

Shared Strategy for Puget Sound Comments on April 2006 Three Year Work Plan Elwha/Dungeness (North Olympic Peninsula)

Introduction

In April, 2006, watersheds submitted three-year work programs that would enable them to get on a recovery trajectory in the first three years of implementation. The work plans were reviewed by the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team (TRT) and the Shared Strategy Interdisciplinary Policy Team.

This feedback is intended to assist your watershed as you refine your three-year work program and continue with implementation of your recovery plan. The feedback will also be used by the TRT and Shared Strategy Work Group to inform the development of the regional work program. A summary of watersheds' work programs was developed by Shared Strategy staff to stimulate discussion on recovery objectives to determine what the best investments are for salmon recovery over the next three years.

Objectives provided as guidance for the development of work programs

The following objectives were provided as guidance to watersheds in the development of the work programs. The Shared Strategy Work Group and TRT developed the objectives pursuant to consultation with watershed implementation leads and the Recovery Council.

- Improve the level and certainty of protection for habitat
- Protect the twenty two existing Chinook populations by beginning to address the most immediate and potentially greatest threats that could cause populations to decline in this timeframe
- Preserve options for increasing ESU diversity
- Restore ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options for habitat restoration, and by addressing the most immediate and potentially greatest threats in
 - estuarines
 - mainstem
 - upper watershed
 - freshwater tributaries and nearshore
 - water quality and quantity
- Advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery and habitat to address the most immediate and potentially greatest threats
- Continue to expand and deepen individual and community support for key priorities
- Develop and implement adaptive management and monitoring program
 - monitoring
 - accountability system for evaluation and decision making

- Build capacity in each watershed to implement the full breadth of prioritized programs and projects needed to get on a recovery trajectory in the first three years
- Support multi-species

I. Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review

The TRT reviewed fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work plans in May 2006. Three questions were addressed. The TRT's responses to the three questions and review comments on objectives for the Elwha/Dungeness (North Olympic) work program are below.

1. Is the work program consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for their watershed? (The 'work program' includes hypotheses and strategies in the larger plan, including watershed plan, TRT review comments and NOAA Supplement comments).

The work program overall is quite consistent with the strategy and the TRT comments on the strategy. Despite the separation of restoration components into separate basins and nearshore components, on the whole, the projects and priorities match the watershed hypotheses and restoration priorities.

The Dungeness components are exceptionally well described, relating directly to the objectives identified in the 10-year plan and directly addressing specific TRT comments concerning integration of the Hs in restoration planning.

The WRIAs 18 and 19, and nearshore components also address some of the primary issues listed in the strategy, namely estuaries, riparian areas, and access to freshwater habitats.

The WRIA 19 elements did an excellent job of describing why actions in that watershed area are important to the Puget Sound recovery plan

2. Is the sequencing and timing of the work program appropriate for the first 3 years of implementation?

The work program provided an excellent discussion of the overall goals and sequencing and how the three-year action plan relates to the overall plan. The project elements appear generally appropriate. An early focus on protecting existing habitat is consistent with the short-term planning horizon.

The proposed Dungeness Chinook population analysis addresses one of the key concerns raised in the TRT comments, specifically, whether hatchery and harvest issues may inhibit recovery of Chinook populations despite habitat restoration.

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

It does not appear that any significant components are missing in the work program. Perhaps the most significant gap is that the plan does not appear to directly address substantial uncertainties surrounding the role of harvest and hatcheries in the NOBLE ecosystem and their potential to inhibit recovery of naturally spawning Chinook salmon populations (with the exception of the Dungeness population analysis). A substantial effort focused on a comprehensive (NOBLE-wide) evaluation of the H-Integration questions would increase certainty that habitat actions will significantly improve Chinook populations.

Expansion of the Dungeness population analysis to all of the NOBLE area would be beneficial.

WRIA 19 or overall NOBLE could benefit from the development of more detailed hypotheses on how Puget Sound Chinook and Hood Canal summer chum may utilize the western straits nearshore habitats. For example, the Pysht River estuary is large enough that it may serve as a non-natal rearing area for multiple stocks.

Comments on how well the work program addresses objectives

1. Improve the level and certainty of protection for habitat and the twenty-two existing Chinook populations.
2. Preserve options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU
3. Ensure protection and restoration preserves and restores ecosystem processes for Chinook.
4. Advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery and habitat

This work programs works toward these four objectives by focusing a substantial amount of actions and efforts on protecting existing habitat, thereby addressing each of the four objectives more directly.

It is important that the watershed recovery team continue to review the May 2005 Technical Gap Analysis to ensure that uncertainties are addressed in the adaptive management plan and work program refinements.

II. Policy Review Comments

The Shared Strategy Interdisciplinary Policy Team evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. The following questions guided the evaluation of the work plans.

1. Is the work program consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 documents (“Watershed Policy Feedback Summaries”; Recovery Plan December 2005, Volume I, Watershed Profiles results sections; and NOAA’s federal supplement published in the Federal Register on Dec. 16, 2005)?
2. Is the work program tied to the objectives identified at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed’s ten-year goals?
3. Are there significant elements missing and how might these be addressed?

The interdisciplinary policy review team noted strengths of the Elwha/Dungeness (North Olympic) work program as well as gaps and special issues warranting attention. Specific

comments are provided below, followed by a short discussion of elements common to all watersheds.

Comments and special issues

The narrative provides a good discussion of sequencing, but additional efforts should be expended on project prioritization.

WRIA 19 will benefit from additional development of hypotheses which support a strategy which results in actions. It is acknowledged that this will require increased capacity at the watershed level.

Additional technical support and nearshore linkage to regional work is needed.

Given the supposition that it provides significant rearing habitat for Puget Sound Chinook, the recovery planning team is urged to consider additional work on the Pysht River.

Elements in common with other watershed work programs

All Puget Sound watersheds' work program refinements and recovery plan implementation activities will benefit from additional efforts to achieve H-Integration and the development of an adaptive management plan. Protecting and restoring ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options and addressing threats is a critical component of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. Strengthening the capacity to implement needed actions and to expand and deepen support for recovery program objectives is an important need in all Puget Sound watersheds. Recommendations to stimulate discussions on how to achieve these objectives are contained in a Shared Strategy document entitled "Watershed Work Plans related to Key Puget Sound Recovery Objectives", available on the Shared Strategy web site.