April 24, 2013

RE: Funding Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) at $80 Million

Dear Representatives Dunshee and Warnick, Senators Honeyford and Nelson;

The Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Forum (Forum) would like to thank you for your work and commitment to support the recovery of Puget Sound and Chinook salmon, and to encourage you to continue this support by fully funding the Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) fund. As I am sure you are aware, our salmon resources are at a critical juncture in Puget Sound. One of the most important actions we must do is to protect and restore critical habitat to ensure that Chinook salmon are plentiful and vibrant in perpetuity. The PSAR fund provides an essential source of funds for the highest priority science-based habitat restoration projects identified in the Snohomish Basin and the Puget Sound region.

The Forum was formed in 1998 to coordinate the effective implementation of salmon recovery efforts in the Snohomish Basin, and to develop the Snohomish River Basin Salmon Conservation Plan. This plan was developed in 2005 as a collaborative effort of local Forum members to respond to the listing of Chinook salmon as a threatened species. The Forum has 41 members including high level decision-making representatives from the 14 municipalities within the watershed, King and Snohomish Counties, the Tulalip Tribes, seven special purpose districts, 11 special interest groups including four farmers and three citizens as well as representatives from federal and state agencies. A critical component of the work supported by this group is habitat restoration actions consistent with the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan. Funding has been a critical constraint to achieving our 10-year habitat restoration goals since the adoption of the plan. The lack of funding is the main reason we are behind schedule on implementation of our recovery actions.

Though encouraged by the House and Senate proposed capital budgets, we feel it is still not enough to address the large backlog of work that must be accomplished for Puget Sound and the Snohomish Basin and we strongly urge you to fully fund the $80 Million package as was included in Governor Inslee’s budget. We also strongly object to the proposal to use the ASARCO and State toxics funds identified by the Senate to fund the PSAR program. We rely on those funds to support our toxics and water quality cleanup efforts which are also necessary to achieve recovery. We hope this gets resolved in the end and that PSAR does receive the full $80 Million.

This funding helps to improve habitat across all watersheds in Puget Sound. PSAR funds the most important salmon recovery restoration and protection (acquisition) projects. These projects are regionally significant and advance key benchmarks for overall Puget Sound recovery. The projects were locally identified through a robust scientific process.
Funding PSAR at $80 Million would fully fund projects that the watershed and our partners have been working to advance for over 10 years including 350 acres of restored estuary habitat by the Smith Island Estuary Restoration Project, and restoration of key floodplain habitat in the Snoqualmie from the Upper Carlson Floodplain Reconnection Project. These two projects address the most important limiting factors and lagging benchmarks in the Snohomish Basin Chinook recovery plan; rearing habitat for juvenile Chinook. In addition, there are at least 7 other projects in the Snohomish basin that are teed up and ready to go if we receive the funding at the $80 Million level. Fully funding PSAR will create jobs, advance Snohomish basin salmon recovery priorities, and get the results that Puget Sound needs and the citizens expect.

Sincerely,

Terry Williams, Tulalip Tribes
Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Forum Chair

James Miller, City of Everett
Vice-Chair

cc:
Representative Frank Chopp
Senator Rodney Tom
Senator Andy Hill
District 38 - Senator Nick Harper, Representative John McCoy, Representative Mike Sells
District 39 - Senator Kirk Pearson, Representative Dan Kristiansen, Representative Elizabeth Scott
District 44 - Senator Steve Hobbs, Representative Hans Dunshee, Representative Mike Hope
District 45 – Senator Andy Hill, Representative Roger Goodman, Representative Larry Springer
District 5 - Senator Mark Mullet, Representative Jay Rodne, Representative Chad Magendanz