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FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE AND PYGMY RABBIT WILDLIFE MITIGATION PROJECT

U.S. Department of Energy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE AND PYGMY RABBIT WILDLIFE MITIGATION PROJECT

Purpose

The Proposed Action is needed to protect and enhance shrub-steppe and riparian habitat for sharp-tailed grouse (Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus), pygmy rabbits (Brachylagus idahoensis), and other indigenous wildlife species. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to compensate, in part, for wildlife habitat lost from the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and the inundation of Lake Roosevelt.

The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit are candidates for Federal listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In addition to the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and the related inundation of habitat by Lake Roosevelt, conversion of shrub-steppe and grasslands to agricultural uses has contributed to loss and fragmentation of habitat. The overgrazing of the habitat that remains has reduced the quality of this habitat for sharp-tails and pygmy rabbits.

Proposed Action

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund management agreements, conservation easements, acquisition of fee title, or a combination of these on as many as 29,000 acres in Lincoln and Douglas Counties to improve shrub-steppe and riparian habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits. The BPA also proposes to fund habitat improvements (enhancements) on project lands including existing public lands. Proposed habitat treatments would include control of grazing; planting of native trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses; protection of wetlands and streambanks; herbicide use; fire prescriptions; and wildfire suppression. Proposed management activities may include predator control, population introductions, and control of crop depredation.

BPA is funding the Washington Department of Wildlife (WDW) to develop management plans for the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit. WDW is in the process of refining the plans by developing site-specific prescriptions. Site-specific prescriptions are intended to tailor habitat treatments to each parcel of land under consideration. The prescriptions are based on factors such as soil type, precipitation, dominant plant species, and other variables that affect the success of habitat treatments. The process of determining exactly which parcels would be selected is underway. Selection will depend on the outcome of negotiations with landowners on terms of title or easement.

Environmental Concerns

The following concerns are evaluated in this Environmental Assessment (EA).

- Vegetation, Wetlands, and Riparian Zones. Habitat treatments would focus on the restoration of shrub-steppe, grassland, riparian, and wetland habitat. Herbicide use, fire prescriptions, and mechanical

treatments such as mowing or plowing would be designed to avoid or minimize adverse effects on native vegetation, wetlands, and water quality. Work in wetlands or streams would be conditioned through applicable permitting processes.

- Wildlife. Habitat treatments would be designed to enhance and restore native plant communities where possible, which would provide additional forage and cover for wildlife associated with shrub-steppe and riparian habitat. Some habitat treatments could cause temporary disturbance to wildlife, but no adverse effects are anticipated.

- Threatened and Endangered Species. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicates that no federally listed threatened or endangered plants or animals occur in any of the project areas. USFWS did identify Federal candidate species which may occur in the project vicinities. In addition to sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit, they include wolverine, sage grouse, spotted frog, and the ferruginous hawk. The wolverine was also listed by the USFWS, but suitable habitat for wolverines does not occur in the vicinity of the project area. Habitat treatments designed to enhance suitability for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit also would benefit other threatened and endangered species. No adverse impacts are expected. If listed species are documented in the future, WDW would consult with USFWS to design any additional mitigation measures that would be required.

- Hazardous Waste and Toxic Materials. As a Federal agency, BPA is responsible for cleanup and remediation of any hazardous or toxic materials located on property in its ownership. For this reason, BPA would conduct a land audit prior to initiating any transactions involving agreements, easements, or acquisitions, to determine whether any hazardous materials were present.

- Cultural Resources. BPA has reviewed the National Federal Register of Historic Places for the occurrence of historical or cultural resources, and none are currently listed within proposed project lands. BPA would consult with the State Historic Preservation Office and conduct field surveys prior to initiating any management activities. If historic or cultural resources are discovered, BPA/WDW would contact affected Tribes and State or Federal authorities to document sites and identify mitigation measures. Management activities could be re-sited to avoid adverse impacts.

A site-specific planning team was assembled by and includes representatives from WDW, BPA, and BLM. The team's purpose is to conduct field tests to determine the most effective way to apply habitat treatments to key project lands and prepare a report summarizing all findings. The site-specific planning team's field analysis will identify and determine the following: primary habitat measures needed to protect and enhance sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit habitats; livestock grazing regimens (if any); habitat/wildlife

monitoring needs, nesting and winter habitat ranges, vegetative structural/ composition needs of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits, and type, location, number, and cost of range water improvements. The site-specific planning team report will assist BPA and WDW with the actual application of habitat enhancement and protection measures for all project lands.

Conclusions

Any potential environmental effects of the proposed project activities, as summarized above, would be temporary and minor. No significant adverse environmental effects have been identified. This project would provide protection and enhancement of two target species (sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit), while enhancing and protecting shrub-steppe and riparian habitat for other indigenous species as well. Based on the evaluation presented in this EA, there would be no significant adverse environmental impact if the proposed action were implemented.

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CHAPTER 1

PROPOSAL AND BACKGROUND

1.1 PROPOSED ACTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Sharp-tailed Grouse/Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife Mitigation Project. This project represents partial mitigation for the impacts associated with the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and the inundation of habitat by Lake Roosevelt on various wildlife species and their habitats. The two species that are targeted for protection and enhancement are the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus) and pygmy rabbit (Brachylagus idahoensis). The habitat types targeted for protection and enhancement are shrub-steppe and riparian vegetation.

In 1990, the Northwest Power Planning Council (Council) reviewed the Washington Department of Wildlife's (WDW) preferred mitigation goals for Grand Coulee and approved the development of projects to address habitat protection and enhancement for priority species. The priorities were based not only on habitat losses resulting from construction of Grand Coulee Dam and inundation by Lake Roosevelt, but on current local and regional wildlife needs, including:

1. species associated with shrub-steppe habitat;
2. special status species (i.e., threatened or endangered species);
3. riparian habitat components; and
4. species and habitat diversity and complexity.

Sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits headed the Council's list of priority mitigation goals. Sharp-tailed grouse were ranked high because they were affected by inundation, and the species is a candidate for Federal listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Although it is not known whether pygmy rabbits were actually lost due to inundation, they were ranked high on the list because they also depend on shrub-steppe habitat, and the species is a candidate for Federal listing under the ESA. The Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife Mitigation Project also meets the criteria for the Council's Wildlife Rule by including riparian habitat components and enhancing habitat diversity.

WDW identified geographic locations where sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits were documented to occur and contacted landowners in those areas who might be open to negotiation of easements or sale of suitable portions of their land. WDW found seven landowners in Lincoln County and three landowners in Douglas County whose property is being considered for inclusion in this project.

BPA proposes to fund management agreements on public lands, conservation easements on private land, acquisition of fee title, or a combination of

these, on as many as 29,000 acres of shrub-steppe habitat in Lincoln and Douglas Counties (Figure 1). Upon securing rights to the land, BPA would transfer management responsibilities to the WDW and provide funding for initial enhancements and future operations and maintenance (O&M) costs. WDW will then apply various habitat treatments to improve habitat quality for sharp-tailed grouse, pygmy rabbits, and other indigenous species.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is based on the management plans developed by WDW for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits. Since both of these species depend upon high quality rangeland and native vegetation, habitat treatments and management activities are aimed primarily at improving these natural resources.

This project would also include a monitoring program. Changes in the populations of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits and changes in the vegetation they depend on would be monitored over time. The monitoring program would provide information that is needed for adaptive management, an important aspect of each of the Council's projects.

It is expected that this project would be initiated in late 1992. Habitat enhancement implementation dates would depend upon completion of negotiations between BPA and landowners for perpetual easement/acquisition and habitat enhancement schedules described within site-specific management plans. Management, monitoring, and necessary long-term O&M would be funded by BPA and carried out by WDW.

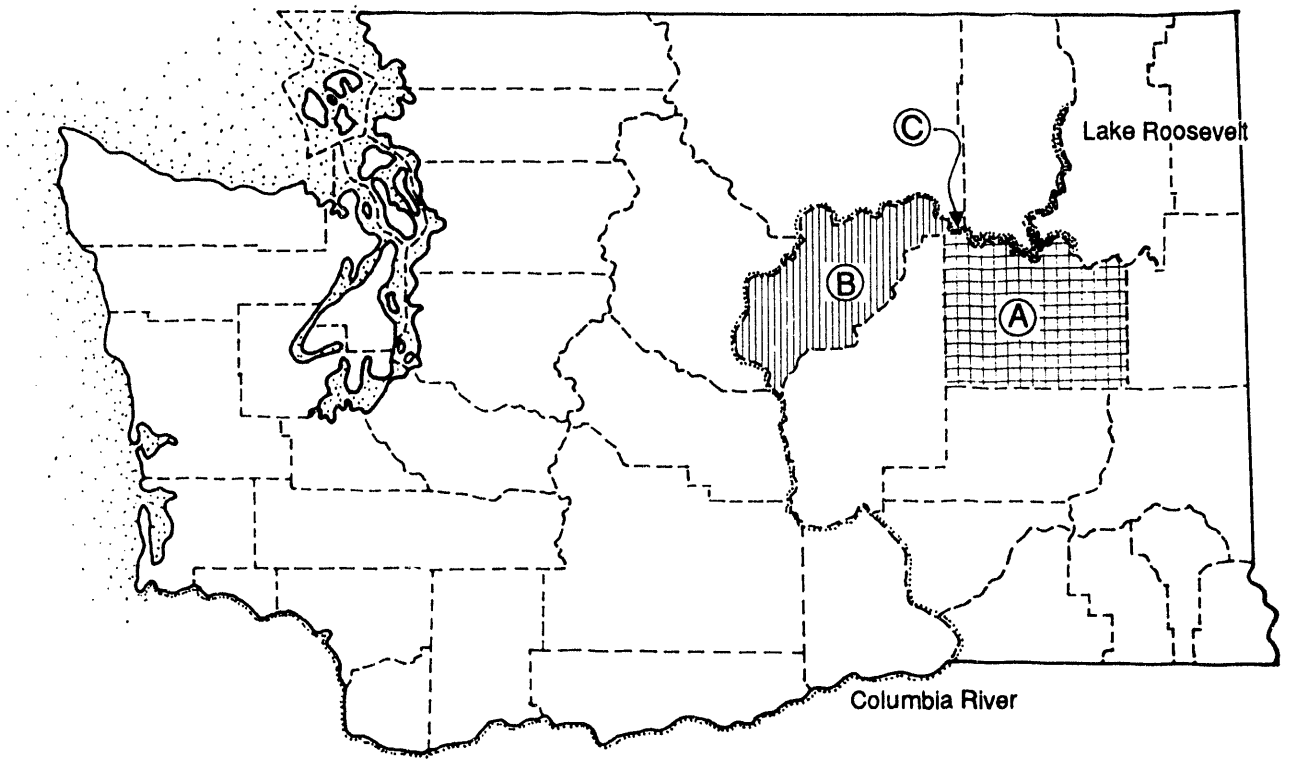
1.2 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action is needed to protect and enhance shrub-steppe habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, pygmy rabbits, and other indigenous species. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to compensate, in part, for wildlife habitat losses resulting from the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and inundation of habitat by Lake Roosevelt.

Grand Coulee Dam was completed in 1942. Its reservoir, Lake Roosevelt, inundated almost 83,000 acres of forest, farmland, shrub-steppe, and riparian habitat along the Columbia River and its tributaries. Wildlife species associated with the types of habitat that were inundated included sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse, mule deer, pileated woodpecker, Canada goose, and others. No mitigation measures for losses of wildlife or wildlife habitat were undertaken during or following construction of the dam.

For both sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits, habitat loss and degradation have been the primary causes of population decline. As the amount of suitable habitat has shrunk, the pressures of competition with other species, predation, and hunting have increased (sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits are not currently legally hunted in Washington State). Protection and enhancement of habitats are the most important factors in protecting these species. Unless active measures are taken to protect sharp-tailed grouse and

FIGURE 1



Ⓐ Sharp-tailed Grouse Project Site: Lincoln County
Ⓑ Pygmy Rabbit Project Site: Douglas County
Ⓒ Grand Coulee Dam

Figure 1. General locations of proposed project areas.

pygmy rabbit and their habitat, further declines can be expected. Implementation of the Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Project would contribute to the recovery of both species in the State of Washington.

1.3 BACKGROUND

Under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act), BPA has the authority and responsibility to fund fish and wildlife mitigation activities that have been approved by the Council and included in the Council's Program. The initial phase of mitigation planning for wildlife habitat losses at Grand Coulee Dam was submitted to the Council for amendment into the Program in 1989. The goal of the plan, entitled "Protection, Mitigation and Enhancement for Grand Coulee Dam," was to protect the same amount and kind of habitat as was lost due to inundation by Grand Coulee Dam (WDG 1986) and to emphasize habitat improvement for native wildlife species that were affected by inundation. The Program includes a process for review of habitat losses and design of mitigation plans for each Federal hydro project in the Columbia River Basin (Section 1002).

In 1989, the Council amended the Program to include the habitat losses identified at Grand Coulee Dam. However, rather than amending a mitigation plan into the Program, the Council adopted an interim goal of addressing, over a 10-year period, up to 35 percent of the wildlife habitat losses due to construction of the Federal hydropower system on the Columbia (Section 1003, Measure (1)(C)).

Consistent with Section 1003(7) of the Program's Wildlife Mitigation Rule, BPA is authorized to fund the implementation of projects that will help to reach the Council's mitigation goals. BPA considers such projects through the implementation planning process (IPP). The IPP invites proposals for specific measures that would achieve the mitigation priorities outlined by the Council.

In order to enter its proposal into the IPP, WDW refined the conceptual mitigation goals and focused on protecting and enhancing habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, pygmy rabbits, and other species associated with shrub-steppe habitat. The Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Management Plans were completed in March 1992 and have been prioritized and approved for funding through the IPP.

The Grand Coulee Wildlife Mitigation Advisory Group was established in March 1990 through an agreement between WDW, local landowners, and elected county officials in eastern Washington. The Colville Confederated Tribes and Spokane Tribe of Indians participated in the Advisory Group once it was established. The Advisory Group was designed to provide a forum for public input into the development of specific mitigation projects. A smaller working group, called the Steering Committee, was formed from the Advisory Group membership. Both of these groups provided suggestions to WDW during development of the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit management plans. The Steering Committee also played an important role in scoping for the proposed

action and alternatives. Issues important to local ranchers, farmers and business owners, as well as biological issues surrounding the project, were addressed during scoping.

1.4 RELATED ACTIONS

Overall Management Strategy. The WDW views the Grand Coulee Wildlife Mitigation Program as only one component of a larger strategy developed to address the biological needs of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits and as a possible means of preventing these species from being classified under the Endangered Species Act.

WDW is pursuing a holistic approach to managing key shrub-steppe grasslands by incorporating the use of Federal, State, and private land to maximize management opportunities.

The following programs and management tools may be used singularly or combined to accomplish this objecti[illegible]:

1. Columbia River Wildlife Mitigation Program (BPA)
2. Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition Program (State)
3. Upland Wildlife Restoration Program (Federal)
4. Coordinated Resource Management Plans (BLM)
5. Conservation Reserve Program (USDA)
6. Land Management Agreements on Private Lands (WDW)
7. Other Federal, State, and local programs

The Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife Mitigation Project would complement the actions of other resource management agencies and Tribes in eastern Washington. For example, in 1990 and 1991, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition purchased approximately 2,300 acres in Lincoln County, which will be managed for wildlife. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) also is engaged in habitat enhancement projects in Lincoln County. Each of these related activities is located close to the proposed action. The combined effect of these activities would be to protect and enhance large areas of shrub-steppe. The combined benefits to wildlife would be greater than the effect of any single action.

Consistent with fostering a "Good Neighbor Management Policy" on project lands, WDW would control weeds to meet local standards as defined by county noxious weed boards, maintain project fences, enforce restrictions, perform other tasks as described within site-specific management plans, and periodically meet with adjacent landowners to discuss management objectives, programs, and policies and resolve potential conflicts.

Private Land Management Strategies. The majority of critical habitats identified within and adjacent to proposed project sites occur on private lands. Once core critical habitats have been permanently protected and enhanced in the Tracy Rock sharp-tailed grouse and Douglas County pygmy rabbit project areas, it is likely that additional private and public land management agreements will be sought.

WDW will seek opportunities to work closely with private landowners and other public entities to manage habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits within targeted project lands and on adjacent properties.

This approach can serve to foster cooperation and to decrease overall project costs while maximizing benefits to both wildlife and the public.

CHAPTER 2

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

This Chapter discusses the No-Action Alternative, the Alternative Land Rights, and associated application of Habitat Treatments. The Alternative Land Rights represent different mechanisms by which BPA could acquire land that would be managed for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits, and the habitat treatments that could be conducted under each of them.

There is no preferred alternative at this time. BPA will select an alternative for implementation based upon this EA. BPA would negotiate with landowners during the implementation phase for those land management rights necessary to ensure the permanent protection of shrub-steppe habitats.

2.1 NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No-Action Alternative, BPA would not fund a project to enhance habitat and populations of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits in eastern Washington. The WDW, however, could continue to pursue alternative funding sources, negotiate land management agreements with private landowners, and develop Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMPs) with State and Federal entities in order to permanently protect key shrub-steppe habitats and manage sensitive wildlife species within the proposed project area.

The No-Action Alternative would mean the loss of an opportunity to provide mitigation for habitat losses due to the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and inundation by Lake Roosevelt. The likely result of the No-Action Alternative would be the continued decline of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations in eastern Washington. The No-Action Alternative would not allow BPA to meet its obligation to wildlife mitigation under the Council's Program. The No-Action Alternative represents the status quo and therefore is not analyzed in Chapter 3 of this document. However it continues to be an alternative for consideration within this EA.

2.2 ALTERNATIVE LAND RIGHTS

The four Alternative Land Rights described below represent different approaches that BPA would take to acquire land management rights. The habitat treatments would depend on which land acquisition method is used and on characteristics of the particular site.

2.2.1 Management Agreements on Public Lands

The Council's amended Program (November, 1989; Measure 1003(7)(K)) states that management of public land for mitigation is preferable to management of private land, in order to maximize coordination and cooperation with resource

management agencies. WDW's first attempts to identify mitigation opportunities were therefore focused on BLM and Department of Natural Resource (DNR) ownerships in the project vicinity. However, the occurrence of sharp-tailed grouse was found to be limited, with highest densities currently on private land in Lincoln County. Pygmy rabbits were observed on only six parcels of shrub-steppe habitat, all in Douglas County, with three of these occurring on private land.

Approximately 2,500 acres of public land currently managed by DNR and 2,300 acres owned by WDW in Lincoln County have been proposed for inclusion in the Sharp-tailed Grouse Project. In addition, BLM is actively pursuing a land exchange program in Lincoln County that would fall within project boundaries.

Preliminary discussions indicate that BLM is willing to consider the development of a cooperative resource management plan with WDW. Separate cooperative agreements would be developed between WDW and the BLM for management agreements on public lands managed by the BLM. BLM and WDW would work together to implement habitat treatments that would improve the quality of the land for sharp-tails and sage grouse. BPA would fund enhancements on existing WDW lands within the project area to benefit sharp-tail grouse and pygmy rabbits.

In this analysis it is assumed that management agreements would be similar to conservation easements on private land in terms of habitat treatments. It is also assumed that some level of grazing would continue on co-managed lands.

2.2.2 Conservation Easements on Private Land

Conservation easements are legally binding restrictions that landowners agree to place upon their property in order to protect natural resource values. Easements vary, depending on how much control the landowner is willing to give up and how much control the easement holder requires to meet his or her objectives.

Under the Easement Alternative, a landowner would be financially compensated for giving up a specified amount of control over his or her land. WDW would focus on acquiring the right to control activities that could degrade or destroy shrub-steppe habitat, i.e., overgrazing, timber harvest, mineral exploration and mining, irrigation and agriculture, public access, and road and building construction. WDW then would have the right to enforce the restrictions placed upon the property and the responsibility to manage the natural resources.

BPA and WDW would focus on developing easement conditions that would permanently protect sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits while considering the needs of landowners. In this analysis, it is assumed that some easement terms would allow a certain level of grazing to continue.

2.2.3 Acquisition of Fee Title on Private Land

Under the Acquisition of Fee Title Alternative, BPA would purchase lands identified as high priority areas. BPA and WDW would focus on purchasing lands where lek locations, nesting and brooding areas, and winter and riparian

habitats have been identified. WDW would pursue protecting, maintaining, and enhancing these sites. Under this alternative, BPA and WDW would have the rights to control activities that could degrade or destroy shrub-steppe habitat, since BPA would own the land.

Under the Acquisition Alternative, it is assumed that livestock would be excluded from Project lands. Grazing would be permitted only if it could be shown to improve habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits. Depending on habitat quality and landowner needs, entire parcels or suitable portions of parcels would be purchased.

2.2.4 Combination Alternative

The Combination Alternative represents a "package" option. It could include management agreements on BLM and DNR parcels within the Project boundaries, conservation easements on some parcels of private land, and acquisition of other parcels. WDW would base the selection of land rights to each parcel on how well it could meet the biological objectives of the proposed action and habitat management. However, the selection also would be modified by the contribution each parcel could make to the whole project. For example, if a landowner is not willing to sell outright, an easement might be acceptable that would fulfill some of the biological needs or goals for the project. The same easement might not be acceptable on a parcel that contained no leks or burrows and was severely overgrazed. Because of the differences in site-specific conditions and landowner needs, a mix of agreements, easements, and acquisitions could provide an effective means of accomplishing project goals.

2.3 ALTERNATIVE HABITAT TREATMENTS AND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The objective under any of the alternatives is to improve habitat quality and quantity for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits, using habitat treatments and management activities proposed by WDW. Habitat treatments would directly enhance characteristics of the habitat for the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit. Management activities could protect and possibly improve the habitat and welfare of the existing populations by placing control actions on certain activities. For example, enhancement plantings (habitat treatment) would directly enhance the habitat for the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits, whereas public access (management activity) may improve habitat by placing controls on access. A comparison of the alternative land rights and application of the habitat treatments is shown in Table 1. A comparison of the alternative land rights and application of the management activities is shown in Table 2.

Habitat Treatments

Control of Livestock. One of the primary differences between the land right alternatives centers around the amount of grazing, in terms of annual grazing schedules, intensity of livestock use (defined in Animal Unit Months (AUM)), and areas that would be excluded from grazing.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE LAND RIGHTS WHEN VARIOUS HABITAT TREATMENTS ARE APPLIED

	ALTERNATIVES		
HABITAT TREATMENTS	CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON PRIVATE LAND	FEE-TITLE ACQUISITION ON PRIVATE LAND	AGREEMENTS ON PUBLIC LANDS
1. Control of Livestock	• Reduction of overgrazing. • Leks, key nesting areas, key wetlands, and riparian zones would be fenced.	• Elimination of grazing unless shown to improve habitat quality for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits. • Reclamation of 100 percent of agricultural lands. • Project boundaries would be fenced and cattle excluded from leks, nesting areas, wetlands, and riparian zones.	• Leks, key nesting areas, key wetlands, and riparian zones would be fenced. Grazing plans would be designated to protect/improve habitats.
2. Enhancement Plantings	• Would be considered only in areas excluded from grazing. • Reclamation of agricultural lands.	• Would be considered on all project lands.	• Would be considered only in areas excluded from grazing.
3. Water Developments	• Would be developed for livestock, if needed, and would be considered as an enhancement technique for wildlife species.	• Would be considered as an enhancement technique for wildlife.	• Would be considered as an enhancement technique for wildlife species. May consider water developments to achieve better distribution of livestock.
4. Herbicide Use	• May be used in limited areas to control noxious weeds and allow re-establishment of native grasses, if biological or mechanical control is not feasible. • Consultation with the Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board would take place. • Would be selected according to U.S Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines and applied according to the Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. • Would be considered as a management tool to reduce shrub canopy to improve grass and forb component of plant community.	• May be used in limited areas to control noxious weeds and allow re-establishment of native grasses, if biological or mechanical control is not feasible. • Would be selected according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines and applied according to the Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. • Would be considered as a management tool to reduce shrub canopy to improve grass and forb component of plant community.	• May be used in limited areas to control noxious weeds and allow re-establishment of native grasses, if biological or mechanical control is not feasible. • Would be selected according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines and applied according to the Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. • Would be considered as a management tool to reduce shrub canopy to improve grass and forb component of plant community.

TABLE 1 - (continued)

	ALTERNATIVES		
HABITAT TREATMENTS	CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON PRIVATE LAND	FEE-TITLE ACQUISITION	AGREEMENTS ON PUBLIC LANDS
5. Fire Prescriptions/ Mechanical Treatment	• May be used in limited areas to improve sharp-tailed grouse habitat or reduce risk of wildfire. • Would be conducted by trained and experienced personnel and scheduled to prevent adverse effects on wildlife and sagebrush communities.	• May be used in limited areas to improve sharp-tailed grouse habitat or reduce risk of wildfire. • Would be conducted by trained and experienced personnel and scheduled to prevent adverse effects on wildlife and sagebrush communities.	• May be used in limited areas to improve sharp-tailed grouse habitat or reduce risk of wildfire. • Would be conducted by trained and experienced personnel and scheduled to prevent adverse effects on wildlife and sagebrush communities.
6. Wildfire Suppression	• Suppression activities would remain the responsibility of DNR and local fire districts where appropriate.	• Suppression activities would remain the responsibility of DNR and local fire districts where appropriate.	• Suppression activities would remain the responsibility of DNR or BLM.

TABLE 2
COMPARISON BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE LAND RIGHTS WHEN VARIOUS MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES ARE APPLIED

	ALTERNATIVES		
MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON PRIVATE LAND	FEE-TITLE ACQUISITION	AGREEMENTS ON PUBLIC LANDS
1. Predator Control	• Would be coordinated and consistent with all Federal, State, and County regulations.	• Would be coordinated and consistent with all Federal, State, and County regulations.	• Would be coordinated and consistent with all Federal, State, and County regulations.
2. Crop Depredation	• Washington Department of Wildlife (WDW) would respond promptly to crop damage complaints and determine the most effective means of dealing with nuisance wildlife.	• WDW would respond to crop damage complaints as required to meet management objectives or comply with sharecropper agreement terms and conditions.	• WDW would respond promptly to crop damage complaints and determine the most effective means of dealing with nuisance wildlife.
3. Public Access	• One lek site would be developed on public land as an interpretive site. Public access to all project lands would be strictly regulated by WDW to minimize disturbance, risk of wildfire, and introduction of noxious weed seeds. • Vehicular access (including off-road vehicles) would be limited to existing county roads.	• An interpretive site could be developed near a lek. • Public access to all project lands would be strictly regulated by WDW to minimize disturbance, risk of wildfire, and introduction of noxious weed seeds. • Vehicular access (including off-road vehicles) would be limited to existing county roads.	• Public access to any lek site would be regulated during breeding season. • May develop an interpretive center for pygmy rabbits and associated shrub-steppe dependent wildlife species.
4. Population Introductions	• WDW would explore the possibility of augmenting existing sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations by introducing genetically compatible individuals from other locations. Introductions would be considered only when habitat conditions could support new populations. • Management of exotic wildlife on project lands will follow WDW policies and guidelines and be consistent with the biological objectives of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit.	• WDW would explore the possibility of augmenting existing sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations by introducing genetically compatible individuals from other locations. Introductions would be considered only when habitat conditions could support new populations. • Management of exotic wildlife on project lands will follow WDW policies and guidelines and be consistent with the biological objectives of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit.	• WDW would explore the possibility of augmenting existing sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations by introducing genetically compatible individuals from other locations. Introductions would be considered only when habitat conditions could support new populations. • Management of exotic wildlife on project lands will follow WDW policies and guidelines and be consistent with the biological objectives of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit.

TABLE 2 - (continued)

	ALTERNATIVES		
MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON PRIVATE LAND	FEE-TITLE ACQUISITION	AGREEMENTS ON PUBLIC LANDS
5. Monitoring Program	• WDW would monitor vegetation parameters and populations of target species over time. Data would be collected in order to: (1) determine whether biological objectives are being met; (2) identify and evaluate unanticipated impacts; (3) ensure compliance with terms and conditions of conservation easements; and (4) determine if other site-specific activities are meeting management objectives.	• WDW would monitor vegetation parameters and populations of target species over time. Data would be collected in order to: (1) determine whether biological objectives are being met; (2) identify and evaluate unanticipated impacts; and (3) determine if other site-specific activities are meeting management objectives.	• WDW would monitor vegetation parameters and populations of target species over time. Data would be collected in order to: (1) determine whether biological objectives are being met; (2) identify and evaluate unanticipated impacts; (3) ensure compliance with terms and conditions of conservation easements; and (4) determine if other site-specific activities are meeting management objectives.

Grazing schedules will be adjusted according to the site-specific planning team's report findings. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that AUMs would be reduced to allow habitat conditions to show measurable improvement.

Enhancement Plantings. Planting of native trees, shrubs, and forb/grass mixes would increase forage and cover for sharp-tailed grouse, pygmy rabbits, and other species. In addition, some or all lands currently in agricultural rotation would be replanted with native species. This enhancement activity may be necessary in areas that have been severely overgrazed to allow increased habitat recovery. On parcels that have been severely overgrazed, reductions in grazing alone would not be sufficient to allow habitat recovery.

Water Developments. WDW would be responsible for developing alternative water sources for livestock, to reduce effects to wetlands and riparian areas to which they ordinarily had access. Water developments could also be used to improve cattle distribution to minimize grazing pressure on critical habitats. No additional water developments would be needed for sharp-tailed grouse or pygmy rabbits, but might be considered by WDW as an enhancement technique for other wildlife species.

Herbicides. In limited areas, herbicides may be recommended to control noxious weeds and allow re-establishment of native grasses. Herbicides would be used only when mechanical control of weeds would not be feasible. Herbicides of the lowest effective plant toxicity would be selected, using USFWS guidelines. Drift and contact with nontarget plant species would be minimized by application only under suitable weather conditions and according to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. Consultation with the Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board would occur.

Fire Prescriptions and Mechanical Treatment. Controlled burning may be prescribed in limited areas to improve sharp-tailed grouse habitat. Burning is intended to reduce competition from unwanted grass and forb species and increase the density and vigor of native forbs and bunchgrasses. Fire can be used to reduce shrub cover and ground litter and prepare the seed bed for planting of native perennial species. It can also increase soil temperatures, residual minerals in the soil, and in some cases the nutrients available in post-treatment vegetation. In addition, prescribed burns can reduce the potential for wildfire which could destroy native plant communities. When the desired conditions are achieved in the Project area, a regular burning program, designed to mimic natural fire occurrence, may be implemented. All local, State, and Federal regulations and permits will be adhered to before burning is carried out.

Wildfire Suppression. Wildfire on lands managed by the WDW will be suppressed. Responsibility for wildfire protection and suppression rests primarily with local fire protection districts and the DNR. Fire

protection on project lands will be included as part of annual O&M costs. The risk of fire may increase as grazing is reduced and more vegetation becomes available for burning; control of public access during fire season would be especially important in protection of Project lands.

WDW wildlife managers will eliminate fire hazards on project lands whenever possible. In the event of a wildfire, WDW personnel will notify the appropriate fire control agency, advise adjoining landowners and recreational users, and if directed, assist with suppression efforts as needed.

The WDW may eliminate all public access to project lands during periods of high fire danger. Lands will be posted and patrolled whenever a closure is implemented.

The control of wildfires does not preclude the use of prescribed burns for habitat manipulation purposes; however, WDW personnel must have the appropriate training and proper equipment to use fire as a management tool. In addition, prescribed burns should be planned and completed with the assistance of WDW and SCS range/forestry specialists. All applicable permits will be obtained and State/local regulations complied with.

Management Activities

Predator Control. Magpies, ravens, coyotes, badgers, and skunks have been identified as the primary predators on sharp-tails. Badgers and coyotes prey on pygmy rabbits, as do weasels, marsh hawks and owls. Predator control would be coordinated and consistent with all county, State, and Federal regulations.

Crop Depredation. WDW would respond to crop damage complaints by promptly contacting the landowners and determining the most effective means of dealing with nuisance wildlife. Responses could range from providing information, to supplying noise makers, to providing monetary compensation. Permits to kill big game out of season would be issued only if no other solution were feasible. Complaints would be handled by WDW according to protocols outlined in the Management Plans, including appropriate referrals to the USFWS.

Public Access. WDW could develop one interpretive site near a lek located on public land as an educational viewing area, with limited access. WDW would determine the type and scope of access programs and recreational opportunities that would be allowed on specific sites. Public access would be strictly limited and vehicular access (including off-road vehicles) would be limited to existing county roads.

Population Introductions. WDW proposes to explore the possibility of enhancing existing sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations by introducing genetically compatible individuals from other locations. Introductions would be considered only when habitat conditions could

support new populations. Management of exotic wildlife on project lands will follow WDW policies and guidelines and be consistent with the biological objectives of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit.

Monitoring Program. WDW proposes to monitor vegetation parameters and populations of target species over time. Data would be collected to: (1) determine whether biological objectives are being met, or whether treatments should be modified; (2) identify and evaluate unanticipated impacts; (3) ensure compliance with terms and conditions of conservation easements; and (4) determine if other land uses described in management plans are meeting expected results. WDW would also review management activities with respect to their consistency with Federal, State, and local programs and regulations.

CHAPTER 3

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This Chapter describes the environment that would be affected by the proposed action and identifies the potential effects of each habitat treatment and alternative lands right.

3.1 VEGETATION, WETLANDS, AND RIPARIAN ZONES

3.1.1 Existing Conditions

The project area is comprised of approximately 26,000 acres of shrub-steppe and grassland cover types. Big sagebrush is the most common sage, with three-tipped sage, rabbitbrush, bitterbrush, and greasewood also common. Grass species include Idaho fescue, blue-bunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread, cheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, and wild rye. Buckwheat, yarrow, balsamroot, and tumbling mustard are common forbs. Approximately 100 acres on the Douglas County sites are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. This program pays farmers to establish herbaceous and woody vegetation on highly erodible lands in order to reduce soil erosion. Within project lands, dryland wheat farming is practiced on approximately 2,000 acres, and cattle are grazed on shrub-steppe and grassland areas.

Proposed mitigation lands in Lincoln County include numerous intermittent streams. No intermittent streams, however, occur on proposed Douglas County pygmy rabbit sites. Several factors have combined to reduce the number of streams that carry surface water even during the spring. Several years of drought, the elimination of beavers, and downcutting of stream channels have reduced the size and changed the character of many area lakes, ponds, and seasonal wetlands (L. Cornelius pers. comm., February 12, 1992). Small pockets of seasonal wetlands persist. Cottonwood, aspen, water birch, and alder are the most common riparian trees, while rose, serviceberry, and chokecherry are the most common riparian shrubs. Cattail and hardstem bulrush are found in emergent wetlands.

Although riparian and wetland areas often represent a small proportion of total available wildlife habitat, they receive more use than any other habitat type (Thomas et al. 1979). In the arid west, this disproportionate use tends to magnify resource competition between livestock and wildlife. Cattle concentrate in green, cool draws, streams, and wetlands. Livestock access can result in erosion and sloughing of streambanks, deposition of sediments in wetlands, compaction of soils, and trampling of streamside vegetation. Some studies indicate that overgrazing also results in downcutting of stream channels, with associated loss of riparian habitat (May and Davis 1982; Platts 1990).

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Under any of the alternatives, vegetation parameters would be measured to provide a quantitative description of each site. Habitat parameter

measurements would be used in conjunction with the species models to identify areas requiring habitat protection and enhancement activities.

WDW is currently working with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and other range specialists to determine site-specific grazing prescriptions and ensure that habitat criteria for target species are incorporated under the Easement or Agreement Alternative.

The prescription for each site would depend on the composition of the existing plant community, site microclimate, and available seed sources. The most predictable response to site-specific prescriptions is an increase in vegetation. The work of Pollen and Lacy (Platts 1990) shows that if grazing intensity is reduced from heavy to moderate or from moderate to light levels, the productivity on western ranges would increase. Changing the season of use and length of the grazing period has also been shown to improve plant communities in some areas.

Even in the absence of grazing, the recovery of range vegetation tends to be different from the original vegetation (Heady 1975), and a return to "pristine" plant communities would be likely to take many years, if it ever occurred. Enhancement plantings would increase the quantity and quality of native plant communities under any of the alternatives. Under the Agreement, Easement, or Combination alternatives, enhancement plantings would be considered on no less than half the area presently in tilled agricultural lands. Under the Acquisition Alternative, tilled agricultural lands could be reclaimed, and more area could be protected and planted than under the Agreement or Easement alternatives.

Under any of the alternatives, damaged or altered riparian areas and wetland vegetation would be protected from further degradation and allowed to recover. Selected riparian areas and wetlands also would be enhanced by planting native species. Where erosion problems are critical, however, faster-growing non-native species may be selected in order to stabilize soils more rapidly.

If water developments were needed for cattle, WDW would consider catchments or modification of existing springs and seeps in preference to excavation of new wells or use of instream flows. Catchments and modification of existing springs and seeps would not be likely to have adverse impacts on wetlands or water quality and would not be limited by existing water rights and current water shortages.

Under any of the alternatives, management activities would protect rangeland and native vegetation from the effects of overgrazing and conversion to tilled agriculture and other uses. Treatments would be carefully designed and controlled, and no significant adverse impacts on rangeland or native vegetation would result from the proposed action.

Under any of the alternatives, alteration of current grazing regimens would protect wetlands, riparian areas, and water quality from environmental degradation currently resulting from extensive livestock use. Temporary adverse effects of activities within wetlands or waterways would be conditioned through permitting processes described in Chapter 4. No significant adverse impacts associated with wetlands and riparian zones are expected for these proposed project activities.

3.2 WILDLIFE

3.2.1 Existing Conditions

The proposed project would include up to 28,200 acres to protect four active leks (areas where sharp-tailed grouse congregate and display during the breeding season). In addition, seven active leks and four inactive leks are located within 3 miles of proposed project boundaries. Habitat improvement and grouse population increases on project lands could have beneficial impacts on local and regional grouse populations. Since Lincoln County currently supports approximately 20 percent of existing sharp-tailed grouse in Washington, the enhancement of project lands would be important in statewide recovery of the species. Population trends, determined by the number of males observed at leks, reflect a decline in Lincoln County sharp-tailed grouse populations (from 123 males counted at leks in 1982, to 50 in 1990) (WDW 1990a).

Sharp-tailed Grouse Sharp-tailed grouse habitat contains several components, each of which satisfies species requirements during different times of the year. Sparsely vegetated flat areas or knolls are needed for courtship and display areas, called leks, where breeding takes place. Tall, dense grass is needed for nesting. Areas with more shrub cover and a higher percentage of forbs are preferred for brooding. Riparian habitat and deciduous tree and shrub communities are used during the winter. Year-round grouse activity appears to take place within fairly close (1.2 miles) proximity to leks if nesting, brooding, and wintering habitat requirements can also be met nearby (WDW 1992a).

The best pre-settlement sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit habitat existed in shrub-steppe grassland areas where soils were deep and relatively stone free. These areas have subsequently been developed for agricultural purposes, because the same soil parameters and moisture regimens responsible for good wildlife habitat are also conducive to producing high crop yields and providing livestock forage. As a result, existing sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations are relegated primarily to marginal habitats within northeastern Washington (Figures 2 and 3).

In order to maintain or increase population levels and to expand into new areas, sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits need habitats that are of sufficient quantity and quality to fulfill the biological requirements of these species. Although predators, inclement weather, and other limiting environmental factors may periodically influence wildlife population levels in a local area, these impacts do not usually determine long-term population trends if good habitat conditions are present.

FIGURE 2

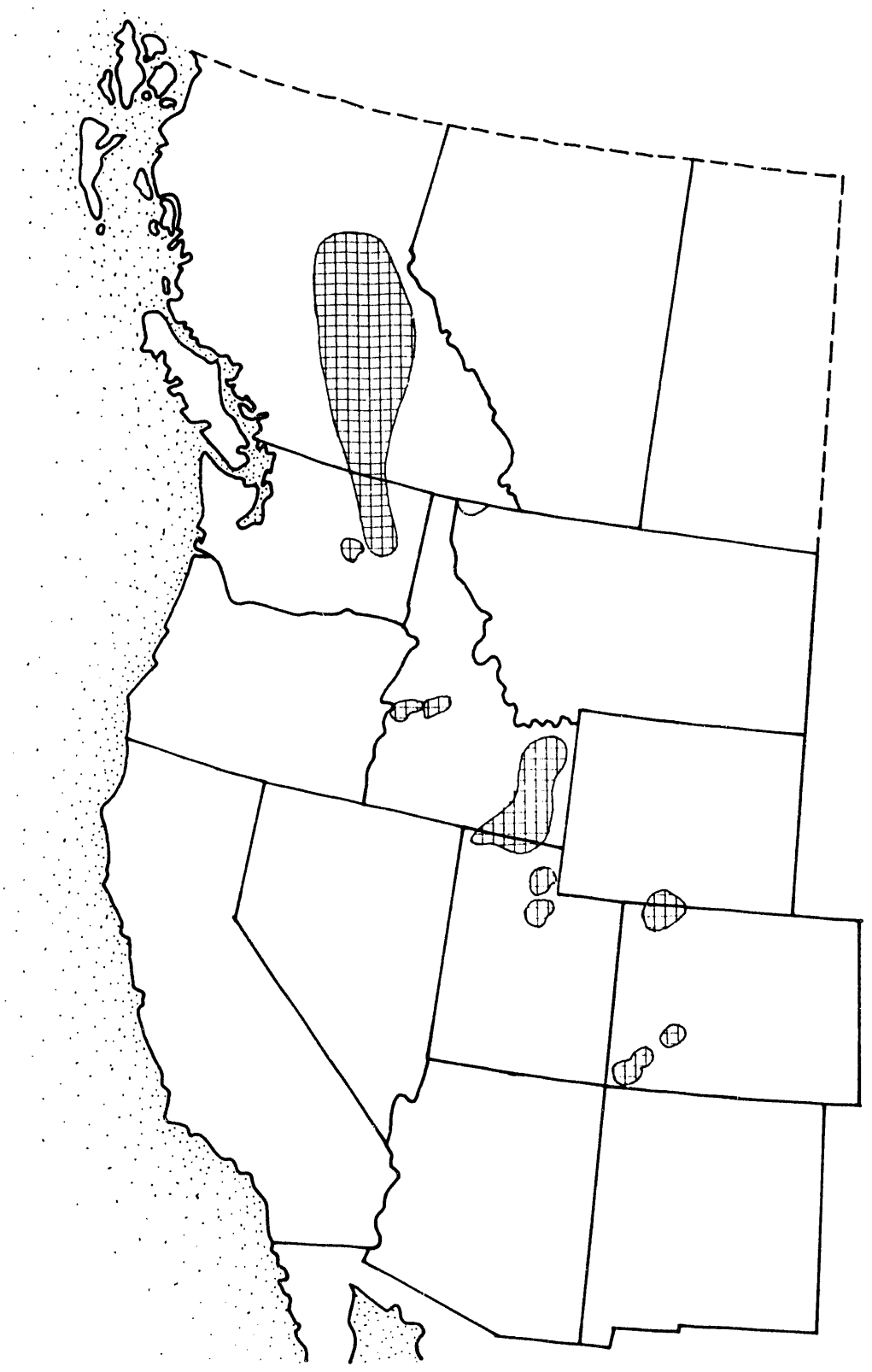


Figure 2. Current distribution of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (after WDW, 1992a)

FIGURE 3

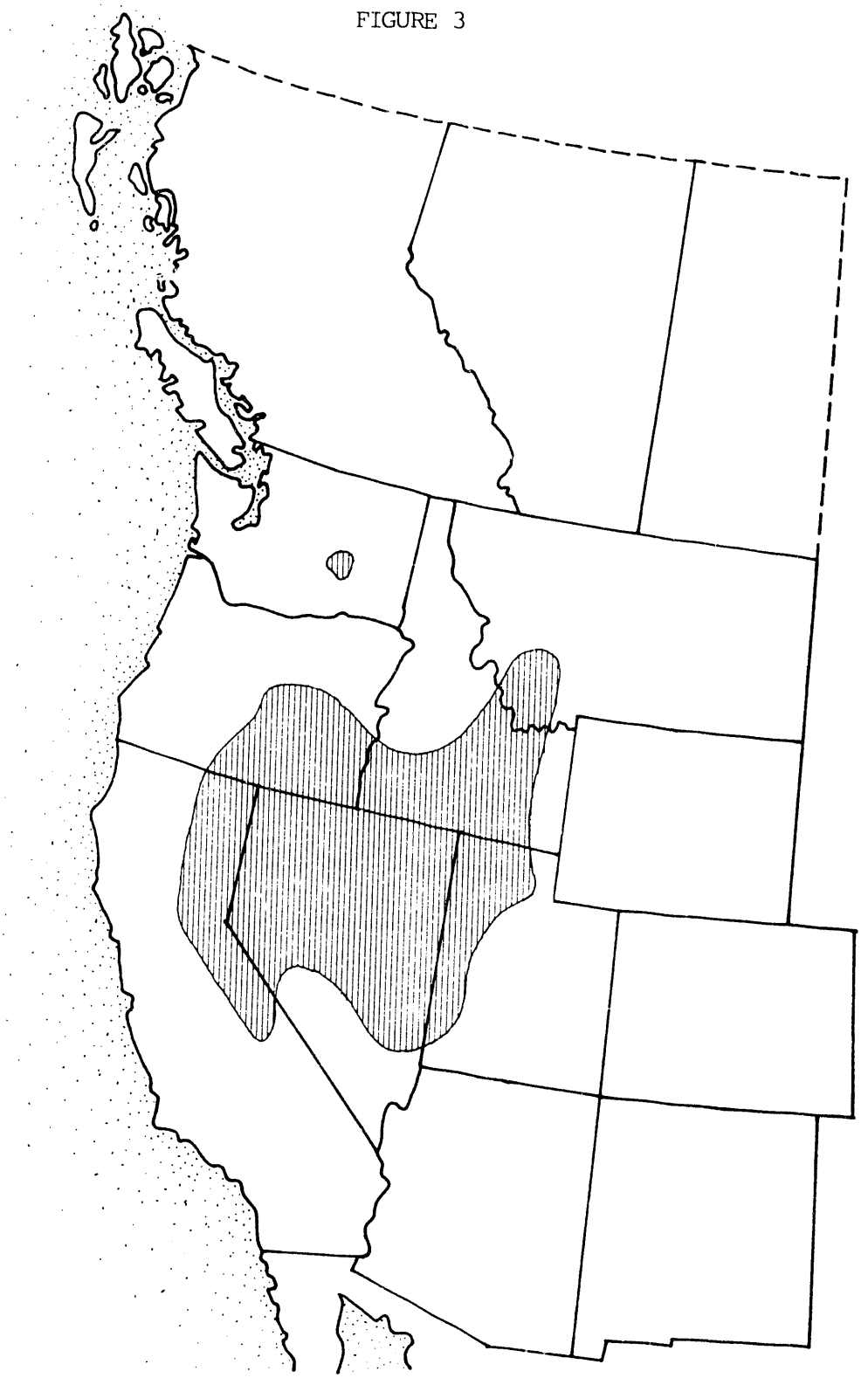


Figure 3. Current distribution of pygmy rabbits (after Verts and Carroway, 1984)

In addition to the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit, most wildlife species found in the project vicinity are those associated with shrub-steppe habitat, i.e., mule deer, cottontail rabbits, and coyotes. Waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, reptiles, and amphibians also occur. Wildlife species could be affected in several ways by overgrazing. Livestock compete with deer for forage (Longhurst et al. 1982). Overgrazing on rangeland could reduce forage, cover, and nesting opportunities for birds and small mammals (Buttery and Shields 1975), and browsing on woody plants leads to the loss of tree and shrub nesting habitat, especially in riparian zones (Carothers and Johnson 1975).

WDW has mapped each of these habitat components on seven parcels of private land in Lincoln County. Each parcel has been evaluated in terms of existing habitat suitability for sharp-tailed grouse, using a model developed by WDW.

WDW has mapped four leks on proposed mitigation lands. Circles of 1.2-mile radius were drawn around each lek, representing potential nesting habitat. Winter habitat within 3 miles of nesting habitat was also mapped. The habitat quality of the proposed mitigation lands is variable, with most areas in fair condition. Grass height and density in nesting habitat (native bunchgrass/ shrub community) is thought to be limiting to sharp-tailed grouse populations on the parcels evaluated.

Pygmy Rabbit Currently, pygmy rabbits are known to occur in only six locations all in Douglas County. Three sites are on private land, and three are on public property. Survey efforts in 1991 recorded 600 active burrow sites.

Pygmy rabbits require dense sagebrush habitat for food and cover. During the spring and summer months, they feed on sagebrush, forbs, and grasses. Sagebrush comprises 99 percent of the winter diet. Pygmy rabbits also require soft, deep soils for excavation of their burrows, in areas where topographic microrelief is varied.

Three parcels of land in Douglas County were evaluated for habitat suitability using a model developed by WDW. Selected habitat variables, including soil depth, shrub height, percent sagebrush canopy cover, presence of immature big sage, and percent grass and forbs, were measured or estimated during a site visit in October 1990. Range condition was also estimated. These variable values were incorporated into the model to show habitat suitability for pygmy rabbits. Suitability was found to be moderate, with range condition rated as "fair." Absence of dense sagebrush cover may be the limiting factor on proposed mitigation lands.

The proposed action would include up to 800 acres of private land and may encompass existing public lands occupied by pygmy rabbits in Douglas County. Treatments would be designed to manage stands of Wyoming big sage to improve habitat potential for pygmy rabbits. The contribution that the project would make to recovery of the species (in terms of population increases) would depend in large part upon the distribution of suitable soil types. Data collected by SCS during soils mapping efforts in Douglas County may provide the basis for more refined predictions about local and regional project

benefits. Soils mapping may also indicate areas where soils and sagebrush communities would permit the creation, protection, and enhancement of movement corridors between separate pygmy rabbit populations. Rabbits may also be exchanged between geographically distinct populations in Washington to enlarge the gene pool.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

Habitat treatments would create additional forage and cover for numerous wildlife species. Benefits would be greater under the Acquisition Alternative than under the Agreement or Easement alternatives, because more area would be treated.

Sharp-tailed Grouse Protection of native shrub-steppe, bunchgrass, and riparian communities would be the primary focus of habitat treatments for sharp-tailed grouse. Grazing prescriptions would address site-specific conditions and sharp-tailed grouse habitat requirements. Native seed and rootstock would be planted in selected areas to provide cover and forage for grouse. Mowing, burning, and other potential habitat treatments would be carefully regulated to maintain adequate vegetative structure. Key wetlands and riparian areas would be protected from livestock, so that wetland and riparian vegetation could recover from the effects of trampling and browsing. If necessary, replacement water sources would be developed for cattle.

In order to enlarge the gene pool, introduction of genetically compatible individuals from other geographic locations would be considered. One lek site would be developed for educational viewing. Public access to all project lands would be strictly regulated to minimize the risk of disturbance, wildfire, and introduction of noxious weeds.

Under any of the alternatives, fencing would be designed to minimize interference with wildlife access to water, forage, cover, movement corridors, and migration routes. Smooth wire would be considered in preference to barbed wire. WDW would evaluate the location of existing fences and remove those not necessary for habitat protection and no longer needed for farming or ranching operations.

Pygmy Rabbit In order to protect the high quality native shrub-steppe and bunchgrass communities that pygmy rabbits depend on, a specific grazing schedule would be developed for each site. Fencing, gates and cattleguards would be installed to control livestock, and water facilities could be developed for better distribution of cattle in conjunction with overall livestock management strategies. Greenbelts, water trucks, and prescribed burns may be employed to control wildfire. Plantings of native seed and rootstock would enhance existing rangeland. Sagebrush communities would be treated to encourage plant vigor and canopy development. Predator control may be critical to protect existing pygmy rabbit populations, and control of public access would be important in reducing the risk of fire, introduction of weed species, and disturbance.

Most species that prey upon pygmy rabbits are wide-ranging, opportunistic feeders and take a variety of prey. Predator control is most effective in situations where predators are concentrating their foraging activities on prey that occur in small, isolated pockets of low quality habitat. Pygmy rabbits occur in just such conditions on Project land in Douglas County. Signs of badger activity are evident throughout at least one mitigation site, and immediate, short-term predator control may be critical. As habitat quality improves, predation tends to exert less pressure on prey populations, and it is not expected that predator control would be a long-term management practice. Predator control measures would be implemented according to Federal, State, and county regulations. No significant adverse impacts would be expected as a result of the proposed alternatives or habitat treatments on any wildlife species located within the project area.

No significant adverse impacts would be expected as a result of the proposed alternatives or habitat treatments on any wildlife species located within the project area.

3.3 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

3.3.1. Existing Conditions

Federal Status of Threatened and Endangered Species. In compliance with Section 7 of the ESA, the USFWS was contacted in March 1992, requesting a list of any threatened and endangered species that may be present within the project area. Their response stated that no federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species occur within the project area (USFWS; D. Frederick letter dated March 30, 1992).

However, the USFWS did identify Federal wildlife candidate species that may occur in the area (in addition to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits): California wolverine, spotted frog, western sage grouse, and ferruginous hawk (see Section 5.5). BPA has determined that the proposed project activities would not effect any Federal threatened and endangered species.

State List of Threatened and Endangered Species. The ferruginous hawk is listed as a threatened species by the State of Washington. Numbers are thought to be low (62 nesting pairs in 1990) but stable (WDW 1990b).

State designated bird species listed as sensitive by the State of Washington that may occur in the project area include raptors such as golden eagle, gyrfalcon, prairie falcon, and Swainson's hawk. Snowy owl and burrowing owl may also occur. Perching birds and song birds that would be expected in shrub-steppe habitat include sage, Brewer's lark, and grasshopper sparrows, ash-throated flycatcher, and sage thrasher. White-tailed jackrabbits and sagebrush voles are listed as sensitive in Washington, and may be found in the project area. Long-toed and tiger salamanders, horned and sagebrush lizards, and spotted frogs may also occur (WDW 1992a; Hickman, Jerry, Personal Communications, WDW, Spokane, WA 1991). BPA has determined that the proposed project activities would not impact any State listed sensitive species.

Before implementing any proposed project activities, consultation would take place with the appropriate agencies to confirm that no adverse impacts to Federal and State threatened and endangered species would result from the action.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

Plantings of birch and other riparian species would provide important winter cover for grouse, and plantings of hydrophytic species would provide forage and cover for grouse broods (D. Ziegler, pers. comm. March 20, 1992). Enhancement of Wyoming big sage would improve year-round forage and cover for pygmy rabbits. Enhancement of native forbs and grasses in the big sage understory would provide year-round cover and important forage during the spring (Chapman et al. 1982). Reclamation of lands currently in tilled agriculture would add to the habitat base for both sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits.

WDW proposes to explore the possibility of augmenting populations of sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits by introducing genetically compatible individuals from other locations. The success of such introductions would depend on the quality and quantity of habitat available. Under the Agreement or Easement alternatives, it is assumed that more time would be required to increase the carrying capacity of project lands than if grazing were completely eliminated (Acquisition Alternative).

Treatments designed to improve habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbits also would benefit many of the other shrub-steppe dependent species that occur in the project area. Protection from development, agriculture, overgrazing, and casual human use would improve overall habitat quality, and additional habitat would be created through reclamation of wheat and barley fields.

If other Federal (candidate) species were found to be in the Project area in the future, WDW would consult with the USFWS in the evaluation of potential impacts and the design of mitigation measures that might be needed. WDW would also consider potential impacts and mitigation measures for State-listed sensitive species. Such measures could include timing restrictions on habitat treatments to protect nesting birds, relocation of fencelines to avoid owl burrows, and more restricted application of herbicides. The proposed alternatives do not include any activities that would cause loss of habitat or disturbance to a threatened or endangered species. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts are expected.

3.4 LAND USE

3.4.1 Existing Conditions

Current land uses in the project area are predominantly cattle ranching and farming. Some landowners permit hunting on their property, but very few other types of recreational use occur on project lands. Tribal use of private lands

proposed for inclusion in the project is regulated by State and Federal law. There is no known current demand by members of the Colville Confederated Tribes or Spokane Tribe of Indians to exercise rights to hunt, fish or gather on usual and accustomed areas within the proposed project lands (C. Merker, pers. comm. March 4, 1992; S. Judd, pers. comm. March 6, 1992).

Parcels proposed for inclusion in the Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Projects are zoned as Agricultural Open Space (T. Goodman, pers. comm. March 6, 1992) and Rural Agricultural (D. Chase, pers. comm. May 1, 1992), respectively. Property tax assessments are based on the ability of the land to produce income. On private land, owners pay property taxes to support county services such as schools and roads. Taxes are also paid into the junior taxing districts to support fire control and cemeteries, and a separate assessment is paid to county weed boards. For lands owned by WDW, the State pays in-lieu-of taxes to the county, or a portion of fines and forfeitures through the district courts. In Lincoln County, a portion of fines and forfeitures through the district courts are disbursed to the junior taxing districts (F. Friesz, pers. comm. March 17, 1992). In Douglas County, leasehold excise taxes paid to the state for use of DNR lands are paid back into the junior taxing districts (M. Dodge, pers. comm. May 1, 1992).

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences

Ranching and farming practices in the project area may change depending on the land rights alternatives selected. Zoning for land use, however, would remain the same.

Recreational use of project lands will be designed to protect the biological needs and objectives of the target species. An interpretive site could be developed at one lek site on public land. Public use of any other project lands would remain at low levels. WDW would regulate public access. Under the Agreement or Acquisition Alternatives, Tribal access to public lands would be regulated by Federal law and Treaty provisions. Under the Easement Alternative, Tribal members would exercise the same rights as other individuals.

BLM and WDW would continue to pay in-lieu-of taxes as they currently do under the Agreement Alternative. Whether a portion of in-lieu-of taxes paid by BLM can be directly disbursed to junior taxing districts is currently under advisement by the State Attorney General. Potential changes in BLM's tax payments are unknown at this time. Under the Easement Alternative, property taxes would be paid by the property owner. In the event that a landowner's ability to produce income from his or her land would decrease, some decrease in property taxes could therefore occur. However, because property taxes are relatively low on rangeland, which represents 90 percent of the proposed project lands, impacts are anticipated to be minimal.

BPA has indicated that it has no authority to pay in-lieu-of property taxes. It is BPA's intention, however, to minimize local economic impacts of the project. BPA would pay for direct project expenses so that the projects would

not represent a burden in either Lincoln or Douglas counties. Due to these considerations, minimal adverse effects are anticipated due to changes in land use.

The proposed changes in land use would be consistent with current State and local land use plans. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts are expected.

CHAPTER 4

COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND REQUIREMENTS

Consistent with the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and subsequent regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1500), this assessment includes a review of project compliance with relevant statutes and executive orders listed below.

4.1 FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO THIS PROJECT

- **Endangered Species Act: 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.**

  BPA has consulted with the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA.

- **Cultural Resource Legislation, Executive Order 11593; Archeological and Historical Preservation Act of 1974, 16 U.S.C. 469 et seq., Public Law 92-291.**

  On April 8, 1992, BPA reviewed existing documentation within the National Federal Register on Historic Places for the Project area, and no currently listed Cultural or Historic Places within the proposed Project area were noted (P. Havens, pers. comm. April 9, 1992). However, Tracy Rock, named after the infamous Harry Tracy who met his fate at that site in the late 1800s, does have local historic significance. When exact locations of management activities on Project lands are identified, BPA will contact the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to request a search of the State data base and will perform a field survey of areas that could be affected by activities such as prescribed burning and plowing. No management activities will be conducted until the initial survey is complete. If a cultural or historical resource is discovered during consultation with SHPO or during the survey, BPA will contact Tribal and Federal or State authorities to report findings and discuss mitigation measures. WDW would re-site habitat treatments as necessary to protect historical or cultural resources; no significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

- **Executive Order 11990: Protection of Wetlands**

  According to this order, all Federal agencies will minimize the loss or degradation of wetlands. The proposed action may include rehabilitation and enhancement of riparian areas and wetlands. During activities designed to restore these habitat types, existing wetland soils and vegetation may be temporarily disturbed. However, no habitat treatments would result in net loss of wetlands.

- **Effects on the Waters of the United States; Permits for Structures in Navigable Waters, Rivers and Harbors Act, 33 U.S.C. 401 et seq., Federal Water Pollution Control Act. See 404 as amended.**

Sections 10, 401, and 404 permits may be required for some activities within wetlands and waterways. Although no structures are proposed in navigable waters of the United States, and no discharges of dredged or fill materials into waters or wetlands are proposed, permitting may be required in order to ensure that adequate sediment and erosion control plans are developed for any site-specific prescriptions involving stream, wetland, or spring rehabilitation.

- **Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 7609 et seq.**

  Plowing and prescribed burning conducted as habitat treatments under the Proposed Action would create the same impacts as current agricultural practices. Both operations could result in temporary, localized reductions in air quality. Project-related traffic is not expected to be significant. Under any of the alternatives, plowing and prescribed burns in the Project area would be limited in size. They would be conducted in accordance with State and county regulations. No permanent emission sources would be constructed. The Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse effects on air quality.

- **Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.**

  The actions proposed in this EA would be coordinated with Federal and State resource agencies and with Indian Tribes.

- **Resource Conservation and Recovery Act: 42 U.S.C. 6910 et seq.**

  The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act regulates the storage, use, and disposal of solid and hazardous waste. It is BPA's policy to perform an Environmental Land Audit (ELA) prior to the purchase of any real property (e.g., fee title, and easements and leases as appropriate). The purpose of the ELA is to determine whether contaminants are located within the boundaries of the subject property, or whether there is a risk of offsite contaminants migrating onto the subject property. The ELA identifies the types of contaminants, their location, and inherent risk as it relates to acquisition of the subject property. BPA's Environmental Protection Section reviews the ELA and provides a Letter of Advice, providing recommendations on whether BPA should proceed with the acquisition, and identifies disposal/cleanup measures that should be initiated before or after acquisition. Contaminants can present a substantial financial liability and long-term management responsibility and may present an unacceptable environmental risk for various BPA projects, such as fish and wildlife projects. In order to ensure that contaminant concerns have been addressed adequately, the highest level of ELA (Level I, II, III or combination) is obtained, appropriate for the specific site. Herbicide application will comply with the requirements of this Act.

There would be no action required under the following regulations as a result of implementation of the Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife Mitigation Project:

Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and DOE guidelines (10 CFR 1022)

Clean Water Act: 33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act: 43 U.S.C. A., Chapter 35

Farmland Protection Policy Act: 7 U.S.C. 4201 et seq.

Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act: 7 U.S.C. 136 et seq.

Toxic Substances Control Act: 15 U.S.C. 2601 et seq.

Coastal Zone Management Consistency

Energy Conservation at Federal Facilities: 42 U.S.C. 8241 et seq.

Recreational Resources; Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1271, et seq.

Noise Control Act

Safe Drinking Water Act

Global Warming

4.2. STATE REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

- **State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)**

SEPA requirements are analogous to NEPA requirements. This EA was prepared according to the NEPA process, and SEPA compliance is therefore maintained.

- **Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA)**

The HPA permitting process is regulated by the WDW or Washington Department of Fisheries. Any instream work conducted within the Proposed Action will go through the HPA permit review, to ensure that adverse impacts on fish and wildlife will be avoided or minimized.

- **Water Quality Certification**

If any activities within the Proposed Action result in applications for Section 404 permits or HPA permits, application must also be made to the Washington Department of Ecology (DOE) for water quality certification or modification. DOE may attach conditions to the permits to further reduce potential adverse impacts.

4.3 LOCAL REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

BPA and WDW have discussed the Proposed Action with Lincoln and Douglas County planning departments and local officials. All proposed activities would comply with local permitting requirements with regard to county planning, zoning, and shoreline management programs. Some of the project area management activities may include public lands managed by BLM. BLM would coordinate with the appropriate county and Federal agencies to ensure consistency with the local zones and planning for management efforts involving public lands.

CHAPTER 5

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

5.1 GRAND COULEE WILDLIFE MITIGATION STEERING COMMITTEE

The preparer of this EA met with the Grand Coulee Wildlife Mitigation Steering Committee during the development of this document. The Steering Committee was established in March 1990. Members of this Committee include representatives from the Wheat Growers and Cattlemen's Associations of Lincoln and Douglas Counties, the Ephrata Sportsmen's Club, the Washington Environmental Council, local government and landowners, the Colville Confederated Tribes, the Upper Columbia United Tribes, and local utilities. The Steering Committee has assisted WDW in developing the programmatic management plans, and will continue to participate in the process as agreements, easements, or acquisitions are negotiated and site-specific treatments are designed.

5.2 COORDINATION

The draft EA was sent to the State of Washington and the interested public for review and comment on June 23, 1992. The comment period closed on August 10, 1992. BPA received 10 comment letters. Comments were considered and, as appropriate, incorporated into the Final EA.

5.3 AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONTACTED

The following individuals were contacted for information and comments regarding the Proposed Action:

Washington Department of Wildlife:	Paul Ashley, Dave Ware, Jenene Fenton
Bonneville Power Administration:	Kevin Ward, Carolyn Davey, Joe DeHerrera
Department of Natural Resources:	Milt Johnston
Bureau of Land Management:	Lou Jurs
Upper Columbia United Tribes:	Chris Merker
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation:	Jim Romero
National Park Service:	Karen Taylor-Goodrich
Soil Conservation Service:	Craig Madsen, Jerry Rouse
Lincoln County Planning Department:	Terry Goodman
Lincoln County Tax Assessor:	Frosty Friesz
Douglas County Planning Department:	Doug Chase
Douglas County Treasurer's Office:	Nancy Dodge
The Nature Conservancy:	Laura Ashley, Joan Bird, Lynn Cornelius
Grant County PUD:	Don Ziegler
Colville Confederated Tribes:	Steve Judd
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:	Dave Frederick

5.4 LITERATURE CITED OR UTILIZED

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5.5 SEPA Adoption Notice

WAC 197-11-965 **Adoption notice.**

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Adoption for (check appropriate box) ☐ DNS ☐ EIS ☐ other EA

Description of current proposal Tracy Rock Sharp-tailed Grouse/Douglas County Pygmy Rabbit Mitigation Project.

Proponent Bonneville Power Administration/Washington Department of Wildlife

Location of current proposal Tracy Rock Sharp-tailed Grouse Proposal: Lincoln County, Washington Pygmy Rabbit Proposal: Douglas County

Title of document being adopted Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife Mitigation EA

Agency that prepared document being adopted Bonneville Power Administration

Date adopted document was prepared June 1992

Description of document (or portion) being adopted NEPA Document

If the document being adopted has been challenged (197-11-630), please describe:
N/A

The document is available to be read at (place/time) Washington Department of Wildlife, Habitat Div., 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501 Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

We have identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for this proposal after independent review. The document meets our environmental review needs for the current proposal and will accompany the proposal to the decisionmaker.

Name of agency adopting document Department of Wildlife

Contact person, if other than responsible official _____ Phone _____

Responsible official Gordon Zillges

Position/title Regulatory Services Program Manager Phone (206) 753-3318

Address Dept. of Wildlife, 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501

Date 2/3/92 Signature [signature]

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Fish and Wildlife Enhancement
3704 Griffin Lane SE, Suite 102
Olympia, Washington 98501-2192
(206) 753-9440 FAX: (206) 753-9008

March 30, 1992

Nanci Tester
Chief, Environmental Compliance Section
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

FWS Reference
1-3-92-SP-334

Dear Ms. Tester:

This is in response to your letter, dated February 26, 1992 and received in this office on February 28. Enclosed is a list of candidate species that may be present within the area of the proposed Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Wildlife projects, in Lincoln and Douglas counties, Washington. To our present knowledge there are no proposed and listed threatened and endangered species in the vicinity of the projects. The list fulfills the requirements of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). We have also enclosed a copy of the requirements for Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) compliance under the Act.

Candidate species are provided simply as advance notice to Federal agencies of species which may be proposed and listed in the future. However, protection provided to candidate species now may preclude possible listing in the future. If early evaluation of your project indicates that it is likely to adversely impact a candidate species, the BPA may wish to request technical assistance from this office.

In addition, please be advised that Federal and State regulations may require permits in areas where wetlands are identified. You should contact the Seattle District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Federal permit requirements and the Washington State Department of Ecology for State permit requirements.

Your interest in endangered species is appreciated. If you have additional questions regarding your responsibilities under the Act, please contact Jim Michaels or Kimberly Williams of my staff at the letterhead phone address.

Sincerely,

For David C. Frederick
Field Supervisor

kmw/kr
Enclosures
c: WDW, Olympia (Nongame)
WNHP, Olympia

LISTED AND PROPOSED ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES AND CANDIDATE SPECIES WHICH MAY OCCUR WITHIN THE AREA OF THE PROPOSED SHARP-TAILED GROUSE AND PYGMY RABBIT WILDLIFE PROJECTS IN LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES, WASHINGTON.
(T23N R34E S1/12; T23N R35E S1-18; T23N R36E S6/7; T24N R26E S29/30; T24N R33E S1-4/9-16/22-27; T24N R34E S1-33/36; T24N R35E S1-36; T24N R36E S6/7/18-20/29-32; T25N R26E S9; T25N R33E S1-4/9-17/20-29/33-36; T25N R34E S1-36; T25N R36E S30; T26N R33E S34-36; T26N R34E S13-15/20-29/31-36; T26N R35E S19/20/28-33)

1-3-92-SP-334

LISTED

None.

PROPOSED

None.

CANDIDATE

California wolverine *(Gulo gulo luteus)* - may occur in the vicinity of the project.

Columbian sharp-tailed grouse *(Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus)* - may occur in the vicinity of the project.

Pygmy rabbit *(Brachylagus idahoensis)* - may occur in the vicinity of the project.

Spotted frog *(Rana pretiosa)* - may occur in the vicinity of the project.

Western sage grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus phaios)* - may occur in the vicinity of the project.

END

DATE FILMED

2 / 10 / 93