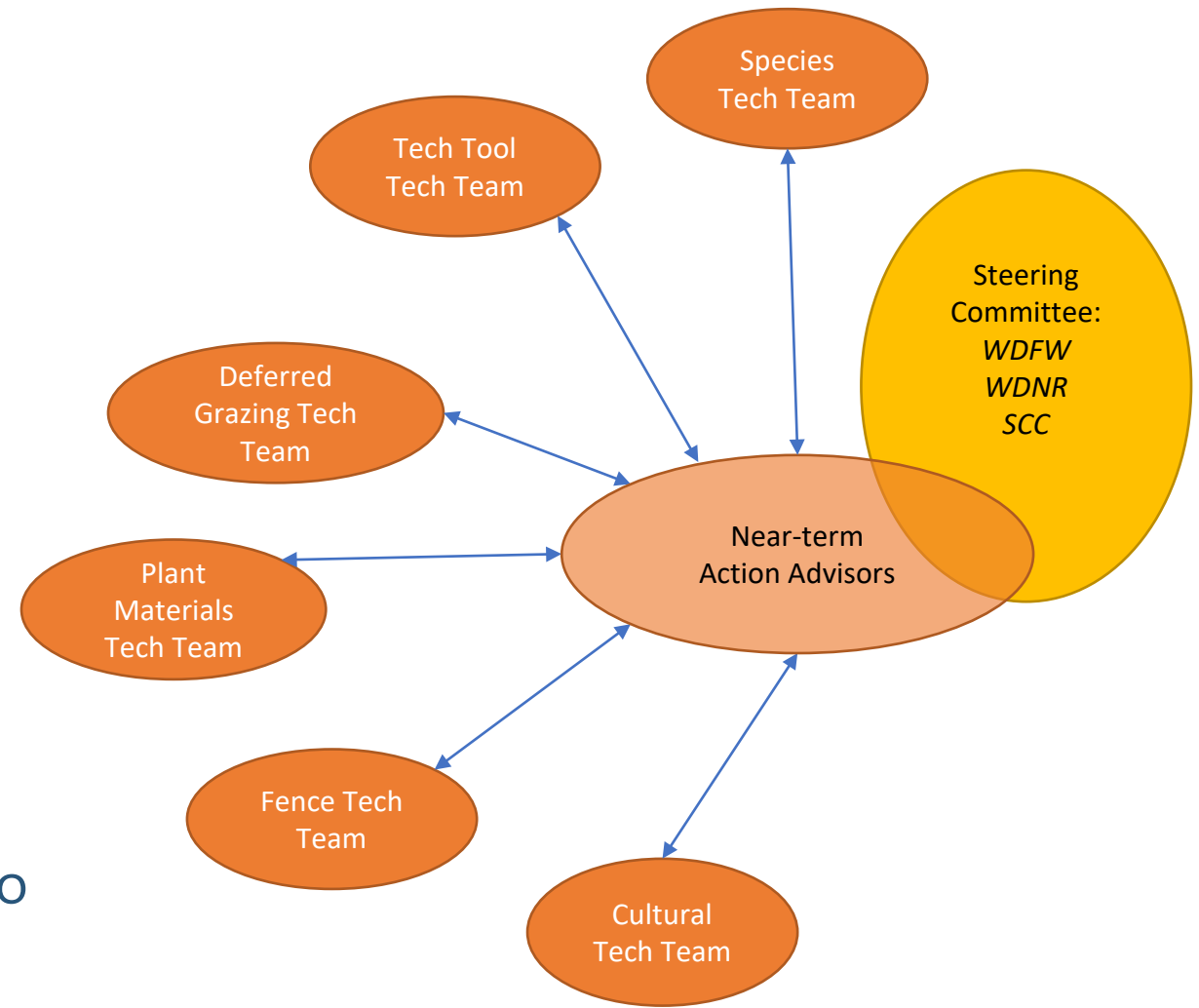
Convened steering committee, advisory groups and technical teams

Purpose, vision, decision-making, guidance

Established formal agreement between WDFW-SCC to facilitate resource delivery

Engaged Technical Teams and advisors for thoughtful input and meaningful review

Steering Committee final decisions on how to spend the money - Jan 2022



Responding to Urgency – Early Decisions

April 2021: Engaged with Dept of Ecology for WCC crew

July- Oct 2021: Hired WDFW Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator

Sept 2021 - ongoing: delivering proviso resources and services to **shovel-ready projects** – plantings, fence removal, pyra enclosures



Where we are now



Shrubsteppe Emergency
Response for Fire Recovery
(SERFR)

Washington Shrubsteppe
Restoration Initiative (WSRI)

Coordinated
Shrubsteppe Restoration
Program (CSRP)

Strategic Shrubsteppe Ecosystem
Restoration and Resilience to Fire
Initiative (SSERRFI)

Immediate Shrubsteppe Action
Program (ISAP)

Shrubsteppe Wildlife and Community
Restoration Initiative (SWCRI)

Washington Shrubsteppe Community,
Wildlife and Habitat Restoration Initiative
(WSCWHRI)

Shrubsteppe Restoration
Response Team (SRRT)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Shrubsteppe Restoration
Response Initiative (SRRI)

Shrubsteppe Landscape
Restoration Initiative (SLRI)

Shrubsteppe Wildland Fire Response
Recovery Program (WFRRP)



REBRANDING TO

**Washington Shrubsteppe
Restoration Initiative**



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat



Recovering Species



Supporting Working Lands



A Coordinated Approach

Coordinated and shared delivery of resources and services at the landscape scale

- holistic and strategic implementation
- filling identified capacity gaps
- efficiency and economies of scale
- sharing of technical expertise
- **ability to pivot to immediate threats**



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat



Recovering Species



Supporting Working Lands



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat

- Enhance and restore wildlife habitat, with special emphasis on SGCN.
- Expand native, perennial plant communities where they remain and reestablish them where they have been lost.
- Deploy restoration resources & services to areas of high wildlife value, irrespective of ownership, where opportunities exist





Habitat Restoration

Habitat restoration resources this biennium:

- **Field assistance (WCC)**
- **Cultural resource review/consultation capacity**
- **Native plant materials**
- **“Fill the gap” project dollars**

Supported and facilitated by
WDFW Shrubsteppe Restoration
Coordinator



Increase Cultural Resource Capacity

Pursue programmatic agreements with Tribes

- WDFW archeologist to focus on shrubsteppe
- Explore opportunities to support tribal participation

Enhance capacity to do project by project reviews/consultations

- Support contract archeologists as needed
- Support CD archeologist (fence)



Enhance availability of **locally-sourced** native plant materials

Seed purchase

- Native grasses/forbs from local growers

Sustainability in Prisons Project

- Sagebrush plugs
- Sagebrush seed orchard





Kelli Bush, SPP Co-Director,
The Evergreen State College

&

Carl Elliott, SPP Conservation
Nursery Manager, The
Evergreen State College



SPP Mission & Vision

Mission: empowering sustainable change by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons.

Diverse collaborations to:

- promote empowering education
- conserve biodiversity
- practice sustainability
- build healthier communities
- reduce recidivism



—

SPP Programs Not Designed to:

- provide cheap labor
- add stress & workload
- “greenwash” prisons
- focus on cost saving
- mandate participation by incarcerated people



Greater Inclusion

- Empowering leaders & environmental stewards
- Access to education
- Shared transformation & hope
- Improved representation & relevance environmental & conservation movements



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat



Recovering Species



Supporting Working Lands



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....

Bolstering
populations
while habitat
recovers and
restoration
occurs



Understanding
populations -
response,
distribution,
viability



Species-specific Actions

Install a fuel break around Beezley Hills pygmy rabbit popn

- Approach will be decided by landowner (TNC), supported/guided by DFW and DNR

Assess and establish new pygmy rabbit recovery area

- 0.2 FTE WDFW Pygmy Rabbit Recovery Coordinator

Assess wildlife communities in relation to land use and wildfires in east-central WA

- WSU-led research, adding support for additional technician and CD staff to do field work



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat



Recovering Species



Supporting Working Lands



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative: supporting wildlife by....

Working lands support resources
this biennium:

- Removal of burned fence
- Fence retrofit or replacement with wildlife friendly versions
- Facilitating deferred grazing to allow habitat time to recover



Supporting
Working Lands



Facilitating Deferred Grazing

Objectives:

- 1) promote habitat recovery in burned areas
- 2) avoid overgrazing intact areas too close to recently burned areas

Support for hay or alternative pasture rental

- Reimbursements (75% cost-share, up to \$10k/yr per producer)
- Facilitated by SCC and Conservation Districts





Wildlife Friendly Fence

- Removal of burned fence
- Installation or retrofit of wildlife friendly fences
 - “Cadillac version” design specifications
 - Fence markers only in strategic places
- Virtual fence – **proof of concept in WA**

Project solicitation opened 14 February 2022

Working lands support will be facilitated by the State Conservation Commission



Habitat restoration support will be facilitated by Dept of Fish and Wildlife



Where?

- Shrubsteppe habitat
- Initial focus on areas impacted by Pearl Hill, Cold Springs, and Whitney fires
- All land ownerships, driven by priority and opportunity



Project Considerations

- Benefit to Species of Greatest Conservation Need
 - Context with breeding habitats, habitat concentrations areas, Arid Lands Initiative Core and Priority Linkage Areas.
 - Special consideration to projects within pygmy rabbit recovery areas, important breeding and wintering areas for sage and sharp-tailed grouse.
- Habitat conditions and land use
- Long-term commitment to wildlife habitat
- Likelihood of success
- Overall wildlife value



Where we're going



WSRI moving forward

- Pilot biennium is a foundation from which to build
- More is needed to fully achieve the vision of landscape scale, coordinated and shared delivery of restoration resources and services that can be responsive to immediate threats.
- WSRI one component of the Long-term Strategy
- Aim to leverage other funding, mechanisms, and programs.



Shrubsteppe Long-term Strategy

- Habitat restoration needs (WSRI)
- Spatial priorities
- Filling gaps in fire coverage
- Tools to reduce fire-prone conditions
- Any other threats



Long-term Strategy Timeline

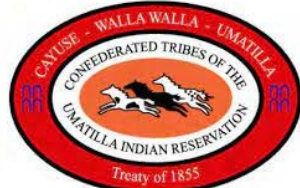
- Third-party neutral facilitator hired
- Advisory group convened
- Forming and norming now – 3rd meeting early March
- Defining values, mission, goals, objectives. What does success look like?
- Identifying strategy components – units of work
- Complete by June 30, 2023



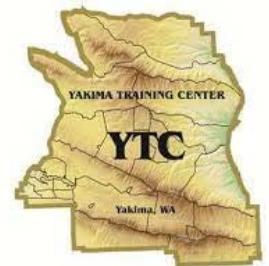
Thank you Tribes and Partners



The Nature Conservancy



Douglas County, WA





Questions?

