

IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY ACTIONS Floodplain Management, FEMA BiOp Update

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Proposed Action

Briefing on key aspects of floodplain management related to Puget Sound recovery.

Background

The Partnership is engaged in three areas of work related to floodplain management which should be aligned with Puget Sound recovery:

1. Implementation of the Biological Opinion on FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program: The Leadership Council passed a resolution on 11/19/10 supporting timely implementation of the Biological Opinion. PSP co-sponsored a March 1-2 workshop to provide support to the 122 local communities in Puget Sound that have implementation obligations if they want to stay in the insurance program. PSP is working closely with agency partners to provide technical and outreach assistance to local communities to enable them to meet the September 22, 2011 deadline for compliance.
2. Development of an alternative, more flexible regulatory standard governing the maintenance of vegetation on levees in Puget Sound: The Army Corps of Engineers is moving forward to set national standards governing the management of vegetation on levees. The draft standards would dramatically reduce the opportunity to maintain vegetation over many miles of levees in Puget Sound, thus further degrading conditions in riparian and floodplain areas that are key to salmon recovery and native species diversity. PSP staff are engaging the Corps' Seattle District Office to create an alternative, Puget Sound-specific standard that will help ensure levee integrity and increase the flexibility to maintain significant vegetation on levees. This alternative standard is scheduled for initial release and consideration by the Corps' decision-makers in June 2011.
3. Development of recovery targets for floodplains: in the last month PSP staff has engaged a core group of floodplain technical and policy experts to develop targets related to floodplain conditions needed for recovery and pressures that affect our ability to achieve those conditions. This topic was addressed in the target workshop on April 19, 2011 and is the focus of additional work.

This briefing will focus primarily on the FEMA Biological Opinion, with a brief review of the status of the other work areas.

Action Agenda Consistency

Work area #1 relates to Action Agenda recommendation A.2.2.5: "Work with FEMA and local governments to prevent further residential, commercial, and industrial development in floodplains. Evaluate the feasibility of assisting vulnerable communities in relocating away from floodplains." The NFIP Biological Opinion was completed virtually at the same time as the Action Agenda was completed in late

2008, and thus many of the opportunities and challenges presented by the implementation of the Biological Opinion are not captured explicitly in the Action Agenda. The anticipated adaptation of the Action Agenda may reflect these opportunities and challenges.

Work area #2 relates to near term action D.4.4: “Convene a process with Corps, NMFS, SFWS, jurisdictions responsible for levee maintenance, and stakeholders to identify and describe conflicts between levee maintenance standards and healthy habitat. This meeting should result in recommendations to the Corps to develop/review potential modifications to levee maintenance standards or the use of the existing variance mechanism.”

Stakeholder Input

The ECB has been briefed on the status of the implementation of the FEMA Biological Opinion. They concluded that their desired level of involvement on the topic is briefings at their meetings.

The Salmon Recovery Council has been briefed on the FEMA Biological Opinion and levee vegetation standards issues. Individual members have engaged outside of SRC meetings per their interest in these topics.