

**For more information
or to report western gray
squirrel sightings contact**

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The Western Gray Squirrel

and other squirrels
in Washington

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Washington
Department of
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WILDLIFE**

This is a guide to distinguish the state-threatened western gray squirrel from other native squirrels (Douglas', red and flying) and from three introduced species (Eastern gray, fox and California ground squirrel) with which they can be readily confused. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife maintains records on the distribution of western gray squirrels in Washington; your assistance is appreciated. **Western gray, Douglas', red, and flying squirrels are all protected species in Washington (WAC 232-12-011).**

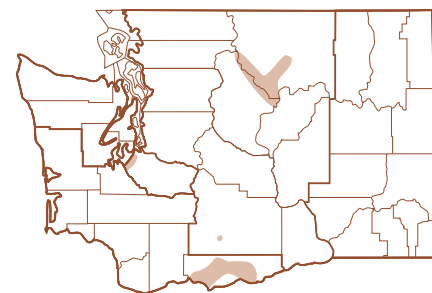
The Decline of the Western Gray Squirrel

The western gray squirrel was added to Washington's list of state-threatened species in 1993 when surveys indicated a decline in its geographical distribution. The species was once common at low to mid-elevations in dry forests where oak, pine, and Douglas-fir mix. It is now limited to 3 areas in Washington: the southern Puget Trough, primarily on Fort Lewis Military Reservation; the Methow Valley in Okanogan County and north shore of Lake Chelan in Chelan County; and in the river valleys of Klickitat and southern Yakima Counties. Threats to the persistence of the species include habitat loss and degradation, fluctuating food supplies, disease, and mortality resulting from road-kill and illegal hunting. State law (RCW 77.16.120) protects nest trees used by western gray squirrels. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists will consult with landowners to protect and enhance oak/conifer habitat.

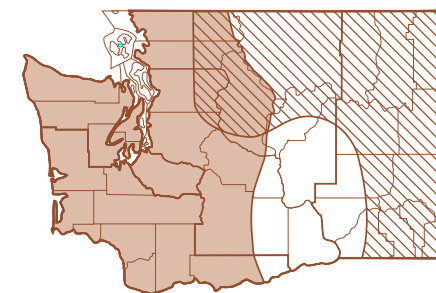


Distribution

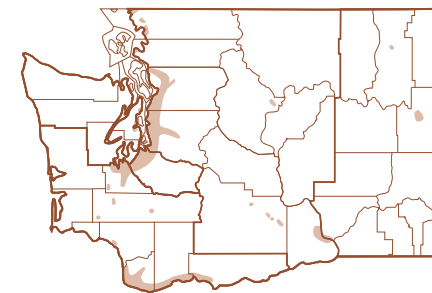
Several species of squirrel occur in the three areas occupied by western gray squirrels in Washington. Eastern gray, Douglas, and flying squirrels are present in the southern Puget Trough; all species except California ground squirrels are found in Chelan and Okanogan Counties; and Klickitat and southern Yakima Counties are home to all but fox and red squirrels.



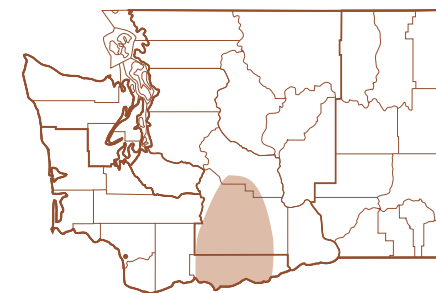
■ Western Gray Squirrel



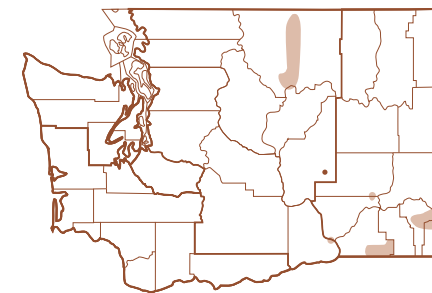
■ Douglas Squirrel ■ Red Squirrel



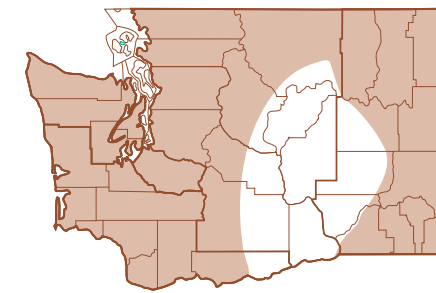
■ Eastern Gray Squirrel



■ California Ground Squirrel



■ Fox Squirrel



■ Northern Flying Squirrel

Western gray squirrel

Sciurus griseus Body: 12" Tail: 12"

Western gray squirrels are the largest native tree squirrels in Washington. They are salt-and-pepper to steel gray on the back with contrasting white underparts. They are distinguished by their very long and bushy white-edged tails, large feet and prominent ears, which are reddish-brown at the back in winter. Western gray squirrels forage in trees for acorns and conifer seeds, but also search the ground for mushrooms and bury acorns. They travel from tree to tree or on the ground in graceful, wave-like leaps. They may vocalize in the fall with a hoarse bark: "chuff-chuff-chuff".



Douglas' squirrel

Tamiasciurus douglasii Body: 7" Tail: 5"

Douglas' squirrels are small native tree squirrels. They are dark chestnut on the back fading to a reddish- or brownish-gray on the sides; their underparts are orange to gray and are offset by a short black stripe. The eye ring is pale orange. Their tails are somewhat bushy, slightly flattened and have a black tip. Douglas' squirrels vocalize often and have a range of calls from a low "chirr" to a sharp staccato "cough".



Red squirrel

Tamiasciurus hudsonicus Body: 8" Tail: 6.5"

Red squirrels are native and closely resemble their cousin the Douglas' squirrel. Their coat is typically reddish-brown on the back, fading to brown on the sides. A black line contrasts with the white belly in summer, but fades as the whole coat brightens in winter. The eye has a prominent white ring. The ranges of red and Douglas' squirrels overlap in the North Cascades Mountains.



Northern flying squirrel

Glaucomys sabrinus Body: 5" Tail: 7"

Northern flying squirrels are native and are found throughout forested parts of the state. They have dense, silky cinnamon to gray-brown fur above and a cream-colored belly. They have wide, flat tails, large dark eyes and relatively long ears. A fur-covered fold of skin stretches from the wrist to the ankle and is extended outward when they glide. They are rarely seen because they are nocturnal and sleep in tree cavities or stick nests during the day.



Eastern gray squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis Body: 10.5" Tail: 8"

Eastern gray squirrels are mid-sized, with relatively narrow tails and short ears compared to western gray squirrels. They have a pale gray coat with a reddish-brown wash on the face, back and tail. Their underparts are creamy white. Eastern gray squirrels were first introduced into Washington in 1925. They are now common in many cities, and thrive in developed areas. Live-trapped squirrels should not be released outside their known Washington range.



Fox squirrel

Sciurus niger Body: 13" Tail: 11"

Fox squirrels are large with variable reddish-brown to pale gray backs and red to yellow-orange underparts. They have broad tails, coarse, grizzled fur and short ears. Fox squirrels can be found in habitats with fewer trees than most other tree squirrels. They were introduced into Washington from the southeastern United States and occur in urban and rural environments in several parts of the state.



California ground squirrel

Spermophilus beecheyi Body: 11" Tail: 7"

California ground squirrels have large heads and stout bodies. Their upperparts are gray-brown with light flecks and the belly is off-white. A triangle of dark fur on the back contrasts with white-tinged shoulders. Their tails are gray above and off-white below, and can be narrow or bushy.

They may be seen in trees, but spend most of their time on the ground, where they run belly to the ground. This species entered Washington in 1912 when bridges were built across the Columbia River. California ground squirrels, also called "gray diggers", are hunted in Washington; special care should be taken to distinguish between these and western gray squirrels.



Signs of Squirrels

All tree squirrels may build or use stick and leaf nests and some use tree cavities for denning. Western gray squirrel nests are large and are often clustered in dry oak/conifer forests, not far from water. Occupied nests may have fresh leaves, conifer boughs, or lichen on top. California ground squirrels nest in underground burrows. Chewed cones and needle clusters on the ground may be a sign of western gray squirrel feeding activity. Large piles of cone scales generally indicate Douglas' or red squirrels.

