Whidbey Action Area Workshop (Mount Vernon)

July 22, 2008

Workshop Summary

Meeting Purpose

The Puget Sound Partnership held a workshop in Mt. Vernon on July 22, 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 75 people attended the workshop at the Best Western CottonTree Inn. Among those represented were local and tribal governments, local organizations, businesses, federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and citizens.

Meeting Summary

Ray Outlaw, meeting facilitator, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. Ray recognized those affiliated with the Partnership in attendance: Linda Lyshall, Gary Rowe, Steve Sakuma and Chris Townsend. Ray led a round of introductions where each participant was asked to state their name and organization.

Steve Sakuma, Whidbey Action Area Leadership Council representative, thanked the audience for their participation. He described the Leadership Council's role and informed participants of the upcoming Leadership Council meeting on July 23 and 24.

Gary Rowe, Whidbey Action Area Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB) representative, described the role of the ECB as an advisory committee to the Leadership Council and gave an update on the last ECB meeting, held on July 18. He also noted that the success of the Action Agenda depends on local participation.

Chris Townsend, Puget Sound Partnership staff, reviewed the Partnership's progress to date. He noted that revised versions of the topic forum papers, which synthesize information gathered from prior meetings, would be available soon. Chris explained the meeting expectations: to review the Whidbey Action Area Profile, discuss local priorities and how they align with the Partnership's initial strategic priorities, and identify local barriers to implementation of priorities.

Session 1: Strategic priorities and action area profile

Linda Lyshall, Regional Liaison for the Whidbey Action Area, presented the action area profile. She explained that in developing the profile, key information was culled from

existing studies and locally reviewed. She then asked participants to provide high level comments on the profile.

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

Physical description comments:

- If the profile mentions eelgrass beds, why does it not mention other very important habitat?
- Mention forest cover and add a table to show land use types in the basin.
- Identify the primary jurisdictions in the Whidbey action area.
- Identify the level of connectivity between functioning ecosystems from mountains to Sound.

Land use, population, economy comments:

- The statement noting that the Whidbey area is shifting away from a resource-based economy is a misrepresentation of how much resource-based industry still exists.
- Emphasize forestry in addition to agriculture as a primary land use.
- Include more quantitative information on land use and ownership patterns.
- Include Mukilteo as a city.
- The projected growth of 30% is a broad generalization. Break down projected growth figures in different areas across the basin, or perhaps compare projected growth in urban and rural areas.
- The word “light” should not be in front of “industrial”.
- Include wetland restoration banking.
- Replace the word “housing” with “construction”.
- Connect commerce and agriculture more clearly to the consumption of natural resources to understand the effects of consumption and promote a greener economy.
- Include recreation and tourism.

Unique ecosystem characteristics and assets comments:

- The largest species of octopi is found in the Whidbey action area.
- Include statistics on the diversity of steelhead salmon and acknowledge the area’s importance to all salmon.
- The Skagit River does not have 26 populations of bull trout but it supports that many.
- Add more quantitative information, such as acreage of eelgrass beds.
- Quantify pocket estuaries and estuaries by acres.
- The Skagit River is a Wild and Scenic River.
- Establish a history of the Sound to determine the best way to restore it to its previous state and protect what we still have.

- Report the size of floodplains that can be recovered or reconnected.

Ecosystem stressors comments:

- Mention lawn and lawn care use and abuse in more detail.
- Use more quantification, such as the percent acreage of tidelands.
- Dams have more impact than just cutting off fish passages, they also cut off gravel recruitment and prevent the peak flows needed for channel processes.
- The riverine system, in addition to the marine system, is affected by dikes and shoreline modifications.
- Residential development and its impacts on watersheds is the biggest challenge in Snoqualmie.
- In the description of septics in the water quality section, use the term "unknown" instead of "failing". Failing implies that we know the state of the septics but the reality is that many are unknown. The Department of Health classifies them as "known" or "unknown."
- Be more specific. For example, quantify acreage or percent of armored shoreline.
- Address impervious surfaces, toxins and stormwater runoff.
- The second to last paragraph mentions impacts on aquaculture. The Samish River and Bay should be included when talking about specific locations.
- In Samish Bay the vessels that come through Haro Strait create a potential problem with invasive species. For example, the bamboo worm is a potential threat—it turns sediment into quicksand that cannot support life. Is the source the ballast water from vessels? There needs to be a radar tracking system to watch those vessels.
- The sedimentation problem is not given enough attention in the text. Sedimentation adds to shoreline and alters river characteristics.
- A good data source is the Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership's change analysis.
- Sea lion populations are at a historic high and are an ecosystem stressor to salmon.
- Consider cumulative and recreation impacts.
- Address air and water pollution from our transportation system.
- Mention the change of hydrology due to impervious surfaces.
- Add the loss of riparian vegetation as a stressor.
- Address temperature in the water quality impairments section.
- Include species that may be less charismatic but are indicative of a healthy ecosystem.
- The climate change description focuses on peak flows, snowpack and runoff. Address other potential ways climate change will affect the area, such as the increase in invasive species.

Session 2: Aligning local and regional priorities

Chris Townsend 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*

- The private sector is trying to bring new products to the market, for example bioremediation. There is an example of this in New Mexico, featured in the 2007 Sunset Magazine. This technology can reduce water aquifer discharge by up to 50%. The first installation was on Whidbey Island but it was a difficult process due to existing laws and regulations. I would encourage everyone to think outside the box and consider this technology.
- As a farmer in the Skagit Valley, I am working on composting seed and animal waste with an indoor controlled and monitored composting facility. In order to achieve 100% pasteurization of manures, I took land out of use and installed my own water retention buffers. The barrier is funding and getting people to think outside the box.
- Snohomish County is updating their standards to make them more compatible with low impact development (LID). One barrier is that street widths are determined by fire departments and thus very wide. Narrower, pervious streets are perceived as potential fire hazards. Additionally, there are questions related to street maintenance and whether pervious streets are durable. Suspicion of new technology prevents us from moving forward.
- Skagit County Public Health has an on-site sewage system management plan in order to establish Marine Recovery Areas and promote water quality monitoring. Inspections of septic systems are now required and public outreach is ongoing. There is a public hearing on August 19 to hear public testimony. The barrier is public awareness and involvement.
- King County worked with Carnation to build a wastewater treatment plant which treats water to reclaimed water standards and discharges the water into the ground and a wetland. The barrier is working with the Department of Ecology. Ecology's water quality and water resources departments need to coordinate.
- Snohomish County and the Snohomish Health District are working together on an innovative program to use GIS to map all septic systems and prioritize key areas that may have failing septic tanks. There is also a community based marketing approach to determine how to reach different communities. The goal is to maximize voluntary compliance.
- Island County is doing a variety of activities to show how to do LID projects, such as rain gardens and impermeable surfaces.

- The Port of Coupeville started a program for complete wastewater treatment in which they pump water back over the top of the hills and back to farmers, giving them an additional one to two inches a year per acre. Funding from the state is needed for a pilot program.
- Skagit County has a "Septic 101" class for residents to learn about septics. In addition, color-coded maps illustrating system compliance were sent out to residents. Residents can visualize progress in their area because as compliance improves, the watershed changes to green on the map.
- The Shore Stewards program educates residents on how their actions may negatively impact Puget Sound. Septic system maintenance is one of the ten main focuses of their program.
- The Beach Watchers program also focuses on watershed education and septic system education.
- The Washington State University Waste Wise program also focuses on septic issues and is working on establishing a chapter for the City of Oak Harbor.
- The Washington State University Master Gardener program does education about the use of pesticides and encourages wise use.
- Skagit County had a low interest loan program to assist residents to put in state-of-the-art septic systems. Does this program still exist? It was a good incentive for landowners.
- Conflicting local codes and land use systems are barriers to implementing LID projects.
- Another barrier at the local level to septic systems is the Shoreline Master Program. Shoreline Master Plans need to be updated and water quality issues addressed properly.
- In Skagit County, there is an incredible process for managing stormwater during construction but the public is not aware of this effort. Whenever anyone is doing anything to improve water quality they should use that educational opportunity to increase public awareness.
- The Partnership should provide more information to help spread the word about the issues in the Sound. We need educational materials with more detail than is provided in the e-newsletter.
- For septic issues, consider forming septic utility districts where owners charge themselves, similar to someone on a sewer system. The fees would pay for maintenance, repair and routine inspection.
- Create a collection service for household hazardous waste that intercepts chemicals at the time of a move or sale of a house to prevent improper disposal.
- Monitoring and understanding the sources of pollution is imperative. How is the Partnership going to address this? Non-governmental organizations would participate in this effort if they were provided the resources and proper training.
- The Growth Management Act is a barrier to installing sewer lines in communities because it will not allow the extension of sewer lines into unincorporated areas.
- Address water pollution from livestock and hobby farm animal waste.

- Consider scale when looking at these issues. Even if all 40,000 rural septic systems in Snohomish County were repaired, it would not compare to one emergency raw sewage dump into the Sound by King County.
- Each county board in Puget Sound meets quarterly and is required by mandate to have onsite septic management plans.
- The Beach Watchers program had a project this spring to look at how to address pet waste.

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

- I am not comfortable with this shotgun approach. The Salmon Recovery Plan was bottom-up, this process should happen in a bottom-up way as well.
- People for Puget Sound is working with property owners to provide grants to restore habitat and replace hard shorelines. The funding permit processes are barriers. It should be easier, cheaper and more streamlined to help the environment.
- It is important to encourage softshore armoring. One barrier is the lack of engineers and experts that have knowledge on this topic.
- A barrier is that restoration projects often target rural areas, when many water quality problems come from urban areas. LID is utilized in new development, but there are thousands of already developed areas that need to be retrofitted.
- Acknowledge that softshore armoring is not the same as restoring ecosystem processes. Recognize that saving Puget Sound is inherently different from saving and protecting property values.
- The contracting industry needs to be involved in this conversation to design more creative, workable solutions that can be implemented.
- The City of Oak Harbor is partnering with other groups to address problems. They are specifically working to train contractors on the island on LID techniques.
- Mitigation should address continuing impacts. Require continuing mitigation instead of trivial mitigation for the first few years of a project.
- A challenge to the ecosystem-based process is that restoration and protection is done on a landowner basis, parcel by parcel. We need to focus on one small geographic area and work with landowners in that area to improve the ecosystem. In the Snoqualmie Valley, we are working with small landowners and providing property tax breaks, developing farm and forest plans, water quality best management practices (BMPs), and small grants for implementation. Our prioritization of geographic areas is based on Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) and watershed plans.
- Projects funded by the Salmon Recovery Board do not provide funding for monitoring. This does not allow us to learn from our work.
- We need more studies in order to understand how to restore physical processes. We also need to monitor and learn from our efforts.

- We need to start investing in science and funding our universities to do the research to understand processes. We do not understand processes well enough to determine how to correctly restore them.
- Beach Watchers is doing a lot of citizen science to answer research questions. Lack of adequate funding is a barrier.
- The Conservation District is encouraging landowners to participate in habitat recovery. Eleven parties received assistance this year for restoration projects on their properties. Permits and the expense to owners are barriers.
- There are multiple, large scale, multi-million dollar projects that would restore ecosystem processes but there is a lack of funding.
- Ecology grant money should be focused on certain priority areas for maximum efficiency. To measure success, projects need to be focused in one area.
- In western Skagit County, there is a lot of important agricultural land and a concern that the way of life in that area will be lost if much land is taken out of production. There needs to be a balance between taking care of the fish and taking care of the farmer.

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

- People living in floodplain and shoreline areas need to understand that it is in the best public interest that they eventually move out of those areas. We need long-term planning strategies that avoid constraining individuals but protect the environment. Our Growth Management Act is not currently accomplishing this.
- The process of habitat acquisition needs to be updated. Counties need a shorter route to accomplish habitat acquisition.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) continually assists people living in the floodway and they are allowed to return to the same area after a flood to potentially be flooded again. We need to help these people find different homes, perhaps by creating a land swap program.
- Ensure that activities are improving the function of a watershed and are not merely the path of least political resistance.
- Pentec Environmental has established numerical values for habitat in their work with the salmon plan. Use these numbers to prioritize habitat function. Additionally, WRIA 7 has a good framework for approaching salmon restoration.
- There is more than one cause to the problem. Selecting only a select number of functions is risky - the ecosystem is much more complicated than that. Look at all six goals and find solutions that will address most of them.
- Keep bringing large sums of money into Puget Sound for land acquisition and restoration projects.
- The Department of Natural Resources has a conservation leasing program that allows entities to lease lands for restoration purposes. .
- The most important piece of maintaining ecosystem processes is education. We need to come up with more creative ways of thinking about land ownership in

order to retain the value of investment and still provide for the public good. Perhaps we could identify shoreline landowners and determine how they can transfer development rights in order to maintain the health of the shoreline and still live in the area.

- The local Shoreline Master Plans are a good source of information. A lot of money is spent to find information on the ecosystem, characterization and restoration opportunities. A barrier is the ability to get these plans adopted and implemented.
- Build upon existing plans and avoid repeating work that has already been done.
- A tool for protection is conservation easements and stripping development rights. We need local and state assistance for this effort.
- Another tool is farmland preservation, transfer of development rights. In the Snoqualmie Valley, large tracts of land have been placed in the farmland preservation program protecting a large portion of the floodplain.

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)***

- We need a structured approach to figure out what our priorities need to be, especially with this priority.
- We need more coordination between agencies and ecosystem-based management. For example, within the Department of Fish and Wildlife, one group is protecting habitat, another group is concerned with rights to fish and hunt, resulting in fishing and hunting regulations that are in conflict with habitat protection.
- Enforcement is a known problem. What is the Department of Ecology doing to remedy this problem and to ensure that people are in compliance with their permits? *A program was started to monitor the implementation of mitigation requirements. The goal is to monitor within 18 months of when mitigation was supposed to occur. A higher compliance rate has been documented with this approach. The first three years have been funded by the EPA.*
- Why are developers not paying for mitigation monitoring?
- Ecology is looking forward to enforcement support from the local government and community. Ecology needs coordination with local organizations.
- Ecology needs to provide the resources, training and opportunities for locals to assist with enforcement.
- Review the legislation and intent of allowing private Washington residents to personally own tidelands. Citizens were allowed to grow shellfish; this was the economic purpose of allowing them to own these lands. However, the assumption is that if they own the shoreline, then it is their shoreline, and this is counter to establishing a public trust policy.
- When we are talking about enforcement, people need to understand that we are not talking about writing tickets. What we really need are people on the ground

educating and providing technical assistance to landowners. Most people want to do the right thing, they just do not know what that means.

- We have never had a problem with compliance. Often landowners are asking us for creative ideas for meaningful mitigation. We have been working with Marine Resources Committees on mitigation and our efforts have been successful at keeping developers honest.
- It is important to train staff and have consistency across jurisdictions with regard to regulations. WRIA 9 is working on this. For example, with shoreline restoration ideas, planners need to be on the same page about what is and is not allowed. The shoreline is continuous, so two neighbors in different jurisdictions cannot be allowed to do different things on their properties. The same applies for Public Works and Planning; we need to have consistency across jurisdictions. The Partnership could work with the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) to get funding to train local jurisdictions.
- We need basin watershed stewards on the ground working with the community. This has been done in King County. Most of the time landowners really want to do the right thing; we just need people showing them what can be done. The problem is funding - watershed stewards is a voluntary program so it is first to get cut when there is no money available.
- This process needs to happen at different levels. Snoqualmie is not even on the map. Does that mean our needs are not being considered? We have to be very clear and look at priorities in each area, since individual areas are inherently different. If there is new funding, where will it go? *When the Puget Sound Action Team put together their plan, they asked each state agency what they were doing and rolled up all of those things into the Puget Sound Action Plan. The Partnership is trying to invert that process. We are looking at what needs to be done to protect and restore the Sound, identify the money needed, and identify the agencies to do the protection and restoration. Further, the Action Agenda will filter the budget for all state agencies related to the cleanup of Puget Sound. Those actions consistent with the Action Agenda will be prioritized for funding.*
- There is too much emphasis placed on fixing the problem rather than preventing the problem.
- This process is no different from the Puget Sound Action Team, in that you are asking people for different perspectives, what is important to them, etc. Is this information going to drive what the priorities are or is something else going to drive the priorities? *The first guidance the Partnership was given by the Leadership Council was to identify strategic priorities to focus our work. The question is, do we focus on all of the priorities and are they different in each action area? This process of community workshops is discussing what the priorities should be in each action area as well as Sound-wide.*
- Through this process, did you get a satisfactory answer of how to mitigate for elevated temperature?

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Chris Townsend thanked participants and reminded them that the Partnership will consider input from this series of meetings, and that there will be another series of meetings in September where the elements of the Action Agenda, including recommended actions, will be available for comment. He also mentioned that the Partnership is currently involved in a SEPA process. The Leadership Council will discuss the SEPA process, which will include a public comment period.