

Ecoregions of Washington State

The Natural Heritage Program uses the concept of ecoregions to help identify conservation priorities within Washington. Although use of this concept has been increasingly adopted in Washington, not everyone engaged in conservation planning, or more broadly in land-use planning, is familiar with the concept and why we use ecoregions in our work. An overview of the concept is provided below.

What are ecoregions?

Ecoregions reflect broad ecological patterns occurring on the landscape. In general, each ecoregion has a distinctive composition and pattern of plant and animal species distribution. Abiotic factors, such as climate, landform, soil, and hydrology are important in the development of ecosystems, and thus help define ecoregions. Within an individual ecoregion, the ecological relationships between species and their physical environment are essentially similar.

Why use ecoregions?

Using ecoregions as a framework for assessing the distribution and status of species and ecosystems make biological sense, compared to using politically derived lines, such as county, state or national boundaries. Ecoregions also provide an ecological basis for partitioning the state into subunits for conservation planning purposes.

Where do the ecoregion boundaries come from?

The ecoregion boundaries adopted in this document are derived from boundaries developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2000). Minor modifications have been made to these boundaries in Washington by Natural Heritage Program scientists in consultation with conservation planning partners, primarily The Nature Conservancy and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The modifications result in a set of boundaries that better reflect local conditions, primarily because they have been drawn at a finer resolution and have taken into account on-the-ground knowledge regarding boundary placement.

How many ecoregions are there in Washington?

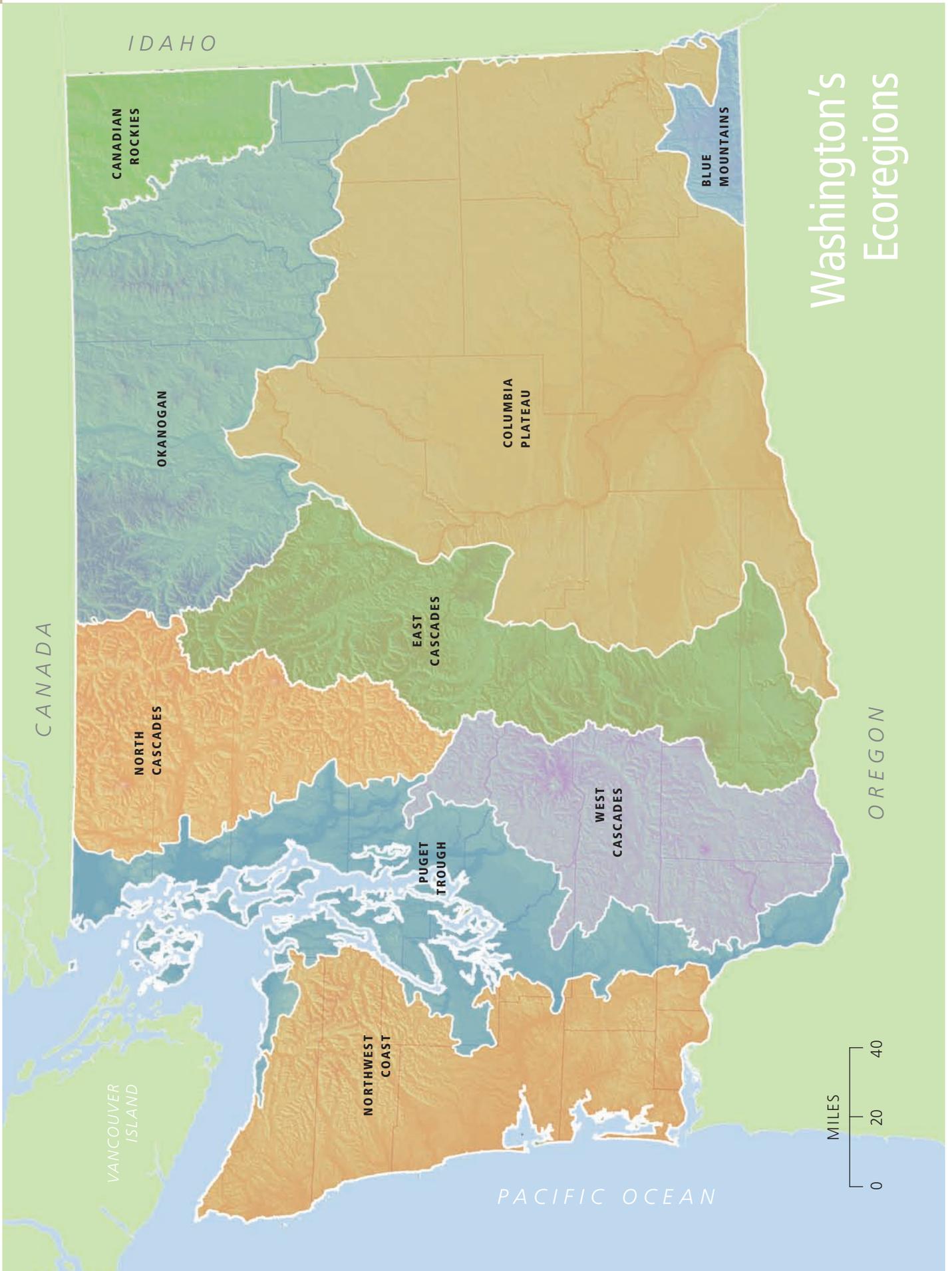
Portions of nine ecoregions occur within Washington's borders. (See map on facing page). Each ecoregion is described on the following pages. Descriptions include information on physiography, climate, biota, land ownership, biodiversity highlights, conservation needs, number of priority species and ecosystems, and a map showing the distribution of natural areas within the ecoregion.

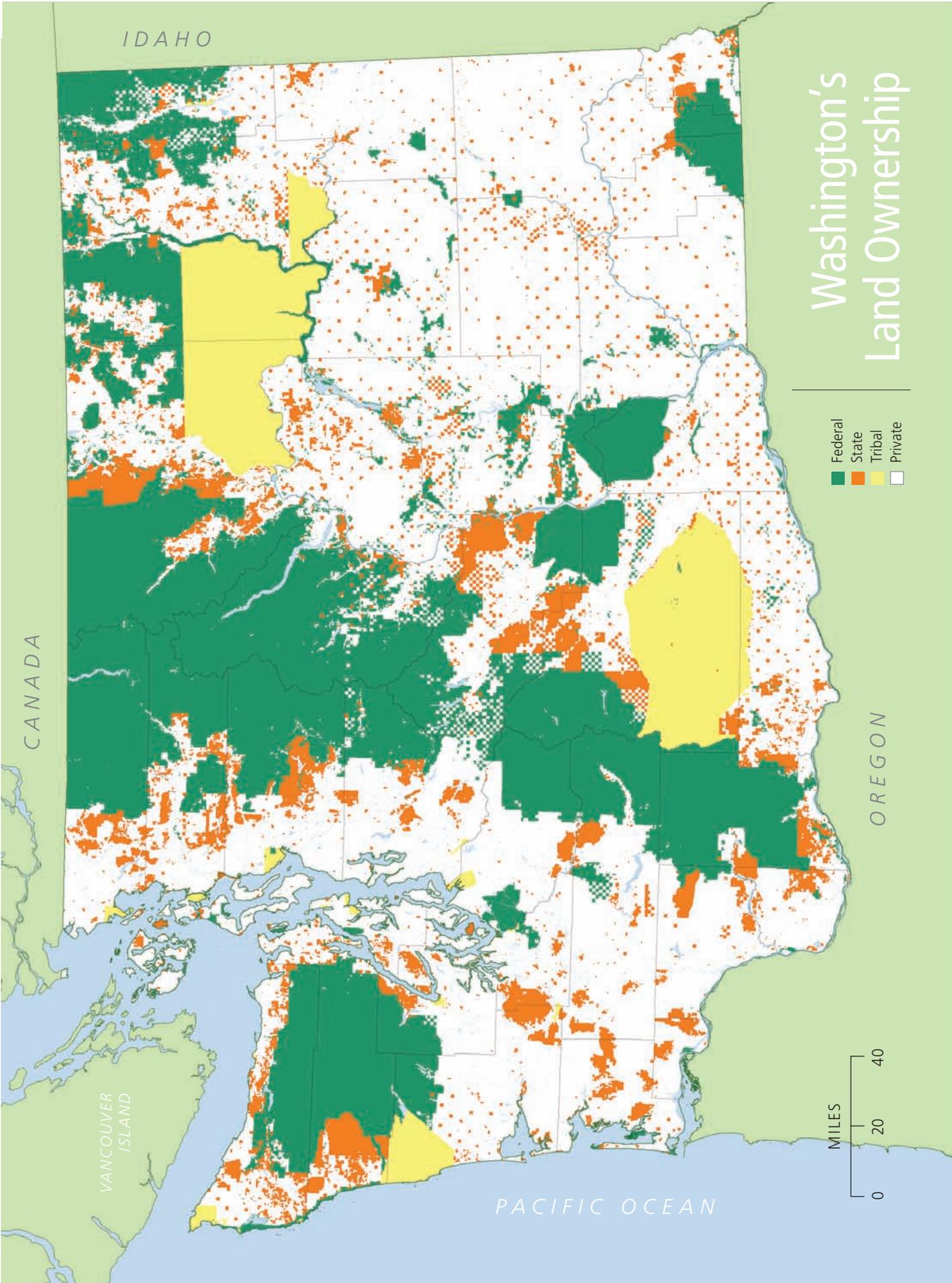
The purpose of including these descriptions is to provide the reader with a snapshot of each ecoregion. The statements regarding biodiversity highlights and conservation needs are not meant to be comprehensive.

ECOREGIONS

- 48 Northwest Coast Ecoregion
- 52 Puget Trough Ecoregion
- 56 North Cascades Ecoregion
- 60 West Cascades Ecoregion
- 64 East Cascades Ecoregion
- 68 Okanogan Ecoregion
- 72 Canadian Rockies Ecoregion
- 76 Blue Mountains Ecoregion
- 80 Columbia Plateau Ecoregion

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Washington's Land Ownership