Climate Change Comments

Overall, the climate change section is exceptionally weak, considering that the text indicates that the need to address climate change was recognized in 2008, (four years ago), and considering the wealth of existing publications and analyses that could be drawn upon. These include scientific reports on projected climate impacts for Washington's coastal areas, and various reports outlining potential adaptation strategies for marine and coastal regions. The text also indicates that climate change will be incorporated in the next draft, but this is the draft made available for agency review and it is difficult to assess and evaluate something that is not here.

The current narrative lays out some general guidance on climate adaptation and provides a bulleted list of climate driven impacts to Puget Sound. It could do so much more. We need to move beyond simply describing impacts and move to articulating the case for "so what?". What will these impacts mean to the things we care about? How will these projected climatic changes impact our ability to achieve our desired outcomes for restoring Puget Sound? What are our primary functions and responsibilities in terms of restoring Puget Sound, and how will climate affect those? Which decisions need to be informed by climate science? Which actions will be most sensitive to climate change and should be modified accordingly? What criteria should we use to make those determinations?

There is no reason not to begin now in terms of laying out a proposed adaptation framework and to identify specific strategies. It is important to remember that adaptation is not rocket science, and much information exists to inform actions today. For example, the interim TAG3 report (attached) prepared to inform the statewide Climate Response Strategy contains a number of adaptation actions specific to marine and coastal systems. It is also includes a list of projected impacts to marine and coastal habitats, the ecological consequences of those impacts and how those ecological consequences might impact the delivery of ecosystem services. Another reference document prepared for the Statewide Climate response Strategy compiles in a narrative format a comprehensive list of observed and projected impacts of climate change on marine and coastal systems and includes citations to existing scientific literature (available through the WDFW website). It is disappointing that these documents apparently have not been consulted or drawn upon as references as the authors prepared to include climate change within the action agenda.

Two other examples follow:

1. The Climate Impacts Group was recently asked by PSP to develop a decision tree for evaluating actions in the action agenda for sensitivity to climate (attached). It clearly identified a set of questions that could be used to guide when a proposed action might be vulnerable to climate change. In fact, the 5560 Steering Committee was tasked to consult this document in preparing our own proposed statewide strategies in the Integrated Climate Response Strategy. It is unclear to me why this document, or some version of the approach was not used in the development of the Puget Sound Action Agenda to screen near term actions for vulnerability to climate change.

2. Page 18 of the narrative also indicates that a vulnerability study for Puget Sound has already been done; why are we not 1) reporting on the results in this document, and 2) starting to act on those findings within this action agenda. If not now, when?

I would argue that developing the draft action agenda is the perfect time to consider climate change, not afterwards, in order to ensure that the strategies that are ultimately selected as high priorities are strategies that will be robust to climate change and will be wise investments. We often tend to think of vulnerability in terms of species and habitats, but actions and investments can also be vulnerable. For example, if we aim to protect land as nesting habitat for plovers and that land is projected to susceptible to sea level rise, that action is vulnerable to climate change. In this way, a number of the proposed strategies ought to have explicit mention of how they might be vulnerable to climate change, and opportunities to incorporate climate change as a consequence.