

South Puget Sound Action Area Workshop (Grapeview-Allyn)

July 16, 2008

Workshop Summary

Meeting Purpose

The Puget Sound Partnership held a workshop in Grapeview-Allyn on July 16, 2008 to gather perspectives from stakeholders and add local knowledge and expertise to Partnership work. The meeting focused on reviewing the Partnership's regional priorities for the recovery of Puget Sound, discussing the newly-drafted action area profile and identifying local priorities.

Meeting Overview

Approximately 71 people attended the workshop at the Horton Community Center. Among those represented were local and tribal governments, local organizations, businesses, federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and citizens.

Meeting Summary

Angie Thomson, meeting facilitator, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. She gave an overview of the agenda for the day, recognized the speakers and those affiliated with the Partnership in attendance including Bill Ruckelshaus, Chris Townsend, Dan Wrye, and Duane Fagergren.

Dan Wrye, South Puget Sound Action Area Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB) representative, gave an overview of the ECB and thanked everyone for coming. He noted that for many in the room, working with the Puget Sound Partnership represents their last opportunity to participate in a project for which the focus is the health and sustainability of the whole Puget Sound. He described work done by the South Sound core group, a group of area professionals, to identify geographically the threats, causes, and solutions for the local ecosystem. Their report divided the action area into nine inlet watersheds. The group identified over 90 Sound-wide watershed or ecosystem programs already in place, which are all lacking funding and may be dormant. They also created a catalogue of citizen-based watershed councils in the Sound.

Chris Townsend, Puget Sound Partnership staff, provided an overview of the Partnership and the draft Action Agenda. He described the Partnership as an agency that is not trying to reinvent the wheel, but instead is working to integrate past knowledge with present knowledge and find a common future.

Chris explained that the topic forum papers will be completed the week of July 21st and available to the public via the Partnership Web site. Chris gave an overview of the Partnership timeline, noting that the next phase of outreach will include action area meetings in September, where the Partnership will share draft pieces of the Action Agenda and gather feedback. Chris asked the audience members to please stay involved

through caucuses, Leadership Council and ECB meetings and the Partnership Web site: www.psp.wa.gov.

Session 1: Strategic priorities and action area profile

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:

- What about excess nutrients such as nitrogen, which cause algal blooms? Are those included when you talk about toxics and pollutants? *Yes, they are included as are pathogens, nutrients, toxins, etc.*
- In Priority A what stands out to me is the phrase, “most urgent and important”, which sounds like a prioritization process. Will there be some prioritization or is this just about realignment? *The Action Agenda is meant to be a living document. In the document released in December there will be a strategic list of a few actions and then year by year, the list will grow. We are looking at prioritizing, but not because one thing is more important than another, but because one might be more achievable in the short term with greater effects on the ecosystem than another.*
- Have you identified benchmarks or measurable objectives to measure your goal achievement? *We are using indicators as benchmarks. Each indicator will have a target and this will help us measure our progress as we move forward.*
- I was referring to policy and not scientific data – an indicator is science based, but benchmarks focus on policy. So, it sounds like you are talking about two different things. *We are using indicators to inform our policy points.*
- New and emerging technologies are hindered from getting into the marketplace. I hope you look at how the regulatory strategy of treatment standards works, because currently, it doesn't have a field compliance standard. The Partnership should review those codes to make sure we are checking all angles.
- We should eliminate loopholes in existing laws that allow for bad development practices. For example, reasonable use exceptions are handed out like candy.
- Growth is inevitable. Where is the human element in this profile? *Good strategies for protecting and restoring the Sound will cover all of our goals and every one of our priorities. Each of the strategies does cover the human element in one way or another. For Priorities B and C, we are working with a group called the World Resources Institute (WRI) who look at ecosystem goods and services and assign a value to them so they become measurable.*
- How is the Partnership coordinating with other agencies and organizations like the Corps of Engineers, who is working on a shoreline restoration project for the Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership? *We have representatives from those agencies on our caucuses. The Partnership is working to simplify processes through this*

kind of interagency coordination. The Partnership had a meeting last week with the Nearshore Partnership to discuss how to coordinate efforts.

- When you talk about cap to cap, does this imply uplands for uplands sake as well or is this just how the uplands affect the waters of the Sound? We have been told at prior meetings that it is uplands for uplands sake, but the priorities say “problems facing the Sound” and “processes that sustain the Sound” and “water pollution”. So, are we talking about the whole region, or are talking about the Sound? *It is the whole Puget Sound region.*

Duane Fagergren, Regional Liaison for the South Puget Sound Action Area, gave an overview of the action area profile. He stressed that this document was developed to be a brief overview of the South Puget Sound Action Area and is intentionally brief. It is focused on the history of the local ecosystem as well as drivers and stressors, but the overarching point of the document is to highlight new initiatives and challenges for this action area. He asked that those in attendance keep this in mind and focus their comments in that direction. He encouraged people to review the inventories to call attention to those new initiatives so the Partnership can find ways of integrating them into their plans.

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

- I think the profile is very good and like that it is short, but I would like to point out three things that I think are missing: 1. upland areas are poorly described, especially where growth pressures are concerned; 2. replacement of conifers by deciduous trees; 3. air pollution as a source of pollution and how that relates to transportation.
- Native grasslands are the least protected resource but are left out of the profile.
- Industrial aquaculture expansion is not listed as a threat but it fits into the shoreline modification and habitat degradation sections. *We are aware of that and will consider adding it and making it more prominent.*
- I am suspicious that we are protecting individual industries like the shellfish industry. This document excludes language about recreational uses like boating and fishing. It sounds as if it is meant to protect shellfish.
- I would like to state that shellfish are very important, the most important industry in the State, but I want to talk about fish like smelt and forage fish that historically were very abundant and are still abundant to a certain extent. The profile should discuss forage fish and their connection to salmon.
- The last sentence of the profile should note that all shorelines have been modified and affected by stressors. Armoring is not the only stressor affecting shorelines.
- The way we develop land is a huge ecosystem stressor. Because on-site septic systems require more space, lot sizes are large. The Growth Management Act is working against us in some cases where we are seeing fewer houses on larger lots where we could have gotten more density and used fewer resources.

- Good profile, but wastewater is only a stressor if it is not maintained. It is difficult to understand how wastewater fits into the Partnership's priorities.

Duane asked people to look at the maps and diagrams and make comments during the break. Their feedback is critical to helping the Partnership improve the figures and correct things that are poorly represented.

Session 2: Aligning local and regional priorities

Angie led a discussion about the initial priorities by asking the following questions about each priority:

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*

- The treatment facility in downtown Shelton is antiquated and set for a major failure. The City of Shelton has written a wastewater plan and regional plan that will relieve the load on the facility. The priority is a new treatment facility but the barrier to implementation is funding.
- Bioremediation is a technology that could be used as a tool to protect and restore the Sound. The Washington State Legislature is in the business of marketing available technology by listing State approved technology for local implementation. We don't have a field compliance component in this State and this process should be market based.
- The Cascade Land Conservancy is also involved in land conservation and community involvement and outreach. In Pierce County, are they looking at sewers or other measures to protect the Rocky Bay Shellfish Protection District as part of the Tri-county ESA response effort? *The shellfish protection initiative in Rocky Bay is a coordinated response between the County and the Department of Health and does not yet include sewage treatment facilities.*
- Funding for education on toxics has run out, which is one barrier. A second barrier is the chemical manufacturing industry and the big box store businesses that carry their products. They impede behavior change.
- We have concerns about the proposed Belfair sewer system. The new treatment plant has been built on land that has perking problems. In addition, water is not supposed to be shifted from one watershed to another, which is in the proposal.
- State regulations do little to discourage development in areas prone to frequent flooding, landslide areas and other environmentally hazardous areas.
- The Mason Conservation District has a good track record of working with private landowners to get them to use best management practices on the ground, but we

have run into a couple of barriers. First, a very limited number of best management practices are allowed by the State Department of Ecology. We have been working on testing a few of these techniques in Oakland Bay and lower Hood Canal with success, but we cannot get approval. One reason for this and the second barrier is that the Department of Ecology has cut funding to its Technology Assessment Protocol – Ecology program (TAPE) which approves best management practices.

- Mason County has a Shellfish Protection District in Oakland Bay. Many of the organizations here today are involved in this project so it has been a very coordinated approach. We have declared Oakland Bay a Marine Recovery Area, like Hood Canal, and we have catalogued 24,000 septic systems so far. Our main barrier is funding for the program.
- A new pathogen to this area, called viral hemorrhagic septicemia, has been found in local salmon farms as a result of monoculture farming. We also need to look at issues beyond our own region such as NOAA's federally funded promotion of expanded aquaculture in our waters, which includes funding for shellfish farming and some open water fish farms in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The National Offshore Aquaculture Act was just introduced in Congress and the Marine Mineral Services just drafted rule making documentation to allow the use of decommissioned oil rigs for fish farming.
- A local barrier we have is that in many cases our farmland is within our critical areas. As a result, it is difficult to find a balance between sustainable agriculture and good land use.
- Mitigation to control stormwater runoff can be undone in one afternoon, such as when the Department of Natural Resources allowed clear cutting last year. This practice allows extreme runoff into our streams and the Sound.
- Washington Sea Grant is working to get smaller containers in big box stores for toxics like pesticides. The barrier is that we need more citizens to ask for these smaller sizes. Another problem we have is medications getting into our waterways. The barrier to getting that cleaned up is the Drug Enforcement Agency because a number of drugs can only be received by designated commission offices.
- Through the Puget Sound Initiative, the Department of Ecology is coordinating toxics cleanup with other local agencies. However, the coordination process has not been entirely effective. For example, in Oakland Bay Ecology came in with a plan and took over with no coordination effort at all. I would ask the Partnership to create a process for these agencies to follow when dealing with local agencies and organizations already doing work.
The Partnership's overall intent is just that and the Action Agenda will act as a guideline for this type of coordination.
- Here are a few problems People for Puget Sound has noted in this action area:
 - There are nine sewage treatment plants in this action area and low dissolved oxygen resulting from nutrient loading. We need funding to upgrade these plants with better technology to deal with the problem.

- I have an issue with using mixing zones to attempt to address toxics concentrations. We need new policies in place to ramp this down over time.
- We have a large number of septic systems. This is a funding and a policy issue.
- Planting improper tree species is a problem on both private and public lands.
- There 15 toxic chemicals coming into the Sound as prominent pollutants. The Department of Ecology needs to focus more on prevention rather than just removal.
- In Oakland Bay, we feel that the Department of Ecology is doing a good job, but we agree that the Partnership needs to set up a comprehensive watershed approach that is inclusive of all interested parties.
- Two barriers I see are the lack of state support for local coordination of programs, and the traditional state model to rely on a competitive grant program. I think direct funding to implementers would be more efficient. *Do you have a particular issue in mind?* No, I am talking about watershed-wide issues and watershed-wide coordination.
- Something we have not touched upon yet are high individual nutrient providers like turf farmers and compost operators. Henderson Inlet and the areas around Belfair are very good examples of this. One approach to address these problems could be through pilot projects that allow experimentation of other technologies and techniques not yet approved by the Department of Ecology. However, the Department of Ecology blocks pilot projects like this from happening.
- Gaps in local funding is a barrier, and funding received for nonpoint source studies is inconsistent. If we are to be successful in this effort, we will need sustainable nonpoint programs.
- Addressing biosolids in our Shelton treatment plant can help clean up Puget Sound. We now have a tri-party agreement with Mason County, the City of Shelton and the Squaxin Island Tribe to collaborate and bring the biosolids into one repository. The barrier is funding.
- We have many competing issues and competing agencies with competing goals. We need to address these issues at a high level to develop coordinated answers to problems.

Chris Townsend noted the interconnectedness of the issues and suggested that many topics will be covered under multiple priorities.

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

- WSU has a number of other programs that do not show up in this inventory such as: shore stewards program, septic education, low impact development training and workshops, native plant salvage project, small farms program, and realtor education that focuses on water quality.

- I would like to submit that conflict and tension within communities is good for figuring out solutions to problems. It helps to find the middle ground that will result in good policy.
- Bioremediation is an ecosystem process that can be applied to many of these issues.
- We have non-sustainable use of our water resources throughout Puget Sound. Rather than pumping it into Puget Sound, wastewater from treatment plants can be reused for irrigation, ecosystem restoration, groundwater recharge and wetland restoration.
- How do we address bulkhead removal in urbanized areas of the Sound? We also need to address the increasing the funding for comprehensive restoration efforts like the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project, a local and federal effort.
- The Pirates Cove community has started a program to help with salmon enhancement by restoring the Cove to its natural condition. The barrier is regulations that inhibit this time-critical process. It may take so long to get through the regulatory process that we lose our funding before we can complete the work.
- The new North Base sewer system in Allyn has resulted in new water quality problems that are difficult to fix. We need to address problems with an ecosystem approach rather than a piecemeal band-aid.
- The Growth Management Act is a barrier. It does not encourage counties or regions to plan on a landscape scale. It also does not connect population growth to local resources to measure if an area can sustain growth.
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife is working on a streamlined permitting process for restoration projects but when it is completed it will need some support to get passed.
- Removal of non-native vegetation along the shoreline and other small projects could be used as pilot programs to get major programs off of the ground. Public education can be used to get the public behind the restoration effort by showing progress.

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

- The Department of Natural Resources has a geoduck farming program on Stretch Island which will change the landscape.
- Forage fish are important to the food web of Puget Sound but they cannot exist if they cannot spawn. New aquaculture is starting to overlap with forage fish spawning areas.
- Tidal lands need to have the same controls as upland areas. The aquaculture industry is bulldozing tidal lands.
- Nine miles of PVC pipe laid across a beach is a significant underwater structure and should be regulated.

- The acquisition of land into a trust, like the work the Capital Land Trust is conducting, is imperative to protecting areas. This requires bulk funding.
- Bioremediation can be used to reclaim drain fields.
- Through the conservation plan for Mason County, we are working on acquiring and protecting intact areas. However, the timeline needs to be accelerated.
- Whoever has the controlling interest in the land must be the one to protect it. Washington State Parks is a good example of an agency protecting the land it is responsible for.
- I am a Stretch Island resident who is concerned about public lands remaining intact. I want to ask you to consider keeping the human element involved in these ecosystem discussions. I would like to thank you all for helping preserve that for me.
- We cannot buy everything, and so cannot fix all of the problems through land conservation. We need to protect these lands by enforcing regulations and exercising our responsibilities as well as our private owner rights. Do not make the rest of us bail out those developers who choose not to be responsible.
- Pierce Conservation District Stream Team removes invasive species and replaces conifers. We need more volunteers and help educating people on the correct way to plant.
- Geoduck farms on State owned beaches leave the land less enjoyable than it was previously. Also, it is expensive to develop these farms. Is the Partnership going to have oversight on how much money is spent on these projects?
- I think the question of geoduck farming is very much a question of the scale of production. Also, I think the major problem with protecting ecosystems is the overflow events from combined sewage treatment plants when there are heavy rains. It is very expensive to fix this problem, but it happens again and again.
- Sea level rise affects shoreline armoring and other shoreline processes.
- Squaxin Island Tribe, the Nisqually Tribe, Pierce County, and Thurston County have already done an extensive inventory for this area. There is no reason for you to try and reinvent the wheel here; the Partnership should just use what we have done.
- Emphasize that we need to protect pocket estuaries because they are a principle source of habitat. We have more of them in our action area because we do not have very swift currents. These areas could be prime pilot projects and protecting them could help other ecosystem processes.
- The University of Washington completed a study in January which found that over the next 100 years, a shift in the tectonic plate we sit on will off-set any sea level rise.
- By protecting the shellfish industry we are helping clean up the Sound because of their shellfish natural filter seawater.

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)*

Chris Townsend asked the audience to think of Priority A as working together more efficiently and effectively. Three examples of things the State and Partnership are working on:

1. Department of Ecology Mitigation That Works Forum
 2. Bill Ruckelshaus convened a meeting of all the top policy makers from the federal, state and local levels to look at enforcing existing environmental regulations
 3. Governor's office of regulatory assistance is working on a pilot project to coordinate all agency permit processes.
- If we take that first sentence literally, we probably need to look at the price of oil projected over the next 20 years—it will most likely be \$20.00 a gallon, which will change everything. How will the region will react and what will it do to our goals here?
 - There needs to be greater collaboration between enforcement agencies, with more resources for inspection of these programs. Bulkheads are built in places where they are not needed but there are no incentives to remove them. Additionally, better boater regulations are needed where we have sensitive shorelines.
 - In the media, there was recently an article about the illegal use of public tidelands. I am concerned that some issues are not discussed freely because certain members of the industries involved are present on boards. Those people of influence should be removed until these issues are resolved. Aquaculture feed lots are no more sustainable than terrestrial feed lots. We must protect forage fish spawning areas and we are not looking at them while these people are board members.
 - Watershed-based programs through watershed councils and biodiversity programs will have more success.
 - The Shelton Wastewater Treatment Plant is 30 years old and could fail at any point. We are short \$20 million to upgrade the plant, which is necessary to address nutrients and slack tide issues.
 - On-site water reuse and other new technologies can help if permits are issued.
 - We are very good at planning but bad at implementation. We allow funds to be used on discussing the issues rather than spending it on the actual implementation of plans. We allow the politics to override the science.
 - South Puget Sound is well organized and has been working on these issues for some time. We have given the Partnership the inventory and we are waiting to find out if this process is a bottom-up approach for setting local priorities or whether they will be dictated to us. We have not seen any action or movement towards support. *We are not trying to reinvent the wheel but this is a Sound-wide effort and we are trying to balance the needs of the whole Sound when prioritizing these issues.*

- Climate change, glacial rebound and sea level change is a big problem for the South Sound. Another barrier is the lack of enforcement staff, who are especially susceptible to budget cuts. Accountability and the lack of tracking of waivers is a barrier. Permit fragmentation is an issue, especially the cumulative effect of those permits. One agency does not necessarily look at the effects their permit might have on functions they do not oversee. Monitoring and adaptive management are critical issues and need funding for information and monitoring. Lastly, we need to understand the true economic impacts of building a house. *The Partnership is engaged in work with the World Resources Institute, which seeks to measure the value of our natural resources and the effects of human needs.*
- It is troubling to hear that mitigation enforcement is so low.
- There is a piece missing here in the South Sound and that is the Marine Resource Committees—we don't have any. They are very good at getting people involved in these issues. We need to deal with combined sewage treatment through the use of separate systems so we don't have overflow events.
- Bioremediation could help with the problems that recreational and industrial boating create.
- Shore Bank Enterprise Cascadia manages a loan program that helps homeowners and small business owners maintain their septic systems. We have had over 260 homeowners and business owners come to us wanting to fix their septic systems and we have provided funding for 100 of those to date, but there are over 500,000 systems in the region. We have an economic need to fix these outdated systems. People need incentive to do the right thing and there is no systematic approach to maintaining existing septic systems. Furthermore, we need to have a management system in place for them after they are updated.
- The Thurston County Roads Department has made some improvements in road maintenance by using best management practices to treat runoff on-site so it does not become a pollutant. They have implemented training programs for employees, used new plantings along the roadsides to help with runoff, and made better decisions about wetland protections. Much of this work is funded through outside sources.
- We must recognize that all of us are the problem and that education and outreach can improve the system and must not be left out of this discussion. *Econet is one approach the Partnership is using to develop an education strategy.*
- Incentives for landowners to do the right thing are very important. Without incentives, landowners will have problems paying for the implementation. We must invest some tax dollars into incentives rather than enforcement; or perhaps use tax credits.
- I would like to suggest that the Squaxin Island Tribe does not represent the whole action area. The Case Inlet Shoreline Commission believes baseline studies need to be done in order to decide how to restore this area before we can prioritize.
- Have we looked at the geology of the area to see how long it takes nutrients to percolate into the ground over time?
- Let's not forget about the Scotch Broom problem.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Chris Townsend mentioned that there is an online threaded discussion where people can comment on the profiles. He also noted that the Partnership will have another round of action area meetings in September discussing the Action Agenda components. Lastly, he described the SEPA process currently underway to complete a non-project checklist and an expected determination.

Bill Ruckelshaus thanked the Horton Community Center for letting the Partnership use their space. He stated that this is one of several meetings we are conducting over the next few weeks and they are very useful and necessary if we are to be successful in restoring and maintaining the health of Puget Sound. In order to account for future growth we need to educate new people about the issues they will face here and help them understand how they can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Bill described the Partnership as both a top down and a bottom up endeavor with no regulatory authority. In order for this to work, the plan needs buy in from the people of Puget Sound. That human factor is where the complex issues lie – human aspiration in relation to all other living things. He noted that the process needs a transparent and useful monitoring program supported by indicators and benchmarks, with a sustainable funding source, and needs the trust and support of the public.