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## Wildlife gets help faster thanks to new agreement between WDFW and BPA

**Joint news release:  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Bonneville Power Administration**

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For more information on BPA, visit our website at: <http://www.bpa.gov>

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**OLYMPIA — Wildlife will get help faster by an agreement that will be announced Oct. 31\* by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) director Bern Shanks and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Fish and Wildlife manager Bob Lohn.**

The recently-signed agreement expedites wildlife habitat improvement and land acquisition by transferring spending authority of some funds available to the state of Washington directly to WDFW. The funding comes from the largest, interagency cooperative wildlife mitigation program in the United States.

“This gives us a chance to get ahead of potential Endangered Species Act action on sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse, pygmy rabbits and other species in our east side shrub-steppe habitat,” said WDFW’s Shanks. “It helps us restore and enhance more than 100,000 acres of our existing wildlife habitat lands, plus acquire another 3,500 acres in the future.”

In 1991 the Washington Wildlife Coalition, (comprised of WDFW, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Yakama Indian Nation, Spokane Tribe of Indians, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), was formed to negotiate the particulars of wildlife mitigation in Washington with BPA. In April 1993 BPA and the Coalition signed a \$45.5 million partial wildlife mitigation agreement to make up for wildlife losses due to construction of federal dams in the Columbia River Basin.

Two-thirds of WDFW’s funding share is dedicated to enhancement, operation, and maintenance of existing wildlife lands for species or habitats impacted by the dams in the Columbia Basin. These targeted species and habitats include sharptail and sage grouse, pygmy rabbit, shrub-steppe, and wetlands. The existing wildlife lands are: Swanson Lakes (4,900 acres) in Lincoln County, Vancouver Lowlands (1,800 acres) in Clark County, Sunnyside-I-82 (9,500 acres) in Yakima County, Scotch Creek (15,500 acres) in Okanogan County, and Wenas (64,000 acres) in Yakima and Kittitas counties. WDFW also owns and manages 3,700 acres in Douglas County and 1,000 acres in the Columbia Basin.

The other one-third is for acquisition and enhancement of about 17,000 additional acres for the same critical species and habitats. Already acquired are 13,000 acres at Swanson Lakes and 320 acres for pygmy rabbits in Douglas County. Identified for future purchase are 500 acres at Scotch Creek, 1,700 acres for sage grouse in Douglas County, 1,200 to 2,300 more acres at Vancouver Lowlands, and 160 acres of wetlands in the Columbia Basin.

So far, however, only about one-fifth of WDFW’s \$22.8 million (its 48 percent share of the \$45.5 million total) has been spent.

“The transfer of spending authority will allow the Wildlife Department the agility it needs to acquire property quickly and get the results we all want to see,” said Lohn. “Over the following years more projects should get underway in less time, which will mean more money hitting the ground faster where it can do the most good.”

When dams were built on the Columbia River and its tributaries, many floodplain and streamside or riparian wildlife habitats were flooded as reservoirs filled. Just two of those six dams alone — Grand Coulee Dam, built in 1941, and Chief Joseph Dam, built in 1955 — flooded more than 90,000 acres of wildlife habitat in Washington.

Congress’ Northwest Power Act of 1980 recognized the loss. It set up the Northwest Power Planning Council in part to develop and direct a program to make up for or mitigate the wildlife and habitat losses. BPA, under the U.S. Department of Energy, is the federal agency responsible to implement the wildlife mitigation program, which is paid for by electricity users across the northwest.

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\* Members of the news media are welcome to attend this briefing at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, October 31, in WDFW’s Director’s Conference Room on the fifth floor of the Natural Resources Building, 111 Washington St. S.E. in Olympia. A map of the project sites and photos of sage and sharptail grouse and pygmy rabbits will be available for your use. ###

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