

# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative

Shrubsteppe Fire Preparedness, Response, Restoration Proviso

Hannah Anderson  
Wildlife Diversity Division Manager  
27 Oct 2022





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**



# And, there are things we can do

## Implement immediate no-regret restoration 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 to WDFW in 21-23 BN budget

On-going operating \$2.35mil/BN  
One-time capital \$1.5mil/21-23BN



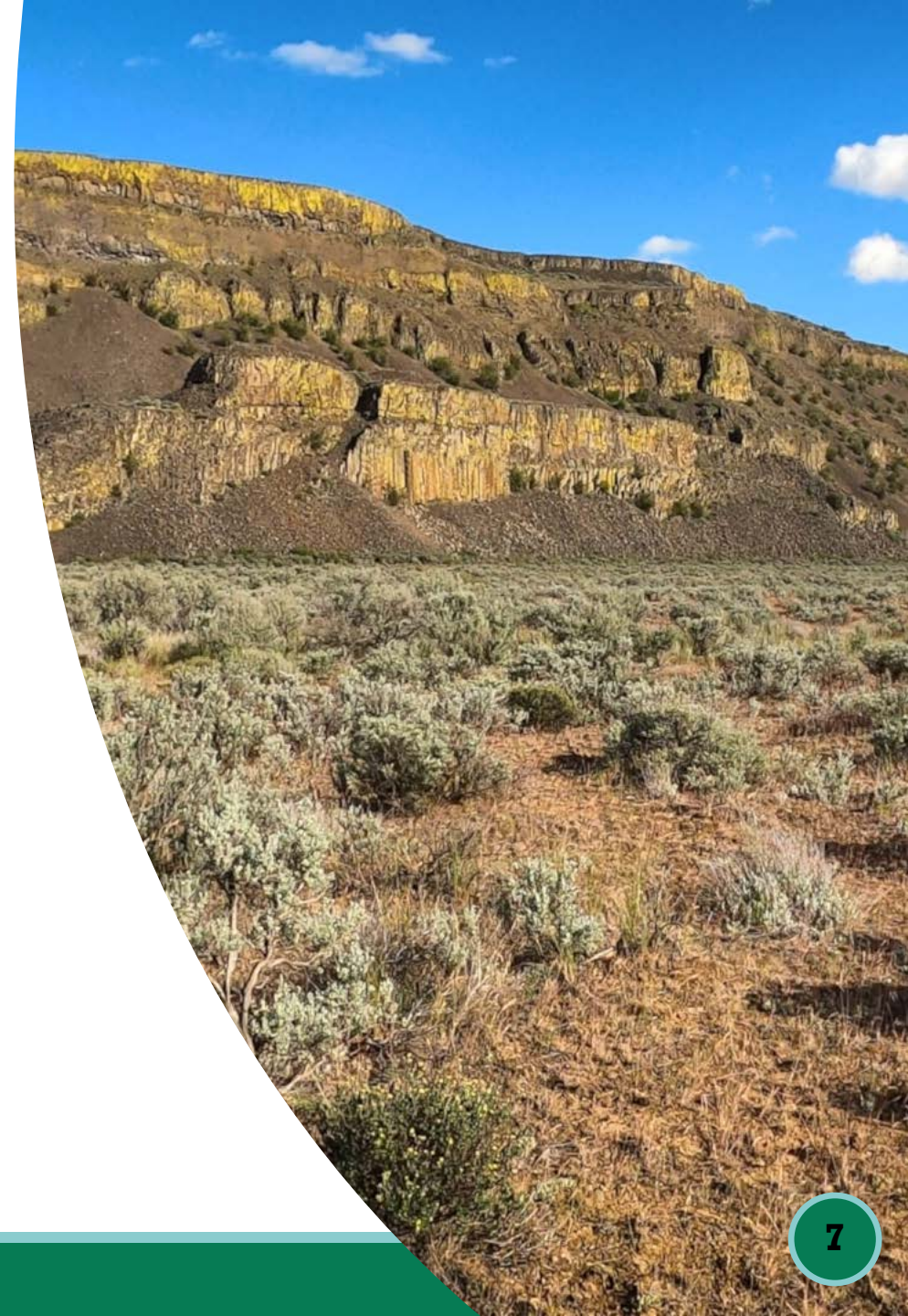
# Proviso Basics

**Why:** primary purpose to benefit wildlife  
*"...solely for the Department to restore shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife impacted by wildfires."*

**How:** be collaborative *"...effort must be coordinated with other natural resource agencies and interested stakeholders."*

**What:** Implement near-term post-fire restoration actions and develop a long-term strategy

**Where:** Shrubsteppe; all landownerships



# Primary purpose to benefit wildlife

Proviso Part 1 (Near-term Actions):

Implementing no-regret immediate actions identified in the wake of the 2020 fires 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





# Convening Collaborative Groups





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, technical teams, and working groups  
the execution of the shrubsteppe proviso



# Decision-Making Process



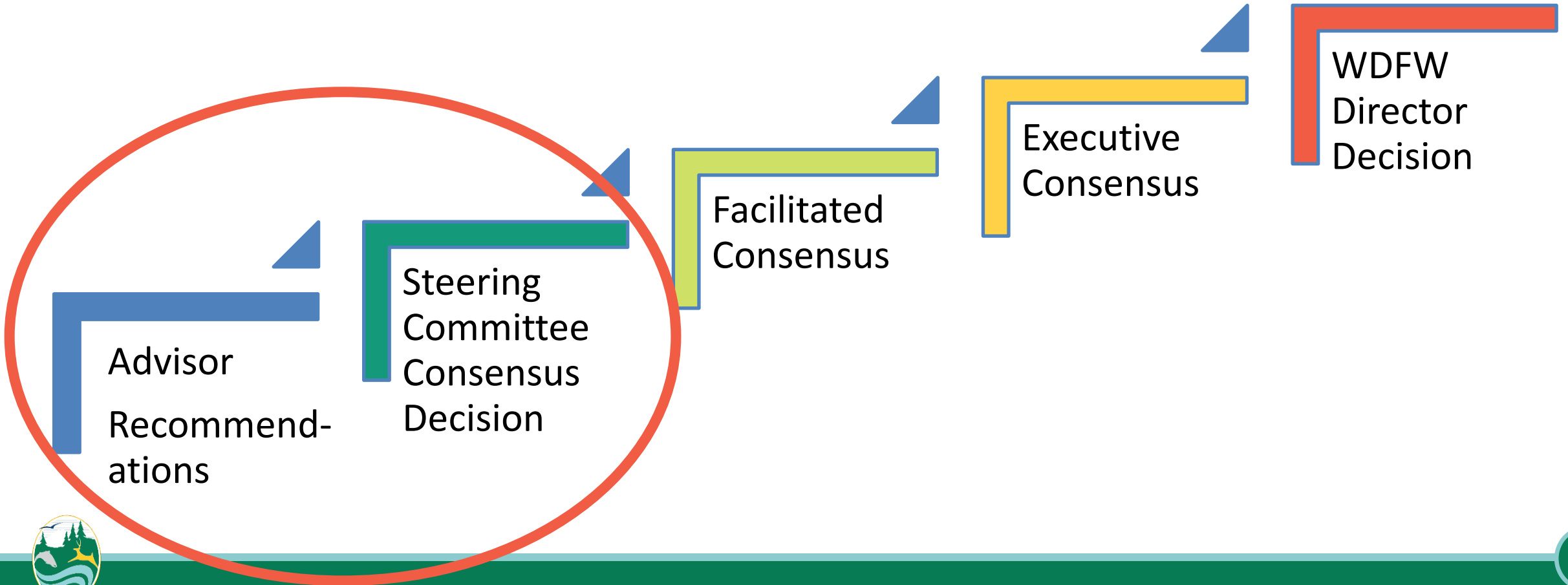
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Near-term Actions



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

Engaged subject-matter experts in:

- Species recovery
- Cultural resources
- Native plant materials
- Wildlife friendly fence
- Deferred grazing

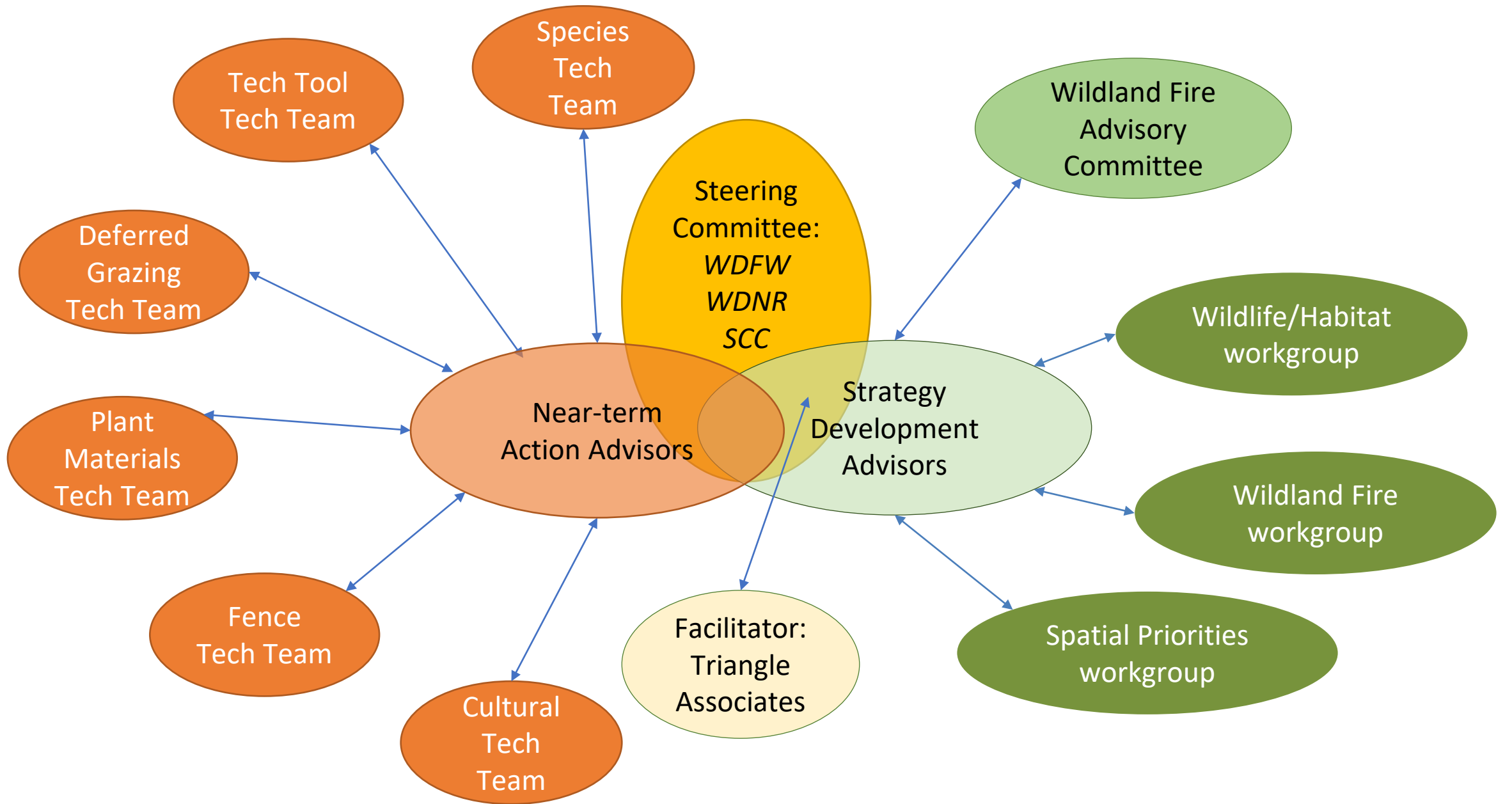
Convened to:

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



# Long-term Strategy Working Groups

Subject-matter experts in species recovery, shrubsteppe ecology, land management, land use, wildland fire response and management, community preparedness, and others were convened to support strategy development.



# 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 Colville Reservation
- 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





# Implementing Near-Term Actions



# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative: supporting wildlife by....



Restoring Habitat



Recovering Species



Supporting Working Lands



## WSRRI aims to:

- Expand and enhance available resources
- Deliver support for restoration actions by providing coordinated and shared resources and services to landowners on the ground
- Be responsive with restoration resources and services within the critical ecological windows that occur post fire



# Expanding Capacity

## Habitat Restoration

- Hired WDFW Restoration Coordinator
- Contracted with Washington Conservation Corps
- Engaged SCC and Conservation Districts
- Purchased seed drill

## Cultural Resources

- Engaged with Tribes, Conservation Districts for archeological services
- Contracted archeological consultants
- In process of hiring WDFW archeologist

## Native Plant Materials

- Partnered with Sustainability in Prisons Project to grow sagebrush plugs and seeds
- Purchased native seed stock from local growers to be ready to respond to wildfire events



# Where to deliver resources and services?

- Shrubsteppe habitat
- All land ownerships, driven by priority and opportunity
- Initial focus on areas impacted by Pearl Hill, Cold Springs, and Whitney fires
- Within burned area, priority considerations included
  - SGCN
  - Burned hot
  - Likelihood of cheatgrass invasion



# Habitat Restoration

- Upland seeding on private and public land (~1000 acres)
- Ensuring resiliency by controlling invasives after fire (~150 acres)
- Enhancing seed mix for wildlife value (~400 acres)
- Riparian restoration using beaver dam analogs and post-assisted log structures (~16 river miles)



# Species-specific Actions

- Supported pygmy rabbit translocation effort
- Removed and rebuilt burned enclosures
- Install a fuel break around Beezley Hills pygmy rabbit popn
- Assess and establish new pygmy rabbit recovery area



# Species-specific Actions

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





# 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)
- 11 landowners; ~35k acres rested



Rested pasture  
photo spring 2022

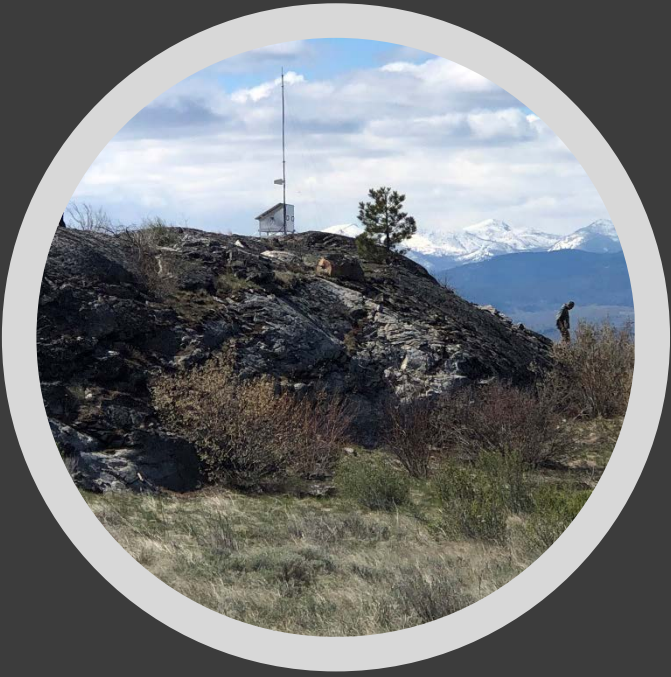
# Wildlife Friendly Fence: “hard fence”



Removal of burned  
fence

Installation or retrofit  
of wildlife friendly  
fences (~20 miles)





# Wildlife Friendly Fence: Virtual Fence (4 projects; ~40k acres)



# Next Steps

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- Additional solicitation in 2022
- Refine our processes for project selection and resource/service delivery
- Refine vision and trajectory of program through Long-term strategy



# Developing Long-term Strategy



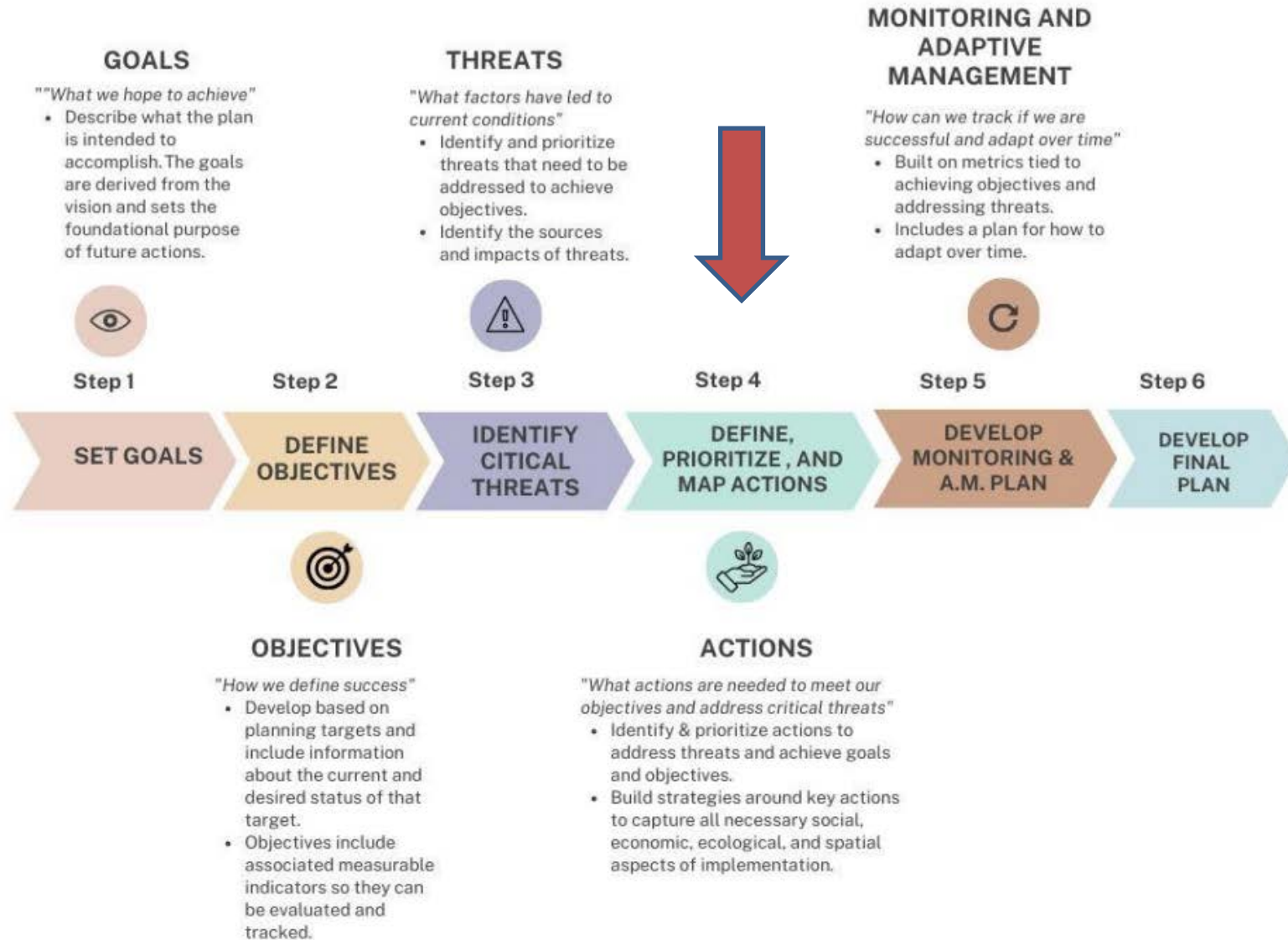
# Long-term Strategy

*“... for shrubsteppe conservation and fire preparedness, response, and restoration to meet the needs of the state’s shrubsteppe wildlife and human communities.”*

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

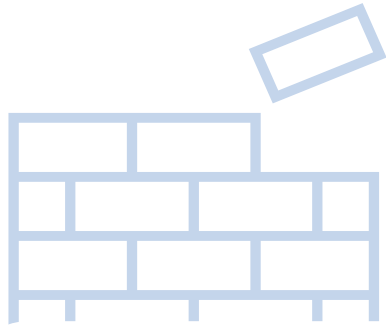


# Facilitated Collaborative Process



## Mission:

Use collaborative processes to develop a long-term strategy for Shrubsteppe conservation and fire preparedness, response, and restoration to meet the needs of the state's Shrubsteppe wildlife and human communities.



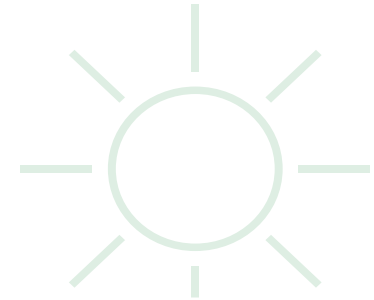
### Values

- Resilient Landscape
- Collaborative Engagement
- Multi-benefit solutions
- Wildlife Habitat
- Climate adaptation
- Informed by science
- Long-term Relationships
- Address Threats



### Vision

“A resilient Shrubsteppe ecosystem, restored and maintained through collaborative partnership for the benefit of wildlife and human communities”



### Goals

- Wildlife habitat and species recovery
- Wildfire risk and resilience





# Goals

## Wildlife Habitat and Species

- Goal #1: Native shrubsteppe habitats are conserved, perpetuated, and restored to support healthy wildlife populations and communities.
- Goal #2: Populations and communities of species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) and other species are representative, resilient, and redundant





# Goals

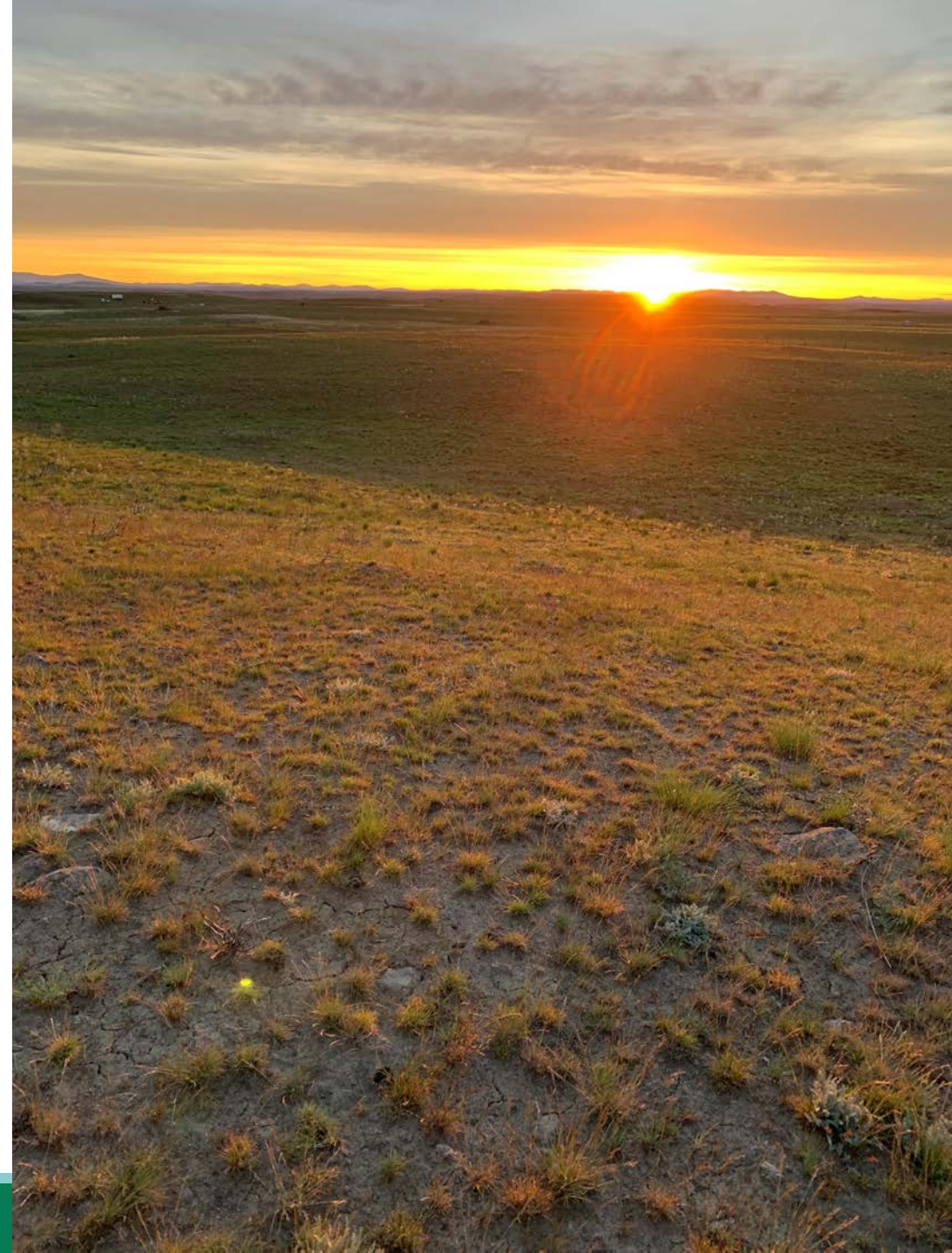
## Wildland fire Risk and Resilience

- Goal #1: Landscapes and communities in the shrubsteppe are fire-resilient.
- Goal #2: Damage from wildland fire to ecological and human communities in the shrubsteppe is reduced.
- Goal #3: The extent, frequency, and severity of wildland fire in the shrubsteppe is similar to pre-European settlement levels.



# Long-term Strategy Next Steps

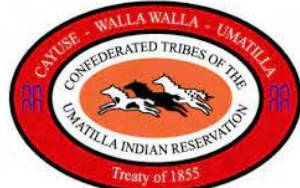
- Finalize draft objectives
- Define actions to meet objectives
- Discuss enabling conditions needed to implement actions
- Identify spatial priorities for shrubsteppe conservation
- Strategy due to legislature Sept 2023



# Thank you Tribes and Partners



The Nature Conservancy



Douglas County, WA

