

WORKING DRAFT

SHRUBSTEPPE MITIGATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION –

October 20, 2025

Program Purpose and Need

The Growth Management Act establishes no net loss (NNL) of ecological functions and values as a fundamental requirement for local land use planning. WAC 365-190-080(1) states:

*"Counties and cities required or opting to plan under the [GMA] must consider the definitions and guidelines in this chapter when designating critical areas and when preparing development regulations that protect all functions and values of critical areas to ensure **no net loss of ecological functions and values.**"*

The County and cities in Benton County, consistent with the GMA, require mitigation to offset impacts from removal or degradation of shrubsteppe habitat when developed. If mitigation cannot be accomplished onsite then offsite, compensatory mitigation is required. Additionally, the US Department of Energy and PNNL also have mitigation needs for development in north Richland and the adjoining southern portion of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

Per the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)¹: *"Shrubsteppe is an arid ecosystem found in Eastern Washington and other western states. This landscape is dominated by rolling, grassy plains, or "steppe" with an overstory of sagebrush and other woody shrubs. On the ground, a fragile community of microscopic organisms form the cryptobiotic crust which locks in moisture and helps prevent erosion. Shrubsteppe landscapes contain many habitat features, including streams, wetlands, rocky talus slopes, canyons, and draws. These features support a variety of plant and animals uniquely adapted to the harsh and sensitive shrubsteppe ecosystem."*

In recent years, several different approaches for addressing mitigation requirements offsite have been utilized in Benton County, including payments for the acquisition of mitigation lands to WDFW, developers seeking out and purchasing their own mitigation properties, and more recently, the cities of Kennewick and Richland, and PNNL contracting with the Benton Conservation District (Benton CD) to secure mitigation lands either through conservation easement or land acquisition. The contracts and amounts required for mitigation vary among these contracts.

¹ https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-01/shrubsteppe_english_jan2021.pdf

In light of this recent history, Benton County recognized the need for regional consistency for shrubsteppe mitigation and assigned White Bluffs Consulting and AC Geo, the consultant team leads for the County's 2026 Comprehensive Plan and development regulations update, to complete the following activities as part of this process:

- Forecast mitigation needs within the County, organized by each city, its respective UGA and the unincorporated area of the County
- Evaluate shrubsteppe habitat quantity and quality in Benton County
- Identify landowners of potential mitigation properties for conservation
- Investigate organizations (e.g. land trust) might be interested in partnering with the County and perpetually holding mitigation lands
- Identify options for a more regional and consistent mitigation solution to support expected development in the County for at least the next 20 years.
- Develop a draft and final program that describes a consistent regional approach for identifying and applying mitigation requirements, tailored to conditions in Benton County based on best available science
- Support coordination with the cities, WDFW, Benton CD and others during program development

Demand Projections for Mitigation Land for Next 20 Years

Each city, the County, and PNNL have identified areas with associated acreages that they expect to be developed over the next 20 years (through 2046). These areas were intersected with shrubsteppe data sets to identify gross acres that may require mitigation for this time period, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Twenty Year Shrubsteppe Acreage Impact Estimate by Jurisdiction

Organization	Estimated Acres to be Developed through 2046
Benton County	14,708
Benton City	267
Kennewick	1,434
Prosser	678
Richland	4,542
West Richland	2,082
Total ²	23,711

Commented [BF1]: placeholders

Using the estimated acres of shrubsteppe impact in each jurisdiction, further projections were made based on average household size, percent of undeveloped shrubsteppe and quality type expected to be developed, and professional judgment on how much onsite versus offsite mitigation might

² PNNL 20-year growth: 134 acres impacted and 403 acres to be mitigated at a 3:1 ratio and with specific mitigation property performance metrics to be met. This is accounted for in mitigation requirement needs but is administered through separate agreements PNNL has with Benton Conservation District.

occur. Habitat was then categorized into WSSRI categories, as informed by Benton CD model of habitat quality, as described above.

Estimates are expected to be reviewed and updated by the County and cities approximately every 5 years.

Commented [BF2]: Steep slopes or open space provisions that can be included as part of development conditions could keep some shrubsteppe intact onsite

Commented [BF3R2]: We could apply % - E.g., 90% offsite mitigation.

Developing the Technical Basis for the Mitigation Program

The mitigation program is built on a dual framework that evaluates both the **habitat quality** (ecological functions) and the **spatial priority** (conservation values) of shrubsteppe habitat in Benton County. This framework relies on several key datasets to evaluate both potential impacts to shrubsteppe and potential mitigation properties. The key datasets include:

- Shrubsteppe quality model developed by the Benton Conservation District
- WDFW PHS Shrubsteppe Habitats
- WSSRI Xeric Habitat Spatial Priority Data
- Shrubsteppe prioritization model developed by the Benton Conservation District

Shrubsteppe Biodiversity Potential Model to Evaluate Shrubsteppe Quality

Staff from the Benton Conservation District developed a **Shrubsteppe Biodiversity Potential (SSBP) model** to evaluate shrubsteppe habitat quality. This model evaluates intrinsic habitat quality and resilience by integrating several key datasets, including LANDFIRE fuel models, fractional vegetation cover data from the Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics Consortium (MRLC), and the Washington DNR's Ecological Integrity Assessment framework. This data provides an initial indication of habitat quality and can be used to evaluate both potential impacts and mitigation opportunities at the County and city scale. Site or parcel-specific findings need to be verified/validated through site evaluation. The dataset is also used in tandem with spatial priority data (such as WSSRI) to prioritize mitigation properties that have a specific combination of quality and spatial priority, e.g., high quality and in a WSSRI core, Growth Opportunity Area, Corridor or Other area.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resilience Initiative (WSSRI) Spatial Data

The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resilience Initiative (WSSRI) provides a comprehensive suite of spatial data to inform habitat protection and restoration actions and investments. The WSSRI approach is built around three core goals: defending high-quality core habitat, expanding the core into adjacent areas, and connecting these cores³. To implement this strategy, WSSRI developed spatial priority maps for three distinct conservation targets:

³ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. *Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative*. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/shrubsteppe#mapping>

1. The Dry (Xeric) ecosystem, which represents the driest environments composed of sagebrush and perennial grasslands.
2. The Wet (Mesic) ecosystem, which includes wetter environments such as wetlands, wet meadows, and riparian habitats.
3. Greater Sage-grouse habitat, which reflects the species' specific life-history needs and is based on empirical data modeling habitat quality and connectivity.

Within each of these three targets, WSSRI classifies habitat into four spatial designations:

- **Core Areas:** Large, high-quality, intact habitat blocks essential for long-term conservation and ecological resilience.
- **Growth Opportunity Areas (GOAs):** Moderately degraded habitat with high restoration potential, typically adjacent to Core Areas.
- **Corridors:** Areas that facilitate wildlife movement and genetic exchange between Cores and GOAs, helping to maintain ecological connectivity.
- **Other:** Habitat outside of the above designations — often more isolated or degraded, but still ecologically valuable.

This spatial hierarchy is used to determine the relative conservation value of both impacted areas and mitigation areas. In Benton County, the dry (xeric) ecosystem layers are used for analysis of shrubsteppe impacts and prioritization of restoration properties, while the mesic and sage grouse data may be used in a supplemental context.

WDFW Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) Shrubsteppe

The PHS shrubsteppe data provides a general view of where shrubsteppe habitats are likely located. While this is not a precise survey of shrubsteppe presence/absence, it provides a planning tool used in land use decisions to flag areas that require a site-specific evaluation. PHS data is a primary tool used by land use planners in reviewing the potential impacts of proposed developments on priority habitats, such as shrubsteppe. For this reason, PHS shrubsteppe data was used to identify spatial extent of shrubsteppe habitat within each jurisdiction in Benton County.

20-Year Forecast of Potential Impacts for Each Jurisdiction

The analysis used the latest (as of September 2025) **PHS shrubsteppe dataset** to inventory the total acres of shrubsteppe that could potentially be impacted by future development. The total acreage of shrubsteppe subject to future development was calculated based on current land use designations within Benton County and its cities. The analysis focused on lands within city limits, Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), and Rural Community Centers and RL-5 zones within the unincorporated County.

The PHS shrubsteppe dataset was then intersected with the Benton County WSSRI dataset to characterize the full potential area that could be affected by future development within each jurisdiction and total for Benton County, organized by the four WSSRI categories and Additional PHS Shrubsteppe, for conditions when WSSRI does not overlap with PHS, as provided in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2.

The summary shows that over 21,000 acres (more than 80%) of the shrubsteppe likely to be impacted falls within the “Other” or “Additional PHS Shrubsteppe” spatial priority categories.

Table 2: PHS Shrubsteppe by Jurisdiction & WSSRI Xeric Spatial Priority Area

Jurisdiction	City Limits	UGA	Total
Richland	3,869	673	4,542
WSSRI Other habitat	1,955	428	2,383
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	1,914	245	2,159
West Richland	2,061	21	2,082
WSSRI Other habitat	1,293	13	1,307
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	768	7	775
Kennewick	1,412	22	1,434
WSSRI Other habitat	846	4	850
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	566	18	584
Prosser	574	104	678
WSSRI Core Area	50		50
WSSRI Growth Opportunity Area	45		45
WSSRI Other habitat	374	70	445
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	104	34	138
Benton City	259	9	267
WSSRI Other habitat	114	0	114
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	144	9	153
Unincorporated Benton County			14,708
WSSRI Core Area			1,494
WSSRI Corridor			943
WSSRI Growth Opportunity Area			418
WSSRI Other habitat			7,567
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe			4,286
Grand Total	8,175	828	23,711

NOTES:

1. Totals do not include PHS “Presumptive Shrubsteppe”
2. “Additional PHS Shrubsteppe” is shrubsteppe that does not fall within one of the WSSRI spatial priority areas.

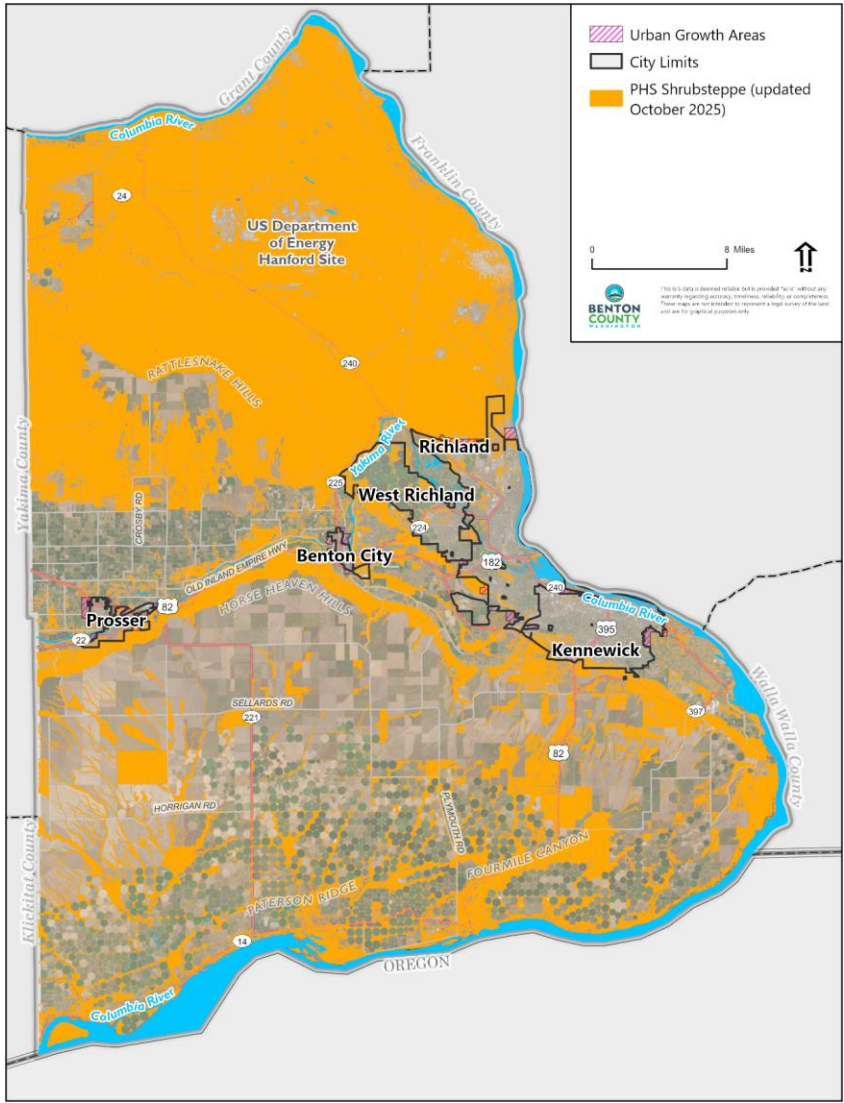
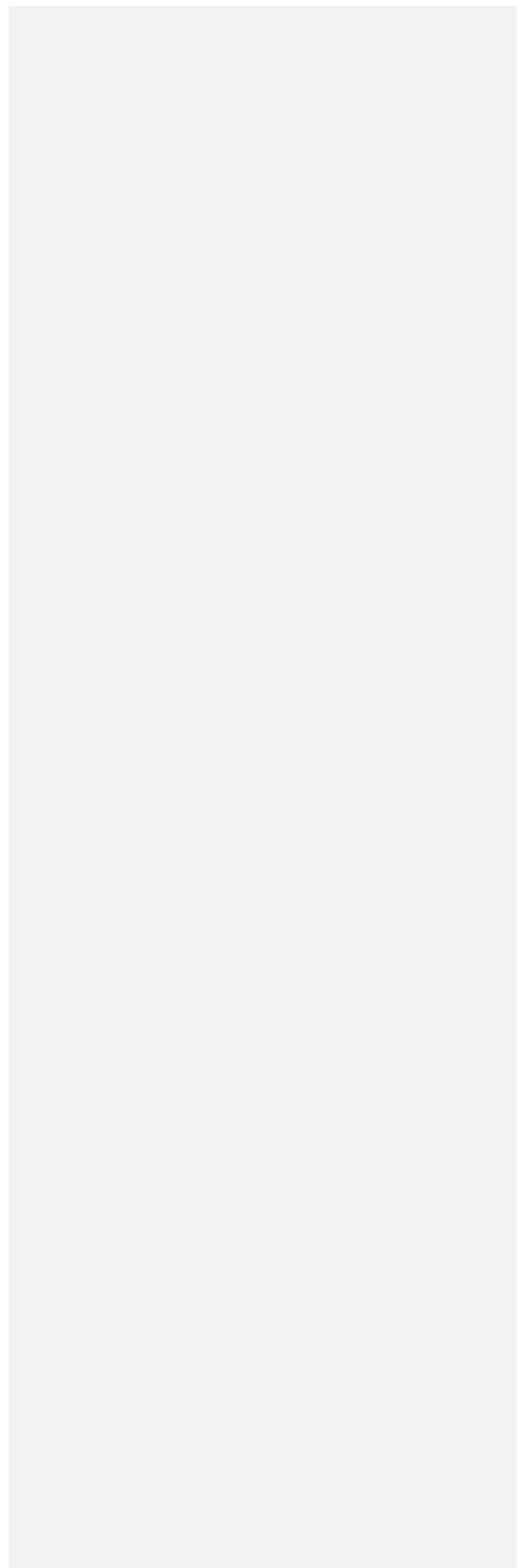


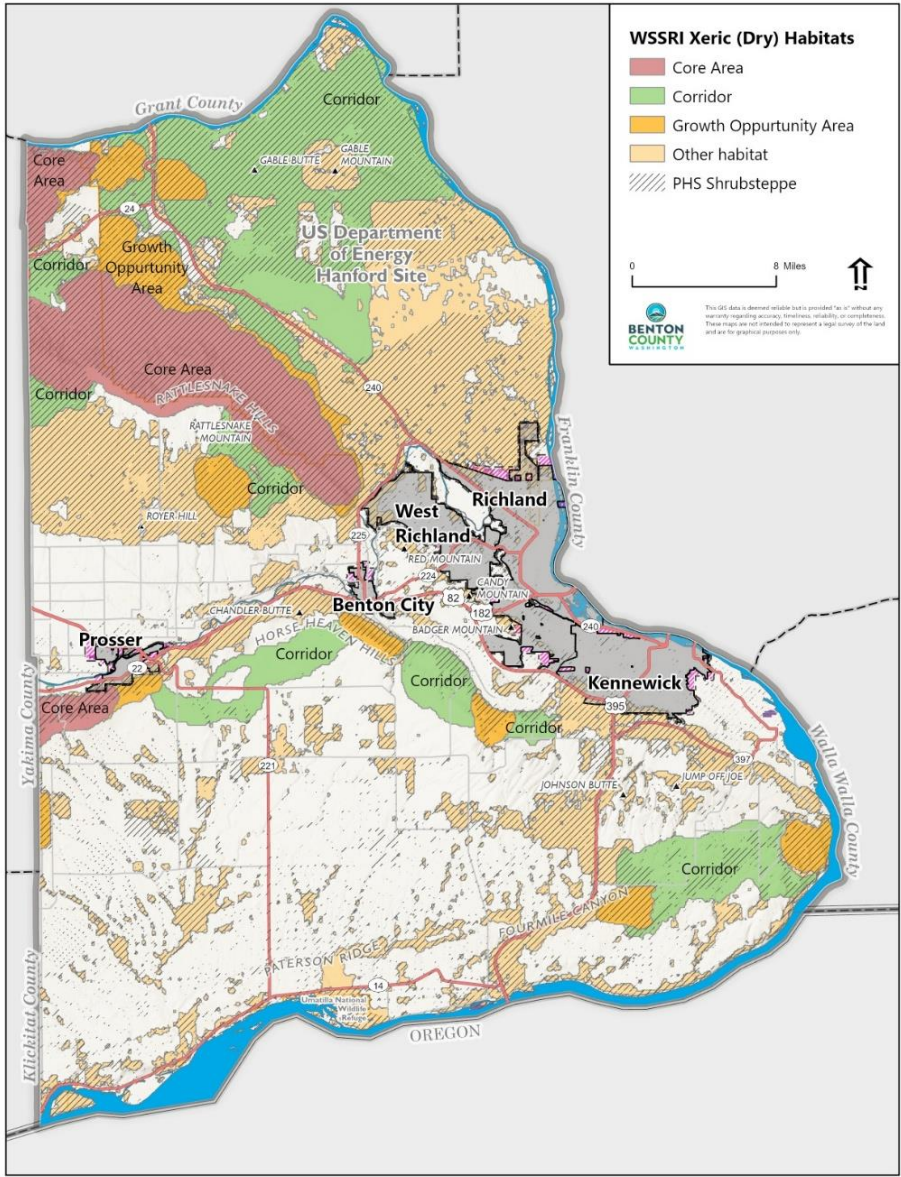
Figure 1: PHS Shrubsteppe

Working Draft

Mapped shrubsteppe extent provides a generalized estimate of shrubsteppe area. Some areas have already been developed or have other landcover types.

Figure 2: Shrubsteppe Spatial Habitat Area (PHS and WSSRI)





The Benton CD shrubsteppe habitat quality model was intersected with the PHS and WSSRI shrubsteppe data sets, to give an initial quality indication for those areas that could be impacted by future development. Habitat quality scores range from 2 to 10, with a higher value indicating higher habitat quality/ecological function. A summary of the quality and spatial priority of shrubsteppe within each jurisdiction is included in Table 3.

Table 3: Shrubsteppe Quality & Spatial Priority by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction & WSSRI Spatial Priority	Shrubsteppe Quality Score										Total	
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Unk		
Richland (City & UGA)	0	27	95	247	1,065	2,165	515	0	428	4,542		
Other habitat			2	18	105	577	1,314	325	0	42	2,383	
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	0	25	76	142	487	851	190		386	2,159		
West Richland (City & UGA)	0	4	21	119	698	975	97		167	2,082		
Other habitat			1	7	77	502	649	50	20	1,307		
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	0	3	14	42	196	326	47		147	775		
Kennewick (City & UGA)			10	63	267	471	449	89	86	1,434		
Other habitat			0	24	164	318	273	51	20	850		
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe			10	39	103	153	175	37	67	584		
Prosser (City & UGA)	0		1	12	140	347	137	7	35	678		
Core Area				2	15	27	5		1	50		
Growth Opportunity Area			0	1	9	20	15	0		45		
Other habitat			1	6	95	240	89	5	8	445		
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	0		0	3	20	59	28	1	27	138		
Benton City (City & UGA)	0	4	8	41	109	91	6		9	267		
Other habitat				0	25	50	34	3	1	114		
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	0	4	7	16	59	56	3		8	153		
Benton County (RL-5, Comm. Ctr.)	0	1	31	265	1,741	6,336	5,182	525	0	627	14,708	
Core Area			3	50	210	908	319	0	3	1,494		
Corridor			4	18	136	441	311	24	0	943		
Growth Opportunity Area				0	2	66	207	131	11	418		
Other habitat			0	5	88	868	3,209	2,892	318	0	186	7,567
Additional PHS Shrubsteppe	0	1	19	106	461	1,570	1,529	171	0	428	4,286	
TOTAL	0	1	77	463	2,555	9,025	8,998	1,239	1	1,352	23,711	

Table 4: Shrubsteppe Quality & Spatial Priority by Jurisdiction (20-year Forecast)
(to be added by early November, after City inputs provided)

Mitigation Properties Spatial Priority and Quality Metrics

Potential mitigation parcels were identified and prioritized throughout the County through analysis of various habitat quality and spatial priority metrics using a model developed by the Benton Conservation District. Figure 3 shows the spatial priority and shrubsteppe quality values of potential mitigation properties in the County. Table 5 summarizes potential shrubsteppe mitigation acreage, organized by quality and spatial priority.

Figure 3: Shrubsteppe Mitigation Parcel Prioritization

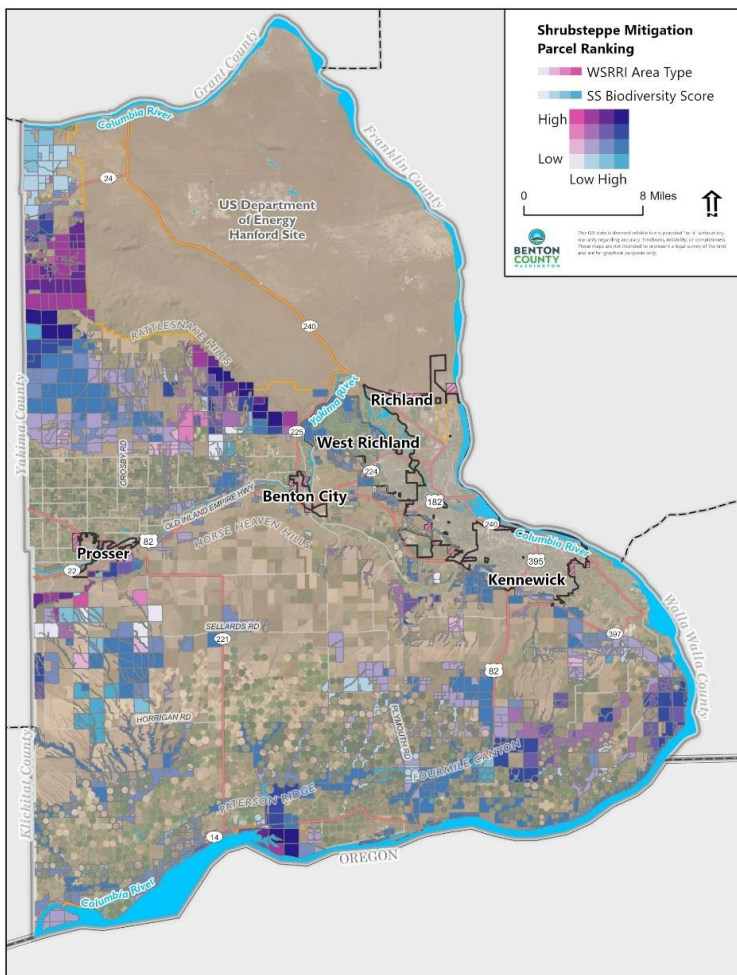


Table 5: Shrubsteppe Quality & Spatial Priority in Potential Mitigation Properties

Shrubsteppe Biodiversity Potential Quality Score											
WSSRI Spatial Priorities	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Unk.	Total
Core Area	15	205	1,540	5,747	10,296	6,045	318	4	105	24,275	
Growth Opportunity Area	1	37	441	3,056	5,946	3,843	310	1	494	14,130	
Corridor		12	246	2,272	5,114	3,440	487	1	1,282	12,854	
Other habitat	0	3	78	1,570	13,987	34,619	26,328	2,309	4	6,316	85,214
Other PHS SS	0	6	133	772	4,343	9,943	6,931	450	1	5,603	28,184
Grand Total	0	25	466	4,568	29,405	65,918	46,587	3,875	11	13,800	164,656

Notes:

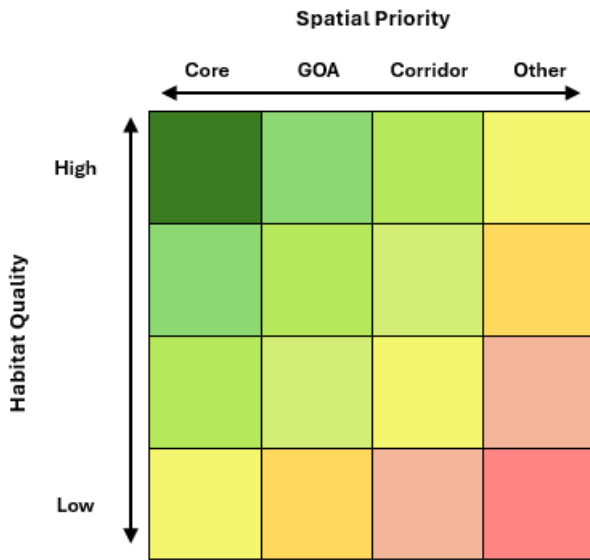
1. 90% of the total acreage is within the green highlighted range

Translating Spatial and Habitat Quality Ratings into Impact and Mitigation Credits

To establish a consistent and transparent method for evaluating impacts and mitigation, the program uses both **spatial priority** (where the site is located relative to core shrubsteppe and connectivity) and **ecological condition** (how well the site currently functions as shrubsteppe habitat). These two components are combined into a standardized credit/debit system.

- **Spatial Score:** Based on WSSRI ratings (e.g., Core, Connectivity, Restoration Opportunity), which identify the landscape priority of a site.
- **Function Score:** Based on the site's actual ecological condition, confirmed through field assessment. Several accepted methods may be applied:
 - **Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA)2** developed by the Washington Natural Heritage Program (see Appendix for additional detail)
 - **BLM AIM** (Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring) (see Appendix for additional detail)
 - **Benton CD Shrubsteppe Quality Model**, with field verification

Figure 4: General Crediting Concept Based on Quality and Spatial Priority



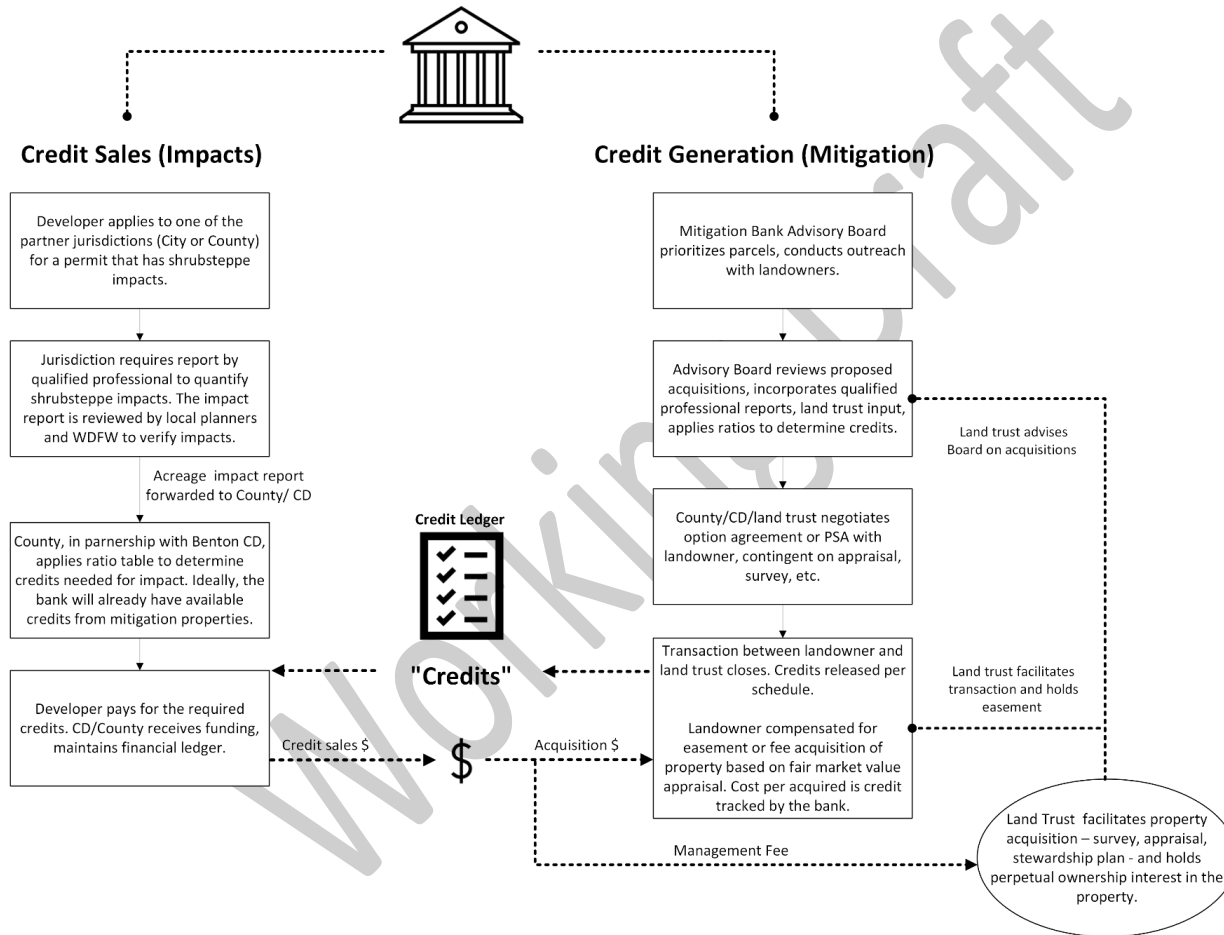
At the time of a development application, a shrubsteppe critical areas (CA) report would be prepared by a qualified professional. The report would document observed shrubsteppe species and habitat features and confirm shrubsteppe quality and WSSRI spatial ratings⁴.

The permitting jurisdiction (County/city) would use the CA report and mitigation report to calculate the number of credits required to offset the project’s impacts. Draft permit conditions would specify the mitigation requirement, which would then reviewed in coordination with WDFW and other members of a mitigation review team (*to be established*). Once the mitigation obligation is finalized, the developer satisfies the requirement by purchasing the prescribed number of credits. See Figure 5 for a conceptual diagram of the impact and mitigation crediting process.

Note: Additional discussion is needed among partner entities to determine who will receive the funds for credit purchases.

⁴ Threatened or endangered species presence and associated species-specific conditions to avoid or mitigate impacts may require additional permit conditions/requirements beyond shrubsteppe habitat loss mitigation.

Figure 5: Process Diagram



Calculating Impact and Mitigation Credits

Credits are calculated based on pre-defined multipliers. The multipliers are set based on a desired range of realized mitigation ratios, which incentivize protection of areas with high habitat quality and spatial priority. Before the correct multiplier can be assigned, quality and spatial priority will need to be verified through a qualified professional's report and WSSRI maps. To calculate credits/debits, the acres of impact or mitigation are multiplied by the value in the table corresponding to their quality and spatial priority value. Many projects include a parcel(s) with more than one quality/spatial priority. In these cases, the acres of each distinct area will be multiplied separately and added together for the composite credit total. Impact (debit) and mitigation (credit) multipliers are shown in Tables 6a and 6b.

In the areas most likely to see shrubsteppe impacts, approximately 80 percent of the shrubsteppe habitat falls in either the WSSRI "Other" category, or is not within the WSSRI spatial area but contains other PHS shrubsteppe. Most of these areas have moderate to high habitat quality. In comparison, the highest priority potential mitigation properties are those with high quality habitat in "Core" or "Growth Opportunity Areas." Accordingly, areas highlighted in Tables 6a and 6b indicate the range within which the majority of applied credit multipliers are likely to fall.

Tables 6a and 6b – Impacts and Mitigation Credit Calculation Tables

Table 6a: Impacts (Debits) Matrix

				WSSRI Priority				
Habitat Quality	EIA	BLM AIMS	SSBP	Standard Quality Score	Core	GOA	Corridor	Other
	4.5-5	Near ref.	9-10 High	4	8x	6x	4x	2x
	3.5-4.4	Slight departure	6-8 Good	3	6x	4x	3x	1.5x
	2.5-3.4	Moderate departure	4-5 Moderate	2	4x	3x	2x	1x
	1.0-2.4	Extreme departure	1-4 Poor	1	2x	1.5x	1x	0.5x

Commented [BF4]: Multiplier

Commented [BF5R4]: Low threshold where mitigation is not required

Table 6b: Mitigation (Credits) Matrix

				WSSRI Priority				
Habitat Quality	EIA	BLM AIMS	SSBP	Standard Quality Score	Core	GOA	Corridor	Other
	4.5-5	Near ref.	9-10 High	4	2x	1.5x	1x	1x
	3.5-4.4	Slight departure	6-8 Good	3	1.5x	1x	1x	0.75x
	2.5-3.4	Moderate departure	4-5 Moderate	2	1x	0.75x	0.667x	0.5x
	1.0-2.4	Extreme departure	1-4 Poor	1	1x	0.75x	0.5x	0.5x

Note: Reestablishment and rehabilitation moves mitigation activities up the “quality” scale based on anticipated post restoration quality.

The credit multipliers used in the impact and mitigation tables result in the following realized ratios, which represent the ratio at which impacts would be mitigated using the same combination of quality and spatial priority. The initial draft ratios of corresponding “like-for-like” impacts are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Realized Ratios of Corresponding Impacts

	Standard Quality Score	WSSRI Priority			
		Core	GOA	Corridor	Other
Habitat Quality	4	4:1	4:1	4:1	2:1
	3	4:1	4:1	3:1	2:1
	2	4:1	4:1	3:1	2:1
	1	2:1	2:1	2:1	1:1

In many cases, the quality/spatial priority combination of impacts and mitigation will be different. To calculate the realized ratio of any theoretical impact and a corresponding mitigation activity, the appropriate value in the Impacts Matrix (See Table 6a) is divided by the value in the Mitigation Matrix (See Table 6b). For example, an acre of impact to high quality (4) Core habitat (value of 8 in table 6a), mitigated with high quality Core habitat (value of 2 in Table 6b), would have a 4:1 realized ratio.

While comparisons of the realized ratios between the impact and mitigation multipliers are useful to illustrate or verify the program design, this is not how the multipliers will typically be used in practice. In practice, the multipliers are used to convert impacts and mitigation to a uniform system of debits and credits, which will serve as the “currency” of the program. This should allow the program to operate on a consistent basis over time.

Commented [AC6]: Pick a term- bank vs. program and do a global update

Accounting for Restoration/ Enhancement

The multiplier values listed in the mitigation credit matrix assume that preservation will occur as a baseline on any mitigation property. However, some properties may also be enhanced or restored. To account for enhancement, the mitigation multiplier would be adjusted to the corresponding quality value after the restoration. This adjustment would occur on an established credit release schedule, which is further described in below. For example, if a poor-quality site within a WSSRI core (mitigation multiplier = 1) is restored to a “3” quality score, the multiplier would move up to the “3”

quality level for Core (1.5), with the additional .5x credits being released after the initial restoration has occurred. This ensures that restoration results in actual functional lift, as measured on a consistent quality scale.

Mitigation Credit Ledger

All impacts and mitigation activities within the program are tracked using a centralized debit and credit ledger, which functions as the program’s official accounting system. Each recorded entry converts impacted or mitigated acres into debits and credits using the multipliers described in Tables 6a and 6b. The ledger maintains a running balance of available, pending, and released credits for each mitigation site, ensuring transparency and consistency across transactions. Credits are only considered “released” and available for purchase once the corresponding mitigation activity has occurred, and, if applicable, any restoration or enhancement has achieved the targeted quality improvement. This approach allows the program to maintain a clear, auditable record of credits, ensures that all mitigation obligations are properly accounted for, and provides a consistent “currency” over the lifetime of the program.

Credit Release Staging

Credit release for mitigation is tied to verified conditions. Projects that only involve preservation will release 100% of the credits when the transfer of ownership interest closes. Mitigation projects that include restoration activities will have multiple credit release stages tied to the preservation and restoration outcomes. The schedule below outlines the suggested conditions under which credits are released for an acquisition and restoration project, ensuring that credits correspond to measurable outcomes.

Credit Release Schedule

Stage	Credit Release Condition	% of Credits Released
1	Conservation easement secured	25%
2	Activity-specific implementation complete	50%
3	Follow-up EIA/AIMs/other habitat assessment shows progress toward quality benchmarks	25%

Establishing Per Credit Cost

Preliminary estimates place the cost of a mitigation credit in the range of **\$4,000–\$5,500**, reflecting land protection, restoration, stewardship, and administration expenses. Actual costs will vary depending on the price of protection (easement or acquisition), applicable mitigation ratios, and the level of restoration required. Further development and review of costs will be needed to finalize per-credit costs and ensure long-term program feasibility.

Commented [BF7]: Values need additional data to firm them up. Hoping to receive this info from BLMT and others establishing conservation easements and acquisitions in E WA/OR

Mitigation Landholder Roles and Responsibilities

The Benton CD modeling was used to identify high-quality candidate properties and preliminary contact has been made with some landowners regarding potential participation in the program.

A designated land trust (or other qualified organization) serving as the holder of ownership rights is responsible for ensuring that mitigation properties provide lasting conservation benefits. Ownership rights may be secured through fee-simple acquisition or conservation easements, both of which permanently protect the property and generate mitigation credits for the program. Additional credits may also be secured through rehabilitation and re-establishment of shrubsteppe, which will also require monitoring and maintenance. The land trust organization may coordinate ongoing stewardship activities and monitoring with the Conservation District or other conservation partners as needed.

Grazing and Other Land Use on Mitigation Properties

Grazing and other vegetation or land management practices may be used as tools to achieve desired conservation outcomes on mitigation properties. Their application should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure compatibility with long-term habitat protection goals.

Appendix

Ecological Integrity Assessment

The Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA), developed by the Washington Natural Heritage Program, provides a science-based method for evaluating habitat condition. It uses a suite of standardized, habitat-specific metrics to assess key ecological attributes (KEAs), including native vegetation composition, invasive species presence, shrub structure, soil and hydrologic function, and vegetation structure and diversity.

Each metric is evaluated independently using a four-tiered rating system, with ratings based on how closely the site conditions align with the Natural Range of Variability (NRV). NRV values are derived from a separate local reference site that represents the best achievable ecological condition for the relevant habitat type. Ranks are converted to numerical values, weighted by ecological significance, and then aggregated to calculate a final ecological integrity score (Table 3). This score is translated into an overall site condition rank, as shown below.

Table. Ecological Integrity Assessment Scoring Framework. This table outlines how individual ranks (A–D) are numerically translated and averaged across Key Ecological Attributes (KEAs) to produce a final EIA score. The final score determines the overall site condition rank, which informs the appropriate mitigation activity. Metric scores are based on alignment with the Natural Range of Variability (NRV) established from a reference site.

Rank	Metric Score	KEA/Final Score
A	5	4.5-5.0
B	4	3.5-4.4
C	3	2.5-3.4
D	1	1.0-2.4

This standardized scoring system allows mitigation sites to be objectively evaluated and compared across landscapes and projects.

BLM AIMs Rating System

The **BLM AIMs Score** is a standardized ecological rating based on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) **Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM)** strategy. AIM is a framework used across the western U.S. to collect standardized data on the condition of public lands.

This score describes how much a site has departed from its "reference condition," which represents the natural and resilient state of the ecosystem. The score is categorized into descriptive tiers:

- **Near Reference:** The site is functioning as expected with minimal human-caused alterations.
- **Slight Departure:** The site shows minor changes from its reference condition.
- **Moderate Departure:** The site exhibits significant changes in ecological attributes.
- **Extreme Departure:** The site's ecological functions and species composition are severely altered from the reference condition.