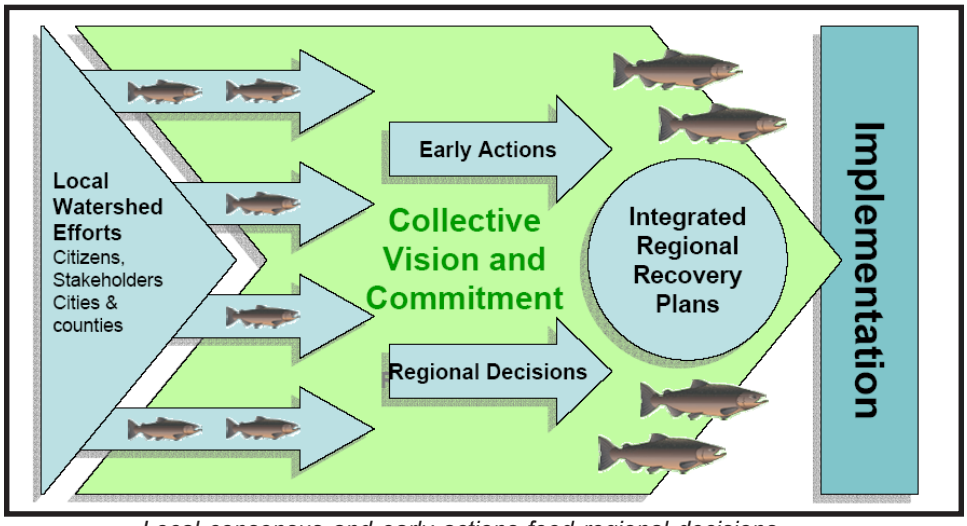
Salmon Recovery in Washington State

The Legislature Responded to ESA Listings and Set the Direction for Salmon Recovery

In the last decade, the federal government listed salmon, steelhead and bull trout across the state as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The listing creates a federal responsibility to restrict actions that harm these fish and to create a recovery plan. The 98-99 Legislature determined that it was in the public interest for the state to manage its natural resources rather than abdicate those responsibilities to the federal government and passed the Salmon Act, RCW 77.85. This legislation set the course for decision-making at the local level to tap into the knowledge and creativity of people living and working in the watersheds. At the same time, the legislature anticipated the need for regional coordination. The Act calls for the state to "coordinate and assist in the development of salmon recovery plans for evolutionarily significant units." The 1999 *"Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon: Extinction is Not an Option"* is the recovery strategy adopted by the Governor.

Both Immediate Actions and Long-term Strategies are Necessary

The Legislature and the Governor empowered local and regional groups to work on improving conditions for salmon. There are two major thrusts to the effort: the first is to make immediate improvements to habitat, harvest and hatcheries. The second is to develop regional consensus on measurable actions to recover salmon that will result in recovering naturally spawning salmon to harvestable levels and achieving their de-listing.



Local consensus and early actions feed regional decisions.

Salmon Recovery Requires the Coordinated Efforts of Many Groups and Interests

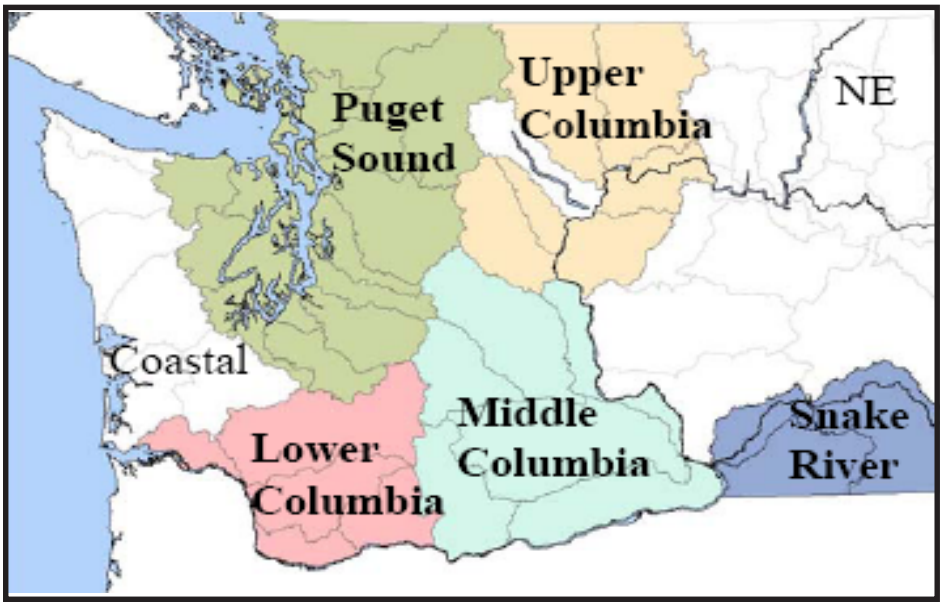
Groups in all watersheds and regions affected by the ESA listing of salmon are working to identify local solutions that meet the needs of people and salmon as well as the ESA requirements. These groups come together at the regional level to coordinate their efforts.

The following groups are contributing to salmon recovery:

- **Local governments** will be revising their growth management and shoreline management acts, and implementing capital projects;
- **Local stakeholder** groups will be making decisions about water quantity under RCW 90.82 (HB 2514);
- **Lead Entities** under RCW 77.85 (HB 2496) are identifying the best science-based habitat protection and restoration projects and building community support;
- **Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups** (RFEG) are engaging citizens in restoring streams and rivers.
- **Businesses** such as hydropower utilities and timber companies are improving practices through various agreements;
- **The State and tribal co-managers** are preparing harvest and hatchery management plans to be consistent with salmon recovery.

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board Provides Fiscal Oversight

In 1999, the Legislature also created the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB). Composed of five citizens appointed by the Governor and five state agency directors, the Board brings together the experiences and viewpoints of citizens and the major state natural resource agencies. The board membership collectively provides the expertise necessary to provide strong fiscal oversight of salmon recovery expenditures in Washington State. The Board supports salmon recovery by funding habitat protection and restoration projects. In its first funding cycles, it was able to build upon the early work done by local watersheds that got the ball rolling on salmon recovery. It also supports related programs and activities that produce sustainable and measurable benefits for fish and their habitat. The SRFB is refining its process to help local watershed groups become more strategic in meeting the needs of



5 of 7 regions are building an integrated recovery plan.

salmon, responding to community values, and planning to make sure money is wisely spent.

Federal Agencies and Congress Support Regional Decision-making

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—Fisheries (NOAA) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the federal agencies responsible for administering the ESA, established geographic boundaries for recovery based on fish biology rather than political jurisdiction. These areas are called evolutionarily significant units, or ESUs. Both federal agencies agreed that recovery plans built upon existing local efforts and ingenuity would have a greater likelihood of being implemented. Recovery planning is funded by the federal government.

Regional Groups Work with Local Watersheds to Draft ESU-scale Recovery Plans

Washington has agreed to assist NOAA in its efforts to write a recovery plan by developing regionally-based draft recovery plans to submit to NOAA. Washington State established seven regions, largely mirroring the ESUs, to respond to the ESA listings. Five of these areas have regional groups established to prepare plans that gain regional consensus on measurable fish population targets, integrate actions necessary in harvest, habitat and hatcheries, and gain commitment to achieve results. To do this, they will integrate a multitude of plans across watersheds into one regional plan, and help connect local social, cultural, and economic needs and desires with science and ESA goals. Lead Entities in the Coastal and NE areas of the state are also working to restore salmon runs. The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office (GSRO) was created to facilitate these planning efforts.

Ocean Conditions Help Jump Start Salmon Recovery

Strong salmon runs in recent years can help us recover listed fish if we act now. The current peak of high runs is mostly due to a cyclical change in ocean conditions known as the "Pacific Decadal Oscillation." Similar to El Nino, it causes ocean temperatures to oscillate between warmer and colder every 20 to 30 years. In the mid to late 1990s the ocean temperatures became colder, increasing salmon survival rates. With Mother Nature now on our side, we have a real opportunity to jump-start recovery efforts and reverse the historic decline of our native salmon stocks. This may be our last chance since many stocks are already threatened with extinction and may not otherwise survive the next major downturn in ocean conditions.

We Have an Unprecedented Opportunity to Set the Standard for Recovery Planning

The way our state has chosen to respond to the ESA listing of salmonid species is a first in the country. It will become the game plan for how we invest in the future of our natural environment. Because all levels of government are involved with local stakeholders, the recovery plans will include commitments for implementation by those responsible. This result is only possible because of the legislature's support of local and regional decision-making efforts.

Leadership at All Levels of Government is Critical for Success

The State has five years invested in local citizen energy for salmon recovery. The investment is paying off—voluntary, citizen-based, activities are restoring critical salmon habitat and building momentum for long-term recovery. Despite the significant progress made to date, there is more to be done. Over the next two years, local watersheds and the regional groups working with them need continued support to complete near-term projects and to reach consensus to deliver a recovery plan by 2005.

An ESU-scale plan developed by the people of Washington is the state's best chance to achieve ESA assurances and the commitments necessary to implement long-term salmon recovery. Afterwards, in 2005-06, the local, state, tribal and federal governments will be faced with a new set of policy decisions on how to structure the implementation of regional recovery plans and the roles of the groups involved.

Meanwhile, people are working hard to ensure a future where people and salmon can co-exist. They are counting on the leadership at all levels of government to honor the commitments made to achieve the goal of restoring salmon, steelhead, and trout populations to healthy and harvestable levels and improve habitats on which fish rely.