

## **San Juan / Whatcom Action Area Workshop (Friday Harbor)**

July 21, 2008

### **Workshop Summary**

#### **Meeting Purpose**

The Puget Sound Partnership held a workshop in Friday Harbor on July 21, 2008 to gather perspectives from stakeholders and add local knowledge and expertise to Partnership work. The meeting focused on reviewing initial strategies for the recovery of Puget Sound, discussing the newly-drafted action area profile and identifying local priorities.

#### **Meeting Overview**

Approximately 27 people attended the workshop at the Friday Harbor High School. Among those represented were local and tribal governments, local organizations, businesses, federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and citizens.

#### **Meeting Summary**

Rachel Garrett, meeting facilitator, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. She recognized those affiliated with the Partnership in attendance: Bob Kelly, Kevin Ranker, Tom Cowan and Chris Townsend.

Bob Kelly, Ecosystem Coordination Board representative for the San Juan/Whatcom Action Area, mentioned his involvement with additional organizations including Whatcom County Council and the Nooksack Tribe and emphasized natural resources, especially salmon, as the common thread in his work. He acknowledged the importance of the San Juan Islands for salmon and said his purpose at the meeting was to learn participants' opinions on the action area profile so he could help the Leadership Council make informed decisions on priorities while developing the Action Agenda.

Kevin Ranker, member of the Ecosystem Coordination Board, thanked the audience for their participation. He expressed his support for the bottom-up process being used in developing the Action Agenda, the collection of local input through action area meetings, and the first-time use of an ecosystem based approach at the agency level. He invited participants to bring friends and neighbors on board and said the success of the process depends on involvement of people throughout the Sound.

Chris Townsend, Puget Sound Partnership staff, presented the Partnership's role and process timeline, including a brief explanation of inventory work, February and March action area meetings, and topic forums. He explained that final versions of the topic forum papers, which synthesize information gathered from prior meetings, would soon be available. Chris acknowledged the importance of outreach and education and mentioned ECO Network, the Puget Sound Partnership program for high priority educational

projects around the Sound. Chris explained the meeting expectations: to review the San Juan Action Area Profile, discuss local priorities and how they align with the Partnership's initial strategies priorities, and identify local barriers to implementation of priorities.

### **Session 1: Strategic priorities and action area profile**

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Chris Townsend reviewed the Partnership's four initial strategic priorities.

The following is a list of questions and comments heard following the presentation. Answers are indicated with italics:

- Does Priority A address cities and counties or is it just at the state level? *It addresses all levels - local and state.*
- The language of the priorities should be addressed. In Priority B it says "ecosystem processes," in Priority C it says "processes and functions." Why are you creating new language? Instead of processes and functions, why don't you use "functions and values"?
- What is the time frame for the strategic science plan? *This work will be ongoing. Like the Action Agenda in the fall, it will not be a comprehensive list but a list of priorities. The science plan will identify the most important research as well as indicators.*
- Regarding Priority B, do you see protection as acquisition of land or do you see protection going beyond that? *Protection is not just the acquisition of land. There are many ways to protect beyond that.*
- Who is the contact for submitting scientific information to the Partnership? *Scott Redman.*
- Regarding Priority A, how will you pursue changing legislation if you find that is necessary to fix the system? *The Partnership has no authority to change legislation but is a good resource, with our Leadership Council, and hopefully can help with political will.*
- The strategy the Partnership is using for prioritization has been used by other state agencies and field tested (for example, by the state noxious weed board to prioritize weeds). It is a good management tool with limited funding.

Chris Townsend mentioned that the Partnership is now responsible for implementing the Salmon Recovery Plan, which will be integrated into the Action Agenda.

Tom Cowan, Regional Liaison, presented on the San Juan Action Area Profile. He explained that in developing the profile, key information was culled from existing studies and locally reviewed. He thanked the San Juan core team for their work on the profile: Bob Kelly, Kevin Ranker, Diana Gale, Barbara Rosenkotter, Mary Knackstedt, Joe

Gaydos and Amy Windrope. Tom then asked participants to provide high level comments on the profile.

The following is a list of questions and comments heard following the presentation. Answers are indicated with italics:

- More emphasis should be placed on the nexus nature of the area. The processes here extend beyond the geographic boundaries of the area.
- The first paragraph of the profile states, “San Juan County has the smallest land mass of any county in Washington State, but with 408 miles of marine shoreline, has more than any other county in the nation.” There are counties in Alaska and Hawaii that have more so this is incorrect.
- The profile says there are thousands of additional visitors every year. This does not capture the magnitude of visitors we have. There are 250,000-600,000 additional visitors per year.
- We need to address the development and capacity of wastewater treatment plants. How much development will be in cities where we can handle the waste?
- The year-round population of the area is 16,000, but the infrastructure must serve much larger populations because of summer homes and also the dramatic influx of tourists.
- The San Juan Islands are unique in that they are not only isolated from the mainland, but are also isolated within one county. Logistically, this makes it difficult and expensive for the state and county to provide services.
- It is interesting that people are being considered as part of the ecosystem in this Action Agenda process.
- There are 20 inhabited islands, four with ferry service in San Juan County.
- San Juan County is a resource used by everyone in the state. We should include Eastern Washington in this process because there are boaters there who use the Puget Sound.
- The boating industry is a four billion dollar industry- almost none of that money is for funding water issues. We would like to see some of the boating tax money earmarked for water quality related funding.

## **Session 2: Aligning local and regional priorities**

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Rachel led a discussion about each of the Partnership’s priorities by asking the following questions:

1. What are you currently doing in support of this priority?
2. What are the top priorities?
3. What are the local barriers to achieving the priority?
4. What else can you do to help the Partnership achieve this priority? How can the Partnership help you achieve this priority in your action area?

**Priority D: *Prevent the sources of water pollution***

- One problem is hazardous waste on the island. It costs \$4.20 a gallon for waste to be hauled off the island. Can there be assistance for small businesses and homeowners to do this?
- The private sector is trying to bring new products to the market such as bioremediation. There is an example of this in New Mexico, featured in the 2007 Sunset Magazine. This technology can reduce water aquifer discharge up to fifty percent.
- Sedimentation from new construction needs to be minimized. Regulations that exist are not enforced due to lack of technical support to property owners and county staff, and lack of funding for sufficient staff.
- Pollutants such as lawn chemicals that run off properties need to be managed. There is a public lack of understanding of the effects of lawn chemicals.
- San Juan County has a new plan for septic system monitoring. New septic owners take a class and must provide a report to the county on their septic systems every year.
- There was a business dumping heavy detergent into the Sound. This problem was identified and is being fixed.
- There have been research projects doing culture bacteria studies and many antibiotic resistant organisms were found. We need to match this data with upland strains to figure out where these organisms originate. Funding is needed to complete river data and determine where pollutants are coming from and to fund prevention activities.
- Salmon “windows”, periods construction work is prevented due to the presence of salmon population, are being expanded.
- There is no comprehensive stormwater plan in the county. We need increased coordination with agencies regarding stormwater.
- There is a tremendous amount of oil running off into the Sound directly from the parking lots and holding lanes of Washington State Ferries.
- Cruise ship pumping is a source of pollution.
- San Juan County is rewriting county code to allow and promote low impact development (LID). The barrier to this process is the lack of staff.
- Where is the Partnership resource for LID on the Web? The Partnership should provide this resource.
- The San Juan Islands are not a Phase II community for stormwater, and cities and counties will not take action unless it is required. There need to be incentives to encourage correct stormwater management.
- Training and support for LID techniques need to be provided on the islands so residents do not have to travel to the mainland to gain this knowledge.
- The state should put a rain garden in Friday Harbor to show the public an example of LID development to get things started.
- LID is an important tool in San Juan County.

- San Juan County is working on local source control with the Department of Ecology. There need to be more programs like this where resources are available on a regional level.
- Stormwater infrastructure is difficult to develop on a basin-wide level. It is difficult to implement not only for future development but also for existing development.
- The San Juan Nature Institute received a grant from the Department of Ecology for a three-part project. One, to identify which pesticides are used in the county and develop a ranking of toxicity to salmon. Two, to do water quality workshops with landowners on three islands. And three, to get alternatives to pesticides and herbicides that rank on the low end of toxicity in retail outlets. The barrier is the time and funding it takes to replicate the workshop on all three islands. The Partnership can maintain funding to Ecology to provide people tools, alternatives and information.
- The Washington State University Extension office trains master gardeners to educate homeowners and property owners about pest control and the proper use of pesticides. The barrier is that there is not enough staff to spread the message to the public.
- Land ownership turnover is really high in San Juan County which creates a need to continually educate the public.
- The Partnership should do a life cycle cost analysis for LID.

**Priority C: *Reestablish the ecosystem processes that sustain Puget Sound***

- Some of the largest tracts of land in San Juan County are used for the commercial harvest of timber. Is there a connection between watershed planning and the existing programs (such as the Designated Forest Land Program) these tracts of land are part of?
- There is a need to work with property owners with developed lands to reduce negative water quality impacts, put in native vegetation, and retrofit to restore water quality filtration. The Conservation District does do some of this work but does not have enough funding to do a complete job.
- Most of the restoration in San Juan County is in the Salmon Recovery Plan. Some of the highlights include: restoring known salmon habitat areas, forage fish habitat, forage fish spawning areas and eelgrass habitat. Restoration is primarily happening in the nearshore habitat but the freshwater systems are also degraded. The county needs to consider those systems as well.
- Boat anchors can cause a lot of damage. Are there any plans to look at restoring the Sound floor? *The Salmon Plans do include restoration of floor habitat.*
- There is a lack of knowledge and understanding about what causes some of the degradation that is happening. A huge barrier is data gaps and this lack of knowledge.

- Alternatives to bulkheads need to be considered. Property owners should be actively engaged and educated in developing restoration plans. There is no funding for this type of outreach, monitoring or restoration. Additionally, there should be incentives for landowners to restore their property.
- A recent report demonstrated the devastation caused by derelict fishing gear, which kills hundreds of thousands of species every year. For only five million dollars, this gear could be cleaned up. Is there a system in place to prevent the reintroduction of more gear? *It is less likely that the gear will be re-introduced because fishing is only occurring at five percent of its historical level.*
- There is a new program that if a fisherman loses a gillnet, he reports the GPS location of the gillnet to a Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) hotline and it is placed on a high priority list for removal. The barrier to this program is that DFW does not always maintain the database, and there is a lack of staff and funding.
- Is there an incentive for a fishing boat to report to the hotline if they lose a net? Are there identification features on the net? *There is no incentive for the fisherman nor identification features on the net, however, with the increase in awareness about problems caused by derelict fishing gear, the program has been receiving excellent reporting from fisherman.*
- Is there a dedicated source of funding for the removal for derelict fishing gear? *No. A portion of the boat license goes to a general fund, so perhaps that money could be used for this program.*

**Priority B: *Protect the intact ecosystem processes that sustain Puget Sound***

- There needs to be more coordination between biologists regarding Hydraulic Project Approvals (HPAs). Lack of enforcement of existing laws, and flaws in existing laws, allow for the loss of habitat.
- There are sections of the county code that are not being enforced, or have loopholes. Long-term planning and updates to regulations are needed to encourage more sensitive land development. The barriers to successful regulation include: money, technical assistance from state agencies and permit funding.
- San Juan County is in the process of completing its critical areas ordinance (CAO) update, which is to be finished by April 1, 2009. Protection of critical areas is really important in San Juan County because only fifty percent of the county is developed. There is also an opportunity to provide technical assistance to homeowners; however, staff and funding is needed.
- Use incentives to encourage landowners and other stakeholders to do site-sensitive planning prior to beginning construction, and provide advanced technical assistance.
- The Department of Ecology is involved in many things mentioned today, including stormwater. The challenge is to identify gaps and legislatively direct or rethink different activities on the ground. Due to the permit structure, even when

- Ecology is aware of gaps, it is difficult to change processes because of mandates on paper.
- There is a sense of place and sense of pride in keeping the ecosystem intact that is unique to the San Juan Islands. There is a strong stewardship message promoted by tourism and businesses here.
  - This area should be called the Salish Sea, not the North Puget Sound. Canada should also be involved in the discussion. *The Puget Sound - Georgia Basin Research Conference is happening next year and we are working very closely with Canada to plan this conference and work on issues together.*
  - “Intact ecosystem processes” needs to be defined. Mapping the intact ecosystem processes would be useful. The San Juan Islands could be used as an example because there are whole watersheds within the county and there are a lot more intact ecosystems than in other places.
  - Focus needs to be placed on education, not just stewardship, so people consider this “our ecosystem.”
  - Examine effects of new technologies to ensure that they do not degrade intact ecosystems. For example, desalination plants are seen as an alternative if groundwater fails. However, these plants pose a potential damage to the nearshore environment because of the release of heavily salted water. Let’s manage our groundwater properly so we do not have to rely on desalination in the future.
  - When issuing permits, we need to be willing to say “no” to mitigation. When can we comment on mitigation? *This is related to Priority A.*
  - There is a higher risk of oil spills in the San Juan Islands. We need to protect against this threat.
  - Technology for harnessing tidal energy has the potential to affect ecosystem processes. There are a lot of unknowns about this technology and it should be used with caution.
  - Watershed characterization studies need to be done to assist with watershed planning.
  - In the San Juan Islands there are many places that need protection, not just restoration. Often there is a need to demonstrate a problem before funding is provided. I would like to see money go toward protection before there is a problem, especially in the San Juan Islands.
  - Protection is more than acquisitions and conservation easements. For example, it is protective regulations, basic infrastructure such as stormwater and county staffing capacity, incentive programs, education, and outreach, creating and fostering a stewardship ethic. There needs to be ongoing programmatic support and funding for these protection activities not just for projects.
  - Funding is also difficult to obtain for increasing capacity and providing ongoing maintenance of existing projects.

**Priority A: *Ensure that activities and funding are focused on the most urgent and important problems facing the Sound (That is: Work more effectively and efficiently on priorities)***

- The word “prevention” should be added to this priority.
- Enforcement is a serious problem in the San Juan Islands. The building code is problematic. A lot of energy is being spent to update the code but there are no resources directed toward enforcement staff. *The Partnership is working on enforcement and developed priorities for enforcement: development and redevelopment of land that requires a permit because it impacts aquatic resources, construction stormwater regulation, and operational stormwater systems.*
- It will be difficult for San Juan County to do mitigation projects. There is no capacity for tracking mitigation and it will be difficult to expect people to offset their impacts. *Yes, because of this it is critical that the code is written correctly.*
- Mitigation is difficult to implement on islands because the watersheds are small. Because there is a short distance from the problem to the shoreline, there is no place to mitigate.
- The American Society of Landscape Architects has a Sustainable Sites Initiative which suggests that development should focus on measuring how closely a project has maintained its original condition. It is an alternative method to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and LID, as it looks at the total impact of the project.
- San Juan County is very small and cannot afford to say “no” to development. It may cost the county a lot of legal fees, and often private landowners have more money than the county itself does.
- There need to be consistent permitting systems between counties. There should be one unified permitting system.
- For water activities such as fishing and whale watching, enforcement is inadequate. There needs to be more coordination between agencies to increase their overall presence. Shoreline residents should also be given neighborhood watch capabilities.
- Permit regulations often only address the significance of an individual project without considering the cumulative effects of many small projects.
- Commuter discounts for the ferries should be given to those people working around the islands on projects to help protect and restore Puget Sound.
- The state owns groundwater rights so the county does not have the power to test wells. It would be useful for the county to be able to conduct those tests. *The state funds the county to do groundwater testing.*

**Wrap Up and Next Steps**

Chris Townsend thanked everyone for coming and supporting this process. Chris told the group that comments could be submitted until August 15, 2008. He explained the

Partnership would be back in September for another round of action area meetings to update people on the status of the Action Agenda and give some more specific information about its contents.