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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

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Biodiversity Council to Release Strategy to Sustain Natural Heritage *Report emphasizes incentives and voluntary actions for landowners*

SEATTLE – After three years of work, the Washington Biodiversity Council will release its strategy to protect Washington's unique plant and animal communities in front of a crowd at the biodiversity conservation conference today at the Bell Harbor International Conference Center.

Developed by a diverse council representing landowners, environmentalists, government agencies, tribes and others, the strategy lays out a path forward to enhance biodiversity conservation in Washington and support other priorities, such as the Puget Sound Partnership and efforts to address climate change.

Washington has a rich bounty of natural environments, from the fertile soils of the Palouse to the diverse marine life of Puget Sound. These environments support a remarkable diversity of life, including the world's tallest Douglas-firs; the salmon, wheat and apples that have made the state famous; and millions of tiny organisms that are the foundation of the food chain. Since Washington became a state, the biological diversity of organisms has steadily diminished, threatening our very way of life. The strategy is aimed at reducing that trend.

"The council was charged with creating a long-term strategy to protect Washington's biodiversity heritage," said Maggie Coon, director of external affairs at The Nature Conservancy and chair of the Washington Biodiversity Council. "This document delivers on that challenge. The strategy sets forth a bold set of actions designed to turn the tide – to marshal our collective efforts to reverse the decline in ecosystem health across our state."

Washington's biodiversity is at risk and under increasing pressure from the state's growing population, development and climate change, Coon said. Based on input from people around the state, the strategy builds on existing efforts and provides a coordinated response to overlapping natural resource issues, she said.

Governor Chris Gregoire, noted, "This strategy represents the good thinking of many people and interests around our great state. I look forward to seeing it become a reality as we work together to ensure Washington's economic and ecological diversity remain strong."

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Three broad initiatives form the heart of the strategy. They offer a new approach to defining priorities, fostering widespread landowner engagement and measuring progress:

Guiding investments on the land, through the use of a new tool that maps biodiversity value and threats at a landscape, regional scale.

Improving incentives and advancing markets for landowners to provide tangible benefits for conservation on working lands and open spaces.

Engaging citizens to work with scientists to inventory and monitor Washington's biodiversity.

The strategy also includes recommendations to achieve objectives in other important focus areas:

- ◆ **Land Use and Development** – Work with local, state, tribal and federal agencies to incorporate biodiversity conservation priorities and tools in land-use planning efforts.
- ◆ **Science and Information** – Establish a comprehensive scientific understanding of Washington's biodiversity and make information readily accessible and useful for land managers and decision-makers.
- ◆ **Education** – Inform, educate and engage Washingtonians so they better understand biodiversity's importance to their quality of life and how to take action to conserve it.

Wade Troutman, fourth generation rancher and member of the council added, "I am very proud to have been a member of a council that recognizes the need for healthy lands containing both wild areas and farms. One should not be sacrificed for the other."

The strategy is being released at the Biodiversity Conservation: What Works, What's Next conference in Seattle. More than 275 people are expected to attend.

"Washington's biodiversity is at risk," Coon said. "By carrying out the actions recommended in the strategy, we can make great strides for citizens, landowners and communities to conserve the beautiful landscapes, plants and animals that provide rich benefits for our communities."

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