

Whidbey Action Area (Everett)
February 27, 2008
Community Conversation Summary

Meeting Purpose

The Puget Sound Partnership held a community conversation in Everett on February 27, 2008 and invited the public to share their comments and concerns about protecting and restoring Puget Sound. This public event provided citizens an overview of the Puget Sound Partnership and the Action Agenda process, reviewed highlights from the afternoon workshop discussion, and concluded with an open community discussion.

Meeting Overview

Approximately 25 people attended the conversation from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the Northwest Stream Center / Adopt-a-Stream Foundation in Everett.

Meeting Summary

Gary Rowe, Ecosystem Coordination Board member, gave opening remarks explaining that his role as a representative for the large Whidbey action area is to coordinate dialogue and allow for broad-based community input.

Steve Sakuma, Leadership Council member, provided an opening address and noted his motivation to join the Partnership to ensure future enjoyment of a healthy Sound by his grandchildren. He expressed confidence in the current process and emphasized building a community-based Action Agenda, establishing priorities based on local feedback and the importance of community outreach.

Martha Neuman, Action Agenda Director for the Puget Sound Partnership, presented an overview of the state of Puget Sound, the structure of the Partnership, and an introduction to the Action Agenda. Martha reviewed the Partnership's six ecosystem goals, NOAA's status and threats analysis, and the need for local information to supplement this work.

Sarah Brandt, the meeting facilitator, opened up the discussion for general comments, questions and concerns.

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

Questions:

- Will politicians be held accountable for the promises they make?
- Will a complete report/inventory of the Sound-wide ecosystem be done? *We tend to have plenty of information from ports and harbors but other data gaps exist.*

- [An audience member mentions: we need more data on things like air pollution and how it impacts the water quality of freshwater bodies.] The Action Agenda will recommend that agencies and legislatures try to fill those information gaps.*
- There are inherent limitations where there is lack of regulatory authority. We need to have the power to implement measures, and people must take part in the regulatory process if it is to succeed.
 - It seems like there are a lot of small organizations that are not at the table and could be useful in moving this process forward. Is the Puget Sound Partnership doing anything to target large and small environmental groups in the area? *There is an environmental caucus, of which Jacques White is a member (representing the Nature Conservancy). The Environmental Caucus includes 26 local and regional environmental groups.*
 - I am confused about what the colors mean on the threat summaries action area slide. Is green supposed to be “good” and red “bad”? *Yes, red represents a threat of high concern and green represents a threat of low concern.*
 - What does “natural drivers” mean? *Examples include climate change and predator-prey imbalances.*
 - How can politics be kept out of the scientific analyses? *There are no politicians on the science panel. Science panel members are highly skilled and demonstrate strong ethics.*
 - How do the status indicators and threats connect, and what if a threat affects multiple ecosystem components? *Jacques White from NOAA’s status and threats steering committee described the role of conceptual models in portraying these links and helping to present information to the broader public.*
 - The color coding gives a limited sense of good/bad/best, but I am not sure what it means to fall from one color to another. I don’t understand how these broad categories and goals will keep things from declining in our area in the long run. *The science panel has not yet evaluated all of the existing data; additional well-vetted information is yet to come. Generally, the logic of “will this system persist for 50 years?” is used to measure conditions. All members of the public are encouraged to provide commentary on the draft posters. Our short timeline means we must do the best we can with limited information.*
 - I am concerned that the data shown does not adequately portray the way things are going for us locally. *Detail is always lost when several categories are rolled*

up into one. One of the reasons for the workshop today is to bring in the local picture.

- I am worried about the quality of life specifically for children. For example, breast milk contamination is becoming more prevalent. We must protect the younger generations first.
- There is limited access to get people down to Puget Sound and connect them with the landscape. How can we better protect those public access resources?
- In contrast to the beaches in California, Washington allows private landownership of the bluffs and beaches, which often contributes to pollution issues. This creates a conflict between the motives of developers and the need to protect the Sound.
- An audience participant from WSDNR explained that they brought a brochure explaining State-owned boundaries pertaining to land use.
- I work for a whale-watching business that looks at orcas. The well-being of the orca depends on the health of the whole ecosystem; businesses are very concerned about the well-being of the Sound. I grew up in Bremerton and spent entire summers on the beaches. Things have changed and resource issues are interconnected; for example, transient orcas are eating harbor seals due to food shortages.
- I work for Clearwater Compliance Services, a storm water treatment company that works on development sites. It would be very difficult to stop development, but there are solutions now available. We need to support these companies that have limited technicians and staff.
- Why are people complacent about industries skirting compliance regulations and why can't we adopt a more progressive public transportation system?
- North Creek watershed is here on the Adopt-a-Stream Foundation building site, in unincorporated Snohomish County. I used to walk the creek in 1978 when it was teeming with salmon, freshwater mussels, spawning beds. Now it is scoured down due to poorly planned development as wetlands have been turned into parking lots and shopping centers. Water quality is now unsuitable for contact recreation. Toxicity levels in fish are high in the region. The original Puget Sound Action Plan outlined actions; we need to start enforcing rules that are already on the books. The word "mandatory" killed the original Action Plan, but mandatory regulations are vital to dealing with existing water quality problems.
- No one will pay for their actions unless they are forced to do so.

- We need a database on the development regulations at all government levels throughout the region and we need to expose violations. The Department of Ecology has the State regulations for Washington.
- The Growth Management Act, which planners must abide by, does not make reference to a city's or county's critical area ordinance. There are loopholes in the code that must be addressed.
- Many people develop their love of Puget Sound through food first – i.e. harvesting for crab and shellfish. These resources are important to many people who are not here tonight.
- A public nuisance lien – something like a tax lien – could be very effective, but there must be political will in order to implement this.
- As a fish biologist I am concerned about deepwater fish fauna that used to be harvested. Whatever plans are developed need to be projected out into the deep water ecosystem.
- We need to study complex ecosystem interactions in greater detail and expose them to the public.
- Why do we not differentiate the source of E. coli in our water? [*Comment from audience member: this is very expensive to do.*]
- Existing beach closure rules do not always reflect true status of beaches; for example, the water may be contaminated but beaches still open. People may be swimming in water that is unsafe in Snohomish County—it is very important to people to be able to continue to be in the water. Remember the boy who drank water in North Creek and became very sick and the lawsuit that resulted. Things like this should not be happening – children cannot be expected to know that water is polluted.
- There was a discussion about the difference between acute vs. chronic contamination issues (for example, E. coli vs. heavy metals)
- Trees play a unique role in protecting local watersheds and are being lost at a very quick rate. The Growth Management Act and associated permitting processes allowed features like trees to become insignificant.
- Suggestion for developing criteria: use common terminology so that different groups of scientists understand one another.

- We need to consider the social sciences as well as hard sciences. Taxpayers will need proof that their money is going to something good.
- It is important that we reach a broader audience. We need to show photos that depict the problem but also get people outside to visibly see problems; for example, visiting sites that are dealing with contamination issues, and also to see working solutions.
- All of the protection work being done could be wiped out by a major oil spill. We need to maintain the rescue tug at Neah Bay.
- We need to focus on low impact development, planned communities and shorter commutes.
- Has the Partnership investigated causes for fish illnesses resulting from naturally-occurring sources (i.e. virus, bacteria)? *Not yet.*
- There is a disconnect between legislators and the problems and solutions. We need to make sure that legislators understand how problems are interconnected.
- We need to ask the broader public what kinds of sacrifices people are willing to make in order to have a healthy Puget Sound.
- I used to harvest clams, seaweed, and other things in Snohomish County. I would like to see the day when that could happen again.
- Where are the fish now, given that water quality was bad 40 years ago (for example, when pulp mills were contaminating the bay)? Why haven't fish populations recovered? This is a mystery that needs to be solved by the Puget Sound Partnership.
- Since a lot of impacts like storm water are based on individual actions, we need to look at programs that are effectively changing the behavior of the average person.
- Port Susan and grey whales go hand in hand. In order to protect one we must protect the other.
- Lack of funding is an excuse and is not the real issue. Lack of long-term commitment for funding is the real issue. The funding mentality must shift from planning based on political will to planning based on a long-term vision.
- The Partnership needs to highlight more local successes.

- Property and business owners need technical and financial assistance to retrofit existing properties and replace impervious surfaces with porous ones.
- We need more incentives for developers to build green and implement low impact development measures. Perhaps there should be a fee schedule based on levels of runoff from properties.
- Ownership and personal responsibility for the Sound will be key to future success.
- We need to get young people involved at an early age. This is information that cannot be learned from books and must be learned through hands-on exposure.

Wrap Up

Martha Neuman closed the meeting. Puget Sound Partnership is holding nine workshops and community conversations around the Sound, though Friday Harbor and Bellingham meetings have been postponed. The Partnership will be conducting another round of workshops and outreach in June. Please contact us with your comments via our Web site. Both Gary Rowe and Steve Sakuma thanked everyone for coming and stressed the importance of a collaborative and open process.