



The Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus

Highlighting the Importance of Puget Sound on a National Level

The Puget Sound is an icon in the Pacific Northwest that has weaved itself into the DNA of Washington state. Not only does the Sound support 71% of the jobs in Washington state, it is also home to a complex ecosystem dependent upon the health of the waterway. The constituency of the Puget Sound is just as intricate: 19 federally recognized tribes, a thriving marine industry, environmental enthusiasts, active military installations, and millions of citizens that call the Puget Sound home.

To coordinate varied economic and environmental interests, the Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus joined together to elevate issues affecting our Sound at the federal level.

The Puget Sound Recovery Caucus was cofounded by Congressman Denny Heck and Congressman Derek Kilmer in June of 2013 to promote Puget Sound cleanup efforts. Other founding members include Jim McDermott (WA-7), Rick Larsen (WA-2), Adam Smith (WA-9), and Suzan DelBene (WA-1). Most recently, House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Peter DeFazio (OR-4) joined the Caucus in April 2014.

As we have had meetings and held briefings with our agency partners, it has become clear that in order to elevate the needs of the Sound, we need to have greater Federal and Executive coordination with state and local partnerships.

What We Need from the Federal Government: Coordinated Action Steps

Executive departments and agencies, working in collaboration, can use their expertise and resources to contribute significantly to improving the health of the Puget Sound. The Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus would like to begin a dialog on how we can leverage agency expertise to improve coordination on the ground. Action items include:

- **Provide Support to the Puget Sound Federal Caucus** - The Puget Sound Federal Caucus was established in 2007 to better integrate, organize, and focus federal efforts in the Puget Sound. The Caucus has also been tasked to develop an action plan to address the western Washington treaty tribes' Treaty Rights at Risk (TRAR) initiative. We would like to build on the framework of the Puget Sound Caucus and continue partnering towards a more transparent,

accessible, and responsive Federal Caucus. Open coordination is critical toward ensuring our region's limited resources are dedicated to activities that will yield the greatest benefit.

- **Formalize Recognition of the Puget Sound Under the Clean Water Act** – Formal recognition of the Puget Sound as a “great water body” under the Clean Water Act will help ensure consistent funding and greater coordination of recovery efforts.
- **Increase Coordination with the Council on Environmental Quality** – The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) coordinates federal environmental efforts and works to develop environmental policies and initiatives. One of these coordinated efforts is guiding the actions of the federal agencies tasked with addressing the tribal TRAR. It is imperative that the federal government uphold its trust obligation by assuring a sustainable harvest of the treaty-reserved resources. CEQ should review the efforts of the Federal Caucus and advise federal agencies on how they can bolster coordination and collaboration in their recovery efforts. CEQ should also work with the Federal Caucus to examine the barriers and challenges to implementing the Puget Sound Action Agenda and identify additional federal action items that would complement and support a healthy Sound.
- **Strengthen Accountability** – The Federal Caucus should work with the Puget Sound Partnership to enhance program evaluation metrics in order to identify and prioritize projects that are in both the greatest need and will yield the most benefit to the Sound and the surrounding community. To assist this coordination, formally recognizing Puget Sound recovery efforts will help enhance multilevel agency goals and priorities.
- **Ensure Early and Ongoing Government-to-Government Engagement with Puget Sound Tribes** – The Puget Sound is home to 19 federally recognized tribes, which includes 17 tribes with tribal treaty rights. We have an obligation to ensure those rights are protected and that tribal interests are considered. We would like to ensure tribal governments are fully consulted and considered partners in coordinated recovery efforts.
- **Learn from Successful Collaborations** – The Chesapeake and the Great Lakes region have successfully established strong federal, state, and local working groups to advance restoration efforts. In Washington state, the Nisqually River watershed project, the Floodplains by Design Initiatives, and elements of the Washington State Forest and Fish law are just a few examples of successful collaborations among diverse stakeholders. We want to build on these efforts with the Puget Sound Partnership and other state, tribal and local partners.

Puget Sound Caucus Legislative Initiatives

As the Puget Sound Recovery Caucus has met with federal, state, and local advocates over the past year, we have identified the following initiatives that we believe could make a meaningful impact in improving the health of the Puget Sound and the region.

- **Formalizing Puget Sound Recovery Efforts** – Formal recognition of Puget Sound recovery efforts will help ensure that coordination continues to take place on a federal level.

To formalize efforts that are occurring on the ground, we would like to explore legislation that would formalize Clean Water Act "program" status, along the lines of other similar great water bodies like the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay, with no new regulatory burdens. For this initiative to be successful, we will hold a series of stakeholder meetings to get comments and suggestions in order to ensure any proposals we introduce are reflective of the needs and unique constituency of our region.

- **Highlighting Innovative Stormwater Solutions** – Stormwater runoff flows across roads, roofs, lawns, and paved areas and into waterways through drainage systems. This can cause flooding, bank erosion, habitat destruction, sewer overflows, infrastructure damage, and contamination of the Sound. Washington state has led innovative research and discovered creative ways to mitigate the effects of stormwater runoff.

Ways that we can advance on a federal level the research already happening in the state include working with the EPA's Office of Water to advocate for greater emphasis on stormwater control in EPA programs, supporting public-private partnerships to drive new investments in stormwater infrastructure, establishing the Washington Stormwater Center as a Center of Excellence, and boosting coordination among federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

- **Advancing Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring** – Ocean acidification is becoming the largest threat to saltwater ecosystems. The evidence of ocean acidification can be seen in our mollusk and crustacean populations and it will only be a matter of time until the effects of ocean acidification begin to appear in the larger ocean food chain. We want to work to advance monitoring efforts and support the research initiatives that are focused on both the economic and environmental impacts of ocean acidification. New approaches should be considered, such as H.R. 4732, the Ocean Acidification Innovation Act of 2014, for their potential to direct more private sector resources toward this pressing issue.

To leverage scarce funding, Congress and federal agencies need to learn how the public and private sector can further partner to advance shared research goals. To better set targets specific to Washington state needs, the newly enacted Washington Marine Resource Council should work with federal working groups, such as the Interagency Working Group on Ocean Acidification, to find ways that recommendations set forth by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification can be effectively implemented. Federal and state agencies have a shared interest in the need to assess the vulnerabilities of our coastal communities and identify goals for ocean acidification research and monitoring.

- **Restoring Habitats throughout the Puget Sound** – Habitat protection and restoration benefits our local communities, shellfish industry, fisheries, and ecosystems throughout the Puget Sound. Federal agencies play a critical role in protecting and restoring the habitat through their actions and investments. However, they cannot do it alone. State and local partners have worked to increase salmon populations and the number of shellfish

beds in our region. The success of habitat restoration projects is directly linked to the effectiveness of habitat protection programs.

We would like to work with our state and local stakeholders to identify areas in greatest need and target projects that will provide the greatest benefit to the ecosystem being restored. Of particular concern are areas that are struggling to see turnarounds such as making improvements to marine water quality, on-site sewage systems, and ensuring all beaches in the Puget Sound are swimmable. We would like to work with the Puget Sound Partnership to better highlight these areas of need and incorporate strong benchmarks to track the project's success.

- **Promoting Economic Development and Environmental Protection** – The Puget Sound is the second largest estuary in the United States, home to biologically diverse and complex ecosystems, and a marine industry that grosses approximately \$30 billion in revenue every year. The waters of the Sound are a shared resource and economic and environmental goals need to be balanced. Environmental initiatives should go hand-in-hand with the economic priorities of the Puget Sound region. This should include looking at financial mechanisms to make it easier for businesses to invest in smart conservation practices. This can include working with small businesses to find ways to make the environmental permitting process more user-friendly and less costly through developing ways to make mitigation practices less burdensome. Other ways include working with utilities to expand energy efficiency loan programs and securing funding for weatherization programs.
- **Removing Derelict Vessels and Creosote Pilings** – Currently, the majority of federal funding available for states to address derelict vessels and creosote pilings can only be accessed when there is a critical threat to the environment and marine traffic. No federal funds are available for prevention—even though preventive measures have shown to be much less costly in the long run. A federal initiative is needed to establish a coordinated program for states, designated local municipalities, and federally recognized tribes to apply for funds for the purposes of preventive measures on derelict vessels and the removal of creosote pilings. The state of Washington has advanced efforts on the state level and as a Caucus, we will advance these actions on a federal level.

For more information on the Congressional Puget Sound Recovery Caucus, please contact

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