

North Central Washington Biodiversity:

Connecting People to Sustain our Natural Heritage

The [Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship \(IRIS\)](#) piloted how recommendations in the Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy can work to help regional planning in 2009. They explored forming a regional biodiversity council and how the conservation opportunity maps in the Strategy can be refined to guide local decisions. They developed a network of photo-monitoring trails to help community members get involved with biodiversity management actions. This project evolved from the [Healthy Lands Initiative](#), one of the Council's previous pilot projects, also led by IRIS.

The North Central Washington Biodiversity project had three primary objectives, aimed at implementing recommendations from the [Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](#) locally:

1. Develop a locally useful conservation opportunity map
2. Conduct scoping for a North Central Washington Biodiversity Council
3. Engage people in monitoring biodiversity with a photo-monitoring trail system

Conservation Opportunity Map for North Central Washington

IRIS and its partners produced a suite of maps for North Central Washington that illustrate biodiversity values and projected population growth.

Participation from local and regional planners enriched the map with land-use category data and information layers. The [map products are now available](#) to help prioritize incentives and other tools.

Key Accomplishments

- **Held meetings with regional, county, and city planners** to provide background and gather input.
- **Gathered local land-use category data** from local planners in a GIS format to combine with the statewide map.
- **Partnered with non-governmental organizations** to develop information layers and base maps.
- **Produced the adapted maps, including:**
 - Regional base map of relative biodiversity values using information from ecoregional assessments.
 - Regional map combining relative terrestrial biodiversity values with projected human population growth (Western Futures dataset).
 - Regional map combining freshwater biodiversity values with potential impacts.
 - Adapted regional map combining relative terrestrial biodiversity values with local land use codes.
 - Adapted regional map combining relative biodiversity values with planned development intensity using comprehensive plans and local zoning codes.
 - Adapted regional map combining biodiversity values with projected regional population growth.

Lessons Learned

- **Provide resources to help planning staff succeed.** Planning staff may not have the background, skills, and tools needed for incorporating biodiversity datasets, maps, and their interpretation into plans.
- **Introduce data and maps early in the planning process.** Conservation opportunity concepts and data have the best chance of being incorporated into updated comprehensive plans and revised zoning if they can be incorporated from the beginning.
- **Share success stories.** Elected officials, planning departments, and planners themselves can learn from how planners have integrated biodiversity into land use practices—inspiring implementation of tested and innovative approaches.

North Central Washington Biodiversity Council

Originally conceived as a stand-alone organization, the regional biodiversity council evolved into an integral part of locally-driven programs.

Key Accomplishments

- **Conducted strategic planning sessions** to scope interest and participation.
- **Organized steering committee.**
- **Fostered capacity for building integrated approaches and programs:** Nature of Place, Regional Food Systems, Healthy Lands, Witnessing Change.
- **Followed steering committee recommendations** to integrate proposed functions of a North Central Washington Biodiversity Council with existing organizations and initiatives. Functions will include:
 - Developing coordinated biodiversity priorities that encompass urban, rural, and freshwater land uses.
 - Hosting two events a year ([Healthy Lands Roundtable](#) and [North Central Washington Community Success Summit](#)).

Lessons Learned

- **A separate entity may not be needed.** Organically evolving forums allow people to coordinate and learn from one another.
- **Existing organizations can expand their scope.** Open forums can provide a sustainable and useful way to promote biodiversity conservation.

Photo-monitoring Trails and Interactive Web site

IRIS and its partners established a network of photo-monitoring trails in North Central Washington. The trails allow people to see the effects of land management actions and to observe ecological trends.

Key Accomplishments

- **Developed the [Witnessing Change website](#),** which provides an interface for public participation as well as information about landowner objectives and biodiversity for each photo-monitoring trail.
 - Designed innovative interface so people can easily upload photographs and compare them with previous images.
 - Chose background information to orient users to landowner objectives: historic photographs, oral histories, and data from the conservation opportunity maps.
- **Negotiated agreements with three landowners to host publicly-accessible photo-monitoring trails.**
 - [Barn Beach Reserve](#), Leavenworth, Chelan County
 - [McCartney Creek Preserve](#), Douglas County (The Nature Conservancy)
 - [Sinlahekin Wildlife Area](#), Okanogan County (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)
- **Mapped, marked, and established protocols for photo points.**
- **Gathered baseline photographs for all photo points.**

Lessons Learned

- **Concrete examples make a lasting impression.** Participants found it easier to see the utility of the Conservation Opportunity maps when they were actively exploring a photo-monitoring trail site.
- **Story increases connection to place.** Oral history excerpts (voices, experiences) increased participants' engagement with biodiversity data and landowner management goals.
- **Low cost enhances landowner interest.** The program's modest expense makes it feasible for landowners to include Witnessing Change in their stewardship and outreach programs.