



## Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

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**Meeting date:**

6/22/2023

**Agenda item:**

4. Land Transaction

**Presenter(s):**

Karen Edwards, Real Estate Services Manager

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**Item 1:** Proposed Acquisition of 597(+/-) acres in Klickitat County  
Simcoe Mountains Unit, Klickitat Wildlife Area, Region 5

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff request Commission approval to acquire a 579(+/-)-acre property in the Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area pursuant to [RCW 77.12.037](#).

**Background summary:**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) proposes to acquire an additional 597(+/-) acres in the Simcoe Mountains Unit (Unit) of the Klickitat Wildlife Area (WLA), in eastern Klickitat County. This Unit is in the Simcoe Mountains, northeast of Goldendale, with Yakama Nation and Bickleton Ridge forming the northern edge of the boundary. This is the sixth phase of what has been over a decade-long, multi-phased acquisition effort, which in turn will conserve almost 11,000 acres of critical habitat for wildlife, water quality for fish, and public recreational opportunities.

This proposed acquisition property was approved through Lands 20/20 in 2014 and will be acquired for the appraised value of \$580,000 using a Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), Critical Habitat (CH) grant from the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). Once purchased, it will be incorporated into the land acquired in the prior five phases, funded through multiple WWRP-CH grants from RCO. Prior phases are as follows:

- 2,694(+/-) acres acquired on July 29, 2016
- 920(+/-) acres acquired on July 29, 2016
- 440(+/-) acres acquired on July 13, 2017
- 1,154(+/-) acres acquired on December 15, 2017
- 5,087(+/-) acres acquired on August 29, 2019

Acquisition of the Unit was initiated to strategically protect a key landscape for conservation within a working lands framework. All land acquired to date, along with this proposed acquisition, was/will be purchased in fee from a large commercial timber company actively dissolving of its real property assets. WDFW desired to acquire another 1,546(+/-) acres from this major timber company, with grant funding to do so, but the property was sold to private buyers. If these 597(+/-) acres are not acquired by WDFW quickly, they too may be sold to other buyers that could result in neighboring, non-conforming uses on

land that was once important for inclusion into the Unit for conservation, as the threat of development is real and occurring in surrounding areas.

The Unit is a unique and diverse contiguous landscape, provides connectivity with existing federal land, and represents one of the most diverse fish and wildlife habitats in south central Washington. The western parts of the Unit receive more moisture and tend to be higher quality timberland, while the eastern parts of the Unit are arid and dominated by open rangeland and dry forest or oak woodlands. The headwaters of Rock Creek and its tributaries originate in the Simcoe Mountains with the Unit being part of the Rock Creek drainage, whose lower reaches support a genetically distinct run of steelhead. The Unit contains Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer, and oak/pine forests, as well as open meadows and riparian habitats. Lower elevations support grasslands, shrub-steppe, and riparian habitats that support numerous listed and priority species, including federally listed steelhead and Chinook salmon.

Western gray squirrels, a state-threatened species, occupy the conifer forests and mixed pine-oak woodlands. Conservation of key habitat for this species will help support this naturally occurring population. The Unit also serves as an important migration corridor for significant mule deer and black-tailed deer herds traveling from higher elevations to summer range and winter range found at lower elevations closer to the Columbia River. The Unit is also home to wild turkeys, bears, cougars, elk, coyotes, and bobcats. There are a great number of bird species found in the Unit, such as Golden eagles and Prairie falcons, that are known to occupy the Unit year-round. The Rock Creek basin has a rich diversity of neotropical species and provides habitat for unique species such as the yellow breasted chat and the Swainson's hawk.

The Unit, formerly managed as working forest and rangeland, is being managed consistent with direction from a Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) process that includes participation by, but not limited to, WDFW, Eastern Klickitat Conservation District, Central Klickitat Conservation District, Yakama Nation, Klickitat County, grazing permittees, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Western Pacific Timber, Columbia Land Trust, neighboring landowners, and the local outdoor recreation community ([Simcoe CRM](#)). This management is focused on long-term protection of fish and wildlife habitat and includes the use of working lands management tools. This partnership promotes the values and interests of the local communities in sustaining the cultural and resource importance of this area, while conserving critical habitat for wildlife, protecting water quality for fish, and providing recreational opportunities such as hunting, wildlife watching, horseback riding, hiking, and wildflower viewing.

Through the Simcoe CRM the [Simcoe Mountains Management Plan](#) is being developed and will become part of the [Klickitat WLA Plan](#) and guide forest management, range management, wildlife and habitat management, recreation management, hydrology, cultural resources, infrastructure and maintenance, as well as public access. A [news release seeking input on the plan](#), a [draft of the plan](#), along with [public meetings and plan development process](#) can be found on WDFW's website.

WDFW will be hiring an Assistant WLA Manager for the Simcoe Mountains Unit due to its large land base, diverse ecological landscape, complexity and collaboration of the CRM, multifaceted management, and distance from the rest of the WLA.

Initial post-closing incidentals for this property, such as noxious weed control, fencing, gates, survey work, signage, and cultural resources survey work, are eligible in the WWRP-CH grant. Ongoing operation and maintenance costs for this proposed 597(+/-)-acre acquisition property is \$52.00 per acre, being a total of \$31,000 annually. This amount will be included in WDFW's 9v decision package for ongoing operation and maintenance for newly acquired land.

Grazing is currently occurring within the Unit. If determined to be consistent with the desired ecological conditions of the proposed acquisition property, grazing may be permitted pursuant to WDFW's [Grazing on WDFW Lands, Grazing Program guidance and tools](#).

The proposed acquisition property is within the Washington Department of Natural Resources Forest Fire Protection Assessment boundary and will be calculated per [RCW 76.04.610](#) at \$17.50 for the first 50 acres and .27¢ on each acre exceeding 50 acres, for a total expected annual fee of \$165.19

Per RCW [77.12.201](#), Klickitat County does opt into PILT as provided in [RCW 77.12.203](#), and this additional payment will occur through the Washington State Treasurer's Office.

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**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommend Commission approval to acquire the 579(+/-)-acre property in the Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area pursuant to [RCW 77.12.037](#).

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**Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:**

Protecting habitat and providing public recreational opportunities.

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**Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:**

Operation and maintenance costs.

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**Action requested and/or proposed next steps:**

Approval of this land transaction.

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**Draft motion language:**

Motion: I move to approve the land transaction as presented by staff.

Is there a "second"?

If so, then motion maker discusses basis for motion; other Commissioners discuss views on motion; amendments, if any, proposed and addressed.

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**Post decision communications plan:**

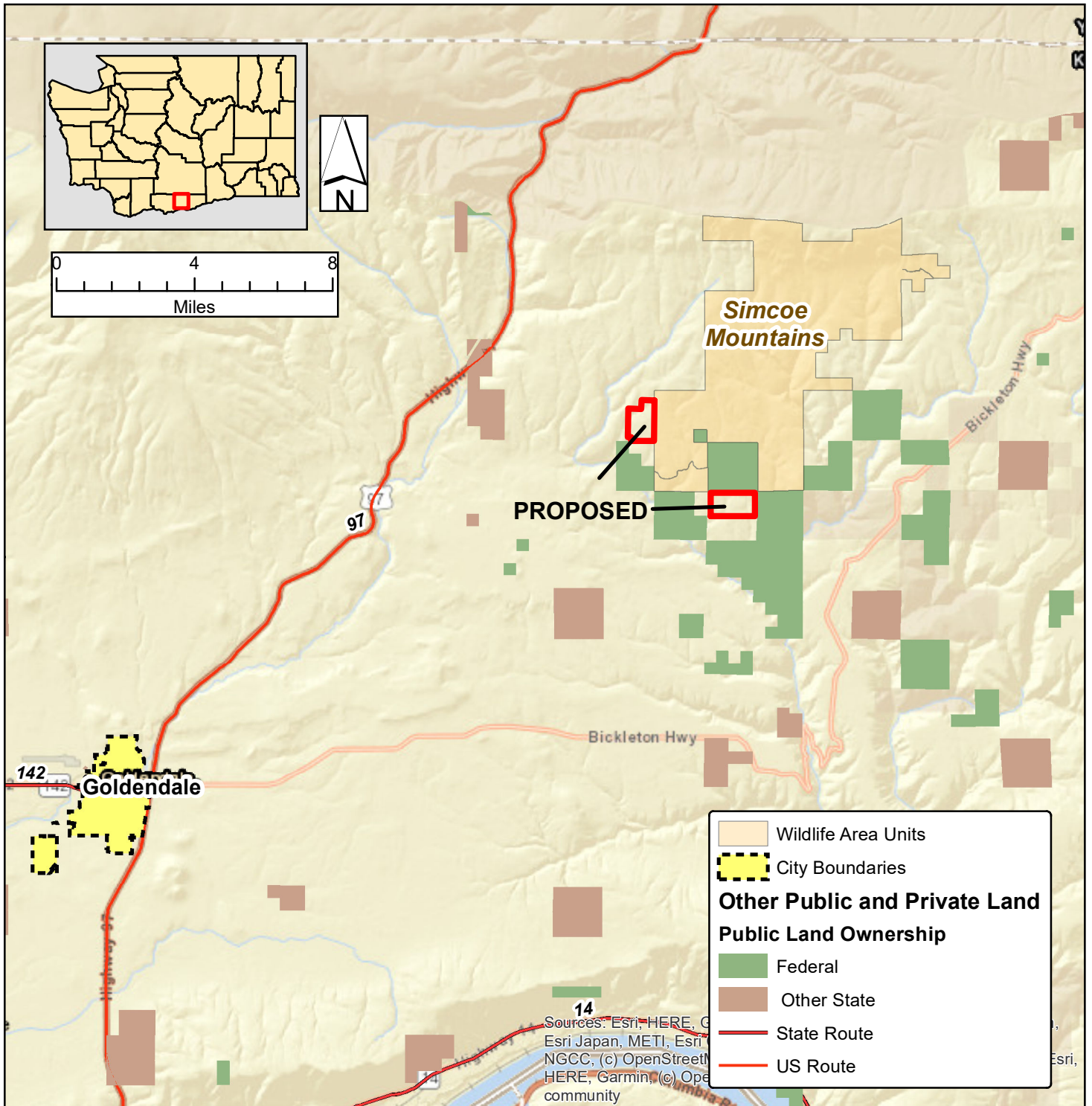
WDFW will distribute a press release informing the public of this action.

**ITEM:1 PROPOSED ACQUISITION, SIMCOE MOUNTIANS UNIT, KLICKITAT WLA**

**ACRES: 597 (+/-)**

**COUNTY: KLICKITAT**

**LEGAL: SECTIONS 7 & 21, TOWNSHIP 5N, RANGE 18W, W.M.**



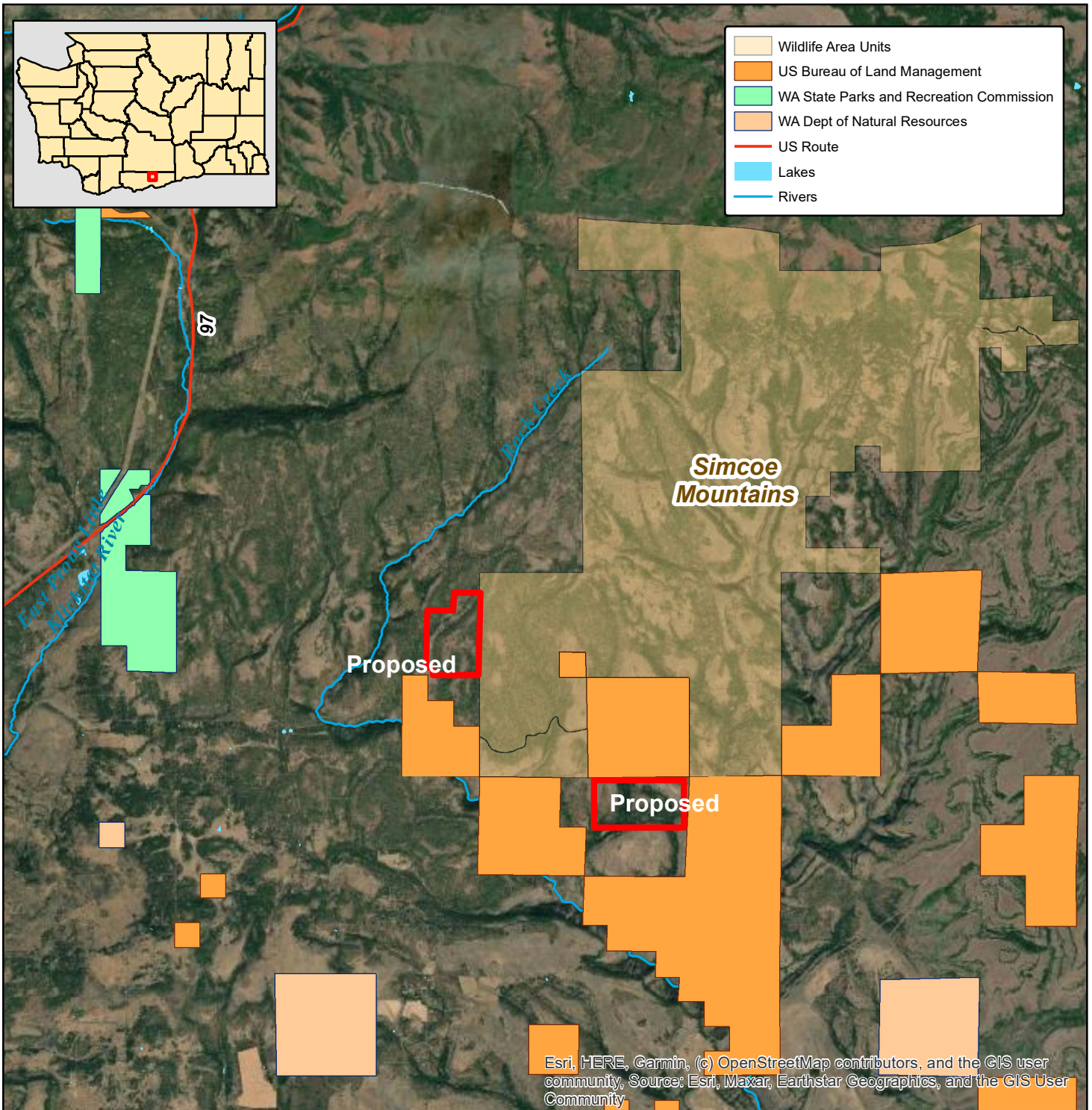
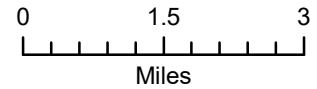


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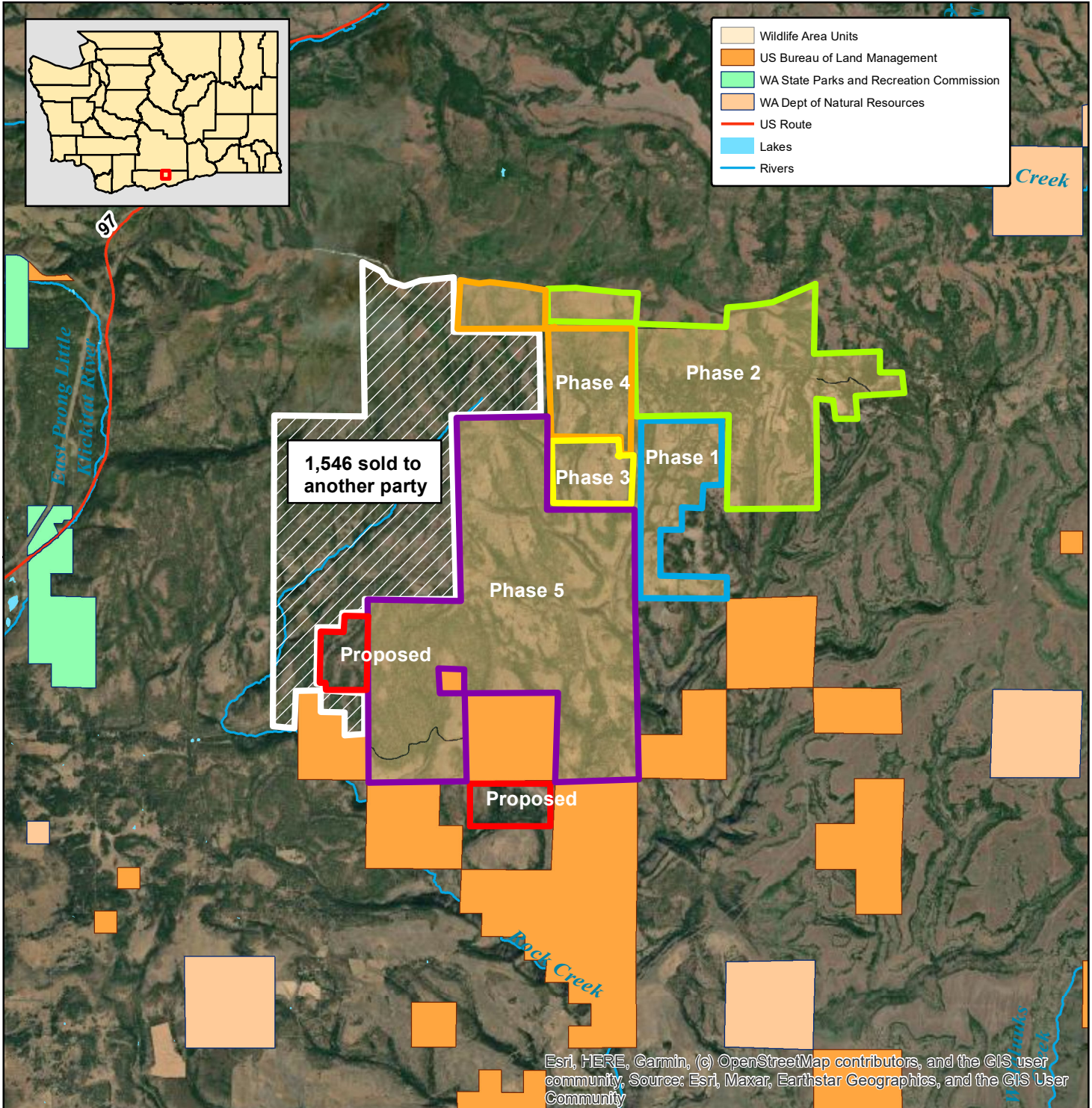
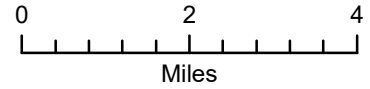


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