

Water Pollution

McCarthy Offers EPA Commitment, but No Specifics for Puget Sound Recovery Efforts

By [Paul Shukovsky](#)

Aug. 13 --The head of the Environmental Protection Agency affirmed the agency's commitment Aug. 13 to help restore the Puget Sound, but provided little detail of what that commitment entails.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy spoke at a meeting of the Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus in Tacoma, Wash., convened by Reps. Denny Heck (D-Wash.) and Derek Kilmer (D-Wash.).

Heck and Kilmer joined state environmental officials and civic leaders in conveying to McCarthy the urgency for a concerted effort to heal a habitat affected by urban and agricultural runoff, development in wetlands, point-source discharges and climate change impacts such as ocean acidification.

The caucus--which includes six Washington congressional Democrats and House Natural Resources Committee ranking member Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.)--released a [white paper](#) on the Puget Sound intended to encourage greater federal coordination with state and local partners.

Puget Sound Caucus Agenda.

The Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus agenda includes efforts to:

- obtain formal recognition for Puget Sound under the Clean Water Act as a “great water body” similar to the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay to “help ensure consistent funding and greater coordination of recovery efforts”;
- develop program evaluation metrics to identify and prioritize projects that respond to the greatest needs and yield the most benefits;
- advance ocean acidification research and monitoring as embodied by the Ocean Acidification Innovation Act of 2014 (H.R. 4732), which it said has the potential to direct private-sector resources to the problem;
- push for greater emphasis on storm water control in EPA programs and support public-private partnerships in new storm water infrastructure; and
- increase coordination with the White House Council on Environmental Quality to ensure that tribal treaty rights to fish for salmon and other species do not become meaningless because of a dearth of fish.

'EPA is Partner in Effort,' McCarthy Says.

McCarthy was unequivocal in saying she got the message.

“If I can be helpful in any way, I will because it's really isn't all about the Great Lakes or the Chesapeake,” she said. “It's about all of the beautiful places that need to be protected.”

McCarthy, both congressmen and several other speakers at the meeting emphasized the importance of close consultation and involvement of tribes in restoring the sound.

“It's not just about this beautiful estuary,” she said, while standing near the shore of Commencement Bay following the meeting.

“It's also about all of the protections we need to put in place to make sure that it doesn't continue to get polluted while we continue to restore it as best we can,” McCarthy said. “It's about protecting the tributaries, uplands that need protection. EPA is a partner in this effort. I want to continue to support the efforts of this congressional delegation to get attention to these issues and to let everybody know that if we work together, we can face these challenges and make significant progress and protect these beautiful places and the economies that rely on them.”

In 2013, in a ruling with potential sweeping implications for new environmental restrictions on development in the Pacific Northwest, a federal judge issued an injunction to ensure that Washington state lives up to treaties whose signers expected that “salmon would remain abundant forever” (*United States v. Washington*, W.D. Wash., No. C70-9213, Subproceeding No. 01-1, 3/29/13).

The opinion and order requiring the state to fix culverts blocking salmon migration is on appeal to the Ninth Circuit.

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The working white paper of the Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus is available at <http://op.bna.com/env.nsf/r?Open=fwhe-9mxujl>.

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