

Program Background

The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) was established in 2021 in response to the 2020 wildfires by the Washington State Legislature, through a budget proviso to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to restore shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife impacted by wildfires. WSRRI is led by a three-agency steering committee that includes the WDFW, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC). The vision of WSRRI is to create a resilient shrubsteppe landscape that benefits wildlife and human communities.

The [WSRRI 30-year Long-Term Strategy 2024-2054](#) charts the course for increasing the restoration of habitat and supporting sustainable working lands management across Eastern Washington's shrubsteppe landscape. For the fiscal year 2023-2025 biennium, capital funds were allocated to SCC for wildlife friendly fencing implementation. For the fiscal year 2025-2027 biennium, capital funds have been allocated to SCC to build upon this work and expand on the ground restoration.

2025-2027 Budget Proviso:

"Funded at \$3,000,000 from the State Building Construction Account to implement the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative 30-year strategy."

This document provides guidance for activities funded through WSRRI with specific detail for habitat restoration, fencing, deferred grazing, and associated activities.

General Eligibility

Conservation districts are eligible to apply to WSRRI under these program guidelines.

All landownerships are eligible under this program including private, tribal, federal, state, non-profit organization, or local government ownerships.

2.1 - Projects must demonstrate a benefit to shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife. Projects must be located within the Columbia Plateau as shown [in this map](#).

2.2 – Eligible Project Types:

- **Habitat Restoration** – Funds are available for shrubsteppe habitat restoration projects.
- **Wildlife Friendly Fencing** - Funds are available for wildlife friendly fencing (WFF) installed in accordance with [WSRRI specifications](#). WFF may include new wildlife friendly fence,

replacement of existing fence (including burned or damaged) with new WFF, retrofit of existing barbed wire fencing to WFF, removal of fence, and virtual fencing. Perimeter fence may be considered for virtual fence and fire recovery projects, but cross fencing and virtual fence projects for grazing management will be prioritized in the case of new fencing projects.

- **Deferred Grazing** - Funds *may* be provided for fire recovery activities such as deferred grazing. The Deferred Grazing project type may be implemented dependent on the needs that arise each wildland fire season, as determined by the WSRRI steering committee.

General Requirements

All general requirements and policies of the SCC must be followed as set out in the [Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual](#) including but not limited to monthly vouchering and [cultural resources policy compliance](#).

Work must begin on all funded proposals within 120 days of the award of funding. To be eligible for reimbursement, all work including all project types (see below) must be completed by the date listed in the award notification. Dates will be the end of the fiscal year or biennium, depending on the source of funds – operating or capital.

Equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis for district-implemented projects only. The WSRRI steering committee or designated review committee will consider requests for materials and equipment for the installation of habitat restoration projects such as sprayers, seeders, and hand tools. Vehicles (including utility task vehicles and all-terrain vehicles) and tractors are not eligible.

Application

Projects shall be submitted to WSRRI utilizing the application form provided on the [SCC WSRRI program webpage](#).

Once received, the funding requests will be reviewed and ranked, by the WSRRI steering committee or designated review committee. Funding will be allocated for as long as funds remain available. Application deadlines and availability of funds will be announced on the [SCC WSRRI program webpage](#).

It is recognized that from time to time, projects may need an expedited review and/or further review.

Applications must include enough detail to determine the eligibility of all activities and geography. Incomplete or vague applications may result in an extended review period or a request to resubmit an application.

An application may be partially funded if the application includes ineligible activities, activities for which funding is not currently available, or if other resources are available. Additionally, if funds

are limited, applications will be reviewed and ranked according to adopted and published prioritization criteria; a portion of an application may rank a higher priority than other proposed projects or project types. For example, in a situation of limited funding, some project types or activities *may* be prioritized over other project types. Prioritization is generally described in Project Prioritization section.

Applicants may submit more than one application over the course of a granting period.

Upon approval of the project(s) by the WSRRI steering committee, districts will be formally notified of the award by SCC financial staff.

Scope Changes

Any scope of work changes to an approved and funded project may only be made upon review and approval by the WSRRI steering committee. Contact the program manager at SCC to discuss any scope of work change requests. Expenditures related to a changed scope are eligible only after the change is approved by the WSRRI steering committee and a formal amendment has been processed by SCC financial staff, if applicable.

Data Tracking & Reporting

All cost-share projects must be entered into and closed out in CPDS. “Shrubsteppe Initiative” will be chosen as the program type under the funding tab. For other project types, reporting requirements will be prescribed by SCC/WSRRI as well as a format/template provided.

Project Prioritization

All project applications will be evaluated for benefit to [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) and other wildlife in the context of important spatial data sets, such as breeding habitats, Habitat Concentration Areas, Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) Priority Core and Priority Linkage Areas, and WSRRI’s Spatial Priorities as described in the Long-term Strategy. Further, the WSRRI steering committee may consider habitat condition and land use, likelihood of project success, leveraged funding, and overall wildlife value. All projects will be reviewed but special consideration will be given to those within:

- Pygmy Rabbit Recovery Areas; and
- Important breeding and wintering habitats for Greater Sage-grouse and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse

Eligible Project Types and Activities

WSRRI funds may be used for the following eligible project types:

- Habitat restoration projects – cost share or District Implemented Project (DIP)
- Wildlife friendly fence – cost share, DIP allowed w/permission of program manager
- Virtual fence – cost share

The following are the eligible activities and associated parameters for each:

Wildlife Friendly Fence (WFF)

- Cost-share will be the primary means for implementing WFF, but district-implemented projects (DIPs) will be allowed on a case-by-case basis upon approval by the program manager. The cost-share percentage is determined by the type of project as outlined below. There is no cap on funding that can be awarded to a private landowner, tribe, or public landowner or lessee participating in this program.
- Funds awarded shall follow the cost-share percentages established under this program, see below.
- Any fences being built on state, federal, tribal or non-profit lands must also follow all rules and regulations as outlined by those landowners.
- Factors that may be considered in the ranking of projects include how the WFF integrates with other WSRRI actions. Selection criteria may also include whether the application is for perimeter, cross, or exclusionary fencing; whether the fence is a total replacement or retrofitting, listed species considerations, overall value to wildlife in the area, whether landowners will remove old fence at their expense, and/or whether suitable perimeter fencing already exists and other pertinent information.

Wildlife Friendly Fence Projects with details:

- Replacing burned fence with Wildlife Friendly Fence. [See Wildlife Friendly Fence Specifications](#). Cost share requires removal of old fence.
 - 100% cost share
- Retrofit existing fence to Wildlife Friendly Fence.
 - 100% cost share
- Fence removal when not being replaced with new Wildlife Friendly Fence
 - 75% cost share
- Fence markers to increase fence visibility and decrease hazards to grouse will be required where appropriate on selected projects that result in hard fencing. Markers will be provided by WSRRI.
- Towers (or other permanent/semi-permanent signal transmitter equipment) and collars for livestock are eligible expenses for virtual fence projects. If collar leases (vs purchases) are requested for the funding, the following parameters shall apply:
 - **Collar Lease** - WSRRI will fund the collar lease and batteries for the initial period that falls within the current biennium (project starting date - end date of funding cycle). The collar lease will be a maximum of from the time the lease is entered into (the date that the collar lease is signed) and the end of the biennium, whichever is less.
 - **Hard wire fencing** - Districts may utilize cost share or DIP to remove hard wire fencing in virtual fence areas, as applicable and dependent on funding available.

Shrubsteppe Habitat Restoration

Cost share projects or DIPs can be used for implementing habitat restoration projects. The cost-share percentage is determined by the conservation district and SCC cost-share policies apply.

The WSRRI wildlife habitat restoration objective is to enhance and restore wildlife habitat, with a special emphasis on benefitting Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in [Washington's State Wildlife Action Plan](#).

WSRRI aims to expand native, perennial plant communities where they remain, and to reestablish them where they have been lost. Restoration projects may include NRCS or other practices designated by WSRRI, designed to address inadequate habitat for wildlife and/or degraded plant condition.

Deferred Grazing Reimbursement

If the Deferred Grazing Program is authorized by the WSRRI steering committee following wildland fire in WDFW prioritized wildlife habitat areas in the shrubsteppe, the following procedures will apply.

- The Deferred Grazing Reimbursement program provides reimbursement for emergency hay feed and pasture rental to rest burned native shrubsteppe pastures. Eligible producers (including public land lessees) may receive up to 75% of the cost of the emergency hay and/or alternative pasture rental up to a maximum amount that is set by the WSRRI steering committee.
- Reimbursement for emergency hay feed and pasture rental to rest burned shrubsteppe pasture is available for hay that was purchased, or pasture rented. The starting dates of deferred grazing and hay purchases and pasture rentals must be on or after July 1 of the funding cycle (fiscal year or biennium) in which the fire occurs. The pasture must be rested within the funding cycle in which the costs are incurred.
- If the pasture is going to be rested for a period beyond the funding cycle, you must apply separately for each funding cycle the pasture will be rested, the awards do not "roll over."
- Priority will be given to projects that rest pasture during the spring growing season and up to two years after a fire.
- Only hay is eligible as 'emergency hay feed,' not other types of supplemental feed (grain, corn silage, minerals, etc.)
- Hay will be prioritized for pastures that need to be rested immediately following a fire. Pasture rentals will be prioritized for resting pastures during the critical growth period (typically April-July, though it varies by location). However, the WSRRI steering committee will consider other time periods on a case-by-case basis due to the unique circumstances of every fire.
- Monitoring of rested pastures will be performed by the conservation district and/or WDFW in the fall following the grazing period or towards the end of the funding cycle cut-off.
- Any livestock that graze shrubsteppe requiring rest to recover from wildfire are eligible.
- This is a reimbursement program only, not a cost-share structure. A [Deferred Grazing Reimbursement Program Voucher Form](#) will be utilized to accompany all invoices and receipts for application for reimbursement.
- Reimbursement will occur after the district/WDFW has monitored the pasture to ensure it was rested and received receipts and/or invoices supporting actual costs.

Definitions

Columbia Plateau - An ecoregion located in eastern Washington and northern Oregon, characterized by shrubsteppe habitats and grasslands with extensive areas of dryland farming and irrigated agriculture (Sleeter et al., 2012). Used interchangeably in the Strategy with shrubsteppe landscape.

Restoration - Returning shrubsteppe habitats to those dominated by native species (e.g., perennial grasses, shrubs, forbs). Restoration activities include enhancement, rehabilitation, creation, or improvement to mean the manipulation of the physical or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of returning natural functions to the lost or degraded native habitat and improving ecosystem resilience.

Shrubsteppe - The communities of plants and animals in the shrubsteppe landscape and the nonliving things (e.g., soil, air, water) that they interact with. 'Shrubsteppe ecosystems' is inclusive of the multiple ecological systems (vegetation communities) that include shrubsteppe, grasslands, mesic systems, and other vegetation communities (<https://deptofnaturalresources.app.box.com/v/amp-nh-eco-sys-guide>) that occur in the Columbia Plateau.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) – Washington State list of species identified in State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). SGCN is a non-regulatory designation chosen to bring attention to the species before they become more rare or costly to conserve and inclusive of species with protected and classified statuses (e.g., listed species).

Steering Committee – WSRRI is led by a tri-state agency steering committee consisting of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Conservation Commission, and Washington Department of Natural Resources.

State Wildlife Action Plan - The SWAP identifies Washington's wildlife and habitats needing conservation attention, the key problems they face, and outlines actions needed to conserve them over the long-term. SWAPs are updated every 10 years.