

Leadership Council Background

February 28, 2008

Topic Forums – Purpose and Process

What is a topic forum?

Topic forums are a process to synthesize, review, and create ideas to address the six goals of the Partnership that define a healthy Puget Sound. These goals include:

- Human health
- Human quality of life
- Species, food-webs, and biodiversity
- Habitats and land use
- Water quality
- Water quantity

What will the topic forums do?

Topic forums will provide scientific and policy information that can help us answer the overarching questions of the Action Agenda:

- What is a healthy Puget Sound?
- What is the current status of the Puget Sound's health and what are the biggest threats to it?
- What actions must be taken that will move us from where we are today toward a healthy Puget Sound by 2020?
- Where should we start?

The topic forums will build on current work including the 2000 Puget Sound Water Quality Plan and 2007-09 Work plan, work conducted during the 2006 Partnership and shortly thereafter, the comments submitted during the 2006 Partnership, and many other pieces of regional and local work.

Each forum will start by describing current conditions and synthesizing what is known about their topic from a scientific perspective (this will augment the status and threats work underway and other scientific information). Each forum will also identify management solutions that have been found to be effective at addressing the main threats to a healthy Puget Sound. Next, each forum will review current policies and approaches to addressing key threats and determine:

- Which actions are on track to address threats (and where)
- Which new actions are needed (and where)
- Which actions need to be modified or changed (and where)

With answers to these questions in hand, each topic forum will begin to identify recommended actions and criteria that can be used to set priorities. Gaps between what we are doing and what we should be doing can be clearly delineated. Each topic forum will document their work in a series of discussion papers that will be available for review.

Once this information has been collected for each topic, the topic forums will meet collectively to identify and assess the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies that exist across the six topic areas. The goal of this exercise is to develop an integrated understanding of the priorities for restoring the health of the Puget Sound ecosystem as a whole.

Who participates in the topic forums?

The topic forums are designed to be both efficient and inclusive. The Partnership selected six experts in their respective fields to lead each topic forum. Very small teams of scientists and policy specialists will assist the lead expert in synthesizing and organizing existing information in short, similarly formatted papers. The papers will address specific, but similar questions related to each topic. This information will then be discussed, reviewed, and refined by experts and interests in a workshop setting. Anyone is welcome and encouraged to participate in the topic forum workshops.

Each topic forum will hold at least one workshop open to stakeholders and the public. In addition, there will be one large cross-topic workshop where all the forum participants will try to knit together the information together to create an ecosystem-wide perspective on the key issues and challenges.

Although it may be difficult for everyone to attend these workshops in person, the Partnership is making every effort to provide opportunities for interested people to participate through conference calls, Web-conferencing and electronic document review.

What is the schedule for the topic forums?

The workshop dates are being scheduled now. The current schedule has the individual topic forum workshops during the week of March 31 and the cross topic workshop the week of April 21. Information will be available about one week in advance of the workshop. Guidance on how participants can best prepare will come out shortly following the workshop dates.