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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**JENNIFER M. BELCHER  
Commissioner of Public Lands

Mr. Thomas W. Ferns  
US Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office  
P.O. Box 550, MSIN HO-12  
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DOE-RL/DIS

Dear Mr. Ferns

The Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP) promotes and tracks the establishment of a Natural Area system in Washington. The program reviewed the Revised Draft HRA-EIS and supports DOE's preferred alternative with some modifications.

The value of the Hanford reservation in conserving the region's shrubsteppe and related ecosystems is demonstrated in the USFWS alternative 1. From that perspective expanding the level of preservation in higher quality areas is important. To that end, the Fitzner/Eberhardt ALE reserve needs to retain its Research Natural Area status (established in 1972 as the Rattlesnake Hills RNA) and remain in a preservation status, as discussed in alternative 2. To insure the long-term conservation goals for native ecosystems, agricultural development (critically, no further irrigation that could compromise the stability of the white bluffs), commercial mining or livestock developments need to be limited. The proposed actions in the preferred alternative ought to provide adequate protection for the many sensitive species and plant community elements and will benefit the native biodiversity of the state.

The final decision on conservation and preservation of uncontaminated lands needs to be disassociated from those requiring special attention for clean-up and long-term environmental quality monitoring. This will hasten the process by separating the fate of some of the most fouled lands in Washington from some of its most natural land.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Revised Draft-EIS and look forward to future coordination with you on managing this valuable, irreplaceable part of Washington's biodiversity.

Sincerely,

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