



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (DNS)

Name of Proposal: DNS 23-049: PYGMY RABBIT HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

Description of Proposal:

WDFW proposes to enhance 150 acres of shrub steppe habitat within the Sagebrush Flat Unit (herein unit) of the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area in southern Douglas County. Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area is managed to promote the recovery of three listed species including the federally listed Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, state listed sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse. Areas occupied by rabbits will be determined and avoided using winter occupancy surveys. The department will employ a combination of land management strategies including mowing, invasive plant control, native bunchgrass seeding, and prescribed burning. We will use standard farming tools which include tractors, mowers, side by sides, heavy harrow, and broadcast seeders. Fifty acres will be mowed along a meandering path patch mosaic using a 12 foot skid steer with masticator implement that chops up woody debris, reducing the upper canopy fuel load while leaving the understory relatively undisturbed. Approximately 100 acres will undergo a low intensity prescription burn.

The unit's even-age mature sage coupled with climate forecasts, nearby housing development and agricultural practices present an increasing risk of high-intensity wildfires in a landscape that historically was more resilient to an uncommon fire. Without proactive intervention toward age diversification of sage and habitat enhancement targeting understory composition, pygmy rabbits at the unit face population setbacks and probable extirpation. We anticipate ongoing pursuits toward this moving target. Shrub steppe habitat will be the primary habitat enhanced in the aim toward a more resilient recovery zone for pygmy rabbit and for the benefit of other shrub steppe obligates and dependent species. Adaptive management will occur over the next two years and may include addressing potential flushes of weedy annual grasses and broadleaf weeds using chemicals appropriate for that weed stage of development. If warranted, disturbed sites will be seeded with native bunchgrass species.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Contact: Sidra Blake
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Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Sagebrush Flat Unit of the WDFW Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area, approximately 15 miles northwest of Ephrata, Douglas County, Washington: Township 23N, Range 25E, Sections 15, 16, 21, 22, 27, 28, and 34.

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this determination of nonsignificance (DNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this DNS according to state rules.² **We will not act on this proposal for 14 days** from the date we issued the DNS. Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or DNS. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this letter. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on December 29, 2023**.

Method of Comment:

SEPA documents related to this proposal can be reviewed at the WDFW SEPA website at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/sepa/open-comments>.

The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals. Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal. You can submit your comments through one of the following ways:

- Online at the Public Input comment portal for this proposal: <https://publicinput.com/PygmyRabbitHabitat>
- Email to: PygmyRabbitHabitat@PublicInput.com

Responsible Official: Lisa Wood

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Habitat Program, Protection Division

Address: P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/sepa/closed-final>. Once the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this DNS or the details of the proposal, or have difficulty with the Public Input comment portal, contact Lisa Wood at: SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov.

DATE OF ISSUE: December 15, 2023

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-340(2).

SEPA Log Number: 23-049.dns

Individuals who need to receive this information in an alternative format or language, or who need reasonable accommodations to participate in WDFW-sponsored public meetings or other activities may contact the Title VI/ADA Compliance Coordinator by phone at 360-902-2349, TTY (711), or email (Title6@dfw.wa.gov).