



STAFF SUMMARY

Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area Addition – 255 Acres

Background

The department is proposing to request the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the acquisition of 255 acres adjacent to the Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area (LDWA; Figure 1-3), expanding it from 18,724 acres to 18,979 acres.

The LDWA was originally established in 1983 with an initial purchase of habitat along the banks of the Deschutes River in Wasco County. That initial purchase was followed by two additional purchases that expanded the wildlife area further up the river corridor and extended its reach to upland habitats. The combination of the LDWA and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) owned lands create a nearly continuous stretch of public access along the last 39 miles of the Deschutes River before it reaches the Columbia River.

The LDWA represents a unique mix of riparian and upland habitat situated on the western edge of the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion. Most of this ecoregion has been converted from sage steppe and grassland habitat to agriculture since European settlement. Upland areas of the LDWA represent some of the last intact and unplowed representations of this former Columbia Plateau grassland. Riparian habitats provide an oasis in this arid landscape for a multitude of fish and wildlife species, including one of Oregon's largest herds of California bighorn sheep.

The parcel proposed for acquisition is a contiguous parcel of private land surrounded by BLM owned property in addition to the LDWA. This parcel represents one of the few private inholdings along this lower portion of the Deschutes River. The proposed acquisition would create a continuous stretch of publicly accessible land on both sides of the Deschutes River from river mile 17.5 to 14. If approved, the parcel would be managed as wildlife habitat using existing staff/funding.

The total purchase price is whichever is less, the appraised value or the asking price of \$395,000. Oregon Wild Sheep Foundation has agreed to fund a minimum of \$195,000, with the remainder funded using ODFW bighorn sheep funds generated from the sale of auction/raffle tags.

Public Involvement to Date

The acquisition is scheduled for review by the Public Lands Advisory Committee (PLAC) on October 22, 2026, as required by ORS 270.120(6). PLAC feedback will inform public sentiment.

The Oregon Wild Sheep Foundation has expressed support and committed funding for the proposed acquisition.

Overview of Proposed Commission Action

The Commission would approve or deny the proposed acquisition of 255 acres adjacent to the Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area.

ODFW proposes acquiring 255 acres in Wasco County adjacent to the LDWA, increasing the total acreage of the wildlife area to 18,979 acres.

The acquisition would:

- Protect both riparian and upland habitat for a wide variety of species.
- Expand public land access for hunting, fishing, and other non-consumptive recreation.
- Improve administration of the wildlife area by not having private land inholdings.

Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area

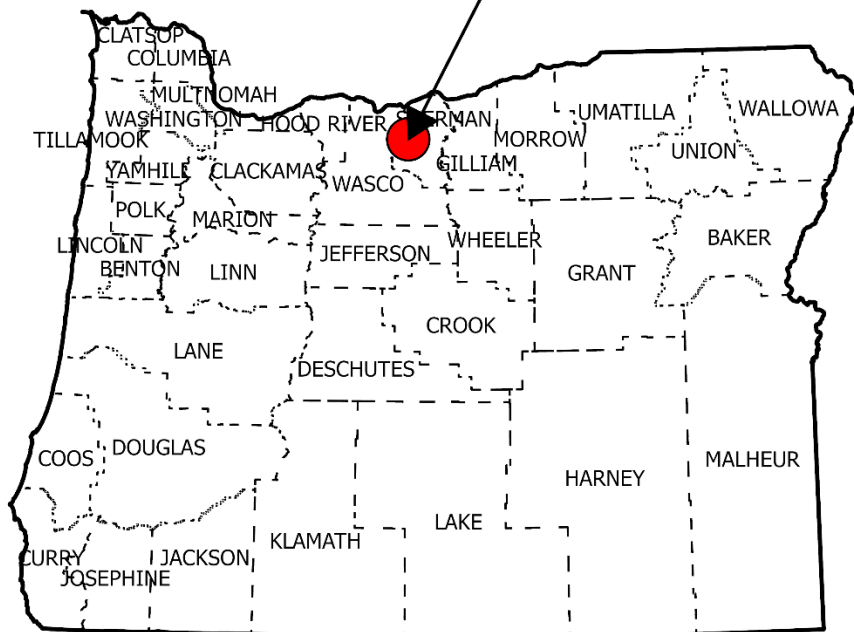


Figure 1. Location of the LWDA within Oregon.

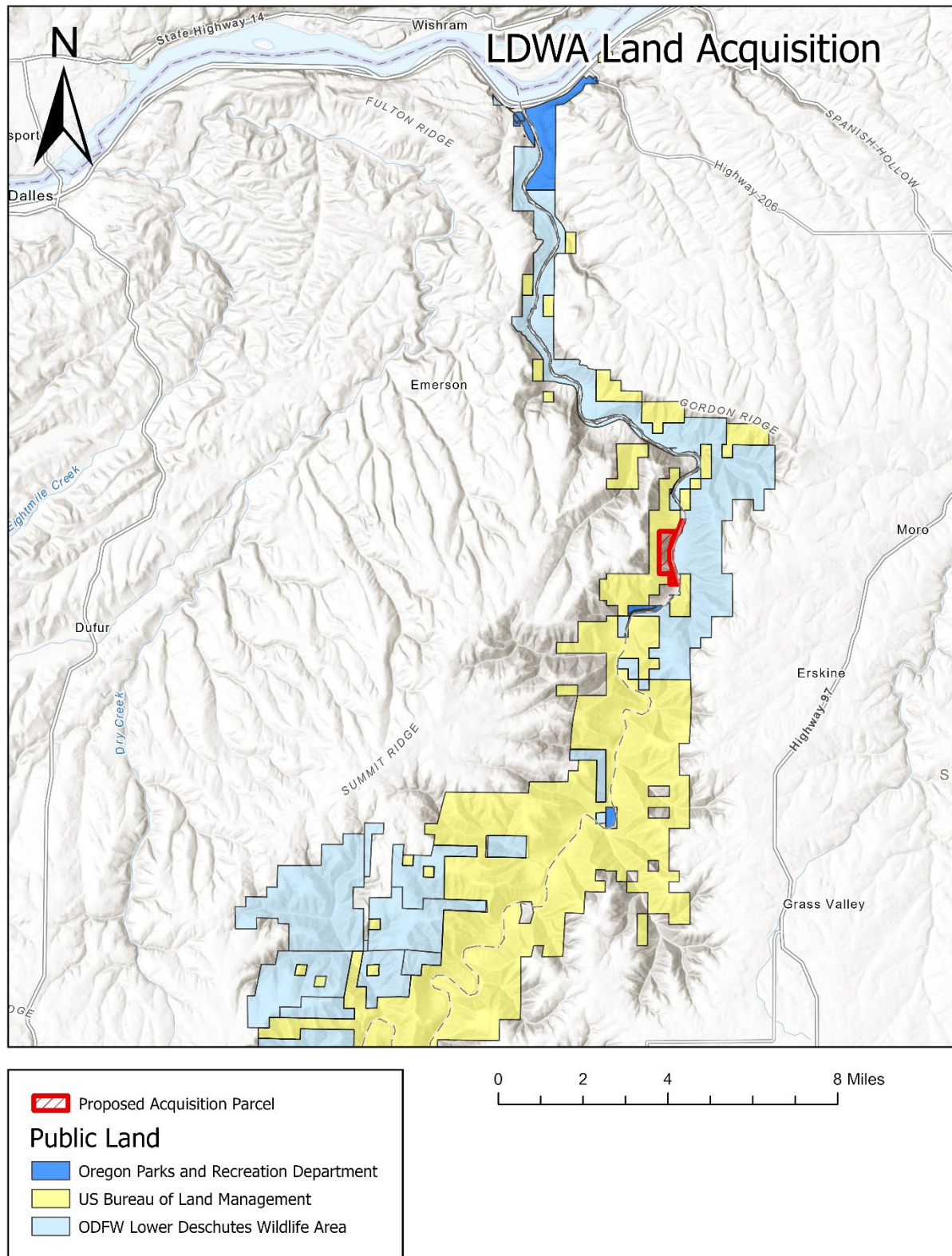


Figure 2. Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area and surrounding public land with proposed acquisition parcel.

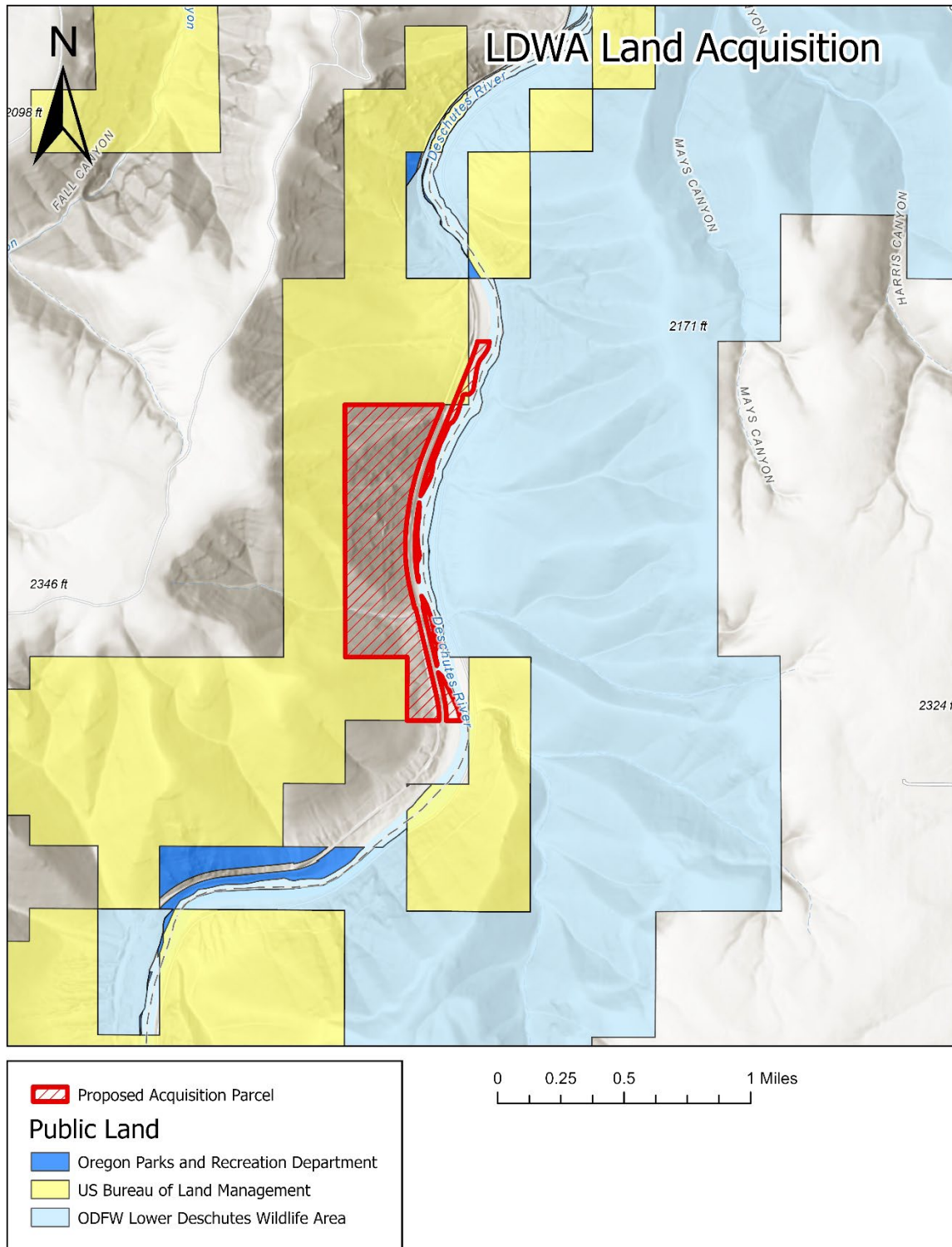


Figure 3. Proposed acquisition along the Deschutes River, OR.