

May 26, 2026

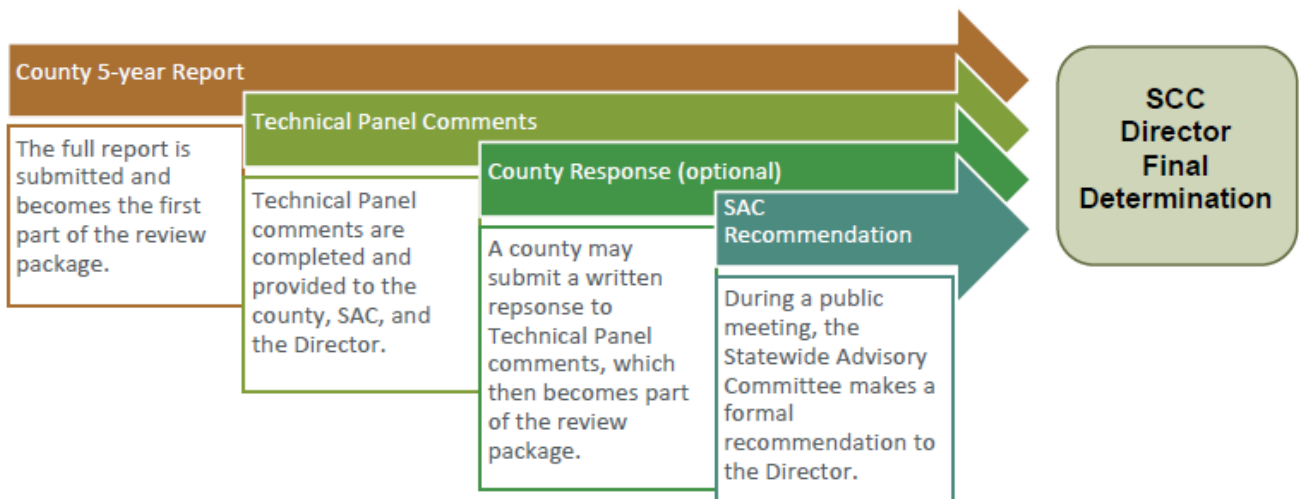
Summary of Technical Panel Reviews for the Second 5-Year Report of Walla Walla County

Purpose & Background

This document provides a summary of the evaluations made by the Technical Panel (TP) during its review of the county's second 5-year report (commonly referred to as the "10-year report"). The TP agencies completed their evaluations in a new Reviewer Tool that was developed in conjunction with the new Reporting Template used by counties to submit their 10-year reports. The Reviewer Tool organizes TP comments into two sections: Final Review Summaries which summarizes the overall findings by each agency and a second, Individual Reviewer Comments, that lists all individual comments made by any agency on each line item of the report submitted. Summary bar charts of these two sections are also generated by the Reviewer Tool to provide visual aid summaries.

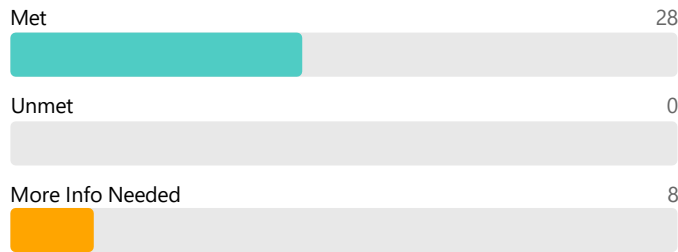
Walla Walla County was required to submit its second 5-year report to the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) on March 7, 2026. The county fulfilled this obligation, and the TP review occurred between March 7, 2026, and May 19, 2026. **The county has until June 16, 2026, to submit a written County Response**, in accordance with the guidance provided in the "County Response Period and Protocol for 5-year Report Reviews," issued to counties on October 22, 2025. The county's full report will be combined with this document, any formal County Response, and the final Statewide Advisory Committee recommendations to create a final review package provided to the SCC Director for final determination of the county's status within the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

Figure 1. Workflow chart showing the components of each county's final review package that will be provided to the SCC Director to make the final determination of each county's VSP status following each five-year report. (This document is the second step in developing the final review package, indicated by the olive-green arrow titled Technical Panel Comments.)

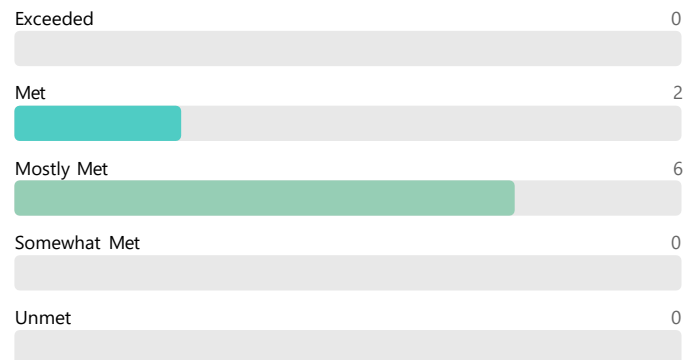




Individual Determination Counts



Final Summary Determination Counts



Final Review Summaries

Agency: DFW || Reviewer Name: Tom O'Brien and Sean Williams

Comments entered before of after review of other comments: After

Protection Overall Agency Determination: Met

Protection Final Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Walla Walla County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) 5-year report. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is dedicated to preserving, protecting, and perpetuating the state's fish, wildlife, and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities. WDFW's review was completed in partnership with Regional Habitat Program staff and focused primarily on evaluating outcomes for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCA's).

Goals and Benchmarks:

WDFW agrees Walla Walla County (County) met their VSP protection goals and benchmarks for FWHCA's. The benchmarks are tied to specific implementation, monitoring, and outreach efforts and the report demonstrates those metrics were met. WDFW appreciates the County's targeted and well-rounded approach to critical area protection. It's clear the County is working on projects that directly benefit FWHCA's. WDFW's justification for this recommendation is outlined below.

Implementation Data:

The County did an excellent job documenting their implementation efforts. The report included baseline data, watershed trends, and metrics for individual conservation practices. In addition, the report offered a clear explanation of how conservation practices contribute to critical area protection. WDFW is pleased to see the County is collaborating with local partners to implement projects that are aligned with local plans and priorities.

The County's implementation data demonstrates measurable progress for improving conditions for FWHCA's. In the last five years, over 164 acres of riparian plantings, 8 fish screens, 6 fish passage barrier replacements, 8 instream restoration projects, and 333 acres of conservation easements were implemented on agricultural land. Combined, these efforts enhanced 8 miles of stream habitat and created 201 in-stream structures. WDFW appreciates the County and the Walla Walla Conservation District for their ongoing efforts to improve conditions for riparian and aquatic habitat. To optimize FWHCA's functions and values, WDFW encourages the County to focus future efforts on expanding connectivity between restoration sites.

In future reports, the County should consider including data from previous reporting periods to show how implementation efforts have increased from the 2011 baseline or start of the Work Plan. This data will help tell the story for what VSP has been able to achieve as well as help reviewers understand how critical area loss has been offset. The County should also consider incorporating case studies and photos to highlight a few noteworthy projects.

Monitoring Data:

The County did an excellent job documenting their monitoring efforts. WDFW appreciates the County's honest evaluation of their program and transparency about where more information is needed.

To monitor riparian habitat, the County assessed changes in enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) alongside land cover shifts using GIS analysis. The findings indicate that CREP enrollment declined from 3,100 to 2,500 acres between 2016 and 2023. However, the GIS analysis revealed a total riparian acreage loss of about 245 acres, implying that despite the reduction in CREP enrollment, many riparian areas have remained intact. The report noted that most of the losses detected by GIS resulted from natural disturbances rather than agricultural activity.

The County's implementation data includes over 164 acres of riparian plantings, which suggests that some of the riparian loss was offset. Ideally, WDFW would like to see the County fully offset riparian loss by planting or restoring riparian vegetation. However, WDFW recognizes that complimentary efforts like exclusion fencing, fish passage improvements, and instream restoration projects also improve wildlife habitat, and the data shows strong investments in these areas. The 245-acre loss remains below the Work Plans approved 10% adaptive management threshold.

WDFW's evaluation of the County's report could be improved by knowing how many acres of riparian loss were due to natural versus anthropogenic changes and how many acres of riparian planting projects have been implemented since 2016. This information will help WDFW better understand how the program is offsetting loss dating back to the onset of the Work Plan. Despite these uncertainties, WDFW Regional Staff feel that riparian conditions in the County are stable, and the County is doing good work to protect this important resource.

To monitor fish passage, the County audited fish screens to ensure protective measures remain in place to minimize impacts from irrigation withdrawals. The data suggests that over 80% of fish screens on agricultural land are functioning as designed, which is within the Work Plans adaptive management threshold. Fish screens have a lifespan, so it is expected that screens will require maintenance and replacement. WDFW appreciates that the County is using VSP to proactively monitor and address non-functioning screens.

To further strengthen their VSP monitoring program, the County should consider incorporating field assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to consider collaborating with neighboring districts to align monitoring protocols, parameters, and techniques, which would support consistent data interpretation across southeast Washington.

Finally, WDFW hopes to collaborate with the County to consider alternatives to the Work Plan's adaptive management threshold for riparian areas, as the level of loss allowed under this threshold may not lead to critical area protection.

Enhancement Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Enhancement Final Comments:

The County stated three enhancement benchmarks were met, while two require more data to understand what progress has been made. WDFW largely agrees with the County's assertion.

WDFW appreciates the work being done to evaluate fish passage barrier assessments. Over the last five years, the County removed 6 known barriers and helped WDFW survey 72 unknown barriers. While the exact number of remaining barriers in the County is unknown, the completed work shows positive strides toward enhancement. WDFW encourages the County to continue collaborating with local partners to assess barriers.

Overall, WDFW is encouraged by the ongoing work and collaboration occurring to improve conditions for fish and wildlife. Opportunities exist to further improve conditions for upland wildlife and habitat. Not all Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields provide the same level of habitat quality, so it would be valuable if the County and Conservation District sought opportunities to enhance habitat conditions on existing CRP fields. Conducting habitat assessments may also improve our understanding of how CRP fields and other agricultural lands provide habitat for species like mule deer and ferruginous hawks. Improving habitat for primary and secondary prey species, reducing rodenticide application, protecting shrubsteppe habitat on field borders, and educating landowners can also improve conditions for fish and wildlife.

Great work!

Agency: E CY || Reviewer Name: Tereas Opolka

Comments entered before of after review of other comments: After

Protection Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Protection Final Comments:

Ecology has reviewed the Walla Walla County report and appreciates the County's efforts to implement practices that protect and enhance critical areas as part of the Voluntary Stewardship Program. Ecology's vision is that our partnerships protect and sustain healthy land, air, water and climate in harmony with a strong economy as we protect, preserve and enhance Washington's environment for current and future generations. Our comments focus on the goals and benchmarks that relate to wetlands and wetland functions.

Walla Walla County's report was well organized and clearly presented their goals and benchmarks as part of the VSP program. The County has presented how they have implemented best management practices to protect and enhance critical areas, exceeding

many of the targeted acreages for these practices. The report noted that much of the land in the County is susceptible to wind and water erosion and that the County has implemented extensive best management practices over thousands of acres that address these issues. These practices specifically are expected to protect and enhance the water quality and hydrologic functions of wetlands.

As with many counties, Walla Walla County has had challenges accurately determining how the 2011 baseline for critical area losses should be identified. This foundational issue directly relates to how the County can demonstrate if wetlands have been protected. To address this challenge, the County has developed two methods for auditing the presence of wetlands in their County that differ based on watershed. For one of the watersheds the auditing method is to request landowner approval for site access and then directly documenting wetland conditions. The method for the other watershed relies on interpreting aerial photographs due to the predominance of corporate ownership and the inability to obtain direct access. Both methods relied on review and expertise by someone with wetland experience. Ecology concurs that these two methods are reasonable approaches given the difference in accessibility. We appreciate the effort to gather data to determine the accuracy of NWI mapping, which the county has determined has low accuracy in these watersheds. It did not reveal obvious wetland loss in Walla Walla County based on the audit, but that the NWI mapping was not reliable which is not an unexpected result.

For both the wetland protection and enhancement goals, Ecology concluded that more information was needed due to the baseline mapping challenges. However, we do think the county has implemented practices that are protecting and enhancing wetlands. At this point in the development of the monitoring program, it is difficult for the available data to conclusively demonstrate this. We anticipate that future audits and reporting will provide additional data on wetland protection. The polygons that have been/will be verified in the auditing process to be wetland, combined with wetland areas identified through new projects would be a reasonable baseline to compare future results with, assuming aerial photographs from 2011 do not contradict the results of the audit.

Ecology supports removing the adaptive management language that allows for up to a 10% loss of wetlands. Protection of wetlands should be the goal, and that is not compatible with acknowledging and accepting high rates of loss, especially in watersheds with minimal wetland acreage.

Enhancement Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Enhancement Final Comments:

As noted in the report, wetlands often overlap riparian areas and it is likely that wetlands have been enhanced through the substantial enhancement and protection of riparian areas. The County reported on over 120 acres of riparian enhancement as well as the establishment of over 100 acres of conservation easements. Future reports might benefit from documenting, if possible, any known overlap of riparian areas and wetlands.

Agency: AGR || Reviewer Name:

Comments entered before or after review of other comments: After

Protection Overall Agency Determination: Met

Protection Final Comments:

Protection: Met

Enhancement: Mostly Met

The Walla Walla County 5-year Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) report was reviewed by Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) staff to assess how the County is meeting their VSP goals and benchmarks. WSDA works in partnership with counties, conservation districts, and agricultural producers to protect critical areas while maintaining the long-term viability of agriculture. WSDA has focused comments on outreach, implementation, and monitoring related to protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks of critical area functions and values.

WSDA agrees with Walla Walla County's assertion that they met protection and mostly meet their enhancement goals and benchmarks.

BMPs

Walla Walla County provided many detailed supplemental reports that clearly described the critical area, goal, benchmark, baseline, along with their strategy for meeting the benchmark, the target metric, and the results. They included outreach, implementation, and monitoring.

The decision support table was informative, and documents targets and results clearly. The tables were clear and provided necessary information. This clarity made it easier to understand the work being done within the County, whether metrics are being met, and what gaps still need to be addressed.

In future reporting, WSDA would also like to see an overall BMP implementation summary table for a snapshot understanding of conservation within the County.

Monitoring

Walla Walla County provided a variety of monitoring results and metrics. Many of the audits were simple ways to validate effectiveness and maintenance of BMP implementation such as fish screens. These types of audits add credence to implementation

values, and how they are maintained over time.

Overall, data provided was easy to read and methods were well described. However, it was sometimes unclear how the monitoring data directly supports the conclusion that critical area functions and values are being protected or enhanced.

WSDA would have liked to see groundwater monitoring of nutrients and pesticides within the Walla Walla basin reported, as it is a clear example of monitoring within the watershed that is directly correlated with agriculture.

As monitoring capacity continues to evolve, WSDA encourages Walla Walla County to consider additional or refined monitoring to better support their conclusion that critical areas are being protected and enhanced at a watershed scale.

Education and Outreach

Education and outreach are critical components of VSP to ensure engagement with the agricultural community through field days, presentations, tabling events, and media.

Walla Walla County provided detailed information on their outreach events including events, type, participants, and relationships to critical areas. WSDA appreciates the thorough reporting on their education and outreach activities, as well as the connection to critical areas. It is clear from the data that Walla Walla County is engaging with their community, producers, and landowners about protecting critical area functions and values.

Additionally, WSDA appreciates the reported connection between outreach and in-field activities, such as how many producers received TA or project implementation.

Overall Comments

Overall, WSDA agrees that Walla Walla County has met their protection and mostly met their enhancement goals and benchmarks of their workplan.

The report and supplemental materials were detailed without unnecessary filler. It was easy to understand the work that has been done in Walla Walla County and see how the workplan has changed over time.

WSDA has enjoyed working with Walla Walla County and appreciates their engagement at a statewide level. WSDA encourages Walla Walla County to continue to adapt their workplan to better align their goals and benchmarks with critical area functions and values.

Enhancement Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Enhancement Final Comments:

Agency: SCC || Reviewer Name: Levi Keesecker & Victoria Fischella

Comments entered before or after review of other comments: After

Protection Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Protection Final Comments:

The SCC Technical Panel finds that protection-oriented goals and benchmarks in Walla Walla County are mostly met, with several goals demonstrating strong performance where protection can be evaluated through direct, measurable indicators. Goals related to Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (flow meter functionality), vegetative cover retention, and irrigation efficiency in liquefaction-prone areas provide the most defensible evidence of protection, as these metrics are quantifiable, repeatable, and directly tied to on-the-ground conditions. In particular, the Vegetation Change Analysis indicates no statistically significant decline in vegetative cover across the county or within agricultural lands, suggesting that large-scale erosion risk within Geologically Hazardous Areas has not increased during the reporting period.

However, the Technical Panel notes that for several critical area types, particularly wetlands and floodplains, protection determinations are constrained by limitations in baseline conditions and monitoring resolution. Wetland protection is inferred from the absence of documented loss, yet the baseline extent (21.74 acres) lacks methodological clarity and current mapping accuracy is low (approximately 8–30%), limiting confidence in trend detection. Similarly, the floodplain protection benchmark cannot be evaluated due to the absence of a baseline inventory of restoration projects and the recent adoption of the goal.

More broadly, protection determinations are frequently supported by proxy indicators, such as BMP implementation and vegetation presence, rather than direct measurement of critical area functions and values (e.g., hydrology, habitat condition, or ecological processes). While these proxies suggest that widespread degradation is not occurring, they do not provide sufficient resolution to confirm protection at the site scale or for dynamic systems such as riparian corridors and wetlands. As such, the Technical Panel concludes that while there is no evidence of landscape-scale loss or degradation, the ability to verify protection of critical area functions and values remains limited in certain cases due to monitoring and baseline constraints.

Enhancement Overall Agency Determination: Mostly Met

Enhancement Final Comments:

The SCC Technical Panel finds that enhancement goals and benchmarks in Walla Walla County are mostly met, with strong evidence of ecological uplift in areas where implementation actions are clearly defined, measurable, and directly tied to resource outcomes. Notably, aquatic habitat restoration efforts have resulted in measurable improvements, including nearly 8 miles of stream habitat enhancement and the installation of over 200 instream structures, which are expected to increase habitat complexity, improve sediment dynamics, and support ESA-listed species. Similarly, CARA-related goals demonstrate substantial progress through

measurable increases in aquifer recharge, irrigation efficiency, and widespread adoption of nutrient and pest management practices across tens of thousands of acres annually.

Enhancement outcomes are also well-supported for ferruginous hawk habitat, where increased nest occupancy rates and installation of artificial nesting structures indicate improved reproductive capacity and habitat suitability. These examples reflect strong alignment between implementation actions and ecological outcomes.

However, enhancement performance is more variable in areas where outcomes are inferred rather than directly measured. Upland habitat goals show mixed results, with increases in mule deer habitat but localized declines in ferruginous hawk habitat in WRIA 32, partially considered offset by conservation easements and BMP implementation. Wetland enhancement remains difficult to evaluate due to unresolved baseline conditions and limited direct restoration activity, with only minor acreage currently planned for future implementation.

Additionally, several goals rely on outreach or knowledge-based metrics (e.g., mule deer habitat understanding, rangeland education), which, while valuable for program development, do not independently demonstrate enhancement of critical area functions and values.

Overall, the Technical Panel concludes that enhancement is occurring; however, the ability to consistently link implementation actions to measurable functional improvements across all critical area types remains limited by baseline uncertainty, monitoring constraints, and attribution challenges.

Final Review Summaries by Agency

The following tables and charts summarize the findings of the TP review. Each agency's evaluation of the second 5-year report is broken out by protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks.

WA State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)			
FINAL REVIEW SUMMARY			
	DETERMINATION	GOALS	BENCHMARKS
PROTECTION	MET	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0
ENHANCEMENT	MOSTLY MET	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0

WA State Department of Ecology (ECY)			
FINAL REVIEW SUMMARY			
	DETERMINATION	GOALS	BENCHMARKS
PROTECTION	MOSTLY MET	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1
ENHANCEMENT	MOSTLY MET	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1	Met = 0 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1

WA State Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW)			
FINAL REVIEW SUMMARY			
	DETERMINATION	GOALS	BENCHMARKS
PROTECTION	MET	Met = 2 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0	Met = 1 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 0
ENHANCEMENT	MOSTLY MET	Met = 5 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1	Met = 5 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1

WA State Conservation Commission (SCC)			
FINAL REVIEW SUMMARY			
	DETERMINATION	GOALS	BENCHMARKS
PROTECTION	MOSTLY MET	Met = 5 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1	Met = 6 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1
ENHANCEMENT	MOSTLY MET	Met = 8 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1	Met = 7 Unmet = 0 Need More Information = 1

Figure 2. All TP agencies' combined individual determinations for Protection and Enhancement goals and benchmarks addressed in the county's report.

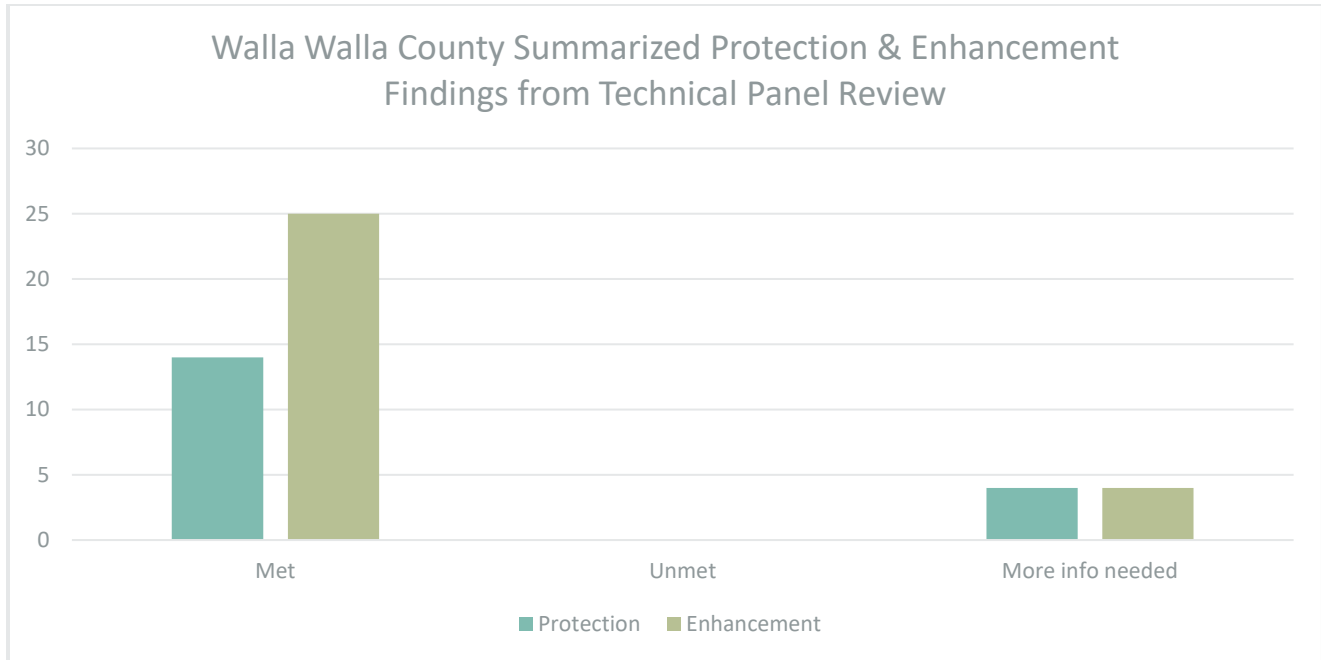


Figure 3. Each of the four TP agencies' total individual determinations for Protection goals and benchmarks.

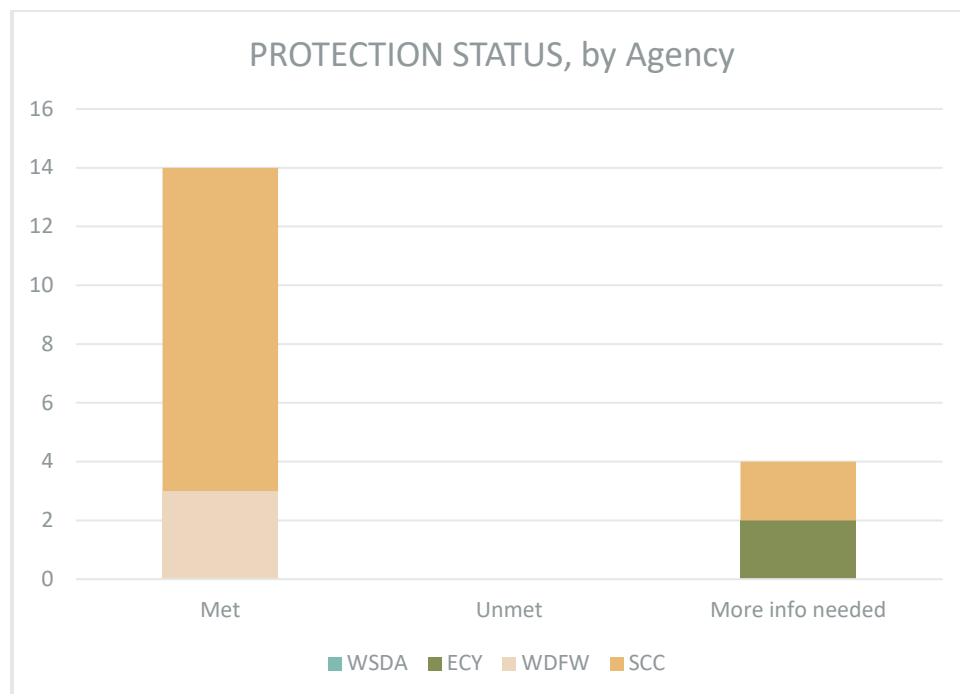
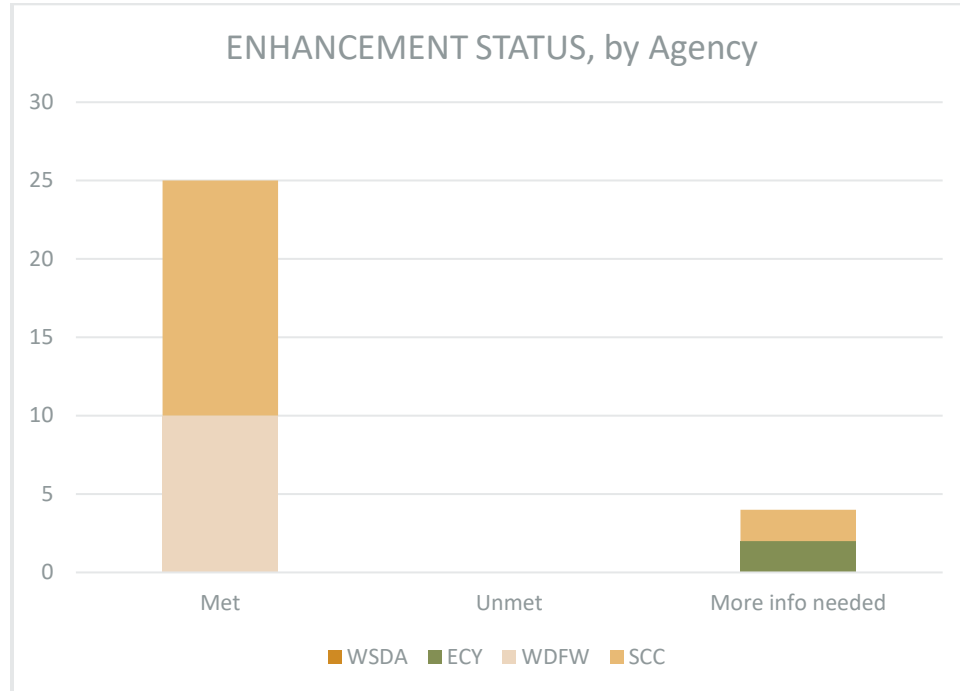


Figure 4. Each of the four TP agencies' total individual determinations for Enhancement goals and benchmarks.



5-Year Report Individual Reviewer Comments

The TP agencies reviewed the county's report by evaluating the individual goals and benchmarks for protection and enhancement of critical areas, and for agricultural viability, and outreach and participation for some counties.

The following pages document the individual assessments for the component parts of the complete second 5-year report from each TP agency. Some assessments may include additional comments from the TP agencies. Careful review of the individual assessments may provide more perspective to develop a County Response to the TP Comments or facilitate other programmatic improvements following this reporting cycle.

This document has been provided to the county, the Statewide Advisory Committee, the Technical Panel, and the SCC Director in advance of the county's scheduled meeting with the Statewide Advisory Committee.

Individual Reviewer Comments

1. County Basic Information -- | | Regulatory Backstop Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

1. County Basic Information -- | | Protection Goals Not Met Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

1. County Basic Information -- | | Enhancement Goals Not Met Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

1. County Basic Information -- | | Regulatory Backstop Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

1. County Basic Information -- | | Protection Goals Not Met Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

1. County Basic Information -- | | Enhancement Goals Not Met Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

1. County Basic Information -- | | Regulatory Backstop Comments

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

May be applicable in future reporting periods. From Report: "While no regulatory backstops are being used by Walla Walla County to protect critical areas, Walla Walla County is currently in the process of adopting its 2046 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and review of the Critical Area Ordinance. The most recent update was adopted in August 2019. In several sections, the consultants have noted that the list of activities exempt from the submission or approval of a critical area report includes more exemptions than other jurisdictions and may "deviate from no net loss policy goals". They suggest the removal of some exempt activities to "ensure exempted activities minimize impact to critical areas and align with no net loss principles". Some of these activities include agricultural practices such as the application of agricultural chemicals for new agricultural land uses. Other changes include refining Best Available Science (BAS) language and updating references to State agency guidance documents and resources."

-- SCC

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of agricultural industries and primary conservation practices

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of natural resource concerns and critical area protection and enhancement practices used in the watersheds

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using capital funding

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using operating funding

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- ECY

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of agricultural industries and primary conservation practices

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of natural resource concerns and critical area protection and enhancement practices used in the watersheds

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using capital funding

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using operating funding

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using operating funding

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of agricultural industries and primary conservation practices

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

2. Summary Overview -- | | Summary of natural resource concerns and critical area protection and enhancement practices used in the watersheds

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

2. Summary Overview -- | | VSP Cost-share using capital funding

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

3. Goals Results -- | | Maintain existing 2011 wildlife habitat

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

3. Goals Results -- | | Increase awareness of critical areas (benefits & hazards)

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Maintain existing 2011 wildlife habitat

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | No net loss of wetlands

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Increase flood event resilience

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Limit aquifer level decline related to agricultural use

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Reduce agricultural pollutants

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Protect critical areas from soil loss

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Reduce landslide potential on rangeland

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

3. Goals Results -- | | Increase awareness of Liquefaction potential

Workgroup Determination: Met
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

5. Critical Area Losses -- | |

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- EGY

5. Critical Area Losses -- | |

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- DFW

5. Critical Area Losses -- | |

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: More Information Needed

More Information Needed Walla Walla County did not report explicit critical area losses within the reporting template; however, the Technical Panel evaluated available monitoring methodologies to assess potential loss or degradation. The primary monitoring tool, the Vegetation Change Analysis,

utilizes Sentinel-2 multispectral imagery (10-meter resolution) with a Forest classifier applied across an 8-year dataset (2016–2023). Results indicate no statistically significant change in vegetative cover at the county or watershed scale, with observed variation consistently below the model error threshold (10%) and most annual changes under 1%. These findings suggest that, at a landscape scale, vegetative cover and by extension erosion susceptibility within Geologically Hazardous Areas has remained stable over the reporting period. Despite this, the Technical Panel emphasizes that the Vegetation Change Analysis is inherently limited in its ability to detect localized or functional changes. The spatial resolution and model optimization for county-wide classification reduces sensitivity to smaller, heterogeneous systems such as riparian corridors and wetlands, which comprise a small proportion of the landscape and require finer-scale monitoring. The County appropriately notes that results are best interpreted as indicators of trend direction rather than precise quantification, particularly in dynamic ecological systems. The Fish Passage Barrier Assessment further illustrates baseline limitations. While 21 culverts were assessed using WDFW Level A protocols, resulting in identification of 5 barriers, 2 non-barriers, and 14 unknowns, a substantial number of barriers remain unassessed; the Technical Panel acknowledges that unknown fish barriers is a national & statewide dataset problem. The presence of a large “unknown” inventory prevents establishment of a defensible baseline and limits the ability to determine whether a net increase in barriers has occurred. Importantly, increases in identified barriers may reflect improved detection rather than new impacts. Collectively, these monitoring approaches indicate that no widespread, landscape-scale critical area loss is evident; however, they do not provide sufficient resolution or completeness to rule out localized loss, functional degradation, or changes within specific critical area types. As such, the Technical Panel concludes that while no loss is detectable at the scale of analysis provided, a definitive determination regarding critical area loss attributable to agricultural activities cannot be made.

-- SCC

6. Critical Area Monitoring -- || The following monitoring approach is referred to as the Vegetation Change Analysis. This monitoring approach was used to monitor the critical areas “Geologically Hazardous Areas: Wind and Water Erosion,” and “Fish and Wildlife Habitat (in part)” by utilizing NAIP, aerial imagery, Sentinel-2 multispectral satellite imagery, and ground-truthing to measure change in vegetative land cover. Spatial analysis was performed with Sentinel-2 satellite imagery through a ‘random forest’ classifier algorithm. Mapping tasks were performed with NAIP, Aerial Imagery, and ground-truthing. Mapping tasks were also used in concert with spatial analysis tasks. Vegetative cover was classified on an annual timeline (2016-2023), where each year’s multispectral data was combined into a single spectral median, calculated from a collection of “late summer” images on roughly a 5 day return interval between August 15th and October 1st of each year. “Late summer” is a locally dry period which allows for clearer delineation of vegetative cover with less cloud cover interference. This particular approach is being used for the first time in the 2025 report, yet annual landcover maps were generated for a range of 8 years (2016 through 2023). Sentinel-2 multispectral data was available at a 10-meter spatial resolution at the county/watershed scale. Please refer to the attached Summary of Vegetation Change Analysis for details on the approach and results.

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

6. Critical Area Monitoring -- || The following monitoring approach is referred to as the Fish Passage Barrier Assessment. This monitoring approach is for the goal “enhance fish passage via barriers” for the Fish and Wildlife Habitat critical area. The monitoring strategy for this goal is to assess 10 “unknown” fish passage barriers in Walla Walla County every

two years. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has a Fish Passage Barrier database for the state of Washington. In 2023, the local lead entity in Walla Walla County, the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board (SRSRB), processed that data and prioritized barriers in the county based on waterway and steelhead use. However, there are many fish passage barriers mapped that lack data in the prioritization, including an assessment, to determine whether they are actually barriers or not. Staff randomly selected over 80 barriers mapped on the SRSRB Barrier Prioritization map that lacked data. WWCCD staff conducted several rounds of outreach, and in total were able to survey 21 culverts. For the assessment, WWCCD staff used WDFW's Level A protocol for fish passage barrier assessments for culverts. Information and methods for a Level A assessment can be found on the WDFW Fish Passage Barrier Prioritization webpage (WDFW, 2025) in the Fish Passage Inventory, Assessment, and Prioritization Manual (Barrett & Zweifel, 2019). After the assessments, WWCCD staff processed the data and submitted them to WDFW for barrier status determination. The data were uploaded to the WDFW Fish Passage Diversion, Screening, and Inventory database (FPDSI) and can be explored on the public WDFW Fish Passage Map. Please refer to the attached Fish Passage Barrier Assessments document for more details on the approach, results, and an example of the Level A Field Form.

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

7. Agricultural Viability -- | |

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

7. Agricultural Viability -- | |

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

8. Landowner Participation -- | | Approaches being used in landowner outreach and technical assistance.

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

8. Landowner Participation -- | | Approaches being used in landowner outreach and technical assistance.

Workgroup Determination:
Agency Determination: N/A

-- AGR

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect Riparian Habitat | No decrease in riparian buffers

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

Estimated impact to riparian buffers is 245 acres of riparian loss based on GIS analysis, which is below the Work Plans adaptive management threshold. Report states that most of this loss can be attributed to natural causes. County's implementation efforts between 2021-2025 include 164 acres of riparian plantings plus several instream habitat restoration projects. More data is needed to understand how many acres of riparian loss are due to ag activities, but preliminary data and local knowledge suggests that this loss was likely offset.

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect Fish Passage Via Diversions | No net increase in unscreened diversions

Workgroup Determination: Met

Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance fish passage via barriers | No net increase in fish barriers

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

WDFW agrees more data is needed on the unknown barriers present in the county. However, the data shows that the county and local partner have implemented several barrier correction projects which suggests that enhancement is occurring above 2011 VSP baseline. Reducing barriers improves fish access to habitat.

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance fish habitat | Increase in fish habitat or function

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance upland habitat in conservation areas | Increase conservation acres in mapped priority species' habitat

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: More Information Needed

County stated more data is needed to determine if implementation efforts offset slight decrease in CRP acres. WDFW agrees, however, the change in CRP acreage does not appear to be too significant. The report shows that upland habitat has improved in several areas through the county's implementation efforts and there been a significant amount of land permanently protected through conservation easements. More analysis of how the implementation data supports these species would be beneficial.

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance ferruginous hawk nest occupancy | maintain or increase ferruginous hawk nest occupancy

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance knowledge of mule deer habitat | increase knowledge of agricultural activity in mapped foothills mule deer habitat

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

Opportunities exist to improve our understanding of the quality of mule deer habitat in the foothills. WDFW is available to offer technical assistance.

-- DFW

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance wetlands | increase in wetland habitat or function

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- ECY

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect wetlands | no decrease in wetland acres since 2011

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- ECY

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance areas with landslide potential on rangeland | educate 3 landowners annually about pasture and rangeland management BMPs

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- | Enhance critical aquifer recharge areas | maintain existing aquifer recharge projects

Workgroup Determination:

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance critical aquifer recharge sites | maintain existing aquifer recharge projects

Workgroup Determination: Met

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance critical aquifer recharge areas | increase irrigation efficiency annually

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance water quality for critical aquifer recharge | reduce risk of agricultural pollutants

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect critical areas from soil loss | no decrease in vegetative cover on ag land

Workgroup Determination: Met

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect areas at risk of liquefaction | no net decrease in efficient irrigation practices in Liquefaction zones

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect critical aquifer recharge areas | no net decrease in functioning flow meters since 2011

Workgroup Determination: Met

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect flood event resilience | no removal of installed floodplain restoration projects

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance wetlands | increase in wetland habitat or function

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect wetlands | no decrease in wetland acres since 2011

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance knowledge of mule deer habitat | increase knowledge of agricultural activity in mapped foothills mule deer habitat

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Protection | Protect flood event resilience | no removal of installed floodplain restoration projects

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: More Information Needed

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance ferruginous hawk nest occupancy | maintain or increase ferruginous hawk nest occupancy

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance upland habitat in conservation areas | Increase conservation acres in mapped priority species' habitat

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance fish habitat | Increase in fish habitat or function

Workgroup Determination: Exceeded

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC

9. Adaptive Management -- Enhancement | Enhance fish passage via barriers | No net increase in fish barriers

Workgroup Determination: More data required

Agency Determination: Met

-- SCC