

Washington Wildlife Action Plan

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Washington snapshot

Geography: Washington's diverse topography, exposure to Pacific Ocean currents and weather patterns, and location on the migratory path of many wildlife species make it one of the most biologically diverse states in the nation, encompassing seacoast, shrub-steppe, native prairie, parts of four major forested mountain ranges, and Puget Sound.

Landscape: Washington contains two ecosystems found nowhere else in the world: the Olympic rainforest and the channeled scablands of eastern Washington. These ecosystems and the biological diversity they support range across a landscape that extends from the Pacific Northwest Coast and Puget Sound in the west to the Columbia Plateau and Northern Rocky Mountains in the east.

Wildlife: Washington is home to a large variety of fish and wildlife species—a natural heritage important to the long-term health and economic security of every resident of the state. However, changes to the landscape and native habitat, primarily as a result of human

activity, have put many of these species at risk. There is a great need to be proactive, to protect what the state already has, and to keep common species common before they become endangered or at risk.



Puget blue butterfly/Kelly McAllister, WDFW

Washington's planning approach

Although the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is driven by planning at many different levels, from multi-agency salmon recovery plans to individual Wildlife Area plans, creation of the State Wildlife Grants program and the CWCS requirement provided an

opportunity for WDFW to undertake an agency-wide effort to reassess wildlife conservation priorities and set a new direction for the future. Specifically, the CWCS process provided the impetus for a thorough reevaluation of priorities for species and habitat conservation, a transition from statewide to ecoregional conservation, acceleration of the evolution from species management (fine filter) to a more ecosystems-based management approach (coarse filter), and expanding the emphasis on biodiversity conservation, at the statewide and ecoregional scales.

“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



Operation Dark Goose/WDFW

“The CWCS creates a compelling vision for wildlife conservation and represents a key resource for conservation planning in Washington state.”
 – John Floberg, Manager of Ecoregional Planning, The Nature Conservancy

In times of diminishing habitat and declining revenues for conservation, it has been important for WDFW to initiate a new round of strategic planning and to begin to establish new ground rules for how the state and its conservation partners prioritize species, habitats and conservation actions, as well as for where the state directs future funding and human resources to address these priorities.

- Invasive alien plant and animal species
- Water quantity—allocation and diversion of surface water
- Water quality issues
- Salmon recovery
- Forest conservation and management practices
- Agricultural and livestock grazing practices
- Disease and pathogens
- Inadequate data on wildlife species, populations, and habitat

Habitat loss through conversion, fragmentation and degradation: Habitat conversion, fragmentation and degradation together pose the most serious statewide threat to Washington’s native fish and wildlife resources. Since statehood in 1889, these combined problems have cost the state more than half of its highest priority functioning habitats, including an estimated 70 percent of estuarine wetlands, 50 to 90 percent of riparian habitat, 90 percent of old growth forest, 70 percent of arid grasslands, and more than 50 percent of shrub-steppe.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Washington

The following major influences have the greatest impact on Washington’s fish, wildlife and habitat base:

- Habitat loss through conversion, fragmentation and degradation

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation*	Threatened/endangered listed species
Mammals	140	33	17
Birds	341	58	12
Herptiles	150		
Reptiles		8	4
Amphibians		11	2
Fish	470	41	0
Invertebrates	>20,000		
Snails		4	0
Mussels		6	0
Insects		26	2
Arthropods		6	0
Totals		201	37

** Many of the wildlife species on Washington’s SGCN list ranked high because of biological concerns such as threat and vulnerability. Some were targeted for the list because it was determined that their recovery or conservation efforts were not adequately funded. Others were included because their life histories and habitat relationships are not well understood and need more research, surveys and/or management dollars directed to them. Only native animal species were considered in developing this list; however, no major groups of wildlife (taxa) were excluded from consideration.*

Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Shrub-steppe <i>Ownership:</i> Mix of private/public	Burrowing owl, Ferruginous hawk, Sage grouse, Washington ground squirrel, Pygmy rabbit, Merriam's shrew, Sagebrush lizard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion to agriculture and grazing • Alteration of fire regimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with public and private landowners to reestablish and restore native shrub-steppe and grassland plant communities to support species at risk and increase species richness. • Work with public agencies and private landowners to reduce the potential destructive impact of wildfires on native habitats by incorporating measures such as fire breaks and prescribed burning into wildlife and land management plans.
Marine and nearshore	Killer whale, Pacific harbor porpoise, Brant Common loon, Western grebe, Surf scoter, Marbled murrelet, Pacific herring, Pacific sand lance, Yelloweye rockfish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoreline habitat loss • Environmental contamination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project (PSNERP) to plan and undertake large-scale restoration initiatives. Coordinate PSNERP with other restoration efforts, including the Puget Sound and Adjacent Waters Program, the Northwest Straits Commission, salmon habitat restoration through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, and other efforts. • Work with governmental and nonprofit agencies to develop an ecoregion-wide strategy for identified toxins and other pollutants: their sources, destinations and effects, and ways to reduce their discharge.
Westside grasslands (prairies) <i>Ownership:</i> Mix of private/public	Western gray squirrel, Mazama pocket gopher, Western bluebird, Slender-billed white-breasted nuthatch, Puget Sound fritillary butterfly, Propertius' duskywing butterfly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss and fragmentation • Invasive species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect existing habitat, remove invading trees and shrubs, and restore function to prairies, balds, and heaths through management plans, conservation agreements, easements, or acquisition. • Provide funding, incentives and technical assistance to private landowners to eliminate undesirable invasive plant species and to restore native plants that provide important habitat for native fish and wildlife. Use integrated pest management practices to control currently established invasive species with help from volunteers.
Ponderosa pine forest <i>Ownership:</i> Mix of private/public	Flammulated owl, Northern goshawk, Great gray owl, Pygmy nuthatch, White-headed woodpecker, Western gray squirrel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest practices • Alteration of fire regimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the Washington Forest Practices Board to develop, implement and enforce forest practices regulations to enhance biological diversity on existing state and private managed and protected areas. • Coordinate with public land managers on the use of controlled fire regimens and stand management practices. Attempt to simulate natural disturbance regime and restore proper ecological function. Consider impacts to local wildlife in each burn plan, including timing, size and location of the burn.

Recommended actions to conserve Washington's wildlife



Killer whale/NOAA

“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

Invasive alien plant and animal species:

Invasive species constitute a severe and growing threat to Washington’s native wildlife, habitat and biodiversity; second only, many believe, to habitat fragmentation. Everywhere in the state, aggressive non-native plants and animals are displacing native species, profoundly altering natural systems and affecting the state’s economy and human health.

Working together for Washington’s wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife met with existing WDFW advisory councils, an appointed CWCS Advisory Committee, federal and state agencies, Washington Indian tribes, the Governor’s Office, key legislators and the Washington State Association of Counties on many occasions. WDFW met with a wide range of agencies and organizations in the initial outreach phase, but the main outreach focus was on public and private agencies and organizations with special responsibilities for fish and wildlife conservation. Special outreach efforts were directed toward conservation partners such as The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Washington and Defenders of Wildlife, as well as private timber and agriculture groups, which are regulated and have a direct influence on Washington’s rural landscape. A CWCS Advisory

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Committee was appointed by the Director of Fish and Wildlife and met periodically throughout the development of the CWCS. The committee included professionals experienced in their respective industries and fields. They provided honest, constructive feedback and served as a valuable sounding board for development of the CWCS.

WDFW sent out a statewide press release announcing that the draft CWCS would be posted on WDFW’s website and a series of six public meetings would be held around the state. These public meetings were successful in giving interested stakeholders an opportunity to review and ask questions about the draft CWCS. The public was also asked to provide comments on the draft CWCS via our Washington CWCS website. Follow-up meetings were scheduled with major conservation partners, including the Washington Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the USDA Forest Service, and Indian Tribes with significant land holdings.

A number of outreach tools were developed by WDFW prior to publicizing the CWCS process. These include the CWCS website at www.wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/cwcs, a variety of CWCS PowerPoint slide-shows tailored to fit different audiences, and two color brochures: one describes the Washington CWCS, and the other illustrates the interactive relationships between the CWCS and other planning efforts at different scales.

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