



## Washington's Biodiversity

*The full range of life in all its forms.* The Washington Biodiversity Council's definition includes the habitats in which life occurs, the ways that species and habitats interact with each other, and the physical environment and the processes necessary for those interactions.

Biodiversity can be considered at several scales: **genetic diversity**, within and between species; **species diversity**, the number and type of different species found in an area; **ecosystem diversity**, the different types of ecological systems of land, water, and organisms; and **landscape diversity**, also referred to **ecoregional diversity**.

Washington is one of the most biologically diverse states in the nation, home to a remarkable array of ecosystems, including estuaries, shrub-steppe, conifer forests, oak woodlands, interior sand dunes, grasslands, deep marine waters, alpine meadows, and freshwater lakes, rivers, streams and bogs.

Biological diversity, like a diversified stock portfolio, keeps our options many and varied and ensures that we can continue to depend on the clean water, food harvests, shelter, medicine, spiritual well-being, and other essentials that it provides.

**WASHINGTON**  
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### Washington's Ecoregions

Ecoregions are broad areas that share similar flora and fauna, geology, hydrology, and landforms. In Washington, terrestrial ecosystems have been grouped into **nine ecoregions**.

These ecoregions extend past our state borders into British Columbia, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Nevada. As a result, Washington shares a rich mix of species and ecosystems with neighboring states and provinces. Ecoregions are a practical unit on which to base conservation planning because they reflect broad ecological patterns and are large enough to encompass entire populations of species and their habitats as well as natural processes such as wildfire.



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#### Northwest Coast Ecoregion

Washington's westernmost and wettest ecoregion extends from ocean depths to the Olympic Mountains' glaciated peaks. Steller sea lions swim among the greatest number of kelp species in the world, and Olympic marmots burrow in alpine meadows.



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#### West Cascades Ecoregion

Rumbling volcanoes and ancient forests distinguish Washington's West Cascades ecoregion. The spectacular—and active—volcanoes host lowland to alpine species.



DNR

#### Puget Trough Ecoregion

A great inland arm of the sea—Puget Sound—flanked by forested foothills and freshened by many rivers. The Puget Trough ecoregion is home to over 75% of Washington's people.



BEN LEGLER

#### North Cascades Ecoregion

Home to lynx and mountain goats, rare alpine daisies and thousand-year old cedars, the North Cascades ecoregion contains some of the largest expanses of wilderness in the lower forty-eight.



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#### Columbia Plateau Ecoregion

Two great rivers, the Columbia and the Snake, dominate the dramatic dry landscape of Washington's largest ecoregion—home to an inland sea of sagebrush and the state's fertile agricultural heartland.



SHARON DAVIS

#### Okanogan Ecoregion

In north-central Washington, the Cascades, the Rockies, and the Columbia Plateau converge to form the Okanogan ecoregion, which boasts highland landscapes and lowland waterways, grizzly bears and sage grouse.



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#### East Cascades Ecoregion

On the dry side of the Cascades lies one of Washington's most diverse ecoregions, rich in biological wealth from its montane crest down through open stands of ponderosa pine and Garry oak to the edge of the shrub-steppe.



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#### Canadian Rocky Mountains Ecoregion

Some of Washington's wildest country is found in its far northeastern corner. Large mammals such as moose and the endangered mountain caribou live in the deep boreal forests.



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#### Blue Mountains Ecoregion

Washington's smallest ecoregion, the rugged Blue Mountains are a rolling high plateau dotted with ponderosa pine forests, vestiges of Palouse prairie, and steeply cut rimrock canyons.