

WASHINGTON STATE PLAN FOR THE WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a national program, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). WHIP is a voluntary program for private landowners to develop and improve high quality habitat that supports wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. Under WHIP, the NRCS provides technical and financial assistance through cost-share agreements to implement habitat restoration and enhancement projects.

WASHINGTON STATE OBJECTIVES

In Washington State, WHIP will be used on private lands where fish and wildlife habitat has been negatively impacted by agricultural or forestry activities, or by invasive species. The major objectives of WHIP in Washington include:

1. Providing technical assistance to eligible private landowners and Tribes, for developing and implementing WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO) that include conservation practices authorized by WHIP.
2. Providing payments for projects that benefit upland wildlife habitat, riparian habitat, small wetlands, and threatened and endangered species habitat (including animals and plants).
3. Educating program participants and the public through wildlife habitat restoration and/or enhancement projects. Completed WHIP projects may be used as demonstration sites, success stories, and discussion points with conservation groups and schools.
4. Entering into cooperative agreements with partners for implementation of Special Projects or projects that involve multiple eligible landowners.
5. Utilizing Technical Service Providers to assist with the implementation of WHIP plans of operations.

Note: When land is suitable for wetland restoration, and the acreage is eligible for WHIP and for the Wetlands Reserve Program, the wetland should be restored using WRP funds, unless WRP funds are not available.

STATE WHIP PRIORITIES

The Washington State WHIP priorities were developed in consultation with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the WDFW Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Washington Department of Natural Resources and representatives of American Indian Tribes within the state.

1. Restoration of Native Vegetation on:
 - Primary Habitats selected from the Priority Habitat and Species list of the WDFW.
 - Secondary Habitats identified by the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC).

2. Habitat Improvement for Targeted Wildlife Species:
 - Federal or State Threatened and Endangered Species and associated critical habitats
 - Federal or State Candidate Species
 - Species identified as Priority Habitat Species (PHS) by WDFW
 - Beneficial insects and pollinators

CENTRAL and EASTERN WASHINGTON WHIP PRIORITIES

1. Priority Habitat Types:

Primary Priority Habitat Types	Secondary Priority Habitat Types
Shrub-Steppe	Riparian
Eastside Grassland	Wetlands
Upland Aspen Forest	Streams
	Forest
	Agricultural Land

2. Priority Treatment Activities:

Primary Habitat Types

- Shrub-Steppe
 - Restore or establish native shrub-steppe vegetative communities where they historically occurred.

Species that may be benefited: black-tailed jackrabbit, pygmy rabbit, Washington ground squirrel, white-tailed jack rabbit, Brewer’s sparrow, burrowing owl, loggerhead shrike, sage grouse, and sage thrasher, beneficial insects, pollinator insects.

- Eastside Grassland
 - Restore or establish native grass communities where they historically occurred (no shrub planting).

Species that may be benefited: sharp-tailed grouse, burrowing owl, white-tailed jack rabbit, giant Palouse earthworm, grasshopper sparrow, beneficial insects, pollinator insects.

- Upland Aspen Forest
 - Enhance or restore native Aspen forest.

Species that may be benefited: black-backed woodpecker, Lewis' woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, western bluebird.

Secondary Habitat Types

- Riparian
 - Restore or enhance native plant community.

- Establish native trees and shrubs where woody vegetation historically occurred.
- Install fencing along perennial streams, springs, ponds or lakes to provide for livestock management or exclusion.
- Provide off-channel watering source when livestock are excluded from perennial water source.

Species that may be benefited: bull trout, Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, westslope cutthroat, redband trout, wood duck, northern leopard frog, western pipistrelle bat (along Snake and Columbia Rivers), pallid bat, Yuma myotis bat, fringed myotis bat.

➤ Wetlands

- Restore or enhance native plant community.
- Restore or enhance natural hydrology.

Species that may be benefited: coho salmon, northern leopard frog, Columbia spotted frog, northern leopard frog, wood duck, American avocet, dunlin, black-necked stilt, western sandpiper, least sandpiper, pallid bat, Yuma myotis bat, fringed myotis bat.

➤ Streams

- Correct human-made fish passage barriers through removal and/or replacement with fish-passable structures.

Species that may be benefited: bull trout, Chinook salmon, coho salmon, kokanee, steelhead/rainbow trout, westslope cutthroat, redband trout.

➤ Forest

- Restore or enhance natural diversity by underplanting of shrubs or other trees into a monoculture, and/or by thinning to increase light transmission through the canopy.
- Precommercial thinning for improvement in understory vegetation
- Create snags.
- Reestablish cover on disturbed sites, using species beneficial to wildlife.
- Enhance or restore native Oregon white oak woodland.

Species that may be benefited: black-backed woodpecker, Lewis' woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, western bluebird, western gray squirrel.

➤ Agricultural Land

- Establish trees, shrubs or herbaceous vegetation on idle land (eyebrows, odd areas, expired Conservation Reserve Program, etc).
- Establish hedgerows or shelterbelts.
- Establish perennial food plots. (Note: annual food plots are not eligible for financial assistance).
- Establish habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

Species that may be benefited: burrowing owl, white-tailed jack rabbit, black-tailed jack rabbit, bats, beneficial insects, pollinator insects.

WESTERN WASHINGTON WHIP PRIORITIES

1. Priority Habitat Types:

Primary Priority Habitat Types	Secondary Priority Habitat Types
Westside Grasslands	Riparian
White Oak Woodlands	Wetlands
Bays and Estuaries	Streams
	Forest
	Agricultural Land
	Coastal Dunes and Beaches

2. Priority Treatment Activities:

Primary Habitat Types

➤ Westside Grasslands

- Remove invasive species such as Douglas fir, Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry, and introduced grasses and forbs.
- Interplant with native prairie grasses and forbs.
- Establish oak seedlings.
- Includes projects in oak savanna and balds.

Species that may be benefited: Oregon silverspot, Puget blue, Valley silverspot, Island marble, Taylor's (whulge) checkerspot, Makah copper (prairie bog), streaked horned lark, Mazama pocket gopher, western bluebird, Oregon vesper sparrow, western pond turtle, Oregon branded skipper, Mardon skipper.

➤ White Oak Woodlands

- Remove invasive species in the overstory such as Douglas fir.
- Remove invasive species in the understory such as Himalayan blackberry, Scotch broom, English hawthorn, English ivy, and introduced grasses and forbs.
- Establish oak seedlings.
- Protect naturally germinated oak seedlings.
- Livestock exclusion fencing.

Species that may be benefited: western gray squirrel, pileated woodpecker, western bluebird, slender-billed white-breasted nuthatch, Puget Sound fritillary.

➤ Bays and Estuaries (extreme high tidal zone to extreme low tidal zone)

- Remove invasive species such as cordgrass (*Spartina* sp.).
- Establish native grasses and forbs.
- Reestablish suitable substrate for native shellfish colonization.

Species that may be benefited: Chinook salmon, coho salmon, pink salmon, chum salmon, sockeye salmon, steelhead, bull trout, coastal resident/searun cutthroat trout,

non-breeding concentrations of shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers, phalaropes), Bald eagle, Dungeness crab, Olympia oyster, common loon, western grebe, northern pintail.

Secondary Habitat Types

➤ Riparian

- Establish native trees and shrubs where woody vegetation historically occurred.
- Install fencing along perennial streams, springs, ponds or lakes to provide for livestock management or exclusion.
- Provide off-channel watering source when livestock are excluded from riparian water.
- Restore or enhance native plant community.
- Restore or enhance natural hydrology.

Species that may be benefited: bull trout/Dolly Varden, Chinook salmon, chum salmon, coastal resident/searun cutthroat, coho salmon, kokanee, pink salmon, steelhead/rainbow trout (in anadromous streams), sockeye salmon, wood duck, great blue heron (breeding concentrations), little brown bat, Oregon spotted frog, Pacific lamprey.

➤ Wetlands

- Restore or enhance native plant community.
- Restore or enhance natural hydrology.

Species that may be benefited: Olympic mudminnow, coho salmon, westslope cutthroat trout, northern leopard frog, Oregon spotted frog, western pond turtle, bald eagle, waterfowl concentration areas, trumpeter swan, Wilson's snipe, dunlin, spotted sandpiper, western toad, Makah copper butterfly, western grebe.

➤ Streams

- Correct human-made fish passage barriers through removal and/or replacement with fish-passable structures.

Species that may be benefited: bull trout/Dolly Varden, Chinook salmon, chum salmon, coastal resident/searun cutthroat, coho salmon, kokanee, pink salmon, steelhead/rainbow trout (in anadromous streams), sockeye salmon, Pacific lamprey.

➤ Forest

- Establish native fruit and berry producing trees and shrubs.
- Create snags and recruit downed wood.
- Enhance or create winter/spring forage for Olympic Peninsula elk herd.
- Precommercial thinning for improvement in understory vegetation
- Restore or enhance natural diversity by underplanting of shrubs or other trees into a monoculture, and/or by thinning to increase light transmission through the canopy.
- Establish habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

Species that may be benefited: band-tailed pigeon, pileated woodpecker, western bluebird

➤ Agricultural Land

- Establish native herbaceous vegetation, trees and shrubs (patches, hedgerow, windbreak, etc.).
- Enhance or create winter/spring forage for Olympic Peninsula elk herd.
- Establish habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

Species that may be benefited: Roosevelt elk (Olympic herd), ring-necked pheasant, band-tailed pigeon, Puget blue butterfly.

➤ Coastal Dunes and Beaches

- Remove invasive species such as Scotch broom, gorse, shore pine, non-native grasses and forbs.
- Establish native grasses and forbs.

Species that may be benefited: Oregon silverspot, Taylor's (whulge) checkerspot, western bluebird, streaked horned lark and the snowy plover.

PARTNERSHIPS

The informal partnership between NRCS, WDFW, WDNR and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and American Indian Tribes provides program participants with a more complete package of technical expertise in:

1. Identifying priority habitats, potential large-scale restoration areas, and species of concern;
2. Writing WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO); and
3. Designing and implementing wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement activities identified in the WPO.

NRCS has a long history of working with landowners to improve ecological conditions on farms and ranches. NRCS has extensive expertise in evaluating natural resource conditions and developing the appropriate treatment plans to successfully improve or restore fish and wildlife habitat.

WDFW and USFWS have expertise in prioritizing and addressing fish and wildlife needs. WDFW has identified Priority Habitats and associated Priority Species within the State of Washington. This information has been used to prioritize those habitats and species that WHIP will address.

NRCS will work closely with existing and new partners to deliver a public information and education program to inform landowners and land managers of the ecological and economic importance of sound wildlife habitat management. Partners will be encouraged to provide onsite technical and financial assistance for restoring and enhancing habitat conditions.

FUND DISTRIBUTION

The State allocation will be split into separate Financial Assistance allocations for each NRCS administrative Area (Central, East, and West Areas). The allocation of funds to each Area will be determined as follows:

- Each Area will receive an equal allocation of the financial assistance funds.
- Each Area may utilize, with concurrence of Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC-P), up to 30% of their allocation to address Special Projects that they consider a priority not identified in this plan.
- Each Area is encouraged to designate up to 12.5% of their allocation for Tribal applications.
- If additional special initiative funding becomes available, distribution of these funds will be determined by the State Conservationist in consultation with the STAC.
- Funds not obligated in each Area by June 15, 2009, will be returned to the ASTC-P for redistribution.

ELIGIBLE PRACTICES and PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Practices approved for WHIP cost-share assistance in Washington State for FY2009 are in the FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs lists (Attachment 1).

Each NRCS administrative Area will develop a FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs list derived from the State eligible practices list, and will be posted on the FY2009 WHIP web page. FY2009 WHIP Payment Schedules will be developed for each Area based on the eligible practices in the Area, and will be uploaded to Customer Service Toolkit and ProTracts, and will also be posted on the FY2009 WHIP web page.

If a maximum cost-share per contract will be used in FY2009, it is noted on the Area's FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs list.

RANKING CRITERIA

Washington will utilize three (3) separate ProTracts Ranking Tools for FY2009, one for each NRCS administrative Area.

Each Area will develop an Application Questionnaire to assist with WHIP application and ranking process. The Ranking Tools and Application Questionnaires will be posted on the Washington NRCS FY2009 WHIP web page.

PROJECT SELECTION

The prioritization and funding of applications in each Area will be completed in the following manner:

- All applications will be entered into ProTracts.
- Applications will be ranked using the ProTracts Ranking Tool developed for the Area.
- The estimated project cost will be entered in ProTracts for each application.

- The District Conservationist (DC) will submit an application package for each application to their Area Program Liaison, as rankings are completed.
- The Area Conservationist and Program Liaison will select the applications to be funded from each Area utilizing the application packages and lists built from ProTracts. The Area Conservationist may vary from the application log to fund Special Projects.
- The Area Conservationist will notify the appropriate DC of the applications selected for funding.
- The DC shall notify the applicants of their application status. Those who have been selected for funding will be notified that they must work with NRCS to develop a WHIP Plan of Operations and the WHIP CPA-1202 Contract.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Each Area Conservationist will have the authority, with concurrence from the ASTC-P, to utilize up to 30% of their WHIP allocation to fund Special Projects. The intent of this Special Project provision is to provide an opportunity to fund projects that are unique and/or where we can participate as project partners with other fish and wildlife agencies and organizations. The basis for funding an application as a Special Project will be documented by the Area Conservationist.

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

The NRCS State Office will send a press release to major newspapers across the state. NRCS field offices will further publicize the WHIP program through local newspapers, radio spot announcements, district newsletters, organization newsletters and public meetings.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The following timeline will be adhered to in the implementation of the FY2009 WHIP plan:

Key Dates	Key Tasks
April 15, 2009	Applications must be received by close of business on April 15, 2009 to be considered for the FY2009 WHIP ranking period.
April 15, 2009	Letters will be sent by DC to each applicant who has incomplete eligibility information in ProTracts, as applications are received.
May 1, 2009	Ranking for all complete and eligible applications completed in ProTracts, and Application Packages due at Area Office.
May 6, 2009	Applications selected for funding, PreApproved in ProTracts, and Field Offices notified by the Area Conservationist.
May 8, 2009	Funds not Approved to contracts in ProTracts will be reallocated between Areas by the State ASTC-P.
June 15, 2009	All contracts of \$150,000 or more will be submitted to the State Conservationist by the Area Conservationist.
June 30, 2009	All WHIP contracts will be submitted to the area office for review and obligation in ProTracts by the Contracting Officers.

MAJOR TASKS

1. Application Procedure

- All applications are entered in ProTracts.
- All applicants must sign a ProTracts-generated CPA-1200 Application, and receive a copy of the CPA-1202 Appendix, by April 15, 2009

2. Applicant and Land eligibility

- Refer to Part 517.10, Part 517.11, and Part 512.20, 440-V-CPM located at <http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/>.
- Program eligibility will be documented on the WHIP Participant and Land Eligibility Worksheet (Attachment 2).
- Certification of Control of Land (Attachment 3), or other proof of control of land.

3. Processing Applications

- Develop preliminary plan at level adequate to evaluate and rank the application.
- Rank the application using the Ranking Tool in ProTracts.
- Enter the estimated cost for each application into ProTracts.
- Submit the application package for each application to the Area Program Liaison:
 - CPA-1200 Application generated from ProTracts and signed by the applicant
 - Application Questionnaire
 - Application Ranking Summary report from ProTracts
 - Preliminary plan
 - Preliminary cost estimate
 - Participant and Land Eligibility Worksheet
 - Certification of Control of Land, or other proof of control of land
 - Proof of signature authority for businesses, per CPM 512.21b
 - Other documents, as required by the Area Conservationist

4. Application Selection

- Area Conservationist and Program Liaison will review and select applications for funding and notify the District Conservationist of the selection.
- Special Projects and/or Tribal projects should also be selected by the Area Conservationist at this time.
- District Conservationists will notify applicants in writing of their application status.

5. Conservation Plan development

- The planning unit will be clearly identified on a conservation plan map.
- A conservation plan will be developed in Customer Service Toolkit (CST) for each selected application.
- The conservation plan will be used as the basis for developing the WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO).
- The plan will be signed by an NRCS planner with approval authority, and the applicant.

6. WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO)

- The WPO will be developed from the conservation plan by using the CST contract wizard and the approved Area FY2009 WHIP Payment Schedule posted in CST. The WPO will be uploaded into ProTracts
- The WPO must contain all essential practices needed to meet quality criteria contained in the Field Office Technical Guide, Section III, that apply to the applicant's wildlife resource concerns identified in their application questionnaire and ranking.

7. WHIP Contract Development

- Follow 440-V-CPM, Part 517 and Part 512 for contract development guidance.
- After uploading the WPO from CST into ProTracts, the AD-1155 and CPA-1202 will be printed from ProTracts.
- The NRCS Field Office will review the conservation plan, AD-1155, CPA-1202 and CPA-1202 Appendix with the applicant and obtain the applicant's signature on all documents. Obtain the District Conservationist's signature on the AD-1155 to certify technical adequacy.
- The Field Office will notify the Area Conservationist (Contracting Officer) that the WHIP Contract is ready to obligate, and provide to the Area Office all documents the Contracting Officer (CO) requires for review prior obligating the Contract.
- After obligating the CPA-1202 Contract in ProTracts, the Contracting Officer will send written notification of WHIP Contract approval to the participant. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Field Office and the DC.
 - ❖ Reminder: Any contract of \$150,000 or more in total cost-share must be submitted by the Contracting Officer, through the State Conservationist, to the Regional Assistant Chief for approval.