Puget Sound Partnership
Action Agenda Update Workshop:
Land Development and Freshwater Strategies

September 13, 2011
Rhodes Center, Tacoma, WA

It is intended that this summary be used along with materials provided to participants. The below comments on Soundwide strategies are provided without attributed comments.

Introduction – Context for Today's Discussion and Overview of All Strategies/Sub-Strategies

Chris Townsend, PSP, welcomed everyone to the workshop, and thanked attendees for dedicating their time to the Action Agenda update. Steve Sakuma and Diana Gale from the Leadership Council were also thanked for attending.

Martha Neuman, PSP, reviewed the workshop objectives, which included:

- Information sharing about work on revising strategies and sub-strategies for the 2011 Action Agenda update.
- Reviewing in detail each of the pressure reduction/priority strategies and sub-strategies, and briefly reviewing each of the non-pressure reduction strategies and sub-strategies
- Gathering feedback on ideas for changes or improvements to existing strategies and sub-strategies.

A powerpoint presentation was provided that reviewed the overall schedule and goals for the 2011 Action Agenda update, a review of near term actions (NTAs), ongoing programs, prioritization considerations, and next steps after the workshops. For this iteration of the Action Agenda, a tension will exist between clearly explaining what needs to get done in the next two years and an honest assessment of what can be done now with limited resources. To this end, the Action Agenda is a short and long term document. Participants were reminded that the Action Agenda belongs to everyone, not just PSP, and a continuing conversation throughout the update process was encouraged.

For the 2011 update, the focus of the strategy and action update work is on those strategies and actions that help achieve targets for reducing five key pressures on the ecosystem: land development, shoreline alteration, runoff from the built environment, wastewater, and loss of floodplain function. Draft strategies and actions for these pressure-reduction strategies were developed by interdisciplinary teams using the Open Standards for Conservation process to inform their work. Non-pressure reduction strategies were updated as needed to provide more clarity and reflect any new information and progress.

In the previous Action Agenda, some actions were not clearly defined or delegated; the 2011 Action Agenda will focus on clear, measurable actions with identified leaders. Ongoing programs will also be nested in this iteration of the Action Agenda to provide clarity on the work already being done and its level of importance in working towards Puget Sound recovery. The process for prioritization is still being developed, but it is clear that it will be largely science based (Open Standards). The upcoming October 12-13 Action Agenda Update workshops will be an opportunity for participants to weigh in on prioritization.

On October 6, the Ecosystem Coordination Board will review the draft strategies and actions discussed at these workshops and form recommendations on key issues and decisions for the Leadership Council, who meets October 20-21.

The below summary describes the general impressions expressed by the participants in attendance on the various strategies and actions. The specific strategies, sub-strategies, and near term actions (NTAs) were provided as separate handouts and should be referred to for clarity. In some cases the numbering of strategies overlapped or was not sequential; participants were asked to not be too concerned with this, as the numbering will be in constant flux until the final draft is prepared. Participants shared their thoughts verbally during the meeting and were also encouraged to provide brief, written responses by September 21.

A1-A4. Smart growth, development, land use, and land protection

The land development strategy is now divided into four separate strategies: focusing land development away from ecologically important areas; protecting intact areas of the Puget Sound ecosystem; protecting ecologically sensitive rural lands; and encouraging compact regional growth patterns. The land use and land cover targets are still being developed by an interdisciplinary target setting team and will be finalized before the October 20-21 Leadership Council meeting.

An overarching theme for this section was a lack of capacity for local jurisdictions; local governments have shrinking budgets and local planning staff is overwhelmed, so adding anything new to their plates may be a challenge. This was also expressed as a tension between a top down approach that tells locals what to do versus the ability for a more bottom up approach that allows locals to make their own decisions. The Watershed Characterization was recognized as the most important action to carry out, and to tie local funding to science.

Comments:

- Think about creating plans for recovery and redevelopment after catastrophic events.
- It is important to identify sensitive areas, then determine where new population can go (every county plays own role), so that differences across local levels are addressed.
- Need to be clear if this can be done on a more regional basis and still accommodate growth.
- Not hearing enough recognition that growth is coming; we have to recognize urban growth boundaries, and look at market forces in terms of the watershed characterization.

- NTAs are too general and need to be linked to specific geographic locations and have clearly defined outcomes for the next two years.
- Citing who will take on the NTAs is an important and necessary step before prioritization.
- Funding is scarce, so we don't want a list of actions that are too broad.

A1. Focus land development away from ecologically important and sensitive areas.

Continuing the watershed characterization is the primary work to be completed for this strategy; the project and data collection will be done in the next month, then the data can be rolled up to begin to help local jurisdictions use the information. Because of the importance of local and regional planning, many of the sub-strategies focus on local jurisdiction's policy and development regulations, how they use data, as well as strengthening permitting.

Comments:

- There is not convincing evidence that the watershed characterization has enough information, and the assessment should be combined at the local and regional level.
- There should be an action that references the need for local government to use new science; the technical guidance that Commerce provides is outdated.
- The strategies and actions are sequenced and logical, but it's not clear when we'll have numbers (e.g., acres) that can help us reach the yet to be determined targets.
- DNR is working on the forest cover target, which will help determine what to manage once we have quantifiable targets.
- Identify non-state leads for some of the NTAs.
- There is confusion about how SMA is really working and how effective they are.
- Make sure that SMP and CAO is followed through on and has "teeth".
- No net loss has been added to the GMA, so it is not strictly for shoreline.
- PSP should promote successful projects.
- On A1.3 NTA 2, tone down the language so it doesn't tell legislature what they will do.

A2. Permanently protect the intact areas of the Puget Sound ecosystem that still function well.

Participants felt that this strategy needs more robustness, and stakeholders still need to be brought together to prioritize areas to acquire.

Comments:

- The RCO Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group sunsets next year.
- There may be a conflict between protecting land for both recreation and protection.
- Aligning the myriad funding sources being implemented in an uncoordinated fashion may be helpful, as opposed to scattered conservation work.
    - Oregon Water Enhancement Board has done work similar to this and it's a successful model.
    - Skagit also has a model that would be good for WA

A3. Protect and steward ecologically sensitive rural and resource lands.

A lot of the discussion within the interdisciplinary team on maintaining working lands was around economic viability.

Comments:

- There needs to be a relationship between clearly defined outcomes and who is responsible and will be held accountable.
- A3.2 - include the words "working lands".
- Concern that there is too much emphasis on successful forestlands and farms, and not on ecosystem functions.
- A3.3 - Agricultural lands should be mentioned, too.
- A3.3 - WSDA has a govt. committee on preservation of farmland that recently completed a report that can be rolled up into this strategy.
- Major activities and milestones stop just short of a delivery mechanism for rural landowners suspicious of govt.; a delivery mechanism on how to make this real is something to work towards.
- Work with conservation districts to give them a stronger role.

A4. Encourage compact regional growth patterns and create dense, attractive, and mixed-use and transit-oriented communities.

This strategy focuses on providing the necessary infrastructure and incentives within UGAs to accommodate new and re-development, and making the benefits of living in compact communities more attractive.

Comments:

- Important for downtown areas to drive in new businesses and increase density, so focus on programs like TIF.

A4. Protect and restore floodplain function.

Defining floodplain and identifying priority floodplain areas were identified as the most important actions, as well as working with the implementing agencies. Participants also recognized the need to better identify ongoing programs, and felt there was significant overlap between the identification of floodplains and Watershed Characterization work.

Comments:

- PSNERP may have an example that overlaps identifying pilot projects, in the Skagit Delta in particular.
- The NTA that deals with a land swap would benefit from identifying an organization.
- If RCO policies were more flexible, they could buy land people are willing to sell.
- Exempt wells are not addressed.
- One way to recast a lot of this preliminary work may be to refer to is as "advancing regional work on floodplains" so that some of the milestones are not cast as NTAs.

- We need to get at a collaborative approach that looks at what's in the best interest for the entire ecosystem, which is a major challenge.
- Try to work more with the Floodplain Manager Associations.
- Make sure to include seasonal wetlands in your floodplain definition.
- An economic analysis that determines how much we can restore without damaging our agricultural economy would be useful.
    - The Skagit model is a good reference for a collaborative approach that addresses floodplains management and protecting agriculture.
- Local agencies need to be part of the process of working with agencies to identify what their programs and regulations are. If we take areas out that are already zoned for development, we need to find other areas, and the inclusion of locals will get at that.
- We need to be clear how many acres need to be restored to reach the 15% restoration target, otherwise we don't have a standard on which we base our decisions.

A5. Adapt, where necessary, and implement and maintain freshwater and upland restoration projects.
While the sub- strategies were broad, participants thought the actions were too Chinook based. Several gaps were also identified: uplands, working lands, private lands, riparian, prairie habitats, wildlife corridors, and river deltas.

Comments:
- We need to focus on the "big lifts" for Puget Sound, not the small projects.
- Using salmon recovery as a basis for freshwater projects is appropriate.
- Some of the strategies and NTAs are redundant, and need to be clearer.
- There are likely other projects to prioritize besides ones from the salmon recovery three-year work plans.
- Wildlife corridors would benefit if viewed through a climate lens.
- Work with local integrating forums so you get a broader focus than just the lead entities.
- Other funding sources besides salmon recovery need to be identified.
- The action on projects of regional significance is not clear.

A6. Protect and conserve freshwater resources to increase and sustain water availability for instream flows.

Comments:
- This strategy suggests what has been done in the past is adequate, but it's not. We need the courage to implement big projects.
- These strategies are only weakly related to the stream flow target; summer stream flows in major river systems is the main influence, and it's hard to tie human activity to that, so there is a disconnect with the knobs and targets.
- Mention climate change in this strategy, and focus efforts on flows and areas that are going to be resistant to climate change.

- Give authority to lead entities for instream flow restoration.
- There needs to be an examination of existing water rights laws to consider instream flows

A8. Protect and recover salmon.

While salmon is mentioned throughout the Action Agenda, there is separate section that is still being developed and will be sent to the Salmon Recovery Council for review.

A9. Implementation of other plans in a coordinated way and maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity.

Comments:

- By implementing plans to repair, restore and protect Chinook you do a lot of what is needed for species like steelhead and trout, but not Rockfish.
- There needs to be stronger language than just saying "implement plans".
- DFW is working on a conservation strategy that would identify actions in freshwater to maintain and enhance biodiversity.

A10. Prevent and respond to the introduction of freshwater and terrestrial invasive species.

The NTAs for invasive species were largely prepared by the Invasive Species Council, who requested further direction on how to guide the NTA prioritization process.

Comments:

- Some of the NTAs listed may be more related to science needs for the Biennial Science Work Plan (BSWP).
- This strategy should be viewed through a climate lens.

Themes from the day

- Prioritize getting basic information to support local jurisdictions to help them make decisions: e.g., watershed characterization and floodplains work.
- Local governments have limited capacity and that needs to be recognized. Since we cannot fund everything in Puget Sound, it may help to tie local government funding to critical key watersheds and make sure it is linked to the best science available.
- NTAs need to be more specific to drive accountability.
- There is a need to prioritize within and across strategies.
- Several gaps were identified in the existing drafts, including riparian areas, upland projects, exempt wells and freshwater flows.
- A climate lens would be particularly useful for viewing issues like floodplains, invasive species, and instream flows.
- Identify where different strategies overlap and highlight the importance of those connections.
- Continue to separate ongoing programs from new actions.

- Education, outreach, and training for local planners is important and can build cooperation and understanding.
- Promote regional approaches.
- Think outside of the traditional process of working with local govt., and consider land trusts and other nonprofit organizations.
- Identify what local citizens can do themselves so they feel like they are part of the long-term solution.
- A lot of content for the Biennial Science Work Plan (BSWP) may emerge from the work discussed today for the Action Agenda update.

Diana Gale, Leadership Council member, noted that at this point the work is still very intellectual, multi-faceted, and complicated. She hopes we can work towards a more precise and bold list that includes everything we need to do to protect, restore and recover Puget Sound, and be clear on what we need to prioritize.

Upcoming opportunities

The Partnership is holding several public open houses across the Sound. The purpose of the open houses is to:

- Share information about PSP's measure of Puget Sound health - the Vital Signs;
- Highlight Puget Sound recovery priorities and accomplishments, especially any local priorities and accomplishments you wish to highlight;
- Describe the upcoming update to the Puget Sound recovery plan, the Action Agenda, and get public input;
- An opportunity to provide general educational information about Puget Sound, recovery, and what individuals can do to help.

Tuesday, September 27 in Sequim at the Guy Cole Convention Center at Barrie Blake Park
Monday, October 3 in Mill Creek at the Department of Fish and Wildlife Mill Creek Regional Office
Tuesday, October 4 in Poulsbo at the Poulsbo City Council Chamber in City Hall
Monday October 10 in Mount Vernon at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
Tuesday, October 11 in Olympia at the LOTT Clean Water Alliance
Wednesday, October 19 in Friday Harbor at a location TBD