



## STATE OF WASHINGTON

March 4, 2024

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House Rural Development,  
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132B Legislative Building  
Post Office Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees –

It is with great pride that the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Conservation Commission jointly submit the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) 30-year Conservation Strategy (Strategy).

We are grateful for the ongoing investment made by the Legislature following the devastating wildfires of 2020 that severely impacted eastern Washington's shrubsteppe habitats, wildlife and people. The FY21-23 Shrubsteppe Budget Proviso supplied a much-needed initial investment in wildlife conservation in the face of wildfire in Washington's shrubsteppe. This Strategy is the final deliverable of that initial proviso, yet just the beginning of the work to restore shrubsteppe habitats and wildlife, support working lands, and create a more wildfire resistant and resilient landscape.

The proviso provided a seed that has grown through collaboration with Tribes and public and private partners and interests to encompass a comprehensive and strategic approach to conserve this precious piece of Washington's heritage. The WSRRI Strategy sets 30-year goals and objectives and identifies the key actions needed to achieve them. Included in these actions and as guided by the proviso, the Strategy outlines a pathway for enhancing wildlife and habitat restoration and supporting working lands, defines spatial priorities for shrubsteppe conservation, and identifies approaches to fill gaps in fire coverage and reduce fire-prone conditions on public and private lands.

Our three agencies are committed to the implementation of this Strategy and are proud to be strong collaborators with a diverse set of Tribal, public, and private interests in that endeavor. We are grateful for the Legislature's support of this important work and look forward to discussing it with you more in the future.

The Strategy Executive Summary is appended here. The full Strategy can be downloaded at: [wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02489](https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02489).

More information about WSRRI can be found at: [wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/shrubsteppe#strategy](https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/shrubsteppe#strategy).



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**



Washington State  
**Conservation  
Commission**



# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative

Long-Term Strategy 2024 – 2054

*Fostering resilient wildlife and human communities  
in the face of wildfire in the shrubsteppe landscape.*

Publication Date:  
March 1st, 2024



Washington Department of  
**FISH & WILDLIFE**





Above:  
Shrubsteppe Habitat on Oak Creek Wildlife Area. J. Haug

Cover photo:  
Sunset over shrubsteppe, with Chopaka Mountain in the distance,  
on the Charles and Mary Eder Wildlife Area Unit J. Haug



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Designed by Erika Frost,  
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# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative Long-Term Strategy 2024-2054

## Executive Summary



Washington Department of  
**FISH & WILDLIFE**

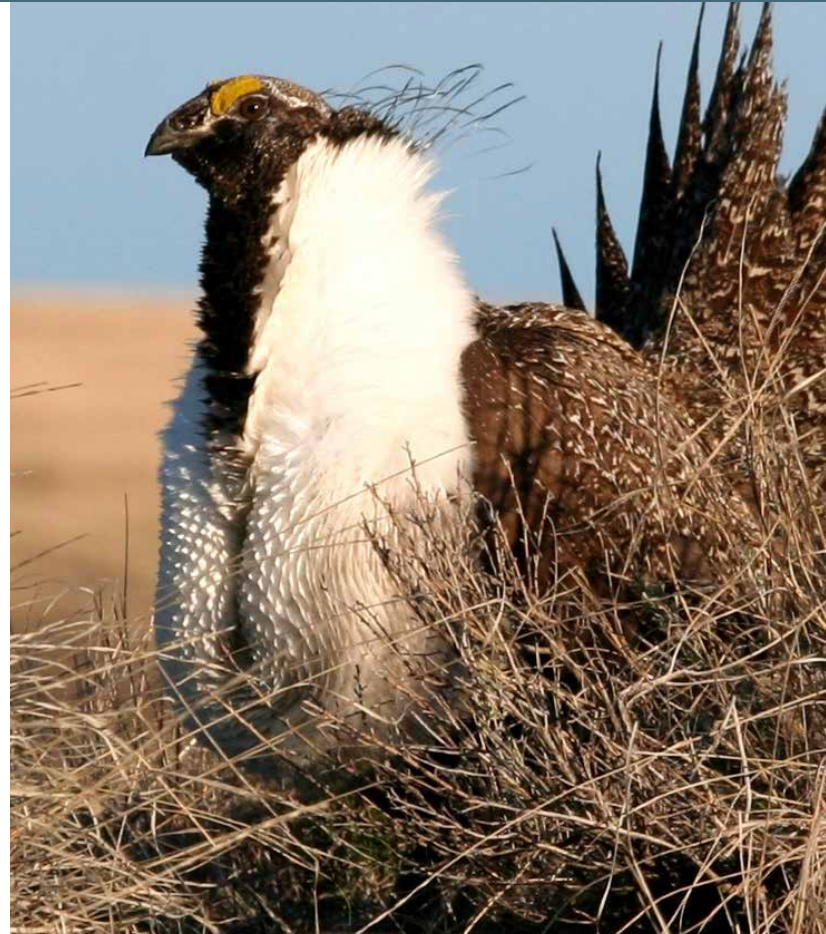


## Introduction

Once covering more than 10 million acres in Eastern Washington, 60 to 80 percent of our state's shrubsteppe landscape has been lost or degraded. This is a diverse landscape, with large expanses of arid mixed shrub and grasslands, scattered permanent and seasonal wetlands, riparian areas, sand dunes, and basalt cliffs and talus. It provides habitat for a wide range of wildlife and plant species, some of which only occur here. Many of these dependent species are federally or state listed as endangered or threatened, and yet more are candidates for listing. This landscape is home to people who derive their livelihoods from these lands and provide essential stewardship and conservation of fish and wildlife habitats.

On September 7, 2020, a historic fire event driven by high winds resulted in 80 fires and nearly 300,000 acres burned in a single day; several of these fires were unprecedented in their scale and impact on wildlife. The Cold Springs Canyon/Pearl Hill fire, the largest wildfire in Washington State recorded history, burned over 410,000 acres of shrubsteppe habitats in Douglas and Okanogan Counties, and the Whitney fire impacted an additional 127,400 acres of shrubsteppe habitats in Lincoln County.

The extent of the areas impacted, the speed at which the fires moved, and the intensity at which they burned resulted in severe and immediate impacts to wildlife, habitat, and human communities, through loss of forage for wildlife and domestic livestock, loss of cover for wildlife coming into winter, and loss of structures and fencing used for management of wildlife and working lands. Long-term impacts include the conversion of shrub-dominated to grass-dominated habitats, and the expansion of invasive species. These fires burned in areas that were critical for endangered and threatened species, including greater sage-grouse, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, likely setting back their recovery for many years to come.



Greater sage-grouse. WDFW

**"When we all woke up the morning after the September 2020 Pearl Hill, Cold Springs, and Whitney fires we all wondered how bad it would be. Thankfully our state legislature led by Senator Christine Rolfes jumped into action and initiated an ongoing funding source to help landowners, communities, and wildlife recover from those devastating fires."**

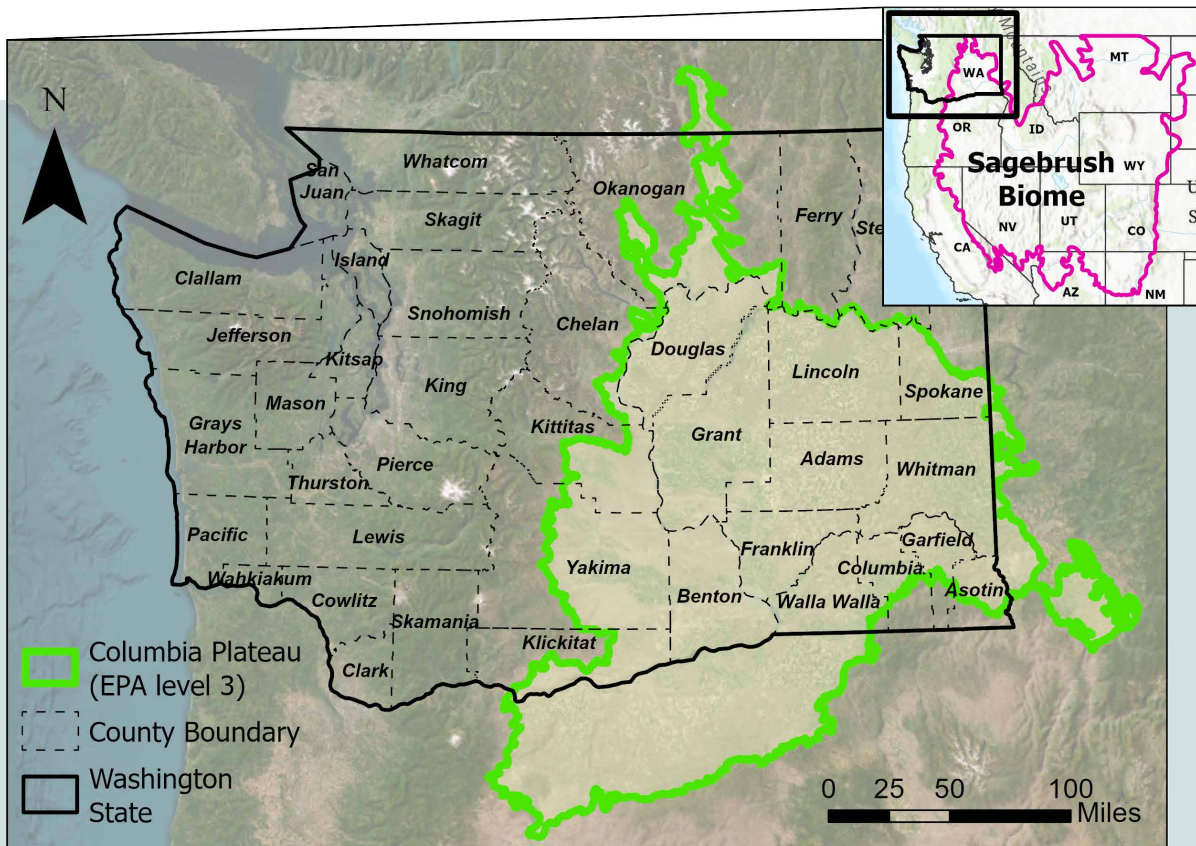
- Jay Kehne, Conservation Northwest

In response to the unprecedented damage from these fires, the Washington State Legislature, through a budget proviso, directed the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to collaborate with the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to restore shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife impacted by wildland fire.

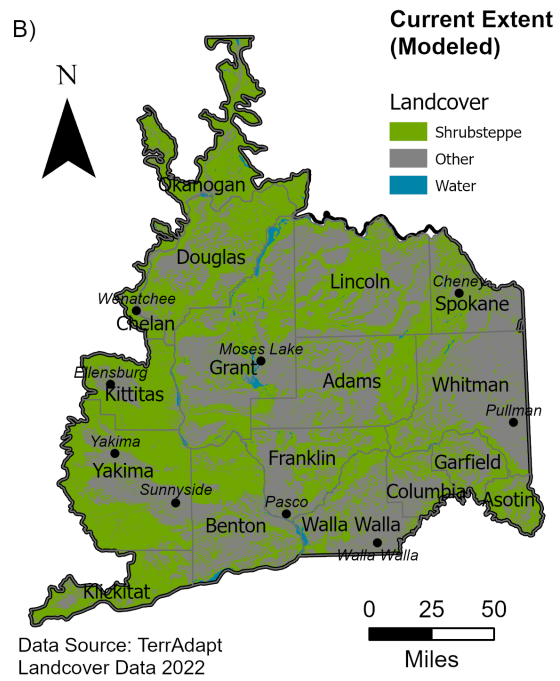
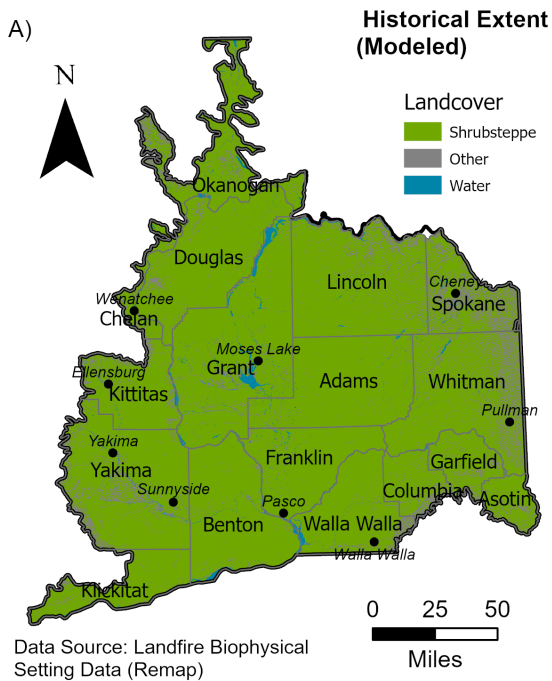
Together, these three agencies worked together to implement immediate actions that support wildlife habitat and rural landowners in response to these fires, and collaboratively develop a long-term strategy to conserve and restore wildlife habitats, enhance wildfire preparedness and response, and support working lands in Eastern Washington's shrubsteppe landscape. This collective effort is the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI).

WSRRI's primary objective is to conserve and restore Washington's shrubsteppe wildlife and habitat with an emphasis on addressing the escalating extent, frequency, and severity of wildland fires. WSRRI also addresses the needs of people that live and work in Washington's shrubsteppe ecosystems and benefit from healthy and resilient landscapes, habitat, and wildlife populations. WSRRI is a collaborative effort, closely informed and guided by an advisory group comprised of tribal nations and diverse stakeholders with a vested interest in Washington's shrubsteppe landscape, including various public and private partners.

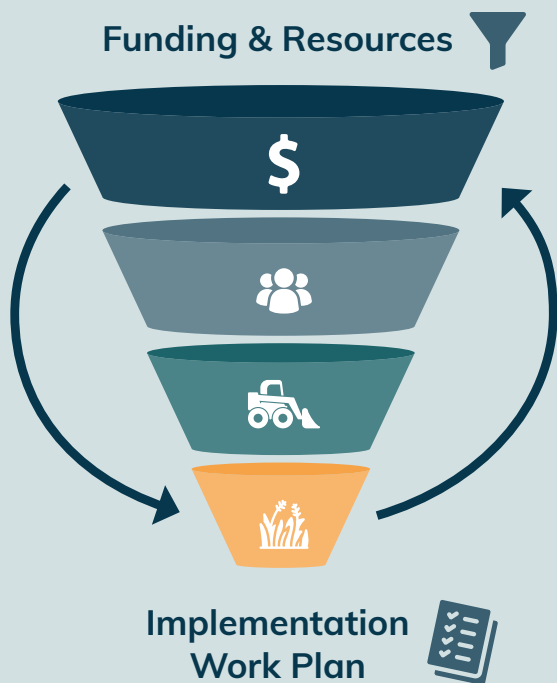
This strategy recognizes that cooperation with tribal nations is fundamental to the ongoing stewardship and management of Washington's shrubsteppe landscape.



The Columbia Plateau Ecoregion (EPA level 3) across the PNW and Eastern Washington with the inset map displaying the rangewide sagebrush biome data (Jeffries & Finn, 2019 (USGS)) used in WAFWA's Sagebrush Conservation Strategy publication.



The historical (A) and current (B) extent of shrubsteppe habitat in Washington. The data sources vary (Landfire Biophysical Setting (A) versus TerrAdapt.org(B)), but in both cases, the landcover types associated with natural shrublands or natural grasslands were combined to map shrubsteppe habitat. Landfire’s Biophysical Setting data represents the vegetation system that may have been dominant on the landscape prior to Euro-American settlement and is based on the current biophysical environment and an approximation of the historical disturbance regime (<https://www.landfire.gov/bps.php>).



“Preparedness for the unknown and being able to deploy resources faster needs to be functional, especially relative to grazing and fencing”

- Allen Miller, private landowner

Bunchgrasses. J.Haug

The WSRRI 3-year implementation work plan will inform resource needs and help prioritize distribution.



# WSRRI Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

Developed with input from an Advisory Group representing broad stakeholders, the vision, mission, and guiding principles articulate the desired outcomes of the Long-Term Strategy (Strategy).

## VISION

WSRRI's vision is a resilient shrubsteppe landscape, achieved through collaborative partnerships for the benefit of wildlife and human communities.

## MISSION

WSRRI's mission, as inspired by the State Legislature, is to implement the collaboratively developed Long-Term Strategy for shrubsteppe conservation and wildland fire preparedness, response, and recovery, to meet the needs of the state's shrubsteppe wildlife and human communities.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles in developing the Strategy:

1. Focus on Shrubsteppe Wildlife and Habitat Conservation
2. Support Working Lands and Rural Communities
3. Strategically Target Investments
4. Accelerate the Pace and Scale of Conservation and Restoration
5. Support and Build Upon Existing Efforts and Capacity
6. Incorporate Diverse and Traditional Perspectives
7. Proactively Address Equity and Environmental Justice
8. Monitor Results and Adapt Strategies



Mule deer doe. J. Haug

WSRRI is grounded in the principles of collaboration, synergy, and efficiency. The Strategy seeks to identify existing efforts and capacity, build upon and support them, and fill gaps to achieve the goal of shrubsteppe landscape conservation and restoration.



## Committing to Environmental Justice

Addressing environmental justice (EJ) and inequities through implementation of the Strategy requires meaningful involvement with underserved, highly impacted, overburdened, and vulnerable human populations across Washington's shrubsteppe landscape to identify their needs, how to meet them, and taking actions that address these needs. WSRRI is committed to these fundamental principles, and this strategy lays the groundwork for developing actions to further assess and integrate EJ and equity principles into shrubsteppe conservation and wildland fire preparedness, response, and recovery.

## The Importance of Private Lands in Shrubsteppe Conservation

Private lands constitute approximately 75% of the Columbia Plateau in Washington, making private landowners and managers key partners in shrubsteppe habitat protection and restoration. Working lands provide a significant benefit by keeping the shrubsteppe landscape open in the face of development pressure, conserving shrubsteppe habitat for wildlife. Livestock grazing is a common practice on the working lands in the shrubsteppe ecosystem. When managed properly, grazing can benefit wildlife and shrubsteppe habitat. However, improper grazing can also be a threat and cause great damage. The Strategy provides recommendations to implement grazing management programs while striving to find a balance in supporting both human and wildlife communities. We recognize the essential role of working lands and rural communities to steward and conserve shrubsteppe habitats, and the Strategy identifies support and opportunities for their sustained well-being, while also protecting wildlife and habitat. The WSRRI organizational structure will provide opportunities for working lands communities to contribute their insights and knowledge, through participation in an Advisory Group, Regional Implementation Teams, and Local Grazing Networks, and participate in implementing wildlife conservation projects supported by funding provided by their local agency partners.



Cow fitted with virtual fence collar J. Kehne, Conservation Northwest

"I grew up on what we called the scablands. Our farm ground on the other side of the gravel road and our pasture/scablands on the same side as our old farmhouse. Recently, some have named these sagebrush areas shrubsteppe.

No matter what you call them, they are precious to farmers/ranchers like we are and necessary for the livestock and the wildlife that call them home as well. Preventing their loss to wildfire is important and recovery from the nearly inevitable lightning strike or man-caused fire event is also crucial.

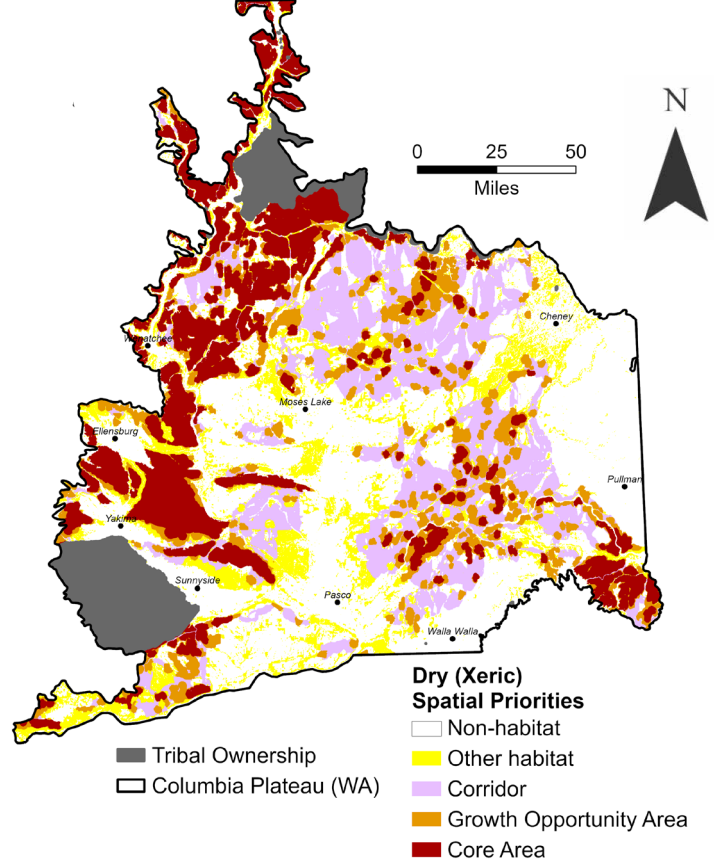
Hopefully this document, the result of many hours of work, thought, deliberation and collaboration, will help guide those of us called to steward these lands toward better prevention and restoration in the years to come."

- Danny Stone,  
Grant County Commissioner

# Strategic Approach

Given the extent of habitat loss across the shrubsteppe landscape, all remaining habitat has conservation value, but it is necessary to collaboratively and strategically prioritize action to realize the best conservation outcomes. WSRRI’s strategic approach to this prioritization in the Strategy is built upon the principles of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Sagebrush Conservation Strategy (Remington et al. 2021) and Sagebrush Conservation Design (Doherty et al. 2022). At the root of these principles is a collaborative framework to “defend the core, grow the core, and mitigate impacts” where core habitat is the highest quality remaining on the landscape. Because of habitat fragmentation across Washington’s shrubsteppe landscape, and the need to keep wildlife populations connected to each other for long-term viability, WSRRI’s approach is not only to defend and grow the core, but also connect it.

To facilitate this approach, the Strategy development process included collaboratively identifying, geographically, core areas, growth opportunity areas, corridors, and other habitat, to guide where on the landscape WSRRI and its partners should invest proactively and implement specific actions. Maps of these spatial priorities were developed for both dry (xeric) and wet (mesic) habitats, as well as greater sage-grouse, a species of highest conservation concern.



WSRRI Spatial priorities for Dry (Xeric) habitats, one of three conservation targets for which spatial priorities were mapped.

**Core Areas** have the highest quality habitat, and actions targeted here should include protection, threat prevention and abatement, and restoration where disturbances occur despite protection measures.

**Growth Opportunity Areas** are areas with significant amounts of habitat that is more degraded than habitat in core areas and should be targeted for strategic restoration where increases in habitat quality would result in more core area.

**Corridors** are relatively free of wildlife movement barriers and connect core areas and growth opportunity areas across the landscape. Further barrier development (e.g., road construction) should be avoided in corridors.

**Other Habitat** is more degraded than the other three categories but is still important to retain and, if resources allow, their condition should be improved over time.

While these maps will influence the geographic application of many specific WSRRI strategic actions and investments over its 30-year planning period, ongoing mitigation of threats to shrubsteppe habitats, wildlife, and human communities (e.g., invasive annual grasses, wildland fire) across the shrubsteppe landscape will continue to be necessary.

## ▶ DEFEND THE CORE

Defending high-quality core habitat from encroachment of threats, like development, conversion, loss due to wildland fire, and invasive annual grasses, must be the highest priority for WSRRI.

## ▶ GROW THE CORE

While cores are being defended, action should also be taken in lesser quality habitat surrounding and adjacent to core areas, to expand the footprint of high-quality habitat.

## ▶ CONNECT THE CORE

Connecting the core, by maintaining open and viable linkages between core areas, will allow wildlife to move across the landscape and access high-quality habitat, allow for demographic and genetic exchange between populations, and increase habitat resilience and viability.

“The devastating fires of 2020 were a wake-up call for everyone who cares about the shrubsteppe landscape, and the birds, wildlife, and people that call it home. Audubon Washington couldn’t be prouder to have participated in this all-hands-on-deck effort to save the shrubsteppe and is ready to get to work putting plans into action. ”

- Trina Bayard,  
Interim Executive Director/Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Washington

## GOALS

### ▶ GOAL #1

Human communities in the shrubsteppe landscape are better protected, prepared, and resilient to wildland fire, engaged in shrubsteppe conservation, and economically viable.

### ▶ GOAL #2

The extent, frequency, and severity of wildland fire in the shrubsteppe landscape are similar to pre-1800s fire return intervals, while taking into consideration changes in land use, climate, and other modern factors.

### ▶ GOAL #3

Habitat quantity and quality is increased to support healthy wildlife populations and communities.

### ▶ GOAL #4

Populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are: representative, ensuring they can adapt to changing conditions; resilient so they are able to persist despite disturbance; and redundant, such that they can withstand catastrophic events.

Creation of beaver dam analog on Big Bend Wildlife Area. J. Burnham



## THREATS

WSRRI considered the following threats, the factors contributing to them, and their impacts to wildlife and human communities while developing our strategies and actions.

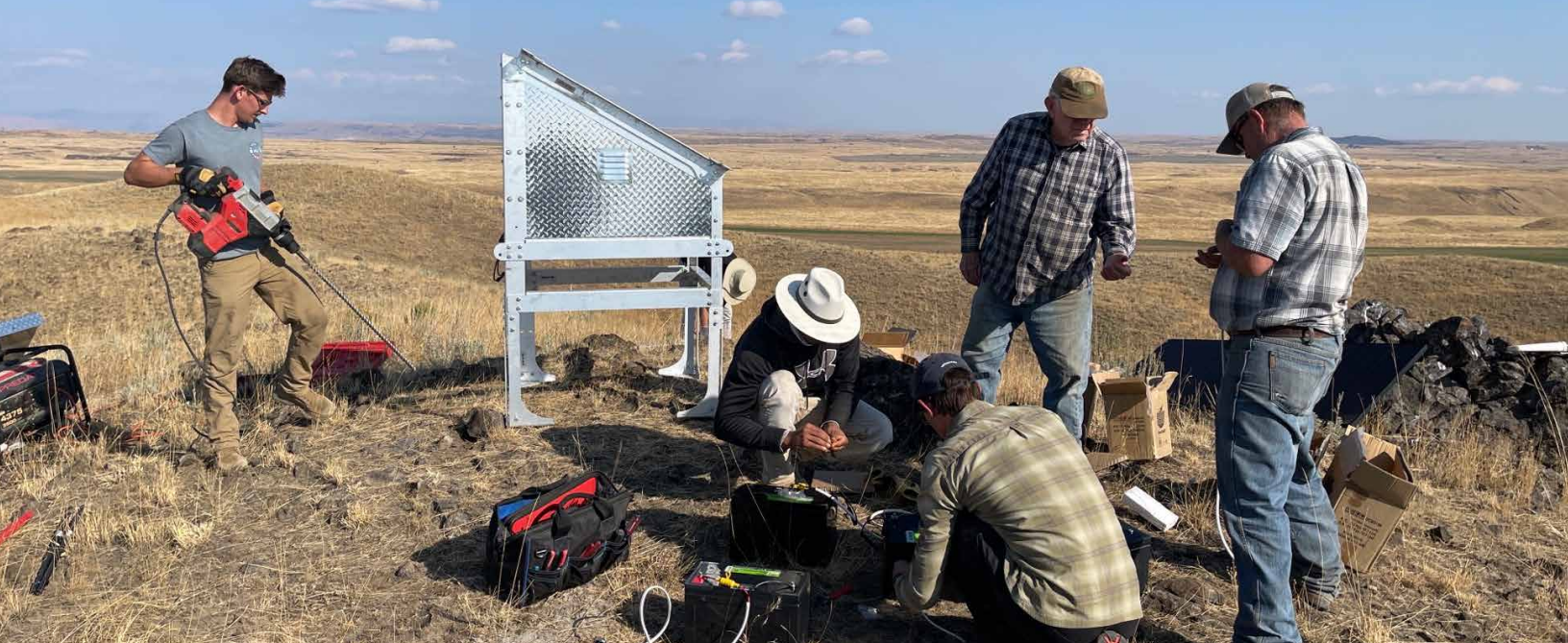
- ▶ Altered wildland fire regimes
- ▶ Altered hydrology
- ▶ Invasive plant species
- ▶ Climate change
- ▶ Wild and free roaming horses
- ▶ Incompatible grazing
- ▶ Mining and energy development
- ▶ Land use and development
- ▶ Small wildlife population size
- ▶ Human associated predators
- ▶ Direct human resource use and disturbance

## ENABLING CONDITIONS

In developing the Strategy, subject matter experts were asked to consider specific mechanisms, structures, and processes necessary to facilitate action and affect change. These are referred to as the “enabling conditions,” which are listed below.

Enabling conditions for the Strategy:

- ▶ Information and Planning
- ▶ Science and Monitoring
- ▶ Organization and Governance
- ▶ Policy and Permitting
- ▶ Resources and Equipment Capacity
- ▶ Outreach and Education
- ▶ Funding



Foster Creek Conservation District virtual fence base station installation

## WSRRI Key Strategies and Corresponding Actions

Recommended actions to achieve WSRRI's Goals and Objectives, and address Threats, are organized into five Key Strategies: Community Engagement, Habitat Protection, Habitat Restoration, Species Management, and Wildland Fire Management. WSRRI's spatial prioritization, organization and governance, and monitoring and adaptive management apply comprehensively across all Key Strategies, to guide implementation and realize the best outcomes over time for both wildlife and human communities.



WSRRI Enabling Conditions and Key Strategies encompassed and guided by Spatial Prioritization, Organization and Governance, and Monitoring and Adaptive Management.

### ACTIONS:

The Actions outlined for each key strategy represent the long-term efforts recommended, spanning a 30-year horizon, to achieve WSRRI's goals and objectives. Actions identified for the short term will be documented in 3-year Implementation Work Plans. Because this Strategy is a living document, the Actions represent the current understanding for how to best achieve the Goals and Objectives.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is vital to the success of shrubsteppe protection and conservation to benefit wildlife and human communities in the face of wildland fire. Human behavior and values can have significant positive or negative impacts on the quantity and quality of wildlife habitat for numerous sensitive species in this landscape. It is essential to the success of the Strategy that meaningful community engagement is the bookend to all other actions taken. Without local community commitment, the goals and objectives to protect and conserve Washington's shrubsteppe landscape cannot be achieved.

Community Engagement Strategy Action categories include:

- ▶ Understanding human values, perceptions, and needs
- ▶ Ensuring communication
- ▶ Conducting sustained and amplified engagement
- ▶ Building and supporting capacity
- ▶ Providing grazing and working lands outreach & education



## HABITAT PROTECTION

Private lands constitute approximately 75% of the Columbia Plateau in Washington, making private landowners key partners in shrubsteppe habitat protection and restoration. WSRRI's interest is to inform, enhance, and accelerate coordinated action on the ground, whether that action is driven by voluntary programs or regulation. Our success will require the full strength of our diverse partnerships to effectively work with landowners and producers to bring those benefits to bear. The Strategy is intended to provide a pathway to improve habitat protection programs and increase opportunities, while strengthening partnerships by increasing capacity and coordination to better work with landowners, support their interests and capitalize on habitat protection opportunities.



Habitat Protection Strategy Action categories include:

- ▶ Improving data, tools, and recommendations to inform land protection
- ▶ Supporting local jurisdictions in Growth Management Act implementation
- ▶ Increasing participation in voluntary incentive programs
- ▶ Increasing innovative approaches and funding support
- ▶ Improving application of conservation easements
- ▶ Empowering partners to deliver incentives
- ▶ Developing local grazing networks
- ▶ Enhancing grazing management programs



A. Wold, Okanogan Conservation District

**"The Habitat Protection goals and strategies recognize the existence of these challenges for land trusts, and point a clear direction towards addressing them, thereby increasing the scope and scale of our efforts.**

**From landowner outreach to a specified funding source for shrubsteppe protection, to funding and collaboration in establishing and monitoring grazing management, they are thorough and well done. We feel heard and look forward to continuing this work."**

- Mickey Fleming,  
Chelan Douglas Land Trust

## HABITAT RESTORATION

The shrubsteppe Habitat Restoration Key Strategy is action-oriented, focusing on collaborative efforts and best practice sharing among WSRRI partners to restore vitality to these landscapes. Key actions include restoring degraded habitats with native vegetation to enhance pre- and post-wildfire resistance and resilience, strategically controlling invasive species like cheatgrass, and significantly scaling up planning and implementation capacity for widespread restoration. The strategy is also focused on protecting cultural resources through well-supported review processes, sourcing locally adapted native plant materials for restoration and employing adaptive management to continuously refine these actions based on evolving knowledge. Through these actions, we aim to provide habitat to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of wildlife and people that inhabit the shrubsteppe landscape.

The WSRRI approach for restoration implementation is aimed at building capacity and resources across the landscape and focusing the shared use of that capacity toward priority areas, irrespective of land ownership. By sharing expanded resources and services, WSRRI can be responsive to restoring habitats impacted by wildfires while also creating more resilient conditions in non-fire years.

Habitat Restoration Strategy Action categories include:

- ▶ Collaborating and sharing information
- ▶ Restoring degraded habitat
- ▶ Increasing restoration implementation capacity
- ▶ Conducting cultural resources review
- ▶ Controlling invasive plants
- ▶ Improving availability of native plant materials
- ▶ Evaluating habitat conditions
- ▶ Expanding the knowledge base

Planted sagebrush plug with Washington Conservation Corps crew member in background. K. Merg



Pygmy rabbit at Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. B. DeMay

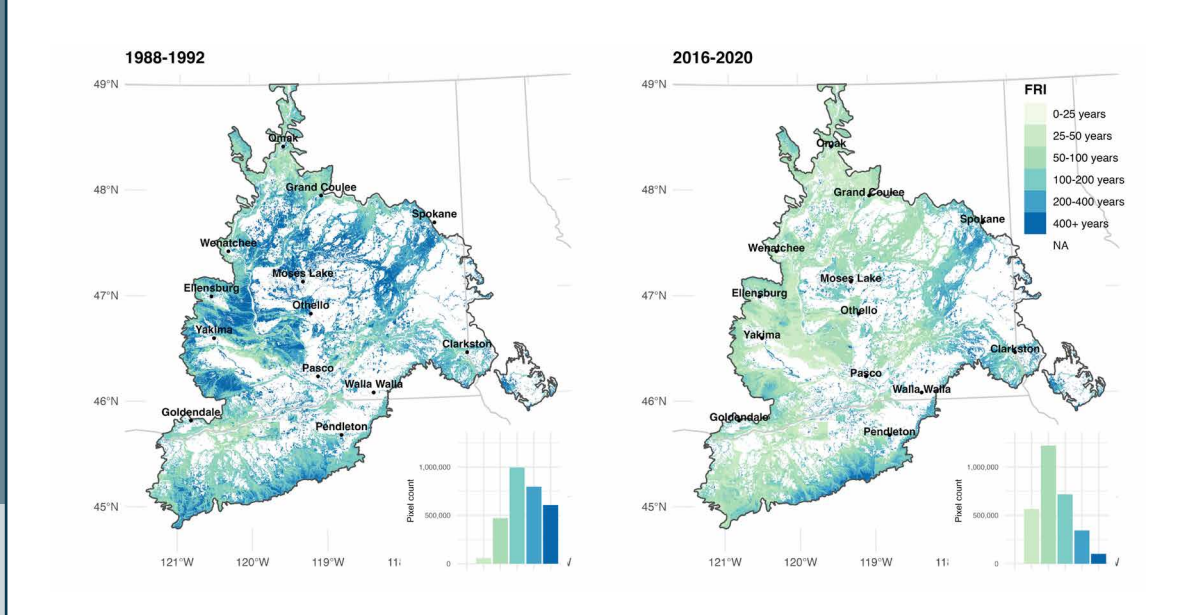


## SPECIES MANAGEMENT

The Species Management Key Strategy actions are meant to complement the Habitat Protection, Community Engagement, Fire Management, and Habitat Restoration actions that we expect to broadly benefit all wildlife species, including both game and non-game, both common and rare. Here, we aim to amplify programmatic actions that support shrubsteppe wildlife and identify those things that are needed to bolster populations in addition to actions necessary in the other strategies. WSRRI's species management strategy focuses primarily on wildlife that occur in terrestrial environments, inclusive of birds and amphibians using wet (mesic) habitats within the shrubsteppe landscape. Salmonids and other fish are not a primary focus.

Species Management Strategy Action categories include:

- ▶ Surveying and monitoring SGCN
- ▶ Developing a comprehensive approach to disease management
- ▶ Conducting conservation translocations as needed
- ▶ Minimizing SGCN impact from non-native and human-associated predators
- ▶ Minimizing impacts to SGCN individuals from built infrastructure
- ▶ Minimizing impact from human actions and disturbance
- ▶ Explicitly linking species-specific considerations in habitat protection and restoration efforts
- ▶ Conducting strategic research for SGCN conservation



Estimated Fire Return Intervals (FRI) Calculated from Burn Probabilities Averaged over the 1988-1992 Fire Seasons (left) and the 2016-2020 Fire Seasons (right). Note that these estimates of the FRI are considered slightly overestimated (Smith 2023).



## WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT AND SHRUBSTEPPE CONSERVATION

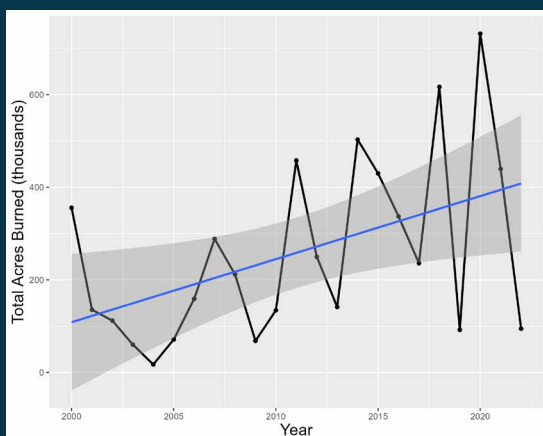
Implementing successful wildland fire management is critical for shrubsteppe conservation. Achieving success with wildland fire management requires a series of integrated and dependent actions such as effective pre-fire response planning and preparation, fire response, mitigating risk and improving community protection, strategic fuel reduction, and reestablishing more natural fire regimes. Importantly, these actions must be implemented in a way that recognizes and supports the overarching goal of restoring ecological functions and processes that result in a healthy shrubsteppe ecosystem.

Invasion by non-native annual grasses and forbs is understood to be one of the primary factors increasing wildland fire risk in Washington's shrubsteppe. This is because invasive annual grasses create continuous and highly flammable fuel conditions, where native shrubsteppe grasses and other fuels are discontinuous, creating a fire-resistant landscape. While native shrubs like sagebrush and bitterbrush burn intensely, they are not the key source of wildland

fire risk in this landscape. It is colonization by non-native annual grasses that increases wildland fire frequency, extent, and severity. Consequently, the strategy prioritizes fuel reduction efforts focused on decreasing non-native annual grasses while encouraging native perennials. It is also explicitly recognized that current land uses, the condition of the landscape, wildlife populations, climate, and other factors must be first taken into account when implementing actions to reduce fuels and reestablish more natural fire regimes.

Wildland Fire Management Strategy  
Action categories include:

- ▶ Improving fire response and mitigation
- ▶ Conducting pre-fire fuels reduction
- ▶ Improving community fire protection
- ▶ Delivering emergency and post-disaster recovery response resources for working lands



Total acres burned across the Columbia Plateau from 2000-2022

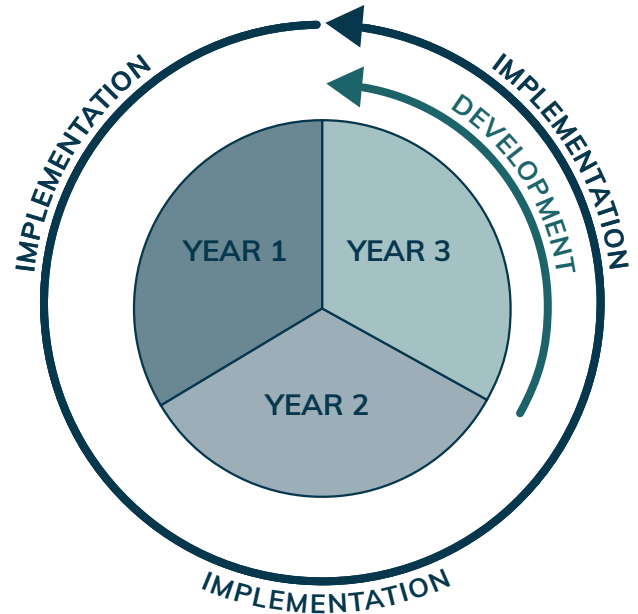
Burned fence. J. Juelson



# The 3-year Implementation Work Plan

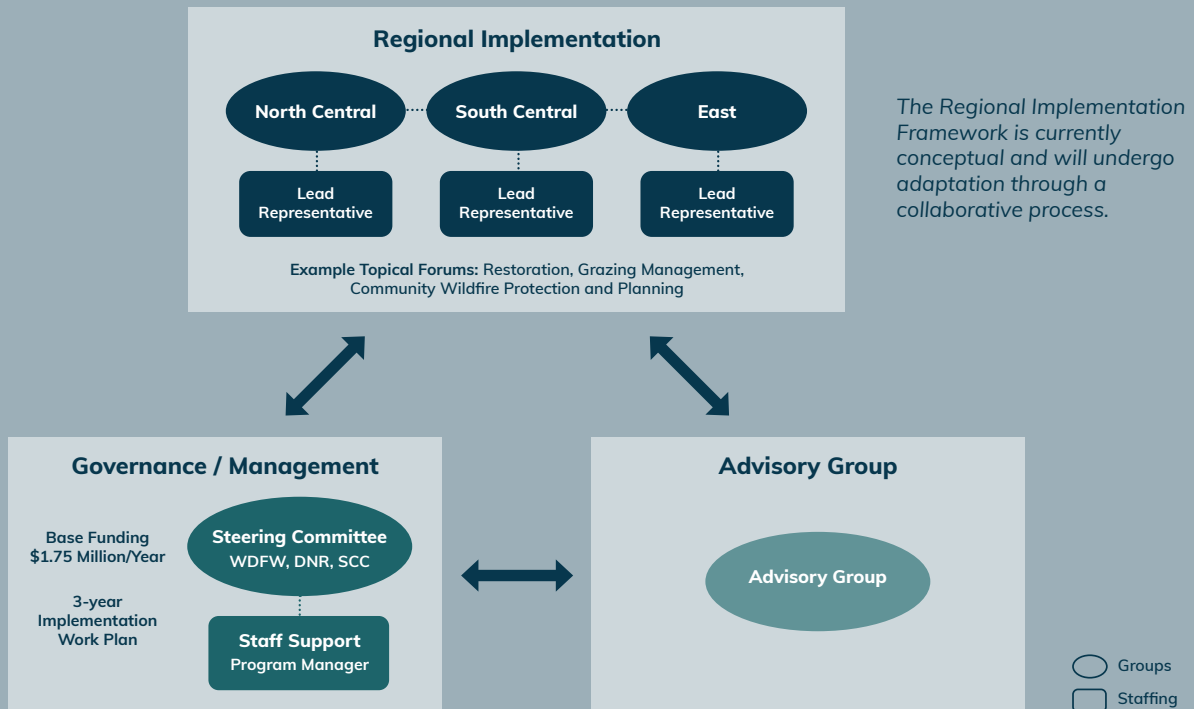
To complement and facilitate the implementation of WSRRI's overarching 30-year vision, iterative and regularly updated implementation work plans will be developed. These work plans will outline specific actions and short-term steps to be taken, and document responsible implementors. They will encompass federal, state, and partner actions, clearly identifying roles and responsibilities.

We anticipate that WSRRI's conceptual management structure and governance will mature through time, adjusting and changing to meet the needs of the partners and communities it aims to support. As we near year one of Strategy implementation, we expect the management structure to include the Steering Committee, a Program Manager, an Advisory Group, and Regional Implementation Teams. Together, these groups and individuals, bolstered by WSRRI's technical, resource, and financial support, will form the backbone of the shared efforts to conserve habitats, provide fire protection, and restore shrubsteppe to meet the needs of the state's shrubsteppe wildlife and human communities across all land ownerships.



WSRRI 3-year work plan cycle

## Strategy Implementation Framework



The Regional Implementation Framework is currently conceptual and will undergo adaptation through a collaborative process.

Conceptual WSRRI implementation framework



▶ **WSRRI STEERING COMMITTEE (WDFW, DNR, SCC)**

The WSRRI Steering Committee has and will continue to play a pivotal role in providing strategic direction and decision-making, ensuring that WSRRI's work remains collaborative and honors the investment of the Washington State Legislature. The Steering Committee will align WSRRI priorities with state agencies, Tribes, and other partners, and integrate these priorities into agency Legislative requests.

▶ **WSRRI PROGRAM MANAGER**

The WSRRI Program Manager will focus on implementation coordination by facilitating collaboration between the Steering Committee, the Advisory Group, and Regional Implementation Teams; monitoring and reporting on WSRRI progress; and managing overall communications. Additionally, the Program Manager will facilitate and support the development of implementation work plans, engage in grant development and management to support strategic action implementation, and refine monitoring and adaptive management plans.

▶ **ADVISORY GROUP**

The Advisory Group, a diverse body comprising representatives from state and federal agencies, Tribes, community members, farmers and ranchers, funding organizations, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders, will provide valuable input, expertise, and feedback, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive perspective in advancing WSRRI's objectives. This group will advise the WSRRI Program Manager and Steering Committee on work plans, assist with securing funding, and recommend priorities and criteria for allocating resources.

**In its initial phases, WSRRI has had limited designated funding available for programs such as habitat restoration, deferred wildland grazing after fire, and wildlife-friendly fencing. Significant additional funding will be needed to fully implement the Strategy, meet the goals and objectives, and realize the complete WSRRI vision.**

▶ **REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS**

While still conceptual at the time of the Strategy finalization, Regional Implementation Teams, built from already existing partner capacity but integrated into and supported by the WSRRI organizational structure, will create regional implementation work plans, pursue funding for region-specific needs, and implement restoration and wildland fire resiliency projects. These teams, in close collaboration with local stakeholders, Tribes, landowners, and communities, will be vital in driving effective on-the-ground conservation and restoration, ensuring the success of WSRRI. Within the Regional Implementation Teams, Lead Representatives will foster collaboration, coordination, innovation, and inclusive engagement, support Regional Implementation Teams in their work, and ensure that regional needs and priorities are integrated into program-level priorities.

▶ **TOPICAL FORUMS**

Topical Forums, convened as needed, will bring together subject matter experts from across Regional Implementation Teams to address specific management issues or opportunities critical for effectively implementing the WSRRI strategy. Topical Forums will cover topics such as (but not limited to) habitat restoration, grazing management, and community wildfire protection and planning. This will provide coordination and idea-sharing across the regional implementation teams to enhance planning and implementation.

## **Proactive Approach to Habitat Restoration and Project Implementation**

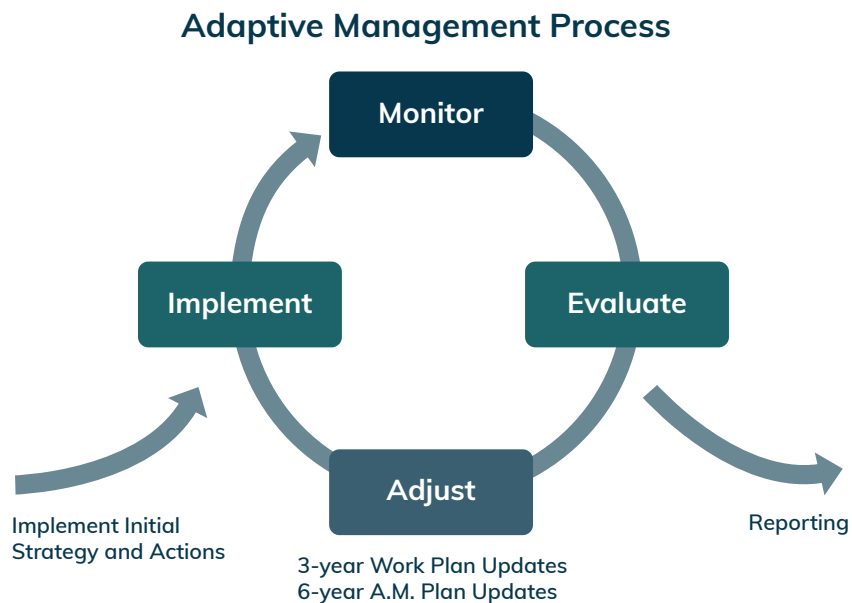
In addition to general solicitations for project proposals, WSRRI will take an active approach to identify habitat restoration projects in strategic areas of the shrubsteppe landscape. We will engage with Regional Implementation Teams, landowners, and other stakeholders and Tribes for effective project planning and implementation. This approach includes establishing clear project selection criteria aligned with WSRRI's conservation goals, leveraging existing capacities and diverse expertise for project execution, fostering collaboration to maximize funding and resources, and instituting a transparent review process. Additionally, WSRRI commits to regularly evaluating and refining its project generation process to adapt to changing conservation needs and ecosystem conditions.



Pond at Big Bend Wildlife Area. WDFW

## Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Given the duration of the Strategy and anticipated uncertainty (e.g., climate change), monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of WSRRRI actions is essential to ensure that we meet our management objectives. Further, adaptive management will allow us to make informed decisions despite uncertainty and incorporate new information over time.



*Adaptive Management Process. Work plan and adaptive management plan updates represent opportunities to adjust during implementation.*

Metrics to track progress towards achieving WSRRRI's goals have been identified for each objective. Metric selection will be refined in the first work plan, and then evaluated and adjusted at regular intervals, to incorporate scientific advancements and lessons learned through implementation.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI), fueled by legislative support and guided by a three-agency Steering Committee, is committed to preserving and revitalizing the shrubsteppe landscape of Washington State for the wildlife and human communities that call this place home. Success will only occur if the people that steward and live on these lands see their priorities and responsibilities reflected in the Strategy, feel ownership of it, and see value in implementing it. The team developing the Strategy has worked diligently to reflect these priorities and responsibilities in the mission, vision, goals, and actions. We remain committed to understanding how to continuously improve the Strategy to ensure it reflects shared priorities. By balancing strategic wildlife habitat protection and restoration with sustainable working lands management, and engaging a broad range of shrubsteppe communities, stakeholders, and Tribes, the initiative seeks to foster a wildfire resilient and thriving landscape.

## Acknowledgments

The Steering Committee extends our sincere appreciation to everyone involved in the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI). This initiative, which commenced even before the Legislature and Governor finalized the initial proviso funding, stands as a testament to the commitment to collaboration between the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Conservation Commission and among Tribes and partners in the shrubsteppe landscape. The steadfast commitment and hard work of staff and leadership from all entities has been fundamental to our collective progress. We are deeply grateful to our Advisory Group, which includes public partners such as Conservation Districts, Grant County, Pasco Fire Department, and US Fish and Wildlife Service, private organizations such as Audubon Washington, Conservation Northwest, and the Cattleman's Association, and private landowners for their expertise in wildlife and habitat management, wildland fire management, working lands, and community engagement, all of which have greatly shaped our comprehensive strategy. We also wish to acknowledge our working groups and focus table participants, whose collective wisdom and insights have been vital in formulating the actionable elements of our approach. A special note of appreciation is extended to TerrAdapt for their spatial analysis work, significantly enriching our understanding and planning efforts. We want to recognize the invaluable contributions and deep-rooted wisdom of the Eastern Washington Tribes, whose perspectives and knowledge have been essential in guiding our efforts towards a respectful and effective approach to land and wildlife management. The dedication and insights of all our participants are the bedrock of WSRRI's ongoing success.



WSRRI Steering Committee members Allen Lebovitz (DNR), Hannah Anderson (WDFW), and Shana Joy (SCC). Photo: J. Juelson

Background photo: Shrubsteppe habitat in hills above Wenatchee. S DeMay



Shrubsteppe habitat at the Chester Butte Wildlife Area Unit. J. Haug



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