

A First Look at Recovery Across the Sound

Jim Kramer, Executive Director
Shared Strategy for Puget Sound

Thanks Krystyna, and thanks to all of you for coming. It's like having a great party and everybody you invited and more showed up. So thank you. It's a tremendous pleasure to be part of this effort because of your commitment to salmon and to the people of Puget Sound. Thank you very much.

I'm going to give a little bit of an overview of what we're seeing across Puget Sound in terms of recovery, and then we're going to have an Oprah style discussion. I've never watched Oprah, but I've been cued in to some of her techniques. So after I speak, I'll have our illustrious panel members talk about their perspectives from their different watersheds. Mark Sollitto, who is a councilmember from North Bend, and also a co-chair of the Snohomish watershed. Jayni Kamen, who is a county commissioner from Mason County, and is working with the South Sound group. Jim Compton, who is co-chair of the Lake Washington/Cedar watershed, and also a Seattle city councilmember. Jay Watson, who is the Executive Director of the Hood Canal Coordinating Council working on summer chum and Chinook recovery in Hood Canal. Bob Kelly, my good friend from the Nooksack Tribe, and one of the leaders of the Whatcom County Nooksack watershed efforts. So in a few moments we'll open it up to a discussion with them. But first I wanted to offer a few welcomes and recognitions and give a little bit of an overview.

I think one of the great things about this work is that people care. It's more than a job, it's a way of life for us here, and I've been taught that by a number of you. And in recognizing that honor, I'll recognize a couple of people who are very special to me. I have three of my family members here. Brenda, my wife of 34 years in partnership and life. Without her support, I couldn't do this work. She's the one that picks up the pieces when I fall into the house at home at night, and gives me the confidence to move forward on the challenges that we all face together. My father is here, Jim Kramer, who spent much of his free time during my youth taking me out into the wilderness and showing both the beauty and mystery of the natural world. And my mother, Mamie, as I like to call her, who is related in some ways, I'm sure, to Mark Sollitto. She's a fellow Sicilian, so watch out if you cross her. [Applause] My mother taught me one of the great skills of life – how to cook. And that has rewarded me endlessly through my life. Most importantly, not just for the food you eat, but also for the community that you create around your table with the food and the sharing. And so I just ask that Brenda, my mother and father stand up and be recognized. [Applause] And Mark and Mamie can share stories of Sicilian traits later on if you have a special interest.

The second group that I want to recognize is the tribes, before I give an overview here. The Shared Strategy exists because of all the people who had a vision, Bill and others. But it's because of the tribes' support in the very beginning of this effort, and the commitment of their staff, of their own time, of their resources, of their dedication to science to learn more about these watersheds and these fish. The tribes are not only the cultural historians of this region, but they've become the experts scientifically because of their dedication and continued interest in learning what's important. They are passionate. They have taught me that this is a life, not a job. And as Billy said, once you start doing this, you cannot retire. And I know that their

passion creates very interesting and charged discussions, amongst themselves and when they meet in groups. I also know that frequently they've started the meeting with, "What the hell is Kramer doing now?" Right, Lorraine? So I would just like all of the tribal members who are here to stand so we can recognize them for their dedication. [Applause] It's your connecting us to the history that makes this place as special as it is for all of us.

So I want to give a quick overview of what we're starting to see. As most people know, these plans that we've talked about are in the final stages of development. A reporter asked me this morning if he could take a photograph of the plan, and I said, "Well, not yet, because it's still in the oven." It's in many ovens, as a matter of fact. But what we're starting to see, I think, is phenomenal, and I want to just show you a little bit of that in this slide show. First of all, I think this photograph of a salmon is one of my favorites for what we're thinking about and what we're trying to accomplish. Is the salmon disappearing from our landscape? Or will our efforts, combined together, bring it back into full focus, and many of its brethren as well? That's the question that I think is before us. We know how to do this. The question is, now will we commit to doing it?

As most people know, the Shared Strategy is a unique approach to creating a recovery plan by the communities that are affected by the ESA listing, and it includes the commitment for implementation. This is the first ever plan in the United States that's been developed in a partnership with the federal government, and with the people who live, work, and care about this species in our communities. And we believe it will be the first ever recovery plan that includes the commitment to implement those actions. That is a phenomenal piece of work that we're striving for. As Bill mentioned, the goal that we all share is to develop a practical, cost effective plan endorsed by the people living and working in the Puget Sound.

We show many of the species of salmon here on this slide. As you know, the focus of this plan is on Hood Canal summer chum, Chinook and bull trout. But we all want to do this in a way that benefits all species of salmon, not just those three. And all species of nature's creatures benefit as well. We believe that the plan we're developing is going to do that. The objective, as Bill mentioned, and is shared by the state's strategy, many local governments, and the tribes, is also to recover and maintain an abundance of naturally spawning salmon at harvestable levels. That means that they are able to do what they need to do, sustaining themselves over the many years and generations that come. And the way we're doing this is by building on our existing efforts.

One of the great things that we're able to do through this process, because of the wisdom of our past and the wisdom of the people working on this, is look at how we combine our efforts in harvest management, in hatcheries, habitat and other activities, to produce a combined result that is very tangible, and very aggressive in terms of restoring and sustaining our environment and the salmon in it. We are fortunate, really for the first time in my career of 25 years, to be in a place where we can bring all of these things together rather than working on them separately. Although some would ask for more, the Forests and Fish agreement¹ covers a huge part of the landscape, and improves the current protections we have within the state of Washington for the majority of each one of the 14 watersheds in Puget Sound. And the timing that's been committed to by both the state and private industries for restoring the road systems and culverts

¹ Forests & Fish Forever, Washington State ESHB 2091, May 19, 1999

over the next 10 years matches perfectly with what we're striving for in the overall recovery plan.

Growth management is another thing we've committed to in the state of Washington that pays us dividends for the salmon and continues to require us to think smartly about how we can implement it. The Critical Areas Ordinances are a major tool in protecting our existing habitats, both in the fresh and marine waters. We need to look at how we do this over the next year while all local governments in Puget Sound are required to update their programs. There's a phenomenal opportunity for us that has not existed before.

And another one – watershed planning. Looking at both how we provide the water for people and how we provide the water for fish and others of nature's creatures during the same time frame. So we're sitting at a moment in time that I believe has never existed before in Puget Sound; we have all of these efforts that we've been working on across the board, and they can be pulled together in a way that produces results we can be proud of.

Our approach, as most of you know, is to work with the watersheds, and we've been successful because of their success. The recovery plan that we envision will have a chapter for each of the 14 watersheds, as well as one for the marine waters. Those plans, as was mentioned earlier, were first drafted and provided for a combined review last June. They've been revised and approved and updated and refined over the months since that time, and will continue to be over the next few months before we deliver the final recovery plan.

In terms of the plan itself, it's important that we are consistent with the Endangered Species Act. It's also important to be consistent with what we know from our work has to be included in that plan. It needs to address what it takes to achieve recovery. What does it mean to achieve recovery for salmon? What are all of the threats? What are all the causes of decline? And what is necessary to address those? It needs to have measurable goals, not just because that's important for recovery, but we need them to be able to monitor our success and know if we are going down the right track at the right pace in order to get to the finish line we're trying to reach. The plan needs to include the protection and restoration actions that will achieve those goals comprehensively across each watershed and across Puget Sound. It needs to identify what it will cost, both in terms of dollars and in terms of resources to be able to achieve those results. And it needs an implementation strategy. How do we organize ourselves in order to make sure that we're making the progress we need to make on each of these actions, and collectively? And, as I mentioned, our commitments: what are we committed to do? What each group will do, when they will do it, and how well they have to do it, all are going to be part of this plan. And then finally, as Bill mentioned, because it's going to be a plan with some holes in it and we will discover some of them along the way, we need to monitor the environment, monitor our actions, and be prepared to manage to the results that we are seeing. We need to lay that out in the recovery plan.

Two key things are needed to determine whether we've got a plan that works. One is the scientific certainty, and the second is the political certainty. When we think about the science, we are fortunate to have the technical recovery team appointed by NOAA Fisheries, as well as the technical team for the bull trout, tell us what we need to look at specifically: the abundance,

(how many fish); the productivity of the population, (how fast is it growing); the spatial structure, (the distribution of habitat across its historic range); and the diversity of different survival types, (or different ways that these fish grow and go through their lives in order to achieve the end result that they're after, which is the propagation of a next generation). So it's important to think about those things and find measures, both in the long term and in the short term, to know whether we're achieving the certainty of results from the science side.

On the policy or political side, we also need to make sure that we've got measurable goals that we agree to, and that we're all striving to measure them and make sure that those are the things that tell us whether we're being successful or not. We need robust implementation steps and a schedule over time so we can measure our progress, not just at the end point, but each year and each decade as we move forward. We need the decision makers involved, and we're fortunate to have a number of you here today, to look at this issue and say "We have some critical decisions to make." We've done some of the technical work. We've done some of the nuts and bolts analysis over the last three years. It's now time for us to start making some of the policy decisions that elected officials, the tribes, and regional government at the federal and state levels need to make. We need to have realistic cost estimates so we know that we can fund this effort and the commitments for its implementation.

We also know, or at least have a better sense of, what recovery actually means. We know, based upon the science, that if we want sustainable populations of salmon in Puget Sound, all populations and all watersheds have to be improved above their current state. We can't leave any watershed or any population behind. We need to get them all out of their current high risk state to a place where they may not be self-sustaining, but we know how to keep them moving and increasing over time. And we know that low risk for a population means abundance and productivity at 70 to 80 percent of their historical levels. We know that not all of these populations for Chinook, in particular, have to be at that low level of risk, but at least half of them do, and that half needs to be dispersed around Puget Sound so that they're not all subject to the same risks. So these are important criteria for us to think about. All populations, all watersheds have to be improved. Where do we focus to make sure that at least half of them or more are out of high risk as we move forward?

There are many challenges that we face when we think about this. Bill talked about some of them. Salmon are only part of the overall problems affecting Puget Sound. Brad Ack, who is the director of the Puget Sound Action Team, reminded us last week that Puget Sound itself is in trouble. Salmon aren't the only species that are struggling. Orcas are now proposed for listing. We've got toxic waste and contaminated sediments. We have a dying Hood Canal. These are critical issues facing the whole region in addition to salmon recovery that we need to pay attention to. We need numerous efforts to move forward together, but to date we haven't seen the unified public and political support to stem the decline. We've done a lot of great things, but not at the pace necessary to stop the decline, turn it around, and increase the productivity and the health of this environment. And we're going to face more people, which will challenge us to be able to do this. The expected growth in the Puget Sound region by 2010 is to increase by 1.4 million more people, adding to our existing population of 3.8 million. That is a huge number of people to accommodate, and we need to think about how we can do that so that we also protect and increase the quality and the health of our environment.

These are big challenges. But one of the greatest things that I'm able to stand up here today and say is that the watersheds are delivering on our hopes. Bill and Billy are passionate advocates for democracy. That's really what they're both about. How does a free society govern itself? And what we're seeing here in the Shared Strategy is exactly that. As Bill mentioned, it's a voluntary process. All of us are here because we care about it and we want to make a difference. I want to just stop for a moment and recognize all of you who are working directly within a watershed or the Puget Sound marine waters in terms of drafting a plan, organizing the meetings, doing the science, helping make those improvements through voluntary efforts. All of you that recognize that's what you're doing, please stand at this moment and be recognized. [Applause]

It's because of you that we're able to stand here and say that we're on the threshold of a great success in terms of putting this plan together. You have identified the causes of decline, the threats and the necessary actions, and you are developing focus in your plans – looking out long term, but also, looking for how we make a difference in this next decade that really moves salmon forward in a substantial way. You're prioritizing the most important projects, like in the Green River, focusing on protecting the middle part of the Green, protecting current spawning habitats and expanding that where possible, and looking at how we can help the transition zone as they go out into Elliott Bay. This is currently a bottleneck. Those kinds of prioritized and focused actions are what are going to move us forward in terms of making a difference in the next 10 years. And we also have, really for the first time, the ability through science to predict and tie major actions to improvements for fish. What will it take in terms of improving the transition zone, and what will that mean in terms of the productivity and abundance of fish? This is a tool that we've never had before. It's got its warts and its kinks, but if we monitor its use, it's a tool that can be very successful in helping us tell the public, "Here's what we get if you make these decisions and these commitments." And you're also identifying what it will take in terms of money, so that we can go to those decisions makers and say, "This is what it takes. Now we need to make some decisions."

There's some very interesting and, I think, cool things happening in these watersheds. The removal of barriers. In the next 10 years, we will take down the two dams on the Elwha River. That is phenomenal. [Applause] Bob Kelly and his colleagues in the Nooksack are looking at a way to remove a dam on the Middle Fork that will automatically increase the number of fish in that system by 15 percent. That is phenomenal. [Applause] And we're looking at culverts across the area to see which ones will produce the most benefit if we fix them so fish can go up into the habitat they have not been able to use for many, many years. I think one of the most amazing things that we're seeing is that we're taking the confinements or the constraints off of the rivers in places where it's safe to do so and protect people at the same time.

What John Ladenburg did not talk about as much as I think he should've, because he deserves a lot of credit, as well as his staff, is that on the Puyallup River above Orting, they have spent the last number of years removing dykes and levies and allowing the river to do what it needs to do, which is to breathe and move according to its natural cycles. That is enormously helpful in creating the kind of habitat fish need. And, as John told us the other day when we met with the editorial board at the Tacoma paper, we haven't had any flooding in the last two years, while our neighbors to the north and to the south have. That's because this same action not only helps fish,

but it helps people by allowing water to be stored in nature's own way. And it's not limited to just the Puyallup. There are very significant proposals to occur in the next 10 years in the Dungeness, the Cedar, the Nooksack and many other rivers in Puget Sound where we're taking the constraints off in a smart way so that we don't harm people, but we allow nature to do its thing, and allow rivers to breathe.

The protection of marine and freshwater habitats. Probably one of the most important things to do at this point in time to make sure that we stem the decline, is to make sure that we protect what we've got. Seventy percent of the watersheds are in long-term resource management in Puget Sound, and 30 percent are the focus area for human habitation. That's significant. If you think about what we've done over decades, we have created the national forests and the national park system, to protect those vital areas of the upper watersheds. We have laws on the books, the toughest in the United States, for the management of forest practices to improve the quality in habitat in our managed forest lands, and we have the agricultural community working to improve the benefits that can be achieved as those rivers go and flow and meander through their properties. That's 70 percent of the landscape in Puget Sound. The tough challenges are, how are we going to accommodate people in that remaining 30 percent and protect what habitat is still vital in those areas? Implementation of the Forests and Fish agreement is but one of the things we need to do, as we will talk about later in the breakout sessions: strategies and incentives for agriculture to improve their ability to contribute to this effort must be created, and we must update the growth management and Critical Areas Ordinances as I mentioned earlier. And as the spill earlier this year showed us, we have to really continue to be vigilant about how we protect against catastrophic events – oil spills in Puget Sound. These efforts are hard, they are controversial, but they are specific proposals in the watershed plans on how and what we need to do to achieve this protection, and they're critical to accomplish in the short term timeframe of this next decade.

As the first installment of the video showed, we have altered the landscape in parts of Puget Sound dramatically. But as John and the mayor of Tacoma mentioned, we have committed to cleaning up the toxic waste and the contaminated sediments. We need to continue to do that. These plans need to be a continued voice to achieve those improvements, to improve the water quality and the quality of the habitat in those very urban and developed areas. We'll not be able to restore them to historic kinds of functioning, but we can definitely make them safer for passage as the salmon go through those areas.

Working with market forces is another part of what we're seeing in these watershed plans, rather than against economic forces. How do we create a sustainable agricultural system that benefits us and the environment? The farming community in Puget Sound is as threatened as the salmon, and we need to make sure that we save it as we save salmon. For stewardship, the creative ideas of Cascade Land Conservancy and others to create sustainable long term stewardship of these forest lands is something that we need to get behind and promote throughout all of Puget Sound. And we must promote restoration as an economic resource. I think one of the most creative ideas, Terry Williams, thanks to you and Dale Reiner and others which I'll acknowledge later this evening, is for turning waste, cow manure, into a commodity for the environment. Phenomenal. And where do we have a tribe supporting a doubling of a dairy herd in a watershed for environmental benefit? It's a phenomenal idea, and it's going to be successful.

And land development. How do we use the fact that this is a cherished place to live? How do we use the values of land in a way that helps us conserve it, rather than works against our conservation? This is another question that we'll be talking up this afternoon, and is important to our future.

Estuaries are one of the most important parts of the salmon life cycle, especially for Chinook. We are blessed, at one time, to have major estuaries in each of our river basins in Puget Sound. This recovery plan, and the proposals that our people are making in the watersheds across Puget Sound, will restore and create new estuarine habitat at a level and a magnitude that we've never seen before in this region. The Nisqually has led the way, introducing significant new estuarine habitat—places, not just for juvenile fish, but also for birds and many other species of wildlife to live and to prosper throughout their life cycle. But we're also seeing very significant proposals that would occur in the next 10 years in the Dungeness, potentially the Skokomish, the Snohomish, and close by in the Cedar and in other watersheds. And these won't just be areas out away from people. In the case of the Snohomish, the proposal is to add 1,500 acres of estuary in the next 10 years, adjacent to the city of Everett. My hope is that, in 10 years or 20 years, people from Seattle will go to Everett to bird watch. It'll be a phenomenal benefit to all of us to have these resources restored, not just for the salmon, but for all of the things that we care about.

So my sense, from looking at these plans, is that the combined efforts of hatchery, harvest, and habitat efforts could increase the capacity to support salmon by 20 percent in the next 10 years. That is amazing, when you think about it—that it took 100 or more years to create this decline, and if we put our commitment behind it, in 10 years, we can increase the capacity of this environment to support them by 20 percent above what it is currently. The fish response will take longer because it will take some time for those improvements to take root and benefit the fish in generations of using that habitat, but it's our responsibility to do it. It's within our power to do it. We will likely require a doubling of our current efforts, both in terms of money and the commitment of resources to accomplish it. But the next 10 years is critical to achieve this, to get ahead of the growth that I mentioned, the 1.4 million people that will be moving here, and to take advantage of the current favorable ocean conditions. If we build these homes, these places where the fish can live and thrive, and improve it at that magnitude, I believe we're on the road to recovery. And we have the opportunity before us.

As Larry Phillips and many others remind us, this is a region that has done this in the past. Lake Washington was cleaned up by people who wanted to swim in the lake. Not because there was an Endangered Species Act, and not because there was federal funding, but because it didn't make sense to us to have a lake next to where we live that was so polluted we couldn't let our children go in it. We have a history of doing these kinds of things, and this is the challenge of our time: to recover the salmon in a way that benefits the overall resource. As I mentioned, the time frame is perfect. The science has improved. We have, as you witnessed today, representatives that are here, the commitment of local communities and the interest of elected officials. And, probably the most important factor, the public cares about the environment in this region, and about economic priorities and prosperity. As Bill mentioned, we don't see that as an either/or choice, but something that we have to have both of.

So our goal with this effort is one region, one strategy, one plan. Shared Strategy with the watersheds, developing a comprehensive plan that sets regional priorities. In the next six months, we propose to achieve agreement on how we will spend money over the next 10 years and distribute it over each watershed, to make sure that all watersheds improve, to make sure that there's a financing plan to achieve that expenditure, and that there's an implementation structure to do that. The comprehensive plan will benefit us because it gives a unified approach to the legislature and congress for funding, it gives us a rational, cost-effective approach to recovery, and gives us the certainty and stability that we want for our region in terms of this environment and in terms of our economy.

So, my sense is that if we do this, the fish in this picture will become very bright, and many of its brethren will be joining it in the future. And if we do this, we can achieve the vision of a Shared Strategy: together, we can create a future in which both people and salmon coexist and thrive for many generations into the future. Thank you for listening to that brief overview. [Applause]