



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
510 Desmond Dr. SE, Suite 102
Lacey, Washington 98503



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Memorandum

To: Washington Fish and Wildlife Office Staff

From: State Supervisor, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office 

Subject: Revised Service Areas for Mazama Pocket Gopher Mitigation, Thurston County, Washington

This memorandum describes revised and adjusted service areas and service area boundaries for three of the four federally-listed subspecies of the Mazama pocket gopher (MPG): Olympia pocket gopher (OPG), Tenino pocket gopher (TPG), and Yelm pocket gopher (YPG) (*Thomomys mazama pugetensis*, *T. m. tumuli*, and *T. m. yelmensis*, respectively). The Roy Prairie pocket gopher (*T. m. glacialis*) occurs in Pierce County, Washington and is not the subject of this memorandum. The service area for the Roy Prairie pocket gopher will, if appropriate, be determined in a separate process.

The service areas for the three federally-listed subspecies of Mazama pocket gopher have been revised to comply with current U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) policy. Per the USFWS's 2017 Interim Guidance (USFWS 2017) on implementing the Endangered Species Act Compensatory Mitigation Policy, service area maps "...must be at an appropriate scale to determine the boundaries at street level and contain a narrative description of the limits." The previously-distributed Draft Thurston County MPG Service Area map (USFWS 2015, Map 1) contained boundary lines that were not always based on on-the-ground features, which in those instances made it difficult for landowners/land managers to self-determine in which service area a particular parcel fell. As such, the USFWS's Washington Fish and Wildlife Office (WFWO) has revised the existing Draft Service Area map for OPG, TPG, and YPG.

Draft service areas in Thurston County were previously described in the USFWS's "Mazama Pocket Gopher Conservation Strategy and Mitigation Guidance" document (USFWS 2015, Map 1). At that time there were six service areas (one for OPG [OPG 1&2], one for TPG [TPG], three for YPG [YPG 1&2, YPG 3, YPG 4], and one additional service area identified as "unknown," then later as YPG 5). It was recognized at the time that service areas could be refined as biological information, recovery needs, and land uses changed.

USFWS and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff worked together in June and July 2017 to revise the Thurston County MPG service area boundaries and describe them in a narrative fashion. There are now five service areas (one for OPG, one for TPG, and three for YPG). Similar to how service areas were previously determined, revised service area boundaries were delineated based on the natural pattern of suitable pocket gopher soils across the landscape, pocket gopher occupancy patterns, genetics, habitat connectivity, and permeable or impermeable barriers to movement. We also considered patterns of land use development and conversion (as presently understood), how resulting impacts are likely to present challenges to subspecies recovery, and how land use development and impacts are likely to generate mitigation debits and drive landscape-scale needs and opportunities for compensatory mitigation.

The biologically- and/or management-relevant, specific, and recognizable on-the-ground features used to map the service area boundaries include: rivers, creeks, and wetlands, including those that are likely to act as barriers to MPG dispersal; MPG soils and soil preferences (including discontinuities/barriers); ridges and landscape-scale breaks in topography (sometimes with reference to 12th-order hydrologic unit code boundaries, [a.k.a. sub-watershed boundaries]); and, administrative and man-made features, such as County line boundaries, highways, streets, or roads. The narrative and the revised MPG service area map will be available online at <https://www.fws.gov/wafwo/articles.cfm?id=149489588>.

Where unnamed creeks and roads are part of the narrative, we strived to include township, range, and section descriptions, as well as Universal Transverse Mercator and latitude/longitude coordinates. The WFWO will update these maps as conditions require. When or if a landowner or land manager has difficulty determining into which service area their parcel falls, we encourage them to contact the WFWO for help, in particular if mitigation may be needed.

Some of the more significant changes from the previous Draft MPG Service Area map include:

- 1) The OPG 1&2 Service Area will now be the OPG Service Area.
- 2) On the west side of Interstate 5, the OPG Service Area extends farther south than before. As a result, the TPG Service Area is now smaller. This change reflects the areas that are likely to be utilized by each subspecies, based on the configuration of suitable pocket gopher soils in the area. Soils that are included in the updated OPG Service Area are more contiguous with the remainder of that service area than with the updated TPG Service Area.
- 3) The YPG 1&2 Service Area will now be referred to as the YPG South Service Area. Numeric naming of service areas was dropped so as to prevent confusion with past naming of service areas for this subspecies.

- 4) The eastern boundary of the YPG South Service Area is the Deschutes River. The previous eastern boundary (for the “old” YPG 1&2) was not determinable on the ground. Using the Deschutes River as a boundary makes biological sense in terms of the natural pattern of MPG soils, pocket gopher occupancy patterns, genetics, and land use patterns, which will drive the future need for mitigation credits/debits.
- 5) The YPG 3 and YPG 4 Service Areas are now combined into one service area, referred to as the YPG East Service Area. Combining these two service areas into one is supported by the natural pattern of MPG soils, pocket gopher occupancy patterns, genetics, and land use patterns, which will drive the future need for mitigation credits/debits.
- 6) The YPG 5 Service Area will now be referred to as YPG North Service Area.

MPG service areas in Thurston County are those areas within which proposed actions that may negatively impact Mazama pocket gophers, and that meet certain criteria, may be mitigated with USFWS approval (81 FR 95316, USFWS 2016; USFWS 2017). The impacts for which mitigation is sought must be located within the designated service area(s) for the affected subspecies unless otherwise approved by the USFWS.

Within each service area, compensatory mitigation should be directed to Reserve Priority Areas (RPAs). RPAs, when combined with areas already conserved or managed for MPGs (see below), are those areas identified by federal and state biologists as being the most important for, and the most likely to support, the long-term conservation and recovery of a particular subspecies of MPG.

Because RPAs are meant to direct mitigation to areas that are not already conserved or managed for MPGs, when the RPAs were identified they did not include lands such as WDFW’s Scatter Creek Wildlife Area (north and south units) and West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area, Washington Department of Natural Resources’ Rocky Prairie Natural Area Preserve, the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Colvin Ranch Grassland Reserve Program area, and the Center for Natural Lands Management’s Tenalquot Prairie Preserve. Other, similar conservation areas have since been established that may not fall within the RPAs but which do provide conservation value to the three Thurston County MPG subspecies. Depending on their location and management, these already-protected lands do and are expected to continue to provide conservation support for the Olympia, Tenino, and Yelm pocket gophers.

Meeting and providing for the conservation needs of MPG subspecies is our primary objective by this service area revision. It is our hope that the MPG service areas presented here will assist in providing a transparent, predictable, flexible, and effective regulatory framework in which to achieve subspecies recovery. We acknowledge that subspecies service areas and service area boundaries may warrant and require further refinement in the future, whether because of new biological information, land use changes, or new conservation needs and opportunities. We also expect that the formal recovery planning process, an effort now underway, may produce new information or concepts about how best to achieve recovery for MPG subspecies. The WFWO has made its best effort to ensure that the MPG service areas presented here reflect the best available science and will properly direct and inform compensatory mitigation requirements and landscape scale conservation now and into the future.

If you have questions about this memorandum or the guidance provided herein, please contact Deputy State Supervisor Brad Thompson (brad_thompson@fws.gov; 360-753-4652) or Curtis Tanner, Division Manager for Consultation and Conservation Planning (curtis_tanner@fws.gov; 360-753-4326) or Tom McDowell, Division Manager for Listing and Recovery (tom_mcdowell@fws.gov; 360-753-6046).

Attachment:
2017 MPG Service Areas Map

LITERATURE CITED

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2015. Memorandum: Mazama pocket gopher conservation strategy and mitigation guidance. Prepared by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, Lacey, Washington. July 1, 2015. 22 pp.
- USFWS. 2016. Endangered Species Act compensatory mitigation policy. Notice of final policy. Federal Register, Vol. 81, No. 248, pp. 95316-95349. December 27, 2016.
- USFWS. 2017. Memorandum: Interim guidance on implementing the final Endangered Species Act compensatory mitigation policy. Prepared by the Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. January 17, 2017. 48 pp.

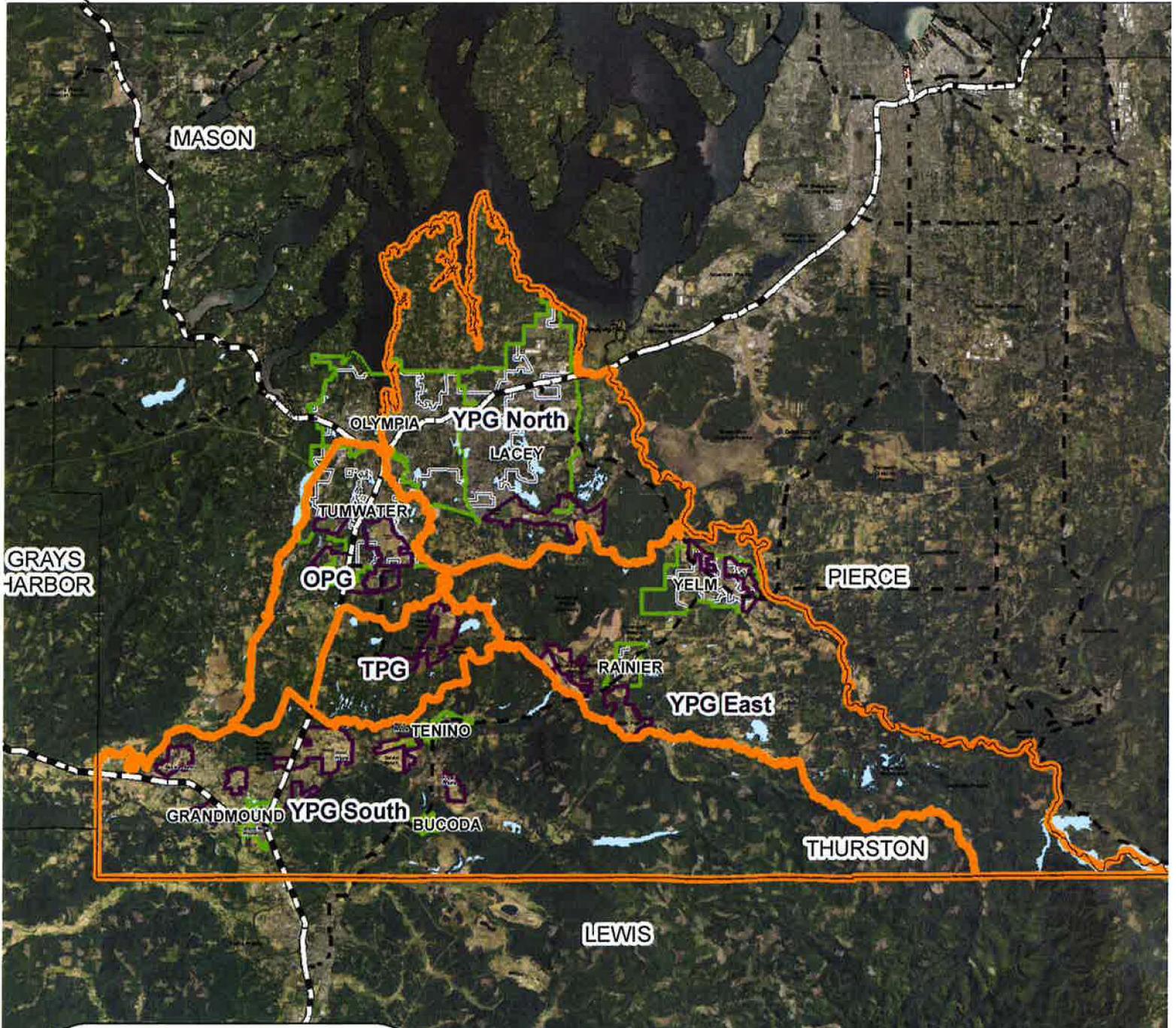


MPG Service Areas in Thurston County

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- MPG Service Areas
- MPG Reserve Priority Areas
- Cities
- Urban Growth Areas
- Major Roads Federal
- Major Roads State
- County Boundaries

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