

Washington's

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy



“The Washington Wildlife Action Plan will help conserve wildlife and vital natural areas before they become too rare and costly to protect. As our communities grow, the Wildlife Action Plan will give us the ability to fulfill our responsibility to conserve wildlife and the lands and waters where they live for future generations.”

- Washington Governor Christine M. Gregoire

“Washington’s Wildlife Action Plan, as well as those of the other states and territories, presents a new comprehensive vision that will change the face of wildlife conservation in North America. We are exploring new frontiers, biologically, socially and economically. In Washington, this is more than the ethic of conserving our state’s biodiversity — lasting solutions to complicated natural resource issues require collaborative processes with our many conservation partners.”

- Dr. Jeffrey P. Koenings, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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strategies for action

A Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

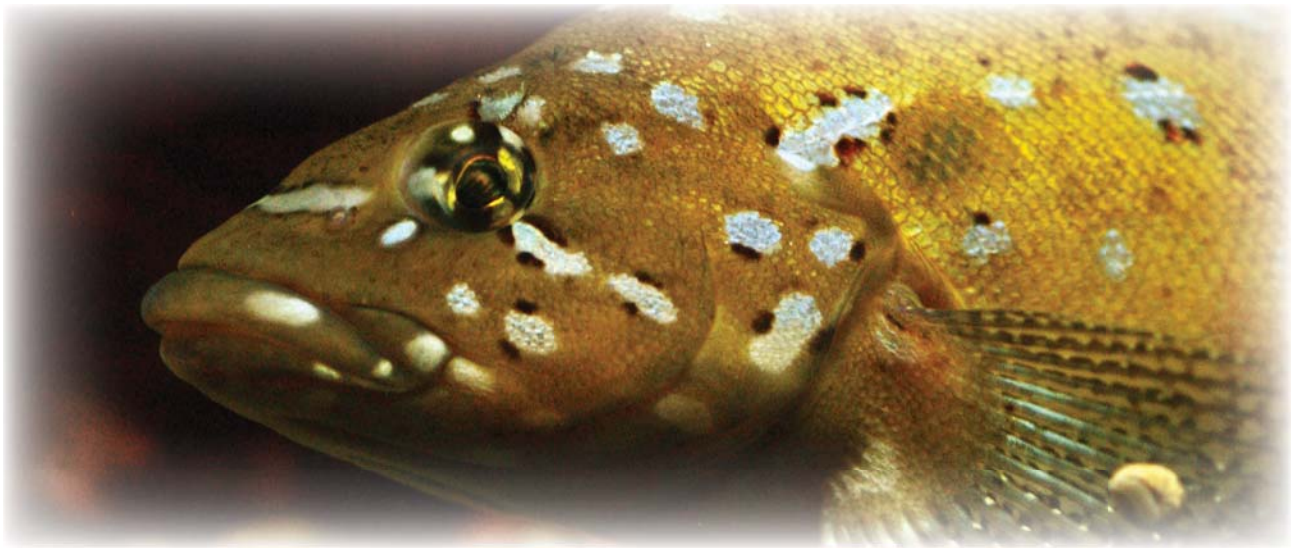
Each state and territory in the U.S. has developed a proactive plan to conserve wildlife species before they become too rare and before conservation actions become more costly. This is a summary of Washington's plan — the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). The CWCS was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October 2005. It qualifies Washington for an important new federal funding source: the State Wildlife Grants program.

The CWCS is part of Teaming with Wildlife, a broad national bipartisan wildlife conservation coalition that includes more than 3,000 organizations across the nation.

The CWCS was developed by scientists and planners, with input from conservationists, natural resource users, and the general public. Washington

is one of the most ecologically diverse states in the United States. Seacoasts and estuaries, grasslands and prairies, dry shrub-steppe and various types of forest create many habitats for many species of wildlife. The CWCS provides a solid biological foundation and strategic framework for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, its conservation partners and Washington residents to take action with specific action plans:

- To identify and safeguard wildlife and natural habitats important to many of our family traditions and for future generations.
- To conserve all wildlife and the habitats they live in, starting with the animals and places most in need of help.
- To assure that the natural habitats needed by wildlife are healthy enough to provide clean water and air for both wildlife and people.



CANARY ROCKFISH | victoria o'donnell

Washington's biodiversity

What's unique about our state?

Two of the state's ecosystems — the channeled scablands of eastern Washington and the Olympic rainforest — are found nowhere else in the world!

These varied landscapes and the animals and plants that live there create Washington's biodiversity — a natural heritage important to the long-term health and economic security of every resident of the state.

Change is normal in naturally evolving environments, but Washington's rapid human population growth and activities associated with increased economic vitality have stressed portions of our natural environment. The combined effects of multiple stressors has disrupted functioning habitats and damaged fish and wildlife populations. The CWCS recognizes this fact, but also acknowledges that both people and wildlife are vital to the Evergreen State. The CWCS seeks to guide the protection and

enhancement of habitats critical to the future of our state's wildlife and thus, to our way of life.

What's at Stake

In many areas of our state, natural places are no longer able to provide for the basic needs of both people and wildlife, including clean air and water, food, and shelter. The losses and changes are considerable in urbanizing areas like the Puget Sound region, where communities are pushing out from the shoreline up into the watersheds to the very foothills of the Cascade Mountains. Wild runs of Pacific salmon used to teem throughout these watersheds, only to be threatened by land use changes and development projects. On the Columbia Plateau, much of the natural shrub-steppe and grasslands are now growing food for people rather than for native wildlife such as the greater sage-grouse. A new threat has emerged from invasive plant and animal species that have no natural enemies, and thus expand rapidly into new areas every year. They are a common enemy to native wildlife and upland farmland, as well as commercial shellfish.

The stakes are high, but responding to change is the Washington way. Moving Washington forward requires a focused effort — and that focal point is the CWCS. The CWCS recognizes that fragmented upland habitats can be enlarged, riparian areas can be restored, estuarine nearshore can be functional, and water can be cool and clean. It also recognizes that people will continue to raise families in and around these habitats. And that a balance needs to be created between the two.

How much have we lost?

- ✓ 70% of estuarine wetlands
- ✓ 50 to 90% of riparian habitat
- ✓ 90% of old growth forest
- ✓ 70% of arid grasslands
- ✓ 50% of shrub-steppe habitat

Some of these habitats are among the most diverse and productive for native fish and wildlife.

COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES		CWCS ACTIONS
Leave no species behind	Protect wildlife and habitats most in need of help, while working to keep common species common.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need ✓ Determine priority habitats ✓ Identify the most serious conservation problems ✓ Identify the most effective conservation actions
Build a plan of plans	Use existing plans, assessments, and scientific tools.	Review and synthesize hundreds of conservation plans that provide information and recommendations for priority wildlife species and the habitats upon which they depend.
Strengthen conservation partnerships	Leverage taxpayer dollars by expanding on WDFW's existing partnerships and identifying new opportunities for cooperating with other organizations.	Partners: Federal and state agencies Local governments Farmers and forest landowners Treaty Indian tribes Nonprofit conservation organizations Local and regional land trusts
Emphasize biodiversity conservation	Identify, protect and restore areas that support the greatest diversity of wildlife.	Coordinate development and implementation of the CWCS with the Washington Biodiversity Council.
<p><i>In keeping with WDFW's mission, the CWCS focuses on animals and animal habitat diversity. It does not directly address rare plants, plant associations or landscape features that are protected by the Washington Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Plan.</i></p>		



PYGMY RABBIT | tara davila



the CWCS toolbox

Protect the wildlife and habitats most in need of help, while working to keep common species common

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Washington's list of 193 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) is the driving force behind the CWCS. It builds on current efforts to protect fish and wildlife species, including those listed on state and federal endangered, threatened and sensitive species lists. It also includes species not yet listed but for which conservation actions or additional information is needed. Life history details and other information about all wildlife on the SGCN list are included in the full CWCS text.

Priority Habitats

The CWCS includes habitats that are crucial for the conservation of at-risk wildlife species and for keeping common species common. This list of 20 habitats was developed using two detailed scientific assessments (the WDFW Priority Habitats and Species list and *Wildlife Habitat Relationships in Oregon and Washington*), as well as the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Some examples of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their associated priority habitats are shown in photos throughout this booklet.



GREATER SAGE-GROUSE | u.s. forest service



SHARPTAILED SNAKE | william leonard

Most Effective Conservation Actions

- ☛ Conserve and restore habitat on public, private and tribal lands.
- ☛ Implement species conservation strategies and coordinated salmon recovery plans.
- ☛ Ensure that local, state and federal laws are implemented to protect fish, wildlife and habitat.
- ☛ Conduct biological assessments, research, surveys and monitoring of fish, wildlife and habitat.
- ☛ Identify scientific information for local governments and planners.
- ☛ Expand wildlife information and conservation education programs.

Greatest Conservation Challenges

- ☛ Reverse habitat loss due to conversion, fragmentation, and degradation.
- ☛ Curb the spread of invasive alien plant and animal species.
- ☛ Improve the diversion and allocation of surface water to leave more water for fish and wildlife.
- ☛ Improve water quality.
- ☛ Recover salmon populations.
- ☛ Implement updated forest conservation and management practices.
- ☛ Implement updated agricultural and livestock grazing practices.
- ☛ Reverse the spread of plant and animal diseases and pathogens.
- ☛ Improve our knowledge of wildlife species, populations and habitats.



OLYMPIC MARMOT | stephen penland



in depth:

Top conservation challenges and effective conservation actions for wildlife

Top Conservation Challenges

Habitat loss through conversion, fragmentation, and degradation

Habitat loss through conversion to other uses, fragmentation and degradation is the most serious statewide threat to Washington's native fish and wildlife. More than half the state's highest priority wildlife habitats have been lost since statehood in 1889. Once native habitat is converted to other uses, remaining habitat is left as isolated fragments in a maze of multiple land uses. Wildlife populations associated with these fragmented habitats may be blocked from their

normal movement patterns and migration routes, and isolated from other breeding populations. Thirty thousand to 80,000 acres of functional habitat for wildlife are lost or altered every year.

Invasive alien plant and animal species

Invasive, non-native plants and animals outcompete and displace native species, profoundly changing natural systems. Invasive alien species evolve in other parts of the world and arrive in Washington without the natural predators and diseases that control their growth in their native environment. This is a critical problem for native fish, wildlife and biodiversity, and for our vital agricultural industry.



BULLFROG EATING DUCKLING | william radke

Cordgrass (*Spartina*) outcompetes and eliminates native salt marsh vegetation and fills in tidal mudflats, which are important habitat for native salmon, shellfish, shorebirds and other migratory bird populations. *Spartina* infestations are present in Willapa Bay, and are gaining a foothold in the inland marine waters of Puget Sound.

Cheatgrass has replaced native grassland communities all over the Intermountain West, including Washington. Originally from Asia, it has limited or no food value for wildlife and livestock and is a major fire hazard in shrub-steppe deserts and ponderosa pine forests.

Bullfrogs have a severe impact in freshwater habitats on declining species such as western pond turtles, northern leopard frogs, and other native amphibian, fish and even bird species.

Other alien invasive species include, but are not limited to: Japanese eelgrass, oyster drill, varnish clam, European green crab, yellow starthistle, knapweed species, Dalmatian toadflax and sulfur cinquefoil.

Effective Conservation Actions

Identify scientific information for local governments and planners.

The CWCS identifies the types of reliable landscape-scale data and biological information needed by local governments for good decision-making to conserve important wildlife habitat, protect natural areas critical for clean air and water, and administer the state Growth Management Act and other locally administered land use laws.

Enhance and conserve habitat on public, private, and tribal lands and waterways.

The CWCS includes specific conservation and acquisition recommendations for each priority habitat type. These recommendations will be used to:



WDFW BIOLOGIST AND FRIENDS AT PUYALLUP FAIR | wdfw

- Make up-to-date management decisions on the statewide network of more than 840,000 acres owned or managed by WDFW.
- Help WDFW improve its role in providing other public agencies with wildlife information and habitat recommendations for the lands they manage. Forty percent of Washington's land base is in public ownership.
- Work with Indian tribal councils to identify and conserve important wildlife habitat on tribal lands. About 16% of Washington is within tribal reservations.
- Boost financial and non-financial incentives for private landowners and provide technical assistance for private conservation organizations, county extension agents, and conservation districts. Approximately 60% of Washington's land base is privately owned.

CWCS and Lands 20/20

In 1990, at the urging of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, the Legislature created the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). This program makes grants to state and local government entities to permanently protect habitat and recreational lands across the state. The program has made over \$450 million available and funded 775 projects. The WWRP has enabled the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to acquire more than 80,000 acres of critical habitat to support species such as sharptail grouse, pygmy rabbits, salmon, elk, deer and upland game.

Land acquisition is a powerful conservation tool that entails more than just the fee title purchase of lands; it also includes conservation easements and other types of landowner agreements. In order to better articulate the relationship between land acquisition and conservation goals, WDFW published *Lands 20/20: A Clear Vision for the Future* in July, 2005. *Lands 20/20* clearly defines those values by which WDFW will make land acquisition decisions in the future, and lays out a process that incorporates scientific review and public involvement.

Lands 20/20 recognizes the legacy established by WDFW after 70 years of acquiring lands for fish and wildlife and related recreation. It also recognizes acquisition as just one conservation tool, and that to be truly successful, conservation of Washington's remaining fish, wildlife and habitat will require public understanding and support of many different conservation strategies. These strategies are outlined in Washington's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). *Lands 20/20* also utilizes the CWCS to inform the acquisition process and to place it in the context of other conservation tools.

- Identify areas with high habitat or biodiversity values that can best be conserved through fee-title acquisition, land donations, land trades, or conservation easements.

Implement species conservation strategies and coordinated salmon recovery.

The CWCS focuses attention on wildlife species included on the statewide Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list. A range of conservation actions is recommended for these species, from the development of recovery plans for wildlife most in need of help, to baseline population surveys for other species.

Large-scale, coordinated salmon recovery efforts are well underway in Washington. The CWCS does not duplicate these efforts, but implementation of the CWCS will enhance salmon recovery by focusing on priority habitats throughout the state.

Expand wildlife information and conservation education programs.

Effective conservation of habitat and biodiversity can only be accomplished if the public and policy makers understand the biological needs of wildlife. The CWCS identifies a wide range of necessary education and information actions.

Conduct biological assessments, research, monitoring and surveys of fish, wildlife and habitat.

The CWCS recommends targeting areas where knowledge should be improved to ensure that conservation priorities and programs reflect the current needs of wildlife and habitats.



Ensure implementation of local, state, and federal laws to protect fish, wildlife and habitat.

The CWCS recommends enhanced enforcement of existing harvest and habitat laws, as well as partnerships with other agencies to publicize and implement laws, regulations, and permit conditions that prevent the destruction or degradation of important habitat.

Building a Plan of Plans

WDFW and its many partners are involved in a range of conservation planning and assessment efforts for fish and wildlife species, habitats, and biodiversity. This work was accomplished through collaboration among policy makers, years of field investigation and analysis by scientists, and input from the public. Some of these efforts are management and recovery plans for individual species such as salmon or lynx. Others focus on managing certain types of habitat. Others address biodiversity statewide. We consulted many plans and assessments to build the CWCS on a solid foundation of both previous and ongoing work, including:

Ecoregional Assessments

Ecoregional assessments (EAs) address species and habitat conservation targets and map biodiversity for each of Washington's nine



ECOREGIONS OF WASHINGTON | wa dept. of natural resources

ecoregions. The CWCS incorporates the results of the EAs to enable us to address biodiversity needs on a landscape scale, as well as problems and management priorities that vary throughout the state.

Ecoregions are broad ecological patterns in the landscape. Each ecoregion has a unique combination of soils, geology, hydrology and climate that in turn create the right conditions for unique plant communities and wildlife. Washington has nine ecoregions, ranging from the marine-influenced lowlands of the Puget Trough to the dry shrub-steppe of the Columbia Plateau.

Washington Natural Heritage Plan

This program provides the framework for a statewide system of state-owned natural areas that provide habitat for rare and declining species and places for healthy, functioning ecosystems.

Other plans include:

- Northwest Forest Plan
- Northwest Power and Conservation Council subbasin plans
- Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan
- Salmon recovery plans and assessments
- Washington GAP Project
- WDFW Wildlife Area Plans



WESTERN POND TURTLE HATCHING | wdfw

from strategy to action

Implementing the Wildlife Action Plan

From the Bottom Up

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff and local stakeholders are building on CWCS strategies by implementing a Wildlife Action Plan in each of Washington's nine ecoregions. These people have the localized knowledge and expertise to determine conservation priorities for their ecoregion.

Action #1. Determine which species, habitats and landscapes represent the greatest conservation opportunities for each ecoregion.

Drawing on the CWCS toolbox, they will work at three scales. First, they will use the statewide list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and species recovery plans to determine priority species for their ecoregion. Working at the landscape scale, they will consult Ecoregional Assessments and specialized maps to identify areas of highest biodiversity. Finally, they will examine the CWCS list of priority habitats to make sure that "all the bases are covered."

Action #2. Identify specific actions needed to realize ecoregional conservation opportunities.

Next, each group will consider conservation challenges identified in the CWCS and evaluate conservation actions already underway by WDFW

and other agencies and organizations. They will conduct a "gap analysis" to determine what still needs to be done. And they will explore ways to create corridors of connectivity between protected landscapes.

Action #3: Activate partnerships; identify conservation roles.

Although WDFW has primary responsibility for wildlife conservation in Washington, implementing the Wildlife Action Plan will require the cooperation and active participation of the public as well as other agencies and conservation organizations. WDFW will work with these conservation partners to prioritize on-the-ground actions and identify roles for each partner.





NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG | john dudak

From the Top Down

Secure adequate funding for wildlife conservation

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will work closely with other state wildlife agencies and the nationwide Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to get the CWCS in the hands of state, federal and local decision-makers, business interests, the conservation community and the general public. In particular, WDFW will make copies of the CWCS available to members of Congress and federal agency administrators who will help provide the necessary funding to implement the Wildlife Action Plan.

Emphasize biodiversity conservation

The Washington Biodiversity Council is developing a proactive blueprint for Washington's first-ever biodiversity strategy. This 30-year vision will include a strategy for educating the public about biodiversity and will incorporate statewide and ecoregional priorities and benchmarks for conservation of land and water (both fresh and marine).

Implementation partners

- ☛ 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
- ☛ Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
- ☛ Tribal land management agencies
- ☛ Private forest landowners
- ☛ Local governments
- ☛ Local conservation districts, irrigation districts, and weed boards.

Other public and private conservation partners:

- ☛ Governmental partners who establish policy, administer programs and regulations, or direct funding to wildlife conservation include the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Puget Sound Action Team, and Washington Departments of Ecology and Transportation.
- ☛ Nonprofit conservation and wildlife recreation groups such as The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Washington, People for Puget Sound, Cascade Land Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Washington Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and local land trusts.



PACIFIC TOWNSEND'S BATS | darrell pruet

Detailed implementation

The CWCS is a dynamic planning strategy designed to be continually examined, refined and adapted to meet changing circumstances. The WDFW, with advice from its public and private partners, will carry on this effort. They will:

- Continue to re-examine and refine the relative priority of wildlife species and associated habitats.
- Integrate the CWCS into the 30-year Biodiversity Conservation Strategy currently being crafted by the new Washington Biodiversity Council.
- Coordinate multi-agency land acquisition with other state and local agencies through the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC).
- Accelerate coordinated planning for species and habitat conservation among federal and state land management agencies.
- Complete local habitat assessments and develop new and better databases and mapping products for local governments to use in Growth Management Planning.
- Better integrate management of marine and aquatic ecosystems with terrestrial ecosystems, both within WDFW and among state and federal agencies.
- Incorporate identified species and habitat conservation priorities into operational work plans within WDFW and other conservation partners.
- Incorporate specific conservation actions into WDFW's cost accounting systems to help develop and monitor project budgets and priorities.

What role does science play in wildlife and biodiversity conservation?

- ✓ Identifies *what* should be conserved.
- ✓ Determines *how* it should be conserved.
- ✓ Measures and monitors the *effect* of conservation actions.



What role do Washingtonians play in wildlife and biodiversity conservation? They use the science to influence or decide:

- ✓ *How much* wildlife and biodiversity should be conserved.
- ✓ *Where* wildlife habitat should be conserved.
- ✓ *How much* money and other public resources should be applied to conservation.

SAGEBRUSH LIZARD | adam p. summers

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has a responsibility to protect our state's unique legacy.

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and Wildlife Action Plan outlined in this executive summary are integral to the preservation of our rich natural heritage for current and future generations.

For more information and access to the full CWCS in PDF format, go to:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/cwcs>



“In the end, we will conserve
only what we love;
We will love only
what we understand;
We will understand only
what we have been taught.”

*- Baba Dioum,
Senegalese ecologist*