WSRRI Resource Programs: 25/27 Biennium

The purpose of this document is to clarify the processes and expectations for expending WSRRI's ***25-27 biennial resources to Wildlife Friendly Fencing and Habitat Restoration.*** Landowners, Partners and Tribes are invited to seek Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) support for these programs. Deferred Grazing for habitat recovery after wildfire will still be offered as a resource program but will be addressed through a separate process.

I. Eligibility

All partners, tribes, and private landowners are eligible to apply for project support. Staff of tribes and partner organizations, including federal, state, local agencies, Conservation Districts (CDs) and non-profit organizations are welcome to apply directly. Private landowners must work with CDs, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Private Lands Biologists, or WSRRI's Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator (Kurt.Merg@dfw.wa.gov), to facilitate application submission.

II. WSRRI Resource Programs

For the 25/27 biennium, WSRRI has both capital and operating dollars to support habitat restoration and wildlife-friendly fencing.

- Capital dollars must be expended within the biennium (i.e., between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2027). Capital dollars will be applied to wildlife friendly fencing and habitat restoration.
- Operating dollars must be expended within the fiscal year (i.e., between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026 or between July 1 2026 and June 30, 2027). Operating dollars will be applied to habitat restoration, *however* most operating dollars are already invested into capacity and resources/materials that will be made available to projects. These investments include:
    - Restoration planning and implementation expertise and capacity, in a Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator, Assistant, and field crews;
    - Plant production through the Sustainability in Prisons Program;
    - Seed procurement to support current and future projects; and
    - Fence markers.

For WSRRI's Wildlife-friendly Fencing and Habitat Restoration Programs, the sections below address the following:

- Available resources during the 25-27 biennium;
- Eligible activities and specifications/standards; and
- Application submission, evaluation, and selection.

Award notification and administrative requirements are addressed for both programs at the end of the document. Where appropriate, information specific to CDs as applicants and awardees is provided.

A. Wildlife-friendly fencing

Available resources during the 25-27 biennium.

A total of up to $1,000,000 of capital funding is available to support wildlife friendly fencing projects, including virtual fencing, for the biennium.

Eligible activities and specifications/standards.
The eligible wildlife-friendly fence practices (and cost-share amounts) available through this program include:

- Replacing burned fence with wildlife-friendly fence (see specifications below), removal of old fence is required, 100% cost share.
- Retrofit existing fence to wildlife-friendly fence (see specifications below), 100% cost share.
- Fence removal when not being replaced with new wildlife-friendly fence, 75% cost share.
- Virtual fence, see specifications below
    - Eligible costs through WSRRI include towers and collars. Some vendors require collars to be leased. In this case:
        - WSRRI can 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 – the removal of hard wire fencing in virtual fence areas is an eligible practice, as applicable and dependent on funding available.

Wildlife-friendly Hard Wire Fence Specifications:

- Fence will consist of a top smooth wire set at 42 inches from the ground, a bottom smooth wire set at 18 inches above the ground, and two strands of smooth or barbed wire, set at 26 inches above the ground, and 34 inches above the ground.
- Barbed wire and barbless wire will be 12.5-gauge, class 3 galvanized. Two- or four-point barbed wire is acceptable.
- T posts minimum weight of 1.25 lbs. per/foot and five and a half feet in length. Steel posts placed at intervals no greater than 16 feet between post. T posts will be set so that the top smooth wire set meets the height requirement specified above. When soil conditions allow, the top of the T post shall be no higher than 45 inches from the ground. When the soil conditions (i.e., shallow, rocky soils) do not allow for a maximum height of 45 inches, the top of the T post may be no higher than 50 inches.
- Braces and corner posts will be constructed with 7 foot long, noncombustible steel products set to a minimum depth of 3 feet diameter to match the NRCS Fence Conservation Standard Practice, Code 382.
- Cross bracing on braces will be made with 8-foot-long non-combustible steel products that match diameter specs of NRCS.
- Existing Brace and T posts in good condition may be used in completion of a fence retrofit with top and bottom wires being replaced with smooth wires at the correct height.
- All wildlife-friendly hard fences must have a life span of at least 20 years.
- Fence markers to increase fence visibility and decrease hazards to grouse will be required where appropriate on all hard wire fence projects. WSRRI will notify you if your project requires fence markers, and where required, will provide them. Fence markers can be installed by the implementing agency or organization, producer/landowner, or by a field crew provided by WSRRI.

Wildlife-friendly Virtual Fence Program Specifications:

- Virtual fencing is a fencing technology with a structural satellite tower and/or cellular connection that provides instructions to Global Positioning System (GPS) collars worn by livestock. The GPS collars influence livestock behavior to recognize stimuli (sound, pulse, and shock) as virtual fence boundaries. The virtual fence lines are managed by producers through computers and smartphone applications (apps), allowing the boundaries to be remotely mapped and adjusted.
- All virtual fence projects must have a life span of at least 3 years
- If required, the number of signal repeating towers is dependent on the size and topography of the area covered. Towers will be placed on the landowner's property in a ratio based on the number of their cows and/or, so that the system will work across the topography of all the property in the project.
- The system must be designed in coordination with the landowner(s) by a company that specializes in virtual fence installations.
- Landowners will be expected to work with the virtual fencing company for all elements of setting up a virtual fence system on their properties. All maintenance, upgrades of collars and other management expenses incurred are at the expense of the landowner(s) or in conjunction with the fence company.
- Where landowners, in consultation with the fence company, have determined that a virtual fence is not appropriate (some perimeter fence areas or along roads) landowners will be encouraged to replace any burned fences with hard wildlife friendly fences, or non-barbed electric fences of adequate design.
- Vegetation will be cleared in a 30-foot radius around each tower and hard wildlife-friendly or electric fence will be used to prevent damage to the tower and guidewires by livestock.

Information for CDs Only

SCC has developed wildlife-friendly fencing practice codes; use the following codes when planning your project and entering information into CPDS:

- SCC58- Wildlife-friendly fence
- SCC59- Wildlife-friendly fence retrofit
- SCC60- Fence removal
- SCC61- Fence markers
- SCC62- Virtual fence

Cost share projects must be entered into CPDS prior to application, see application details below. Refer to the SCC WSRRI Guidelines for additional guidance.

Application submission, evaluation, and selection.

Wildlife-friendly fencing projects will be submitted into Formstack (Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative Funding Request - Formstack). Where project applicants have multiple fence projects of interest, please submit one application for each project. Through Formstack, applicants will be directed to provide project spatial data (i.e., geometry, either as a shapefile or kmz file) to allow evaluation against some of the criteria identified below. If a project includes both wildlife friendly-fencing and habitat restoration components that are complementary and related, it may be submitted in Formstack as one project with both components; spatial data should be submitted for both components.

Because of the time required to contract fence construction or virtual fence deployment, WSRRI seeks to select and fund projects early in the biennium. Wildlife-friendly fencing projects may be submitted into Formstack year-round with evaluations conducted in October 2025, January 2026, July 2026, and January 2027, ***as long as funding remains available.*** Project evaluations will terminate when all funds have been expended. Un-funded projects will be used to justify additional legislative requests.

All project applications will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- Project will occur where the Washington Habitat Connectivity Action Plan (WAHCAP) landscape connectivity scores are greater than 5; or
- Project will occur within WSRRI-designated core, growth opportunity, or corridor spatial priorities.

A multi-partner evaluation team will be convened to evaluate projects. For projects meeting the above criteria, this team will assess the following, given the information provided in the application:

- Long-term commitment of landowner to wildlife habitat; and
- Overall wildlife value.

Special consideration will be given to those projects within ungulate migration corridors.

The evaluation team will generate a ranked list of projects according to the criteria above. WDFW and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) will be responsible for conveying funding recommendations on behalf of the evaluation team to the WSRRI Steering Committee. The WSRRI Steering Committee has decision-making authority on project selection and funding when FUNDING is requested by a project proponent.

B. Habitat Restoration

Available resources during the 25/27 biennium.
WSRRI has already invested operating funds into resources (e.g., implementation capacity in field crews and equipment, seed, sagebrush plugs) and these resources are available for project implementation and can be requested. Further, approximately $1million in capital funds and $100,000 in operating funds are available to support habitat restoration. Dollars (both capital and operating) available for project implementation must be spent according to the fiscal year or biennial timelines described above.

Eligible activities and specifications/standards*.
WSRRI's wildlife priorities are those species that occur in terrestrial environments, inclusive of birds and amphibians using wet (mesic) habitats within the shrubsteppe landscape. These species, and especially Species of Greatest Conservation Needs (SGCN) as identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), are the wildlife that should benefit from habitat restoration efforts supported by WSRRI. Salmonids and other fish are not a primary focus.

- *Site preparation for seeding or planting*. Physical removal of existing vegetation and soil preparation for planting or seeding. The general purpose is to create conditions suitable for plantings to root and seeds to germinate. The scale of site preparation is dependent on restoration objectives. Examples range from clearing and preparing a previously cultivated field to digging individual holes for containerized plants. WSRRI aims to work at a landscape scale and in upland/xeric habitats, WSRRI prioritizes seed-based restoration to address large areas because it can be accomplished with agricultural machinery rather than by hand-labor.

    - WSRRI Standard: Seedbeds and planting beds for live plants must be clean, free of growing weeds and weed seed in the soil seed bank and comprised mostly of bare soil that is free of undecomposed plant residue. Plant residue can be reduced by removing it mechanically or allowing it to decompose. Clean soil must be firmly compacted such that a human footprint in advance of seeding/planting is generally no more than ¼" deep.
- *Seed Collection*. Harvesting seed from locally adapted plant populations for use in nearby habitat restoration projects. Best available science indicates that locally adapted plant materials are most likely to establish and persist on restoration sites. Further, local native plants coevolved with local wildlife and so are more likely than nonlocal plants to meet the needs of that wildlife.
    - WSRRI Standard: Seed collection for WSRRI projects can be done from wild populations of common species only, not protected or endangered species. Collections should not overharvest a stand and must otherwise conform to the INSR Standards for Native Seeds in Ecological Restoration. They also must be made by hand rather than by machine to minimize disturbance in remnant native plant communities. Finally, collections should be made from truly wild populations not from planted stands of unknown seed provenance.
- *Seeding*. Distribution of plant seed to establish vegetation, used particularly where natural regeneration is unlikely due to past management practices or disturbances, or where natural reestablishment is likely to be slow and partners want to facilitate rapid ecological recovery, to prevent erosion, to prevent the establishment of invasive species, or to provide specific wildlife needs. The appropriate method for seeding is determined on a site-specific basis and depends on terrain, accessibility, soil characteristics, and time of seeding.
    - WSRRI Standard: To the extent practicable, seeding projects should use proper seeding equipment capable of precise seed placement from 1/8"-1/2" beneath the soil surface. Seed should be pressed firmly into the soil. Where erosion risk is high, consider breaking site into smaller zones and getting native vegetation established in one set of zones before proceeding to the next zones. Alternatively, use fast-growing annual crop species like sterile triticale to stabilize a site, and follow that with a native seeding. WSRRI projects must be designed to restore as much locally adapted, native plant diversity as practicable. In this "natives first" approach, WSRRI projects must use locally adapted ecotypes (e.g., source-identified plant materials) of native species first, native cultivars second, and all other plant materials third, only if native species are not available, or if there is an imperative sufficient to justify the reduction in habitat value that non-native species typically provide.
- *Planting*. Physical planting of fully-developed plants and starts, employed particularly where natural regeneration is unlikely due to past management practices or disturbances, where natural reestablishment is likely to be slow and partners want to facilitate rapid ecological recovery, or to provide specific benefit to wildlife. Plants may be containerized seedlings and bare-root stock. Stem wraps or cages of metal, plastic or fabric, may be installed on highly palatable species to protect them from mammal damage.
    - WSRRI Standard: Live plants must be planted so that their roots are wholly beneath the soil surface, into soil that is sufficiently friable that it can be firmly compressed around the roots, which must occupy a planting hole sufficiently large that the roots are not folded or cramped. WSRRI projects must be designed to restore as much locally adapted, native plant diversity as practicable. In this "natives first"

approach, WSRRI projects must use locally adapted ecotypes (e.g., source-identified plant materials) of native species first, native cultivars second, and all other plant materials third, only if native species are not available, or if there is an imperative sufficient to justify the reduction in habitat value that non-native species typically provide.

- *Mulching*. Applying plant residues or other suitable materials to the land surface to increase seeding and planting success and improve plant productivity and health.
- *Thinning*. Above ground manual or mechanical manipulation of existing vegetation to achieve desired density, composition, and structure objectives. This action may target the reduction or thinning of above ground vegetation biomass, including thatch, herbaceous and woody species. This action is often necessary where systems lack historically periodic natural disturbances, including fire. Most of Washington's ecological systems, including shrubsteppe and riparian, were historically maintained by fire, which created variation in spatial patterns of habitats and microsites. Prescribed fire and grazing for the purpose of thinning are not eligible activities.
- *Restoration area protection*. Temporary exclusion of domestic and wild animals from a restoration area through electric or hard fencing to decrease herbivory and increase seeding and planting establishment and success.
- *Removal of man-made structures and debris*. The removal of structures and debris that are no longer needed for their intended purpose; create hazards or impediments for wildlife, livestock, or people; or prevent the long-term recovery of habitat. Structures include any built structure where the landowner is interested in removal. Debris includes any derelict and otherwise abandoned man-made items (i.e., junk) less than 50 years old. Man-made structures and debris include, but are not limited to, fencing, irrigation equipment, drainage tiles, signage, and modern dumps.
- *Weed control*. The management, control, and removal of undesired vegetation (i.e., weeds) by manual, mechanical or chemical means, or through insect biocontrols. These methods can be used alone or in combination. Further, weed control may be done as an independent activity when done for the purpose of fish and wildlife habitat restoration, but should always be included in site preparation for seeding and planting.
- *Post-assisted Log Structures (PALS)*. Low-tech structures used in stream restoration that mimic and promote wood accumulation processes and are typically hand-built using hydraulic post-pounders to push untreated wood posts into the bed of a stream.
- *Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs)*. Low-tech man-made structures used in stream restoration that mimic and promote beaver activity and are typically installed by weaving woody plant material among untreated wood posts that have been driven into the bed of a stream.
- *Zeedyk Structures*. Low profile, hand-built structures made of rock or wood that restrict streamflow to restore hydrologic and ecological function of wet meadows and small streams impacted by head-cutting, gully erosion, and channel incision. The structures help to slow and disperse water, dissipate energy, capture sediment, and increase soil moisture thereby promoting mesic and wetland plant species expansion that prevents further degradation and fosters channel recovery. Typical installation requires multiple structures to achieve desired effects within a reach.

*Information for CDs Only

WSRRI has attempted to relate restoration activities eligible for WSRRI support to corresponding NRCS and SCC Practices in SCC's Conservation Practice Data System (CPDS). These

corresponding practices are applicable to WSRRI projects in CPDS when done to accomplish the purpose of wildlife habitat restoration. *We recognize our attempt to relate these two lists is imperfect; if additional NRCS and SCC practices that correspond to eligible restoration activities OR if there is a legitimate gap in NRCS and SCC practices in CPDS that can correspond to eligible actives, please give us this feedback*. We will be working to update the CPDS list to ensure that all WSRRI-eligible habitat restoration activities can be implemented through CDs.

The WSRRI standards described above will guide the implementation of corresponding NRCS/SCC practices. Refer to the WSRRI standards first when planning and implementing projects in combination with NRCS and SCC practices.
Cost share projects must be entered into CPDS prior to application, see application details below. Refer to the SCC WSRRI Guidelines for additional guidance.

Eligible Activity	**Corresponding NRCS/SCC Practices**
Site preparation for seeding or planting	NRCS 490 Tree-Shrub Site Preparation NRCS 342 Critical Area Planting
Seeding	NRCS 550 Range Planting NRCS 327 Conservation Cover NRCS 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
Planting	NRCS 612 Tree-Shrub Establishment NRCS 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
Mulching	NRCS 484 Mulching
Thinning	NRCS 314 Brush Management NRCS 660 Tree/Shrub Pruning
Restoration Area Protection	NRCS 382 Fence NRCS 472 Access Control SCC5 Beaver Exclusion Fence SCC64 Temporary Fencing
Removal of man-mad structures and debris	SCC 60 Fence Removal NRCS 500 Obstruction Removal
Weed control	NRCS 315 Herbaceous Weed Treatment
Post-assisted Log Structures (PALS)	SCC55 Dead Stake Revetments
Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs)	SCC3 Beaver Dam Analogue
Zeedyk Structures	
Seed Collection	Must be used in combination with seeding or planting codes above when utilizing capital funding.

Application submission, evaluation, and selection.
Habitat restoration projects should be submitted into Formstack (Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration Initiative Funding Request - Formstack). Where project applicants have multiple restoration projects of interest, please submit one application for each project. Through Formstack, applicants will be directed to provide spatial data (i.e., geometry, either as a shapefile or kmz file) to allow evaluation against some of the criteria identified below. If a project includes both habitat restoration and wildlife friendly-fencing components that are complementary and related, it may be submitted in Formstack as one project with both components; spatial data should be submitted for both components.

Habitat restoration projects may be submitted into Formstack year-round with evaluations conducted in October 2025, January 2026, July 2026, and January 2027. These evaluation periods were selected to correspond with, but occur in advance of, anticipated restoration work during the fall and spring seasons. Because WSRRI has both funding and services/materials to offer, and it is possible that additional restoration funding becomes available if those funds are not applied to deferred grazing, we should assume that project evaluations will occur two times per year BUT funding (i.e., dollars) available to support habitat restoration will decrease as the biennium proceeds. Late in the biennium, WSRRI may only be able to support projects needing the services and materials already invested in. Restoration projects requesting funding, where funding is not available, will be used to justify additional legislative requests.

All project applications will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- Project will occur within important species' breeding habitats, recovery zones, and migration zones (Greater Sage-grouse, Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Pygmy Rabbit, Mule Deer).
- Project will occur where WAHCAP landscape connectivity scores are greater than 5; or
- Project will occur within WSRRI-designated core, growth opportunity, or corridor spatial priorities.

A multi-partner evaluation team will be convened to evaluate projects. In addition to the information above, this team will assess the following, given the information provided in the application:

- Likelihood of project success, including achievement of the restoration objective;
- Long-term commitment of the landowner to wildlife habitat; and
- Project scale and overall wildlife value and impact.

Special consideration will be given to those projects within:

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

The evaluation panel will generate a ranked list of projects according to the criteria above. WDFW and SCC will be responsible for determining how projects can be funded and/or resourced given the available operating dollars, capitol dollars, and existing WSRRI's investments. The WSRRI Program Manager with support from SCC and WSRRI Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator will jointly convey funding/resourcing recommendations for habitat restoration to the WSRRI Steering Committee.

- The WSRRI Steering Committee has decision-making authority on project selection and funding when FUNDING is requested by a project proponent.
- The WSRRI Steering Committee has already approved investments in capacity, plant materials, and other resources. The WSRRI Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator has decision-making authority on the application of these investments and will inform the Steering Committee of their application to projects.

III. Award Notification and Administrative Requirements

A. Award Notification

Project proponents will be notified of their selection within two months of the date on which submitted projects were pulled from Formstack for evaluation. **The date starting the first**

evaluation period in this biennium is October 17th, 2025. Partners and tribes will be notified of other evaluation periods this biennium moving forward.

Proponents of selected projects should expect significant further conversation with one or more of the following individuals to discuss and confirm the administrative requirements described in the section below.

- Janet Gorrell, WSRRI Program Manager (WDFW); Janet.Gorrell@dfw.wa.gov
- Allisa Carlson, SCC WSRRI Program Manager (SCC); ACarlson@scc.wa.gov
- Kurt Merg, WSRRI Shrubsteppe Restoration Coordinator (WDFW); Kurt.Merg@dfw.wa.gov

B. Contracts and agreements

Projects awarded to CDs will be administered through SCC with the following requirements:

- Awards will be made by SCC; and
- All general requirements of SCC must be followed as set out in the SCC Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual and WSRRI Guidelines

Projects awarded to all other partners will be administered through WDFW. Funding awards made by WDFW will require a contract with the agency.

All selected habitat restoration project proponents will be provided a suggested "WSRRI Resource Plan" to clarify the dollars (capital or operating) and resources (capacity, materials, etc.,) that WSRRI can provide to the project and suggested timelines given how those dollars and resources are pieced together. The project proponent will need to agree to this plan prior to development of formal agency contracts.

C. Cultural Resources

WSRRI funding is subject to the Governor's Executive Order 21-02 (EO 21-02), which requires the State to consult with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and with Tribes, for potential impacts on cultural resources. EO 21-02 applies to both projects and pass-through funding, when projects will not undergo Section 106 review under the National Historic Preservation Act.

For all projects administered through SCC, CDs must follow SCC's cultural resources policy which complies with EO 21-02. Funds have been reserved for cultural resource services. CDs can work with Cascadia CD's archaeologist (directly billed between Cascadia CD and SCC) or secure their own archaeology services. SCC will contact CDs receiving awards to determine what the CD prefers.

All projects administered through WDFW must meet WDFW's requirements for cultural resource review and consultation to comply with EO 21-02. WDFW has dedicated archaeological service capacity to conduct this work for WSRRI projects. Where selected projects are managed by a federal partner, WDFW will defer to the Section 106 consultation conducted by the federal agency, but that consultation must be produced and documented by WDFW Cultural Resources staff. For all other projects, WDFW can manage the cultural resource review and consultation process,

unless a partner or tribe has already conducted a cultural resource review and consultation that meets EO21-02 and can produce that documentation.

Because both SCC and WDFW have archaeological service capacity to support WSRRI projects, project applications should not include funding or service requests for cultural resource review and consultation. During project selection, the WSRRI Steering Committee will determine what additional WSRRI resources are available, if necessary, to support these needs above and beyond those that can be met through SCC and WDFW. An example is a large-scale field survey conducted by a contracted archaeologist.