

# Response to ISRP Review Comments

**Project ID: 29035**

## **Okanogan River Riparian and Upland Acquisition**

Sponsors:

### **STEWARDSHIP PARTNERS**



Helping Landowners Preserve the Environment

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1. *Acquisition of property in the Columbia Cascade Province needs to be coordinated and prioritized in watershed assessments and subbasin summaries. Has this property been identified as high priority by a watershed assessment or by a watershed council? If so, the response should clarify*

The property is specifically mentioned in the Okanogan/Similkameen Subbasin Summary 2001 (NWPPC) under Existing and Past Efforts. “The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has talked to landowners in the Okanogan floodplain between Riverside and Janis. This is the only intact riparian area along the Okanogan in the U.S. Landowners are interested in selling, but as yet the state does not have funds to make the purchase.”

This acquisition dovetails nicely with *The South Okanogan-Similkameen Conservation Project* in Canada that seeks to maintain north-south connectivity, particularly along the river courses. This project identifies four habitat types as important for protection: riparian/instream, shrub-steppe, dry forest, and steep habitat (cliffs, talus, etc). All of these occur on the project property. This Canadian effort is mirrored by a U.S. project called the Similkameen-Okanogan Conservation Corridor Project. WDFW expects to receive about \$1 million for this project, part of which could be spent on the property for land stewardship efforts.

This project is also expected to meet the acquisitions objectives to be derived from the upcoming WDFW/Nature Conservancy eco-regional planning efforts.

The property falls within the reach of the Okanogan River mainstem identified and assessed by the Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team in their report, “A Strategy to Protect and Restore Salmonid Habitat in the Upper Columbia Region” (July 2001). This reach from the Similkameen River to the confluence with the Columbia River has warranted a Category 2 priority status which means this watershed is a system that most closely resembles natural, fully functional aquatic ecosystems but which is characterized by an increased level of fragmentation that has resulted from habitat disturbance or loss. Protection of this property will stem this trend of habitat fragmentation.

A proposal from Central Washington University (CWU) to acquire the southernmost end of this acquisition totaling 440 acres was submitted to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board. The project was ranked a “Good Project” and “Good potential to decrease width: depth ratio of important reach of river”, by The Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team for review of third round 2001 grant applications.

2. *Also, the ISRP needs to be assured that the property is included in an acceptable long-term monitoring program for both aquatic and terrestrial resources.*

An important component of any monitoring plan is an evaluation of the ecological status of terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic systems. The habitat and restoration plan developed by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (2000) will be used as a model for the long-term

and baseline monitoring plan in this project. The data collection protocol will include: Baseline Fisheries Habitat Data Collection; Baseline Wildlife Data Collection; Baseline Vegetation Database; Baseline Wetland Riparian Area Data Collection.

The database will include information on community structure, the condition of each population in the community, the geographic range of the species, threats to the species, biological and ecological information, and prescribed management needs.

Depending on the condition of each species, planning and habitat enhancement may be necessary. Ultimately, a comprehensive, ecologically-based restoration strategy will be developed. Some potential enhancement activities will include shrub-steppe reconstruction and restoration, riparian enhancement, noxious weed control, and revegetation. GPS and GIS technology will be incorporated in collating and managing data.

Initially, monitoring projects will focus on the following: collecting baseline information on native fish populations; collecting baseline information on exotic fish; collecting shoreline riparian vegetation monitoring; conducting studies that monitor dominant shrub-steppe plant taxa; and monitoring populations of deer, sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, ground squirrels, hawks, eagles, owls, reptiles, and amphibians.

Several projects will focus on monitoring water birch and aspen in the riparian zone since these species have been identified as food sources for the endangered sharp-tailed grouse.

A major component of CWU's planned field station activities, are field projects focusing on long-term monitoring of the populations of organisms that inhabit the area. CWU has a strong field biology program with approximately 150 students enrolled as majors. Faculty mentors in the disciplines of ichthyology, herpetology, mammalogy, ornithology, mycology, phycology, and plant taxonomy will direct monitoring and research activities according to the University's long-term monitoring program and will supervise student projects.

- 3. A conservation easement is needed that will protect the property for the benefit of fish and wildlife for the indefinite future. Based on the reviewer's experiences, ownership by a university without legal assurance of conservation is not adequate. The sponsor might consider working through or with the Nature Conservancy to specify the details of a conservation easement.*

CWU is prepared to enter into a binding agreement with a public land trust that would establish a conservation easement in perpetuity. The Okanogan Valley Land Council (Land Council) will develop a conservation easement with support from The Methow Conservancy (See Appendix A). The Land Council will administer the conservation easement and will be supported with a stewardship endowment created by the University and Stewardship Partners. The only area of the acquired property that would be developed is at the southernmost end of the property where the county road ends. This is the area where the field station will be sited. It is currently used for grazing and raising alfalfa and is in close proximity to existing ranch buildings and pre-existing development.

4. *Evidence also needs to be provided that the university is committed to the biological station. The sponsor might consider contacting the Organization of Biological Field Stations ([www.obfs.org](http://www.obfs.org)) for further information on operating costs and potential for use of the property for educational purposes.*

The University has, for quite some time, actively pursued the acquisition of an appropriate site for a field station. CWU has, in the past, contacted the Organization of Biological Field Stations when attempting to purchase 3200 acres on Swauk Creek in Kittitas County through the State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation. Additionally, a proposal had been submitted to the National Science Foundation for a planning grant that would have assisted in the development of a field station on this site. In 1997, funding was approved for the purchase of this site by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, but ultimately the funding was withdrawn because of political pressure applied by the Kittitas County Commissioners who were against the property being removed from the tax rolls. CWU remains fully committed to developing a biological field station that would benefit its faculty, students, and the local community. A review of this property by CWU has revealed it to be well-suited for fulfilling their established goals of developing and maintaining such a field station.

5. *The response needs to include a HEP analysis for value to wildlife, and identification of mitigation credit to BPA.*

The property has not had a baseline Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP). In our proposal under Objective 2, Task a., we state our intention to conduct a baseline HEP, and a plant survey, that includes interagency and tribal coordination. It is the proponents understanding that once a commitment is made to purchase the property a baseline HEP will be completed. The following are acreage estimates for cover types based on Department of Natural Resources Orthophoto Maps flown in 1995 (Table 1).

Table 1. Cover types and acres on the Okanogan River Riparian and Upland Acquisition

Cover Type	Acres
Shrub-steppe	811*
Emergent wetland	38
Riparian Forest	101
Riparian shrub	205
Agriculture	96
Steep Habitat	195
Palustrine/Riverine	128
Islands	62
TOTAL	1,636

\* Approximately 35% is currently impacted by grazing providing improvement opportunities.

The following represents a conservative estimate of the number of Habitat Units for indicator species representing primarily palustrine, riparianriverine, and shrub-steppe habitats. A measured field HEP analysis was not possible due to the limited time available to respond to ISRP comments (two weeks). As a result, the Habitat Units shown on Table 2 are ocular estimates and/or extrapolated from Scotch Creek WA HEP results within similar cover types and vegetation characteristics as those found on this proposed project area. Habitat suitability models, depicted on Table 2, are consistent with Grand Coulee Dam and/or Chief Joseph Dam loss assessment species.

Table 2. Okanogan River Riparian and Upland Acquisition cover types and estimated baseline habitat units.

Cover Type	No. Acres	HEP Model	Estimated $\times$ HSI	Estimated HUs
Shrub-steppe	811	Sharp-tailed Grouse	0.3	243
		Mule Deer	0.4	324
Emergent wetland	38	Mink	0.2	8
Riparian Forest	101	Black-capped Chickadee	0.3	30
Riparian shrub	205	Yellow Warbler	0.4	82
Agriculture	96	Sharp-tailed Grouse	0.1	9
		Mule Deer	0.1	9
Palustrine/Riverine	128	Mink	0.4	51
Island	62	Canada Goose	0.5	31
Steep Habitat	195	Bobcat	0.2	39
Totals	1,636			826

## References:

Ashley, P. 2002., Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Personal communication to David Burger re: Habitat Evaluation Procedure estimation.

BPA, WDFW. 1986. Wildlife protection, mitigation and enhancement planning for Grand Coulee Dam.

BPA, WDFW. 1992. Wildlife Habitat Impact Assessment Chief Joseph Dam Project, Washington.

Fitkin, S. 2002., Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Personal communication to David Burger re: Planning and prioritization.

NWPPC, Golder Associates. 2001. Okanogan Subbasin Summary. Talayco, N. (ed.). Prepared for: Northwest Power Planning Council.

Paquet, P. 2002., Northwest Power Planning Council, Personal communication to David Burger re: Habitat Evaluation Procedure estimation.

Swedberg, D. 2002., Okanogan Valley Lands Council, Letter of Support re: development and administration of conservation easement.

Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team. 2001. A Strategy to Protect and Restore Salmonid Habitat in the Upper Columbia Region

Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team. 2001. Review of Third Round 2001 Grant Applications

Ward, M. 2002, Upper Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, Personal communication to David Burger re: Monitoring protocols in the Upper Columbia Basin.

Appendix A

**Okanogan Valley Land Council**

P.O. Box 1538  
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March 14, 2002

David Burger, Executive Director  
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Dear Mr. Burger,

The Okanogan Valley Land Council unanimously supports the effort of developing a conservation easement for the 1,636 acre property under consideration in the proposal entitled "Okanogan River Riparian and Upland Acquisition".

If the acquisition of the 1,636 acre parcel is successful, we are willing to develop the Conservation Easement in concert with you, Central Washington University and the Methow Conservancy. Additionally, once a Conservation Easement is developed we are willing to administer the easement in perpetuity under an endowment to cover the costs of administration.

Sincerely,



Dale Swedberg, Board Member  
Okanogan Valley Land Council