

# Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative

30-year Strategy for Shrubsteppe Conservation

FWC Habitat Committee Briefing: January 2024

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# The Assignment







# Responding to 2020 Wildfires





# Proviso Basics

**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 landownerships



Legislative Proviso to collaboratively “... develop a 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.”

### Required elements of Strategy:

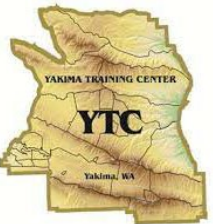
- Landscape scale habitat and species restoration
- Spatial priorities
- Filling gaps in fire coverage
- Tools to reduce fire-prone conditions
- Any other threats



# A Collaborative Effort







The Nature Conservancy



Spokane Tribe of Indians



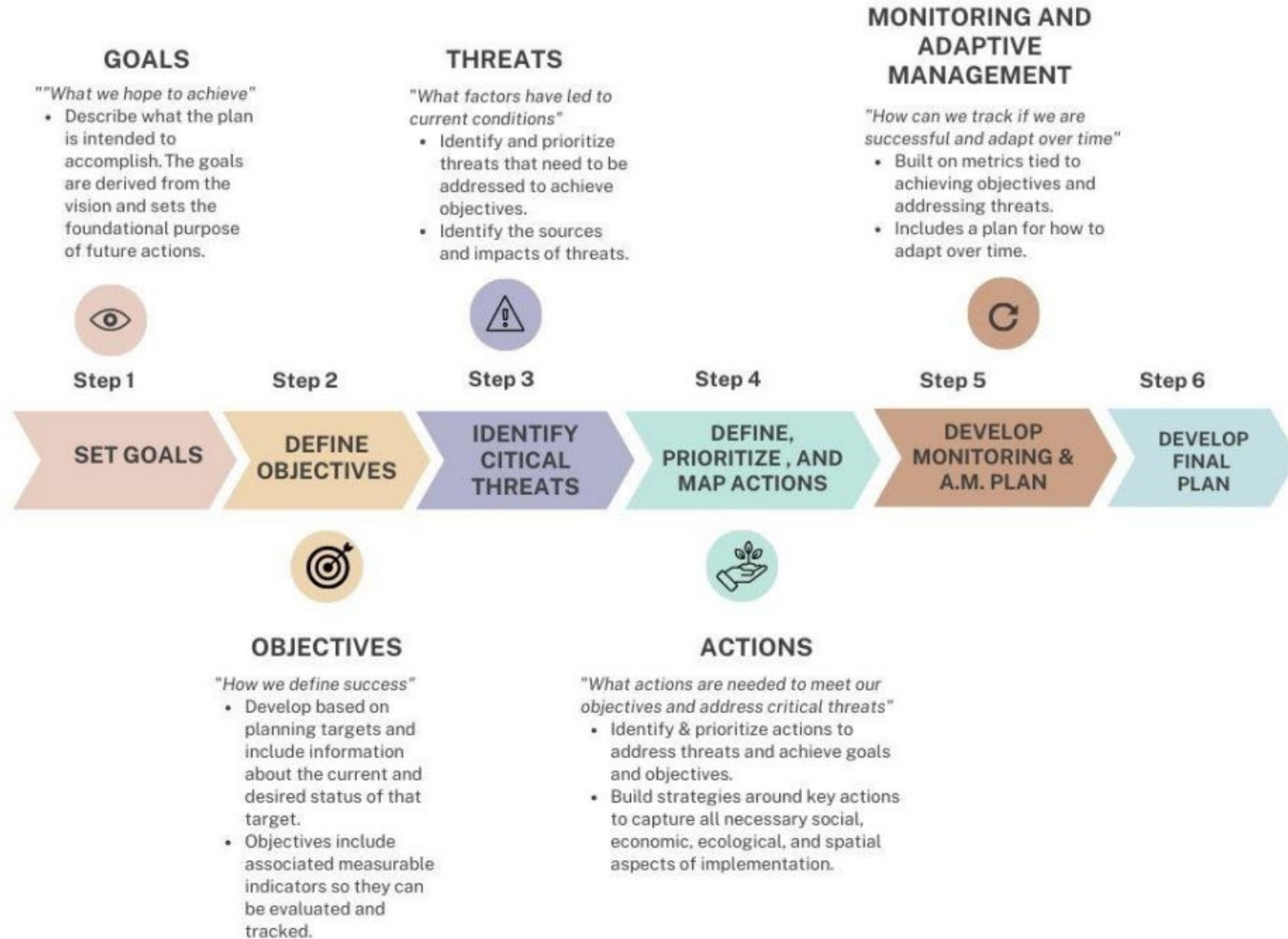
# Long-term Strategy Advisory Group Invitees

- 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
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Pheasants Forever
- Private landowners
- Spokane Tribe
- 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
- Washington Fire Chiefs
- WA Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Woodland Park Zoo
- Yakama Nation
- Yakima Training Center





# Facilitated Collaborative Process



# Guiding Principles

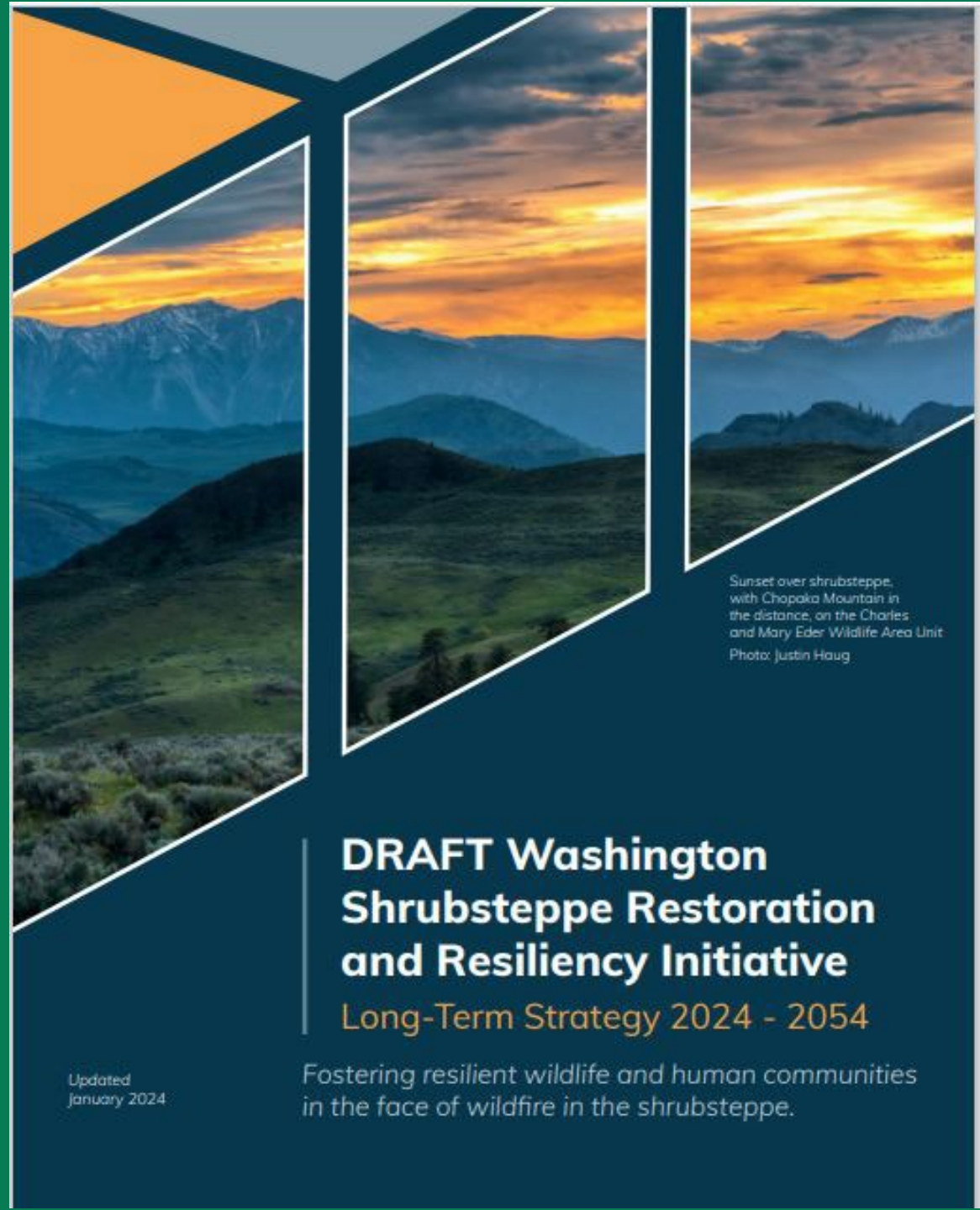
1. Focus on shrubsteppe wildlife and habitat conservation
2. Support for working lands and rural communities
3. Strategically target investments
4. Support and build upon existing efforts and capacity
5. Incorporate diverse and traditional perspectives
6. Accelerate the pace and scale
7. Proactively address equity and environmental justice
8. Incorporate ongoing monitoring and adaptive strategies



30-year Strategy currently out for  
Public Review through  
February 21, 2024

Visit WDFW website at:  
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/shrubsteppe#stratgy>

Delivering final to Legislature  
March 2024



Sunset over shrubsteppe,  
with Chopaka Mountain in  
the distance, on the Charles  
and Mary Eder Wildlife Area Unit  
Photo: Justin Haug

## **DRAFT 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.*

Updated  
January 2024







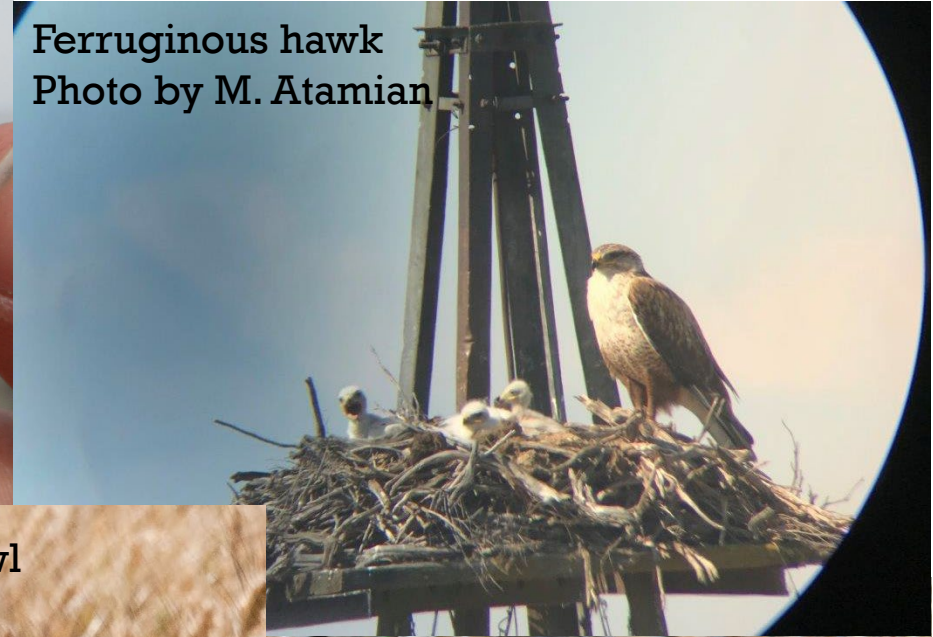
# 43 Species of Greatest Conservation Need



Pygmy rabbit  
Photo by B. DeMay



Pygmy short horned lizard  
Photo by S. DeMay



Ferruginous hawk  
Photo by M. Atamian



Monarch butterfly  
Photo by M. Atamian



Columbian sharp-tailed grouse  
Photo by T. Munson



Burrowing owl



Northern leopard frog  
Photo by S. DeMay



# Strategically Targeting Investments

Given the extent of habitat loss, **All** remaining shrubsteppe habitat has conservation value

**Yet** prioritization is needed to realize best conservation outcomes over time

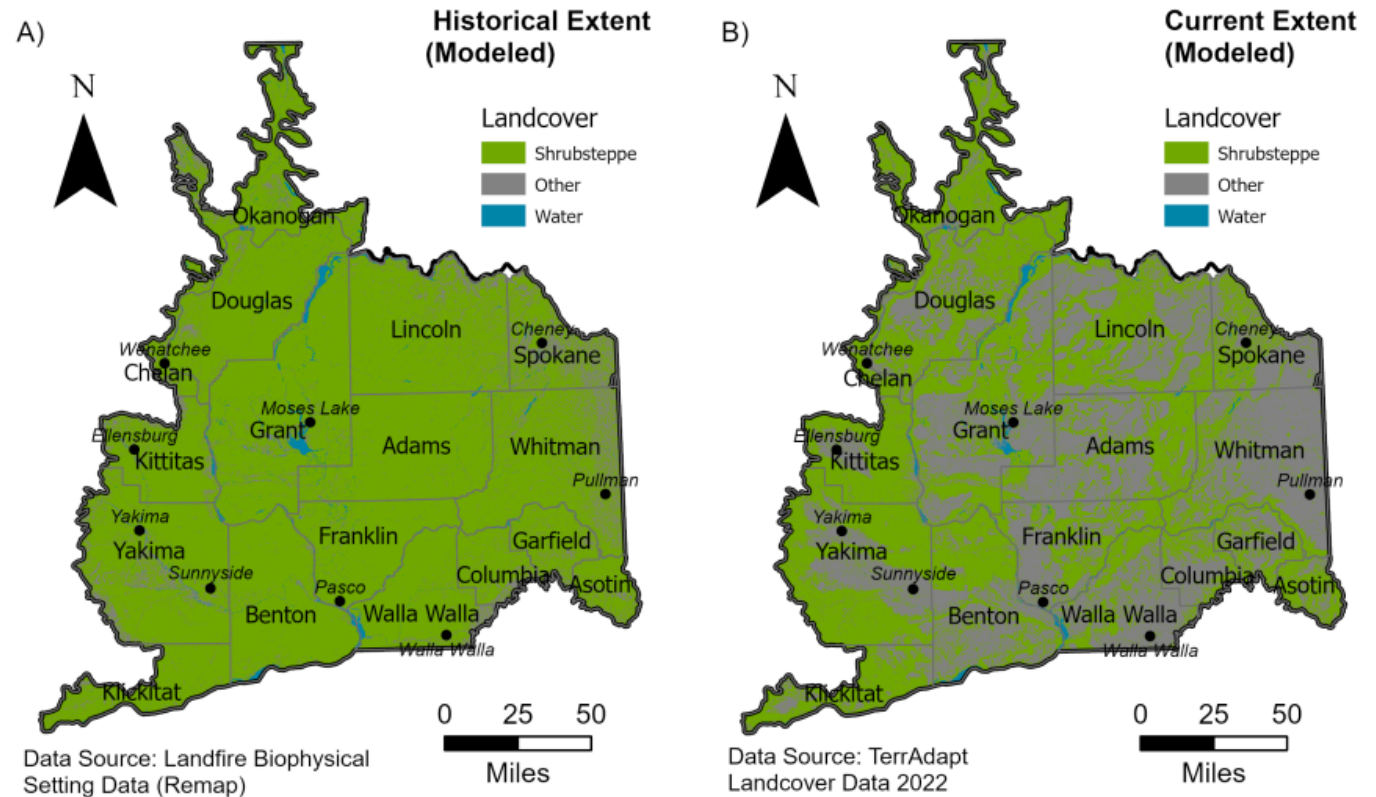


Figure 2. The historical (A) and current (B) estimates of shrubsteppe habitat. The data sources vary (Land - fire Biophysical Setting (A) versus TerrAdapt.org(B)), but in both cases, the landcover types associated with natural shrublands or natural grasslands were combined to map shrubsteppe habitat.





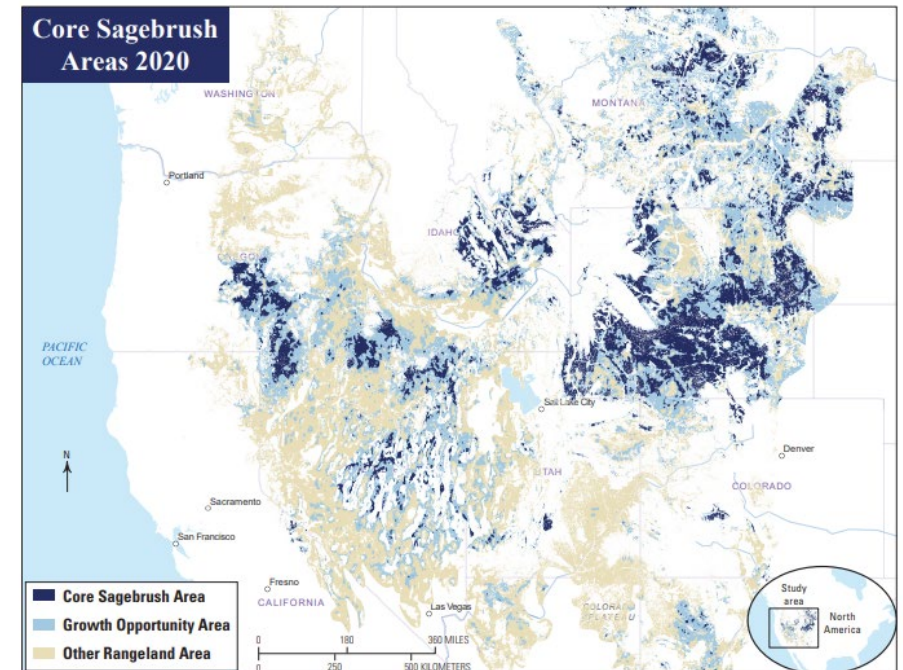
# Defining WSRRI Spatial Priorities

- Use WAFWA Sagebrush Conservation Design as a blueprint. The design calls for a Defend the Core, Grow the Core approach.
- “Stepping down” the approach in WA, setting our own thresholds, and also included Connect the Core
- With Terradapt, we are creating dynamic and spatially explicit mapping products that inform WSRRI objectives



Prepared in cooperation with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## A Sagebrush Conservation Design to Proactively Restore America's Sagebrush Biome



# Defend the Core, Grow the Core, Connect the Core

**Core Areas** – highest quality habitat

**Growth Opportunity Areas** – significant amounts of remaining habitat, though more degraded

**Corridors** – paths for wildlife relative free of movement barriers

**Other Habitat** – Critical to maintain.



Dry (xeric) habitat



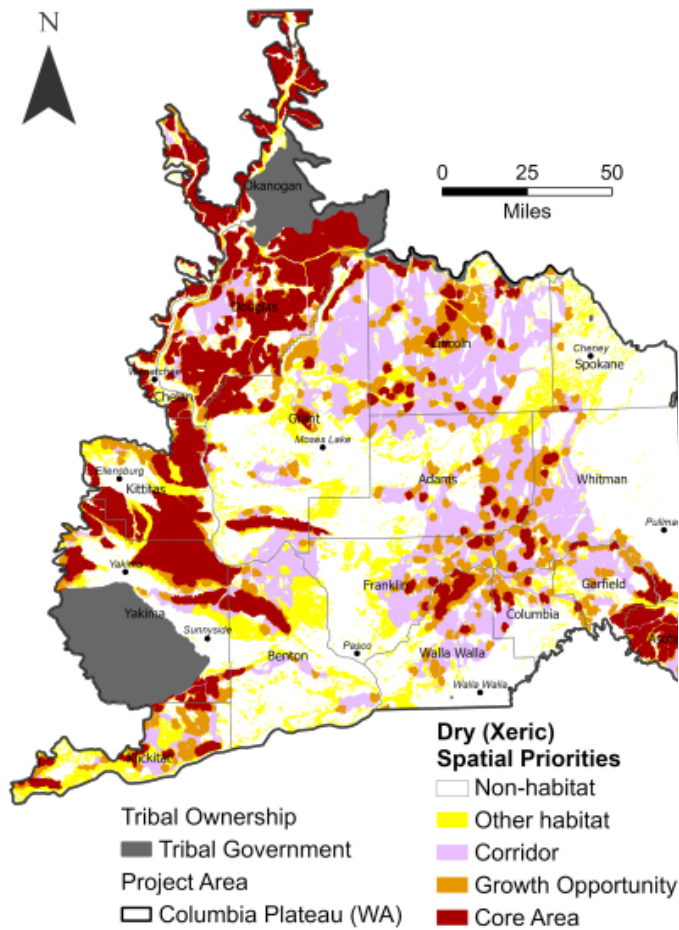
Wet (mesic) habitat



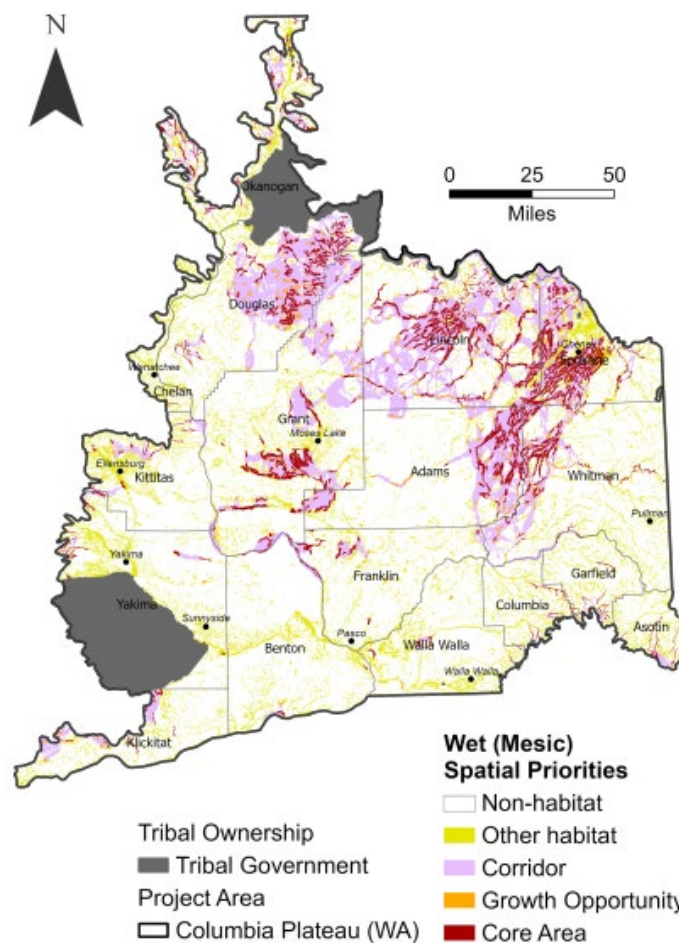
Sage grouse habitat



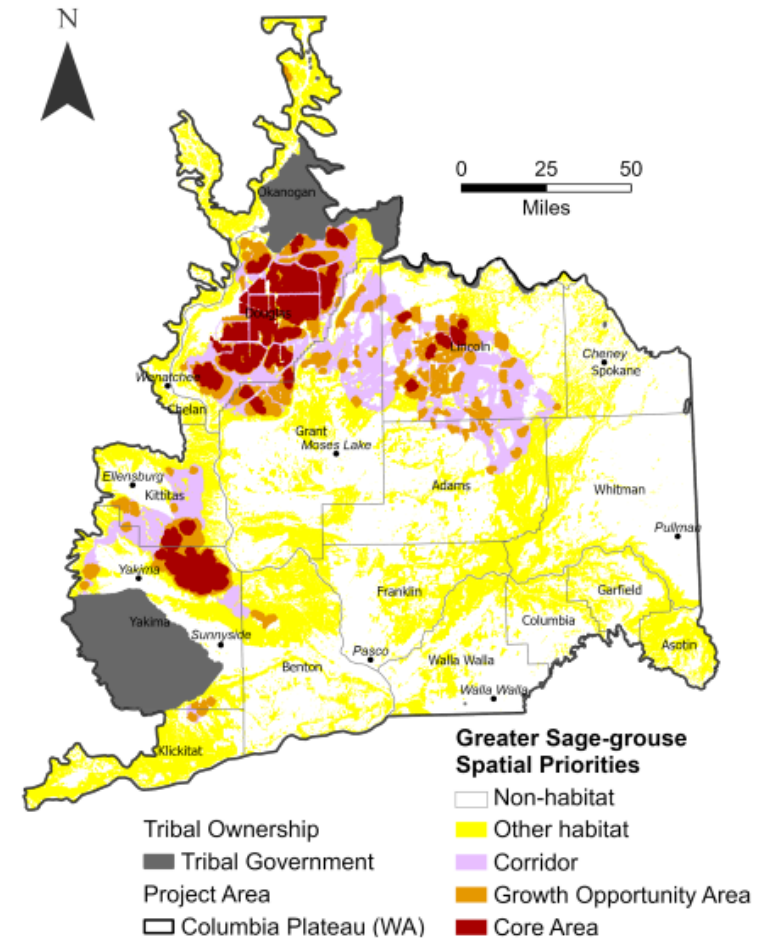
# Mapped Spatial Priorities



Dry (xeric)



Wet (mesic)



Sage grouse







# Goal 1

## Human communities

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



# Goal 1 Objectives

- 1. Community Fire Resistance and Resilience** - Ensure all human communities in the shrubsteppe landscape are engaged in, aware of, and planning for fire resistance, resilience, and recovery by 2029.
- 2. Community Damage** - Reduce the present-day adjusted dollar amount of damage, number of structures burned, and families displaced resulting from wildland fires in the shrubsteppe landscape below the 10-year average by 5% for 10 consecutive years beginning in 2029.
- 3. Landowner Engagement** - Establish a baseline and increase the number of local landowners and communities engaged in conservation efforts across the shrubsteppe landscape, aiming for a 15% increase by 2029.
- 4. Working Lands** - Increase support for working lands to enhance contribution to shrubsteppe wildlife conservation while remaining economically viable.
- 5. Underserved, Highly Impacted, Overburdened, or English as a Second Language (ESL) Communities** - Identify underserved, highly impacted, overburdened, or ESL communities located within the shrubsteppe landscape and prioritize them for assistance to become more resistant and resilient to wildland fire.





# Goal 2

## **Wildland fire Risk and Resilience**

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 2 Objectives

- 1. Fire Frequency** - Identify the likely pre-1800 fire return intervals on all core and growth shrubsteppe habitat areas and manage planned and respond to unplanned fire to achieve this frequency in these landscapes by 2053.
- 2. Fire Severity/Extent** - By 2053, reduce ecological impact from fire by (1) reducing high severity fire to 1% or less of total acres burned in shrubsteppe Core Areas and (2) reducing high severity fire to 5% or less of total acres burned in Growth Opportunity Areas.
- 3. Human-caused wildfire starts** - Reduce the number of human-caused starts annually in the planning area to less than 25% of the current 10-year average by 2029.
- 4. Ecological Damage** - Reduce the extent of core areas burned at high-severity by 5% of the 10-year average per year, for 10 consecutive years beginning in 2029.





# Goal 3

## **Wildlife Habitat**

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



# Goal 3 Objectives

- 1. Core Areas** - Through management, grow core areas to achieve a net increase of total core area representation across the Columbia Plateau for each of the conservation targets by 2054:
- 2. Growth Opportunity Areas** - Manage growth opportunity areas to increase core areas and avoid net loss of growth opportunity areas through a) conversion to land uses that do not provide wildlife habitat (e.g., development), and b) degradation of growth opportunity areas to other habitat for each conservation target by 2054:
- 3. Other Habitat** - Manage other habitat to increase growth opportunity areas and core areas and avoid net loss of other habitat through conversion to land uses that do not provide wildlife habitat by 2054:
- 4. Connectivity** - Avoid a net loss of connectivity in all corridors and improve connectivity in key corridors that are central and valuable to the larger network of cores.
- 5. Unique Habitats** - Avoid net loss of unique habitats and features, such as sand dune, talus, Palouse prairie, vernal pools, and others, through conversion to land uses that do not provide wildlife habitat, to support associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need and other wildlife.







# Goal 4

## Wildlife Species

Populations of species of greatest conservation need and other species 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.



# Goal 4 Objectives

- 1. State Listed Species** - Achieve a positive trend toward State Recovery Plan objectives for state listed species by 2050
- 2. Species of Greatest Conservation Need Species-** Stabilize and improve population status of unlisted SGCN species by 2050, as indicated by appropriate demographic and/or habitat indicators (e.g., occupancy, distribution, abundance; the extent and quality of habitat).



Greater sage grouse  
Photo by M. Atamian



## WSRRI ENABLING CONDITIONS

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





# Key Strategy - Community Engagement

## Action Categories:

- Understand human values, perceptions, and needs
- Strategic communication actions
- Sustained and amplified engagement
- Build and support capacity
- Grazing and working lands outreach & education



# Habitat Protection

- Private landowners are key partners – 75% in private ownership
- Emphasis on voluntary incentives
- Growth Management Act, including Voluntary Stewardship Program
- WDFW's Priority Habitats and Species program
- Defend and grow the Core



Photo by H. Anderson



# Key Strategy – Habitat Protection

## Action Categories:

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





# Habitat Restoration: Shared Resource and Service Delivery

- Expand capacity of restoration professionals, crews, equipment
- Increase availability of native plant materials and other resources
- Deliver resources and services to high priority places and projects

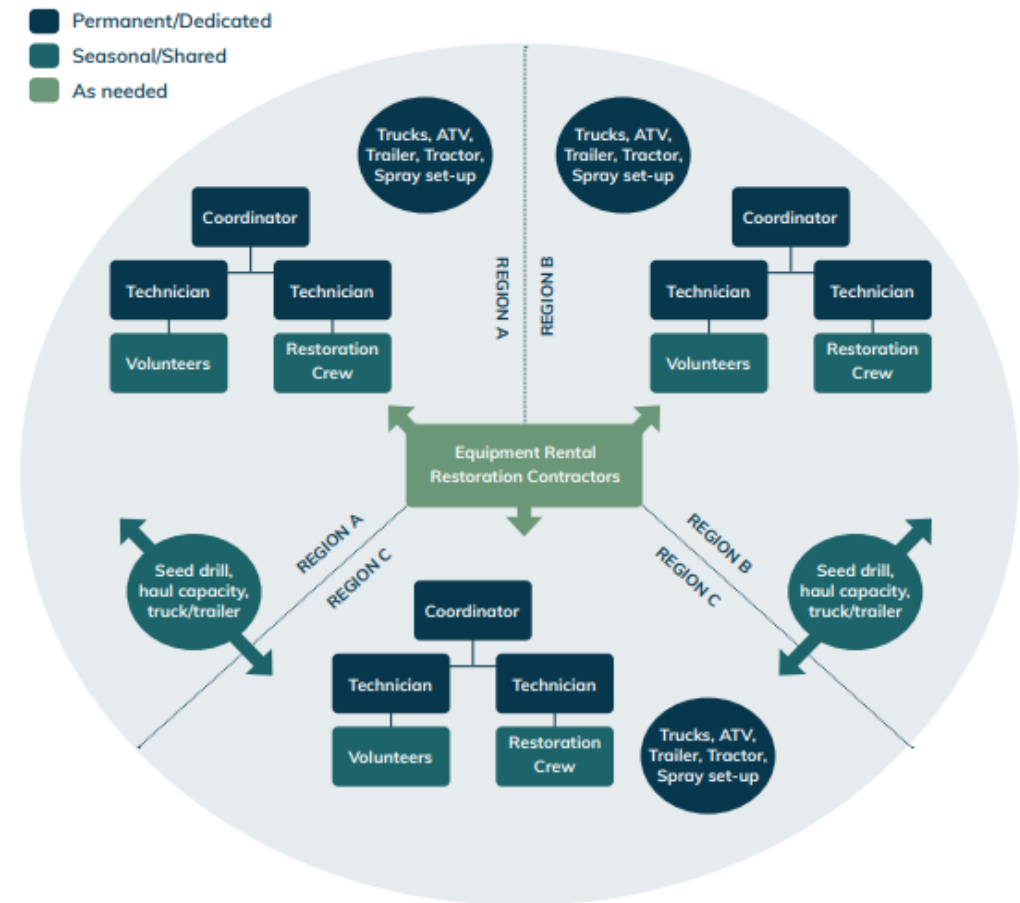


Figure 10. Conceptual design outlining restoration teams within WSRRI management regions

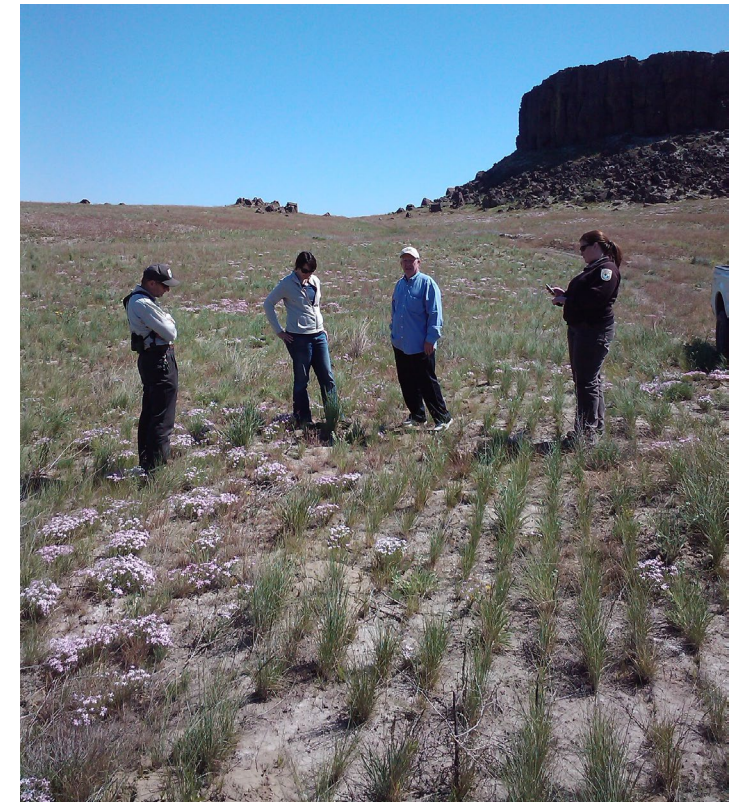


# Key Strategy – Habitat Restoration



## Action Categories

- Collaboration and information sharing
- Restore degraded habitat
- Restoration implementation capacity
- Cultural resources review
- Invasive plant control
- Native plant materials
- Evaluate habitat conditions
- Expand the knowledge base





# Key Strategy – Species Management



- Survey and monitor species of greatest conservation need (SGCN)
- Develop a comprehensive approach to disease management
- Conduct conservation translocations as needed
- Minimize SGCN impact from non-native and human-associated predators
- Minimize impact to SGCN from built infrastructure
- Minimize impact from human actions and disturbance
- Explicitly link species-specific considerations in habitat protection and restoration efforts
- Conduct strategic research for SGCN conservation



Columbian sharp-tailed grouse  
Photo by M. Atamian



# Key Strategy – Fire Management



## Action categories:

- Fire response and mitigation
- Pre-fire fuels reduction
- Community fire protection
- Emergency & post-disaster recovery response resources for working lands

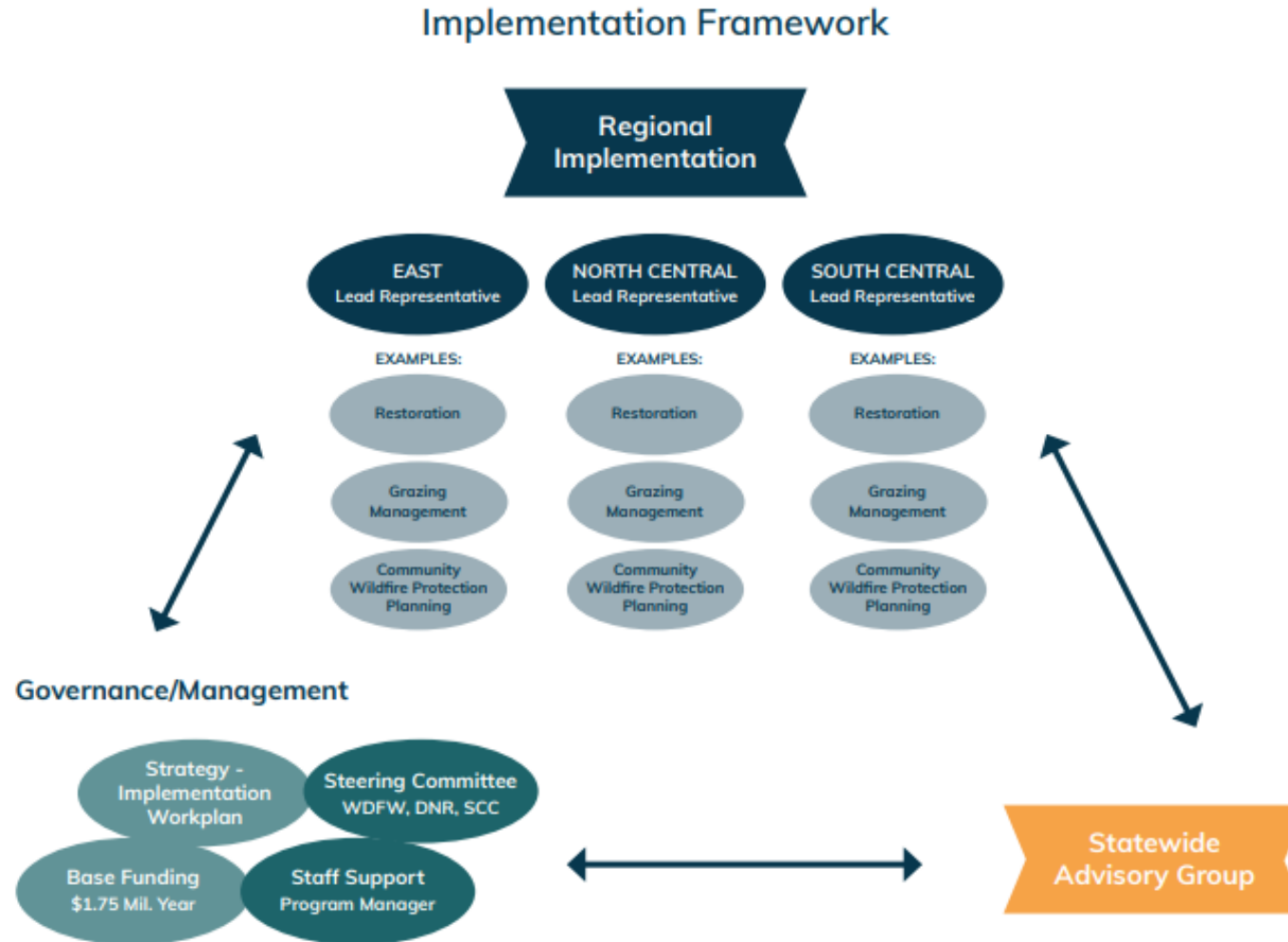


Photo by R. Anderson





# Draft Concept Organization and Governance



# Draft Workplan: Organization and Governance

- Formal agreements between DFW, DNR, SCC
- Tribal engagement and coordination plan
- Multi-agency communications plan
- Stand up Advisory Group, develop charter
- Operationalize WSRRI Program Manager
- Initiate pilot Regional Implementation Team
- Refine monitoring and adaptive management plan, develop reporting system
- Collaboratively prioritize actions



# Draft Workplan: Implementation


- Take steps toward safeguarding unprotected lands
- Refine and implement habitat restoration project generation and review process
- Develop WSRRI practice standards for fuel breaks, stewardship plans, fence specifications, etc.
- Pursue additional federal funding for WSRRI activities
- Pursue options for state supported virtual fence infrastructure
- Maintain active participation in federal Farm Bill formulation processes





## Seeking public input through 2/21/24:

- Is there sufficient background to understand conservation issues?
- Does it reference best available science?
- Are the concepts and issues communicated clearly?
- Do the actions reflect the changes needed to conserve the shrubsteppe landscape?
- Are the actions specific, achievable, and relevant?
- Does the workplan include the right actions to be completed in the first three years of implementation? Are there others that should be included?
- Provide any additional comments - specifically any gaps, corrections, or concerns



Sunset over shrubsteppe, with Chopaka Mountain in the distance, on the Charles and Mary Eder Wildlife Area Unit  
Photo: Justin Haug

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**Long-Term Strategy 2024 - 2054**

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# Thank you and Questions

