

# **Puget Sound Partnership 2008 Three Year Work Program Update San Juan County Watershed (WRIA 2)**

## Introduction

In April 2008, each of the fourteen watersheds submitted three-year work program updates on accomplishments, status of actions, and proposed actions that built on the 2006 and 2007 three-year work programs. 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. The 2008 Three-Year Work Program Update is the last of the first three years for implementation since the Recovery Plan was finalized in 2005. As salmon recovery in the Puget Sound is now part of the Puget Sound Partnership's legislative responsibility, the Puget Sound Partnership will perform an assessment of the development and review of these work programs in order to be as effective as possible in the coming years.

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 Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team (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 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 2008 work program updates

Factors to be considered by the Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team in performing its technical review of the Update:

- a. Is the Update consistent with the recovery plan hypotheses and strategy for the watershed's work program?
- b. Is the sequencing and timing of the action in your updated three-year work program appropriate?
- c. Are there significant components missing from the work program? If so, what is missing and what can be done about them in the three-year work program update or at a regional scale?

Watersheds were also provided with the following seven questions, answers to which the Recovery Council Work Group and the Partnership salmon recovery watershed liaisons assessed in performing their policy review of the three-year work program

1. Is the work program consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 documents, Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan Volume I, Watershed Profiles – Results section, NMFS Supplement, as well as the regional Nearshore Chapter, where applicable?

2. Is the work program tied to the identified three-year objectives and scheduled to proceed at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed's ten-year goals?
3. Is the work program narrative tightly linked to individual projects and priorities?
4. Do programmatic actions address protection objectives?
5. To what extent are habitat, harvest and habitat actions integrated and included in the work program?
6. How is the capacity to implement the updated three-year work program addressed?
7. What are the three-year work program objectives and how well does the updated program address them? This includes:
  - Improves the level and certainty of protection of habitat and the 22 existing Chinook populations;
  - Preserves options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU;
  - Ensures habitat protection and restoration and restores ecosystem processes for Chinook; and
  - Advances the coordinated/integrated management of habitat, harvest, and hatchery.

## **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 early June 2008. Three primary questions were addressed along with additional regional questions. The questions and the RITT's review comments are below.

### **San Juan County Watershed**

The RITT reviewed updates to fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work programs in May 2008. Three questions were addressed. The questions and RITT's review comments on the San Juan (WRIA 2) three-year work program are below.

*1. Is the Update consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for the watershed's Work Program? (The 'work program' includes hypotheses and strategies in the Puget Sound Recovery Plan, including the watershed plan, TRT review comments and NOAA Supplement comments)*

Yes, the San Juan 3-year work program is mostly consistent with the overall plan for WRIA 2. The plan states that their priority strategies are assessment and protection (i.e., "Tier 1") and then restoration (i.e., "Tier 2"). The primary emphasis in the 3-year work program is on assessment and restoration projects, and there is not much included that pertains to protection. The approach WRIA 2 has adopted relies on learning from assessments so that priority areas can be identified for protection or restoration. The relative lack of attention to protection strategies in the near term appears to be inconsistent with the overall approach outlined in the Recovery Plan. For example, the protection-related activities mentioned in the 3-year work program are listed below:

- Spatially explicit analysis of major shoreline permit activity
- San Juan Initiative

- CAO update participation
- Instream flow protection

The narrative for the work program states that the level of involvement in instream flow protection and CAO updates are relatively minor (e.g., reviewing documents), and it is not clear how the spatially explicit analyses or San Juan Initiative will change what the WRIA does for protection strategies. These activities all are worthwhile, but the capacity for ensuring the products are good and then thinking through how to implement them to improve protection for the WRIA 2 watersheds and nearshore makes the outcomes uncertain.

The list of potential and ‘in-the-pipeline’ restoration projects is good. As the WRIA group knows, restoration as a strategy is not as certain and is very expensive, so it is hard to say what benefits will come from their projects. The purpose of the 3-year work plan is to have a comprehensive list of what can be started within 3 years. As the work program states, H-integration—especially hatchery fish use of nearshore—is important to understand.

*2. Is the sequencing and timing of the actions in your Updated 3-Year Work Program appropriate for this third full year of implementation of the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan?*

Yes, the strategy outlined in the 3-year work program—including assessments and protection projects first, and then restoration—is appropriate. The actual order in which actions in the 3-year work program will be implemented is not as clear, and it is possible that because of capacity and funding being more available for the restoration projects that the “Tier 2” projects will be implemented ahead of “Tier 1”. This financial and capacity conundrum is probably a general phenomenon in work programs, and would be worth further discussion.

The *Blueprint* document contains a complete list of identified projects for the WRIA 2 plan, but additional projects are likely to be necessary for salmon recovery. The authors point out that in general, the current work program is more comprehensive than what can be started or completed in 3 years, especially as funding is not available for all of the work.

The three-year plan does point out that implementation of habitat recovery actions has fallen short of planned pace in some areas, mainly due to funding shortfalls. This plan does a very nice job of illustrating that problem, the specific areas where the shortfalls are occurring. As a result of this, the watershed will be able to make a credible case for the funding necessary to implement this plan at the needed pace.

*3. Are there significant components missing from the work program? If so, what are these and what can be done about them in the three-year work program update or at a regional scale?*

The watershed group has done an excellent job with the staff capacity it has to outline an excellent conceptual model with clearly stated hypotheses, strategies, and implementation check points. The next step is to move beyond the general conceptual model and the quantitative modeling and assessments that are being conducted in the San Juans and to think through how

those translate more explicitly into actions. Future restoration projects deemed to be high priority in WRIA 2 need to be specifically justified based on results from assessments.

The major missing components are capacity and funding to carry out the work outlined.

### *Partnership Questions*

#### *1. Improve the level and certainty of protection for habitat and the 22 existing populations.*

See comments above—protection strategies are highlighted as high priority, but given the capacity in the WRIA 2 group, they may not in fact be getting as much attention as assessments and restoration projects. Assessment work may be able to be more focused—for example, it would make a lot of sense to design habitat and forage fish monitoring to complement San Juan Initiative, yet that is not evident in this plan. Thinking through how monitoring that is being conducted will feed into protection or restoration strategies and how actions will be changed is very important.

#### *2. Preserve options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU?*

The work program preserves options for the future role of the San Juan nearshore habitats as supporting several populations within the ESU.

#### *3. Ensure protection and restoration preserves and restores ecosystem processes for Chinook salmon?*

It will be important to know what help WRIA 2 need from us (the RITT or PSP) to significantly advance on protection approaches, certainty—in the meanwhile learning more about fish habitat use and relative importance of protecting intact habitats. Currently, WRIA staff resources appear to be focused on developing and working out restoration projects because that is where funding is available. How can we get more capacity focused on protection strategies and how to significantly advance them?

#### *4. High level of protection and restoration of ecosystem processes for multi-species?*

The whole San Juan Plan is based on the notion that several populations of Chinook salmon and other salmonids rear and forage in the nearshore habitats of the San Juan archipelago. The assessment, protection and restoration strategies are focused on those habitats, and thus the plan is consistent with an ecosystem approach.

#### *5. Advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery, and habitat*

San Juan County has not been directly involved in harvest or hatchery management. They are open to considering ways for them to ensure that their habitat work is consistent with, and complements, the hatchery and harvest management in the region. The WRIA 2 recovery plan should acknowledge the existing hatchery programs for Chinook and coho, so that assessing their impacts on salmon recovery is not forgotten as part of future work.

## II. Policy Review Comments

The Recovery Council Work Group, an interdisciplinary policy team, evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. In addressing the questions identified above, the interdisciplinary team noted accomplishments and strengths as well as gaps and issues warranting special attention. The team assessed each of the watersheds' three-year work plans, as well as the general themes that applied across the region. The general comments addressing common accomplishments and opportunities for advancement are discussed below as well as specific comments for the San Juan County watershed.

### **General Comments for 2008 Three-Year Work Program Updates**

The 2008 watershed three-year work program updates reflect advancement in terms of project and programmatic identification. Watersheds received capital and non-capital funding through the 2007 biennial budget process, providing a significant increase in resources relative to previous years. Despite these gains, both in funds and in work program, many of the watersheds continue to have gaps, to varying degrees, that were identified in the NOAA supplement as well as the 2006 and 2007 work program reviews. Regional assistance to the watershed planning and implementation teams will be needed to address how best to fill the needs identified below.

*Work Plan Accomplishments, Status Updates, Sequencing and Prioritization:* As identified in 2007, work program updates are a useful tool for defining progress toward recovery plan goals and ESU-wide recovery. Narratives should continue to be refined to provide a sharper focus on what each watershed expects to accomplish within the three-year period. These narratives should also document what projects have been successfully completed, what programmatic actions are underway, and how successful the watershed has been in implementing the previous year's work plan. This includes documenting how the funds of the previous year are being applied for both on-the-ground projects and capacity within the watersheds.

Work program updates can be strengthened by providing a more focused description of how needed recovery projects and actions are identified, developed, prioritized and sequenced. It is also important that the narrative provide sufficient information to enable watershed teams and regional reviewers to determine whether the pace of implementation is appropriate to achieve each watershed's ten-year goals and if not, to be able to identify the types of changes necessary to get them on pace. This can include information on adaptive management, status updates on actions, and monitoring data.

*Integrated Management of Habitat, Harvest and Hatcheries:* All Puget Sound watersheds' work programs would benefit from additional efforts and regional resources to achieve H-Integration. Several watersheds advanced their understanding and application of the six steps of H-Integration during 2007 through the strong support of co-manager resources. It is noteworthy that there is a strong connection between full co-manager engagement within the watershed context and significant progress toward salmon recovery implementation. By the end of 2008, it is anticipated all watersheds with Chinook populations will be engaged in actions that reflect an integrated management of habitat, harvest, and hatcheries for Chinook recovery. The Puget

Sound Partnership and RITT liaisons will continue to assist those watersheds without independent Chinook populations to integrate management and capacity of the nearshore to sustain natural and hatchery-origin populations of all salmonids. As integration advances, it will be important for each watershed to document how their actions are integrated and advancing in the work programs.

*Monitoring and Adaptive Management:* At the end of 2007, Shared Strategy staff along with a work group of technical experts completed a regional draft monitoring and adaptive management plan. The completion of this draft plan included a workshop and a gathering of comments on the plan. Since the completion of this draft plan, the Puget Sound Partnership has officially assumed responsibility for completing a regional adaptive management and monitoring plan, including the monitoring of fish populations and the tracking of implementation and effectiveness of actions identified in the Chinook Recovery Plan. At the regional scale, several actions have been initiated to advance adaptive management, including: 1) a pilot program directed at developing an implementation tracking system at both the watershed and regional scale; 2) a status and trends approach for Washington State, which includes directed resources for the Puget Sound; and 3) an accountability system to identify and hold responsible the appropriate entities at the local, regional, state, and federal levels.

Some watersheds have already begun developing their own monitoring and adaptive management frameworks and initial monitoring tasks. The regional team working on the diverse aspects of adaptive management will coordinate with those watersheds to ensure that the monitoring and adaptive management plans are consistent and complementary. During this transitional time, the Puget Sound Partnership staff, the work group, and the RITT acknowledge that they play an important role in providing assistance to all of the Puget Sound watersheds to advance in their development, refinement, and implementation of an adaptive management and monitoring approach. This is important in order to enable watersheds and the region to assess progress in reducing uncertainties in the population and ESU-wide recovery.

*Protecting and restoring ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options and addressing threats* are critical components of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. The Chinook Recovery Plan is predicated on the assumption that existing habitat will be protected. Regional work to assess this assumption and to strengthen the regulatory framework is underway through the San Juan Initiative and through the Action Agenda work of the Puget Sound Partnership. Initial findings and recommendations from the San Juan Initiative are expected by the end of 2008. The Action Agenda will be completed by December 2008.

Recovery actions are continuing to become more complex and expensive. All watersheds are challenged in terms of their capacity to acquire land in order to secure future options and to implement large-scale, multi-year projects. It will be important for watersheds to coordinate and partner with other groups, organizations, and agencies locally and regionally to increase capacity and enhance their ability to successfully identify and implement habitat acquisition and restoration efforts. Increased capacity for the key participants in watershed recovery efforts is essential to successfully implement their recovery chapters and protect and restore the ecosystem processes that Chinook and other species require. The Puget Sound Partnership staff and the work group members acknowledge that additional efforts will be needed at the regional scale to

assist in securing on-going resources for the watershed groups to protect and restore ecosystem processes.

*Water quality and Water quantity:* Water quality and water quantity will continue to be important issues for the long-term recovery of all populations within the ESU.

Work on water quality issues is associated with both urban and rural sources. The authority to address these sources is within the purview of the Washington State Department of Ecology and is primarily being addressed through the NPDES permit program, the establishment of TMDLs under the Clean Water Act, and the Forest Practice Rules. It is important to apply these programs and resources in a manner that supports the watershed groups and advances the recovery of salmon in their areas. It is recognized that emerging water quality threats to the health of Puget Sound (e.g. endocrine disruptors) are not adequately addressed under current regulatory regimes and significant new resources are needed to identify and resolve these threats. Watersheds continue to play an important role in ensuring that local jurisdictions implementing these permits adopt water quality programs that include actions and regulations that protect and enhance water quality in rivers and streams critical for salmon recovery.

Work on water quantity issues is also important at both the regional and local watershed scale. At the regional level, the Water Quantity Sub-Committee, coordinated by the Washington State Department of Ecology, is working on advancing the science on instream flows and viable salmon populations (VSP). In May of 2008, the Water Quantity Sub-Committee held an instream flow and VSP workshop to discuss the current state of instream flow/VSP science and flow assessment tools, and to identify and develop a future science agenda for instream flow/VSP work over the next five to 10 years. The workshop also focused on trying to determine the appropriate scale for flow assessment tools and VSP concepts. Additionally, the impacts of climate change will need to be assessed and integrated into salmon recovery planning on a regional scale.

Locally, watershed groups can help move these issues forward in a manner that reflects their priorities for salmon recovery. Each watershed should consider (1) advocating for appropriate instream flow rules in places where they are needed; and (2) working with the Department of Ecology to begin creating protection and enhancement programs (PEPs) in areas where instream flows hinder the recovery of fish populations.

The RITT and the Puget Sound Partnership liaisons will continue to assist watersheds in advancing water quantity and water quality actions.

*Nearshore Habitats and Processes:* There continues to be a need to advance our understanding of nearshore habitats and processes associated with Chinook recovery. Several nearshore fish presence assessments were funded through the 2007 biennial budget and SRFB round. These assessments are a crucial step in advancing our knowledge of salmonid use of the nearshore and nearshore processes. The Puget Sound Partnership and RITT liaisons recognize the need to support these watersheds in translating the assessments into protection and restoration projects. The Puget Sound Partnership and the work group also acknowledge that we need to increase the scientific certainty regarding sequencing and prioritizing which nearshore areas to protect across

the Puget Sound. Finally, we need to develop a standardized framework to not only monitor nearshore fish presence, but to also assess fish utilization of those areas.

*Multi-species planning:* The Puget Sound Steelhead were listed in May 2007 and a NOAA-appointed Technical Review Team (TRT) is working to define the population and habitat criteria for the listing. This information is anticipated to be available in March 2009. The Puget Sound watersheds will play an instrumental role in sequencing and prioritizing actions across multiple species in order to gain the highest ecosystem benefit. NOAA, the co-managers, and the watersheds are currently discussing options for Puget Sound Steelhead recovery planning. It is expected that the planning process will be defined by the end of 2008. Resources are needed to support the watersheds in steelhead planning over the next several years.

## **San Juans (WRIA 2) Watershed-Specific Comments**

### **Significant Advancements**

- The 2008 Work Program continues to advance on a clear suite of actions with protection as the highest priority, including the funding of assessment projects that will refine the area's understanding of what areas are most important to protect;
- Identification of actions across all of the h's, including the beginning of participation in harvest management discussions;
- Successful funding of eight significant projects through the 2007 Biennial budget and SRFB 2007 round, including the Big Picture Project and the Deer Harbor estuary habitat restoration project;
- Continued clarification and description of the roles that the Lead Entity program plays in San Juan County through both capital and non-capital actions.

### **Issues Needing Advancement**

- There is a continued need for resources and capacity support in order to advance the implementation of salmon recovery across the San Juan County watershed. This includes funding for projects and for staff support;
- Continued need for refining and implementing protection actions;
- Funding for monitoring and adaptive management, including contaminant monitoring.