

Puget Sound Partnership 2010 Three Year Work Program Update WRIA 2 /San Juan County Watershed

Introduction

The 2010 Three-Year Work Program Update is the fifth year of implementation since the Recovery Plan was finalized in 2005. The Puget Sound Partnership, as the regional organization for salmon recovery, along with the Recovery Implementation Technical Team (RITT), as the NOAA-appointed regional technical team for salmon recovery, perform an assessment of the development and review of these work programs in order to be as effective as possible in the coming years.

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.

In April 2010, two of the fourteen watershed chapter areas submitted early three-year work program updates on accomplishments, status of actions, and proposed actions that built on the work programs since 2006. The remaining twelve watershed chapter areas submitted their three-year work program updates in May 2010, with one submitting in June 2010.

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 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, all H integration, 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 2010 work program update reviews

Factors to be considered by the RITT in performing its technical review of the Update included:

- 1) *Consistency question*: Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the hypotheses and strategies identified in the Recovery Plan (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)?
- 2) *Pace/Status question*: Is implementation of the salmon recovery plan on-track for achieving the 10-year goal(s)? If not, why and what are the key priorities to move forward?
- 3) *Sequence/Timing question*: Is the sequencing and timing of actions appropriate for the current stage of implementation?
- 4) *Next big challenge question*: Does the three-year work plan/program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year?

Watersheds were also provided with the following four questions, answers to which the Recovery Council Work Group and the Partnership ecosystem recovery coordinators assessed in performing their policy review of the three-year work program:

- 1) *Consistency question:* Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the needs identified in the Recovery Chapter (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)? Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the Action Agenda?
- 2) *Pace/Status question:* Is implementation of salmon recovery on-track for achieving the 10-year goals?
- 3) *What is needed question:* What type of support is needed to help support this watershed in achieving its recovery chapter goals? Are there any changes needed in the suites of actions to achieve the watershed's recovery chapter goals?
- 4) *Next big challenge question:* Does the three-year work program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year either within the watershed or across the region?

Review

The following review consists of four components: a regional technical review that identifies and discusses technical topics of regional concern; a watershed-specific technical review focusing on the specific above-mentioned technical questions and the work being done in the watershed as reflected by the three year work plan; a regional policy review that identifies and discusses policy topics of regional concern; and a watershed-specific policy review focusing on the specific above-mentioned policy questions and the work being done in the watershed as reflected by the three year work plan. These four components are the complete work plan review.

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 June 2010. The RITT evaluated each individual watershed according to the four questions provided above. In the review, the RITT identified a common set of regional review comments for technical feedback that are applicable to all fourteen watersheds, as well as watershed specific feedback using the four questions. The regional review, along with the watershed specific review comments, is included below.

Regional Technical Review: 2010 Three-Year Work Plans – Common Themes

In addressing the review questions at the watershed level, as outlined above, the RITT also noted general comments common to all watersheds within the region. Four of these region-wide themes are listed below.

1. H-Integration

The work plans continue to emphasize habitat restoration projects for understandable reasons. However, salmon recovery also requires habitat protection, and hatchery and

harvest management actions. **H-integration** has been considered in a number of watersheds by assessing progress towards plan goals in all of the H's. New projects using EPA funds to specifically address habitat protection for some watersheds came about because an overview of progress in all H's showed that habitat protection had received less attention than the other H's. It is important for all watersheds to assess how the work in each H will affect and be affected by the other H's. For example, do exploitation rate ceilings in harvest management provide sufficient fish to take advantage of newly restored habitat; is progress in restoring one type of habitat negated by the loss of the same kind of habitat due to inadequate protection? These kinds of questions will be an important component of adaptive management. Therefore, it would be advantageous to address them in subsequent 3-year work plans.

A challenge that still has not been met in most watersheds is to coordinate actions in all H's to the same set of hypotheses and strategies that underlie the watershed's recovery plan chapter. For example, it should be clear how a hatchery program set up to supplement production addresses the limiting factors for that watershed in a fashion complimentary to the habitat restoration and protection work in the same watershed. It is important to keep in mind that actions in all H's are aimed at moving the populations towards recovered levels of the same set of VSP parameters. Therefore, it would be advantageous for the managers of all the H's to work with each other towards a common vision of how their actions, in combination, will achieve this recovery.

Six steps of H-integration were suggested at a Shared Strategy workshop in 2006 to help groups begin this process). Some watersheds are working through them in a systematic fashion. We continue to support these steps as useful guidance for assuring that all H's are part of each watershed's recovery plan implementation.

1. Identify the people needed to participate, covering all Hs. Bring them into the process.
2. Gain a common understanding of how the H's influence the salmon system.
3. Agree upon common goals for improving salmon.
4. Select a suite of complimentary actions covering the Hs that address the goals (these should then be placed in the work plans).
5. Document implementation of actions and expected outcomes (in work plans).
6. Monitor, report, and adjust (adaptive management!).

2. Adaptive Management

One of the biggest challenges that the RITT has consistently identified for implementing the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan is the development of realistic, useful, and applicable **adaptive management plans** at the watershed level. The Recovery Plan identified these as the key tool for addressing the scientific uncertainties inherent in the plan, yet developing this tool remains a challenge in 2010. To help identify needs, to provide a consistent template for planning and prioritizing monitoring, to develop a process for refining short-term objectives and 10-year goals, and to increase the technical capacity of the watersheds to complete these plans, the RITT began working with three watersheds – San Juan Islands, Skagit, and Hood Canal - using the Open Standards

conservation planning approach with the intent of expanding the work sequentially to other watersheds. As this work began, however, watersheds that did not want to wait for the RITT asked that it develop a template that they could use to prepare for RITT involvement. The template will be completed by July 1, 2010. The RITT will continue to work with watersheds on developing adaptive management plans using this template under a revised time table. Although RITT support will be available to each watershed, the process of building the adaptive management and monitoring plans will still demand time, commitment, and resources from the watershed leads, planners and implementers of actions associated with the Recovery Plan.

3. Climate Change

Climate change is expected to affect the fundamental aquatic and terrestrial processes that control the quality and quantity of habitats for Pacific salmon. This change is the subject of global and regional research, modeling, and planning. For the RITT, Puget Sound Partnership, watershed groups, and other salmon recovery entities, climate change is likely to become a core issue when considering the types and designs of restoration efforts. Specific watershed-scale planning guidance regarding the effect of climate change on salmon and their habitats will require additional study. However, empirical data clearly demonstrate rising air temperatures in the Pacific Northwest during the 20th century, and regional climate models predict that this trend will continue. Resulting changes can be expected in watershed hydrology (magnitude and timing of peak and base flows), stream and ocean temperatures, ocean currents and coastal circulation, salinity gradients, sea level, and biological diversity. Salmon production is intimately linked with many of these variables.

As ecosystem processes and functions respond to climate change, adaptive strategies will need to be developed to mitigate and compensate in the implementation of salmon recovery efforts. The Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan and accompanying NOAA Supplement both indicate that climate change impacts on salmon need to be considered in evaluating recovery. The NOAA Supplement also identifies climate change as one of several “specific technical and policy issues for regional adaptive management and monitoring.” To this end, the RITT will work with watershed groups, Puget Sound Partnership, and other stakeholders to develop of adaptive management plans that address climate change.

The following online references synthesize various agencies’ efforts at understanding the potential impacts of climate change on natural resources in Washington State:

- University of Washington Climate Impacts Group. 2009. The Washington climate change impacts assessment: Evaluating Washington's future in a changing climate. <http://cses.washington.edu/cig/res/ia/waccia.shtml>

- University of Washington Climate Impacts Group. 2010. Hydrologic climate change scenarios for the Pacific Northwest Columbia River basin and coastal drainages. <http://www.hydro.washington.edu/2860/>
- Lawler, J.J. and M. Mathias. 2007. Climate change and the future of biodiversity in Washington. Report prepared for the Washington Biodiversity Council. <http://www.biodiversity.wa.gov/documents/WA-Climate-BiodiversityReport.pdf>
- National Wildlife Federation. 2009. Setting the stage: Ideas for safeguarding Washington's fish and wildlife in an era of climate change. http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/cwcs/nwf_climatechange09.pdf

For a comprehensive listing of resources regarding climate change impacts, preparation, and adaptation, see the Washington Department of Ecology website: http://www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange/ipa_resources.htm.

4. Protection of Ecosystem Functions

An important element of recovering salmon in Puget Sound is the protection of existing habitat. Adequate protection of salmon habitat in Puget Sound continues to be an issue in all watersheds and continued degradation is noted throughout the area. While habitat restoration is relatively easy to implement by watersheds, given funding, protection of existing habitat is reliant on local regulations and their enforcement. Many regional policy drivers impact salmon habitat, including the Shoreline Management Act, Growth Management Act, National Marine Fisheries Service's Biological Opinion on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's implementation of the National Flood Insurance Program, and the Army Corps of Engineers' revised levee vegetation management policy. These regulations address many of society's concerns about the environment, but not necessarily salmon recovery first and foremost. Stakeholders in salmon recovery (e.g., the watershed groups, PSP, and RITT) need to develop ways to provide the technical input for integrating, to a greater extent, actions that promote salmon recovery into these local and regional decisions and regulations affecting salmon habitat.

Watershed Specific Technical Review: San Juan County Watershed (WRIA 2)

Implementation of the San Juan County recovery plan is proceeding consistently with the assessment, protection and restoration priorities outlined. The San Juan plan's recovery strategy is to implement projects that will protect and restore the important salmon habitats. This has involved first and foremost an assessment approach to determine how, when and where salmon are utilizing San Juan County's shorelines, fresh and marine waters so that such information can be used to prioritize protection and restoration actions. In a recent adaptive management (Open Standards) exercise the WRIA staff conducted with members of the RITT, it became clear that most of the projects outlined in the initial phase of the recovery plan have already been

implemented. It will be important to evaluate the status and results of the assessment projects to determine whether additional work is needed and when San Juan County will be poised to analyze data from the “Big Picture” project and plan to use the results to help them prioritize protection and restoration actions going forward from here.

1. Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed’s three-year work plan/program consistent with the hypotheses and strategies identified in the Recovery Plan (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)?

Generally, yes, the WRIA 2 (San Juan County) work program is consistent with the hypotheses and 3 primary strategies for their area (i.e., assessment to inform protection and restoration). The WRIA 2 protection and restoration projects initiated to date have been supported by assessment information, and the WRIA has not gone beyond such evidence to ‘just do it’ in other places. This approach is consistent with that outlined in their plan. Specific actions are not prioritized beyond categorizing them into Tier 1 (protection) and II (restoration), and the near-term need for that work is acknowledged in their work program.

The budget allocation in the project spreadsheet accurately reflects the priorities of the salmon recovery plan. Because of limited funding for 2010, the WRIA 2 approach priorities are to implement 2 projects. One is to fill the funding gap for the Thatcher Bay Nearshore Restoration project. The second focus for 2010 is to use the remaining grant funds to bring the various assessments and data sets together to develop a framework to prioritize and sequence protection and restoration actions for San Juan County. The 3-year plan refers to the development of a modeling framework to prioritize and sequence protection and restoration actions, but it is unclear what this framework is, when the assessment data that will inform the framework will be available, and what capacity the WRIA staff have to do an analysis of the “Big Picture” assessment. The WRIA 2 staff can include some of the key information contained in the existing Request For Proposals (RFP) for this project. We understand the RFP contains a lot more detail on the scope/feasibility of the modeling project.

2. Is the implementation of the salmon recovery plan on-track for achieving the 10-year goal(s)? If not, why not and what are the key priorities to move forward?

The surprising and positive finding from the adaptive management assessment, that most of the actions identified in the salmon recovery plan are being implemented, is great news! The assessments will provide a basis for protection and restoration actions. Because there were no explicit statements of ‘what will it take’ in terms of the magnitude of actions needed to support salmon recovery, there is no doubt need to revise the plan and adjust the actions, even consider setting a 10-year goal for salmon recovery efforts in the San Juan’s. Funding cutbacks at all levels of local, state and Federal governments make it unlikely that sufficient capacity (people, money, and political relationships) exists for implementation and possible updating of the plan; especially considering the CAO and SMP Updates that are underway or happening soon in the WRIA. Developing and implementing an adaptive management strategy is a key priority in moving towards longer-term goals. This work is underway with the RITT, thus increasing the chances that WRIA 2 is moving with the capacity that it has and can acquire in the most efficient manner.

3. *Is the sequencing and timing of actions appropriate for the current stage of implementation?*

At a coarse level (i.e., grouping projects into 2 Tiers), the sequencing of the work program appears to be appropriate. The WRIA 2 efforts thus far have focused on assessments that will generate information to guide further protection and restoration activities. Some protection and restoration efforts have been implemented in these early years of plan implementation, which is in keeping with moving forward with some actions that have relatively high certainty of achieving positive outcomes, while also delaying larger investments until more information about salmon and food web use of nearshore habitats is available. The WRIA now articulates good questions about adaptive management; such as what frequency should monitoring be conducted, now that the baseline “Big Picture” study is coming to an end.

The Lead Entity should provide information connecting Education and Outreach activities to salmon recovery goals, for example, listing the expected outcomes related to salmon recovery. While the connections may be obvious to those doing the work, they should be documented to help others understand the relationships.

4. *Does the three-year work plan/program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year?*

The WRIA is beginning to address a major need in this watershed, which is to complete and implement an adaptive management plan and strategy that directly identifies key uncertainties and how to use existing and new knowledge to make effective decisions to recover salmon. With the support of the RITT, the WRIA is going through the adaptive management discussion, which is a good forum within which these issues can be addressed. The Lead Entity should show the link between the assessment framework and the recovery plan chapter update. The framework analysis will provide information for the update of actions and goals in the recovery plan chapter. How will the Lead Entity sequence the recovery plan chapter update and the adaptive management plan now being developed? If the new adaptive management plan is in place when the recovery plan chapter is updated, the Lead Entity would have to go back and revise the adaptive management plan with the new actions and goals. You may want to update the chapter first. The RITT would be happy to talk about this sequencing with you.

II. Policy Review Comments

The Recovery Council Work Group, an interdisciplinary policy team made up of lead policy staff in federal, state, local agencies, as well as a lead policy staff representative from the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. In addressing their review questions, outlined above, the interdisciplinary team noted both general comments common to all watersheds within the region, as well as significant advancements and issues needing advancement that are watershed specific and need special attention. The general and watershed specific comments follow below.

Regional Policy Review: 2010 Three-Year Work Plan – Common Themes

The region wants to call attention to the significant amount of work and effort that each of the watershed groups put into updating the three-year work plan narratives and spreadsheets. Each year, the watershed groups build off of the previous year's reviews and information, incorporating this into the update. The watershed groups continue to demonstrate an increasing amount of sophistication in implementing the recovery plan, advancing strategically important projects by doing long-term planning, sequencing work, and ultimately prioritizing where funding is focused.

We look forward to continuing to work with watersheds to identify and facilitate high priority projects to move forward and to refine the process and three-year work plans.

Adaptive Management and Monitoring

Advancing monitoring and adaptive management remains a high priority both regionally and at the watershed scale. The majority of watersheds continue to indicate that this is a significant, 'next big challenge' in their areas. The NOAA Supplement has identified this gap in the Recovery Plan as a critical weakness. As part of the approval process, NOAA indicated that developing this plan was a requirement.

A coordinated monitoring and adaptive management framework that supports refinement at both the regional and watershed scales is critical to understand the pace and effectiveness of recovery actions. This framework and the resulting programs need to support an integrated approach to recovery implementation tracking, incorporate uncertainties around climate change, and develop or refine recovery plan goals where needed.

The region continues to be committed to supporting watersheds in advancing their efforts to develop and implement a monitoring and adaptive management plan in a way that acknowledges the interaction across habitat, harvest, hatchery, and hydropower management decisions. At the regional scale, several actions have been initiated to advance adaptive management, including:

1. RITT guidance on monitoring and adaptive management
2. RITT/PSP template for monitoring and adaptive management that builds a framework within which each watershed that can connect their monitoring information to other watersheds and the ESU.
3. RITT/PSP coordinated approach to support the development/advancement of monitoring and adaptive management programs in each watershed chapter area.

Significant resources are and will continue to be needed to support involvement in the development of these programs across the Puget Sound and then in the implementation of the programs via focused monitoring funds. Resources need to include having involvement from all sectors of salmon recovery working together: hatchery, harvest, habitat protection, habitat restoration, and hydropower.

Protecting Ecosystem Functions

Preserving options and addressing threats are critical components of recovery implementation both at the local and regional scale. Recovering salmon in Puget Sound requires effective regulatory protection of existing habitat, along with acquisition, incentives, and education and outreach programs around existing land uses. The protection of habitat through these and other approaches remains a high priority.

At this time, there are several opportunities to strengthen the nexus between habitat protection, salmon recovery, and different regulatory mechanisms.

- *Shoreline Master Programs and Critical Area Ordinances*: Local jurisdictions across the Puget Sound are working to update their shoreline master programs, through the Shoreline Management Act, and their critical areas ordinances, through the Growth Management Act. These two regulatory programs are critically important to our collective ability to protect and manage habitat since they address the management of riverine and marine shorelines, streams, wetlands, water recharge zones, and other ecologically important habitats for salmon. There is a strong need to incorporate existing information from the salmon recovery plan and implementation efforts into these regulatory updates in order to strengthen the relationship between land use management and the needs of salmon. Although the watershed groups are not the empowered entity for leading the effort to incorporate information from the salmon plan into the regulatory update, it is the responsibility of everyone involved to support local jurisdictions in adopting the regulations necessary to preserve recovery options for the future. This includes making information accessible as well as understandable within a regulatory context.
- *FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)*: NOAA recently issued a Biological Opinion on FEMA's NFIP, concluding that the program jeopardizes and adversely modifies designated critical habitat for salmon recovery. Since this decision in 2009, there has been a significant amount of concern and conversation about how to respond. Local jurisdictions, along with FEMA, NOAA, PSP, and others, are working to identify a clear path forward for protecting floodplains in terms of ecosystem recovery and human health and well being. Implementation of an agreed-upon approach to limit the impacts of development in the floodplain will require additional resources at the local and state level and need to be tracked as part of understanding the status of salmon recovery efforts.
- *Army Corps of Engineers Levee Vegetation Management Policy*: A significant amount of riparian habitat sits on top of levees within the floodplains and deltas of the Puget Sound. The Corps' policy requires the removal of vegetation over two inches in diameter. This new levee vegetation management policy removes significant amounts of vegetation, which provide salmon habitat in already degraded riparian areas. A regional response to this policy is underway and important to continue to support in order to reduce the negative impact for salmon recovery. Numerous entities, including state agencies, local governments, non-profits, tribes, and the Puget Sound Partnership, sent a letter to the Corps urging that this policy be changed to allow for retention of more trees on levees.

Additionally, there are non-regulatory mechanisms that are timely. This includes:

- *Education and Outreach*: Many of the watersheds identified education and outreach programs as an element of their work plans. Working with the public to advance a comprehensive understanding and individual actions associated with recovery is critically important. Advancing programs across the watersheds and that are mutually supportive within the watersheds will help strengthen the effort.
- *Nearshore Technical Assistance*: protection of the nearshore remains a high priority for salmon recovery across the Puget Sound. There are emerging tools and resources available, including technical work from the General Investigation for the Puget Sound nearshore, the monitoring and adaptive management template, and watershed-based prioritization approaches for nearshore. Continuing to advance the thinking around fish utilization and critical nearshore habitats will support a refined approach to protection and balancing different uses along the nearshore.

Focus on Salmon Recovery

Salmon recovery implementers continue to be pulled in many directions by other mandates. The Puget Sound Partnership and the Policy Work Group recognize that implementation of salmon recovery actions remains a high priority. Maintaining a focus on the priorities in the salmon recovery plan, as described in each watershed chapter plan, will be increasingly challenging, and will require a continued investment of time, resources and support.

Funding

Establishing consistent, reliable funding for capital and non-capital projects to implement the recovery plan chapters continues to be a challenge. It is critically important to fund implementation of the plan, at an adequate level, in order to keep the momentum and focus on recovery. Lack of capacity across member organizations of watershed groups remains a significant limiting factor for advancing recovery objectives. The advancement of H-integration and adaptive management objectives, in particular, call for continued funding to support ongoing coordination and participation.

Balancing Land Uses

The Puget Sound Partnership funded a report, *Obstacles to Implementing Important Capital Project for Salmon Recovery* (Blackmore Consulting, 08/27/09), to identify obstacles for implementing habitat restoration for salmon recovery around the Puget Sound. The report identified the following key obstacles that continue to be a challenge and require significant regional and local resources:

- Balancing working lands, primarily agriculture and working forests, with salmon recovery. This is especially important in the estuaries where both working agriculture and salmon restoration is located.
- Supporting a decision-making approach that incorporates salmon recovery needs, based on the plan, into decisions at the federal, state, and local scale. This is often difficult due to variable politics and community support but ultimately has a significant impact on our collective ability to complete capital projects on pace to achieve recovery goals

Watershed Specific Policy Review: San Juan County Watershed (WRIA 2)

Materials: Recovery Plan chapters, 2007, 2008, & 2009 three-year work plan updates and reviews, and 2010 three-year work plan updates.

Significant Advancements:

- Near completion of technical assessments to fill critical data gaps. The information will support a prioritization strategy for protection and restoration actions in WRIA 2 and the update of the San Juan recovery plan chapter in the near future.
- Significant investment in time and resources to advance the adaptive management and monitoring process. Working with the RITT and PSP staff to evaluate monitoring needs and develop a viability assessment. Continued to work with the Marine Resource Committee to coordinate with the Marine Stewardship Area monitoring plan.
- Continuing to participate in local regulatory protection programs, such as the Critical Area Ordinance update process and Shoreline Master Plan update process. The contribution of salmon recovery assessment data continues to inform these efforts.
- Advancing outreach and education efforts in coordination with the Marine Resource Committee by increasing awareness and coordinating messaging.
- Effective and strategic use of limited resources.

Issues Needing Advancement:

- An increasing amount time and staff resources are needed to advance recovery plan objectives, integrate salmon recovery information with other local efforts (CAO update, SMP update, San Juan Initiative, etc), as identified in the salmon recovery plan, and to serve as a much needed resource for the San Juan community for salmon recovery information. Continuing to work to secure base funding in concert with regional efforts to support salmon recovery capacity needs will help support the important role of the Lead Entity Coordinator.