



Shared Strategy for Puget Sound

What's Working, What's Next for People and Salmon in Puget Sound

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So where are we with these fish? I could make our task simple but that would be inaccurate. Let us not forget what we are trying to do. All of us, the Federal agencies, State agencies, tribal governments, local governments, business interests, farmers, citizen groups and citizens are trying to accommodate our policies and our actions to the needs of several species of salmon that swim in our midst. And we are trying to do that at the same time we want to enhance the prosperity of our region. Some of the fish species have been declared threatened - by NOAA fisheries - Puget Sound Chinook, Hood Canal Summer Chum and Bull Trout. Other salmon species are doing ok for now. There are ground fish or bottom fish as fishermen call them in Puget Sound, that are in trouble as well but their habitat is not as intimately or directly intertwined with our lives as an anadromous fish like salmon. In fact, we may be able to help the ground fish survive by setting aside certain marine areas and declaring them off limits. Not popular with all but I have seen it work.

Not salmon. They spawn in the fresh water that laces the land where we all live. They rear in fresh water, go to the ocean to mature, only to return, reproduce and die where they originated.

We humans not only control their birthplace and where they live the early part of their lives, but also their final resting place.

Between their birth and death, we try to control how many of them are caught, when, and by whom and using what gear type. In addition, we have figured out how to artificially breed and rear these fish to a certain size and start them on their life's journey. This is good or bad news, depending on the answers to scientific questions that have proven elusive or not pursued with sufficient determination and rigor.

Just to further complicate things, we humans have created very complex laws, treaties, rules and regulations affecting the fish throughout their lives. We have given the jurisdiction to implement those laws and treaties and rules and regulations to federal, state, tribal and local governments with overlapping, inconsistent and sometimes conflicting charges. We can't even decide which branch of government should decide our salmon related disputes, Legislative, Executive or Judicial. I have often thought, if I were say a Chinook in Puget Sound and I knew my fate depended on wise policies and actions by us humans and I knew what we had done so far, I might at least figure out some other way to spawn or just commit suicide and get it over with!

As if all this weren't enough, when ocean conditions change, where human control is limited, these fish in our midst do appreciably better or worse depending on the stage of the ocean's natural cycle. We haven't pursued the questions on the effects of the ocean on salmon with sufficient determination and rigor either.

All of this is enough to make a grown region like Puget Sound cry, or wring our collective hands, or call each other names, or point our fingers at and blame whichever of the four 'h's [harvest, hatcheries, hydropower and habitat] affected me least or just hire a lawyer and sue whoever got in my way. Indeed, we have done all of these things. In fact, we have been pursuing one or more of these remedies (if that's the right word) for over

100 years in the Northwest. In the meantime, our regional icon has suffered.

A couple of years ago, shortly after the fish were listed by NOAA Fisheries under the Endangered Species Act, about 200 people from the Puget Sound met in Port Ludlow. We represented all the levels and branches of government I mentioned, except the Judiciary. We were tribal members, farmers, forestry interests, big and small city and county representatives, politicians, environmental organizations, fisherman, scientists, just plain citizens and whoever else wanted to come. We decided enough is enough! If we didn't get our act together, the fish would be gone and so would our pride in our place. We all live here. We like it here. We're proud to show it to people who visit from other parts of the country or the rest of the world. We don't really want to see one of our fellow creatures unique to this part of the world disappear. We particularly don't want them to disappear because of our neglect or because our policies and actions and institutions weren't up to the job.

We understood we didn't know everything about the salmon and by the way, we never will, but we felt we knew enough to save them from extinction.

And we decided we might not save them unless we developed a strategy, a strategy that involves all of us in its execution. No more finger pointing, no more blaming another 'h', no more waiting for one more scientific study that would give us all the answers, no more relying on the agency friendliest to my point of view or one more piece of legislation or one final 'blast em to smithereens lawsuit'. No, this was a problem that needed not only a strategy but a shared strategy - one we could all pursue in one boat using one set of oars that pulled all of us together in the same direction - that decision to develop a shared strategy was made in Port Ludlow October, 1999. Over the ensuing months and years, the wisdom of that decision has been more apparent than ever. So have its difficulties.

In addition, to the complexities surrounding the fish and our human habits that I have already mentioned, other things have become apparent:

1. If we decide our choice is between a healthy watershed for fish or economic prosperity, we will end up with neither. We won't do what is necessary to ensure healthy watersheds for ourselves and our children, or human dependent creatures like salmon, and we will risk all sustainable economic development that ultimately rests on a healthy environment.
2. We found that people from all segments of the disputes over salmon are either tired or disillusioned with trying to resolve their differences in court. They will still seek to use the courts if all else fails, but the courts never seem to decide enough of the problem to avoid one more lawsuit to further refine the answers.
3. Landowners living in watersheds do not want to be told how they should manage their land by some remote governmental official. The more remote the official's government, the more the landowner resists unsolicited advice.
4. The people most dramatically affected by the changes necessary to save the fish, want to be involved in the decisions that will affect their lives.
5. For progress to be had, leadership is needed at all levels but particularly at the watersheds.
6. In some watersheds, the involvement of all interested parties is lacking. Commitments from the people in the watersheds to achieve goals are of no value unless all who can make the commitments happen are in the same boat and rowing.
7. We also found that Federal, State and tribal governments need to concentrate on what needs to be done and then back off and allow watershed groups to figure out how to do it.
8. Our approach is complex and we need constantly and broadly to communicate what we are doing and why and make sure all support the approach. The approach we are taking by the way was laid out by the Legislature in HB2496 in 1998.
9. We need to monitor our results and measure progress against our goals.

10. We need to understand the economic cost of achieving our goals and pursue the most cost effective alternative or we risk losing public support.
11. We need a clear identification of scientific needs and the research timing and sequence necessary for wise policy choices. This will not happen without a scientific strategy that all science-based agencies pursue in coordination with one another. Volunteers are accepted.
12. An impressive hatchery reform effort has been underway in Puget Sound for over two years. It is supported by the Feds, state and tribes, science driven, funded by the Congress and facilitated by Long Live the Kings, a not for profit salmon enhancement organization. Hatchery goals are being driven by the needs of wild fish.
13. Significant progress has been made in reducing harvest to help insure healthy runs of fish in the future. This is not without economic pain to tribes, commercial and sport fisherman and the communities and industries that support them.
14. Although some progress is being made, we still do not have a centralized data management system open to all and easily accessible. We need to get on with opening up all our salmon recovery information.
15. The ESA may have gotten people to the table but positive incentives will be necessary to achieve agreement on a course of action. We should explore which ones work under which circumstances. We need then to try and put them in place.
16. While our approach emphasizes the positive and encourages maximum involvement of all interested parties in every watershed, if no progress is made in a given watershed and no real effort is underway, enforcement, unlike extinction, is an option.
17. If the path we're on proves off course, we need to adapt and change to a more certain way. In other words, we need to practice adaptive management, not preach it.
18. Success needs to be celebrated like we are doing here for the next day and a half.

19. Consistent and predictable funding for regional and watershed efforts is crucial for success.

Our progress to date has been impressive.

We have a shared strategy. It is a five-step process to develop a recovery plan - a plan that will satisfy the legal requirements of the ESA and accommodate the treaty rights of and obligations to the tribes. We are on step 3 which means; in each watershed we are identifying actions necessary to achieve recovery goals.

Most watersheds in Puget Sound have Chinook planning targets from which individual watershed goals are being developed and steps to achieve them identified.

Rolling up these watershed goals, harmonizing them with hatchery and harvest policies, coupled with strong commitments to achieve them, is step 4 and 5 of the shared strategy. Final approval of the resulting recovery plan is the goal of our effort.

The most impressive thing to me in all this is the degree of cooperation everyone is showing. Over the last several years there has been an increasing recognition that we are all in this together. No single agency of government, no matter at what level, or power they have been granted by statute or guaranteed by treaty can alone bring these fish back. It takes everyone submerging their own agenda and pulling in the same direction. Where this has happened, the progress is inspiring. You know it is happening. You can see it. You feel it way down in your bones.

In the watersheds in Puget Sound where people are listening to one another, trying to understand what the world looks like to their neighbor, whether tribal member, farmer, forest owner, government official, fisherman or just someone concerned about the future of the place where they live and where people are working together to ensure a prosperous future - when all this is happening - it's like magic. These magical moments are occurring all over Puget Sound. You will hear about some of them today and tomorrow. In river basins like the Nooksack, the Stillaquamish, the Dungeness, the Snohomish, the Nisqually, to name just a

few, people are coming together to solve common problems and to access common opportunities. They have laid down their guns and picked up the mantle of citizenship - and they are making progress.

In April of 1999, when the fish were listed, a great man noted and I quote, "The costs of proceeding without a more effective means of coordinating the development of a response strategy are likely to be high. Without a collectively "owned" plan, the likelihood for legal challenges is heightened, and the likelihood of success of such challenges is also increased since different institutions will take different positions on recovery needs. A proliferation of separate planning activities and separate negotiations with NMFS will diminish the ability to use science as the basis for recovery planning, since individual negotiations will be driven by the unique political aspects of each local or regional government. Multiple planning activities will tend to overwhelm the already stretched federal agencies charged with implementation of the ESA and may overtax the limited number of scientists who have expertise on these systems. And, there is a significant risk that a more fragmented approach to developing recovery plans will become bogged down in inter-institutional rivalries and proceed at a glacial pace. Such delay in the development of an effective plan will inevitably increase the ultimate cost of recovery and the likelihood of judicial intervention and decrease the potential for successful recovery." My wife told me last night, you can't quote yourself. Well, I just did.

Think of it, if we don't pull together, more cost, more lawsuits and less progress. That's a prescription for sound-wide disillusionment.

What we have seen in the last few years is the opposite when there is cooperation by government officials and collaboration by watershed interests. The cost is less and the progress more.

Lest we overwhelm ourselves with congratulations; we should acknowledge we have much left to do.

Coordination among agencies at the state level and genuine collaboration at the watershed level is not uniformly pursued. Old habits die hard. Old wrongs, real or perceived, still fester.

The Congress passed a law more than thirty years ago that said it was not permissible for Americans to allow a species like salmon to become extinct. That's why we need to do something about salmon. Congress told us we had to. Even if we disagree with the Congressional mandate, we still must act. We could try to get the ESA changed - good luck - but I would guess the great majority of Washingtonians don't want to destroy this wonderful creature. The controversy arises over what to do and how to do it.

Usually, with these top down mandates, the responsibility for carrying out the Congressional will lies with a Federal governmental agency or some combination of Federal and State agencies. In the case of Congressional edicts that affect the way people manage their land it is very hard for either Federal or State agencies to implement them. The governments are too remote from the problems to really understand how to achieve the statutory goals on the lands affected. Secondly, the resultant alienation of the landowners from their government makes real progress problematic. The result has been as mentioned above, high cost, much litigation and little progress.

Aided and abetted by our State legislature, the shared strategy we have developed assigns the task of setting goals to the Federal, State and tribal governments. The Legislature told us, leave it up to the people most affected by the effort to achieve the goals to decide how to get there. This process has been called community based, or in our case, watershed based decision-making. For it to work, several things have to happen.

The government has to put definition around the assignment to the watersheds. This has happened here where the Feds/State/tribal governments have set planning targets for watersheds. The Watershed's job is to figure out how to achieve something approximating that planning target by a combination of habitat restoration and landowner incentives or disincentives. In addition, the habitat effort needs to be supported by harvest and hatchery policies.

The setting of ultimate targets for the watersheds will be an iterative process. Planning targets have been established for many watersheds. Watershed groups will then work toward those targets to see what kind of

changes their achievement would entail. As I said earlier, the Federal and State governments have to back off and let the watershed groups do their work. Help should be provided where requested but essentially the course to be followed is up to the people most affected by the necessary changes. Ultimately, each watershed in Puget Sound must do its part to contribute to a completed recovery plan. The watersheds have requested and some demanded their right to create their own future. It is a premise of the shared strategy that with that right goes a responsibility of citizenship - each watershed must step up and do their part toward the overall responsibility. In short, you've got the ball, now run with it.

Many watersheds are doing just that as you will hear.

The ingredients for success are now apparent. We need to include all interests in the watershed to make real commitments. We need a forum where it is safe for people to put their interests on the table and see if they can be harmonized. Our experience to date is that once sufficient trust builds up the interests of the affected people are a lot closer than they thought and some form of mutual accommodation is possible. This is particularly true where the element of time and some positive incentives are made part of the equation. Professional facilitation is almost always helpful in these collaborative processes, particularly at the outset.

On the plus side, people who live together in a watershed and are concerned with a particular use they want to make of the water, say irrigation, are always concerned that another use, say fish habitat, will squeeze out their preferred use. Once all the uses from irrigation to fish habitat, to drinking water, to transportation, to energy generation, to recreation are put on the table and honest dialogue ensues, accommodation can often be had. Not always but a lot more often than we could ever imagine.

That's the thesis of the strategy we are pursuing. That people when faced with clear goals would much prefer to be in charge of their own destiny and if enabled, can come up with better solutions than more remote government officials.

The early evidence is very encouraging. If properly led in their own watersheds, people will step up to their own responsibilities. They can greatly improve the place where they live and allow for all the uses people want to make of their water. But they have to talk, to listen, to be flexible and to accommodate to one another. Where all this happens justifiable pride emerges, the self-confidence of citizens in their ability to cope with the complexity of modern life also grows. If we don't trust government to guide our lives then we must take on that responsibility ourselves. This is the essence of Jeffersonian democracy.

What's at stake here is the capability of a free people to truly govern themselves. If we step up to this challenge, we will show by example, why freedom and personal responsibility can create a truly bright future.

As our nation apparently prepares for war, surely we need more domestic examples of how problems can be solved peaceably and through cooperation. The Northwest part of North America has the opportunity to provide such an example.

If over the next year and a half the people of Puget Sound come together and define their goals, the actions necessary to achieve them and then commit to those actions, we will be justifiably proud and set a beacon to which all seekers of freedom can repair. We will have helped ourselves, the fish and our nations' cause and used free institutions and free people to do it.