

WASHINGTON STATEWIDE CONNECTIVITY ANALYSIS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ANALYSIS

What is habitat connectivity and why is habitat connectivity important?

Habitat connectivity is a term used to refer to the ability of animals to move within a habitat or from one habitat to another. Different species move at different temporal and spatial scales for a wide variety of reasons. These movements can occur daily for food, seasonally as some species migrate with changing conditions, or over generations as new territory is explored. With predicted shifts in habitat due to climate change, wildlife will need the ability to move from habitat that becomes unsuitable for them to more favorable conditions.

Well-connected landscapes help ensure the future of healthy wildlife in Washington State by facilitating these movements, and maintain the natural beauty and health of the land and water we depend on for farming, recreation, hunting, and fishing.

Who did the analysis?

The Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group is an open science-based public-private collaborative that is composed of representatives from land and natural resource management agencies, tribes, non-profit conservation organizations, and universities. The WHCWG is supported by a core team responsible for the management and delivery of the statewide analysis and protocol for future complementary analyses. The core team includes members from the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife, WA Department of Transportation, WA Department of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, University of Washington, Conservation Northwest, The Nature Conservancy, WA Biodiversity Project, and Western Transportation Institute. The Core Team is supported by subgroups that focus on particular aspects of the analysis, and a full group of participants that contribute to the work.

How should the analysis be used?

At the statewide scale, we identified patterns of habitat distribution that dominate large landscapes. This can be thought of as a “view” of the land from 50,000 feet up. The purpose of a statewide analysis is to provide consistent regional data layers, emphasize areas of high quality intact habitat, identify areas important to maintain regional connectivity between those high quality habitats, and provide a framework for future finer scale and climate change analysis.

The statewide analysis will have many uses including informing the Washington State Department of Transportation for safe wildlife passage implementation, and by organizations involved in conserving and restoring wildlife habitat. The statewide analysis will fulfill a part of Washington State's contribution to the Western Governors' Association Wildlife Corridors Initiative and Decision Support System, and is a component of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wildlife Action Plan.

As an informational tool not a recommendation, the Working Group did contract with Blue Heron Strategies LLC to conduct a third party review of all policies and land management plans that can be informed by integrate the data from this analysis. Contact us if you would like a copy of this report.

What are the next steps?

This analysis uses relatively coarse-scale data for this first-step in identifying regionally important areas for connectivity in Washington State. Therefore additional analyses at smaller, eco-regional scales will need to be conducted to provide more detailed information about local connectivity. Analyses at the ecoregional scale will likely involve selection of new sets of focal species associated with more patchily distributed habitats, more limited ranges, and smaller movement scales. Ecoregional focal species are likely to have important habitat requirements that are not adequately addressed at the statewide scale. We intend to conduct assessments of one or more ecoregions at a time until all nine ecoregions within Washington have been analyzed. These ecoregional analyses will produce finer resolution products that complement the statewide analysis and are more valuable to local area planners. The ecoregional analyses will include considerable outreach to local wildlife and habitat experts and local communities. At this time, we are partnering with Washington's Arid Lands Initiative to complete a connectivity analysis for the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion, and the Hells Canyon Preservation Council is developing a similar analysis for the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

This analysis also represents current connectivity levels, so additional analyses are underway that account for predicted changes in climate.

How should the data be cited?

Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group (WHCWG). 2010. Washington Connected Landscapes Project: Statewide Analysis. Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife, and Transportation, Olympia, WA.

Where is the full report? And, how do I request a copy of the data layers?

The report and associated maps are posted to the WHCWG's website at www.waconnected.org

To request data layers from this project or for more information, please contact Kelly McAllister with the WA Department of Transportation, McAllKe@wsdot.wa.gov, or Joanne Schuett-Hames with the WA Department of Fish & Wildlife, Joanne.Schuett-Hames@dfw.wa.gov.

The WHCWG thanks the California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project, commissioned by the California Departments of Transportation and Fish and Game, for allowing us to borrow from their design template in the production of these documents.

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