

# **Shared Strategy for Puget Sound Comments on April 2007 Three Year Work Program Update (Stillaguamish)**

## 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 s 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**

The TRT reviewed fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work program updates in April and early May 2007. Three questions were addressed. The questions and the TRT’s review comments are below.

### **Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review**

The TRT reviewed updates to fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work programs in May 2007. Three questions were addressed. The questions and TRT’s review comments on the Stillaguamish 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 is consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for the watershed. This watershed has put in considerable effort developing watershed hypotheses and protection and restoration strategies based on modeling using EDT. This work program continues to use the conclusions of those modeling efforts to guide and prioritize watershed restoration and salmon

recovery. The 10-year plan submitted in 2005 is projected to achieve approximately 30% of the recovery goal. Last year's 3-year implementation plan would keep the watershed on, or slightly ahead, of that pace. However, according to the update, implementation of projects has fallen off the pace anticipated in the 3-year plan due to shortfalls in funding or capacity to complete projects.

*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?*

Yes. In general, the sequencing and timing of the actions in the work program are appropriate. The work program entails identification and restoration of key habitat components in the estuary, log jams, and restoration of natural river banks combined with restrictive harvest management and hatchery supplementation programs to promote colonization of spawning habitats.

The updated three-year work program puts increased emphasis on the South Fork population because recent years of apparent low abundance have increased the urgency of actions to assure that the South Fork population does not become extinct in the near term. The plan for the South Fork includes a pilot project to test whether a supplementation program similar to the one in the North Fork will stem the decline of the South Fork population. This project, combined with work to prioritize engineered log jam construction and identify, and eventually control, sources of excess sediment in the South Fork, appears to be an appropriate set of initial actions to address the current situation with the South Fork population. However, it is important that the supplementation program be carried out in a manner that does not jeopardize the potential for the South Fork population to recover in the long term. Starting out this program as a pilot project is important, so that little will be lost if something major goes wrong. It will also be important to pay close attention to details of where and how many natural fish are taken for broodstock, as well as the balance between hatchery and natural production. A review of these aspects of the program would look at both the risk to natural production of taking fish from the spawning grounds as well the potential of domestication effects. The TRT has not yet had an opportunity to review these aspects of the proposed supplementation program. In addition, the importance of reviewing the harvest management guidelines for the Stillaguamish management unit to be sure that they are appropriate for the current South Fork program increases. Given that these potential risks are adequately addressed, the South Fork supplementation program, combined with concurrent habitat protection and restoration in the South Fork Stillaguamish, and a review of harvest management guidelines has the potential of greatly benefiting the South Fork population.

The updated three-year plan also put more focus on nearshore habitats, important to critical early marine rearing lifestages. This has been possible because of efforts to coordinate among the watersheds with shorelines in the Whidbey basin area. The nearshore protection and restoration projects resulting from this coordination will be important to support the productivity of the Stillaguamish basin Chinook populations as recovery actions in other areas are implemented.

Discussions with the watershed group helped the TRT confirm that the approach to floodplain restoration is the result of a long standing planning process where sequencing issues posed by the state of ecological processes have been considered to a substantial degree. The described sequencing of the overall combination of current floodplain habitat improvements (ELJs and off-

channel rearing capacity enhancements) and their long-term strategy - protection and restoration programs tied in with a comprehensive floodplain management strategy – is appropriate for the overall hypotheses and strategy for the work program. It would be useful for the group to include this context in the work plan narrative to make links between the current actions and the strategies and hypotheses more transparent to other interested parties.

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?

Protection of existing well functioning habitats and habitats forming and maintaining processes will be a key to success of salmon recovery in the Stillaguamish basin. The watershed has begun to identify overlaps between land use planning programs and salmon recovery. It will be important to advance this to the point where land use planning takes salmon recovery objectives explicitly into account. The watershed group is also working with forest land managers to explore incentive programs that may eventually support restoration of key habitat forming processes in the basin. In general, this watershed's work is very advanced on the technical and project implementation level. Restoration of appropriate streamflow patterns and management of forestry consistent with hydrological processes appropriate for salmon recovery will also be key for ultimate achievement of goals in the Stillaguamish. These are not directly addressed in this three-year workplan and will probably best be addressed through regional efforts that hopefully will focus on the Stillaguamish as one specific example watershed.

*Shared Strategy Objectives*

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

The work program builds on successful protection efforts. Protection and acquisition projects in the tributaries, mainstem, and estuary will contribute to maintaining the production base for the two Chinook populations that spawn in the Stillaguamish system. In addition, the watershed has embarked on a project to integrate the salmon recovery plan with existing watershed protection plans. This will eventually lead to better coordination of Snohomish County's Critical Areas Regulations and Shoreline Master program with salmon recovery in the Stillaguamish basin. In addition the watershed is initiating contact with the US Forest Service and Washington DNR to integrate the watersheds adaptive management program for forest road maintenance and abandonment into their programs as well as exploring new mechanisms to finance upper watershed restoration projects. They are also partnering with WSU Extension to work on stewardship activities with small forest landowners. These steps towards improved forest management in the upper watershed could eventually lead to restoration of natural streamflow and sedimentation patterns throughout the watershed, which is necessary for the protection actions in the lower watershed to be maximally effective.

*2. Preserve options for achieving the future role of this population in the ESU?*

The work program preserves options for the future role of these populations in the ESU. The plan relies on maintaining the North Fork population through hatchery intervention until the functioning of the watershed is restored sufficiently that the population can sustain itself. Because the South Fork population has not been sustaining itself in all years, the plan includes a

program for beginning hatchery intervention there as well. Both programs are clearly focused on restoration of these populations, and harvest is managed consistent with this goal. Because of the dire condition of the South Fork population, the plan includes early habitat protection and restoration actions there. The plan also anticipates derivation of harvest management guidelines specific to the South Fork population, which will be important for preserving this population.

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

There is emphasis on restoration of estuary and tidal marsh habitats, which will be critical for restoring fundamental ecosystem processes in the Stillaguamish system. Protection and restoration projects in the floodplain will be tied in with a comprehensive floodplain management strategy to be developed by all parties with authority and responsibility for floodplain management and supported by Snohomish County with technical analysis of bank armoring removal and outreach to the agricultural community. Sediment and hydrological processes are addressed through improved landslide remediation and some projects in forestry areas. However, a clear connection with forestry policy is missing, although the efforts to coordinate with the US Forest Service, Washington DNR, and small private landowners are definitely initial steps towards this connection. The plan reflects the wide scope of water quality monitoring that is going on in the basin. Much of this will be useful for establishing trends and spatial patterns that will be useful for developing future salmon recovery actions. However, these programs were designed around objectives that do not directly address salmon recovery. The watershed is taking steps to integrate TMDL, water quality monitoring, and clean up priorities with the priorities for dissolved oxygen and temperature in the salmon recovery plan.

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

This three-year plan reflects the high level of integration that has already occurred in recovery planning in the Stillaguamish. The existing hatchery supplementation program is designed to overcome specific habitat limitations in the North Fork. The proposed program for the South Fork is also specific to habitat problems there. The harvest management plan is based on an assessment of the performance of the North Fork Stillaguamish population under current habitat conditions and it takes into account the goals of the hatchery program. As more recovery work focuses on the South Fork and more South Fork specific data becomes available, the relevance of current harvest and hatchery plans to the South Fork population decreases. Therefore, the watershed may wish to explicitly call for a review of these plans as they pertain to the South Fork population.

## **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 that the narrative provide 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:* 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 have 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. 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 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 2007; and (3) 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.

## **Comments Specific to Stillaguamish 2007 Work Program Update**

### **Significant Advancements:**

- The 2007 work plan reflects the priorities in the recovery plan and the strength of the SIRC to make decisions for recovery in the Stillaguamish watershed.
- There is a refinement in thinking towards planning and capacity needs, as reflected in the increase in projects focusing on stewardship and adaptive management.
- There is an increase in partners, including cross-watershed projects focused on stewardship and the Whidbey Basin that is evidence of the commitment to restoring the estuary, a key priority for this watershed.
- There has been advancement in restoration projects and work with forest land managers.
- There is an iterative adaptive management process in place for implementation of the salmon recovery plan.

### **Issues Needing Advancement:**

- Document the progress made and the current approach to protection, restoration, H-integration, and adaptive management in a narrative as part of the update for this year and the years to come. This documentation will help with future reviews.
- As protection programs are advanced, including in-stream flows and upper watershed hydrology and sedimentation, it will be important to identify the existing gaps and strategies for filling these gaps in order to strengthen the programs.
- As mentioned above, a strong capacity need was identified in the work plan update in order to make advancements in salmon recovery. Continuing to address this need, and the articulation of this need, will be important for this watershed.