

Staff Summary for August 12-13, 2026

19. Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan**Today's Item****Information ☒****Action ☐**

Receive a presentation from the Department and discuss updates to the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| • Determined that listing western Joshua tree under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) may be warranted | September 2020 |
| • Public notice that western Joshua tree is protected as a candidate species under CESA | October 2020 |
| • Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act signed into law | July 10, 2023 |
| • Commission approved the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan | August 13-14, 2025 |
| • Today, discuss potential updates to the plan | August 12-13, 2026 |

Background

At its September 2020 meeting, the Commission determined that listing western Joshua tree (WJT; *Yucca brevifolia*) under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) may be warranted and accepted for further consideration the petition submitted to list WJT as threatened or endangered. The Commission provided public notice of that decision; consequently, WJT is a candidate species under CESA pursuant to California Fish and Game Code Section 2074.2.

In March 2022, the Department completed and made publicly available a status review report for WJT, as required under CESA. At its June 2022 meeting, the Commission considered the status review report and other information in the administrative record, but could not reach a decision regarding whether listing the species as threatened was warranted. In February 2023, while the Commission was still considering its final decision on the petition, state legislation was introduced to protect WJT. In response to the legislative proposal, the Commission postponed further consideration of the petition under CESA.

On July 10, 2023, the Governor signed the [Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act](#) (WJTCA; California Fish and Game Code sections 1927-1927.12), authorizing the Commission to postpone final consideration of the WJT CESA petition until the Department submits an updated status review, *no later than January 1, 2033*. Among other provisions, the act requires the Department to draft a conservation plan for WJT in collaboration with the Commission, governmental agencies, and California Native American tribes, for approval by the Commission. Pursuant to WJTCA requirements, in August 2025 the Commission approved a conservation plan for WJT (exhibits 2 and 3) that, among other things:

- incorporates a description of management actions necessary to conserve WJT and objective, measurable criteria to assess the effectiveness of such actions;

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- includes guidance for avoiding and minimizing impacts to WJT and protocols for the successful relocation of western Joshua trees; and
- includes tribal co-management principles, provides for the relocation of western Joshua trees to tribal lands upon request from a tribe, and incorporates traditional ecological knowledge.

WJTCA specifies that beginning in 2026, and every two years thereafter, the Commission must review the status of WJT and the effectiveness of the conservation plan in conserving the species. As part of the review, the Department must make recommendations for revisions to the conservation plan.

Today, the Commission will receive a presentation (Exhibit 1) on the status of WJT and the effectiveness of the conservation plan. The Department does not recommend any amendments to the conservation plan at this time.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. [Department presentation](#)
2. [Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan \(Volume 1\)](#) (external link)
3. [Western Joshual Tree Conservation Plan, Appendices \(Volume 2\)](#) (external link)

Motion (N/A)



WESTERN JOSHUA TREE CONSERVATION PLAN

August 2026 Fish and Game Commission Meeting

PRESENTED BY:

Drew Kaiser - California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Presentation Outline

- Recommendation Not to Amend the Conservation Plan
- Conservation Plan Progress/Effectiveness Review

Photo: Adobe Stock



Conservation Plan Amendment

Conservation Plan Background

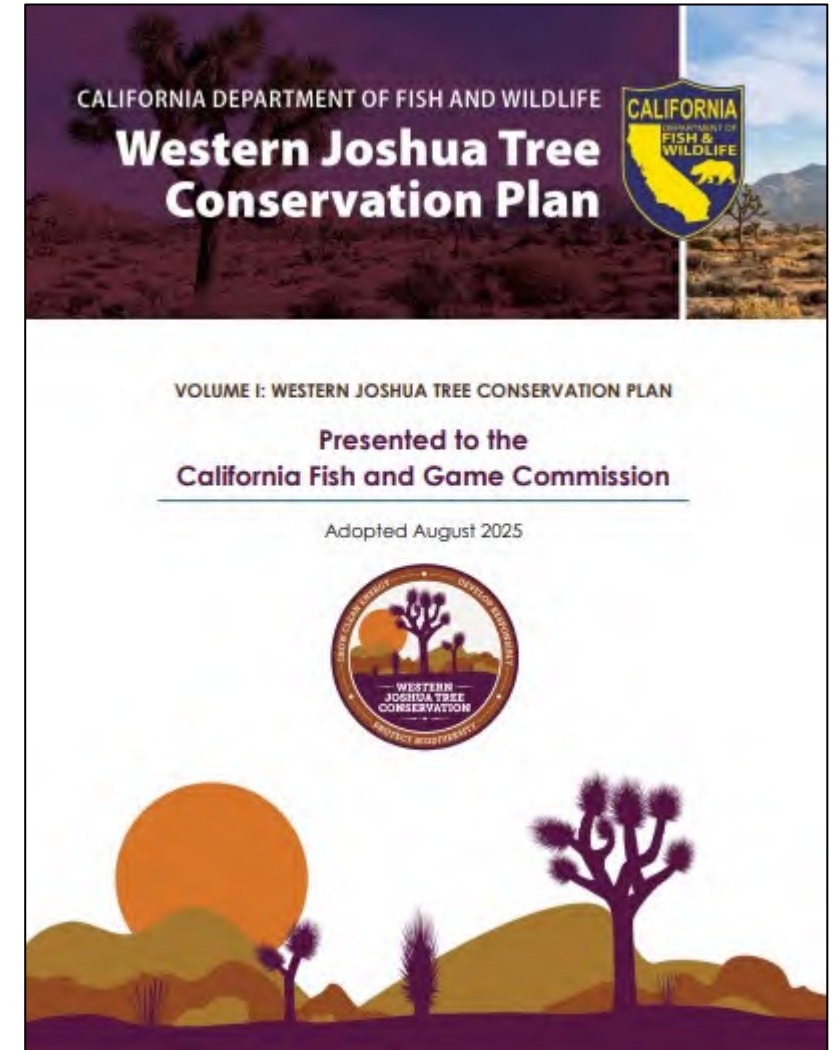
The Plan was developed by CDFW in collaboration with:

- Fish and Game Commission (Commission)
- Governmental agencies
- California Native American Tribes
- Public

The Plan includes:

- Management actions to conserve WJT
- Guidance to avoid and minimize impacts to WJT
- Tribal co-management objectives
- Research/information for future conservation
- Education and awareness actions
- And more...

The Plan was approved August 13, 2025



Not in Conservation Plan

The Plan does not include:

- Regulatory/permitting requirements
- Fee regulations
- CEQA compliance (Program EIR in progress)
- Control over WJT relocation guidelines (approved under separate authority)

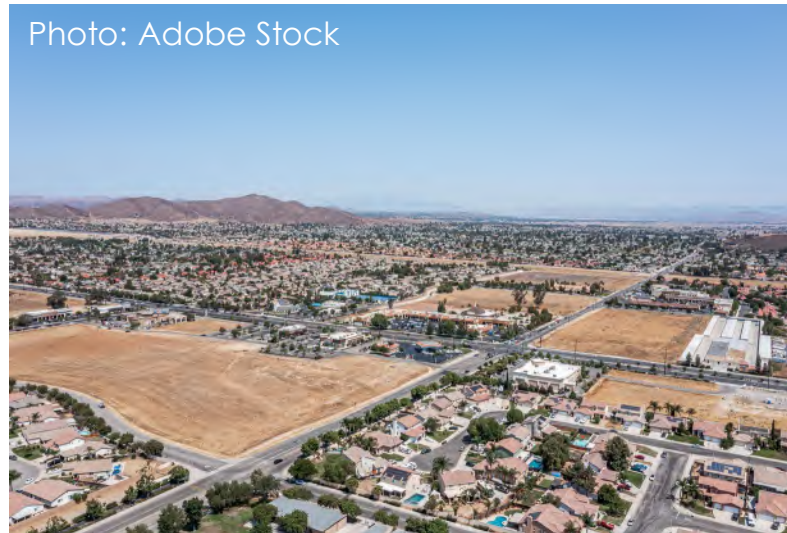


Photo: National Parks Service



WJTCA Requirements

Fish and Game Code Section 1927.8(a)

"Beginning in 2026, and at least every two years thereafter, the commission shall review the status of western Joshua tree and effectiveness of the conservation plan... prior to August 31. Concurrent with each review...the department shall make recommendations to the commission, as necessary, for amendments to the conservation plan to ensure the conservation of the western Joshua tree."



Photo: Drew Kaiser

Public Meetings

- WJT Conservation Plan Amendment Public Meeting (January 13, 2026)
- Public comment: January 13 - March 1
- Call for new information or research on WJT
- 95 registered attendees



Photo: Adobe Stock



Public Comments Received

Conservation Banking Community

- Acquire bank credits in addition to fee title lands
- Establish disturbance/take limits
- Require higher relocation ratios
- In-depth reporting and analyses: pre- & post-WJTCA

Pioneertown Resident

- Concerns over defensible space
- “Take” definition

Photo: Adobe Stock



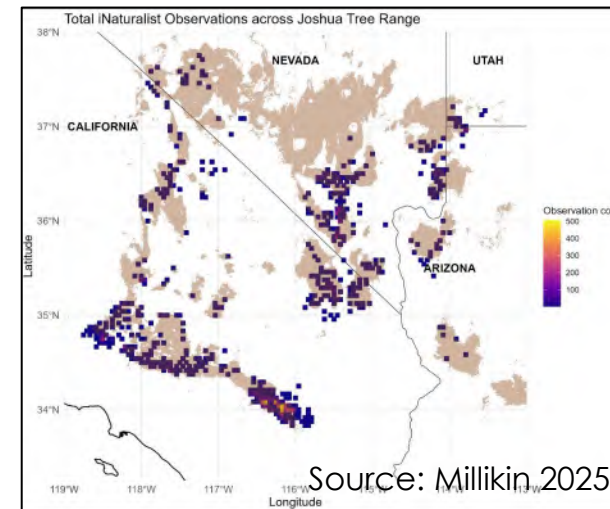
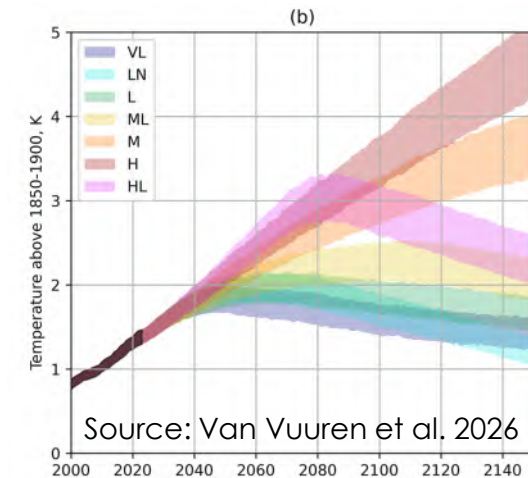
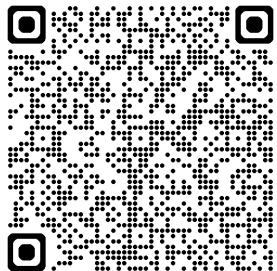
Photo: Adobe Stock



New Research

- Cryptic CAM photosynthesis – Heyduk et al. 2025
- Yucca Moth thesis – Millikin 2025
- Yucca giant-skippers – Chatman 2026
- IUCN Red List Ranking – McLaughlin et al. 2026
- Fall Blooms – Yoder et al. 2026
- New Climate Model (CMIP7) recommendations – Van Vuuren et al. 2026

Watch Recording



Ongoing Topics

- WJT Inter-Tribal Coalition
- Federal nomenclature and activity
- Changes to the landscape (ex. wildfires, land use, etc.)
- Public Meetings/Workshops



Department Recommendation

The Department has determined no changes to the plan are necessary at this time to ensure conservation of western Joshua tree and has **no proposed recommended amendments.**

Conservation Plan Progress

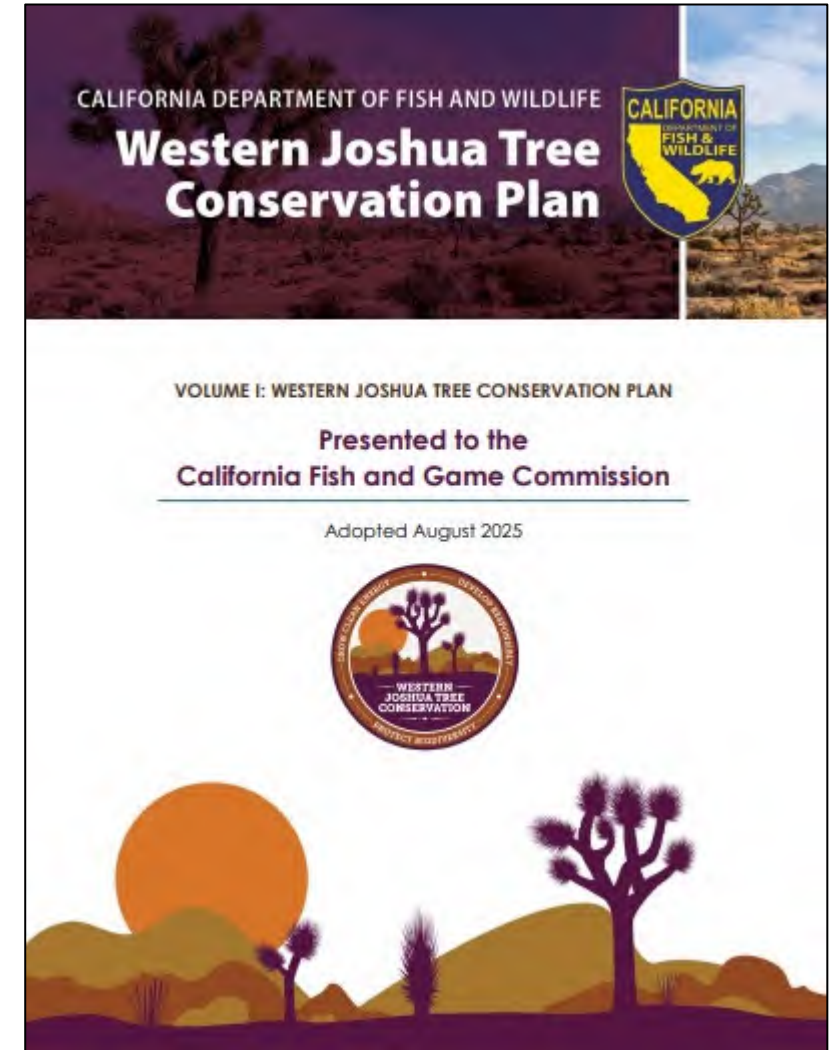
Effectiveness Criteria

5.3.1 Conservation of Western Joshua Tree in California:

- 70% of priority conservation lands protected and managed
- WJT monitoring program shows sustainability
- Cooperative wildland fire strategies in place
- 90% of non-highly degraded climate refugia conserved

5.3.2 Conservation Plan and the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund:

- Draft priority conservation areas identified
- More acres conserved than previous reporting period
- Endowments funded
- Interagency conservation MOU or agreement
- Tribal MOUs
- Local jurisdictions incorporate A&M measures
- Develop and implement interagency fire guidelines



5.3.1 Update – Land & Monitoring



Photo: NPS Flickr

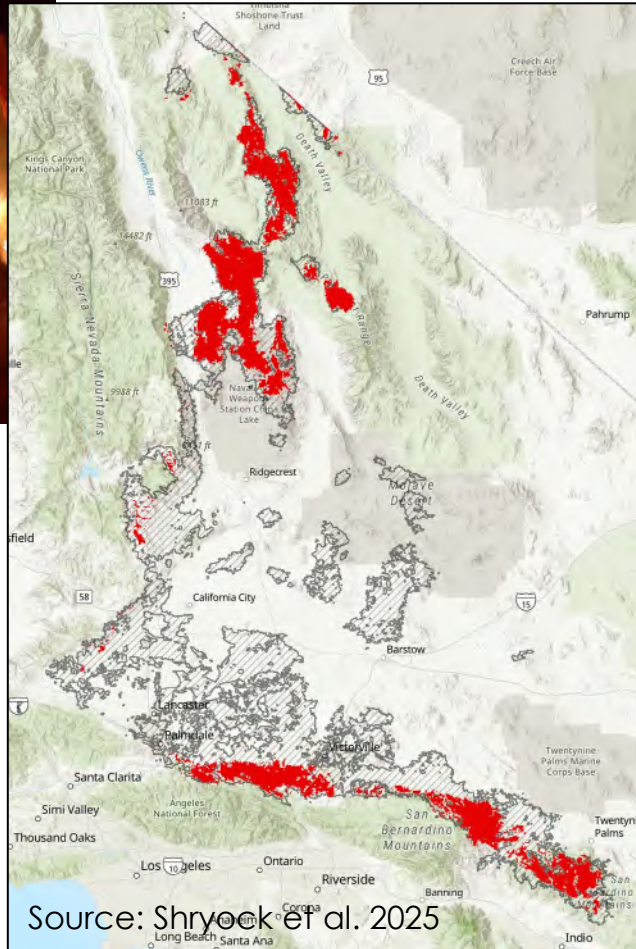
5.3.1 Conservation of Western Joshua Tree in California:

- 70% of priority conservation lands protected and managed
 - Priority conservation lands in progress
- WJT monitoring program shows sustainability
 - Baseline data gathered

5.3.1 Update – Wildfire & Refugia



Photo: UC Riverside



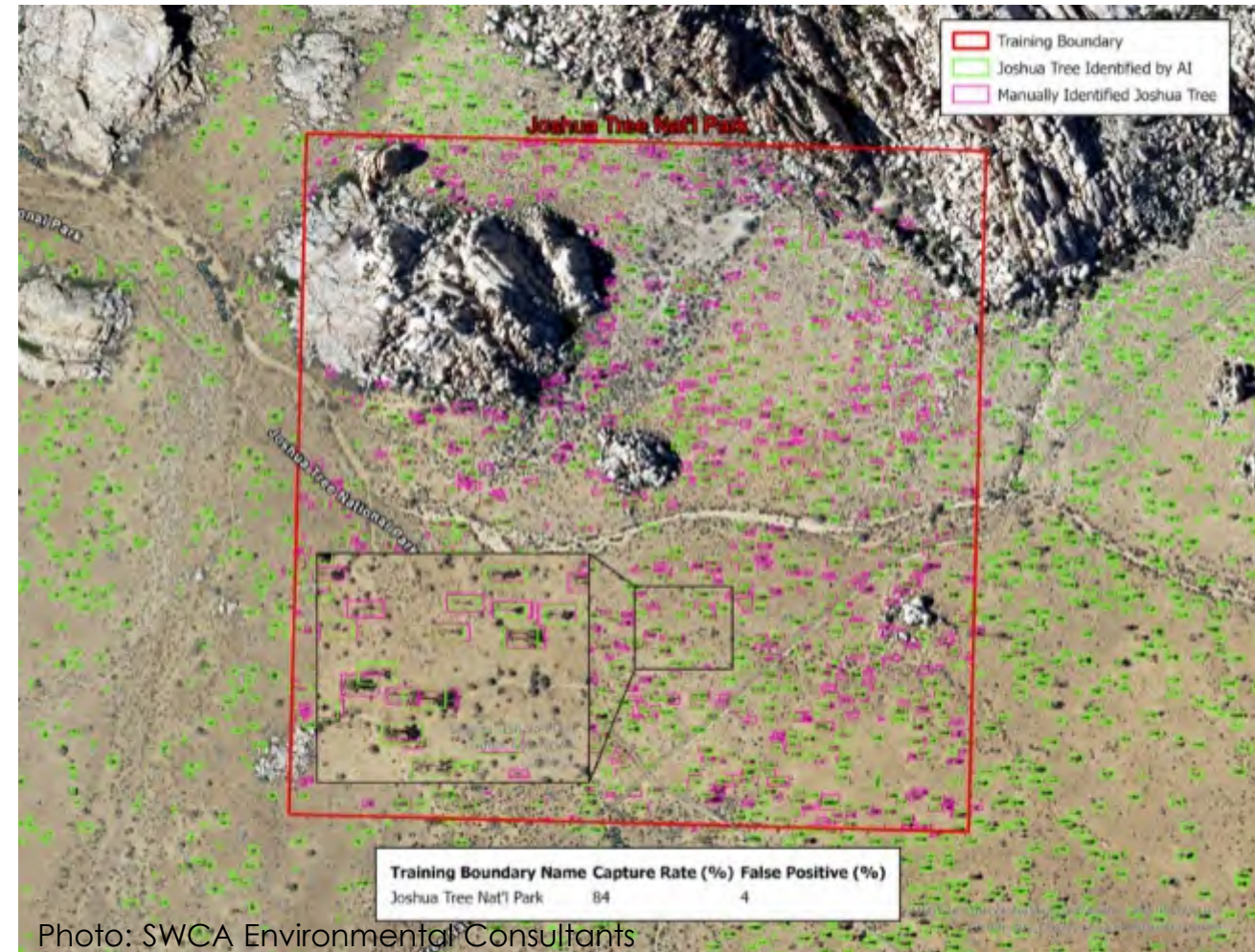
5.3.1 Conservation of Western Joshua Tree in California:

- Cooperative wildland fire strategies in place
 - In progress through Joshua Tree Conservation Coalition
- 90% of non-highly degraded climate refugia conserved
 - Approximately 3,000 acres of ~20,000 acres of private land are being evaluated.

5.3.2 Update – Priority Conservation Lands

5.3.2 Conservation Plan and the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund:

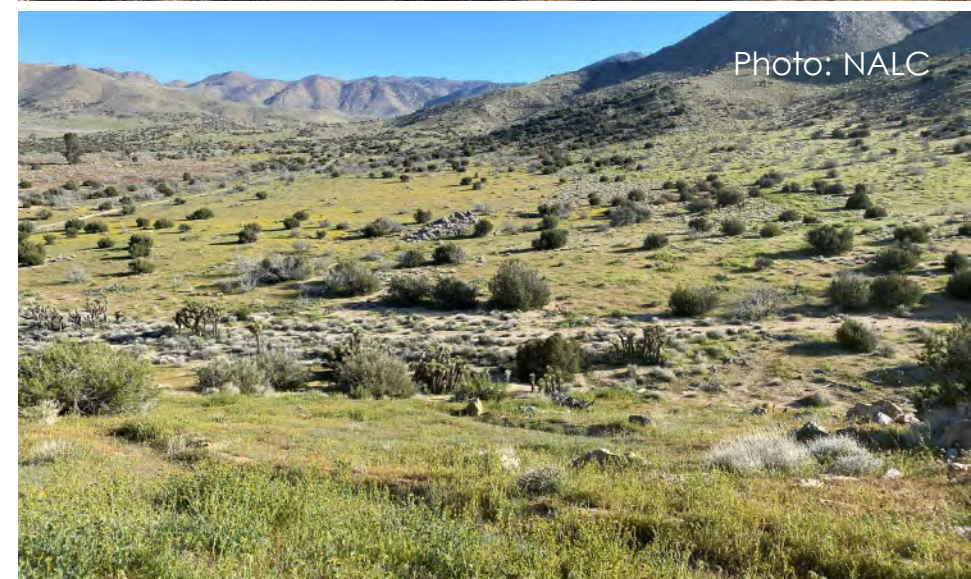
- Draft priority conservation areas identified
 - In progress



5.3.2 Update – Acres & Endowments

5.3.2 Conservation Plan and the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund:

- More acres conserved than previous reporting period
 - In escrow on 640 acres; more in progress
- Endowments funded
 - Endowment finalized for 283-acre parcel



5.3.2 Update - Collaboration

5.3.2 Conservation Plan and the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund:

- Interagency conservation MOU or agreement
 - In progress through interagency coalition
- Tribal MOUs
 - Several projects in the works through Inter-Tribal Coalition
- Local jurisdictions incorporate A&M measures
 - Draft measures in 1 jurisdiction
- Develop and implement interagency fire guidelines
 - In Progress through interagency coalition



Other WJT Actions in Progress

- Seed collection
- Restoration projects
- WJT care handouts for homeowners
- WJT quarterly meetings



Photo: Drew Kaiser



Photo: Adobe Stock



QUESTIONS?

