

Tribal Wildlife Conservation – A History of Success

There are countless stories that exemplify excellent Tribal fish and wildlife resource management. This history of success would be sustained, strengthened and expanded with an investment of resources from the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.



Confederation Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

Based in Montana, the CSKT led and directed efforts to achieve wildlife and wetland mitigation on the reconstruction of the main highway route through the center of the Reservation, resulting in the construction of 43 wildlife underpass crossing structures and one large overpass named “The Animals Bridge” on U.S. Highway 93. These state of the art wildlife crossings provide critical wildlife habitat connectivity and improve public/wildlife safety from the thousands of animal crossings occurring each year. Painted turtles to grizzly bears, nearly every type of four legged animal found on the Reservation and even some birds utilize these highway crossings and they have become a model highway design across the country.

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI)

The EBCI Natural Resources Department is working to build upon generations of Cherokee stewardship and manage terrestrial and aquatic species of concern through an EBCI Wildlife Action Plan. Modern-day Cherokee lands located in the southern Appalachians harbor tremendous biodiversity and rare species that receive focused population monitoring and habitat protection efforts from EBCI biologists. These species include three ESA listed bat species, the federally endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel, the eastern elk, and many neo-tropical birds and salamanders. The EBCI is also successfully working with multiple government and non-profit partners to restore native aquatic species to EBCI watersheds such as the eastern hellbender, sickelfin redhorse, and multiple freshwater mussels. Sustained wildlife conservation efforts within the EBCI aboriginal landscape are critical to preserving ecosystem services, economic resources, and cultural values for future generations.





Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes –

The Shoshone and Arapaho Fish and Game Department has been actively and successfully conserving fish and wildlife on the Wind River Reservation since the implementation of a “Game Code” in 1984. Wind River, encompassing over 2.2 million acres in west-central Wyoming, is an important part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Prior to the implementation of the Game Code, unregulated hunting resulted in severely depleted populations of large game including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, elk, moose and bighorn sheep. Because of the vast expanse of high quality habitat, ungulate populations rebounded upwards of 500 to 1000% once hunting seasons and harvest quotas were implemented and enforced. Commensurately, large ungulate populations now support a large and robust contingent of medium and large carnivores including wolverines, bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, black bears and grizzly bears. In addition to these successes, the Department is currently partnering with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Wyoming Game and Fish, University of Wyoming, The Nature Conservancy, and others on a variety of GPS-collaring studies to investigate the survival, movements and migration patterns of bighorn sheep, mule deer, elk, wolves, and grizzly bears located on Wind River. Information from these studies will further knowledge that leads to continued sustainability of fish and wildlife on Wind River for Tribal and non-tribal members alike.

Lower Brule Sioux Tribe

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of South Dakota has a long track record of restoring native species to its Tribal lands. Perhaps the most notable effort has been the restoration of black-footed ferrets. Ferrets were first released in 2006 and a population was quickly established. Since becoming involved in ferret recovery, the Tribe has been a leader in several aspects of ferret recovery. The Tribe was the first to request and receive a scientific recovery permit for the reintroduction of ferrets, which has since been used by other Tribal, federal, and private land sites. The Tribe is an active member of the Black-footed Ferret Recovery Implementation Team and the Black-footed Ferret Friends Group. The Tribe has drafted and implemented a management plan for black-footed ferrets and designated ferrets as a priority species in the Tribe’s multi-year Wildlife Conservation Plan for its Tribal lands. When plague outbreaks created serious challenges to the Tribe’s ferret recovery program, the Tribe stepped up and became the only Tribal partner in a study that occurred across 7 western states that tested an experimental plague vaccine that one day might prevent plague outbreaks from occurring.



Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC)



Western Washington's 20 treaty Tribes actively manage wildlife to protect, conserve, and restore many of the Pacific Northwest's most iconic species. The NWIFC tribes' management efforts include a wide array of activities, including protecting ESA-listed species through habitat restoration, ensuring science-based conservation of important biological and cultural resources, and conducting research to better inform wildlife management. **Examples include:**

- In partnership with Washington State, Tribes returned the Nooksack elk herd to a sustainable population through a large-scale elk translocation project. The partners relocated elk from Mount Saint Helens to augment the 300 remaining elk residing in the

Nooksack elk management area, and the population has since rebounded to 1,500.

- Tribes are also establishing baseline ecological information of the elk herds in the Indian and Elwha valleys prior to removal of two fish-blocking dams on the Elwha River from 2011-14. The work contributed to a long-term monitoring program to detect changes in herd composition and population sizes following dam removal.
- On the Olympia Peninsula, Tribes are collecting data to provide a detailed understanding of cougar and bobcat populations. Data on habitat use patterns, home range size, relative abundance, productivity, prey selection and survival rates of both species were collected to assist in a tribal re-colonization effort.
- Work is underway to restore, enhance and protect in perpetuity 60 acres of floodplain habitat along the south fork of the Stillaguamish River. The effort is part of a 10-year conservation management project to ensure long-term protection of severely depressed chinook stocks. The project will also provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife species and serve as a tool to teach tribal members about nature and cultural history.



Red Lake Band of Chippewa

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa, located in north-central Minnesota, governs most of Red Lake, its namesake. Walleye fishing in the lake is at the heart of the Band's heritage and economy. When the lake's walleye population collapsed, the Band took swift action. In 1997, the Band decided to stop fishing in its part of the lake. That was not enough. In 1999, the Band partnered with the state of Minnesota to ban all fishing on Red Lake. The Band then worked with the state, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the University of Minnesota to implement a recovery plan. The walleye rebounded in only seven years – way ahead of schedule.



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