

Shared Strategy for Puget Sound Comments on April 2007 Three Year Work Program Update (San Juan)

Introduction

In April 2007, watersheds submitted three-year work program updates on accomplishments and proposed actions that built on the 2006 three year work program they developed to get on a recovery trajectory in the first three years of implementation.

This feedback is intended to assist the watershed recovery plan implementation team as it continues to address actions and implementation of their salmon recovery plan. The feedback is also being used by the TRT and Recovery Council Work Group to inform the continued development and implementation of the regional work program components such as adaptive management. The feedback will also stimulate further discussion on recovery objectives to determine what the best investments are for salmon recovery over the next three years.

Guidance for the 2007 work program updates

Guidance for the preparation of the 3 year Work Program update emphasized the importance of stating what has changed in the Update of the 3-year Work Program from the prior adopted Work Program. Watersheds were asked to:

- Describe why you have made the changes proposed, including rationale for including omitting or changing the rank of a project
- Describe any adjustments related to considering sequencing, timing, or H-Integration issues
- Discuss the status of implementation of your three year work program. – what have you accomplished in terms of the priority actions, what have you struggled with and how you resolved it, and provide suggestions, if the issues were not resolved, how we might work together to improve the situation in the future.

The guidance for preparation of the work program update provided the following as factors to be considered by the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team in performing its technical review of the Update

- a. Is the Update consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for the watershed's work Program?
- b. Is the sequencing and timing of the action sin your updated 3-Year work Program appropriate for this first full year of implementation of the Puget sound Salmon Recovery Plan>
- c. Are there significant components missing from the work program? Is so, that are these and what can be done about them in the three-year work program update or at a regional scale?

Watersheds were provided with the following 7 questions that the Recovery Council Work Group would address in performing its policy review of the Three-Year Work Program

1. Is the work program consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 documents, Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan (See Volume I, Watershed Profiles – Results sections, and the NMFS supplement to the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan, as well as the regional nearshore chapter guidance, where applicable)?
2. Is the work program tied to the identified three-year objectives and scheduled to proceed at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed's ten year goals?>
3. Is the work program narrative tightly linked to individual projects and priorities?
4. To what extent do programmatic actions address protection identified in the work program and non-capital project list?
5. To what extent are habitat, harvest and habitat actions integrated and included in the work program?
6. To what extent does the work program address the watershed's capacity to implement the updated three year work program?

Guidance noted that the Work Group would also examine the objectives of the three year work Program and how well the program addresses them. This includes considering whether the Work Program Update:

- Improves the level and certainty of protection for habitat and the 22 existing Chinook populations;
- Preserves options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU;
- Ensures protection and restoration preserves and restores ecosystem processes for Chinook, and
- Advances the coordinated/integrated management of harvest, hatchery and habitat

I. Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review

May 24, 2007

The TRT reviewed updates to 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 Update consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for the watershed's Work Program? (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. This year the tiering system in the project matrix appears to be consistent with the narrative's priority for protection, filling of information gaps, and developing capacity and consensus for habitat protection, followed by restoration.

2. *Is the sequencing and timing of the actions in your Updated 3-Year Work Program appropriate for this first full year of implementation of the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan?*

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 that has the greatest likelihood of producing regional benefit to salmon in the long run. The work program places highest priority on the Big Picture project, which is designed to fill the key data gaps in a manner that will enable the prioritization of protection and restoration to provide the greatest benefit to achieving VSP goals for listed salmon. The workplan's second priority is analysis of regulatory, voluntary, educational, and incentive-based protection measures to determine what's working and what isn't. This work could lead to measures to resolve the identified gaps and thereby improve habitat protection. The San Juan Initiative (SJI) is cited as one project that could support this priority. However, the three-year plan lacks specific guidance and details as to how the SJI and similar projects could proceed to promote protection.

Proposed restoration projects are in tier II, and many of them are supported by analysis in the *Soft Shore Protection/Structure Removal Blueprint for San Juan County Forage Fish Beaches*. Although this analysis does not include a direct method for predicting the benefit to salmon VSP parameters resulting from the proposed restoration actions, the benefits to forage fish and other ecosystem functions are clear. Some restoration projects in the work program, however, do not have a clear link to the *Softshore Blueprint*, and the reasons for their priority or sequencing are unclear.

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. The Big Picture project, which is the watershed's top priority in tier I, provides the opportunity for the closer tie-in with Puget Sound-wide recovery efforts for salmon in the marine environment 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 three-year work program update 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.

Shared Strategy 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 a technical assessment to determine the importance of specific habitats to specific life stages and populations of listed salmon as well as a policy analysis of the effectiveness of existing regulatory and other protection measures and a development of a protection package that includes voluntary and regulatory actions coupled with education and incentives. Both of these steps are critical to ensure actions will likely produce results of significance to listed 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 that will guide 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, including the analysis in the *Soft Shore Protection/Structure Removal Blueprint for San Juan County Forage Fish Beaches*.

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. The plan does not explicitly 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. There are several projects in the matrix that address the role of hatchery fish, but their priority rating is unclear from the presentation.

San Juan (WRIA 2)

Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review

II. Policy Review Comments

The Recovery Council Work Group, an interdisciplinary policy team, evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. The following questions guided the evaluation of the work plans updates.

1. Is the work program update consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 policy feedback summary, Recovery Plan Watershed Profiles - Results section, and NOAA's Federal Supplement?
2. Is the work program update tied to the objectives identified and at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed's ten year goals?
3. Are there significant elements missing and how might these be addressed?

In addressing these three questions, the interdisciplinary team noted accomplishments and strengths of the three year work program update and also identified and discussed gaps and special issues warranting attention. Specific comments are provided below, followed by a short discussion of comments common to all watersheds.

General comments on 2007 watershed work program updates

Although the watershed 2007 work program updates reflect advancement in terms of project identification, many of the watersheds continue to have gaps, to varying degrees, that were identified in the 2006 work program review. Regional assistance to the watershed planning teams will be needed to address how best to fill the needs identified below.

Work Plan Accomplishments, Sequencing and Prioritization: Work program updates are a useful tool for defining progress toward plan goals and ESU-wide recovery. Narratives should be crafted to give a sharper focus on what each watershed expects to accomplish within the three year period and identifying alternatives if they are unable to implement a given suite of actions. All work program updates could be strengthened by providing more focus on how projects and actions are prioritized and sequenced. It is also important the narrative provides sufficient information to enable watershed teams and regional reviewers to determine whether the pace of implementation is appropriate to achieve each watershed's ten year goals.

Integrated Management of Habitat, Harvest and Hatcheries: *Integrated Management of Habitat, Harvest and Hatcheries:* All Puget Sound watersheds' work programs would benefit from additional efforts to achieve H-Integration. During 2006, all watersheds with Chinook populations have engaged in actions that reflect increased attention to the integrated management of habitat, harvest and hatchery. By the end of 2008, it is anticipated that those watersheds will completed or substantially advanced efforts to accomplish the 6 Step process developed at the regional level by the H-Integration sub-group of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring

Steering Committee and that the region . The Shared Strategy and TRT liaisons will continue to assist watersheds without independent Chinook populations concerning integrated management and the capacity of the nearshore to sustain natural – and hatchery-origin populations of all salmonids.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management: A regional monitoring and adaptive management plan is currently being drafted by Shared Strategy staff along with a work group of technical experts, which will guide monitoring efforts at the regional and fish population scales. Some watersheds have already begun putting together their own monitoring and adaptive management frameworks and initial monitoring tasks. The regional team will coordinate with those watersheds to ensure that both of the monitoring and adaptive management plans are consistent and complementary with each other. During the intervening time, the Shared Strategy staff, work group and TRT acknowledge that they play an important a role in providing assistance during the coming year to ensure that all Puget Sound watersheds can engage in a coordinated and efficient process to develop, refine and implement a robust monitoring and adaptive management approach. This will enable watersheds and the region to assess progress in reducing uncertainties in the population and ESU-wide recovery. Shared Strategy anticipates that the regional plan will be adopted by the Recovery Council by the end of 2007. In the meantime, the Puget Sound TRT and Shared Strategy liaisons will assist watersheds who are poised to take the next steps in the development of their watershed monitoring and adaptive management plans.

Protecting and restoring ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options and addressing threats are critical components of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. Recovery actions have progressed from relatively straightforward work to complex and more expensive multi-year projects. All watersheds are challenged in terms of their capacity to acquire land in order to secure future options, and to implement the large-scale projects. The Shared Strategy staff and work group members acknowledge that additional efforts are needed at the regional scale to assist in securing resources that will enable watersheds to protect restoration options in rapidly developing areas and to implement projects at an appropriate pace to achieve ESU-wide recovery.

Water quality and Water Quantity: Water quality and water quantity will continue to be important issues for the long-term recovery of all populations within the ESU.

Work on water quality issues is within the authority of the Washington State Department of Ecology and will be primarily pursued through its implementation of the NPDES permit program and the establishment of TMDLs under the Clean Water Act throughout the ESU. However, watersheds can play an important role in ensuring that local jurisdictions implementing NPDES permits adopt water quality programs that include actions and regulations that protect and enhance water quality in rivers and streams that are critical for salmon recovery.

At the regional level, a work group has been established on instream flows to determine how to move forward the protection strategy identified in the Recovery plan. At present, the Plan calls for a 3-pronged approach to improving instream flows: (1) setting and/or revising instream flows under the authority of the Department of Ecology; (2) improving our scientific understanding of fish population needs in relation to instream flows, groundwater dynamics and

relationship to surface water, as well as the implications of climate change on instream flows over time; and (3) coordinating water management decisions and actions within each watershed to avoid further degradation of instream flow conditions through the creation of Protection and Enhancement Programs (PEPs). Watersheds will play an important role in moving these issues forward in the near term. Each watershed should consider (1) advocating for appropriate instream flow rules in places where they are needed; (2) participating in the development of new science by sending technical staff to instream flow workshops planned in 20076; and (3) by working with the Department of Ecology to begin creating PEPs in areas where instream flows hinder the recovery of fish populations. The TRT and Shared Strategy liaisons will assist watersheds in advancing water quantity and water quality actions.

San Juan Specific Comments

Significant Advancements:

- i. Inclusion of the *Soft Shore Protection/Structure Removal Blueprint for San Juan County Forage Fish Beaches* information and prioritization scheme which allowed restoration projects to be ranked based on benefit to forage fish and eelgrass. This is an excellent way to advance their multi-species and ecosystem approach given that there is not enough salmon data to prioritize restoration efforts.
- ii. The work program provides more detail to capital and non-capital efforts and advances the consolidation of various approaches into more coordinated approaches like the Big Picture project.
- iii. Synthesis and partial funding of data gap work is consolidated and will be prioritized based on the outcomes from the San Juan Initiative.
- iv. Prioritization across suites of actions more closely reflects the technical guidance. The current prioritization scheme has two tiers- Tier One: protection and assessment/research and Tier Two: restoration.

Issues Needing Advancement:

- i. Increased capacity funding for San Juans is critical as the lack of resources continues to limit both the strategic and substantive advancement of the work program and its components.
- ii. The current prioritization structure and process do not include a means to prioritize or sequence h-integration, capacity, or adaptive management. Prioritization is lacking for many of the items within the work program. Within Tier One, priorities were determined at the discretion of the staff based on workshops, meetings and discussions. The criteria used by staff and as the basis for these discussions about prioritization is not explicit. [Note that prioritization criteria (*San Juan County Goals, Objectives and Priorities*) have been developed and attached to the 3-Year work program since the review.]
- iii. The work program appears to lack coordination between some of the projects. Costs and information are missing for much of the non-capital components even though capacity, protection and assessment work is considered the highest priority for this area.

- iv. Protection is noted as a key priority for the plan. It will be important to develop and implement a habitat monitoring plan to be able to track progress in protection.