3.14 Recreation

This Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) considers the adverse environmental impacts on recreation use and facilities that would result from the types of facilities described in Chapter 2, Overview of Transmission Facilities, Development Considerations, and Regulations. This section addresses the following topics related to the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of high-voltage electric transmission facilities (transmission facilities) in Washington.

- Section 3.14.1 identifies regulatory, siting, and design considerations.
- Section 3.14.2 describes the affected environment.
- Section 3.14.3 describes the adverse environmental impacts.
- Section 3.14.4 describes Mitigation Measures.
- Section 3.14.5 identifies probable significant adverse environmental impacts on recreation.
- Section 3.14.6 provides an environmental sensitivity map and criteria weighting for the siting of transmission facilities as it relates to recreation, based on the identified considerations, adverse environmental impacts, and Mitigation Strategies.[1]

3.14.1 Regulatory, Siting, and Design Considerations

This Programmatic EIS establishes a broad framework for compliance, outlining general laws, regulations, best management practices (BMPs), and design considerations. It is assumed that project-specific applications would be developed within this pre-established regulatory context and comply with existing laws and regulations. Any projects not complying with applicable laws and regulations or failing

[1] A comprehensive set of analysis, planning, and implementation tools specific to this Programmatic EIS designed to avoid or otherwise mitigate adverse environmental impacts associated with the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities. These strategies are inclusive of three key components identified in Chapter 3 and detailed in Appendix 3.1-1: General Measures, Avoidance Criteria, and Mitigation Measures. Together, these elements form a hierarchical and integrated approach to environmental management, ensuring that transmission projects in Washington are planned and executed with a strong emphasis on sustainability, regulatory compliance, and ecological stewardship.

to adhere to design considerations or BMPs would require additional project-specific environmental analysis and mitigation. The federal and state laws and regulations that apply to recreation are summarized in **Table 3.14-1**.

Table 3.14-1: Laws and Regulations for Recreation

Applicable Legislation	Agency	Summary Information
43 USC Chapter 55 – National Environmental Policy Act	Council on Environmental Quality	This act requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. This includes evaluating the impacts of the proposed actions on recreational uses.
43 USC Chapter 35 – Federal Land Policy and Management Act	Bureau of Land Management	This act governs the management of public lands by the Bureau of Land Management. It mandates multiple-use management, which includes recreation alongside other uses.
16 USC § 528 – Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act	U.S. Forest Service	This act directs the U.S. Forest Service to manage national forests for the multiple-use and sustained use of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed and fish, and wildlife.
54 USC Chapter 2003 – Land and Water Conservation Fund Act	U.S. Department of Interior	This legislation establishes a "Land and Water Conservation Fund" to assist states in planning, acquisition, and development of recreation resources and to finance new federal recreation lands. In doing so, this act promotes the coordination and development of effective outdoor recreation programs.
16 USC § 1131 – Wilderness Act	▪ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ▪ National Park Service ▪ Bureau of Land Management ▪ U.S. Forest Service	This act authorizes Congress to designate wilderness areas. It defines wilderness as an "area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions…"
16 USC Chapter 28 – Wild and Scenic Rivers Act	▪ Bureau of Land Management ▪ National Park Service ▪ U.S. Forest Service ▪ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	This act protects and enhances river values, including free-flow, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values.
16 USC Chapter 27 – National Trails System Act	▪ National Park Service ▪ Bureau of Land Management	This act designates national scenic trails to be continuous, extended routes of outdoor recreation within protected corridors. It promotes the enjoyment and appreciation of trails while encouraging greater public access. It establishes four classes of trails:

Applicable Legislation	Agency	Summary Information
	▪ U.S. Forest Service	national scenic trails, national historic trails, national recreation trails, and side and connecting trails.
43 CFR Subpart 8351 – Designated National Area	Bureau of Land Management	Title 43 CFR regulates public land management areas. Subpart 8351 under this code mandates management consistent with the purposes of the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the National Trails System Act.
Executive Order 12962, Recreational Fisheries	All federal agencies	This act promotes the conservation of aquatic systems, enhances aquatic resources, and supports recreational fisheries.
Washington State Environmental Policy Act	▪ Washington State Agencies ▪ Local governments	This act is a process that identifies and analyzes environmental impacts that can be related to issuing permits. SEPA helps permit applicants and decision-makers understand how a proposed project will impact the environment. Certain projects, as defined in the SEPA Rules (WAC 197-11-704) and that are not exempt, are required to go through the SEPA process.
Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan	Recreation and Conservation Office[a]	This plan provides a strategic direction for how local, regional, state, and federal agencies; Tribal governments; and private and nonprofit partners can work together to make sure Washington residents' outdoor recreation and conservation needs are met.
RCW 36.69.010, Park and recreation districts authorized—"Recreational facilities" defined	Local county governments	This legislation defines "recreational facilities" to mean "parks, playgrounds, gymnasiums, swimming pools, field houses, bathing beaches, stadiums, golf courses, automobile racetracks and drag strips, coliseums for the display of spectator sports, public campgrounds, boat ramps and launching sites, public hunting and fishing areas, arboretums, bicycle and bridle paths, senior citizen centers, community centers, and other recreational facilities."
Washington Growth Management Act, RCW 36.70A.020(9), Open space and recreation	▪ Washington State Department of Commerce ▪ Local county and city governments	This legislation guides the development and adoption of local comprehensive plans and development regulations with the goals of retaining open space and green space, enhancing recreational opportunities, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, increasing access to natural resource lands and water, and developing parks and recreation facilities.
RCW 77.04.012, Mandate of department and commission	▪ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife[a] ▪ Fish and Wildlife Commission[a]	This section of the RCW outlines the mandate of the WDFW and the Fish and Wildlife Commission to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage wildlife, food fish, game fish, and shellfish in state and offshore waters.

Applicable Legislation	Agency	Summary Information
WAC 173-60-030	Washington State Department of Ecology[(a)]	This legislation establishes limits on sounds crossing property boundaries, based on EDNA. It includes Class A EDNA, where people reside and sleep, including "recreational and residential areas (e.g., camps, parks, camping facilities, and resorts)."
WAC 220	▪ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife ▪ Fish and Wildlife Commission	This legislation introduces the WDFW and describes regulations promoting conservation of fish and wildlife, while providing fishing, hunting, fish and wildlife viewing, and other outdoor recreation opportunities compatible with healthy, diverse, and sustainable fish and wildlife populations (RCW 77.04.012, 77.04.020, 77.04.055).

Notes:

[(a)] The agency responsible for administering most permits or authorizations for the identified regulation. However, if EFSEC is determined to be the agency responsible for approving a proposal, EFSEC can administer several types of permits at the state and local levels. EFSEC provides a streamlined process for siting and licensing major energy facilities, including transmission facilities in Washington State. EFSEC coordinates all evaluation and licensing steps, specifies the conditions for new construction and operation, and issues a Site Certification Agreement, which assumes the responsibility for issuing individual state or local permits. By consolidating these permits into a single Site Certification Agreement, EFSEC can simplify the regulatory process for energy facility developers. While EFSEC itself does not directly administer federal permits, it works closely with federal agencies to ensure that all necessary federal requirements are met during the evaluation and licensing of energy facilities.

CFR = Code of Federal Regulations; **EDNA** = Environmental Designation for Noise Abatements; **EFSEC** = Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council; **RCW** = Revised Code of Washington; **SEPA** = State Environmental Policy Act; **USC** = United States Code; **WAC** = Washington Administrative Code; **WDFW** = Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The siting of transmission facilities is determined by engineering, technical, environmental, and socioeconomic factors. **Table 3.14-2** summarizes guidance documents and management plans that outline the design considerations and BMPs generally used to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts on recreation.

Table 3.14-2: Siting and Design Considerations for Recreation

Siting and Design Consideration	Description
Recommended Siting Practices for Electric Transmission Developers (Americans for a Clean Energy Grid 2023)	This report by Americans for a Clean Energy Grid outlines practices for engaging with landowners, Tribal governments, and local communities. It emphasizes early and consistent engagement, transparent route selection, and respectful treatment of landowners.
Policy Guidance for Processing Right-of-Way Applications for High-Voltage Electric Transmission Lines (BLM 2016)	Issued by the Bureau of Land Management, this guidance includes best management practices for avoiding, minimizing, and compensating for resource impacts. It stresses the importance of using

Siting and Design Consideration	Description
	the full mitigation hierarchy and ensuring that Mitigation Measures are durable and timely.
Transmission Corridors Work Group Final Report (EFSEC 2022)	The final TCWG report concludes the following: ▪ **Regional and interregional planning:** To ensure reliable access to renewable energy, it is essential for Washington to maintain a strong and active role in regional and interregional transmission planning efforts. Timely engagement in clean energy transmission planning will ensure that the renewable energy the state needs can reach the homes and businesses that require it. ▪ **Staff resources in state agencies:** The state's critical role in transmission planning would be enhanced by the designation (and funding) of a team dedicated to incorporating state input into regional planning processes. Sufficient staff are also needed to perform the transmission siting work that will be required in the coming years, particularly in the realm of archaeology and historic preservation. ▪ **Enhanced resources for Tribes:** The burden of paying for siting-related archaeological and cultural review should not fall on the Tribes. It is critical to identify mechanisms for funding Tribal governments to carry out this vital work. ▪ **Pre-application planning and coordination:** Key stakeholders believe the state currently lacks sufficient transmission infrastructure to meet CETA's 2030 targets for renewable energy. Given that it can take over 10 years to properly site a major transmission project, the needed planning work is already overdue and should begin as soon as possible.
Energy Facility Siting in Washington: Projects, Strategies and Resources (DOC 2021)	The Washington State Department of Commerce provides example guidelines for siting energy projects. These guidelines emphasize minimizing disturbance to existing economies, habitats, wildlife, and quality of life.
Recommended Siting Practices for Electric Transmission Developers (Americans for a Clean Energy Grid 2023)	This document outlines best practices for siting electric transmission facilities. Recommended practices include: ▪ Early and transparent engagement ▪ Respect and fair dealing ▪ Environmental considerations ▪ Interagency coordination ▪ Use of existing infrastructure

BLM = Bureau of Land Management; **CETA** = Clean Energy Transformation Act; **EFSEC** = Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council; **TCWG** = Transmission Corridors Work Group

3.14.2 Affected Environment

This section describes recreation in the Study Area (see Chapter 1, Introduction). The analysis of the affected environment incorporates the following:

- Parks and Recreational Facilities
- Cycling, Walking, and Hiking Trails
- Hunting and Fishing
- Other Recreation

3.14.2.1 Parks and Recreational Facilities

The Washington State Legislature (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 79A.05.010) defines "Recreation" as "activities of a voluntary and leisure time nature that aid in promoting entertainment, pleasure, play, relaxation, or instruction." RCW 36.69.010 defines "recreational facilities" as "parks, playgrounds, gymnasiums, swimming pools, field houses, bathing beaches, stadiums, golf courses, automobile racetracks and drag strips, coliseums for the display of spectator sports, public campgrounds, boat ramps and launching sites, public hunting and fishing areas, arboretums, bicycle and bridle paths, senior citizen centers, community centers, and other recreational facilities."

Washington's national and state parks and recreational facilities provide residents and tourists ample opportunities to enjoy year-round recreation in Washington. Recreationists in the state can enjoy activities such as the following:

- Scenic trails
- Climbing excursions
- Hiking and backpacking
- Trail-riding
- Camping
- Wildlife viewing (including bird watching)
- Hunting
- White-water rafting and swimming
- Fishing and boating
- Aerial sports (e.g., paragliding)
- Picnicking
- Snowmobiling
- Alpine skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Cross-country skiing
- Dogsledding

In 2019, the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) analyzed the significance of the recreational assets in Washington State (RCO 2019). The study aimed to identify key outdoor recreational assets, understand gaps in recreational facilities, and provide recommendations for future investments. The analysis helped highlight the economic, social, and health benefits of these assets, ensuring that they are preserved and enhanced for future generations.

The RCO's effort identified recreational assets of statewide significance through interviews with statewide user and advocacy groups, land managers, and others. These assets were then categorized as either "foundational assets" or "exceptional assets."

Foundational assets are areas that support the most popular recreational activities, promoting the recreational satisfaction and well-being of residents. These assets are crucial for providing widespread access to outdoor activities and can be found across the state in different parks, forests, or other recreation management areas. Examples include biking trails, fishing areas, camping sites, sports facilities, and leisure parks.[2]

Exceptional assets are unique or high-quality recreational sites that attract visitors from across the state and beyond. These assets are crucial for both their recreational value and their role in attracting tourism, which supports local economies. Examples include iconic destinations like Mount Rainier, the San Juan Islands, the Columbia River Gorge, Olympic National Park, North Cascades National Park, and Lake Chelan. According to the 2019 study report, RCO has categorized 24 specific types of recreational activities as "exceptional" due to a unique profile of recreational significance. These activities include the following:

- Archery
- Bicycling and Walking
- Boating (motorized and sailing)
- Camping
- Climbing, bouldering, and scrambling
- Equestrian (backcountry)
- Firearms
- Fishing and shellfishing
- Hiking and backpacking
- Hunting with firearms and bows
- Leisure activities in parks
- Mountain biking
- Mountaineering

[2] A designated outdoor area designed for various recreational activities and relaxation. Leisure parks typically offer a range of amenities and facilities to cater to different interests and age groups.

- Nature activities
- Off-road 4x4 riding
- Off-road all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding
- Off-road motorcycling
- Paddling
- Paddling (whitewater)
- Playing sports
- SCUBA diving
- Skiing
- Snowmobiling
- Winter trails

Both foundational and exceptional recreation assets can be found in Washington's numerous federally and state-managed recreation facilities.

National Parks and Recreational Facilities

Washington is home to a variety of national parks and recreational facilities that offer diverse outdoor experiences. **Figure 3.14-1** shows the locations of national parks and facilities in Washington. The National Park Service (NPS) owns and manages officially designated NPS units, including national parks; national recreation areas; and national historic trails, parks, reserves, and sites (NPS n.d.). These areas offer the following benefits:

- **Conservation of Biodiversity:** National parks protect diverse ecosystems and wildlife, preserving habitats for countless species.
- **Environmental Protection:** National parks safeguard natural landscapes from development and exploitation, ensuring that pristine environments are preserved for future generations.
- **Recreation and Tourism:** National parks offer numerous recreational opportunities such as hiking, camping, and wildlife viewing. They attract millions of visitors each year, contributing to local and national economies through tourism.
- **Cultural and Historical Preservation:** Many national parks protect sites of cultural, historical, and archaeological significance, allowing people to connect with the past and learn about the heritage of different regions.
- **Education and Research:** National parks serve as outdoor classrooms and laboratories, providing valuable opportunities for education and scientific research. They help raise awareness of environmental issues and the importance of conservation.

- **Health and Well-being:** Spending time in nature has been shown to improve mental and physical health. National parks provide spaces for people to relax, exercise, and enjoy the natural beauty, promoting overall well-being.

Washington is home to 24 National Historic Landmarks. These landmarks highlight the state's rich contributions to the national park movement and include the following:

- **Maritime Heritage:** Seven of the landmarks are individual boats, reflecting Washington's strong maritime history.
- **National Park Sites:** Three landmarks are located within Mount Rainier National Park, itself a National Historic Landmark.
- **Diverse Historical Sites:** The landmarks feature a variety of structures, districts, and objects of national significance.

Additionally, Washington has an abundance of sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), showcasing a wide array of historically significant locations across the state (DAHP 2024). The affected environment and adverse environmental impacts from the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities on historic and cultural resources, including Tribal rights, interests, and resources, are analyzed in Section 3.15, Historic and Cultural Resources.

Washington has seven national forests, each offering unique landscapes and recreational opportunities (WTA 2024):

- Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
- Gifford Pinchot National Forest
- Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
- Olympic National Forest
- Colville National Forest
- Umatilla National Forest
- Kaniksu National Forest

Washington has 31 designated wilderness areas, many of which are situated within the boundaries of national forests. These areas cover approximately 4.3 million acres and are protected to preserve their natural conditions and provide opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation[3] (Washington Wild 2024). Wilderness areas are given a higher level of protection than other parts of national forests. This means stricter

[3] Outdoor activities that emphasize simplicity and a connection to nature, often involving non-motorized and non-mechanical means of travel. This type of recreation typically includes activities such as hiking, horseback riding, canoeing, and camping in wilderness areas.

regulations on activities like logging, mining, and motorized vehicle use to maintain their pristine condition.

Washington is also home to nine military campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks for eligible members (Army MWR 2024). The federal government manages these areas to balance conservation and recreational uses for the benefit of future generations. **Table 3.14-3** lists federal parks and recreational facilities in Washington and their affiliated land ownership agencies. Additional analysis specific to historic and cultural resources can be found in Section 3.15, Historic and Cultural Resources.

Table 3.14-3: Federally Designated Recreation Facilities

Land Ownership Agency	Type of Recreational Facility	Name of Recreational Facility
National Park Service	▪ National Historic Site ▪ National Historic Reserve ▪ National Geologic Trail ▪ National Historic Trail ▪ National Historic Park ▪ National Recreation Area ▪ National Park ▪ Affiliated Areas	▪ Daniel J. Evans Wilderness Area ▪ Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve ▪ Fort Vancouver National Historic Site ▪ Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail ▪ Klondike Gold Rush - Seattle Unit National Historic Park ▪ Lake Chelan National Recreation Area ▪ Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area ▪ Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail ▪ Lewis and Clark National Historical Park ▪ Manhattan Project National Historical Park ▪ Minidoka National Historic Site ▪ Mount Rainier National Park ▪ Mount Rainier Wilderness Area ▪ Nez Perce National Historical Park ▪ North Cascades National Park ▪ Olympic National Park ▪ Oregon National Historic Trail[a] ▪ Ross Lake National Recreation Area ▪ San Juan Island National Historical Park ▪ Stephen Mather Wilderness ▪ Whitman Mission National Historic Site ▪ Wing Luke Museum Affiliated Area

Land Ownership Agency	Type of Recreational Facility	Name of Recreational Facility
U.S. Forest Service	▪ National Forest ▪ National Scenic Area ▪ National Wilderness Area[(b)] ▪ National Volcanic Monument ▪ National Monument	▪ Alpine Lakes Wilderness ▪ Boulder River Wilderness ▪ Buckhorn Wilderness ▪ Clearwater Wilderness ▪ Colonel Bob Wilderness ▪ Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area ▪ Colville National Forest ▪ Gifford Pinchot National Forest ▪ Glacier Peak Wilderness ▪ Glacier View Wilderness ▪ Goat Rocks Wilderness ▪ Henry M. Jackson Wilderness ▪ Indian Heaven Wilderness ▪ Kaniksu National Forest ▪ Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness ▪ Mount Skokomish Wilderness ▪ Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument ▪ Mountain Adams Wilderness ▪ Mount Baker Wilderness ▪ Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest ▪ Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness ▪ Norse Peak Wilderness ▪ Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest ▪ Olympic National Forest ▪ Passayten Wilderness ▪ Salmo-Priest Wilderness ▪ San Juan Wilderness ▪ Tatoosh Wilderness ▪ The Brothers Wilderness ▪ Trapper Creek Wilderness ▪ Umatilla National Forest ▪ Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness Area ▪ Wild Sky Wilderness ▪ William O. Douglas Wilderness ▪ Wonder Mountain Wilderness
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	▪ National Monument	▪ Hanford Reach National Monument ▪ Washington Islands Wilderness Area

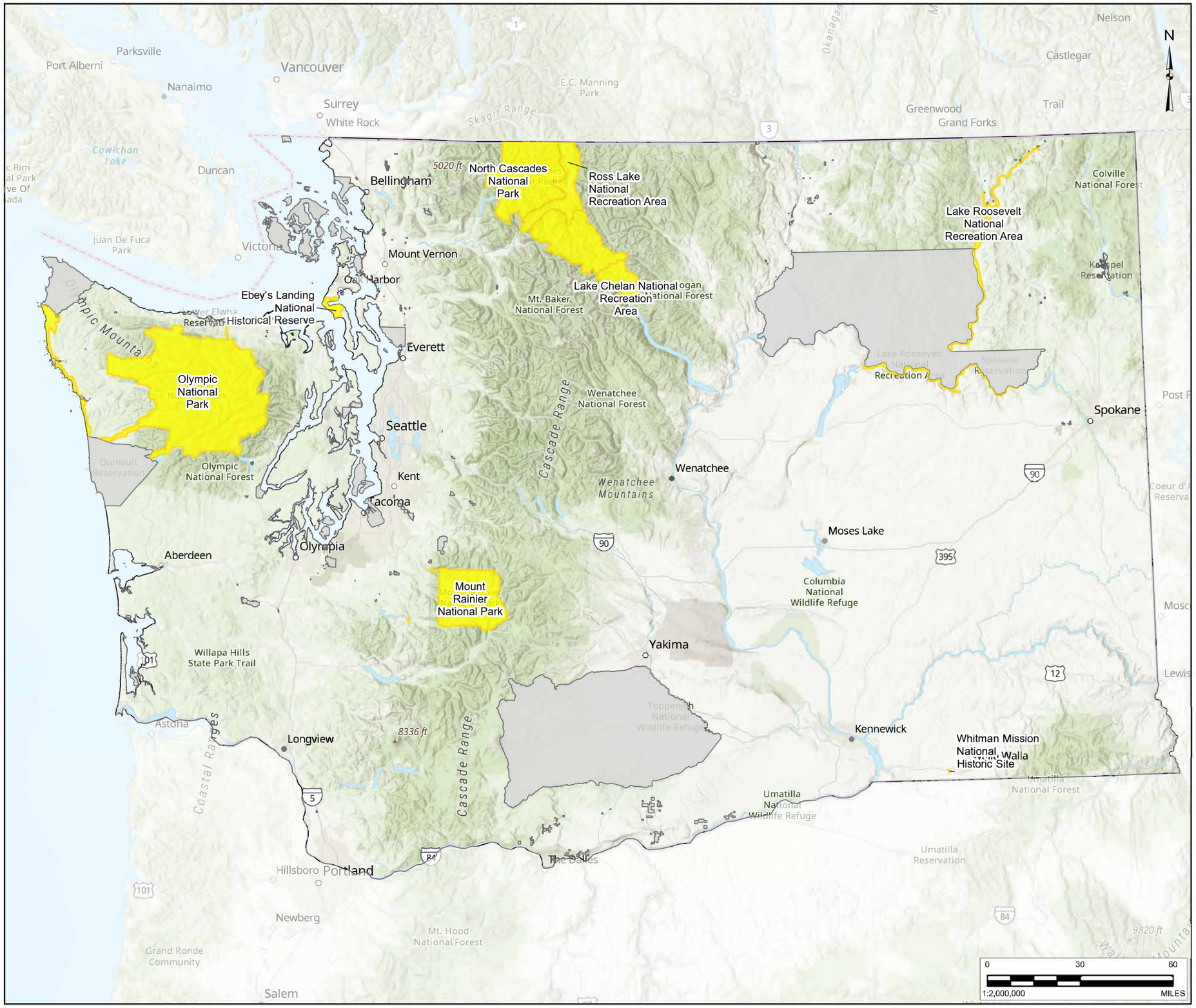
Land Ownership Agency	Type of Recreational Facility	Name of Recreational Facility
Bureau of Land Management	▪ National Monument	▪ Juniper Dunes Wilderness Area ▪ San Juan Islands National Monument

Notes:

[a] Portions of the trail that pass through lands managed by the BLM are administered by the BLM.

[b] National Wilderness Areas in Washington also include lands managed by the NPS, BLM, and USFWS.

BLM = Bureau of Land Management; **NPS** = National Park Service; **USFWS** = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



LEGEND

- Study Area
- Exclusion Areas
- National Park Service Lands (NPS 2025A)

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. SERVICE LAYER CREDITS: SOURCES: ESRI, TOMTOM, GARMIN, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE GIS USER COMMUNITY, ESRI, USGS
2. NPS. 2025A. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE LANDS. ACCESSED JUNE 9, 2025. HTTPS://DATA-USDOT.OPENDATA.ARCGIS.COM/DATASETS/USDOT::NATIONAL-PARKS/EXPLORE?LOCATION=47.688949%2C-122.415994%2C9.21

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council

PROJECT

PROGRAMMATIC EIS
HIGH-VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION

TITLE

NATIONAL PARKS AND FACILITIES

YYYY-MM-DD 2025-08-04 CONSULTANT wsp FIGURE 3.14-1

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State Parks and Recreation Facilities

Washington offers state-managed parks and recreation facilities, providing additional opportunities for outdoor activities and recreation through the following:

- State Parks
- State Forests
- State Resources Conservation Areas
- State Natural Area Preserves
- State Wildlife Areas

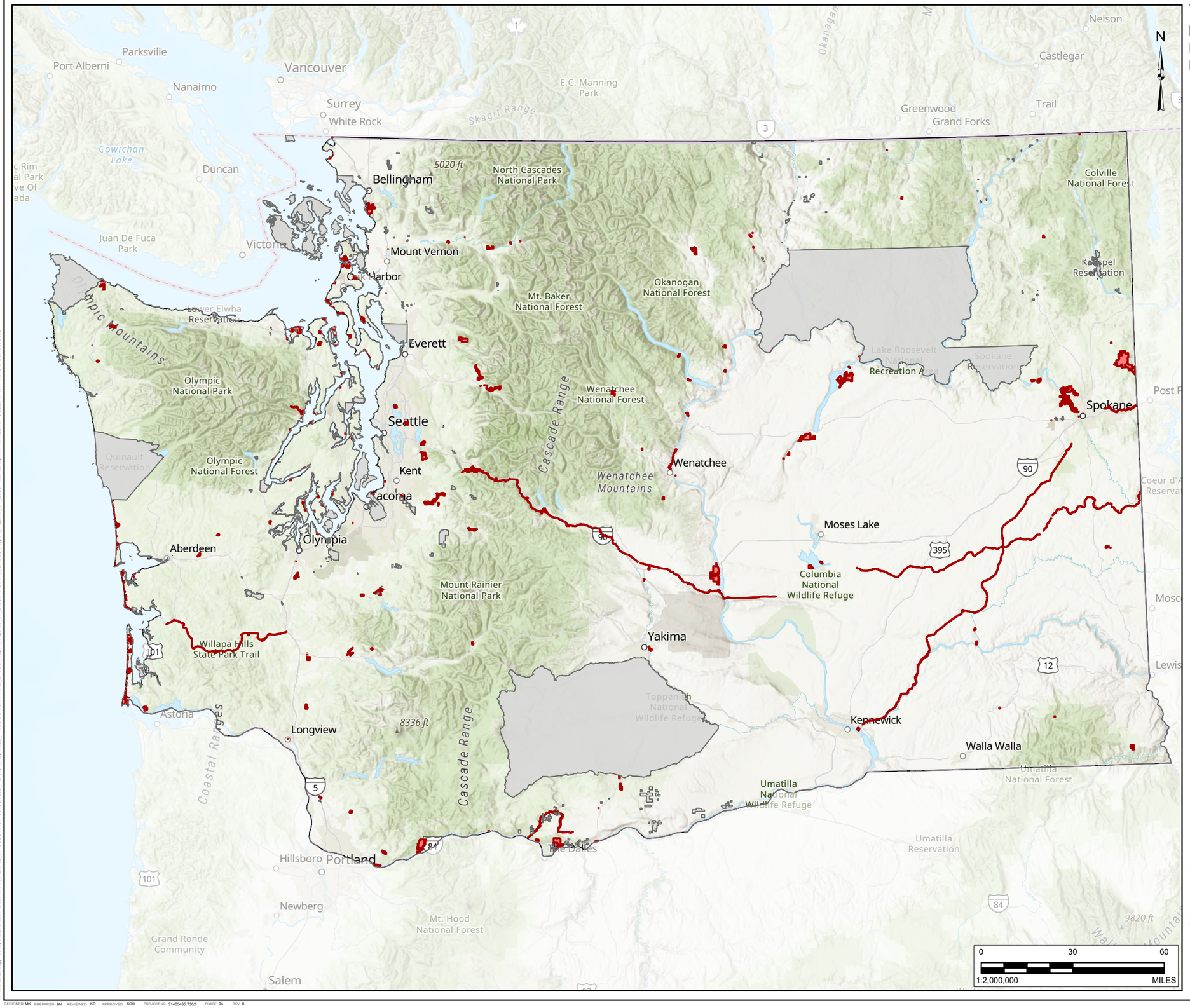
Each year, state parks and recreation facilities generate more than $1.4 billion in economic activity (WSPRC 2020). The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (WSPRC) is responsible for guiding the policies and management of the state's extensive park system. WSPRC comprises seven citizen members appointed by the Governor. These commissioners do not hold elected or full-time appointive office during their service and receive no pay beyond travel expenses relating to their work on the commission. WSPRC also manages statewide programs, including over 400 miles of long-distance trails, recreational boating, and winter recreation (WSPRC 2020). Its key responsibilities include:

- **Strategic Planning:** Developing long-term plans to enhance and preserve state parks
- **Public Input:** Engaging with the public to gather feedback and ensure the parks meet community needs
- **Budget Management:** Overseeing the budget requests and allocations for the state parks system
- **Rule Making:** Participating in the rulemaking process to establish and update regulations for state parks

Winter-based recreational facilities are managed by WSPRC's Winter Recreation Program in partnership with federal agencies, private landowners, and other state agencies. The Winter Recreation Program manages activities in national forests, in state forests, and on private forest land (WSPRC n.d.). Snowmobile Sno-Parks[4] are open

[4] Parking lots that have been cleared of snow that are close to groomed or other backcountry snow trails.

to both motorized and non-motorized winter recreation. Non-motorized Sno-Parks are open to sports such as cross-country skiing, dogsledding, snowshoeing, and snow play (WSPRC n.d.). **Figure 3.14-2** shows the location of state parks, including winter recreational facilities, in Washington.



LEGEND

- Study Area
- Exclusion Areas
- State Parks and Properties (WSPRC, 2025)

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. SERVICE LAYER CREDITS: SOURCES: ESRI, TOMTOM, GARMIN, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE GIS USER COMMUNITY, ESRI, USGS
2. WSPRC (WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION). 2025. PARKS – PARK BOUNDARIES. ACCESSED JULY 31, 2025. HTTPS://GEO.WA.GOV/DATASETS/WA-STATEPARKS::PARKS-PARK-BOUNDARIES/ABOUT

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council

PROJECT

PROGRAMMATIC EIS
HIGH-VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION

TITLE

STATE PARKS (INCLUDING WINTER PARKS/SITES)

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3.14.2.2 Cycling, Walking, and Hiking Trails

The RCO manages 259,009 miles of trails (RCO 2024a). Statewide trails offer outdoor enthusiasts an array of opportunities to participate in backcountry hiking, leisurely strolls, trail runs, snowshoeing excursions, mountain biking, and more. Many of these trails are located on federally managed lands, across state parks, and throughout cities, towns, and local communities.

Recreational trails provide economic, environmental, and social benefits for residents and visitors. Washington residents are avid trail users, spending more than an estimated average of 30 days per person per year participating in non-motorized recreational trail use. Economically, the recreational use of trails contributes substantial value (ECONorthwest 2019).

In 2023, the RCO administered the Outdoor Recreation Experience Survey to collect data on outdoor recreation user experiences and the quality of the recreation experience. The survey found that road cycling, backpacking, running or jogging, and snowshoeing are among the top 20 activities that outdoor recreationists participate in statewide. For trail-based recreation, survey results found that the top three motorized trail uses were:

- Four-wheel-drive vehicles (22 percent)
- Motorcycles (16 percent)
- All-terrain vehicles (15 percent)

The top three non-motorized uses on trails were:

- Walking/day hiking (90 percent)
- Bicycling (40 percent)
- Trail running (31 percent)

Results also showed that 90 percent of Washington residents regularly walk on trails, making this the second-most popular (behind walking on roads or sidewalks) recreational activity for Washington residents (RCO 2023). **Figure 3.14-3** shows the distribution of trailheads and trails across Washington.

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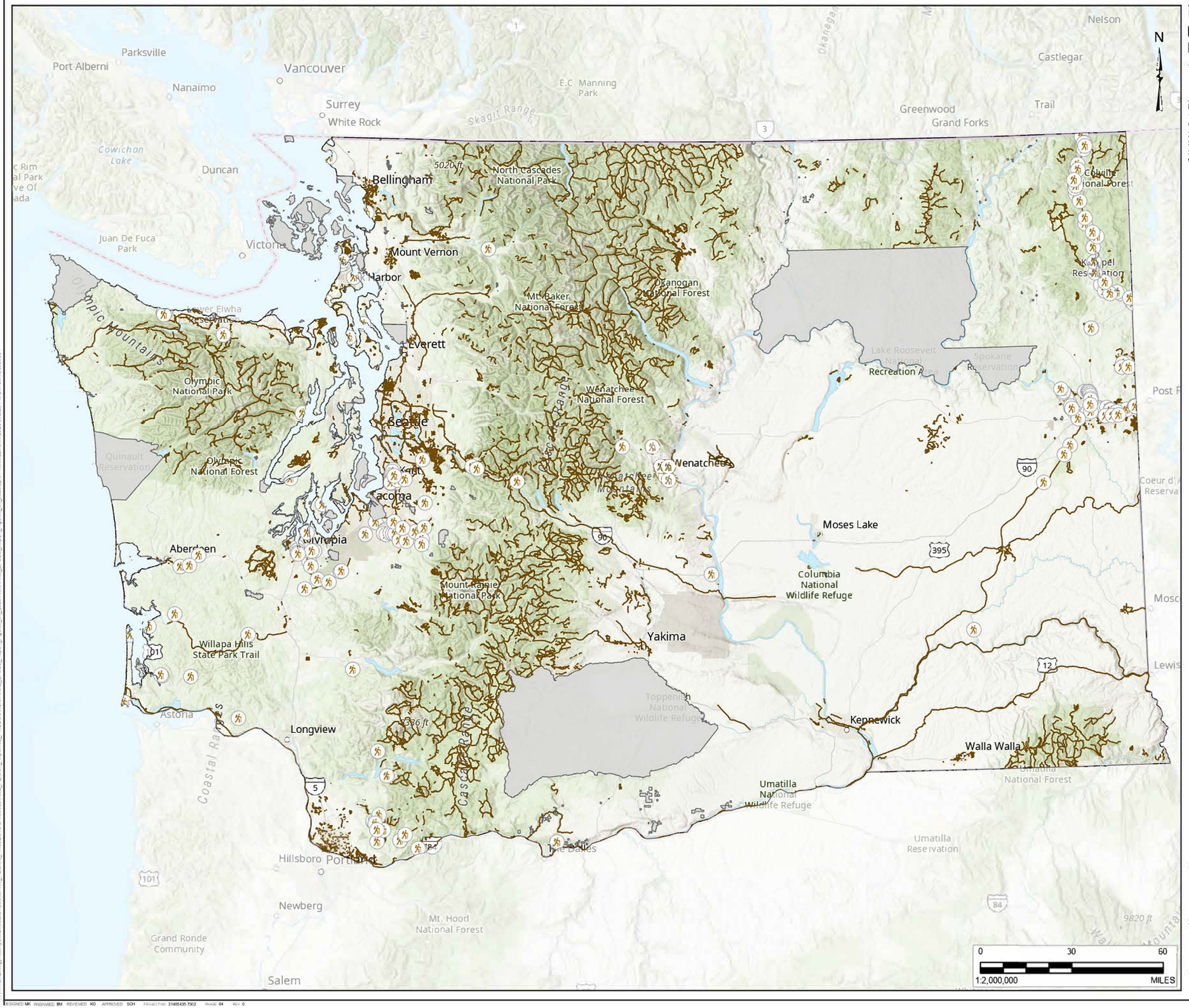

LEGEND

- Study Area
- Exclusion Areas
- Trails (RCO 2025B)
- Trailheads (RCO 2025A)

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. SERVICE LAYER CREDITS SOURCES: ESRI, TOMTOM, GARMIN, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE GIS USER COMMUNITY, ESRI, USGS
2. RCO. 2025B. TRAILS. ACCESSED AUGUST 5TH, 2025. DATA DOWNLOAD | WASHINGTON STATE TRAILS DATABASE HUB (ARCGIS.COM)
3. RCO. 2025A. TRAIL HEADS. ACCESSED AUGUST 5TH, 2025. DATA DOWNLOAD | WASHINGTON STATE TRAILS DATABASE HUB (ARCGIS.COM).

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council

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TITLE

Washington Trailheads and Trails

YYYY-MM-DD 2025-08-14 CONSULTANT wsp FIGURE 3.14-3

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3.14.2.3 Hunting and Fishing

Habitat, wildlife, and fish are analyzed in Section 3.6; hunting and fishing also are vital to Washington for several reasons related to recreation, including the following:

- **Economic Impact:** These activities generate revenue for the state.
- **Conservation Funding:** The revenue from hunting and fishing licenses, permits, and related taxes helps fund conservation efforts and wildlife management programs. This ensures sustainable populations of fish and wildlife.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Hunting and fishing are deeply rooted in Washington's cultural fabric. They offer opportunities for individuals to connect with nature, providing food security, self-sufficiency, and mental and physical health benefits.
- **Recreational Opportunities:** These activities provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, promoting outdoor activities and a healthy lifestyle.
- **Wildlife Management:** Regulated hunting and fishing help manage wildlife populations, preventing overpopulation and maintaining ecological balance.

The Washington State Legislature (RCW 77.04.012) sets the overall state policy and direction for managing wildlife resources in Washington, including hunted wildlife (WDFW n.d.). This mandate identifies the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) as the responsible parties for wildlife-based recreation, inclusive of hunting and fishing across the state (WDFW n.d.). The WDFW administers a Game Management Plan as a planning-level document to regulate recreational hunting opportunities and to minimize adverse environmental impacts on residents, other wildlife, and the environment. The Game Management Plan also establishes the hunting seasons in Washington and guides the management of hunted game species (WDFW 2024a).

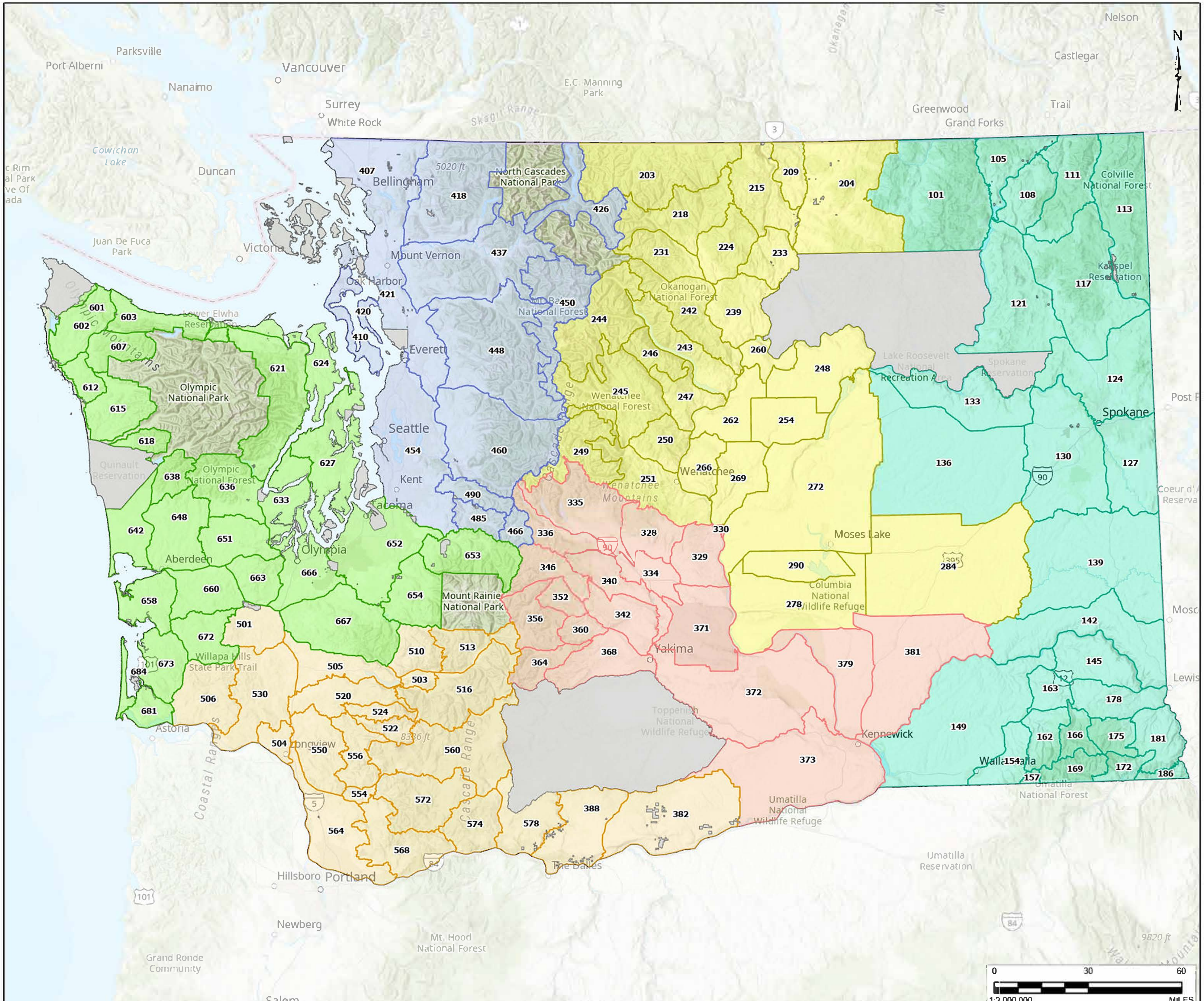
Tribal governments also play a vital role in wildlife-based recreation in Washington, including hunting and fishing. Tribal governments typically have Tribal hunting committees that meet to develop regulations and management strategies. The committees often work with the WDFW to better manage wildlife resources associated with key wildlife populations (WDFW n.d.). The affected environment and adverse environmental impacts from the new construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission facilities on historic and cultural resources, including Tribal rights, interests, and resources, are analyzed in Section 3.15, Cultural and Historic Resources.

Hunters and hunting help to manage wildlife population levels and fund the conservation of Washington's wildlife (WDFW n.d.). Hunting and fishing also generate revenue for businesses and taxes to support the services provided by the WDFW and other public agencies. Hunters in Washington spent approximately $1.1 billion in 2022 on hunting-related expenses (Van Deynze 2024). State, federal, Tribal, military, and private lands have specified rules and restrictions about where and when hunting may be permitted (WDFW 2024b).

Washington is divided into Game Management Units (GMUs), which are geographic areas established by the WDFW to manage hunting activities and wildlife populations. These units are used to regulate hunting seasons, bag limits, and access for various game species, including deer, elk, bear, and upland birds. **Figure 3.14-4** identifies Washington's GMUs.

While hunting generally occurs on public land, hunting can occur on private land, too, with the appropriate permissions (WDFW 2022; Van Deynze 2024). Hunting seasons for big game vary throughout the calendar year, depending on the species hunted. A combination of hunting and trapping seasons is provided for small game and furbearing animals. However, the trapping season for furbearers generally occurs during the winter months, and hunting seasons extend from September to early spring of the following year (WDFW 2024b).

Washington offers a rich variety of fishing opportunities, including freshwater and oceanic fishing, fly-fishing, salmon fishing, and crabbing (WDFW 2024c). Millions of people fish and crab recreationally in Washington each year, contributing to the state's economy. Washington anglers spent approximately $2.1 billion in 2022 (Van Deynze 2024). Commercial fishing in Washington is distinct from recreational fishing and is not analyzed in this Programmatic EIS.



LEGEND

- Study Area
- Exclusion Areas

Game Management Units (WDFW, 2025)

- Region 1
- Region 2
- Region 3
- Region 4
- Region 5
- Region 6

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. SERVICE LAYER CREDITS: SOURCES: ESRI, TOMTOM, GARMIN, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE GIS USER COMMUNITY, ESRI, USGS
2. WDFW. 2025. GAME MANAGEMENT UNITES. ACCESSED AUGUST 5TH, 2025. GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS (POLYGONS) 2025 | WA DEPT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (ARCGIS.COM)

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council

PROJECT

PROGRAMMATIC EIS
HIGH-VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION

TITLE

HUNTING INFORMATION

YYYY-MM-DD 2025-08-15

CONSULTANT wsp

FIGURE
3.14-4

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3.14.2.4Other Recreation

Washington offers a wide range of recreational activities beyond cycling, walking, hiking, hunting, and fishing, including the following:

- **Mountaineering and Climbing:** Washington's volcanic peaks, like Mount Rainier and Mount Adams, provide excellent opportunities for mountaineering and climbing.
- **Water Sports:** The state is well-suited for a variety of water-based activities, including kayaking, canoeing, sailing, scuba diving, boating, and surfing. The numerous lakes and rivers, as well as the Pacific coastline, offer diverse recreational opportunities. The rugged coastline, especially around areas like La Push and Westport Light State Park, is ideal for beachcombing and surfing.
- **Skiing and Snowboarding:** During the winter months, Washington's mountain ranges, including the Cascades, are ideal for skiing and snowboarding.
- **Wildlife Viewing and Bird Watching:** Washington's diverse ecosystems, from rainforests to high deserts, provide excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and bird watching.
- **Other Trail Use:** Many trails and parks in Washington are suitable for horseback riding or mountain biking, offering a unique way to explore the state's natural beauty.
- **Camping and Backpacking:** With numerous national and state parks, Washington is a popular destination for camping and backpacking enthusiasts.
- **Aerial Sports:** Washington offers a variety of aerial sports for enthusiasts of all levels, including paragliding, hang gliding, ziplining, aerial arts, skydiving, and hot air ballooning.

3.14.3 Impacts

For this Programmatic EIS, adverse environmental impacts were assessed for the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities within the Study Area.

3.14.3.1 Method of Analysis

The study area for a project-specific application would typically encompass several key regions and features, such as the following:

- **Project Site and Immediate Vicinity:** This includes the specific location of the project and the surrounding area that might be directly affected by new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification activities.
- **Viewshed:** This includes conducting a visual assessment to determine what recreation facilities may be indirectly affected by new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification activities.

This Programmatic EIS analyzes the affected environment and adverse environmental impacts on recreation within the Study Area (see Chapter 1, Introduction). Four project stages for each transmission facility type (overhead or underground) were considered: new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification.

This evaluation considers both overhead and underground transmission facilities for each stage. Overhead transmission facilities consist of transmission lines, substations, and ancillary infrastructure. Overhead and underground transmission facilities may involve similar aboveground infrastructure. Underground transmission facilities consist of underground transmission lines, underground access vaults, and other infrastructure located below the ground surface. The new construction of underground transmission facilities could include both open trench and trenchless construction methods.

Laws and regulations used to determine the adverse environmental impacts of transmission facilities on recreation are summarized in **Table 3.14-1**. Information reviewed to identify adverse environmental impacts on recreation uses and areas in the Study Area was obtained from federal agencies, state agencies, local planning documents, and public scoping.

Impact Determination

The discussion of adverse environmental impacts is qualitative, given the high-level nature of a Programmatic EIS; quantification would require project-specific details to analyze. **Table 3.14-4** describes the criteria used to evaluate adverse environmental impacts from the Action Alternative and No Action Alternative. Information reviewed to identify adverse environmental impacts on recreation in the Study Area was

obtained from federal agencies, state agencies, local planning documents, and public scoping.

Table 3.14-4: Criteria for Assessing the Impact Determination on Recreation

Impact Determination	Description
Nil	No foreseeable adverse environmental impacts are expected. A project would not adversely affect recreational uses or facilities.
Negligible	A project would result in minimal adverse environmental impacts on recreation. Changes would either be non-detectable or, if detected, would have only slight effects. A project would not adversely impact the use of recreational resources, affect their integrity, or increase the risk of wildfire hazards. Negligible impacts would be short-term in duration. BMPs and design considerations are expected to be effective.
Low	A project would result in noticeable adverse environmental impacts on recreation uses or facilities, even with the implementation of BMPs and design considerations. These adverse environmental impacts may include slightly increased safety risks associated with the recreational facility, infrequent detours or restricted access areas that would inconvenience users for short periods of time, and temporary changes in the facility's quality or integrity. However, these impacts would be limited and controlled. Adverse environmental impacts on recreation would be localized and may be short or long-term in duration.
Medium	A project would result in adverse environmental impacts on recreation, even with the implementation of BMPs and design considerations. A project would result in increased safety risks, frequent and extended detours or closures of recreational areas, and long term changes to the facility's quality or integrity. Medium impacts may be short- or long-term in duration.
High	A project would result in adverse and potentially severe environmental impacts on recreation, even after implementation of BMPs and design considerations. A project would cause substantially increased safety risks, permanent closure of all or parts of recreational facilities, and permanent changes to the facility's quality or integrity. Adverse environmental impacts on recreation may affect a larger area, not just localized to the construction site. High adverse environmental impacts may be short or long-term.

BMP = best management practice

To clearly understand the potential severity of adverse environmental impacts without any interventions, the following impact determinations exclude the use of Avoidance Criteria and Mitigation Measures. The ratings assume compliance with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations, as well as standardized BMPs and design considerations. Assessing adverse environmental impacts without Avoidance Criteria or Mitigation Measures offers a baseline understanding of potential environmental effects, helping to identify the true extent of these impacts. Environmental laws often

require that initial impact assessments be conducted without considering mitigation to maintain the integrity of the environmental review[5] process.

When impact determinations are identified as medium or high, then either the applicant would adopt applicable Mitigation Measures from this Programmatic EIS, or the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Lead Agency may require other applicable mitigation measures to be implemented to reduce project-specific adverse environmental impacts. When impact determinations are low, applicable Mitigation Measures should still be considered by the applicant and the SEPA Lead Agency, as these measures would help to further reduce adverse environmental impacts, including the project's contribution to cumulative impacts. These Mitigation Measures would be implemented in addition to compliance with laws, regulations, environmental permits, plans, and design considerations required for transmission facilities.

3.14.3.2 Action Alternative

New Construction

Overhead Transmission Facilities

New construction activities for overhead transmission facilities would vary and depend on the scale of the facility and site characteristics. New construction could include site preparation of relatively short duration (e.g., a few months), followed by longer construction and start-up. It is assumed that the new construction of overhead transmission, per mile, would have a shorter duration than underground construction. Overhead transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts on recreation resources during new construction:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure
- Increase in Use
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire

[5] The procedural framework established under SEPA to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action. This process includes determining whether SEPA applies to a proposal and conducting a threshold determination to assess whether the proposal is likely to have significant adverse environmental impacts. Environmental review is the formal decision-making process that agencies must follow to ensure environmental considerations are integrated into project planning and permitting.

- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Temporary Closure or Restricted Access

In areas where construction activities overlap with recreational facilities, users could be exposed to an increase in air pollution, fugitive dust, noise, and occupational safety risks (see Section 3.8, Public Health and Safety). To prevent public health and safety impacts, recreational facilities may need to be closed temporarily. Temporary closures of recreational sites and facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations. This would include designated motorized and non-motorized trails. New construction of overhead transmission facilities may also temporarily restrict access to certain GMUs.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from temporary closure or restricted access during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to medium.

Permanent Closure

Although rare, new construction activities could result in permanent closures of recreational spaces if they are no longer deemed viable for public use or if continued access would compromise public safety or environmental integrity. While temporary disruptions during new construction are more typical, permanent closure would have a long-term adverse effect on recreational facilities and users by restricting access to public land or areas with a long history of recreational use.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from the permanent closure during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to high.

Increase in Use

New construction projects often generate publicity that can increase public awareness of nearby recreational facilities, attracting new users who were previously unaware of them. Large-scale developments may also lead to more frequent use of these facilities due to the influx of temporary construction workers. Additionally, new construction of transmission facilities can increase the capacity for residents and contribute to the urbanization and development of surrounding areas, which can bring more residents

closer to recreational sites, resulting in higher visitation and increased usage. The heightened activity can accelerate wear and tear, leading to increased maintenance costs, more frequent repairs, and greater environmental degradation. Furthermore, temporary and permanent closures of recreational areas during new construction may inadvertently shift visitor pressure to nearby sites, intensifying human disturbance and compounding the strain on facilities that were otherwise unaffected.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from increased use during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to low.

Change in Integrity

New construction and assembly of overhead transmission facilities could temporarily and permanently impact the environmental and natural landscape of a recreational facility, possibly leading to a change in integrity and decreased usage. Construction activities, including road grading, land and vegetation clearing, blasting,[6] and operating combustion engines has the potential to destabilize natural resources, disturb soils prone to sedimentation and erosion, and alter the existing visual landscape. Wildlife viewers and photographers could also experience an adverse environmental impact from construction activities, as noise associated with heavy machinery and construction crews could impact surrounding wildlife habitat and behaviors. Construction activities could have an adverse environmental impact on people recreating in areas of undisturbed wilderness, including on mountains, in forests, near water, and within deserts and arid landscapes.

The degree to which the integrity of a recreational or cultural resource is affected is context-dependent and should be evaluated in relation to the existing setting and landscape character. In urban environments, where parks and public spaces are already surrounded by built infrastructure, the addition of transmission facilities may not result in a perceptible change to the resource's integrity. By contrast, in rural or undeveloped areas, such as scenic or natural parks, where the landscape character is integral to the resource's value, new construction and operation and maintenance may have a more pronounced effect. Integrity-related impacts are higher where the existing landscape character is a key component of the recreational experience. In urban settings, the potential for such adverse environmental impacts is lower.

[6] Controlled use of explosives to break, excavate, or shape rock, concrete, or other materials.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from changes in integrity during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to medium.

Increased Risk of Wildfire

Construction activities, including welding, vehicle ignition, blasting, and overland travel, may induce sparks and electrical currents that can ignite the surrounding vegetation and cause wildfires. Wildfires could adversely impact recreation facilities in several ways, including damage to infrastructure, air quality issues, temporary and permanent closures, alteration of landscapes, and increased maintenance needs (see Section 3.3, Air Quality). Wildfire near recreational facilities could temporarily or permanently prevent access and use. In some extreme cases, a wildfire may destroy the integrity of a recreational facility and render it unusable in the future. In addition to recreational closures, wildfires can pose an extreme threat to public health and safety (see Section 3.8, Public Health and Safety), including recreational users. Users of recreational areas, including backpackers, mountain bikers, hunters, campers, and others, may become stranded in remote locations during a wildfire.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from increased risk of wildfire during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to high.

Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

New construction of overhead transmission facilities could have an adverse environmental impact on aerial recreation activities, such as hang gliding, paragliding, and aerial sightseeing. The presence of equipment such as cranes and helicopters required during the transport of material can pose a collision risk for aerial recreation enthusiasts. To ensure safety, certain areas around transmission facility construction may be designated as restricted airspace temporarily, limiting where aerial activities can take place.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from physical hazards to aerial recreation during the new construction of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and

site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to low.

Underground Transmission Facilities

Activities for the new construction of underground transmission facilities would vary depending on the scale of the facility and site characteristics. New construction could include a site preparation period of relatively short duration (e.g., a few months), followed by a longer construction and start-up period. It is assumed that the new construction of overhead transmission, per mile, would have a shorter duration than underground construction. Underground transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts related to recreation during new construction:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure
- Increase in Use
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Temporary Closure or Restricted Access

In areas where construction activities overlap with recreational facilities, users could be exposed to a wide variety of risks. Due to the increased groundwork associated with underground construction, nearby recreation users may be exposed to heightened levels of fugitive dust, air pollution, and other hazards associated with trenching activities. To prevent public health and safety impacts, recreational facilities may have restricted access or be closed temporarily. As underground facilities typically take longer to construct than their overhead counterparts, temporary closures and access restrictions may last longer. Temporary closures of recreational sites and facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations. This would include designated motorized and non-motorized trails. New construction of facilities near waterbodies may temporarily restrict access to waterbodies, affecting activities like boating, fishing, and swimming. New construction of facilities may also temporarily restrict access to certain GMUs.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from temporary closure or restricted access during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from low to medium.

Permanent Closure

In some cases, construction activities could result in permanent closures of recreational spaces if they are no longer deemed viable for public use or if continued access would compromise public safety or environmental integrity. Permanent closure would have a long-term adverse effect on recreational facilities and users by restricting access to public land or areas with a long history of recreational use.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from permanent closure during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to high.

Increase in Use

New construction projects often have associated publicity that can raise awareness of recreational facilities, attracting new users who were previously unaware of them. Large construction developments can lead to increased user frequency because of the greater number of temporary construction workers they tend to employ. The development and urbanization of surrounding areas can bring more people closer to recreational facilities, leading to increased usage. As a result, these facilities may experience faster wear and tear, leading to higher maintenance costs, more frequent need for repairs, and greater environmental degradation. Additionally, permanent and temporary closures of recreational areas during new construction may inadvertently expose nearby recreational sites to greater use and human disturbance, indirectly amplifying the strain on otherwise unaffected facilities.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from increased use during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to low.

Change in Integrity

New construction of underground transmission facilities could temporarily and permanently impact the environmental and natural landscape of a recreational facility, possibly leading to a change in integrity and a decrease in usage. Underground construction activities, including trenching, road grading, land and vegetation clearing, blasting, and operating combustion engines, have the potential to destabilize natural resources, disturb soils prone to sedimentation and erosion, and alter the existing visual landscape. Underground transmission construction often takes longer than overhead facilities and requires permanent clearing of vegetation along the ROW, leading to permanent alteration of the landscape. Wildlife viewers and photographers could also experience an adverse environmental impact from prolonged construction activities as noise associated with heavy machinery and construction crews could impact surrounding wildlife habitat and behaviors. Construction activities could have a permanent adverse environmental impact on people recreating in areas of undisturbed wilderness, including on mountains, in forests, near water, and within deserts and arid landscapes.

Wilderness areas have long been valued in the United States for their untouched natural beauty. The Wilderness Act mandates the preservation of the natural conditions of designated wilderness areas, limiting development in these areas.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from changes in integrity during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from low to medium.

Increased Risk of Wildfire

New construction activities, including welding, vehicle ignition, blasting[7] and overland travel may induce sparks and electrical currents that can ignite the surrounding vegetation, resulting in wildfires. Wildfires could adversely impact recreation facilities in several ways, including damage to infrastructure, air quality issues, temporary and permanent closures, alteration of landscapes, and increased maintenance needs (see Section 3.3, Air Quality). Wildfire near recreational facilities could temporarily or permanently prevent access and use. In some extreme cases, a wildfire may destroy the integrity of a recreational facility and render it unusable in the future. In addition to recreational closures, wildfires can pose an extreme threat to public health and

[7] Controlled use of explosives to break, excavate, or shape rock, concrete, or other materials.

safety (see Section 3.8, Public Health and Safety), including recreational users. Users of recreational areas, including backpackers, mountain bikers, hunters, campers, and others, may become stranded in remote locations during a wildfire.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from increased risk of wildfire during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to high.

Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

New construction of underground transmission facilities could have an adverse environmental impact on aerial recreation activities, such as hang gliding, paragliding, and aerial sightseeing. The presence of equipment such as cranes and helicopters required during the transport of material can pose a collision risk for aerial recreation enthusiasts. To ensure safety, certain areas around transmission facility construction may be designated as restricted airspace temporarily, limiting where aerial activities can take place.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from physical hazards to aerial recreation during the new construction of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to negligible.

Operation and Maintenance

Overhead Transmission Facilities

Activities for the operation and maintenance stage of overhead transmission facilities would vary based on the type of facility, scale, and site characteristics. Facilities are not expected to have staff on site daily, but maintenance crews are anticipated to be regularly deployed. Transmission facilities require ongoing maintenance for equipment and ROWs. Overhead transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts on recreation during the operation and maintenance stage:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire

- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Temporary Closure or Restricted Access

Similar to new construction, operation and maintenance activities, including vegetation management, repairs, and inspections, may require temporary closure of, or temporarily restrict access to, recreational facilities. Temporary closures of recreational sites and facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations. This would include designated motorized and non-motorized trails.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from temporary closures during the operation and maintenance of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to low.

Change in Integrity

In areas where they overlap with recreational facilities, overhead transmission facilities could adversely impact recreational integrity in several ways. As permanent fixtures, overhead transmission facilities have the potential to visually alter landscapes, particularly in undisturbed, natural areas. Regular maintenance activities like vegetation clearing may also alter the visual landscape and integrity of recreational areas. Similarly, the operation and maintenance of overhead transmission facilities would require reliable and consistent access roads for maintenance crews to conduct repairs and routine inspections. Roads within and around recreational areas may have both positive and negative impacts on recreational facilities and users. In most cases, roads can serve as a multipurpose access point for various uses, including off-highway vehicles,[8] mountain biking, walking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, dogsledding, and hunting. However, in some areas, access roads fragment existing landscapes, causing adverse environmental impacts on the natural and aesthetic integrity of the environment. Furthermore, the presence of maintenance staff and vehicles, along with noise from potential repair activities, can disrupt the aesthetic quality of recreational areas and negatively affect the recreational experience for visitors. Operation and maintenance of transmission facilities may change wildlife movement patterns (see Section 3.6

[8] Any type of vehicle capable of driving off roads or on non-paved surfaces like trails.

Habitat, Wildlife, and Fish) or create physical hazards (e.g., towers and lines) that hunters must avoid, decreasing the integrity of GMUs.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from a change of integrity during the operation and maintenance of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to medium.

Increased Risk of Wildfire

Due to their height, overhead transmission facilities are vulnerable to unpredictable weather events and lightning, which can lead to wildfires. The presence of overhead transmission lines can increase overall wildfire potential in remote areas with unpredictable weather, frequent lightning strikes, or dense vegetation and underbrush, as electrical arcing[9] can ignite fires when in contact with surrounding vegetation and flammable materials. Wildfires could adversely impact recreation facilities in several ways, including damage to infrastructure, air quality issues, temporary closures, alteration of landscapes, and increased maintenance needs (see Section 3.3, Air Quality). Wildfire near recreational facilities could temporarily or permanently prevent access and use. In some extreme cases, a wildfire may destroy the integrity of a recreational facility and render it unusable in the future. In addition to recreational closures, wildfires can pose an extreme threat to public health and safety (see Section 3.8, Public Health and Safety), including recreational users. Users of recreational areas, including backpackers, mountain bikers, hunters, campers, and others, may become stranded in remote locations during a wildfire.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from increased risk of wildfire during the operation and maintenance of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to high.

Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Overhead transmission facilities could have an adverse environmental impact on aerial recreation activities, such as hang gliding, paragliding, and aerial sightseeing. Overhead transmission facilities pose a collision risk for aerial recreation enthusiasts. The presence of wires and towers can be hazardous, especially in low-visibility

[9] A visible discharge of electricity created by an electric current that jumps across a gap between two conductive points. The arc generates heat, which can cause burns or ignite flammable materials. Sparks may fly from the point of discharge.

conditions. To ensure safety, certain areas around transmission facilities may be designated as restricted airspace, limiting where aerial activities can take place.

While the physical hazard to aerial recreation is introduced during new construction, when new towers and lines are erected and become visible on the landscape, the greatest magnitude of this adverse environmental impact occur during the operation and maintenance stage. Once constructed, the transmission facilities remain a persistent obstacle for aerial recreationists for the life of the project. Therefore, the most substantial and long-term risk to aerial recreation is associated with the operation and maintenance stage.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from physical hazards to aerial recreation during the operation and maintenance of overhead transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to medium.

Underground Transmission Facilities

Similar to overhead transmission facilities, activities for the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities would vary based on the type of facility, scale, and site characteristics. Facilities are not expected to have staff on site daily, but maintenance crews are anticipated to be regularly deployed. Transmission facilities require ongoing maintenance for equipment and ROWs, similar to any other linear industrial facility. Underground transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts during the operation and maintenance stage:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Temporary Closure or Restricted Access

Operation and maintenance activities, including vegetation management, repairs, and inspections, may require temporary closure of, or temporarily restrict access to, recreational facilities. Underground cables are generally harder to access than aboveground cables, and it can take longer to pinpoint damaged areas, leading to prolonged maintenance time and potential closures. The extended closure of recreational facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on

consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations and may indirectly increase foot and vehicle traffic in other recreational areas.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from the temporary closure of, or restricted access to, recreation resources during the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts range from nil to low.

Change in Integrity

Similar to overhead transmission facilities, underground facilities could alter recreational integrity in a number of ways. Although underground facilities are considered to have less visual impact than their overhead counterpart, they still require permanent vegetation clearing along the ROW, which could alter the visual landscape of recreational areas. Similar to overhead facilities, the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities would require reliable and consistent access roads for maintenance crews to conduct repairs and routine inspections, which could adversely impact the natural and aesthetic integrity of the environment. This change in integrity could have a permanent, adverse environmental impact on people recreating in these areas. For example, ongoing operation and maintenance activities could adversely impact wildlife viewers and photographers as noise associated with heavy machinery and maintenance crews could affect surrounding wildlife habitat and behaviors. Operation and maintenance of transmission facilities may change wildlife movement patterns (see Section 3.6 Habitat, Wildlife, and Fish) or create physical hazards (e.g., maintenance equipment, connections between underground and overhead transmission facilities) that hunters must avoid, decreasing the integrity of GMUs.

Due to the more complex nature of underground facility repair, adverse environmental impacts associated with repair and maintenance may be prolonged, resulting in extended impacts on recreational users.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from a change in integrity during the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to medium.

Increased Risk of Wildfire

Underground transmission facilities generally pose a lower risk of wildfire compared to overhead systems due to the absence of exposed conductors and reduced interaction with vegetation. However, wildfire risk is not entirely eliminated. Maintenance activities, such as vegetation clearing, use of heavy equipment, or access via maintenance roads, can introduce ignition sources, particularly in dry or fire-prone environments.

While the likelihood of wildfire ignition from underground transmission operation and maintenance is low, any fire that does occur near recreational areas can have consequences that impact recreation.

Wildfires also pose public health and safety risks (see Section 3.8, Public Health and Safety), especially for recreational users in remote areas such as hikers, campers, and hunters who may be stranded or exposed to hazardous conditions.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from the increased risk of wildfire during the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from negligible to low.

Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Underground transmission facilities pose minimal physical hazard to aerial recreation enthusiasts. Because facilities are located below ground and lack aboveground structures like towers or conductors, they do not present collision risks or visual obstructions in the airspace.

Unlike overhead transmission facilities, underground facilities do not require restricted airspace or pose long-term navigational challenges for aerial recreationists. The absence of visible infrastructure ensures that the integrity and safety of aerial recreational activities remain largely unaffected.

The presence of large equipment or the transportation of material via helicopter may pose a hazard to aerial recreation enthusiasts during maintenance activities.

Impact Determination: Adverse environmental impacts on recreation resulting from physical hazards to aerial recreation during the operation and maintenance of underground transmission facilities are expected to vary depending on the scale of the project and site-specific conditions. In the absence of mitigation, these adverse environmental impacts could range from nil to negligible.

Upgrade

Overhead Transmission Facilities

Upgrades to overhead transmission facilities would occur within existing ROWs without expanding the existing facility footprint or causing new ground disturbance. However, these upgrades may result in adverse environmental impacts on recreation, including:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

The adverse environmental impacts from upgrading overhead transmission facilities are often comparable to those of maintaining overhead transmission facilities. These adverse environmental impacts are generally anticipated to be lower than those for modifying or constructing a new transmission facility due to several factors. Table 2.3-1 highlights how upgrading existing transmission facilities would generally result in fewer or less impactful adverse environmental impacts.

Underground Transmission Facilities

Upgrades to underground transmission facilities would occur within existing ROWs, without expanding the facility footprint or causing new ground disturbance. However, these upgrades may result in adverse environmental impacts on recreation, including:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

The adverse environmental impacts from upgrading underground transmission facilities are often comparable to those of maintaining underground transmission facilities. These adverse environmental impacts are generally anticipated to be lower than those for modifying or constructing a new transmission facility due to several

factors. Table 2.3-1 highlights how upgrading existing transmission facilities would generally result in fewer or less impactful adverse environmental impacts.

Modification

Overhead Transmission Facilities

Modifying existing overhead transmission facilities typically involves several key steps, each with specific requirements, timelines, and settings, as outlined in Chapter 2, Overview of Transmission Facilities, Development Considerations, and Regulations. The adverse environmental impacts of modifying existing transmission facilities would vary depending on the scale of the project-specific application. Overhead transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts on recreation during the modification stage:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure
- Increase in Use
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Adverse environmental impacts of modifying overhead transmission facilities could be similar to those of new construction but are anticipated to be lower. Table 2.3-2 highlights how modifying existing transmission facilities would generally result in fewer or less impactful adverse environmental impacts.

Underground Transmission Facilities

Modifying existing underground transmission facilities would involve several steps, each with specific requirements, timelines, and settings, as outlined in Chapter 2, Overview of Transmission Facilities, Development Considerations, and Regulations. The adverse environmental impacts of modifying existing transmission facilities would vary depending on the scale of the project-specific application. Underground transmission facilities could have the following adverse environmental impacts on recreation during the modification stage:

- Temporary Closure or Restricted Access
- Permanent Closure

- Increase in Use
- Change in Integrity
- Increased Risk of Wildfire
- Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation

Adverse environmental impacts of modifying underground transmission facilities could be similar to those of new construction, but are anticipated to be lower. Table 2.3-2 highlights how modifying existing transmission facilities would generally result in fewer or less impactful adverse environmental impacts.

3.14.3.3No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Programmatic EIS would not be adopted as a planning or analytical framework. Instead, transmission facility siting and development would continue under existing state and local regulatory processes, with each project evaluated for environmental compliance without the benefit of the environmental review provided in this document. This approach would lack the advanced notice of potential serious environmental concerns for those planning transmission facilities, as well as the Mitigation Strategies developed under the Programmatic EIS. As a result, environmental outcomes could be less predictable and consistent, and adverse environmental impacts could be greater.

3.14.4 Mitigation Measures

Under SEPA, there are six recognized forms of mitigation that agencies can apply to reduce or address adverse environmental impacts:

- **Avoiding the adverse environmental impact** altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- **Minimizing adverse environmental impacts** by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- **Rectifying the adverse environmental impact** by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- **Reducing or eliminating the adverse environmental impact** over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.

- **Compensating for the adverse environmental impact** by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.
- **Monitoring the adverse environmental impact** and taking appropriate corrective measures.

This section describes the Avoidance Criteria and Mitigation Measures that could apply for adverse environmental impacts from new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities.

All General Measures adopted for this Programmatic EIS (see Section 3.1 of Chapter 3, Affected Environment, Significant Impacts, and Mitigation) are relevant to this resource section. Applicants would be responsible for providing information within their application materials documenting their implementation of the General Measures.

Avoidance Criteria[10] that are relevant to this resource section are described below:

AVOID-2 – Wetland Disturbance: Avoid having equipment or infrastructure within 300 feet of all wetlands.

Rationale: Protecting wetlands would decrease the chances of wetland degradation during new construction activities, as these areas are important for sustained wetland function. Wetlands within the project footprint would be delineated following the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetland delineation methodology and rated using the ECY's Western Washington, Version 2, and Eastern Washington, Version 1.

AVOID-3 –Sensitive Water Features: Avoid impacting areas sensitive to degradation, including adjusting the layout of new transmission facilities to steer clear of sensitive water features.

Rationale: Avoiding sensitive water features that are susceptible to degradation from new construction activities, including changes to the water features' physical characteristics (e.g., banks, bathymetry, and substrate[11]), as well as chemical properties. Avoiding these areas helps preserve their structure and function.

AVOID-6 – Old-Growth and Mature Forests: Avoid old-growth forests, which include forests older than 200 years in western Washington and greater than 150 years

[10] The complete list of Avoidance Criteria and their rationales can be found in Section 3.1 and Appendix 3.1-1.
[11] A layer of material or surface where an organism could live.

in eastern Washington, and mature forests, which include forests greater than 80 years.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion would reduce direct loss of old-growth and mature forests, which have already lost the majority of their historical extent. Old-growth and mature forests are particularly susceptible to long-term adverse environmental impacts due to the time lag to reestablish current ecological functions if clearing occurs. In addition, linear features through old and mature forest stands increase the adverse environmental impacts from edge effects[12] such as the spread of invasive plants.

AVOID-13 – Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities: Avoid incompatible land uses and adhere to all applicable zoning and development regulations. Demonstrate that there are no direct or indirect adverse land use incompatibilities with private property owners or public land administrators.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion aims to avoid conflicts with land use and zoning. Avoiding land use and zoning conflicts will also help reduce adverse environmental impacts on property owners, agricultural landowners, noise, visual resources, and socioeconomics.

AVOID-17 – Night Sky: Avoid impacts on areas managed for the protection of night sky.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion aims to protect designated night sky areas.

AVOID-18 – Exceptional Recreation Assets: Avoid having equipment or infrastructure near or within the viewshed of exceptional recreation assets, as defined by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and listed in Appendix 3.1-1.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion aims to guide early transmission facility planning efforts to protect exceptional recreational assets. These places provide a unique experience or activity that may not be available in all areas of the state, such as rock climbing, whitewater rafting, and backcountry horseback riding.

AVOID-19 – Wilderness Areas: Avoid having equipment or infrastructure near or within the viewshed of designated wilderness areas.

[12] A phenomenon in which species composition changes near the boundary of a habitat. This term is typically used in the context of habitat degradation, where intact habitat contains less diversity near the point of contact with disturbed areas, such as clearcuts or agricultural land.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion aims to protect the scenic integrity of wilderness areas. Wilderness areas are valued for their untouched natural beauty. The Wilderness Act of 1964 mandates the preservation of the natural conditions of designated wilderness areas.

AVOID-20 – Limit Closure of Recreation Resources: Consider closure and restrictions only after other mitigation strategies and alternatives have been explored. Avoid long-term closure and restriction of recreation resources lasting more than 24 months.

Rationale: This Avoidance Criterion establishes the definition of "long-term closure" in relation to adverse environmental impacts on recreation resources from the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities.

The Programmatic EIS is intended to support more efficient and effective siting and permitting of transmission facilities, consistent with the legislative direction in RCW 43.21C.408, by streamlining environmental review where projects incorporate the recommended planning and Mitigation Strategies. Applicants would be responsible for providing information within their application materials documenting the project's compliance with the above Avoidance Criteria. While total avoidance of all adverse environmental impacts is not required in order to use the Programmatic EIS, applicants are expected to demonstrate how their project aligns with the intent of the Avoidance Criteria to the extent practicable. If specific Avoidance Criteria are not met, the applicant would provide an explanation and supporting information. Additional environmental analyses would be required as part of the documentation for SEPA for the project. Additional mitigation could be required, depending on the nature of the deviation and its potential to result in probable significant adverse environmental impacts.

Mitigation Measures have been identified to minimize adverse environmental impacts from transmission facility projects. These measures are intended to be broad so that they can be applied to most projects that would be covered under this Programmatic EIS. However, project-specific plans would be needed to adapt the measures for project-specific applications. The inclusion of a Mitigation Measure in this Programmatic EIS does not imply that a given adverse environmental impact is presumed to occur. Rather, the measures are provided to support early planning and the avoidance of adverse environmental impacts, streamlining project-specific environmental review when impacts are identified. Mitigation Measures are intended

to serve as a set of potential strategies that the SEPA Lead Agency and applicants can draw from, depending on the specific environmental context and project footprint. Applicants and the SEPA Lead Agency retain discretion to:

- Propose alternative mitigation strategies that achieve equivalent or better outcomes.
- Demonstrate that certain Mitigation Measures are not applicable due to the absence of relevant adverse environmental impacts.

When impact determinations are identified as medium or high, then either the applicant would adopt applicable Mitigation Measures from this Programmatic EIS or the SEPA Lead Agency may require applicable mitigation to be implemented to reduce project-specific adverse environmental impacts. When impact determinations are low, applicable Mitigation Measures should still be considered by the applicant and the SEPA Lead Agency, as these Mitigation Measures would help to further reduce adverse environmental impacts, including the project's contribution to cumulative impacts. These Mitigation Measures would be implemented in addition to compliance with laws, regulations, environmental permits, plans, and design considerations required for transmission facilities.

The following Mitigation Measures could be adopted to mitigate adverse environmental impacts:

Rec-1 – Stakeholder and Agency Coordination: Coordinate with potentially affected federal, state, and local agencies, communities, and recreation-based organizations to mitigate adverse environmental impacts on recreational facilities and during seasonal activities.

Rationale: This Mitigation Measure aims to reduce the adverse environmental impact of transmission facilities on recreation facilities and seasonal activities. Effectively engaging stakeholders is crucial in the planning and development of transmission facilities and for building community support.

Rec-2 – Public Notification of Temporary Closure: Notify appropriate stakeholders of temporary closures at least six months prior to the start of the closure.

Rationale: This Mitigation Measure aims to reduce the adverse environmental impact of transmission facilities on recreation users. Notifying the public of temporary closures of trails or sites through public outreach and media outlets provides transparency between the applicant and the local community. Public

notifications are also necessary to ensure public awareness and safety within construction areas.

Rec-3 – Trail Detours: Consider phased closures or explore alternative solutions such as rerouting trails, creating temporary access points, or scheduling work during off-peak times to minimize disruption.

Rationale: This Mitigation Measure aims to alleviate the inconvenience of construction on recreationists.

Rec-4 – Informational Signage and Precautionary Safety Measures: Place informational signage, placards, safety fencing, and other precautionary indicators in areas where transmission facilities are within or adjacent to existing recreational facilities.

Rationale: This Mitigation Measure aims to alert recreational users to construction hazards or, in cases where transmission lines are operating within or near recreation sites, protect recreationists from accidental injury.

Rec-5 – Notice to Air Missions: Coordinate with the appropriate aviation authorities, such as the Federal Aviation Administration, to determine the necessity and content of a Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM).

Rationale: A NOTAM is a critical communication tool used in aviation to inform pilots and other flight personnel about potential hazards or changes in the National Airspace System that could affect flight operations. NOTAMs provide timely information about the abnormal status of a component of the National Airspace System, such as runway closures, airspace restrictions, or changes in navigation aids.

In addition to the above Mitigation Measures, the following Mitigation Measures[13] developed for other resources may be applicable:

Geo-1 – Minimize Soil Disturbance: Minimize soil disturbance, including footprints related to access roads and permanent structures, to the greatest extent practicable. Minimize the use of construction techniques that would be harmful to topsoil composition, where feasible.

[13] The rationales for the identified Mitigation Measures are provided in their respective resource sections.

Geo-4 – Minimize Impacts on Sensitive Soils: Design projects to minimize adverse environmental impacts on high erodibility zones and areas sensitive to degradation.

W-2 – Clear Spanning or Trenchless Methods for Water Crossings: When feasible, use clear spanning for overhead transmission or trenchless construction for underground transmission to minimize disturbance to riparian areas, wetlands and wetland buffers, and surface waters.

W-4 – Store Chemicals, Operate Equipment, and Conduct Maintenance away from Water: Store fuel, oils, and lubricants away from watercourses. Maintain, repair, and/or service vehicles and equipment away from watercourses and at designated repair facilities whenever possible. Operate equipment and machinery from the top of the bank and outside of riparian areas, wetlands and wetland buffers, and surface waters.

W-5 – Implement Erosion and Sediment Control Measures: Implement effective and appropriate erosion control measures in new construction and operation to mitigate runoff into streams.

W-6 – Minimize Hydrology Changes: Minimize water diversions and changes to natural hydrology or hydroelectric dam flow regimes to the greatest extent possible.

Veg-1 – Site Transmission Facilities in Existing ROW or Disturbed Areas: Site transmission facilities in existing ROW or disturbed areas, to the greatest extent practicable.

Hab-2 – Minimize Transmission Line Crossings at Canyons and Riparian Habitat and Parallel to Rivers and Ridge Lines: Minimize transmission line crossings of canyons and draws, along ridge lines, parallel to rivers, and within riparian habitat.

Hab-3 – Decommission Nonpermanent Roads: Decommission and restore any access roads not required for operation and maintenance.

Hab-7 – Retain Wildlife Trees where Practicable: Wildlife trees are trees with features that are especially beneficial to wildlife. These typically include living and dead trees that are decaying and those that have cavities or good conditions for cavity creation, sloughing bark that can provide roost sites for bats, branches for perching, basal cavities for denning, and foraging opportunities for

woodpeckers and other wildlife. Wildlife trees would be retained where safe to do so.

Fish-12 – Reduce Number of Stream Crossings: Design transmission facilities to reduce the number of stream crossings. Access roads and utilities would share common rights-of-way.

Fish-13 – Use Bioengineering: Design stabilization structures to incorporate bioengineering principles; for example, use of living and nonliving plant materials in combination with natural and synthetic support material for slope stabilization, erosion reduction, and vegetation establishment.

TR-1 – Coordination with Aviation Groups: Work closely with aviation groups and authorities to ensure that transmission facilities are marked on aviation maps and that pilots, both commercial and recreational, are aware of their locations.

Vis-1 – Selection of Finishes: Use dull and/or dark painted surfaces, textured surfaces, and low-reflectivity finishes on transmission facilities.

Vis-2 – Visual Appeal of ROWs: Create varied, feathered vegetation edges for cleared areas and linear ROWs that are sinuous horizontally and layered vertically. Strategically retain or plant native vegetation within the ROW where practicable in visually sensitive areas.

Vis-3– Underground Construction: Use underground construction methods in areas with high scenic quality and/or open rural areas, depending on geologic conditions.

Vis-4 – Visual Screening: Use techniques such as berms, fencing, or vegetative screening to conceal or improve the appearance of distribution substations, above-ground vaults, and other facilities.

Vis-5 – Span Length: Maximize the span length when using overhead lines crossing highways and other linear viewing locations.

Noise-3 – Use of Operational Noise Mitigation: Provide vendor-supplied noise mitigation or acoustic barriers for substation transformers and equipment located near noise sensitive areas.

Noise-5 – Noise Assessment: Prepare a noise assessment that includes measuring existing baseline noise environments, predicting future noise levels from either new construction and/or operation and maintenance, and evaluating the

potential adverse environmental impacts on surrounding sensitive noise receptors.

3.14.5 Probable Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts

Determining the significance of an adverse environmental impact involves consideration of context and intensity, which, in turn, depend on the magnitude and duration of the impact. “Significant” in SEPA means a reasonable likelihood of more than a moderate adverse environmental impact on environmental quality. An adverse environmental impact may also be significant if its chance of occurrence is not great, but the resulting impact would be severe if it occurred (Washington Administrative Code 197-11-794).

Identification of adverse environmental impacts and assignment of discipline-specific ratings are based on a structured evaluation consistent with the criteria outlined in WAC 197-11-330. Significance determinations consider the context and intensity of potential adverse environmental impacts, using both quantitative and qualitative information where appropriate. Professional expertise does not substitute for regulatory compliance. Regulatory requirements establish the baseline for environmental analysis and mitigation. Professional experience is used to supplement this baseline, providing additional insight to identify whether mitigation measures beyond those required by regulation may be warranted. In cases where data are incomplete or unavailable, a conservative approach has been applied to ensure that potential adverse environmental impacts are not underestimated.

This Programmatic EIS weighs the potential adverse environmental impacts on recreation use and facilities that could result from transmission facilities after considering the application of laws and regulations; siting and design considerations, including agency guidance and BMPs; and Mitigation Strategies and makes a resulting determination of significance for each impact. **Table 3.14-5** summarizes the adverse environmental impacts anticipated for the new construction, operation and maintenance, upgrade, and modification of transmission facilities.

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Table 3.14-5: Summary of Adverse Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Strategies, and Significance Rating for Recreation

Adverse Environmental Impact	Project Stage	Description of Impact	Impact Determination Before Applying Mitigation	Mitigation Strategy Applied[a]	Significance After Applying Mitigation Strategy	Rationale for Significance Rating
Recreation – Temporary Closure or Restricted Access	New Construction	New construction activities often require the temporary closure of recreational areas, trails, and facilities to ensure safety and allow for the completion of work. Temporary closures of recreational sites and facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations.	**Overhead:** negligible to medium **Underground:** low to medium	▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas ▪ **AVOID-20:** Limit Closure of Recreation Resources ▪ **Rec-1:** Stakeholder and Agency Coordination ▪ **Rec-2:** Public Notification of Temporary Closure ▪ **Rec-3:** Trail Detours ▪ **Rec-4:** Informational Signage and Precautionary Safety Measures ▪ **Rec-5:** Notice to Air Missions	Less than Significant	By carefully planning, coordinating, and managing the stages of a transmission facility project, adverse environmental impacts on recreation can be avoided or minimized.
	Operation and Maintenance	Similar to new construction, operation and maintenance activities may require temporary closure of, or temporarily restrict access to, recreational facilities. Underground cables are generally harder to access than aboveground cables and can take longer to pinpoint damaged areas, leading to prolonged maintenance time and potential closures.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to low			
	Upgrade	Upgrading existing transmission facilities may occasionally require temporary closures or restricted access to recreational areas, trails, or facilities to ensure public safety and facilitate work activities. However, because upgrades typically occur within existing ROWs and do not involve new disturbance, the potential for recreational disruption is lower than for new construction or modifications. Temporary closures associated with upgrades are expected to be short-term and localized, with minimal adverse environmental impact on recreation users, particularly in areas where access routes and management protocols are already established.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to low			
	Modification	Similar to new construction, modification activities may require temporary closure of, or restrict access to, recreational areas, trails, and facilities to ensure safety and allow for the completion of work. Temporary closures of recreational sites and facilities would have short-term adverse effects on users who rely on consistent public access to remote, exceptional, or frequently used recreational destinations.	**Overhead:** negligible to medium **Underground:** low to medium			
Recreation – Permanent Closure	New Construction	New construction activities could result in permanent closures of recreational spaces if they are no longer deemed viable for public use or if continued access would compromise public safety or environmental integrity. Permanent closure would have a long-term adverse effect on recreational facilities and users by restricting access to public land or areas with a long history of recreational use.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to high	▪ **AVOID-13:** Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities ▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas ▪ **AVOID-20:** Limit Closure of Recreation Resources ▪ **Rec-1:** Stakeholder and Agency Coordination ▪ **Rec-2:** Public Notification of Temporary Closure	Less than Significant	Strict safety regulations ensure the safe installation of transmission facilities. Through compliance with these regulations, along with careful planning and coordination, adverse environmental impacts on recreation can be avoided or minimized.
	Operation and Maintenance	This adverse environmental impact is not anticipated to occur during operation and maintenance of transmission facilities.	**Overhead:** N/A **Underground:** N/A			

Adverse Environmental Impact	Project Stage	Description of Impact	Impact Determination Before Applying Mitigation	Mitigation Strategy Applied[a]	Significance After Applying Mitigation Strategy	Rationale for Significance Rating
Recreation – Increase in Use	Upgrade	This adverse environmental impact is not anticipated to occur during the upgrade of transmission facilities.	**Overhead:** N/A **Underground:** N/A	▪ **Rec-3:** Trail Detours ▪ **Rec-4:** Informational Signage and Precautionary Safety Measures ▪ **Rec-5:** Notice to Air Missions	Less than Significant	By carefully planning, coordinating, and managing the stages of a transmission facility project, the adverse environmental impacts on recreation can be avoided or minimized.
	Modification	Modification activities could result in permanent closures of recreational spaces if they are no longer deemed viable for public use or if continued access would compromise public safety or environmental integrity. Permanent closure would have a long-term adverse effect on recreational facilities and users by restricting access to public land or areas with a long history of recreational use.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to high			
	New Construction	New construction activities in recreational areas can generate publicity and attract new users, lead to more frequent use from temporary construction workers, and increase user frequency at nearby, unaffected recreational facilities. Increased visitation can strain these recreational areas and lead to environmental degradation and costly maintenance.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to low	▪ **AVOID-13:** Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities ▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas ▪ **Rec-1:** Stakeholder and Agency Coordination ▪ **Rec-4:** Informational Signage and Precautionary Safety Measures		
	Operation and Maintenance	This adverse environmental impact is not anticipated to occur during the operation and maintenance of transmission facilities.	**Overhead:** N/A **Underground:** N/A			
	Upgrade	This adverse environmental impact is not anticipated to occur during the upgrade of transmission facilities.	**Overhead:** N/A **Underground:** N/A			
	Modification	Modification of transmission facilities in or near recreational areas can generate publicity and attract new users, lead to more frequent use from temporary construction workers, and may increase user frequency. Increased visitation can strain these recreational areas and lead to environmental degradation and costly maintenance.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to low			
Recreation – Change in Integrity	New Construction	New construction activities can disturb vegetation and soils prone to erosion, decrease water quality, alter the existing visual landscape, and create disturbances from noise and vibration. These actions could temporarily impact the environmental and natural landscape of a recreational facility, possibly leading to a change in integrity and decreased usage.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** low to medium	▪ **AVOID-2:** Wetland Disturbance ▪ **AVOID-3:** Sensitive Water Features ▪ **AVOID-6:** Old-Growth and Mature Forests ▪ **AVOID-13:** Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities ▪ **AVOID-17:** Night Sky	Less than Significant	Mitigation strategies often include careful planning to avoid sensitive areas, or areas more susceptible to visual or environmental changes. Using less intrusive constructive methods and restoring affected areas after construction is completed can help to avoid and minimize long-term adverse environmental impacts.

Adverse Environmental Impact	Project Stage	Description of Impact	Impact Determination Before Applying Mitigation	Mitigation Strategy Applied[a]	Significance After Applying Mitigation Strategy	Rationale for Significance Rating
	Operation and Maintenance	As permanent installations, overhead transmission facilities can change the visual landscape of recreational areas and alter recreational integrity. Vegetation management efforts, vehicles and access roads, as well as noisy repair activities can alter area aesthetics, particularly in undisturbed, natural areas, leading to a change in integrity. Underground transmission facilities may change the integrity of recreational areas through vegetation clearing, presence of vehicles and access roads, and noisy repair activities.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** nil to medium	▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas ▪ **AVOID-20:** Limit Closure of Recreation Resources ▪ **Rec-1:** Stakeholder and Agency Coordination ▪ **Rec-2:** Public Notification of Temporary Closure ▪ **Rec-3:** Trail Detours ▪ **Rec-4:** Informational Signage and Precautionary Safety Measures ▪ **Rec-5:** Notice to Air Missions ▪ **Geo-1:** Minimize Soil Disturbance ▪ **Geo-4:** Minimize Impacts on Sensitive Soils ▪ **W-2:** Clear Spanning or Trenchless Methods for Water ▪ **W-4:** Store Chemicals, Operate Equipment, and Conduct Maintenance away from Water ▪ **W-5:** Implement Erosion and Sediment Control Measures ▪ **W-6:** Minimize Hydrology Changes ▪ **Veg-1:** Site Transmission Facilities in Existing ROW or Disturbed Areas ▪ **Hab-2:** Minimize Transmission Line Crossings at Canyons and Riparian Habitat and Parallel to Rivers and Ridge Lines ▪ **Hab-3:** Decommission Nonpermanent Roads ▪ **Hab-7:** Retain Wildlife Trees where Practicable ▪ **Fish-12:** Reduce Number of Stream Crossings		
	Upgrade	Upgrading existing transmission facilities may result in localized and temporary changes to the integrity of recreational areas. These adverse environmental impacts could include minor disturbances to vegetation, temporary visual changes, and short-term noise or vibration during construction activities. However, because upgrades are confined to existing ROWs and infrastructure, the potential for severe or permanent changes to the recreational experience is limited. In most cases, upgrades do not introduce new visual elements which helps preserve the natural and aesthetic qualities of recreational settings.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** nil to medium			
	Modification	Similar to new construction, modification activities can disturb vegetation and soils prone to erosion, decrease water quality, alter the existing visual landscape, and create disturbances from noise and vibration. These actions could temporarily impact the environmental and natural landscape of a recreational facility, possibly leading to a change in integrity and decreased usage.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** low to medium			

Adverse Environmental Impact	Project Stage	Description of Impact	Impact Determination Before Applying Mitigation	Mitigation Strategy Applied[a]	Significance After Applying Mitigation Strategy	Rationale for Significance Rating
				▪ **Fish-13:** Use Bioengineering ▪ **Vis-1:** Selection of Finishes ▪ **Vis-2:** Visual Appeal of ROWs ▪ **Vis-3:** Underground Construction ▪ **Vis-4:** Visual Screening ▪ **Vis-5:** Span Length ▪ **Noise-3:** Use of Operational Noise Mitigation ▪ **Noise-5:** Noise Assessment		
Recreation – Increased Risk of Wildfire	New Construction	Wildfires can directly impact recreation through the destruction of recreational areas and infrastructure, as well as indirectly impact users through decreased air quality in affected areas. Wildfires can alter the landscape of recreational areas, directly impact user safety, lead to temporary or permanent closures of recreational sites, and increase maintenance needs.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to high	▪ **AVOID-6:** Old-Growth and Mature Forests ▪ **AVOID-13:** Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities ▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas	Less than Significant	Strict regulatory requirements and standard practices ensure the safe design, installation, and operation and maintenance of transmission facilities. Through compliance with these measures, as well as careful planning and emergency management coordination, adverse environmental impacts on recreation can be avoided or minimized.
	Operation and Maintenance	Wildfires can directly impact recreation through the destruction of recreational areas and infrastructure, as well as indirectly impact users through decreased air quality in affected areas. Wildfires can alter the landscape of recreational areas, directly impact user safety, lead to temporary or permanent closures of recreational sites, and increase maintenance needs. Certain activities, such as equipment operation or welding during maintenance, or vegetation management, can introduce ignition sources.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to low			
	Upgrade	Upgrading transmission facilities may pose a risk of wildfire depending on the type of infrastructure and the nature of the upgrade activities. While upgrades typically involve limited disturbance and are conducted within existing ROWs, certain activities, such as equipment operation, vegetation management, or welding, can introduce ignition sources.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to low			
	Modification	Wildfires can directly impact recreation through the destruction of recreational areas and infrastructure, as well as indirectly impact users through decreased air quality in affected areas. Wildfires can alter the landscape of recreational areas, directly impact user safety, lead to temporary or permanent closures of recreational sites, and increase maintenance needs.	**Overhead:** negligible to high **Underground:** negligible to high			

Adverse Environmental Impact	Project Stage	Description of Impact	Impact Determination Before Applying Mitigation	Mitigation Strategy Applied[a]	Significance After Applying Mitigation Strategy	Rationale for Significance Rating
Recreation – Physical Hazard to Aerial Recreation	New Construction	New construction of overhead transmission facilities may introduce new physical hazards to aerial recreation enthusiasts, such as low-flying aircraft, paragliders, hang gliders, and skydivers. These hazards stem from the presence of new structures and conductors in previously unobstructed airspace. While underground construction poses minimal risk, overhead installations can alter flight paths or reduce safe maneuvering space.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to negligible	▪ **AVOID-13:** Land Use and Zoning Incompatibilities ▪ **AVOID-18:** Exceptional Recreation Assets ▪ **AVOID-19:** Wilderness Areas ▪ **Rec-1:** Stakeholder and Agency Coordination ▪ **Rec-5:** Notice to Air Missions ▪ **Vis-3:** Underground Construction ▪ **Hab-2:** Minimize Transmission Line Crossings at Canyons and Riparian Habitat and Parallel to Rivers and Ridge Lines ▪ **TR-1 –** Coordination with Aviation Groups	Less than Significant	Careful design and siting of transmission facilities can help minimize the adverse environmental impact on popular aerial recreation users. Informing the public and recreational users about the locations of transmission facilities can help mitigate safety risks.
	Operation and Maintenance	Overhead transmission facilities are a hazard to low-flying aircraft and helicopters, paragliders, hang gliders, and skydivers. Temporary equipment such as cranes or elevated platforms may pose short-term risks during maintenance activities.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** nil to negligible			
	Upgrade	Upgrades to existing transmission facilities typically do not introduce new aerial hazards, as they occur within established ROWs and involve existing infrastructure. However, temporary equipment such as cranes or elevated platforms may pose short-term risks during upgrades.	**Overhead:** nil to medium **Underground:** nil to negligible			
	Modification	Modifications may involve replacing or enlarging existing overhead structures, which can increase the risk to aerial recreation enthusiasts.	**Overhead:** nil to low **Underground:** nil to negligible			

Notes:

(a) Appendix 3.1-1 provides a detailed listing of Mitigation Strategies. This appendix serves as a reference section that can be consulted independently of the main text. This is particularly useful for detailed guidance and technical specifications that may be referred to multiple times. Additionally, including this information in an appendix allows for easier updates and revisions. If Mitigation Strategies or supporting guidance change, the appendix can be updated without altering the main content.

BMP = best management practice; **N/A** = not applicable; **O&M** = operation and maintenance; **ROW** = right-of-way

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3.14.6 Environmental Sensitivity Map

Project-specific applications require a comprehensive analysis to identify the site-specific adverse environmental impacts on resources and determine the suitability of this Programmatic EIS. Environmental review may be phased by incorporating relevant information from this Programmatic EIS by reference while evaluating site-specific adverse environmental impacts of individual project applications. For more information on phased reviews, please refer to Chapter 1, Introduction.

Each project-specific application would include details about the proposal's location and site-specific conditions. This Programmatic EIS provides environmental sensitivity maps that, when used alongside project-specific data, could support more informative and efficient environmental planning. An online mapping tool has also been developed to provide public access to the most current data used in creating these environmental sensitivity maps.

Figure 3.14-5 presents the environmental sensitivity map for recreation resources, identifying areas of varying sensitivity based on the siting criteria described in the following sections.

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LEGEND

Sensitivity Score

Low Sensitivity

Very High Sensitivity

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council

PROJECT

PROGRAMMATIC EIS
HIGH-VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION

TITLE

SENSITIVITY MAP
RECREATION

YYYY-MM-DD 2025-09-22 CONSULTANT wsp FIGURE 3.14-5

N

0 30 60

1:1,700,000 MILES

IF THIS MEASUREMENT DOES NOT MATCH WHAT IS SHOWN, THE SHEET SIZE HAS BEEN MODIFIED FROM: ANSI B

DESIGNED MK PREPARED MK REVIEWED SHUP APPROVED AH/SG/ZA

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3.14.6.1 Environmental Sensitivity Map Criteria Cards

The environmental sensitivity map evaluates various siting criteria and assigns sensitivity levels to geographic areas based on their potential for adverse environmental impacts, as analyzed in this Programmatic EIS. Each criterion was assigned a sensitivity level (1, 2, or 3), with Level 3 representing the highest sensitivity. Criteria cards illustrate the spatial extent of the siting criteria chosen. A summary of the criteria cards is provided below. Appendix 3.1-2 details the data preparation process for the criteria cards.

Parks and Recreational Facilities – Sensitivity Level 1

Figure 3.14-6 illustrates the spatial extent of recreational areas from the 2023 Outdoor Recreation Inventory plus a 0.5-mile buffer (RCO 2024b). Recreational areas include state parks, playgrounds, gymnasiums, swimming pools, beaches, stadiums, golf courses, racetracks, coliseums, campgrounds, boat ramps, hunting and fishing areas, arboretums, paths, trails, and community centers. Lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams were also included for their recreational value (DNR 2021).

National Parks and Recreational Facilities – Sensitivity Level 2

Figure 3.14-7 illustrates the spatial extent of National Parks, National Forests, National Historic Landmarks, Properties, and Districts (DAHP 2025a, 2025b; NPS 2025b; USFS 2025). A 0.5-mile buffer was applied around National Historic Landmarks.

Wilderness Areas – Sensitivity Level 3

Figure 3.14-8 shows the spatial extent of protected wilderness areas and national wildlife refuges (USFWS 2025; USGS 2024).

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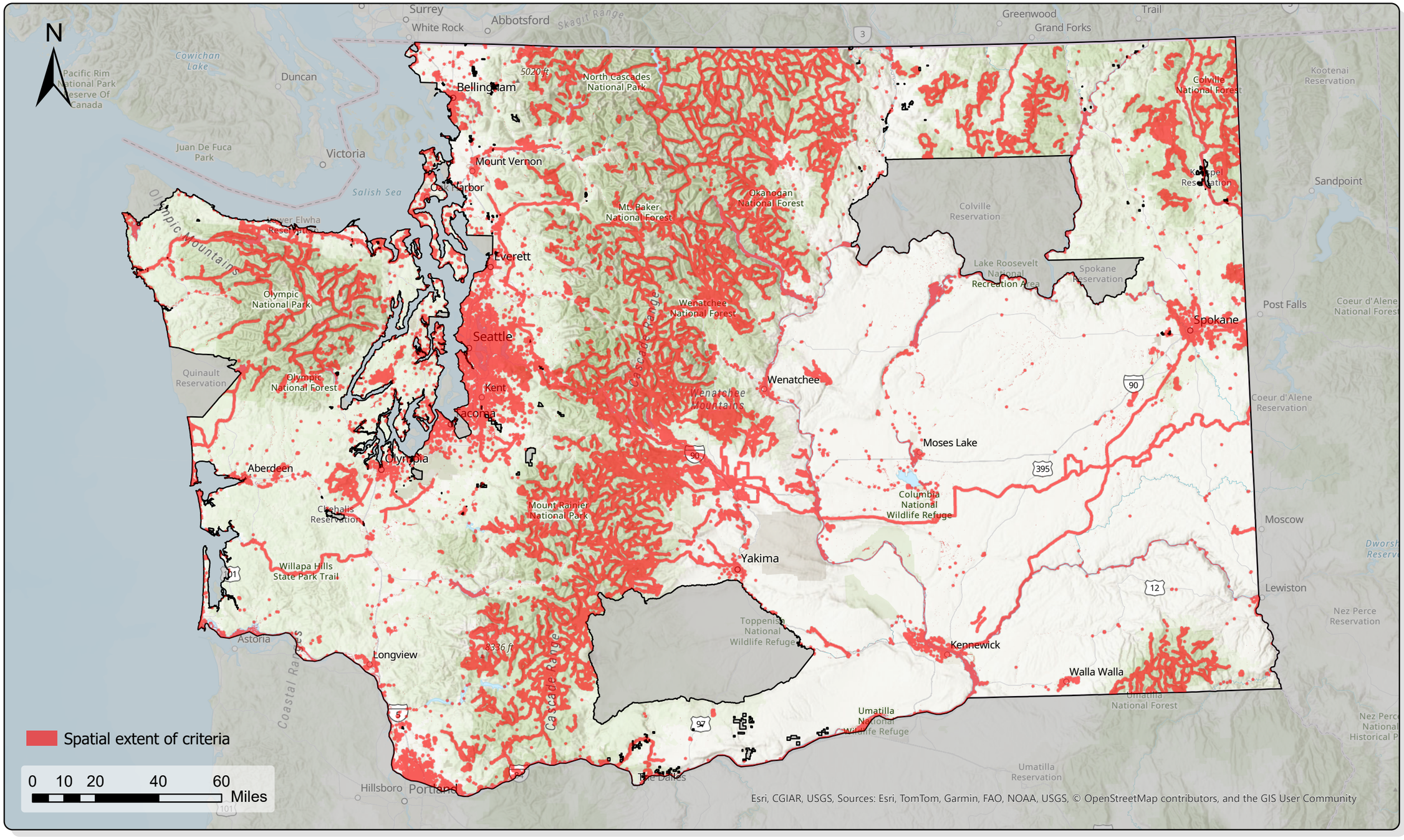
Parks and Recreation Facilities - Sensitivity Level 1

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council



RECREATION

Figure 3.14-6

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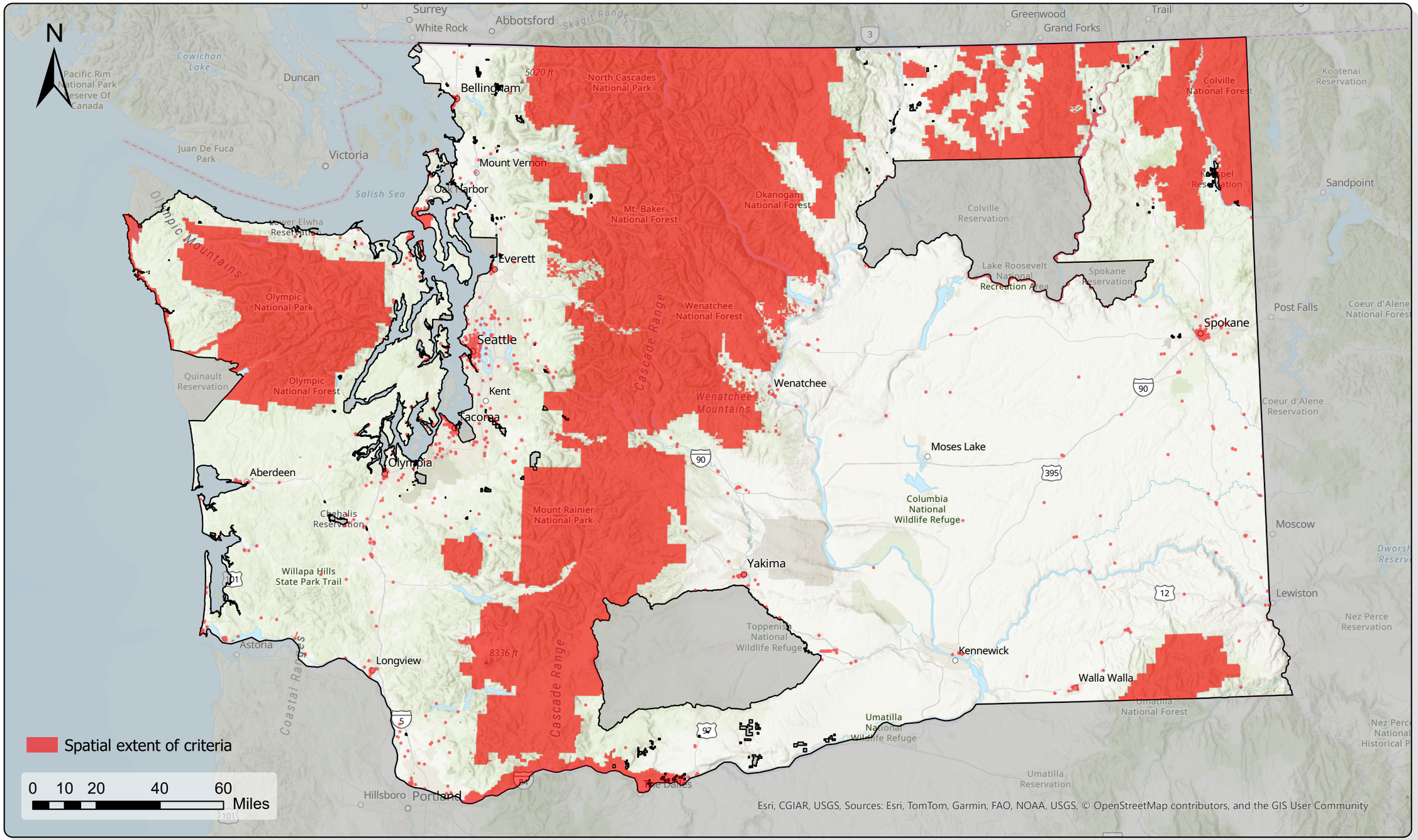
National Parks and Recreation Facilities - Sensitivity Level 2

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council



RECREATION

Figure 3.14-7

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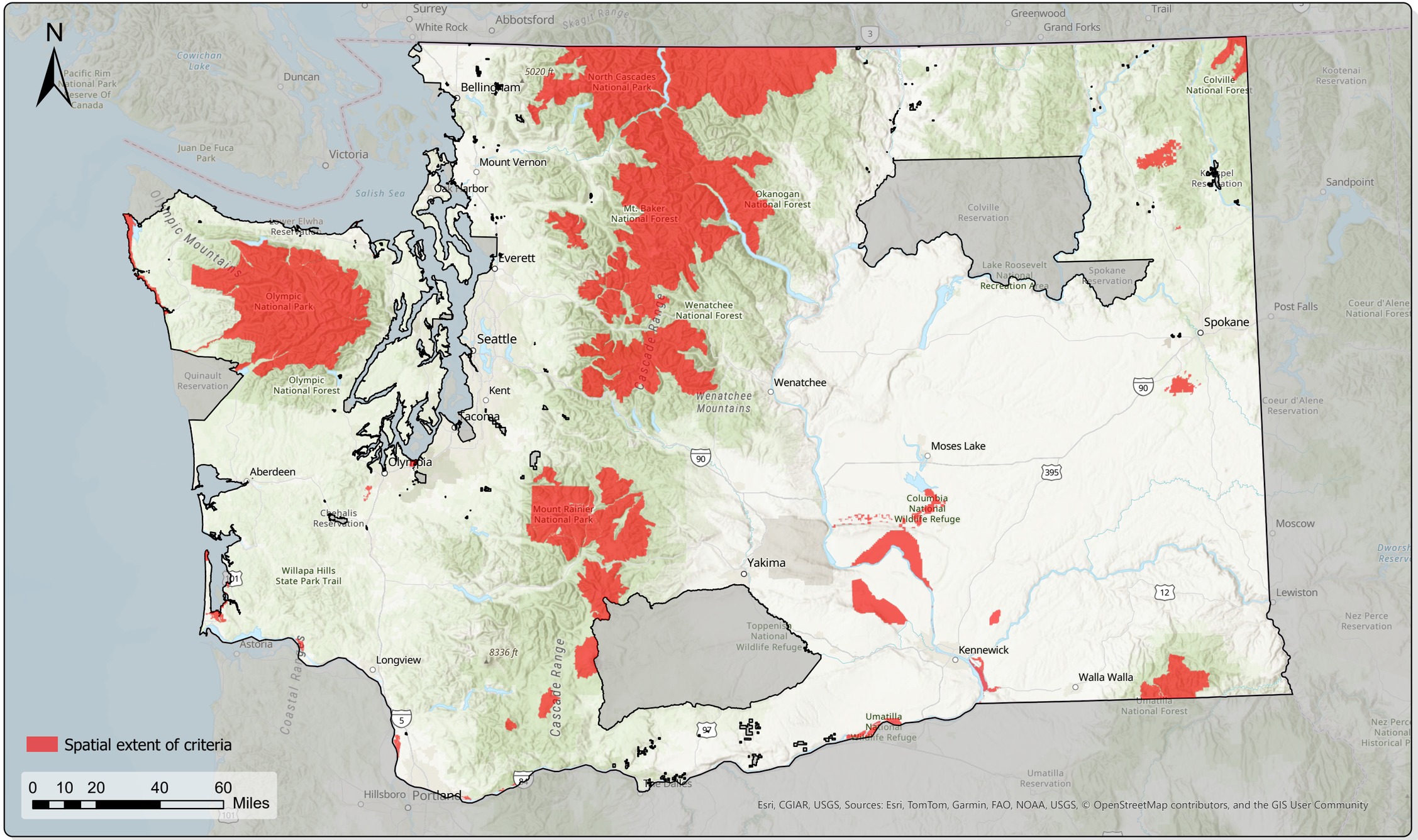
Wilderness Areas - Sensitivity Level 3

Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council



RECREATION

Figure 3.14-8

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