



# Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility Boardman Environmental Impact Statement

## Protecting Natural Resources at NWSTF Boardman

The U.S. Navy and Oregon National Guard are committed to protecting the environment as they train service men and women and citizen soldiers to defend the United States. As good stewards of the military lands they are responsible for, these agencies recognize that Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility (NWSTF) Boardman is part of a diverse and functioning environment.



Juniper Tree in Sagebrush Habitat

An *ecoregion* is an ecologically and geographically-defined area that is determined by its environmental conditions, including climate, landforms and soil characteristics.

### COLLABORATING AND PARTNERING TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Under the Sikes Act, the Navy, in coordination with military operators, is required to implement an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) and has done so in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. As a stakeholder in the management of natural resources at NWSTF Boardman, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife works closely with the Navy on various wildlife conservation issues, including:

- Protecting on-site habitat
- Controlling invasive species
- Developing and conducting wildlife and habitat research and surveys

The Nature Conservancy co-manages three Research Natural Areas at NWSTF Boardman, which are areas set aside for education and research purposes. Established in 1978, the NWSTF Boardman Research Natural Areas are part of a federal program to preserve high-quality areas of Columbia River Basin vegetation and associated wildlife.

### NATURAL RESOURCES AT NWSTF BOARDMAN

NWSTF Boardman is located in the Snake-Columbia shrub steppe ecoregion, a vast, arid region of about 84,000 square miles extending from eastern Washington through southeast Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, northeast California and western Wyoming.

In the term "shrub steppe ecoregion," "shrub" refers to the abundant woody plant species present at NWSTF Boardman, such as big sagebrush and rabbitbrush. "Steppe" is a Russian word that means a vast treeless plain.

In Oregon, much of the ecological integrity of the Snake-Columbia shrub steppe has been lost or degraded by conversion of land to irrigated agriculture and livestock grazing. This ecoregion is considered to be endangered from a conservation perspective.

NWSTF Boardman contains 11 habitat types, which support a variety of plant and animal species, such as:

- Three species of snakes
- Three species of lizards
- More than 20 species of mammals
- More than 80 species of birds

NWSTF Boardman contains several species with high conservation concern, such as:

- Northern sagebrush lizard
- Sage sparrow
- Ferruginous hawk
- Burrowing owl
- Washington ground squirrel
- Long-billed curlew

Currently, there are no federally listed threatened or endangered species known to occur at NWSTF Boardman, but the installation is an important population center for the Washington ground squirrel, which has been listed as endangered by the state of Oregon.

## Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP)

An INRMP is a long-term planning document that guides natural resources management at NWSTF Boardman. Maintaining the health of habitats and wildlife ensures the preservation of the native landscapes and allows military training in a realistic setting. The comprehensive and expansive INRMP is implemented to ensure:

- Sustainability of all species and habitats within NWSTF Boardman
- Balance of military training with natural resources management, with the goal of no net loss of the military capabilities at NWSTF Boardman, as required by the Sikes Act

The Navy and Oregon National Guard comply with federal environmental regulations and executive orders, to include:

- Endangered Species Act
- Sikes Act
- National Environmental Policy Act
- Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Clean Water Act
- Executive Orders (EO):
  - › EO 11990 – Protection of Wetlands
  - › EO 11644 – Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands
  - › EO 11987 – Exotic Species
  - › EO 13186 – Protection of Migratory Birds

## PARTNERS IN FLIGHT

Partners in Flight is a collaborative bird conservation effort comprised of over 300 partners, including state and federal agencies, academics and conservation groups, to promote the long-term health of bird species and habitats throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Department of Defense supports and promotes its partnership role through protection of habitats and wildlife, enhancement of biodiversity, and maintenance of healthy and productive natural systems, while remaining consistent with the military mission.



Burrowing Owls



Sage Sparrow



Long-billed Curlew

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



### WASHINGTON GROUND SQUIRREL

The Washington ground squirrel is a protected species in Oregon. One of the largest remaining collections of Washington ground squirrel colonies occurs at the installation and the adjacent Boardman Conservation Area. The ground squirrel is an important component in the food web for local predators, especially badgers, hawks and golden eagles and is a likely indicator of the health of other species and habitats at NWSTF Boardman. The ground squirrels' burrowing also improves soil by:

- Loosening soils
- Increasing water infiltration in soils
- Increasing air flow through soils

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the Washington ground squirrel as a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered. Ground squirrel studies and research at NWSTF Boardman have and will continue to be conducted to improve Navy and National Guard knowledge of ground squirrel locations, habitat and natural history. Gathering this information will lead to more effective management of the species to ensure its protection.

### Management Strategies

The Navy and Oregon National Guard recognize that their training activities may potentially affect habitat and wildlife at NWSTF Boardman. Although there are currently no federally threatened or endangered species residing within the boundaries of NWSTF Boardman, the Navy proactively engages in management strategies to identify possible impacts from training activities on potentially listed species and strives to minimize these effects. Proposed projects, military training activities or other actions are routinely evaluated for potential impacts on species and to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations.



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