

Snohomish (WRIA 7)

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 Stillaguamish 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 3-year action plan presents good logic for how effort is to be distributed among the sub basin strategy groups outlined in the Snohomish salmon recovery chapter of the 2005 Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan. The projects on this three-year list are consistent with the sub basin strategy group priorities in the recovery chapter. It should be noted that restoration projects outnumber protection in the habitat project list even though the basin strategy gives priority to protection. All projects proposed are important for initial implementation of the watershed recovery chapter, and they are grouped into priority tiers based on first the priority of the project in the watershed recovery chapter and second the ability and capacity of sponsors to complete them. This shows how capacity building is critical for the success of the recovery plan since tier 3 projects may be as important as tier 1 projects in terms of salmon recovery goals. There are projects listed for each "h", harvest, hatchery, and habitat management, which is consistent with the basin's coordinated all-h strategy. The list also includes monitoring and research projects, which is a necessary component of a complete recovery approach.

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

Yes. The work plan focuses on the most important protection and restoration actions in each of the principal sub-basins of the Snohomish, to build upon and protect function throughout the watershed.

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?

This plan is very comprehensive and well organized towards specific recovery goals. However, there are several key components that would benefit from increased specificity or inclusion. Addressing water quantity, especially limits on production due to low flows, will be key to Chinook recovery in the Snohomish basin. This is addressed through several capacity-building projects in the three-year plan. These are a necessary first step, but they must be designed to lead to specific efforts that will protect and restore

natural flow patterns. Habitat regulation and protection actions are mentioned but not with sufficient specificity to understand how they will work, what the staffing requirements will be, and what the expected outcomes will be. Climate change has been recognized as possibly the most significant impediment to the success of this plan, but there are no actions proposed to address this or to better understand its effects so that the plan can be modified in response.

Comments on how well the work program addresses objectives

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

Habitats in the Snohomish basin that are currently intact are listed and projects are encouraged to preserve these through acquisition or other means. However, the work program only has a place-holder for developing a comprehensive plan for identifying and protecting currently functioning habitat processes. There does not appear to be an approach to integrating land use planning directly with salmon recovery objectives. The importance of protecting instream flows for salmon recovery is addressed through capacity building and initiation of a process for bringing the appropriate parties together to set water quantity guidelines keyed to salmon recovery objectives. Although there is also a good deal of water quality work underway in the basin, the plan does not include a similar process for coordinating this with salmon recovery.

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 Skykomish and Snoqualmie populations in the ESU. The habitat actions in the plan emphasize protection where possible. Wild stock goals are given priority in the harvest and hatchery management plans. The critical life stages that occur in the nearshore marine waters of the Whidbey Basin will have to be addressed through inter-watershed coordination focusing on that area, which is not part of this three-year action plan. The plan includes monitoring of actions in each of the “h”s. These activities will be more effective when they are included into an adaptive management plan that specifies how actions will change based on the outcome of monitoring.

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

The sub basin strategy groupings provide an appropriate structure for assuring that the right kinds of projects will be implemented in locations where they will have the greatest effect on protecting and restoring basin-wide ecosystem processes.

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

The coordination among the habitat, harvest, and hatchery management sectors that was clearly evident in the recovery chapter carries through to this three-year implementation plan. Hatchery, harvest, and habitat management actions are all designed to move the populations towards the same recovery goals. Harvest management guidelines are based

on population performance under current habitat conditions and designed to be modified when habitat conditions change. The hatchery program is designed to provide fish for harvest with minimal impact on wild stock recovery goals. Initial implementation actions in this three-year plan focus on genetic integration of wild fish into the hatchery broodstock and increasing naturalization of the offspring of hatchery-origin fish in the watershed. The 3-year implementation plan also includes one project for documenting ecological interactions between hatchery and wild fish in the estuary. Ecological interactions of hatchery and wild fish merit even more attention in this basin.