

A shared strategy for endangered salmon

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Saving endangered salmon is a bit like picking up the house. There's no single, grand solution. It's a room-by-room affair, and it works a lot better when the kids clean up their own messes.

That's the virtue of the new Puget Sound salmon-recovery plan, which has just been tentatively endorsed by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The product of intense regional collaboration, it's not a decree handed down by the federal government.

It was developed by local stakeholders under the auspices of a nonprofit umbrella organization, Shared Strategy for Puget Sound. Key early leadership came from former Gov. Dan Evans, Indian fisheries leader Billy Frank and former EPA chief William Ruckelshaus.

The plan is as comprehensive as the problem it seeks to solve. Runs of wild chinook salmon are at risk of extinction (or have already gone extinct) through much of the vast watershed that drains into Washington's inland marine waters.

Over the last few years, Shared Strategy coordinated salmon-recovery efforts within 14 watersheds – including the Puyallup and Nisqually rivers – and then pulled it all together into a 502-page plan for rebuilding the region's chinook runs.

The fundamental idea – the “shared strategy” – was to come up with something that would work for all affected interests, including cities and counties, farming, forestry, Indian fisheries, federal biologists, environmentalists and the 1 million-plus additional people who are going to be living in the region 15 years from now.

The plan, which would cost \$120 million a year for the next decade, will require changes in real estate development, fishing, logging, farming, logging and just about every other aspect of life in the 14 watersheds.

These sacrifices will be spread far and wide, but all the parties involved in the planning are behind the finished product.

This is far better than a plan devised in Washington, D.C., which would probably have been fought as too draconian by industries or else as too lax by environmentalists.

The continuing dispute over salmon recovery in the Columbia and Snake rivers is an obvious contrast. There, salmon plans advanced by the Clinton and Bush administrations have been repeatedly challenged in court and rejected by federal judges. Those plans did not – like Shared Strategy – reflect a regional consensus born of long negotiations.

Shared Strategy is more than a Puget Sound plan. It's likely to become a model for other regions of how to do salmon recovery right.

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