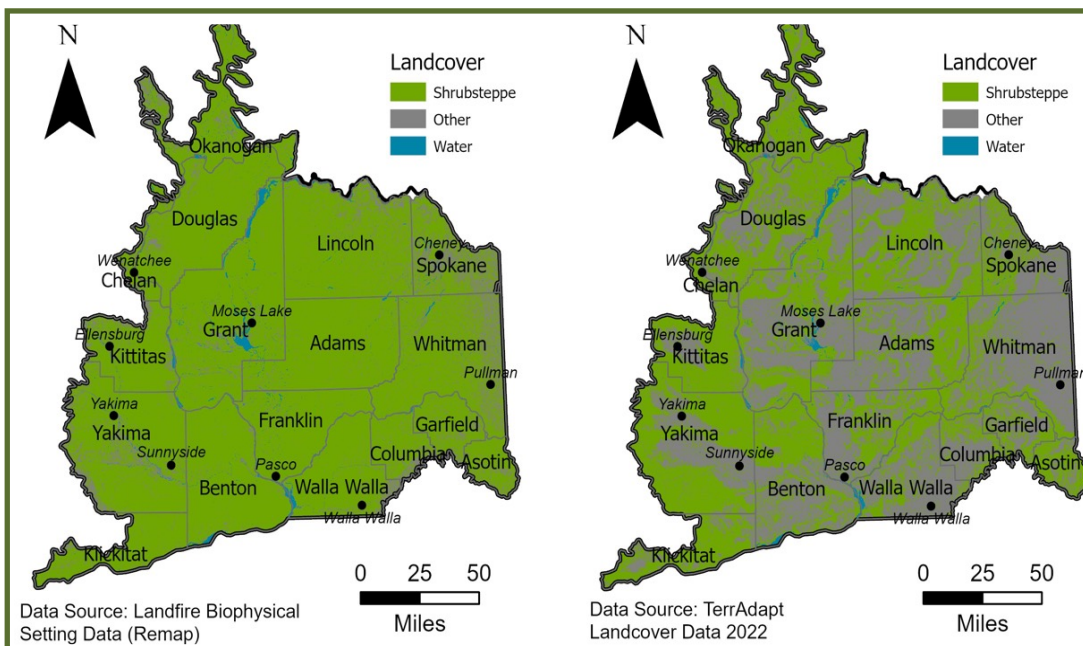


SHRUBSTEPPE HABITAT RECOVERY

Photo: Kara Karbowski, WRCD

Shrubsteppe and Wildfire

In 2020, a historic fire event resulted in over 500,000 acres of shrubsteppe habitat being burned. The extensive damage resulted in changes across the landscape, impacting vulnerable wildlife populations and local ranchers. Restoring such fragile habitat is no easy task, especially with non-native grasses ready to establish themselves immediately after a fire. But, the good news is shrubsteppe is adapted to fire, even dependent on it for successional reset. Therefore, restoration relies heavily on these successional pathways.



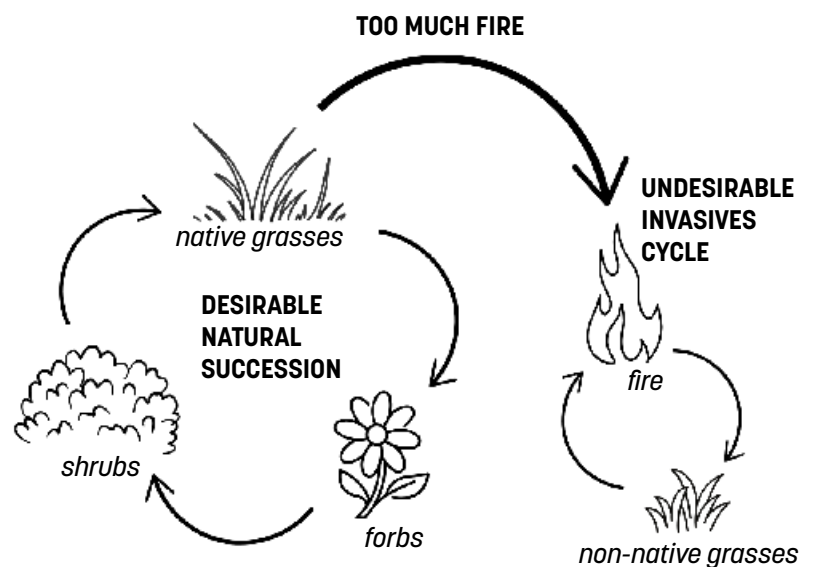
Once spanning over 10 million acres of Eastern Washington, somewhere between 60 to 80% of shrubsteppe habitat has been lost or degraded. See historic landcover (left) compared to current landcover (right).

Graphic: [WSRRI Strategic Plan](#) (WDFW, DNR, SCC)

Restoration

In many cases, shrubsteppe will recover on its own after a wildfire, and a wait and watch approach might be more appropriate. In areas of high quality shrubsteppe habitat, allowing natural regeneration to occur is often the best course of action.

Whereas, places where habitat has already started to decline may call for more intervention. When more hands-on restoration is required, it is important to mimic its natural cycles and disrupt any growth of invasive grasses, which can exacerbate damaging fire cycles.



SHRUBSTEPPE HABITAT RECOVERY



Tips and Tricks for Shrubsteppe Restoration

- If the site has been disturbed by fire control lines (e.g. dozer lines), there might still be native seed in the disturbed dirt. Pull berms back into place in addition to adding more native seed and controlling weeds to discourage the growth of non-native plants.
- Herbicide may be necessary to control non-native species.
- To mimic shrubsteppe's successional cycle, start by reseeding with native grasses and maybe a few forbs. Let those species establish themselves before adding any larger shrubs.
- Habitat will not re-establish overnight, this is a multi-year project. Your land might look different than you're used to for a while, but that's normal. Trying to skip ahead of the natural successional cycle will likely result in high mortality rates for your seedlings and plantings.
- **WSU Native Plant Specialty Nurseries and Seed Sources Directory** provides a list of vendors for native seed and plants.

In Washington, most remaining shrubsteppe is often found on privately owned lands, making private landowners key in the protection and restoration of this vulnerable and important ecosystem. If you are a private landowner and want assistance restoring shrubsteppe on your property, consider reaching out to:

1. [Your local Conservation District](#)
2. [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Regional Offices](#)
3. [The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Recovery Initiative](#)
4. [Natural Resources Conservation Service Offices](#)