# *Draft Recovery Plan For Pocket Gophers up For Public Comment*

**Local News**

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OLYMPIA - The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will accept public comments through April 19 on a draft recovery plan for the Mazama pocket gopher, a burrowing rodent listed by the state as a threatened species.The draft recovery plan, available at http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01449/ on WDFW's website, outlines strategies the state and its partners will use to conserve and restore existing pocket gopher populations in seven areas of the south Puget Sound region.Five of those areas are in Thurston County, one is in Mason County near the Shelton Airport, and another is in southern Pierce County and includes part of Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM). The primary goal of the draft plan is to maintain or increase pocket gopher populations in the seven areas where wildlife managers believe they have the greatest chance of long-term survival, said Eric Gardner, WDFW wildlife diversity manager. "Much of the historical gopher habitat of the south Puget Sound area has been lost to housing construction and other development in recent decades," he said. "This plan focuses on protecting gopher populations living on the larger remaining grasslands in prairie areas."

Recent surveys conducted by WDFW confirm that the largest remaining gopher populations inhabit public land around the airports in Olympia and Shelton, and at JBLM in Pierce County.To protect these and other key populations, the draft plan supports a combination of existing local land-use regulations, habitat restoration and educational programs designed to increase public understanding and acceptance of pocket gophers.Gardner said all three counties included in the draft recovery plan provide protection for pocket gophers through their critical area ordinances. In addition, WDFW has been working with a variety of partners - including the two airports and JBLM - to maintain or restore essential gopher habitat."In many ways, the draft recovery plan reflects the management initiatives that have been in place since pocket gophers were listed for protection by the state in 2006," he said. "This plan is really designed to provide more focus for those efforts."Meanwhile, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is accepting public comments through Feb. 11 on its proposal to list the Mazama pocket gopher as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Information on the proposed federal listing is available at http://is.gd/bPdeSP .