

San Juan (WRIA 2)

Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review

September 28, 2006

The TRT reviewed fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work programs in May 2006. Three questions were addressed. The questions and TRT's review comments on the San Juan Islands (WRIA 2) three-year work program are below.

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

Yes, the work program narrative overview is consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for the watershed and reflects the considerable effort the watershed has spent revising and focusing watershed hypotheses and protection and restoration strategies based on input from the TRT and others. The overview reflects this advancement in focus. However, the project matrix appears to carry forward some projects not framed up in the overview and of lesser immediate priority. For example, there are a number of restoration projects in the matrix that are given the highest priority ranking. This conflicts with the narrative's priority for protection, filling of information gaps, and developing capacity and consensus for habitat protection.

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

In general, the conceptual sequencing and timing of the actions in the work program narrative are appropriate. The program places a priority on protection of intact, functioning habitat and improvement of information upon which to base further actions. The TRT believes this is the approach for the next three years has the greatest likelihood of producing regional benefit to salmon in the long run. Restoration projects will only be proposed once there is a logical basis for predicting the benefit to salmon VSP parameters resulting from them. There remains a need to develop approaches for predicting the effects of protection and restoration actions in this area on salmon VSP parameters to increase the certainty that actions taken will result in improvements to the populations. Closer tie-in with Puget Sound-wide recovery efforts for salmon in the marine environment will likely be necessary to advance this issue.

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?

The major missing component, namely specific information regarding the likely effects of specific protection and restoration actions on specific populations or population groupings is addressed by the plan's emphasis on information acquisition. It is important that these efforts be supported regionally and that the watershed evaluate proposals in

light of the growing base of knowledge regarding salmon in nearshore marine environments. The narrative section of this three-year implementation plans heads in this direction. However, it should be made clearer how the ultimate goal of the information acquisition is to identify which projects, in which places will support and improve VSP parameters for which populations. This will make it clear that the ultimate purpose of information acquisition is to provide a logical basis to focus protection and restoration projects.

Comments on how well the work program addresses objectives

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

Yes. The work program emphasizes protection of existing intact habitat and assessment to determine appropriate further protection and restoration actions. The plan specifically calls for an assessment of the effectiveness of existing regulatory and other protection measures and a development of a protection package that includes voluntary and regulatory actions coupled strategically with education and outreach. This remains a critical step to ensure actions will likely produce results of significance to salmon.

2. Preserve options for achieving the future role of populations in the ESU?

Yes. The work program preserves options because it calls for assessments and studies prior to restoration work. This will provide the basis for not only predicting the outcome of restoration projects but more importantly for evaluation of project success during implementation and adaptive management. The work program also preserves options by emphasizing the protection of existing functioning habitat. This is very important in the San Juan Islands because, compared with other Puget Sound watersheds, a much larger portion of the shoreline remains in a condition that promotes salmon survival and growth.

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

The three-year program addresses key ecosystem processes by attempting to identify the highest priority areas that most affect salmon and are the most threatened. The San Juan salmon recovery plan identifies areas with bank hardening, beaches with documented forage fish spawning, and the quality and quantity of freshwater inputs to nearshore habitats as high priority areas. This is based on the currently best available science.

4. Advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery, and habitat

The three-year plan appropriately does not address overall exploitation rates on individual Chinook salmon populations, as these are part of the watershed plans for the regions where these populations spawn. However, the issue of local harvest on a mixture of stocks may become an item of discussion relative to the recovery plan for listed orca whales. Thus, this may be something the WRIA 2 watershed group will need to be cognizant of. However, it is not a critical element of the three-year implementation plan.

The plan does not address the possible interaction of hatchery-origin fish with wild fish in San Juan Islands habitats. There are two aspects of this: hatchery fish released in other watersheds and hatchery fish released locally in the San Juan Islands. The extent to which hatchery fish from either group affect wild salmon in San Juan Islands habitats is currently unknown, but assessment projects designed to better understand how wild fish use WRIA 2 habitats should also be looking for interactions of wild and hatchery fish.