

Puget Sound Partnership 2008 Three Year Work Program Update Hood Canal

Introduction

In April 2008, each of the fourteen watersheds submitted three-year work program updates on accomplishments, status of actions, and proposed actions that built on the 2006 and 2007 three-year work programs. These work programs are intended to provide a road map for implementation of the salmon recovery plans and to help establish a recovery trajectory for the first three years of implementation. The 2008 Three-Year Work Program Update is the last of the first three years for implementation since the Recovery Plan was finalized in 2005. As salmon recovery in the Puget Sound is now part of the Puget Sound Partnership's legislative responsibility, the Puget Sound Partnership will perform an assessment of the development and review of these work programs in order to be as effective as possible in the coming years.

The feedback below is intended to assist the watershed recovery plan implementation team as it continues to address actions and implementation of their salmon recovery plan. The feedback is also used by the Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team (RITT), the Recovery Council Work Group, and the Puget Sound Partnership to inform the continued development and implementation of the regional work program. This includes advancing on issues such as adaptive management and capacity within the watershed teams. The feedback will also stimulate further discussion of recovery objectives to determine what the best investments are for salmon recovery over the next three years.

Guidance for the 2008 work program updates

Factors to be considered by the Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team in performing its technical review of the Update:

- a. Is the Update consistent with the recovery plan hypotheses and strategy for the watershed's work program?
- b. Is the sequencing and timing of the action in your updated three-year work program appropriate?
- c. Are there significant components missing from the work program? If so, what is missing and what can be done about them in the three-year work program update or at a regional scale?

Watersheds were also provided with the following seven questions, answers to which the Recovery Council Work Group and the Partnership salmon recovery watershed liaisons assessed in performing their policy review of the three-year work program

1. Is the work program consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 documents, Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan Volume I, Watershed Profiles – Results section, NMFS Supplement, as well as the regional Nearshore Chapter, where applicable?

2. Is the work program tied to the identified three-year objectives and scheduled to proceed at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed's ten-year goals?
3. Is the work program narrative tightly linked to individual projects and priorities?
4. Do programmatic actions address protection objectives?
5. To what extent are habitat, harvest and habitat actions integrated and included in the work program?
6. How is the capacity to implement the updated three-year work program addressed?
7. What are the three-year work program objectives and how well does the updated program address them? This includes:
 - Improves the level and certainty of protection of habitat and the 22 existing Chinook populations;
 - Preserves options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU;
 - Ensures habitat protection and restoration and restores ecosystem processes for Chinook; and
 - Advances the coordinated/integrated management of habitat, harvest, and hatchery.

I. Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team Review

The RITT reviewed each of the fourteen individual watershed chapter's salmon recovery three-year work program updates in May and early June 2008. Three primary questions were addressed along with additional regional questions. The questions and the RITT's review comments are below.

Hood Canal Watershed

The Hood Canal 3-Year Implementation Priorities and Work Program lists habitat actions in areas used by the two populations of Chinook salmon, the two populations of summer chum salmon, as well as steelhead and bull trout. The matrix of actions and descriptive characteristics do not identify which of these ESA-listed species the actions are most likely to affect. As noted in the overview provided by the Hood Canal Coordinating Council (HCCC), the list has not changed much since 2007, except for the addition of five new habitat restoration projects. Programmatic recovery activities, such as hatchery management, monitoring and adaptive management, and H-integration were not included in the list or described elsewhere. Consequently, most of our comments remain the same as in 2007.

RITT Questions

1. *Is the update of the work program consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for their watershed? (The 'work program' includes hypotheses and strategies in the Puget Sound Recovery Plan, including the watershed plan, TRT review comments and NOAA Supplement comments).*

As noted in our comments in 2005, 2006, and 2007, the habitat actions chosen for the work program followed the limiting factors analysis and were supported by some EDT analyses, which

were also used to develop the recovery plan, providing consistency. It has been difficult for the TRT (now the RITT), however, to judge the strengths or possible improvements to the work program because the hypothesized links between habitat forming processes, land use practices, habitat restoration actions, habitat characteristics, and the status of the viable salmonid population (VSP) attributes were not clearly described. In the 2008 HCCC overview document, they noted that the relative benefits of different habitat actions were assessed using additional EDT analyses completed for all extant summer chum populations. In addition, in discussions with HCCC staff it seems clear that the technical staff has a conceptual model of the hypothesized links as well as hypotheses generated by EDT analyses. This raises an important policy and technical question of how the RITT should review recovery activities when there is apparently new additional technical information that is being used that the RITT has not seen or evaluated and that has not been incorporated into a revised recovery plan.

2. *Is the sequencing and timing of the actions in the updated work program appropriate for the third year of implementation of the Puget Sound Recovery Plan?*

This is difficult to judge. Overall, projects addressing the more significant limiting factors are proposed to be done first, although some lower priority projects are included because they are important for generating community support. The prioritization of the habitat projects in Mid-Hood Canal, which is used by both Chinook salmon and summer chum salmon as well as other species, was based on rankings from EDT analyses of mostly “in-stream” actions that if fixed would have a predicted biological benefit to the fish and a qualitative assessment of the likelihood of implementation. It is not clear from the documentation provided for the EDT analyses, that modeling the effects of different sequences of the projects in order to understand either the synergistic or antagonistic effects was part of the analysis, but as a first step this approach seems reasonable. The implementation priorities matrix does not show similar EDT-based rankings for projects in the other geographical regions, however. These are based mainly on inferences about the limiting factors in those areas. Similarly, the projects identified for the geographical areas used primarily by summer chum salmon but not by Chinook salmon are focused on addressing major limiting factors in the watershed or nearshore habitats. It is not clear from our current information how much alternative combinations and sequences of actions might be better or not.

The projects listed for the Skokomish watershed range from upstream passage in the North Fork to modifying silviculture practices to restoration of the river and estuary. These appear consistent with the hypotheses linking habitat forming processes, land use, and limiting factors or habitat conditions in the Skokomish Recovery Plan, which the RITT is reviewing currently. Clearly some of the projects are more important for short-term recovery of Chinook salmon in the watershed and others are more important for their longer-term benefits or multispecies benefits but this is not yet well documented.

3. *Are there significant components missing from the work program? If so, what are these and what can be done about them in the 3-year work program update or at a regional scale?*

Our comments here are the same as 2007. No hatchery actions or capital projects are listed and likewise H-integration appears to be missing. Missing is any detail about actions in these non-habitat management sectors (e.g. harvest, hatcheries, adaptive management) that is comparable

to the actions or projects identified in the work program or the tables of the summer chum and Mid-Hood Canal recovery plans.

Puget Sound Partnership Questions

- 1. Does the update provide information on improved level and certainty of protection for habitat and the 22 existing populations?*

The update does not provide qualitative or quantitative information on whether the level and certainty of habitat protection is improving, staying the same, or declining. The work program focuses mostly on habitat restoration rather protection actions. Likewise, the recovery plan relies on the existing regulatory actions in the national forest and on county, city, and private lands for habitat protection rather than new protection actions. Large parts of Hood Canal watershed remain in better ecological condition than watersheds in other parts of the Puget Sound.¹ That these levels of ecological integrity remain, partially reflects the protections provided to these watersheds by the Olympia National Park and Forest, which covers a large proportion of these watersheds. A key issue for the ESU, therefore, is how regulatory protection on private or state lands will work in the Hood Canal watersheds. The work program does contain several actions focused on implementation monitoring, enforcement, and permitting different land uses. These would need to be expanded to ensure better certainty.

- 2. Does the update provide information on preserving options for achieving the future role of these populations in the ESUs?*

The update does not provide this information but the different recovery plans do lay out general strategies. As noted early, the update to the 3-year work program does not include actions for hatcheries, harvest, and H-integration—the management sectors where species level protection can be implemented. The importance of protecting habitat to preserve options for these populations is covered in question #1 (above). The Puget Sound TRT (now the RITT) also considers a well-planned and implemented adaptive management program a key part of preserving future options. Adaptive management is listed in the work program, but the plan and implementation remain undeveloped. This remains an important area for improvement.

- 3. Does the update provide information on ensuring protection and restoration for ecosystem processes for Chinook salmon?*

The habitat projects are intended to help restore ecosystem process. As noted early, we did not have enough information to judge whether these are the right locations or magnitudes to have that effect.

¹ Puget Sound TRT. 2006. Ecological integrity of Chinook salmon watersheds in the Puget Sound and population status. (<http://www.sharedsalmonstrategy.org/council-materials.htm#052106>).

4. *Does the update provide a high level of protection and restoration for ecosystem processes for multi-species?*

Because four different salmonid species are listed under ESA in this region—Chinook salmon, summer chum salmon, steelhead, and bull trout—the approach of the update is focused on habitat recovery that will benefit multiple species. It does not provide enough information to determine whether this is a “high” level.

5. *Does the update advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery, and habitat?*

This is not described in the work program.

II. Policy Review Comments

The Recovery Council Work Group, an interdisciplinary policy team, evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. In addressing the questions identified above, the interdisciplinary team noted accomplishments and strengths as well as gaps and issues warranting special attention. The team assessed each of the watersheds’ three-year work plans, as well as the general themes that applied across the region. The general comments addressing common accomplishments and opportunities for advancement are discussed below as well as specific comments for the Hood Canal watershed.

General Comments for 2008 Three-Year Work Program Updates

The 2008 watershed three-year work program updates reflect advancement in terms of project and programmatic identification. Watersheds received capital and non-capital funding through the 2007 biennial budget process, providing a significant increase in resources relative to previous years. Despite these gains, both in funds and in work program, many of the watersheds continue to have gaps, to varying degrees, that were identified in the NOAA supplement as well as the 2006 and 2007 work program reviews. Regional assistance to the watershed planning and implementation teams will be needed to address how best to fill the needs identified below.

Work Plan Accomplishments, Status Updates, Sequencing and Prioritization: As identified in 2007, work program updates are a useful tool for defining progress toward recovery plan goals and ESU-wide recovery. Narratives should continue to be refined to provide a sharper focus on what each watershed expects to accomplish within the three-year period. These narratives should also document what projects have been successfully completed, what programmatic actions are underway, and how successful the watershed has been in implementing the previous year’s work plan. This includes documenting how the funds of the previous year are being applied for both on-the-ground projects and capacity within the watersheds.

Work program updates can be strengthened by providing a more focused description of how needed recovery projects and actions are identified, developed, prioritized and sequenced. It is also important that the narrative provide sufficient information to enable watershed teams and regional reviewers to determine whether the pace of implementation is appropriate to achieve each watershed’s ten- year goals and if not, to be able to identify the types of changes necessary

to get them on pace. This can include information on adaptive management, status updates on actions, and monitoring data.

Integrated Management of Habitat, Harvest and Hatcheries: All Puget Sound watersheds' work programs would benefit from additional efforts and regional resources to achieve H-Integration. Several watersheds advanced their understanding and application of the six steps of H-Integration during 2007 through the strong support of co-manager resources. It is noteworthy that there is a strong connection between full co-manager engagement within the watershed context and significant progress toward salmon recovery implementation. By the end of 2008, it is anticipated all watersheds with Chinook populations will be engaged in actions that reflect an integrated management of habitat, harvest, and hatcheries for Chinook recovery. The Puget Sound Partnership and RITT liaisons will continue to assist those watersheds without independent Chinook populations to integrate management and capacity of the nearshore to sustain natural and hatchery-origin populations of all salmonids. As integration advances, it will be important for each watershed to document how their actions are integrated and advancing in the work programs.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management: At the end of 2007, Shared Strategy staff along with a work group of technical experts completed a regional draft monitoring and adaptive management plan. The completion of this draft plan included a workshop and a gathering of comments on the plan. Since the completion of this draft plan, the Puget Sound Partnership has officially assumed responsibility for completing a regional adaptive management and monitoring plan, including the monitoring of fish populations and the tracking of implementation and effectiveness of actions identified in the Chinook Recovery Plan. At the regional scale, several actions have been initiated to advance adaptive management, including: 1) a pilot program directed at developing an implementation tracking system at both the watershed and regional scale; 2) a status and trends approach for Washington State, which includes directed resources for the Puget Sound; and 3) an accountability system to identify and hold responsible the appropriate entities at the local, regional, state, and federal levels.

Some watersheds have already begun developing their own monitoring and adaptive management frameworks and initial monitoring tasks. The regional team working on the diverse aspects of adaptive management will coordinate with those watersheds to ensure that the monitoring and adaptive management plans are consistent and complementary. During this transitional time, the Puget Sound Partnership staff, the work group, and the RITT acknowledge that they play an important role in providing assistance to all of the Puget Sound watersheds to advance in their development, refinement, and implementation of an adaptive management and monitoring approach. This is important in order to enable watersheds and the region to assess progress in reducing uncertainties in the population and ESU-wide recovery.

Protecting and restoring ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options and addressing threats are critical components of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. The Chinook Recovery Plan is predicated on the assumption that existing habitat will be protected. Regional work to assess this assumption and to strengthen the regulatory framework is underway through the San Juan Initiative and through the Action Agenda work of

the Puget Sound Partnership. Initial findings and recommendations from the San Juan Initiative are expected by the end of 2008. The Action Agenda will be completed by December 2008.

Recovery actions are continuing to become more complex and expensive. All watersheds are challenged in terms of their capacity to acquire land in order to secure future options and to implement large-scale, multi-year projects. It will be important for watersheds to coordinate and partner with other groups, organizations, and agencies locally and regionally to increase capacity and enhance their ability to successfully identify and implement habitat acquisition and restoration efforts. Increased capacity for the key participants in watershed recovery efforts is essential to successfully implement their recovery chapters and protect and restore the ecosystem processes that Chinook and other species require. The Puget Sound Partnership staff and the work group members acknowledge that additional efforts will be needed at the regional scale to assist in securing on-going resources for the watershed groups to protect and restore ecosystem processes.

Water quality and Water quantity: Water quality and water quantity will continue to be important issues for the long-term recovery of all populations within the ESU.

Work on water quality issues is associated with both urban and rural sources. The authority to address these sources is within the purview of the Washington State Department of Ecology and is primarily being addressed through the NPDES permit program, the establishment of TMDLs under the Clean Water Act, and the Forest Practice Rules. It is important to apply these programs and resources in a manner that supports the watershed groups and advances the recovery of salmon in their areas. It is recognized that emerging water quality threats to the health of Puget Sound (e.g. endocrine disruptors) are not adequately addressed under current regulatory regimes and significant new resources are needed to identify and resolve these threats. Watersheds continue to play an important role in ensuring that local jurisdictions implementing these permits adopt water quality programs that include actions and regulations that protect and enhance water quality in rivers and streams critical for salmon recovery.

Work on water quantity issues is also important at both the regional and local watershed scale. At the regional level, the Water Quantity Sub-Committee, coordinated by the Washington State Department of Ecology, is working on advancing the science on instream flows and viable salmon populations (VSP). In May of 2008, the Water Quantity Sub-Committee held an instream flow and VSP workshop to discuss the current state of instream flow/VSP science and flow assessment tools, and to identify and develop a future science agenda for instream flow/VSP work over the next five to 10 years. The workshop also focused on trying to determine the appropriate scale for flow assessment tools and VSP concepts. Additionally, the impacts of climate change will need to be assessed and integrated into salmon recovery planning on a regional scale.

Locally, watershed groups can help move these issues forward in a manner that reflects their priorities for salmon recovery. Each watershed should consider (1) advocating for appropriate instream flow rules in places where they are needed; and (2) working with the Department of Ecology to begin creating protection and enhancement programs (PEPs) in areas where instream flows hinder the recovery of fish populations.

The RITT and the Puget Sound Partnership liaisons will continue to assist watersheds in advancing water quantity and water quality actions.

Nearshore Habitats and Processes: There continues to be a need to advance our understanding of nearshore habitats and processes associated with Chinook recovery. Several nearshore fish presence assessments were funded through the 2007 biennial budget and SRFB round. These assessments are a crucial step in advancing our knowledge of salmonid use of the nearshore and nearshore processes. The Puget Sound Partnership and RITT liaisons recognize the need to support these watersheds in translating the assessments into protection and restoration projects. The Puget Sound Partnership and the work group also acknowledge that we need to increase the scientific certainty regarding sequencing and prioritizing which nearshore areas to protect across the Puget Sound. Finally, we need to develop a standardized framework to not only monitor nearshore fish presence, but to also assess fish utilization of those areas.

Multi-species planning: The Puget Sound Steelhead were listed in May 2007 and a NOAA-appointed Technical Review Team (TRT) is working to define the population and habitat criteria for the listing. This information is anticipated to be available in March 2009. The Puget Sound watersheds will play an instrumental role in sequencing and prioritizing actions across multiple species in order to gain the highest ecosystem benefit. NOAA, the co-managers, and the watersheds are currently discussing options for Puget Sound Steelhead recovery planning. It is expected that the planning process will be defined by the end of 2008. Resources are needed to support the watersheds in steelhead planning over the next several years.

Hood Canal Watershed-Specific Comments

The 2008 work program update reflects refinements to the capital program and demonstrates the iterative process for developing and implementing salmon recovery.

Significant Advancements

- Development of the Skokomish Chinook Recovery Plan for inclusion into the Puget Sound Recovery Plan. At the time of this review, the Skokomish Plan is under review by NOAA, the Regional Policy Team, and the RITT. The development of this plan fills an important gap in the Regional Recovery Plan;
- Continued discussions and coordination with the North Olympic Planning Lead Entity regarding project identification and implementation of summer chum priority actions;
- Multi-species approach to the Three-Year Work Plan, including actions for Chinook, steelhead, bull trout, and summer chum salmon;
- Identification of programmatic habitat protection actions, including adaptive management, land use permit tracking, and a conservation strategy database.

Issues Needing Advancement

- Clarification about how new information is being incorporated and informing decision-making within the Hood Canal for salmon recovery;
- Inclusion of a status update and a description of the work underway associated with the Adaptive Management and Monitoring framework, including any preliminary findings;

- Continued refinement of the programmatic needs associated with implementing the Recovery Plans. This includes, but is not limited to identifying how the existing capacity funds are being directed towards priority areas as well as providing information on the needs for additional support;
- An explicit discussion and suite of actions addressing flows and habitat protection.