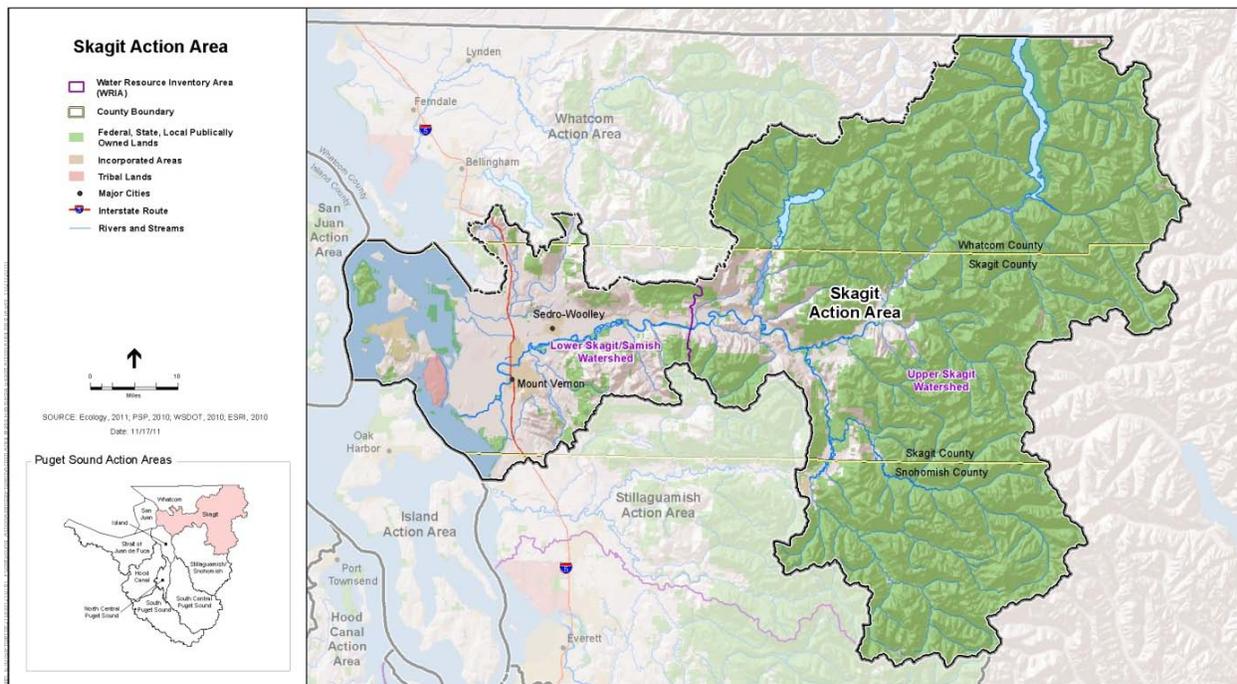


The Action Agenda in Skagit County/ Watershed

Profile²⁷

The largest watershed in Puget Sound, the Skagit system begins in Canada, flows through the rugged Cascades down into low-lying valleys and drains into Skagit Bay. The rich soils of the river's broad delta support the region's most productive farmlands appreciated not only for their crops of berries, potatoes, and organic vegetables, but especially renowned for their bright fields of daffodils and tulips. The Upper Skagit River Valley is a favored wintering area for bald eagles. This impressive gathering of bald eagles, one of the four largest in the contiguous 48 states, coincides with the spawning runs of chum salmon on the Skagit River.

The Skagit Watershed is a fertile center of productivity for high-profile members of the ecosystem's food web including salmon, whales, herring, eagles, and people. Foremost among Puget Sound rivers in volume and length, the Skagit system has 2,989 identified streams totaling approximately 4,540 linear miles. Fed by glaciers on Mount Baker and Glacier Peak, the Skagit has a different seasonal flow pattern from the other major river systems in the area. The Samish River, a smaller drainage comprised of



²⁷ Puget Sound Partnership will double check facts and figures listed in profiles during the public review period.

mostly lower elevation terrain, enters Samish Bay and is part of the greater Skagit Watershed (WRIAs 3 and 4). The upper river is home to the region's only major complex of dams, most of which are built above natural salmon barriers. Puget Sound Energy's two Baker dams obstruct sockeye runs. Diablo, Ross and Gorge dams supply about 25 percent of Seattle's power demands.

Also in the Upper Skagit, the Cascade, Sauk, and Suiattle rivers are designated as Wild and Scenic, making them one of the largest undammed river systems remaining in the Pacific Northwest. The designation includes 158.5 miles of the Upper Skagit River and its tributaries. The Skagit Wild and Scenic River designation begins just east of the town of Sedro-Woolley, extending to Bacon Creek near the boundary of the Ross Lake National Recreation Area in the North Cascades National Park Service Complex.

The Skagit Delta contains large concentrations of wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors. A significant portion of an entire Trumpeter Swan population winters at the site, as well as the entire population of gray-bellied Brant, a subpopulation of Brant geese. Birdwatchers flock to the area in early spring to catch the inspiring sight of hundreds of snow geese rising off the fields in graceful waves. The estuarine and intertidal ecosystems are critical habitat for salmon, other marine fish, and wintering raptors and waterfowl.

Unique ecosystem characteristics and assets

Once dependent on traditional Northwest economic sectors such as agriculture, fishing, and wood products, Skagit County has diversified – tourism, international trade, and specialized manufacturing now comprise the bulk the Skagit Valley economy. Skagit County also has ports and refineries, making it an important location for the petroleum industry. Although the economy has continued to diversify,



fishing for salmon, crab, and shellfish remain an important commercial and recreational activity. Fishing is also a cultural focus and important source of food for the Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, and Samish tribes. Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, and Upper Skagit all have reservation lands located in the watershed. Major cities and towns include in the Skagit Watershed include Mount Vernon, Anacortes, La Conner, Edison, Bow, Conway, Burlington, Sedro-Woolley, Lyman, Hamilton, Concrete, Rockport, Marblemount, and Newhalem.

Agriculture is still a major land use in the river delta areas of the Skagit Watershed. The renowned annual tulip festival in Skagit County provides tourism as well as farm revenues. Active farmland protection programs are utilizing programs to reduce or preclude conversion, such as the purchase or transfer of development rights and outright farmland purchase by regional food co-ops, land trusts, and other organizations.

Recreation and tourism are also important economic sectors, with opportunities for float trips, eagle watching, kayaking, camping, hunting, and backpacking. There are seven designated wilderness areas. The North Cascades National Park, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area protect the headwaters of

the Whidbey Basin,²⁸ and extensive areas of public and private forest, as well as several popular state parks, provide habitat protection and allow for low impact outdoor recreation. Forestland dominates the upper mountainous portions of the Skagit, with more than half in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest or in state-owned forests managed by Washington Department of Natural Resources.

Local Action Agenda Process

The work to develop an updated Action Agenda in the Skagit Watershed is in its nascent stages. At this time, the Skagit Watershed does not have a unified conveying forum such as a local integrating organization (LIO). There have been initial discussions to develop this group, however these have not advanced into a functional entity. The timeline for this effort is dependent upon the interest within the Skagit Watershed.

Due to the lack of a unified forum, the content in this section was taken from two primary sources: (1) background material presented in the 2008 Action Agenda; and (2) information developed through a process of collecting feedback on a template from those entities that had time to engage in the process. The information below represents a beginning of the material, effort, and focus for work to implement the Action Agenda, but not the end. The Skagit Watershed group will work on refining key threats and pressures and developing strategies and near term actions in 2012.

Key Threats/Pressures

At this time, all the pressures and associated sub-categories from the regional taxonomy are relevant to the Skagit Watershed. Further discussion about the level of threats and what pressures are most prevalent is still necessary. The following is the list of pressures for further discussion:

- Agriculture and Aquaculture (and all sub-categories)
- Energy production and mining (there is disagreement locally about whether this constitutes a pressure in the Skagit)
- Natural system modifications (and all sub-categories)
- Biological Resource Use (and both sub-categories)
- Human Intrusions and Disturbance Residential and Commercial Development (military exercise sub-category has disagreement)
- Transportation and Service Corridors
- Pollution (and sub-categories)
- Invasive and other Problematic Species and Genes
- Climate Change

²⁸In the 2008 Action Agenda update, the Skagit, Island, and Stillaguamish and Snohomish Action Areas comprised one Action Area called the Whidbey Basin Action Area. A map of the Whidbey Basin Action Area can be found at the end of this chapter.

Opportunities, Priorities and Near Term Actions

Further work is needed to identify a clear sense of prioritization of strategies and near term actions. The Skagit Watershed group has developed their initial and very draft set of strategies and actions. Below is a copy of the working document that captures the dialogue to-date.

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Protect and Restore Terrestrial and Freshwater Ecosystems			Question 1, Page 3 states that the number of acres in farms is a measure of the health of Puget Sound. This ill-defined target and benchmark are not a meaningful measure of how well we are protecting Puget Sound. Should be linked to the number of acres of farmland where water quality is not compromised as a result of farming activity. Also applies to Priority A and to Sections A.2 and A.4
<i>Smart Growth, Development, Land Use and Land Protection.</i>			
Focus land development away from ecologically important and sensitive areas		High	This is locally controlled; nothing about mitigation
Adopt clearing and grading ordinances throughout Whidbey Basin			
Review and apply recommendations of the Envision Skagit 2060 project		High	
Protect and restore native riparian forests along streams			Source: Salmon Recovery Plan
Protect, restore, and maintain fish passage at road culverts and tide gates			Source: Salmon Recovery Plan
Include Section 106 streamlining			
Protect and steward ecologically sensitive rural lands			
	Ensure that protection actions maintain funding priority.	High	In this economic downturn funding discussions & \$\$ seem to be leaning towards restoration however cost-benefit studies clearly show coordinated and systematic land

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			protection pays off. Can't lose sight of this due to current economic climate- need to evaluate long term cost-benefit. Funding for stewardship or community systems for stewardship need to be included in protection costs and analysis. Protection only meaningful if in perpetuity with a funded stewardship system (whether fee land protection or CE).
Continue funding for CREP program and other voluntary agricultural stewardship programs			This is not specific to farming and it is not really clear how to identify ecologically sensitive or what stewardship means exactly. If they are degraded, will they be restored? How will they be integrated with ecological objectives? Distinctions should be made between those farming practices that support ecological objectives and those that do not.
Support conservation markets and incentives programs for agricultural lands			
Update shoreline management plans and CAOs	To be done within the next 2 years	High	
Strategy around supporting agriculture in the context of having drainage, fish passage, marsh reclamation, and riparian issues done in a way that recovers salmon and a healthy Puget Sound			Efforts to distinguish farms lands worthy of protected status from those that should not be included should recognize operators who have committed to sustainable practices that consider both land and water resources jointly. Clear benchmarks by which to measure farmland integration with ecological values should be developed and utilized.
Encourage compact regional			

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growth patterns and create dense and attractive communities			
Work with Skagit County code to develop zoning rules that are compatible with restoration and protection			Code allowing the subdivision of parcels in order to create substandard lots specifically for the protection of sensitive land would be helpful
Review and apply recommendations of the Envision Skagit 2060 project		High	
Adopt the Shared Strategy recommendations for protecting and preserving agricultural lands in the Puget Sound region			
Watershed Characterization process should be clarified: Who will do the characterization and what level of resolution will be developed?			
Protect and restore floodplain function		high	Nothing about flood hazard management plans in spreadsheet; the only recommended actions are to implement large scale floodplain restoration projects. Elements that include protection measures should be included.
	Action around flood hazard mitigation plan		
Implement large-scale floodplain projects to remove bank armoring, re-connect side channels and provide mainstem rivers with ability to migrate and create diverse instream habitat	Action around FEMA NFIP rule		Natural process-based restoration should be prioritized. Costs of restoration need to be project life costs and include evolving design, monitoring and management including costs of possible impact to other landowners. Indemnification of landowners and insurance will help people to sign on to these projects .
Add protection strategy			
<i>Restore Key Terrestrial and Freshwater Habitats.</i>			
	Implement the projects identified in		

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	the Middle Skagit Project (Skagit Watershed Council)		
	Several projects identified in the Middle Skagit project are implementable in the next two years.	Medium	
Implementation and maintenance of key restoration projects for upland and freshwater ecosystems			
	Participate in knotweed removal efforts (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group)	Medium	
<i>Sustain Freshwater Availability for Instream and Human Uses.</i>			
Instream flow protection and enhancement			
Implement flow rules and programs in all basins		High	A6 includes implementing flow rules and programs, upgrade flow rules in Skagit basins, and protect intact mainstem rivers. There is nothing specific about the list of water critical basins and there is nothing about the Samish.
Upgrade flow rules in Skagit basins / Flow rules adopted and implemented for the Skagit Basin			It is unclear what upgrade flow rules in the Skagit basin is intended to do.
Protect intact mainstream rivers		High	likely one of the best long-term solutions for the cost
Promote and fund programs that invest in public and private water use efficiency projects			
Groundwater protection and management			
<i>Protect and Recover Salmon.</i>			
Protect and Recover Salmon			
Implement Salmon Recovery three-year work plan (WRIAs 3, 4); meet restoration targets set in the salmon recovery plans / The regional habitat protection decision making			

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framework promoted here is inconsistent with the basis upon which watershed-specific Chinook Recovery Plans were developed. It is unclear what is being proposed-more details are needed regarding who will be making decisions and the scope of their authority.			
Create and implement actions to monitor and adaptively manage salmon recovery work	Finish the AMM RITT template for the Skagit.	High	
Plan for the recovery of steelhead in the Skagit and Samish basins.	Review Skagit Plan for gaps in planned actions		May need more nearshore work identified.
Support Lead Entity program	Writing of the PS Steelhead recovery plan should at least be well underway within 2 years.		
Support/implement fish passage projects			
<i>Protect and Recover other Native Terrestrial and Freshwater Species.</i>			
Implementation of other plans in a coordinated way and maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity			
Implementation of Northern Pacific Coast Regional Shorebird Management Plan. United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, Pacific Coast Joint Venture North American Waterfowl Management Plan And North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Oregon Spotted Frog program (WDFW)	Communicate with WDFW wildlife program to learn of other plans being implemented and developed		
Clarify process associated with Watershed Characterization, including what level of resolution used			Links to a Regional Strategy
Invasive species prevention and response			
Participate in knotweed removal efforts (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group)			
Participate in WDFWs Zebra Mussel			

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prevention program			
<i>Fill Key Science and Information Gaps for Terrestrial and Freshwater (see step 3).</i>			
Include scientific references to support assertions made regarding threats to Puget Sound.			
Strategies and actions to flow from the Biennial Science Work Plan effort			
Protect and Restore Marine and Marine Nearshore Ecosystems			
<i>Nearshore Growth, Working Waterfronts, and Marine Protection.</i>			Nothing about fish passage in the spreadsheet
Protection of marine and nearshore ecosystems that still function well			Need to strengthen connection with Puget Sound health
Complete and implement Shoreline Master Program updates on schedule; implement restoration components of shoreline management plans			
Evaluate need to protect ecosystem processes and quality of life needs when considering tidal energy projects		High	concern that we may get ahead of ourselves here before we know how these impact natural processes and habitat.
Protect Padilla, Skagit and Fidalgo Bays eelgrass beds			Need a funding source to contact private owners and purchase tidelands and then return these to public ownership (DNR etc) with a conservation easement or other protection mechanism on them.
Protect unique spawning areas and bird habitat		High	Need for a co-ordination of all the various datasets, maps and plans into one useable and accessible source.
Re-visit WDFW rules allowing the construction of bulkheads to protect single family residents			Current code does not allow the denial of an application for building a bulkhead to protect a single family dwelling.
Support economic viability of working waterfronts to help maintain ecosystem function and			Working waterfronts intermixed with a good level of connected community access

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sustain quality of life			will draw largest support
Note: B2 is about supporting economic viability of waterfronts. Also does not get at the health of Puget Sound ecosystem			
Promote public access and use of waterfronts and marine systems			Need more of this- public access is currently very limited and with population growth in the region it will be needed.
<i>Restore Marine and Marine Nearshore Areas.</i>			
Implement and maintain priority ecosystem restoration projects marine and marine nearshore ecosystems.			
Complete large scale estuary restoration projects in the Skagit, Snohomish, and Stillaguamish rivers / This Action Agenda statement fails to consider the existence of variable real world examples of large scale estuarine restoration projects that have already been implemented and are currently being monitored. The action item should take a more aggressive stance and work to ensure support for robust monitoring strategies, and subsequent implementation at all large scale estuarine restoration projects	Skagit Counties Freestad Lake project is ready to be started. WDFW/Ecology lands in Padilla bay need to be revisited for restoration opportunity.		Need to repeatedly tell community about the cost-benefit of these projects. Currently seen by many citizens as costly or interfering with agriculture without clear understanding of the long-term benefits. Need to show how sea-level rise will factor into estuary restoration project planning.
Prioritize and strategically remove derelict gear removal			
Support and promote implementation of the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative Agreement			
<i>Protect and Recover Native Marine Species.</i>			
Protect and recover marine and nearshore species			
Invasive species prevention and response			
Continue local efforts to identify and eradicate invasive species		High	Needs to be systematic and science-based.

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impairing habitat			
Participate in WDFWs Ballast inspection program			
<i>Fill Key Science and Information Gaps for Marine and Nearshore (see step 3).</i>		High	Need to co-ordinate all the data and plans into one place. Data may be good but it is in multiple plans and data sets.
Strategies and actions to flow from the BSWP effort			
<i>Prevent and Reduce Toxic Loadings into Puget Sound.</i>			
Implement toxic chemical and pollution policy and programs to reduce release of chemicals.		High	
Participate in WDFWs Ballast inspection program			
Implement and clean-up activities to reduce pollution			Air quality continues to be neglected in strategy document
Implement Watershed Management Plans addressing temperature, dissolved oxygen, mercury, and bacteria impairments			
Evaluate low dissolved oxygen levels in Saratoga Passage, and Possession Sound, and develop and implement strategy to address low dissolved oxygen levels if necessary (using lessons learned in Hood Canal)			
Participate in the Clean Samish Initiative			
Protect clean air / protect air quality			
<i>Control and Manage Stormwater.</i>			
Use a comprehensive approach to manage urban stormwater runoff at the site and landscape scales			
Implement NPDES permits			
Use and increase site-appropriate LID techniques to manage for future planned growth			
Begin stormwater retrofits in dense urban areas		High	
Support the Skagit Clean Samish Initiative and continuing funding priority			
<i>Prevent Pathogen and Nutrient</i>			

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<i>Loadings into Puget Sound.</i>			
Control and manage pollution from decentralized wastewater treatment including large and small on-site systems			
Support local efforts to identify and control sources of pollution		High	
Control and manage pollution from centralized wastewater management			
Comprehensive approaches to rethink wastewater control and management			
Control and manage pollution from discharges of wastewater from boats and vessels			
Participate in WDFWs Ballast inspection program			
Agricultural and forest runoff			
Support TDR/PDR programs /Support Shared Strategy recommendations for providing more state and federal funding for PDR programs to keep farmland in farming.			Need to do economic studies to ensure TDR & PDR programs get us where we need to go. If agriculture is not a long-term viable industry in the area where a program takes place, we may end up with lots of acres of invasives in the future and/or the conservation easements will be challenged and undone. To avoid this, conservation easements need to allow for open space and habitat uses if agriculture is no longer viable or as a secondary use. Groups that manage TDR and PDR programs should have transparent systems and funds to monitor and enforce these. TDR and PDR should bring cost of ag land down so affordable. Focus needs to be on maintaining viability of ag in the area as a priority since a robust ag industry is really what will keep the ag land in

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			place in the long run.
Provide support for technical assistance and cost-share programs for small farms and commercial agriculture to improve and integrate agricultural nutrient management		High	
Integrate small farms into current programs			
Keep livestock out of streams			
Participate in the Skagit County Voluntary Stewardship Program	Local and State committees will be forming in the near future to create planning documents a programs.		
Shellfish bed restoration			Attention must be paid to toxic conditions found in some growing areas such that conditions be improved to the point that consumption of fish and shellfish at rates common to Tribal Communities will not jeopardize health. There is no provision for truly examining the connections between human health and the environment. An element should be added to the plan to address this.
Implement shellfish protection plans			Not clear what is in these plans or if the 10,000 acres is relevant
Participate in the Clean Samish Initiative			
Oil spill prevention, readiness and response			
<i>Fill Key Science and Information Gaps</i>			
Strategies and actions to flow from the BSWP effort			
Sustain, Coordinate, and Adapt Puget Sound Recovery Efforts			
<i>Capacity Building and Coordination / D1 includes working collaboratively with farming</i>			D1 includes working collaboratively with farming community, TFI, and alt futures

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<p><i>community, TFI, and alt futures project. The TFI, DFI and Alt Futures processes lack substance and resource related goals and objectives. This strategy should speak to specific programs and partnerships that seek cohesion with ecological outcomes.</i></p>			<p>project. These processes have shown little resource benefit and are largely focused on addressing mitigation requirements for agriculture activities that continue to damage resource values (DFI & TFI). References to these should be removed or revised to strengthen Ag community obligation to go beyond mitigation and start helping to restore and recover the Puget Sound. Regulations should be put in place to insure the water quality standards are met on streams flowing through agricultural lands.; Other than nutrient runoff and supporting collaborative efforts there are no specific agenda items, and nothing related specifically to drainage, fish passage, marsh reclamation, or riparian issuesNothing about lead entities in spreadsheet</p>
<p>Building and sustaining cooperative partnerships</p>			<p>This strategy should speak to specific programs and projects that seek cohesion with ecological outcomes</p>
<p>Support integration of species recovery, water quality, aquatic reserve and natural resource management plans, shoreline master programs, and Marine Resource Committee strategies; start with salmon recovery, MRC, and water management plans</p>			
<p>Continue to work cooperatively with farming community to develop a coordinated restoration strategy that balances the needs of agriculture and fish</p>			
<p>Support engagement of salmon recovery watershed groups with the</p>			

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Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Boards and other farming groups			
Support collaborative efforts to negotiate the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative / negotiation complete	Support implementation of the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative Final Agreement		
Sustain recent collaborative efforts to identify protection and restoration opportunities in the Skagit watershed			
Implement Skagit Alternatives Futures Project results; expand project as warranted; integrate and coordinate project with other Skagit community efforts / Implement Envision Skagit 2060 results; expand project as warranted; integrate and coordinate project with other Skagit community efforts			Skagit Alternate Futures is now called Envision Skagit
Tribes are treated as the formal governments they are. Government to government discussions, especially as co-manager roles with regard to fisheries.			No, language is not assertive nor well placed. PSP has shown some disregard for this relationship
Implement a process that is bottom up, based on a locally-driven effort.			
Sustain recent collaborative efforts by Ducks Unlimited and regional agricultural interests to initiate the "Preserving Farmland, Waterfowl and Coastal Estuaries in North Puget Sound" program.			
Continue to endorse implementation of the Skagit Delta Drainage and Fish Initiative - Maintenance Plans			
Funding strategies			
			Need to flesh out the details of this strategy
Social and institutional infrastructure			
Add Climate change strategy			
Add in strategy around Section 106			

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streamlining re: restoration projects			
Increase public awareness and understanding			
Implement STORM group recommendations			
Cultivate broad-scale practices and behaviors			
Fill key science and information gaps [SEE SCIENCE NEEDS TAB]			

*Skagit developed this list of local strategies within the context of an early draft outline of regional strategies and sub-strategies. Since this list of local strategies was compiled, the regional strategy outline changed. As such, the order and wording may not match what is currently in the Action Agenda. Once the local area has completed their prioritization process, the final list of local strategies will be cross-walked with the most current regional strategies.

Link to Recovery Targets

The Skagit Watershed group feels that it is critically important to accomplish the regional recovery targets. At this time however, there is no specific information on where or how recovery targets are being addressed in the Skagit Watershed.

References and Additional Resources

Shared Strategy for Puget Sound Website. Available online at: <http://sharedsalmonstrategy.org>
 Skagit County Website. Available online at: www.skagitcounty.net