



STATE OF WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE
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August 28, 2006

TO: IAC Members & Designees
FROM: Laura Eckert Johnson, Director *LEJ*
PREPARED BY: Marguerite Austin, Manager *MA*
Recreation & Habitat Section, Project Services Division
SUBJECT: Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
Critical Habitat Ranked List for Fiscal Year 2008
Notebook Item #7b

“Critical habitat projects provide habitat important for the protection, management, or public enjoyment of certain wildlife species or groups of species, including, but not limited to, wintering range for deer, elk, and other species, waterfowl and upland bird habitat, fish habitat, and habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species.”¹

EVALUATION SUMMARY

Eleven Critical Habitat (CH) category projects requesting \$26.2 million were evaluated on August 8, 2006 in an open public meeting. Utilizing criteria adopted by IAC, a team of eight evaluators reviewed and ranked the CH projects. The team, comprised of individuals recognized for their expertise, experience, and knowledge related to fish and wildlife habitat conservation, included:

EVALUATOR	DISCIPLINE
Carey Smith, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Vancouver	Natural Resources Mgmt
David Giblin, University of Washington, Seattle	Herbarium Collections Mgr
Elizabeth Rodrick, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia	Wildlife Biologist
George Boggs, Whatcom Conservation District, Lynden	Natural Resource Manager
Greg Rabourn, King Co Water & Land Resources, Seattle	Stewardship Specialist
Pene Speaks, Department of Natural Resources, Olympia	Botanical/Wetland Scientist
Peter Dunwiddie, The Nature Conservancy, Seattle	Stewardship Ecologist
Rob Fimbel, State Parks and Recreation, Olympia	Natural Resources Ecology

¹ Chapter 79A.15.010(3), Acquisition of Habitat Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Lands



The results of the evaluations, provided for IAC Board consideration, are found in *Table 1 – WWRP, Critical Habitat Ranked List of Projects, Fiscal Year 2008*.

CRITICAL HABITAT CATEGORY

Critical Habitat category projects provide habitat for wildlife including game and non-game species. These habitats include freshwater, salt-water, forests, riparian zones, shrub-steppe, wetlands, winter range, etc. Acquisitions often provide protection of habitat for both federal and state endangered, threatened, or sensitive species.

Other factors related to this category are:

- Acquisition of lesser interests such as conservation easements is eligible.
- Habitat enhancement or creation is allowed.
- Public use for both consumptive and non-consumptive activities is allowed.
- Public use may be excluded if needed to protect habitat and species.
- Where appropriate, development of public use facilities such as trails, wildlife blinds, interpretive signs, parking and restrooms is eligible.
- Mitigation banking projects are eligible,
- Local and state² agencies may apply for funding.
- Local agency applicants must provide a 50% matching share.

The Critical Habitat category of the Habitat Conservation Account is eligible to receive 40% of the WWRP funds in the account.³

RECOMMENDATION

After reviewing the results of the scoring and ranking of projects, and considering comments from evaluators and applicants, staff recommends approval of the ranked list of projects as shown in Table 1. Table 1 also shows staff's recommendation for the list of projects to be forwarded to the Governor and Legislature. In keeping with IAC guidelines, this list includes enough projects to use the statutory amount set aside for this category and alternates. Resolution #2006-28 is provided for Board consideration. It is our understanding that the Department of Fish and Wildlife may request an alternative funding recommendation. At the time of this memo, our office had not received the request.

ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution #2006-28
- Table 1 – *WWRP, Critical Habitat Ranked List of Projects, FY2008*
- State Map for Critical Habitat Category projects
- Critical Habitat Evaluation Criteria Summary
- Critical Habitat Project Evaluation Scoring Summary
- Critical Habitat Project Summaries (a synopsis of each proposal)

² State agencies mean the State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of General Administration, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

³ Chapter 79A.15.040(1)(a) RCW

RESOLUTION #2006-28
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
Critical Habitat Category - Fiscal Year 2008
Ranked List of Projects

WHEREAS, for fiscal year 2008 of the 2007-2009 biennium, eleven Critical Habitat category projects are eligible for funding from the Habitat Conservation Account of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and

WHEREAS, these eleven Critical Habitat category projects were evaluated using evaluation criteria approved by IAC Board Members, and

WHEREAS, these evaluations occurred in an open public meeting, and

WHEREAS, all eleven Critical Habitat category projects meet program requirements as stipulated in IAC Manual #10b, *Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program- Habitat Conservation and Riparian Protection Accounts: Policies and Project Selection*,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that IAC hereby approves the ranked list of projects depicted in Table 1 – *WWRP, Critical Habitat Ranked List of Projects, FY2008 (2006-28)*, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that IAC hereby recommends to the Governor the ranked list of Critical Habitat category projects for further consideration.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: September 21, 2006



**Table 1
Washington Wildlife Recreation Program - Critical Habitat
State Fiscal Year 2008**

Rank	Score	Number	Project Name	Project Sponsor	IAC Amt	Sponsor Amt	Total Amt	Cum Amt
1 of 11	43.625	06-1807A	Skookumchuck Watershed	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	4,670,250		4,670,250	4,670,250
2 of 11	42.250	06-1813A	Sharptailed Grouse Phase 6	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	526,260		526,260	5,196,510
3 of 11	41.000	06-1835A	Cowichee/Tieton Watershed Phase 3	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	1,688,720		1,688,720	6,885,230
4 of 11	40.000	06-1937A	West Branch Little Spokane River Phase 1	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	3,661,966		3,661,966	10,547,196
4 of 11	40.000	06-1814A	Klickitat Steppes, Columbia Hills	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	608,002		608,002	11,155,198
6 of 11	38.375	06-1808A	Teanaway Ecosystem	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	1,922,100		1,922,100	13,077,298
7 of 11	36.250	06-1784A	Allen Forest	Pierce County Parks & Rec	568,070	568,070	1,136,140	13,645,368
8 of 11	35.125	06-1810A	Methow Watershed - Phase 5	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	4,692,465		4,692,465	18,337,833
9 of 11	28.625	06-1811A	Mid-Columbia Shrub Steppe	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	3,129,000		3,129,000	21,466,833
10 of 11	26.000	06-1815A	Touchet River and Grassland	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	2,217,600		2,217,600	23,684,433
11 of 11	24.125	06-1809A	Okanogan-Similkameen Corridor	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	2,593,473		2,593,473	26,277,906
					26,277,906	568,070	26,845,976	

Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program

Evaluation Criteria Critical Habitat Category (Local & State Agencies)

“Critical habitat means lands important for the protection, management, or public enjoyment of certain wildlife species or groups of species, including, but not limited to, wintering range for deer, elk, and other species, waterfowl and upland bird habitat, fish habitat, and habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species.” RCW 79A.15.010

WWRP - CRITICAL HABITAT EVALUATION SUMMARY		
Criteria	Evaluation Elements	Possible Points
Project Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate the project on statewide, vicinity, and site maps • Brief summary of the project [goal(s) and objective(s) statement] 	Not scored
Ecological and Biological Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bigger picture • Uniqueness/significance of the site • Fish and wildlife species and/or communities • Quality of habitat 	20
Species and Communities with Special Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat to species/communities • Importance of acquisitions • Ecological roles • Taxonomic distinctness • Rarity 	10
Manageability and Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediacy of threat to the site • Long-term viability • Enhancement of existing protected land • On-going stewardship 	15
Public Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project support • Educational and/or scientific value 	5
Total Points Possible		50

**Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program
Scoring Criteria**

Critical Habitat Category

- 1. Ecological/Biological Characteristics.** Why is the site worthy of long-term conservation?
RCW 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(iii, v - vii, xi, xiv); (6)(b)(ii)
- 2. Species and/or Communities with Special Status.** What is the significance of each species or community listed on your species and communities status table?
RCW 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(iv, ix, xiii,)
- 3. Manageability and Viability.** What is the likelihood of the site remaining viable over the long term and why is it important to secure it now?
RCW 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(ii, iv, viii, x)
- 4. Public Benefit.** To what degree do communities, governments, landowners, constituent groups, or academia benefit from or support the project?
RCW 79A.15.060 (6)(a)(i, xii)



Evaluation Summary
Washington Wildlife Recreation Program - Critical Habitat
State Fiscal Year 2008

Rank	Name/Sponsor	1	2	3	4	Total
		Biological Charact.	Species & Communities	Manageability & Viability	Public Benefit	
1	Skookumchuck Wal/Fish & W	17.375	8.500	13.250	4.500	43.625
2	Sharptailed Gro/Fish & W	16.625	8.250	13.375	4.000	42.250
3	Cowiche/Tieton /Fish & W	16.500	7.625	12.500	4.375	41.000
4	West Branch Lit/Fish & W	16.875	7.875	11.375	3.875	40.000
4	Klickitat Stepp/Fish & W	15.875	7.625	12.125	4.375	40.000
6	Teanaway Ecosys/Fish & W	15.375	7.875	11.500	3.625	38.375
7	Allen Forest/Pierce C	14.500	7.250	10.750	3.750	36.250
8	Methow Watershe/Fish & W	13.750	6.750	10.875	3.750	35.125
9	Mid-Columbia Sh/Fish & W	11.500	6.125	8.125	2.875	28.625
10	Touchet River a/Fish & W	10.750	4.750	7.875	2.625	26.000
11	Okanogan-Similk/Fish & W	9.875	4.750	6.750	2.750	24.125

Evaluators Score Questions: 1-4

Prepared: 09/05/2006

WWRP
Habitat Conservation Account

CRITICAL HABITAT
Fiscal Year 2008

Project Synopses



**Washington Wildlife and
Recreation Program
Critical Habitat**

State Fiscal Year 2008 Projects, In Ranked Order

Fish & Wildlife Dept of **\$4,670,250** **\$0** **\$4,670,250**
Skookumchuck Watershed

The Skookumchuck Watershed proposal is a partnership between WDFW and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) that seeks to acquire and protect approximately 12,360 acres. It consists primarily of shrub steppe habitat which contains stream, riparian, cliff, talus and cave habitats as well. This acquisition will complete efforts to acquire 17,500 acres, establish a landscape scale linkage between the Whiskey Dick and Quilomene Wildlife Areas, and protect virtually an entire watershed in a key location.

Skookumchuck is an inholding between wildlife areas and a gap between protected areas within the largest swath of shrub steppe remaining in the state. Numerous plans and studies point to the significance of the Skookumchuck as fish and wildlife habitat. The WDFW Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan, the Upper Middle Mainstem Subbasin Plan, the Nature Conservancy's Columbia Plateau Ecoregional Assessment all identify this area as a conservation target. The Skookumchuck is listed as an Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA). A long list of shrub steppe obligate and associated species will benefit from this acquisition including sage grouse, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, loggerhead shrike and sagebrush lizard. NOAA Fisheries has designated Skookumchuck Creek as critical habitat for steelhead, threatened in the Upper Columbia ESU. If we are able to obtain this ground, we can avoid adjacent landowner conflicts and harmonize management across the landscape. The project has broad support. (06-1807A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of **\$526,260** **\$0** **\$526,260**
Sharptailed Grouse Phase 6

The Scotch Creek Wildlife Area in Okanogan County is a successful project to enhance habitats and recover the Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse population in Washington. The Columbia sharp-tailed grouse are a state threatened species and a federal "species of concern" adding further support for efforts to protect and enhance their habitat. The Scotch Creek unit at 8,694 acres was purchased with WWRP funding in 1991. Habitat enhancements and genetic supplementation since acquisition are having a positive effect on the population. Lek counts have increased annually since 2000, and birds are now found in many areas previously unoccupied. This is the only area in Washington State with an increasing population of native sharp-tailed grouse.

This acquisition is an island of private land within public ownership and access to the land is 2.5 miles across the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. If developed the vehicle traffic and associated disturbance to wildlife would increase significantly. For protection of what we have accomplished over the past 15 years, and to add critical habitat to the recovery area, it is imperative that we secure this parcel. Acquisition of this land would also provide contiguous and continuous ownership between the Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Wildlife Areas, which would simplify management of these lands. (06-1813A-FY08)

(Swale Creek), cliffs, and Oregon white oak woodlands. This site, when combined with three adjacent sites, will make up the largest steppeland under public ownership in Klickitat County. This property will also help to recover endangered and threatened species including the Peregrine, Prairie Falcon, Bald & Golden Eagles, and the federally listed steelhead trout in Swale Creek. The property has good condition native plant communities and is adjacent to the DNR Columbia Hills Natural Area preserve, which encompasses more than 2,000 acres and in turn borders the 2,500 acre Columbia Hills State Park. (06-1814A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of Teanaway Ecosystem	\$1,922,100	\$0	\$1,922,100
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The Teanaway is a key watershed in the central east Cascades, providing habitat for spotted owls, goshawk, steelhead, bull trout, deer, elk and many other species of interest. Habitats are mid elevation, mixed-conifer forests, open ponderosa pine and riparian corridors. The scenic Teanaway valley is considered a "gem" in the region, with high recreational use. Currently, 50,000 acres are owned by a timber company (American Forest Resources) who are working with WDFW to transition this landscape from commercial forests to a combination of planned development and conservation lands. An emerging Conservation Plan identifies approximately 45,000 acres of this landscape as protected in a sustainably managed forest, providing habitat and recreational opportunities in perpetuity, while clustering development in a small proportion of the main block. The conservation lands portion of the plan likely will include public land acquisitions.

This grant would provide funding to acquire 1,280 acres of key habitat lands checkerboard with existing public lands as a part of Phase I protection of the conservation lands. This project would protect key owl and fish habitats long-term, assist with spotted owl and bull trout recovery, and help the landowner and partners move closer to the shared vision of a sustainably managed, publicly accessible upper Teanaway. (06-1808AFY08)

Pierce County Parks & Rec Allen Forest	\$568,070	\$568,070	\$1,136,140
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The Allen Forest project seeks to purchase and permanently protect 142 acres of riparian, wetland, and forest habitat in the Upper Nisqually Valley near Mt. Rainier National Park. This project includes 40 acres of mature forest, threatened with immediate harvest, as well as 80 acres of wetland, meadows and two fish-bearing streams, Copper Creek and Glenn Creek, tributaries to the Nisqually River. Acquisition of this property will complement the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Habitat Conservation Plan by protecting northern spotted owl dispersal, recruitment nesting habitat for marbled murrelets and bald eagles, and Rocky Mountain and Roosevelt elk habitat.

This project is Phase Two of the multi-phase Mt. Rainier Gateway Initiative of the Nisqually Land Trust and Nisqually River Council, which seeks to acquire some 4,500 acres of privately held timberlands between Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests and manage them for wildlife habitat, forest production and recreation. The Initiative is supported by the, the Pierce County Biodiversity Network Assessment 2006 Nisqually Watershed Stewardship Plan, the WDNR Habitat Conservation Plan, the Washington State Elk Herd Plan, and the City of Tacoma Nisqually River Project Wildlife Management Plan. (06-1784A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of	\$4,692,465	\$0	\$4,692,465
Methow Watershed - Phase 5			

Conserving the habitat and related ecological processes that sustain the extraordinary biological diversity of the Methow Watershed is the overall goal of this ongoing project. The current emphasis is to secure the most critical habitats under-represented in the protected land base, and to link these parcels to existing agency holdings. Targeted parcels will emphasize shrub-steppe and riparian habitats, protecting 1,330 acres (2,660 total in partnership with USFWS), including almost 5 miles of critical stream frontage. Acquisitions will benefit over 40 priority habitats and species, including sharp-tail grouse, spring Chinook, steelhead, bull trout, and rare carnivores. In addition to protecting key habitats, targeted parcels are strategically located to connect existing conservation lands, link critical riparian components to protected uplands, and maintain important wildlife movement corridors.

This project directly addresses the objectives of many regional planning efforts including WDFW's Strategic Plan, Okanogan Ecoregional Assessment, Methow Subbasin plan, and several salmon recovery documents. No other major inhabited watershed in the state offers similar opportunity for such comprehensive protection of fish and wildlife resources and associated recreation. This is WDFW's most successful WWRP acquisition project to date, and continued support is vital to its completion, ensuring the finished product will be a showcase for the compatibility of sustainable development and resource conservation.
(06-1810A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of	\$3,129,000	\$0	\$3,129,000
Mid-Columbia Shrub Steppe			

Most of Washington's shrub-steppe habitats have been converted to agriculture. Approximately 60% of shrub steppe that existed in eastern Washington before European settlement has been lost. Much of the remaining shrub steppe is highly fragmented, occurring as small blocks surrounded by a sea of agricultural fields and suburban development. Few large expanses of shrub steppe remain as refugia for wildlife dependent on this habitat and many species find it difficult to disperse.

Douglas County still retains quality habitat that supports several shrub-steppe species that have been extirpated from much of Washington. Many of our highest priority species in need of conservation are covered by the scope of this proposal, including the pygmy rabbit, sharp-tailed grouse, Washington ground squirrels, and greater sage grouse. Maintaining these species will depend on protecting and maintaining the connectivity among existing habitat patches. Four wildlife areas are managed by WDFW within the scope of this project: Sagebrush Flats, Foster Creek, Central Ferry Canyon, and Chester Butte. These areas were purchased and are being managed for the protection and conservation of shrub-steppe dependant species. The conservation value of these properties can be threatened by development or other land-use changes on parcels adjacent to or surrounded by wildlife areas. The goal of this project is to acquire 5000 acres of habitat and secure the conservation values of existing wildlife areas and improve the connectivity among areas. (06-1811A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of Touchet River and Grassland	\$2,217,600	\$0	\$2,217,600
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The Touchet Riparian and Grassland Project proposal includes acquisition of approximately 2,560 acres, including 3.5 miles of the Touchet River that supports critical riparian habitat. Acquiring the property provides the opportunity to integrate grassland and riparian zone protection, which will help WFDW meet strategic plan goals to preserve and protect fish and wildlife resources. The following list of species either currently utilize, or have historically utilized, the target property and are found on a state and/or federally threatened, candidate, or species of concern list: Mid-Columbia steelhead, bull trout, ferruginous hawk, white or black-tailed jackrabbits, burrowing owls, bald eagles, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, and sharp-tailed and sage grouse.

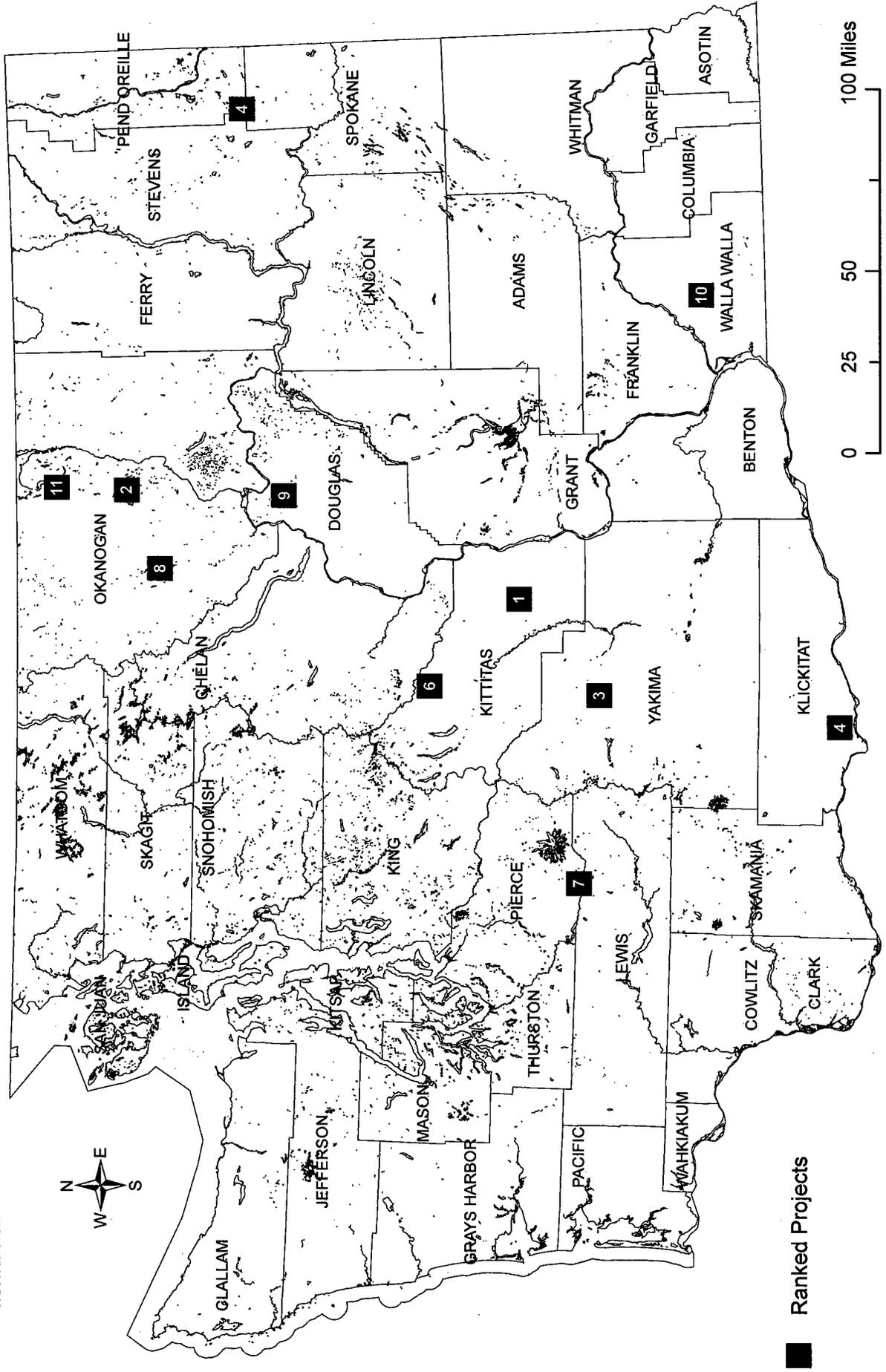
The parcels proposed for acquisition/easement are unique as they comprise the only significant properties along the lower Touchet River where the river bottom is not being farmed. The riparian zone is approximately 185 acres, which includes 60 acres of mature cottonwood habitat and 125 acres that were recently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The remainder of the proposed acquisition consists of lands enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and existing grassland and native habitats. The Walla Walla sub-basin plan has identified riparian zone acquisition, protection, and management as a priority. The property would be managed by WDFW as a unit of an existing wildlife area. (06-1815A-FY08)

Fish & Wildlife Dept of Okanogan-Similkameen Corridor	\$2,593,473	\$0	\$2,593,473
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This project is part of a larger international effort in the Okanogan-Similkameen Watershed to maintain the only viable north-south ecological corridor that connects the remaining grassland and shrub-steppe habitat in southern British Columbia with the broad desert and shrub-steppe habitat in the Columbia Basin. This international biodiversity hotspot is one of the three most endangered ecosystems in Canada and priority conservation landscape in Washington.

The project will conserve about 1,500 acres (3,000 acres with BPA partnership) of high quality, focal terrestrial habitats (shrub-steppe, dry coniferous forest, riparian, rugged terrain) identified in international conservation projects and planning efforts. These habitats will help support 77 priority species including 35 Canadian and 7 U.S. listed species. Work site acquisitions target the most biologically rich and unprotected portions of a critical north-south habitat corridor, enhance existing public ownership, provide critical linkages, and abut Canadian conservation work areas in the Similkameen watershed. The work site area lies along segments of Okanogan County's proposed regional trail network, and supports a variety of wildlife-based recreational opportunities, complimenting the ecologically sustainable land-use objectives of the international conservation effort. The Okanogan-Similkameen Conservation Corridor Program, of which these purchases would be a part, is quickly becoming a model for cross-border community-based natural resource conservation. (06-1809A-FY08)

Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program - Critical Habitat (WWRP - CH) FY 2008 Ranked Projects



September 2006