



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



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WILDLIFE**

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**TO:** Forest Practices Board

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**SUBJECT:** 2022-2023 Biennial Report on the Status of the Voluntary Protection Approach for the Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly (TCB)

The attached status report covers calendar years 2022 and 2023 for actions related to this Washington state and federal listed endangered species.

As background, the Board in 2007 approved a voluntary cooperative protection approach for TCB that was recommended by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and supported by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). In 2014, the Board expanded its protection approach to include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2013 federal-designated critical habitat for TCB. In 2016, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission retained the state's endangered listing based on WDFW's status review for the butterfly, which concluded that the species remained threatened with extinction in Washington state.

DNR and WDFW staff will be available during your November 13, 2024, meeting to answer questions about the attached biennial report for TCB. If questions in the meantime, please contact: [colleen.granberg@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:colleen.granberg@dnr.wa.gov) or 564-200-3496; [darrin.masters@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:darrin.masters@dfw.wa.gov) or 360-764-9942.

Attachment (1)

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## **2022-2023 Biennial Report to the Forest Practices Board Status of a Voluntary Protection Approach for the Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly November 13, 2024**

Once common in the Pacific Northwest, the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas editha taylori*; TCB) remains on only a handful of sites in Washington state. This butterfly was listed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) as State Endangered effective on March 2, 2006. On November 4, 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) federally listed the butterfly as endangered and designated critical habitat (federal) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Based on recommendations from the state's [Periodic Status Review for the Taylor's Checkerspot](#) (July 2016), the Commission retained the species' State Endangered status on August 5, 2016.

### **SPECIES BACKGROUND**

In western Washington, TCB inhabits highly localized areas where the butterflies complete their year-round life cycle. Therefore, the species is always present on occupied sites.

Occupied sites within state and private forestland in eastern Clallam and southern Thurston counties, and in northeastern Olympic National Forest consist of small grassy balds, which are shallow-soiled openings situated within the forest matrix that do not support timber production. Occupied sites on federal land within Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) in southern Pierce county, and state and private lands in northern Thurston county occur on native grasslands (prairie). A non-forested, sandy, coastal private property in Clallam county also has an occupied site.

Unoccupied areas included in the federal designated critical habitat involve non-federal forestland in eastern Clallam, southern Thurston, west Skagit, and northern Island counties that meet the habitat needs of the species. These areas may have been historically occupied.

### **FOREST PRACTICES BOARD RESPONSE HISTORY**

#### 2006 STATE LISTING AS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

On [May 10, 2006](#), the Forest Practices Board (Board) determined there was enough potential risk to TCB from certain forest practices activities to consider rule making and protection strategies. As part of that process, the Board authorized Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff to provide the public formal notice of intent to consider rule making.

Following public notice and through August 2007, DNR led meetings attended by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), forest landowners, and interested stakeholders, including the Washington Butterfly Association and The Nature Conservancy. Discussions addressed the butterfly's habitat requirements, potential effects of certain forest practices, and protection strategies. In addition, WDFW staff met with individual landowners and land managers having TCB habitat to identify opportunities for voluntary protection and management options. During this process, the five large forest landowners who owned or managed lands containing occupied butterfly sites committed to the development of management plans with WDFW.

On [September 11, 2007](#), the Board approved the voluntary protection approach recommended by DNR and supported by WDFW. This decision recognized the work of both agencies in coordination with stakeholders, as well as the commitments from landowners to develop management plans. In addition to voluntary management plans, DNR's conditioning authority to protect public resources, including wildlife, provides a safety net for protection, which is key to the Board's acceptance of a voluntary approach.

At the Board's request, DNR and WDFW initiated a joint-agency screening process for Forest Practices Applications and Notifications (FPA/Ns) to identify proposed FPAs with the potential to impact the species. The Board also requested the agencies *annually* report on:

- butterfly protection issues associated with individual FPA/Ns; and
- the status of completing WDFW-approved large landowner management plans.

Once landowners who committed to develop management plans had successfully done so, subsequent reports would occur *every five years*. In any case, the agencies were to immediately report to the Board any protection issues that arose for the species.

#### 2009 CO-AGENCY TRAINING

In March 2009, DNR and WDFW conducted a formal joint training for agency staff. This training highlighted the species life cycle, habitat requirements and sensitivities, and clarified the agencies' roles and responsibilities for processing, reviewing, and conditioning FPA/Ns.

#### 2014 FEDERAL DESIGNATION OF CRITICAL HABITAT

On [February 11, 2014](#), the Board accepted DNR's recommendation supported by WDFW to:

- include the federally designated critical habitat in the FPA screening process and continue implementing the voluntary protection approach; and
- continue *annual* reporting, recognizing that all WDFW-approved large landowner management plans had been completed.

Federal designated critical habitat areas were incorporated into DNR's Geographic Information System (GIS), effectively extending FPA/N screening and landowner outreach to additional non-federal forestlands in Clallam, Thurston, Island, and Skagit counties.

#### 2018-2019 BIENNIAL REPORT

On [August 8, 2018](#), DNR and WDFW recommended biennial reporting given success of the protection approach, incorporation of federal critical habitat data in the screening process, and the fact that there had been no FPA-associated issues. The recommendation was accepted by the Board with the stipulation that DNR and WDFW provide immediate notification of any issues if they arose with the voluntary cooperative approach adopted for the species.

### **FOREST PRACTICES APPLICATIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS (FPA/Ns)**

#### SCREENING PROCESS

FPA/Ns are screened by DNR for proximity to TCB-occupied habitat identified by WDFW and for federally designated TCB critical habitat. When an FPA/N is in or within one mile of any of these areas, DNR notifies WDFW. WDFW reviews these FPAs for potential impacts from proposed forest practices activities. If necessary, WDFW then consults with the landowner to protect the site and species. If voluntary landowner action is not adequate, WDFW may request protective conditioning by DNR. To

date, there have been no issues or concerns associated with individual FPA/Ns during the cooperative protection approach. Because of this, WDFW is confident that the screening process is working well and the potential risk to the species from forest practices remains low.

#### 2022-2023 BIENNIUM

2023 marks the sixteenth year since the Board's 2007 approval of the voluntary cooperative protection approach for the TCB. This is the eighth report to include the 2013 federal designated critical habitat for the species, and the third biennial report.

For calendar years 2022 and 2023, a total of 53 FPAs were proposed and approved within the one-mile butterfly screening buffer:

- Nineteen (19) FPAs were within ½ mile of state and/or federal designated TCB habitat.
- Twenty six (26) FPAs were within 1.0 mile of state and/or federal designated TCB habitat.
- Eight (8) were determined to be greater than 1.0 mile from state and/or federally designated TCB habitat.

These FPAs were located within Island, Clallam, and Thurston counties, and reviewed through DNR's Northwest, Olympic, and South Puget Sound regions, respectively. None of these forest practices activities were determined by WDFW to pose a risk to the species.

#### BIENNIUM SPECIFICS

Of the Nineteen (19) FPAs located within one-half mile from a habitat edge:

- Two (2) were approved for uneven age harvest.
- Eleven (11) were approved for even-aged timber harvest activities.
- One (1) was approved for both even and uneven age harvest.
- Two (2) were approved for aerial chemical spray.
- One (1) was approved for road construction, right-of-way, and stream crossings.
- One (1) for Rock Pit or Spoils Area, Stream Crossing.
- One (1) for salvage only.

Of the twenty six (26) FPAs located between one-half to one mile from a habitat edge:

- Five (5) were approved for uneven age harvest.
- Fourteen (14) were approved for even-aged timber harvest activities.
- One (1) was approved for both even and uneven age harvest.
- One (1) was approved for aerial chemical spray.
- Three (3) were approved for road construction, right-of-way, and stream crossings.
- Two (2) were approved for Rock Pit or Spoils Area, Stream Crossing.

Other activities associated with even and uneven age harvests include stream crossings, additional salvage, road construction, rock pit and spoils area, and right-of-way harvests.

#### **BUTTERFLY SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS AND LANDOWNER STATUS**

With information developed during stakeholder involvement, WDFW produced general guidance on what types of activities should be addressed by management plans in order to protect the habitat of occupied sites. In late 2006, this guidance was distributed to the five large forest landowners who owned

or managed sites occupied by the butterfly at the time. To date, three landowners have management plans: DNR, Weyerhaeuser, and RD Merrill Company. The RD Merrill plan expired in 2014 and has not been renewed. Weyerhaeuser updated and renewed their plan in 2023.

Weyerhaeuser worked with WDFW to renew and improve their TCB management plan. The revised plan added four new sites to the Vail Tree Farm management area in north Thurston County for a total of 15. In addition, management actions within and adjacent to TCB core zones were modified to give more flexibility for habitat enhancement. WDFW currently works with DNR on habitat enhancement projects on areas adjacent to the Weyerhaeuser sites. With support from Weyerhaeuser, WDFW's habitat restoration program has included the tree farm sites in grant proposals for restoration funding from the US Department of Defense (DoD) Sentinel Landscapes partnership and the DoD/US Fish and Wildlife Service's Installation Climate Change Conservation Resilience Program. A decision on the Sentinel Landscapes grant is expected in November 2024. The Climate Change Conservation proposal was not selected this round. However, it is a shovel-ready project and will be submitted to other funding opportunities in the coming biennium.

### **PROTECTION BY COUNTIES**

WDFW's Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) database with TCB GIS data is available for use by counties to identify known occupied butterfly sites for local land use planning. Counties (and the public) access these data via WDFW's [PHS on the Web](#). This is the same data WDFW biologists use to screen FPA/Ns and proposals being reviewed under the State Environmental Policy Act that might affect TCB.

Thurston County receives regularly updated PHS data from WDFW digitally. The County's Habitat Conservation Plan for prairie and oak woodland species, including TCB conservation strategies was approved and implemented in February 2022. Clallam, Island, and Skagit counties also receive PHS data upon request in support of specific plans or projects.

### **2022-2023 BIENNIUM SURVEYS AND CONSERVATION ACTIONS**

#### BUTTERFLY SURVEYS

During spring and summer of 2022 and 2023, biologists from WDFW, Olympic National Forest (ONF), and JBLM conducted monitoring surveys in one or both years on all eight existing native TCB sites and four reintroduction sites in Washington. The distribution of the twelve TCB populations currently known to occur in Washington are discussed below.

*South Puget Sound (Thurston and Pierce counties).* TCB populations were monitored at one native site on JBLM in Pierce county and on four south Puget Sound prairies where WDFW has reintroduced captive-reared butterflies. The pattern of population decline continued at all sites and recruitment rates at reintroduction sites continued to decline as well, following the pattern observed in 2020-2021.

*North Puget Sound (Clallam county).* Populations were monitored by ONF on four sites in 2022 and 2023, WDFW monitored two sites located on state land in both years, one site on private land was surveyed in both years. Butterfly occurrence was lower than usual at all the sites monitored, except for one site within ONF. Low population numbers from sites on state land prompted an emergency temporary captive rearing effort (one season).

## CONSERVATION ACTIONS

Ongoing conservation activities include efforts by WDFW, DNR, Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM), USFWS, JBLM, Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), and the DoD. Actions include continuing restoration and enhancement of habitat and large-scale captive rearing and reintroduction efforts. The county governments of Thurston, Clallam, Island, and Skagit continue to utilize WDFW's GIS data as they conduct local land use planning. This committed group of collaborators has made significant progress to address threats and promote recovery of TCB in Washington. However, species' persistence remains dependent upon the continuation of these conservation efforts.

*South Puget Sound (Thurston and Pierce counties).* On-going TCB conservation actions in 2022-2023 were achieved by WDFW, DNR's Natural Areas Program, and the CNLM in partnership with USFWS, JBLM, and RCO. USFWS Recovery Funds have become the sole source of support for WDFW's efforts to re-establish TCB populations in south Puget Sound, although some money has been available to monitor populations on JBLM through May 2023. DNR and WDFW also received grant monies for south Puget Sound prairie restoration from RCO's Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. Using these funding sources, the following activities were conducted:

- WDFW continued restoration and enhancement of habitat on three sites in Thurston county.
- WDFW oversaw large-scale captive-rearing and reintroduction efforts with 6,000+ checkerspot larvae released at three butterfly translocation sites in 2022. In 2023, 6,000+ larvae, 400 pupae, and 300 adults were released at four sites. All releases were conducted in Pierce or Thurston county.
- WDFW coordinated and oversaw the reinitiation of the TCB captive breeding program after a short hiatus due to ramifications from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- DNR restored and enhanced additional habitat at the Bald Hill Natural Area Preserve.
- The CNLM restored and enhanced additional habitat on several Thurston county sites in preparation for ongoing and future butterfly reintroductions.

*Additional Conservation Actions.* Taylor's checkerspot butterfly is one of twenty-one Oregon and Washington rare and/or declining prairie and oak woodland species that received support from multi-year USFWS Competitive State Wildlife Grants awarded in 2012-2022. The grants funded prairie-oak conservation work for TCB on south and north Puget Sound sites. WDFW was the lead entity for the grants and many partners cooperated to develop the project and have received funding, including WDFW, DNR, Oregon Department of Forestry, CNLM, the American Bird Conservancy, local land banks, additional public land managers, and private landowners from both states.