

We invite you to review this information, use it, and let us know how it can be improved. Critical review will not only enhance the assessment. It will also help to ensure that this remarkable region remains healthy, biologically diverse, and a wonderful place to live for generations to come.

The making of the assessment

An ecoregion is a large geographic area that shares similar climate, geologic history, landforms, and native species. Increasingly, conservation biologists, policymakers, and planners are viewing their work in the context of ecoregions, since they provide an analytical framework based not on jurisdictional boundaries but on the geography of landscape and biology.

The Willamette Valley–Puget Trough–Georgia Basin Ecoregional Assessment was undertaken by five science teams, which focused on the plants, animals, and ecological systems of the terrestrial, nearshore marine, and freshwater environments. Each team selected conservation targets—the species, communities, and ecological systems that characterize the biological diversity of the ecoregion and, in some instances, act as proxies for species and/or systems we know little about. The teams identified 833 targets, gathered all known records of their location and status, then set goals for each target that considered its abundance and distribution within the ecoregion.

Team members analyzed this information, along with current land uses, existing protected areas, land ownership, and other factors. Equipped with that analysis and with help from additional experts, the five teams crafted a portfolio of 372 priority conservation



photo credits: cover: Maury Island; Peter Murray; Fender's blue, Alan D. St. John; lowland forest, Keith Lazelle; Oregon spotted frog, William Leonard; Willow Creek Reserve, Chns Carvalho/Lensjoy.com; seal pup and marine photos, Keith Lazelle; Inside, Western pond turtle, Kate Slavens; Columbian white-tailed deer, Keith Lazelle; harlequin ducks, Charlie Ott; oak woodlands, Catherine Macdonald/TNC; and Louisa with fescue, Peter Dunwiddie/TNC.

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This assessment provides conservation agencies, planners, and organizations with an important opportunity. Despite enormous population pressures, our region's broad lowland valley and inland seas continue to harbor a vast array of native plants and animals—heralded species like the bald eagle, once-abundant fish like the Pacific herring, and rare animals like the Columbian white-tailed deer. Ensuring that they not only survive but also thrive will take thoughtful planning, careful conservation decisions, collaboration, and wise allocation of our resources. We hope this assessment will be helpful in informing or supporting your organization's current and future actions. We also hope you will let us know how we can make this tool even more useful and meaningful. In so doing, we will strengthen the collaborative partnerships needed for the long-term conservation of this region's natural beauty and wonder.

An opportunity to build partnerships and conserve biodiversity



Conserving the diversity of life:

The Willamette Valley–Puget Trough–Georgia Basin Ecoregional Assessment

A long and narrow lowland extends from Discovery Passage in British Columbia's Strait of Georgia to the verdant valleys of Western Oregon, a geological ribbon flanked by the rugged Cascade Mountains to the east and the coastal mountain ranges to the west. It is a place of temperate climates and gentle topography, taking in British Columbia's Georgia Basin, Washington's Puget Trough, and Oregon's Willamette Valley.

It is also a region of great biological diversity. Found here are hundreds of miles of coastline, expansive lowland forests, oak savannas, broad rivers, and thousands of streams, lakes, and ponds. This is the most populous area of the Pacific Northwest, much loved by the millions of people who work, farm, recreate, and raise their families here. That growth, however, comes at a cost. Though still a place of beauty, the ecoregion is witnessing a steady decline in the many plants, animals, and ecosystems that make it special and unique.

How do we make sound conservation decisions about a region that is, at once, vibrant and at risk? How do land-management agencies, planners, conservation organizations, and others decide where to direct their limited resources? The Willamette Valley–Puget Trough–Georgia Basin Ecoregional Assessment provides an important tool to help answer these questions. Crafted by a broad-based group of conservation scientists and other experts using the best available information, the assessment describes the most important places for conserving native species and ecosystems in this fast-growing region of the Pacific Northwest. The assessment results and supporting data products are new resources for landowners, planners, agencies, land trusts, and others working to protect the region's native plants, animals, and ecosystems.

At the same time, this report is a first approximation and a work in progress. It is the most comprehensive conservation analysis of this lowland valley and inland sea, the first that integrates terrestrial, nearshore marine, and, to a lesser extent, freshwater biodiversity needs. It is also incomplete, due to gaps in information about the region's natural habitats and species, particularly in the marine and freshwater environments.





areas—prairies, forests, river corridors, wetlands, nearshore marine waters, and more as well as 39 shoreline segments. Collectively, these areas represent some of the last places where one or more of the target species occur, some of the last large expanses of relatively intact natural habitat, and the most promising sites for successful conservation. They also represent “conservation efficiency” the least number of places necessary in the ecoregion to capture the greatest amount of the region’s biological diversity.

As a supplemental tool to existing resources, the assessment can help conservation practitioners, planners, and landowners set priorities and measure conservation progress over time. This assessment has no regulatory authority. Nor are the conservation areas designed to become parks or nature preserves set aside from economic activity. While some areas may warrant such protection, many others will accommodate multiple uses as determined by landowners, local communities, and appropriate agencies.

Partners in this assessment

Partners in this project include The Nature Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center, the Washington Department of Natural Resources (Nearshore Habitat and Natural Heritage programs), and the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre. Many additional scientists and conservation practitioners also supported this project by providing information and/or offering expert review.

What will you find in the assessment and data products? Here are some examples:

The portfolio represents areas of biodiversity significance.

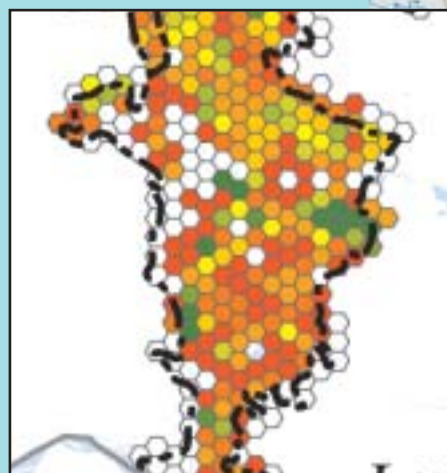
The assessment displays these areas in detail throughout the ecoregion.



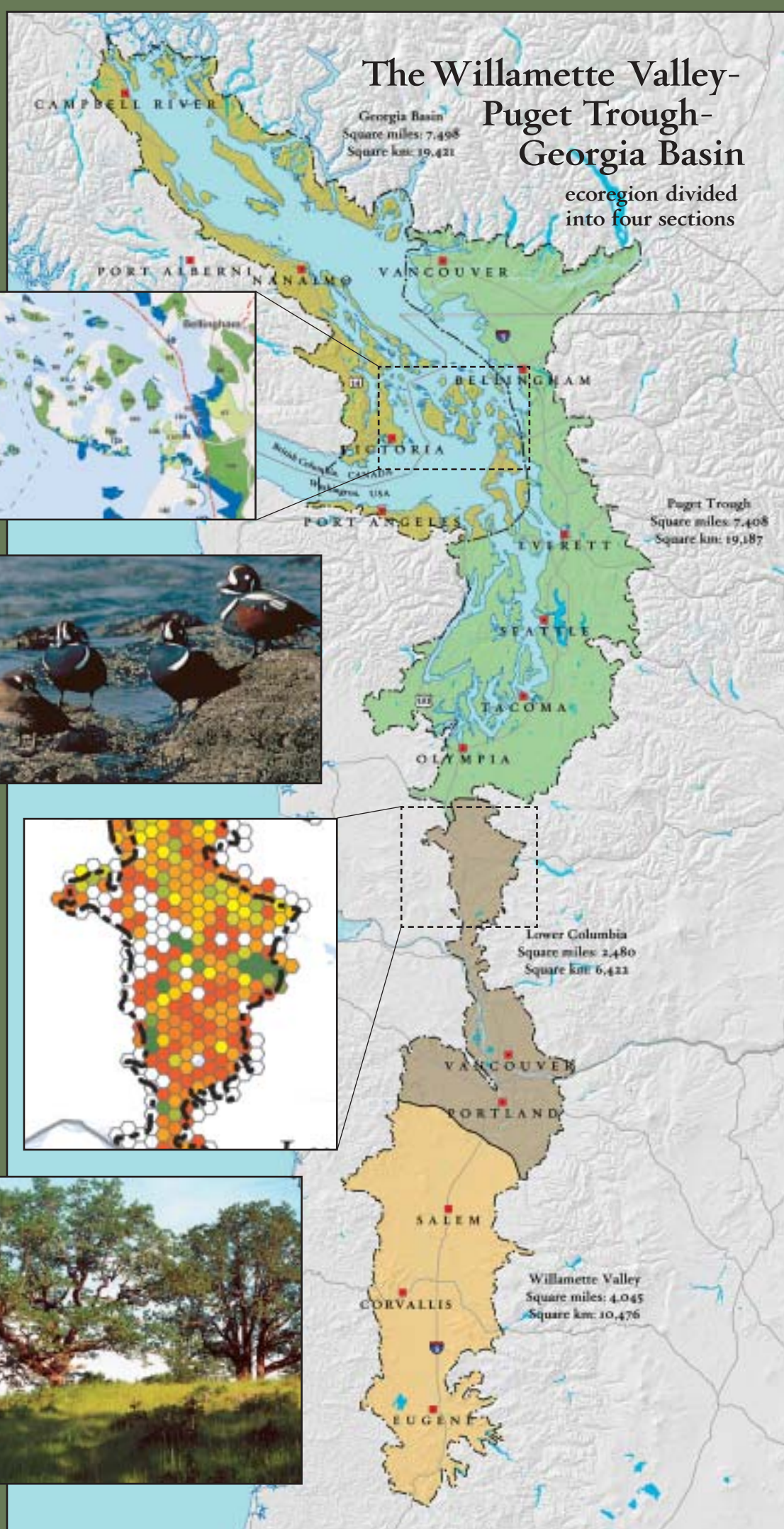
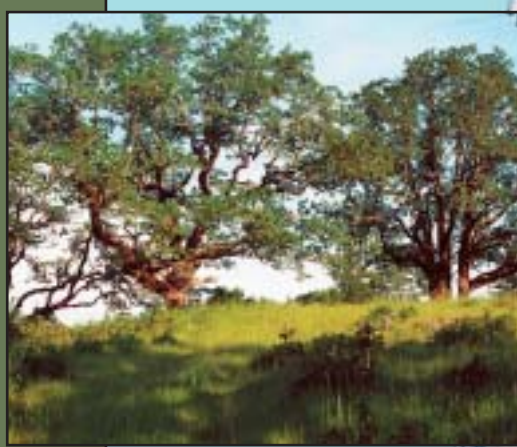
Populations of species are a key part of the analysis and were one of the important factors in identifying priority conservation areas.



One element of the assessment is an analysis using identically sized hexagons, each of which contains information about biological attributes, current condition, and human impacts. This allows the user to compare relative value and suitability for conservation at various sites within the ecoregion.



Habitats or natural systems are another key part of the analysis and were also critical to the identification of priority conservation areas.



Available on the CD:

The Full Report: Text, tables, figures, and much more.

Appendices: Supporting information from the ecoregional assessment describing terminology, references, and other background information, as well as characteristics of the ecoregion, conservation targets, and the areas of biological significance.

Maps: More than 30 maps of the ecoregion, including political boundaries, natural systems, biological occurrences, the portfolio, marine and freshwater analyses, and more.

Conservation Planning Tool Database: An interactive database where users can browse ecoregional and biological information, such as lists of priority conservation areas and conservation targets.

ArcReader Mapping Tool: An interactive mapping product that allows users to zoom in and obtain detailed information, such as the area of sites, land cover, proximity of conservation areas to roads and rivers, and much more.