



SECTION 4:

HOW LOCAL AREAS ARE WORKING TO PROTECT AND RECOVER PUGET SOUND

How Are Local Areas Working to Protect and Recover Puget Sound?

Puget Sound is a vast and beautiful region that is extremely diverse. The unique attributes of Puget Sound have created highly variable conditions in climate, habitat types, and species from alpine forests to the depths of the marine waters, and have contributed to the diverse communities of people that call it home. This section of the Action Agenda is focused on outlining the differences across the Puget Sound region and providing detailed descriptions of the process and outcome of identifying and prioritizing strategies and actions that are tailored to local conditions and goals.

Background on the Local Integration Concept

The Puget Sound Action Agenda is a strategy for cleaning up, restoring and protecting Puget Sound by 2020. The Action Agenda integrates existing basin-wide and watershed scale plans. Groups sponsoring or administering local watershed and nearshore programs - including but not limited to local governments, tribes, private sector entities, watershed planning units, watershed councils, shellfish protection districts, conservation districts, regional fishery enhancement groups, marine resource committees (including those working with the Northwest Straits Commission), and watershed lead entities - are working to implement the Action Agenda. However, closer cooperation and further integration is needed to inform local implementation priorities and approaches. Local integrating organizations, also referred to as LIOs, provide a mechanism for the Puget Sound Partnership to work directly, in a coordinated way, with local communities to help prioritize actions and implement the Action Agenda. LIOs are part of the Puget Sound Management Conference and relate directly to the Leadership Council.

The action area profiles in the Action Agenda recognize the different features of each action area, the major local ecosystem benefits and threats, and the local implementation priorities and strategies that both mirror the basin-wide priorities and yet address local conditions and issues. Within Puget Sound there are separate programs for water quality, water quantity, land use, shoreline protection, toxics cleanup, aquaculture management, and other environmental protection activities. Since the 2008 iteration of the Action Agenda, local communities continue to refine local protection and restoration strategies and priorities, integrate local actions and prepare to inform the update of the Action Agenda. The actions identified through this process are important elements of the Action Agenda and reflect the work and partnerships of local implementers. LIOs are expected to update and refine their local strategies and near term actions as new information becomes available or as implementation strategies advance their work. These changes are captured in the updates to the Action Agenda.

How Local Integrating Organizations are Formed

Local integrating organizations are recognized by the Leadership Council that have:

- Strong support from the local community and are broadly inclusive
- Strong capacity to execute roles, responsibilities, and the necessary scope of work.

Local governments and tribes were invited to consult with each other and with groups sponsoring or administering watershed and nearshore programs to evaluate options for organizing a local integrating group. In some cases, an existing organization was supported to undertake this role. In other cases, a new organization was formed.

After consulting locally, tribes and local governments from respective areas made a joint recommendation regarding local coordination and integration approaches. The recommendations identified a proposed LIO, fiscal agent and geographic scope. Based on the local recommendation and Partnership staff analysis, the Leadership Council decided whether to recognize the proposed LIO and its proposed approach and geography. To date, the Leadership Council has recognized eight LIOs:

- Strait of Juan de Fuca: Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network
- Hood Canal: Hood Canal Coordinating Council
- South Sound: Alliance for a Healthy South Sound
- South Central: South Central Puget Sound Caucus Group
- Island County/Watershed LIO
- Stillaguamish and Snohomish Watersheds: Executive Steering Committee
- Whatcom: Consolidated WRIA 1 Policy Boards
- San Juan Islands: San Juan Action Agenda Oversight Group

The Leadership Council will consider additional LIO proposals, as they are developed, for the remaining areas of Puget Sound.

Vision for Local Integrating Organizations

Local integrating organizations have been formed to help bolster consensus and momentum around locally relevant Puget Sound recovery actions. They are a coordinating body, helping to integrate and advance efforts from various entities in each action area. They are formed to help identify leverage points and create increased opportunity for Puget Sound recovery locally. Local integrating organizations also serve an advisory function for the Puget Sound Partnership by identifying recommendations on local priorities for funding decision and consideration. LIOs advance the specific actions necessary for achieving the high level Puget Sound strategies of habitat protection, restoration and pollutant reduction. More specifically,

- Local integrating organizations enable communities to develop and own a dynamic decision making process, to guide implementation of Action Agenda priorities including restoration, protection and pollutant reduction, and to prioritize local actions for investment.
- Local strategies and systems are connected with basin-wide Action Agenda strategies and

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regional performance management and monitoring systems through the Local Integrating Organization. LIO operations contribute toward the development and implementation of local priorities in the Action Agenda.

Local integrating organizations, by design, represent the perspectives of many different actors within their local areas that hold implementation responsibilities in different ecosystem scale and watershed scale plans. These actors include, but are not limited to, local governments, tribes, private sector entities, watershed planning units, watershed councils, shellfish protection districts, conservation districts, regional fishery enhancement groups, marine resource committees (including those working with the Northwest Straits Commission) nearshore groups, and watershed lead entities, all working to implement the Action Agenda.

Funding the Local Integrating Organizations

The Puget Sound Partnership will fund local integrating organizations for organizational capacity to complete the following activities:

- Maintain, Organize, Facilitate and Administer a Local Integrating Organization
- Updating Local Action Agenda strategies and local near term actions
- Identify, coordinate implementation of local priorities
- Performance management

The Action Areas and Local Integrating Organizations

The legislation that created the Puget Sound Partnership established seven geographic action areas around the Sound to address and tackle problems specific to those areas:

- Hood Canal
- North Central Puget Sound (locally called West Puget Sound)
- San Juan/Whatcom (now covered as two separate areas)
- South Central Puget Sound
- South Puget Sound
- Strait of Juan de Fuca
- Whidbey (now covered as three separate areas)

While the action area concept is useful for sharing information and working to implement the Action Agenda and priority local actions, the Partnership has taken the concept a step further. Since 2008, local areas have been working toward both a structure and an approach to implement, as well as integrate, local community efforts to advance the Action Agenda. The Partnership has nearly completed the formation of Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) that are organized at a scale that makes the most sense for Action Agenda implementation. In some areas around the Puget Sound, this has led an action area (e.g. Hood Canal, Strait of Juan de Fuca, South Central, and South Sound) to become a LIO. In other areas (e.g. Whatcom and San Juan) a different geography was determined to be more useful. The Partnership is continuing to work with those areas where local communities are still deciding how and what a LIO looks like.

LIOs are a coordinating body that includes local jurisdictions, tribes, and implementing groups. The purpose is to identify locally relevant strategies and actions to implement the Action Agenda and accomplish the sound-wide objectives.

As of April 2012, LIOs have been formed for:

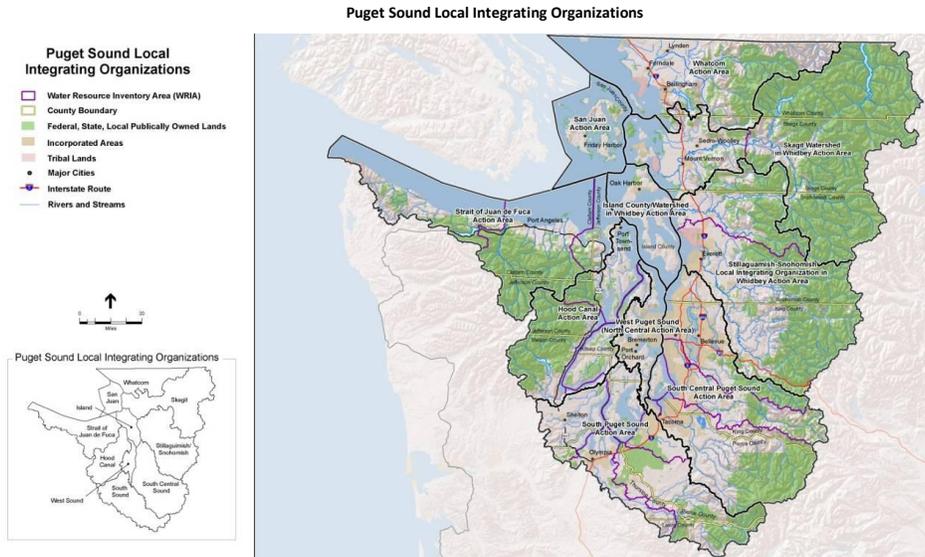
- Strait of Juan de Fuca: Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network
- Hood Canal: Hood Canal Coordinating Council
- South Sound: Alliance for a Healthy South Sound
- South Central: South Central Puget Sound Caucus Group
- Island County/Watershed LIO
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Each LIO has different membership. Example members include salmon recovery watershed groups, marine resource committees, tribes, local governments, local utilities, farming interests, environmental interests and others. Composition of each group is included in their profile in the Action Agenda.

Those areas that are still in formation are:

- West Sound (North Central): (West Sound Watersheds Council assisting with profile)
- Skagit Watershed

Each area has many distinctive local features and communities. These differences are due to physical and biological conditions such as geology, rainfall, habitat for plants and animals, and the history of the people who have lived there. Each corner of Puget Sound also has its own set of issues and constraints. For example, the South Puget Sound and Hood Canal action areas are world-renowned shellfish growing areas. The areas are also subject to poor water circulation and high nutrient inputs that result in low dissolved oxygen conditions and can lead to massive fish kills. The Strait of Juan de Fuca Action Area, Whatcom County, and other rural areas struggle to retain working forests and productive agricultural lands in the face of increased development pressure. Water supply is a critical issue in the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca and the San Juan Islands. The Whidbey Action Area contains three of the top five salmon-producing rivers in Puget Sound – the Skagit, Snohomish, and Stillaguamish; here the drastic modification to the river deltas and estuaries is particularly problematic for salmon recovery. The South Central Puget Sound Action Area contains the ports of Seattle and Tacoma, is home to approximately 3 million residents, and is the heart of the Puget Sound economy. In the South Central and the West Sound, many ecosystem challenges result from shoreline armoring, transportation infrastructure, stormwater runoff, and other urban issues – yet these areas have important nearshore habitat for migrating salmon and other species.



Action Area and Local Integrating Organization Profiles

Crafting **answers** solutions to the pressures facing Puget Sound must occur with the input and cooperation of the local people who have detailed knowledge of the problems, must implement the solutions, and will carefully monitor the success. The LIO's, including the remaining two in formation, have helped to update the Action Agenda by more clearly articulating local information, priorities, and actions.

Each of the local area descriptions that follow includes a narrative profile and map that summarizes the geography and unique ecosystem characteristics and assets of the area, an overview and status update of the local Action Agenda process and the local implementation structure, a list of key threats to and pressures on local ecosystem health, as well as information on local relationship to the Soundwide Recovery Targets, and provides a list of references and additional resources. In addition, many of the descriptions include detailed information on local priority strategies and near-term actions.²³ All areas agree that implementation of the funding strategy is needed to support local recovery efforts, and this need will be discussed by the ECB funding committee. In addition, common outreach messages are a key to understanding in all communities. Over the next two years, each local area will continue to move forward in defining priorities, implementing actions, and contributing to a cleaner, more vibrant, and community oriented Puget Sound.

²³ Each area is at a unique point in the process of identifying their priorities and contribution to the Action Agenda. See the text box on p.249 for an overview of the current status of each area as it relates to Action Agenda engagement.