

Eastern Washington Pilot Project Healthy Lands Initiative

WORKING TO CONSERVE THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE IN WASHINGTON STATE

Background

Executive Order 04-02, which created the Washington Biodiversity Council, directed the Council to demonstrate the applicability of incentive programs in two biodiversity conservation pilot projects, one on the east side of the state and one on the west side.

Each project received \$20,000 from the Council and ran from January 2006 through June 2007.

The Council's Pilot Projects Committee chose the projects.

Pilot Projects Committee

Bonnie Bunning, chair
Washington Department of Natural Resources

Brian Collins
Skokomish Nation

Rob Fimbel
Washington State Parks and Recreation
Commission

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University of Washington

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Ken Risenhoover
Port Blakely Tree Farms

Steve Tharinger
Clallam County Commission

Josh Weiss
Washington Forest Protection Association

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Washington State Department of Transportation

Project Summary The Healthy Lands Initiative brought together the agriculture, land conservation, planning, and economic development communities to learn about the biodiversity in north central Washington and to explore conservation tools and resources, both existing and potential.

Key Accomplishments

- **Created slide show and DVD, *Nature of North Central Washington***, with input and feedback from residents and ecologists.
- **Analyzed available conservation incentives and developed slide show, *Conservation and Agriculture: Moving beyond the traditional into the sustainable***.
- **Reached 300 people in community dialogue process** through focus groups and discussions.
- **Organized a culminating forum with more than 60 attendees.** This led to the formation of the Healthy Lands Coalition and a strategic plan.
- **Convened a habitat farming work group**, which created a conceptual program that would pay farmers for growing riparian habitat.
- **Facilitated grassbanking work groups** and identified strategies for and barriers to grassbanks in north central Washington.

Lessons Learned

- **Local production is valuable.** Producing *Nature of North Central Washington* as a collective effort took a long time, but it allowed the slide show to reflect the contributions of many people. Even long-time residents learned something new and expressed an invigorated pride of place.
- **Gaps exist in incentive programs.** Analysis revealed that available incentive programs do not address invasive species, altered fire regimes, or climate change as their primary focus.
- **Institutional challenges remain.** The habitat farming program remains a case study of how slowly these things can move, even with willing participants, available funds, scoping, and a restoration plan.
- **Balancing land uses is critical.** Grassbank work groups clarified that the key to future efforts is making the case that livestock grazing can be compatible with wildlife needs.

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Relationship with the Washington Biodiversity Council's Strategy

Several learnings from the project inform the recommendations put forth in the public review draft of the *Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy: Sustaining our Natural Heritage for Future Generations* (August 31, 2007).

- **Growing conservation markets is slow, but the effort is a valuable learning process that will benefit future efforts.**
(Incentives Strategy 1.3)
 - Work to develop a habitat farming program in Chelan County—one that addresses economic, community, and ecological needs—requires that diverse partners share in the responsibilities associated with this complex project.
 - A desire for broadening partnerships led to a joint proposal to the Ruckelshaus Center for Policy Consensus. This project is one of ten asked to submit a full proposal.
- **Dialogue among landowners and incentives providers offers unexpected benefits.**
(Incentives Strategy 1.1; Education Strategy 3.4)
 - Grassbank work group participants agreed that learning about grassbanks was valuable even though they decided not to pursue grassbanking at this time. Meeting with others to discuss landowner/producer needs, species needs, limitations, and opportunities was especially worthwhile.
 - Small focus groups are an effective tool for scoping out issues and identifying leaders.
 - The newly-formed Healthy Lands Coalition, a result of the community dialogue process, has several capacity-building charges. It plans to develop education and outreach program to showcase and build upon local conservation successes.
- **Raising awareness of biodiversity issues feeds opportunities for networking and education.**
(Education Strategies 3.1, 3.2)
 - *Nature of North Central Washington* serves as a platform for complementary programs about, for example, individual counties or habitat types.
 - The slide show/DVD invites continuing input from the community: information, images, stories.
- **Local needs give rise to citizen science initiatives.**
(Education Strategies 3.2, 3.3; Science Strategy 4.2)
 - The grassbank work groups clarified the need for a common language and protocol for monitoring and for sharing results of management actions in shrub-steppe habitats. This stimulated the creation of new partnerships to conduct rangeland monitoring workshops.
 - Student Achievement from the Ground Up, a program that brings landowners, teachers, and students together to monitor landscape change, has been launched with a coalition of partners in north central Washington.

Project Partners include:

Institute for Rural Innovation and Stewardship, North Central Washington Resource Conservation and Development Council, Okanogan Conservation District, Foster Creek Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy, Icicle Fund, and the Community Foundation of North Central Washington.

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