EPA National Estuary Program Funding: Marine and Nearshore Protection and Restoration

---

Context

In October 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) solicited a Request for Proposals (RFP) to implement priority work consistent with the 2020 Action Agenda for the protection and restoration of Puget Sound. The RFP solicited proposals from applicants that would serve as a Lead Organization (LO) for one of four areas of emphasis. The period of effort for the RFP was for six-years. Washington State agencies were selected as LOs, to coordinate six-year efforts to develop and implement strategies in the four areas of emphasis:

- Marine and nearshore protection and restoration (LOs - Departments of Fish & Wildlife and Natural Resources);
- Watershed protection and restoration (LOs - Departments of Ecology and Commerce);
- Toxics and nutrients prevention, reduction and control (LO - Department of Ecology); and
- Pathogen prevention, reduction, and control (LOs - Departments of Health and Ecology).

For the first year of the LO strategies, EPA allocated $12 million divided equally among the LOs along with a State match of $12 million. The total funds over the six-year period could be up to $192 million plus the required State match. The level of funding after the first year is in part dependent on demonstration by the selected LOs to EPA and Congress that funds can be expeditiously and appropriately expended with significant measureable results. A dollar-for-dollar nonfederal match is a condition of each grant, but match by local entities for sub-awards is not expected at this time. Full text of proposals for each area of emphasis can be found on the Puget Sound Partnership website: http://www.psp.wa.gov/EPA_funding_FY10.php. The LO work is being coordinated with EPA and PSP and will be an important part of the Action Agenda update process.

In addition, both the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) have cooperative agreements with EPA. PSP funding is focused on regional engagement and Action Agenda management. NWIC funding is to provide sub-awards to 19 Federally-recognized Indian Tribes located within the greater Puget Sound Basin, and any authorized consortium of these eligible Tribes to implement high priority projects identified in the PSP's Action Agenda, or other existing recovery plans or which will contribute directly to the restoration and protection of Puget Sound.

Overall Strategy

The marine and nearshore technical approach is based upon an adaptive management framework, using the Open Standards method and other adaptive management principles to set goals, plan and implement, monitor and assess, and change as necessary. To accomplish nearshore and marine protection and restoration using this approach, we will support five areas of investment: 1) Adaptive management, 2) Effective regulation and stewardship, 3) Strategic capital investment, 4) Programs to address additional high priority threats, and 5) Cross-cutting issues. We will fund innovative and ambitious actions that are consistent with the prioritized approaches and produce measurable outcomes tied to 2020 marine and nearshore ecosystem and pressure reduction targets.

Adaptive Management. Invest in a strategic adaptive management system that fosters a common understanding of the role of adaptive management, evaluates progress toward ecosystem recovery by 2020, and that informs necessary changes to our strategies. Actively participate in setting ecosystem and pressure reduction targets, revising strategies and actions in the Action Agenda to achieve these targets, and supporting monitoring that is critical to tracking the Dashboard Indicators and key threat reduction indicators.

Effective Regulation and Stewardship. Reduce pressures from human development in the nearshore by implementing actions that improve the protections provided by marine and nearshore regulations and stewardship mechanisms. Implement actions that improve the protection provided by SMP updates and implementation, advance model compliance and enforcement techniques, and add new marine aquatic reserves or protected areas in Puget Sound.

Strategic Capital Investment. Further reduce pressures from human development in the nearshore by implementing capital restoration and protection projects consistent with the PSNERP process-based analysis and other supporting information such as salmon recovery plans, Aquatic Landscape Prioritization, and Watershed Characterization.

Programs to Address Additional High Priority Threats: Invasive Species. Preventing invasive species from establishing and spreading is the most cost effective and least environmentally damaging method of protecting the Puget Sound and local economies from the impacts of invasive species. Fund projects that prevent or eliminate pathways of invasive species movement and spread.

Programs to Address Additional High Priority Threats: Oil Spills. Oil spills have the potential to overwhelm gains we make in the recovery of Puget Sound. Prevention is the most cost effective and least environmentally damaging method of protecting the Puget Sound and local communities and economies from the impacts of oil spills. Fund projects that prevent spills through compliance with, and enforcement of existing standards and regulations. Improve the state's "spill drill" program to ensure timely and effective response to spills that do occur.

Cross-Cutting Issues. There are threats and barriers to Puget Sound recovery that cross jurisdictional boundaries, disciplines, and parts of the ecosystem. As a result, lead organizations will pool resources to fund innovative strategies and actions in watersheds or jurisdictions that resolve barriers to implementation, propose solutions, and achieve synergistic results across the LO ecosystem areas of emphasis.

Proposed Budget

The proposed budget broken down by area of investment is summarized below.

Area of Investment	Year 1 Funds
Adaptive Management	$270,000
Effective Regulation and Stewardship	$1,213,000
Strategic Capital Investment	$674,000
Threat Reduction: Invasives	$135,000
Threat Reduction: Oil Spill	$135,000
Set-Aside for Crosscutting Issues	$270,000
Sub-Total for Sub-Awards	**$2,697,000**
Administrative Costs	$303,000
TOTAL	**$3,000,000**

Status

EPA accepted our proposals and, in the month of December, the LOs worked to convert the proposal narratives into a two year detailed work plan that EPA could incorporate into Cooperative Agreements. These revised applications were submitted to EPA on January 4, 2011. If accepted by EPA, award funds are expected to be available beginning in February 2011.

Work plans included in the LOs' applications outline tasks and deliverables for decisions about initial investments. LOs (along with PSP, EPA and NWIFC) have been meeting on a weekly basis since December to work on details of an overarching, coordinated implementation strategy (such as

development of a single portal application website, and how to incorporate input from stakeholders in the process).

Next Steps

The current plan is to refine decision-making criteria and the application process in the next few months, with a Request for Proposals (RFP) expected to go out in May. Contracts for successful applicants to the RFP process are expected to be executed in July. The timing and amount of second year funds from EPA are still being debated in Congress, so the process needs to be flexible enough to respond to federal actions whenever they occur. DFW and DNR each expect to hire a project manager for the cooperative agreement as soon as practical, hopefully within the month of February.

A separate process coordinated by the PSP to establish Ecosystem Targets and refine the Action Agenda will be going on in parallel with this grant application process. Stakeholders may be asked for input into both processes since they are related. Both processes will feed into the LO objective of developing a detailed six-year strategy by the end of July.