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Area's salmon strategy wins praise

14 miniregions around the Sound contribute to plan

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By ROBERT MCCLURE

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

Six years after Puget Sound chinook salmon won legal protection under the Endangered Species Act, the region is telling the federal government what people here plan to do to save the imperiled fish.

Surprisingly -- considering the seemingly never-ending fights over salmon that go on around here -- the long-range strategy unveiled yesterday drew cautious applause from builders, environmentalists and nearly everyone in between.

It calls for enlisting private property owners, fishermen and many others in a collaborative effort to save the icon of the Northwest -- and doubling the \$60 million a year currently spent to save salmon in the region.

What distinguishes this effort and similar ones around the Pacific Northwest from endangered-species rescue plans elsewhere in the country is the deliberate bottom-up approach, supporters say. The document sent to the federal government includes a compilation of plans drawn up by 14 Puget Sound miniregions, each a little different.

"This is the next stage of democracy -- really getting people to figure out how they accomplish something together when they have different interests," said Jim Kramer, executive director of Shared Strategy for Puget Sound, the group set up to coordinate the 14 watersheds' efforts. "People said: We want to control our destiny on this. We don't want to have the federal government impose this."

The plan aims to boost salmon populations by 20 percent over the next 15 years by requiring improvements in a number of areas, including:

- Providing enough water for fish to live -- meaning not taking out too much for human needs.
- Making sure fish aren't cut off by dams, roads and other blockages from streams where they spawn.
- Restoring places where salt and fresh water mix at the edge of the Sound, known as estuaries, where young salmon find food and hide from predators as they prepare to go to sea.
- Protecting wetlands and floodplains alongside rivers, which absorb floodwaters and give young fish a place to hang out during floods.

- Carefully managing the amount of salmon caught.
- Rejiggering the operation of salmon hatcheries so they don't harm wild fish.

"Protection is a more certain strategy than restoration because we know that untrammelled habitats are more likely to support species," the plan says. "In contrast, restoration approaches are relatively untested, especially at large scales."

The plan goes for approval to the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- agencies that were glad to see locals taking charge.

"These recovery plans, including the one put together by Shared Strategy, are very tied to the local needs and local perceptions and local peculiarities, not only political but also biological and geographical," said Brian Gorman, spokesman for the Fisheries Service.

He said Puget Sound chinook "presents one of the most problematic recovery plans that we have" because of development and population growth. While about 3.8 million people live in the Puget Sound region now, 1.4 million more are expected by 2020.

Developers are on board. But looming large in the background is the ongoing debate over development in rural areas.

"We can lean too heavily toward environmental issues without also taking into account affordable housing, which is obviously a problem in our region," said Tim Attebery, a lobbyist with the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties.

Environmentalists said the plans are great -- but they're looking for performance. Connie Kelleher, associate director of the Seattle office of American Rivers, said most plans say too little about how to leave water in streams for fish. "We are really encouraged they are working on putting together this voluntary effort," she said, but added, "What we'd like to see is actual commitments by those putting these plans forward."

TO HELP SALMON

Although governments make big plans to help salmon, they ask citizens to take these steps right away:

- In your yard: Use fewer pesticides. Use less water. Landscape using native plants. Clean up pet waste.
- On your driveway: Reduce polluted storm water by fixing oil leaks. Don't wash your car on the street -- use a car wash or put the vehicle on the lawn.
- At the water's edge: Protect stream banks and beach bluffs by keeping them naturally vegetated. If you install erosion control, find out about "soft" armoring other than riprap or bulkheads. Keep livestock out of the water.
- In your home: Conserve water. Install low-flow shower heads, faucets and toilet.
- In the community: Volunteer to plant trees, count salmon, restore streams and shorelines. Many groups provide opportunities, including Adopt-A-Stream Foundation,

425-316-8592 or aasf@streamkeeper.org; and People for Puget Sound, people@pugetsound.org or 206-382-7007.

P-I reporter Robert McClure can be reached at 206-448-8092 or robertmcclure@seattlepi.com

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