



WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE  
REAL ESTATE SERVICES  
P.O. BOX 43158  
OLYMPIA, WA 98504  
November 11<sup>th</sup> 2022

Dear WDFW Lands Staff:

Conservation Northwest is thrilled to support the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife’s 2022 land acquisition priorities. In general, we believe most of the proposals would have strong benefits for the wildlife and habitat within some of our priority program areas. Six of the proposed acquisitions reside within our Cascades to Olympics Program Geography. Our Cascades to Olympics program works to restore habitat and improve wildlife connectivity between Washington’s Cascade Range and the Olympic Peninsula. One of the proposed locations (Easton Hills) sit within the geography of our Central Cascades Program, the program works to restore habitat on public lands north and south of Interstate 90 that are vital to wildlife movement between Mount Rainier National Park and the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Finally, Our Sagelands Heritage Program focuses on central Washington’s shrub-steppe wildlife and habitat, three of the proposed acquisitions fall within this program geography, including Wenas Wildlife Area (WLA) and Big Bend WLA.

### Hoffstadt Hills Cowlitz County

The Hoffstadt Hills parcel has the potential to secure important habitat for a major wildlife corridor and to help secure and conserve key riparian habitat in the region. Recently, the Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group completed a regional connectivity analysis for 5-focal species and landscape integrity. Interestingly, the highest priority linkage and the largest corridor from that study is the one coined “the southern linkage” which runs from the Cascades over I-5 and into the Willapa hills, this parcel albeit small in comparison to the corridor will help to keep this linkage functional for flora and fauna to use for daily, seasonal and climate motivated dispersals. We are hopeful that WDFW manages this property with functional corridors in mind.

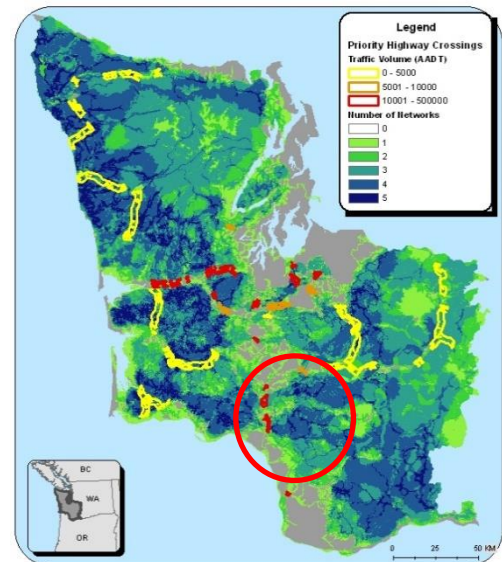


Figure 1 Western side of the southern linkage, including the Hoffstadt parcels. WWHCWG 2022. Waconected.org

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### **Shillapoo Addition Clark County**

This proposal represents a great opportunity to conserve and restore important riparian habitat in the region. Although salmon and semi-aquatic species will no doubt benefit from this acquisition. We think that managing the land to promote quality habitat suitable for Columbian White-tailed deer and other aquatic species is the most holistic way to restore and maintain ecosystem function.

### **South Montesano Access Grays Harbor County**

While we agree that access to the rivers in the region is important to community members, we have seen these recreation areas in other locations devolve into extremely degraded ecosystems. We hope that WDFW considers that this riparian corridor may be key for some species as they move and adapt to climate. And if this location encourages the types of behavior and bad acting we have seen at other WDFW boat launches, we recommend that WDFW finds way to make sure that a whole section of the waterbody is not fragmented during the warmer months by heavy usage and boating.

### **Sol Duc Access Clallam County**

We have many of the same concerns for this location as we do for the Montesano access. Although we still support the proposal we would like to see a greater emphasis put on corridor connectivity for all living things,

### **Quilcene Tidelands Jefferson County**

This acquisition represents a great opportunity to protect and conserve key shoreline habitat. We feel this is a great investment of public funds and will have immediate benefits for the community and the wildlife. Furthermore, it is our hope that the site is managed with a strategy that considers the impacts of climate change and the need for functional tidelands and clean water.

### **Lynch Cove Estuarine/Tidelands Mason County**

Another excellent proposal, protecting estuary ecosystems is key if we want to see thriving salmon populations in the future. In addition, these areas are important for numerous other aquatic wildlife and many birds as well. This will make an excellent place to enjoy the wildlife and scenery while protecting those resources for future generations.

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## **Easton Hill**

Conservation Northwest fully supports WDFW's proposed land acquisition of Easton Hill Wildlife Crossing in Kittitas County. These 22.92 acres are located in a Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) Critical Area designated as a wildlife movement corridor adjacent to Phase 3 wildlife crossings which are part of the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project. The 240 foot crossing structures underneath I-90 will increase landscape permeability and facilitate wildlife movement for a variety of species to safely cross the north-south travel barrier that is I-90. Conservation Northwest has been heavily involved in I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project efforts to increase habitat connectivity in the Cascades and has worked with hundreds of volunteers over the past decade to monitor wildlife presence in the surrounding habitat. We know that wildlife will benefit from a more permeable and resilient landscape enabling free movement throughout the Cascade Range. We also agree with and support the exclusion of recreation in this critical movement corridor. Science shows that human presence can reduce wildlife use of an area, and this location should be protected for wildlife and from detrimental impacts of increased human presence. Acquiring this land and prioritizing wildlife movement here is the correct action. The Easton Hill Wildlife Crossing will function as one piece of a larger effort to enable wildlife connectivity and movement through the Snoqualmie Pass landscape.

## **Wenas Watershed- Miracle Mile (Yakima County)**

Acquiring the 440 acres of land that lies within the Wenas Wildlife Area (WLA) will connect fragmented WDFW land parcels, increase wildlife connectivity for many species (especially Elk). Combined with significant watershed restoration these efforts will help improve wildlife habitat in this important migration corridor. Protected and then restored wetlands will also act as essential fire refugia for wildlife species and plants, which is of growing importance with the increased wildfires on the Wenas WLA in recent years. We recognize many benefits to acquiring lands adjacent to existing wildlife areas, and this year's emphasis on acquiring important shrub-steppe lands with significant riparian areas can benefit central Washington both recreationally and ecologically. Shrub-steppe habitat should be of high priority for WDFW, as it is under constant pressure of fragmentation, development, and wildfires.

## **Big Bend Phase 4 (Douglas County)**

The large acquisition in Douglas County (up to 3,425 acres) would be an incredible expansion to the Big Bend WLA. These acres consist of exceptionally valuable riparian areas, Columbia River shoreline, and shrub-steppe habitat. Protecting and restoring riparian areas included in this acquisition will greatly improve sharp-tailed grouse nesting areas, and these lands will benefit state priority species including Washington ground squirrel and golden eagles, as well as mule deer and many other species of birds. Located in Northern Douglas County, this is an important connectivity corridor prioritized by our Sagelands Heritage Program and the Arid Lands Initiative.

## **Blue Lake Oroville (Okanogan County)**

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Moving northward, we greatly support the acquisition of 479 acres near Oroville and Blue Lake. This gain will benefit aquatic, forest, and shrub-steppe species (like gray wolf, mule deer, and many more) living in or migrating through the Blue Lake area.

We want to thank the Department of Fish and Wildlife for giving us this opportunity to comment on these important acquisitions.

Brian Stewart

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