



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY



Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE

Contact:

Danny Palmerlee, Western Rivers Conservancy, 503-241-0151, dpalmerlee@westernrivers.org

Nicole Jordan, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 509-906-6837, Nicole.Jordan@dfw.wa.gov

Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat and Columbia River Frontage Conserved with Expansion of Big Bend Wildlife Area

Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed the 2,135-acre Big Bend Ranch to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for inclusion within the Big Bend Wildlife Area.



The ranch includes over 1.5 miles of the Columbia River and expansive sagebrush habitat.

Photo Credit: Tyler Roemer/Western Rivers Conservancy

DOUGLAS COUNTY, Washington (November 19, 2025) — Delivering a boost for wildlife, recreationists and public lands, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) conveyed Big Bend Ranch, a 2,135-acre property featuring 1.5 miles of Columbia River frontage, to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) for permanent inclusion within the Big Bend Wildlife Area. The project conserves excellent habitat for one of Washington's most imperiled species—Columbian sharp-tailed grouse—while opening new recreation opportunities for the public.

“There are very few unbroken expanses of public land like this along the Upper Columbia, where you can look out over the river and be surrounded by a sea of sagebrush,” said Jessica Inwood, Washington state project manager for WRC. “Conserving these places is critical for upland game birds and other wildlife, and it gives people more opportunity to experience what remains of the Columbia Plateau’s sagebrush-steppe. We’re incredibly proud of what we were able to accomplish in partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.”

Located 14 miles northwest of Grand Coulee on the south shore of the Columbia River, Big Bend Ranch is defined by its rugged basalt cliffs, rolling hills and low buttes. The stretch of the Columbia that flows through the property is called Rufus Woods Lake. This 51-mile “lake” is formed by Chief Joseph Dam at the downstream end and by Grand Coulee Dam upstream.

Despite the dams, and despite being called a lake, this stretch of the Columbia River retains moving current and still provides habitat for a number of resident fish, including kokanee and rainbow trout. Above Chief Joseph Dam, the Colville Tribes are leading efforts to reintroduce anadromous fish, making conservation efforts along this stretch of the river timely.

With its large swaths of sagebrush-steppe, Big Bend Ranch provides essential habitat for grouse, including Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, one of Washington’s most at-risk species. In addition, the ranch includes ponderosa pines, scattered seasonal wildflowers and a wetland formed by a natural spring, which creates a rare haven for neotropical birds in this arid region.

“Partnerships like this are instrumental in supporting the Department’s mission to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish, wildlife, and ecosystems,” said Brock Hoenes, WDFW north central region director. “By bringing Big Bend Ranch into public ownership, we’re not only protecting critical habitat, but also opening the area for a variety of recreational opportunities for the public to experience in this unique landscape.”

For people throughout Washington and the Pacific Northwest, this project will provide new opportunities to hunt, view wildlife, horseback ride, hike and mountain bike on a beautiful stretch of the Columbia.

WRC purchased Big Bend Ranch in January 2024 and completed transfer of the property to WDFW yesterday afternoon. With this conveyance complete, the Big Bend Wildlife Area now encompasses roughly 24,000 acres of protected wildlife habitat and public lands along and adjacent to the Columbia River.

This project was made possible through pivotal support from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation and through the generosity of individual supporters.

About Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy’s motto is “Sometimes to save a river, you have to buy it.” WRC purchases land along the West’s finest rivers and streams to conserve habitat for fish and wildlife, protect key sources of cold water and create public access for all to enjoy. WRC has created sanctuaries for fish and wildlife and secured recreational access along 260 rivers and streams around the West. Its approach to river conservation is effective, tangible and permanent. More information can be found at westernrivers.org.

About Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife works to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.