

# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



Washington State  
**Conservation  
Commission**

**Allen Lebovitz**  
Wildland Fire & Forest Resilience Liaison  
Chair, Wildland Fire Advisory Committee  
Washington Department of Natural Resources



## 2020 Fires

600,000 acres of shrubsteppe burned

### Proviso

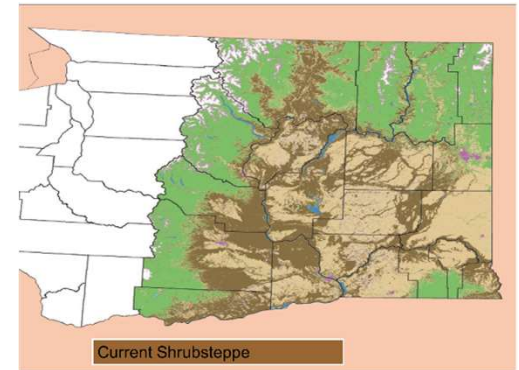
*On-going operating \$2.35mil to DFW per biennium*

*One-time capital \$1.5mil to DFW 21-23BN;*

*One-time capital \$1.5mil to SCC 23-25BN*

# The Shrubsteppe Landscape

- Located in the SE and central parts of the state.
- Rolling, grassy plains with an overstory of sagebrush and other shrubs.
- Patchy vegetation with a unique cryptobiotic crust which locks in moisture and prevents erosion.
- Believed to have been 10.4 million acres in Washington historically – now > 2 million acres.
- Home to hundreds of dependent species.
- Species of greatest concern:
  - Greater sage-grouse
  - Columbian sharp-tailed grouse
  - Ferruginous hawk
  - Pygmy rabbit



# Washington State Legislature Proviso to WDFW July 2021

**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:** all land ownerships



# Steering Committee



Shana Joy  
Regional Manager Coordinator



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



Allen Lebovitz  
Wildland Fire and  
Forest Resilience Liaison

Hannah Anderson  
Wildlife Diversity Division  
Manager

# Intent

## 1. **Protect Human Communities**

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

## 2. **Manage Wildland Fire to Reduce Impacts**

*The extent, frequency, and severity of wildland fire in the Shrubsteppe is similar to pre-European contact fire return intervals, while considering changes in land use, climate, and other modern contexts.*

## 3. **Conserve and Restore Shrubsteppe Habitat**

*The mosaic of successional stages of native shrubsteppe habitats are conserved and restored to support healthy wildlife populations and communities.*

## 4. **Restore Populations of Dependent Wildlife Species**

*Populations and communities of species of greatest conservation need and other species are representative, resilient, and redundant.*



# 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

# Two Part Approach

## Near-term Actions

- Implementing no-regret immediate actions identified in the wake of the 2020 fires.
  - Expand on-the-ground capacity to implement restoration
  - Enhance cultural resources review capacity
  - Enhance availability of native plants
  - Implement species specific recovery
  - Deferred grazing for habitat recovery
  - Wildlife friendly fencing

## Long-term Strategy

- Collaboratively develop a long-term strategy for shrubsteppe conservation in the face of wildfire.
  - 30 year planning horizon
  - Habitat conservation and restoration
  - Reduce fire-prone conditions
  - Managing fire
  - Landscape scale and cross boundary
  - Spatial priorities



# Near Term Actions



For Habitat



For Wildlife



For People

# Habitat Restoration



- Enhancing and restoring wildlife habitat, with special emphasis on SGCN.
- Expanding native plant communities where they remain and reestablish them where they have been lost.
- Deploying restoration resources & services to areas of high wildlife value.

# Species Recovery

- Bolstering populations while habitat recovers and restoration occurs
- Understanding populations - response, distribution, viability



# Working Lands Support

- Supporting working lands:
  - Replacing burned over fencing with wildlife friendly fence – Virtual fencing
  - Facilitating deferred grazing to allow habitat time to recover



# Where Focused

- All land ownerships, driven by priority and opportunity
- Initial focus on areas impacted by Pearl Hill, Cold Springs, and Whitney fires but since expanded to all areas in the biome impacted by fires as they've occurred
- Within fire areas, priority considerations included
  - SGCN
  - Burned hot
  - Likelihood of cheatgrass invasion



## 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.”*

### **Proviso required elements:**

- Habitat restoration
- Landscape scale & cross-boundary
- Spatial priorities
- Fill gaps in wildland fire management
- Tools to reduce fire-prone conditions
- Any other threats

### **WSRRI approach:**

- 30-year planning period – Iterative workplan
- Managing wildland fire
- Modeled after biome-wide Sagebrush Conservation Design being implemented by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

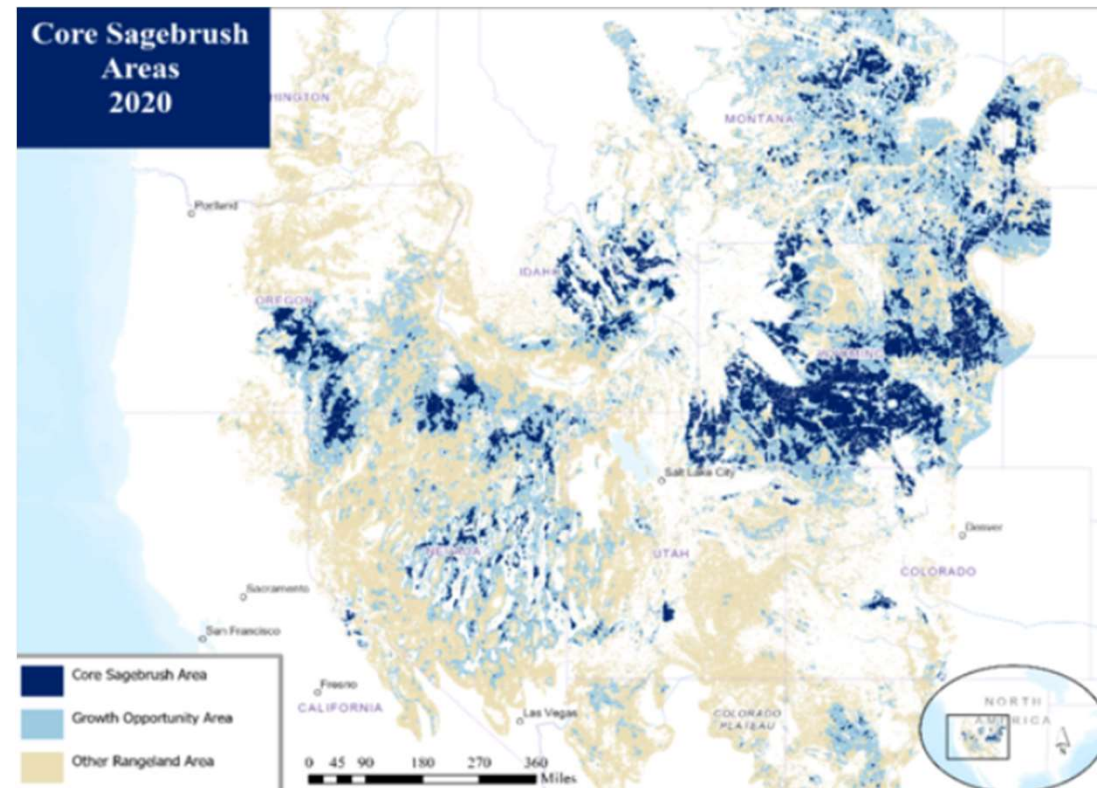
# WSSRI Strategy modeled after Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Sagebrush Conservation Design (SCD)

The design calls for a ‘Defend and Grow the Core’ approach.

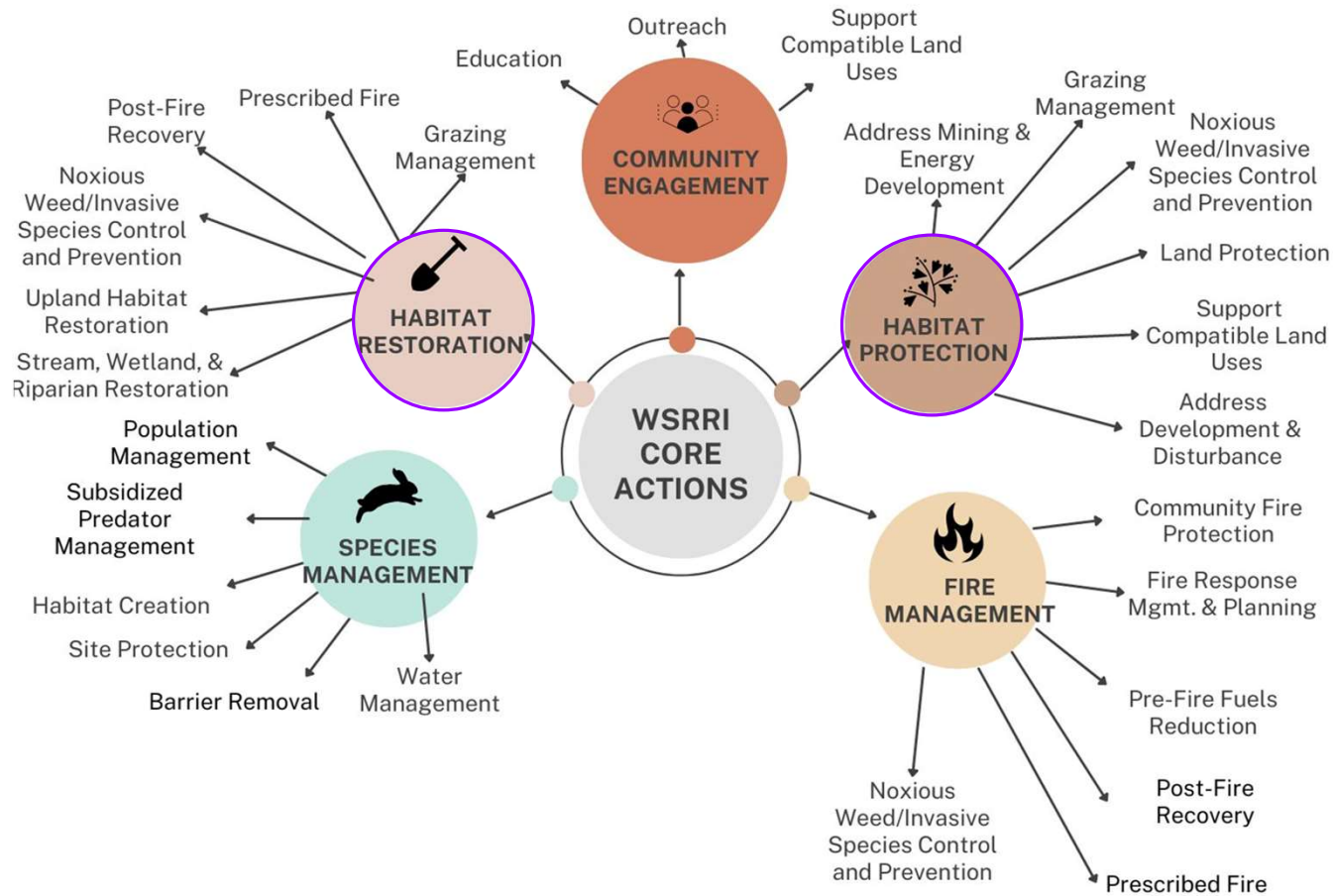
Focus first on intact Core Sagebrush Areas that are of immediate high value to wildlife

Then growing them by working outward to more degraded areas

“Stepping Down” to Washington



# Priorities for Actions





# Long-Term Strategy Advisory Group

- Audubon Society
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# Spatial Data

## Conservation Targets

- Species
- Ecosystems

Expert Knowledge  
Field Data



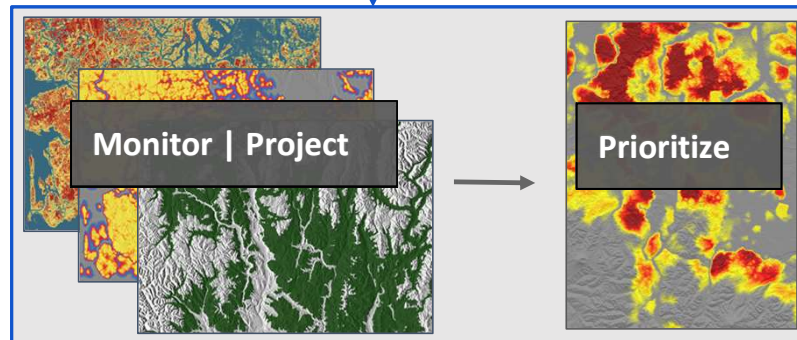
Environmental  
Data



## Dynamic Inputs

- Landsat imagery
- Transportation infrastructure
- Energy infrastructure
- Topography
- Climate
- Soils

Automated Annual Updates



## Annual Outputs

### Monitor

- Ecological disturbance
- Landcover and vegetation
- Habitat
- Connectivity

### Project

- Climate change risks
- Disturbance risks

### Prioritize

- Habitat protection
- Habitat restoration
- Barrier mitigation

- Map
- Dashboard





## Draft Goals

### Human Communities

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

# Draft Goals

## Wildland Fire Management

The extent, frequency, and severity of wildland fires in the shrubsteppe are similar to fire return intervals that were occurring prior to the 1800's when widespread fire suppression policies and practices were instituted, while taking into consideration changes in land use, climate, and other modern factors.





# Draft Goals

## Wildlife Habitat

Landscape integrity and the mosaic of successional stages of native shrubsteppe habitats are conserved, perpetuated, and restored to support healthy wildlife populations and communities.



# Draft Goals

## Wildlife Species

Populations and communities of species of greatest conservation need and other species are representative, resilient, and redundant.

# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative Timeline Summary



<p><b>Proviso Components</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement actions to restore from fire impact: species recovery, habitat restoration capacity, deferred grazing, wildlife friendly fence</li> <li>Develop long-term plan: spatial priorities, habitat and species recovery, fire response and preparation, any other threats</li> </ol>	<p><b>Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFW, DNR, SCC</li> <li>Advisory groups</li> <li>Subject matter experts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Species recovery, habitat restoration, deferred grazing, wildlife friendly fence projects underway throughout</b></p>	
		<p><b>30-yr Shrubsteppe Conservation Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modeled after WAFWA Conservation Design – Defend the Core, Grow the Core, Connect the Core</li> <li>Key strategies to achieve goals and objectives</li> <li>Iterative; will include shorter-term workplan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Proposed Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain a collaborative structure</li> <li>Enhance structural capacity</li> <li>Leverage additional funding sources</li> </ul>