

Whidbey and Camano Islands (WRIA 6) Shared Strategy October Feedback for Policy Makers

I. Key Questions for Regional Summit: The following questions are important to determine the contribution of the Whidbey and Camano Islands to regional salmon recovery in the next ten years. Answers to these questions by the end of December 2004 will support regional consensus on the direction for Puget Sound salmon recovery at the January 2005 summit.

1. What habitat conditions in Island County are necessary to support the recovery of the populations which use this area?

It is our understanding from the draft materials submitted on June 30, 2004 and the August meeting with the Technical Recovery Team (TRT) and Work Group that work is still being done to improve the specificity of the answer to the question of what habitat conditions are necessary. The TRT and Work group encourage the completion of this work.

2. Summer review discussions between the TRT, Shared Strategy staff and work group, and representatives from the Island County Salmon Technical Advisory Group about regional recovery have focused attention on the key role that Island County habitats provide for Puget Sound chinook, chum and bull trout populations. These habitats are critical for juvenile rearing and adult migration and feeding. These populations are largely considered to be at high risk and will have to increase their abundance, productivity, spatial structure and diversity to achieve recovery. Do the Water Resource Advisory Council (WRAC), the Island County Salmon Technical Advisory Group and the Island County Board of Commissioners support the continuation of this role into the future?
3. What measurable habitat goals do the WRAC, Island County Board of Commissioners and Island County Salmon Technical Advisory Group support for the 10 year timeframe?
4. What policy conditions are necessary to pursue the long-term vision and the ten-year measurable habitat goals? Are these policy conditions supported by those responsible for implementation?
5. The level of protection currently provided for existing habitat functions is still highly uncertain across Puget Sound. What is necessary to achieve the protection of existing functions? What policy conditions must be in place to achieve protection? Are these policy conditions supported by those responsible for implementation?

- i. Would decision-makers endorse a spatially explicit strategy (combining regulatory and voluntary tools) to protect the intact nearshore areas that support salmon recovery? Protection from a combination of voluntary and regulatory approaches within a five mile radius of the Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish river deltas would have significant benefits for recovery.
- ii. What actions do decision-makers support to prevent excessive nutrient input that could cause dissolved oxygen and eutrophication problems?

II. Essential Decisions for Final Watershed Chapter: Based on the June submittal, the summer review process, and our best scientific understanding, the TRT and the Work Group consider the following policy decisions as the most important to answer and include in the chapter by April 30, 2004. This will increase the certainty that actions taken in the next ten years will move us on a trajectory toward recovery.

1. What actions will be and have been taken (through voluntary and regulatory mechanisms) to protect those intact nearshore areas in Island County that support salmon recovery?
2. What are the steps, timeframe and potential costs for reaching your ten-year habitat targets?
3. Due to a variety of factors, Whidbey Basin is vulnerable to water quality degradation that could result in significant impacts to salmon recovery. What actions will and have been taken (through voluntary and regulatory mechanisms) to protect water quality?

III. Increasing ESU Certainty: The Technical Recovery Team suggests that addressing the following will increase the certainty of meeting ESU recovery and should be noted in the plan with a brief statement of long-term strategy to address even if it is not possible to develop actions at this time.

1. Work with regional parties to protect against catastrophic events particularly in the Admiralty Inlet area.
2. Identify a restoration strategy with necessary and potential steps which would lead to implementation.

IV. Highlights of Summer Review 2004: This section summarizes our understanding of your responses to the six questions from your June submissions and August discussions.

- A. Information about the planning approach, conditions necessary to achieve recovery, and measurable goals.**

Planning Group: Is there a group working to complete a chapter?
Yes, the Island County Salmon Technical Advisory Group is working on behalf of the WRAC to complete a chapter.

Recovery Conditions: Has the watershed group identified the conditions (habitat, harvest and hatchery) necessary to support the region in reaching the planning targets?
No, though initial work has been completed that informs an answer to this question.

Measurable Goals: Has the watershed group endorsed the planning targets as a long-term goal? If not, what is their goal?

Neither the WRAC nor the Island County Board of Commissioners has yet endorsed the planning targets. The chapter submittal does identify the co-manager planning targets for the ten populations most likely to use Island County's nearshore habitats for juvenile rearing, Hood Canal Summer Chum recovery goals and bull trout recovery standards.

Quantitatively linking nearshore habitat actions to the planning targets at this time is highly uncertain. In lieu of biological goals measurable habitat goals could be established for the short-term. Measurable habitat goals have not yet been established.

Long-term Contribution to ESU Recovery: What is the long-term contribution of the independent spawning populations using this watershed for ESU recovery? To achieve ESU recovery the TRT draft delisting criteria recommends that all populations show significant improvements. Also based upon the delisting criteria 2-4 populations in each of the five sub-regions must achieve the planning targets and other viable salmonid population parameters. These criteria are not intended to limit additional populations in each of the five regions from achieving the planning targets. These criteria are not intended to limit additional populations in each of the five regions from achieving the planning targets.

All populations are believed to use Island County habitats during their juvenile or adult phases. The ten chinook populations most likely to intensely use Island County habitats for juvenile rearing come from the Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit rivers. The Snohomish and Stillaguamish groups have currently endorsed the planning targets and are working to achieve low risk populations. The Skagit river system does not currently have a group that has determined a goal they are trying to achieve. However, the TRT delisting criteria would encourage some if not all Skagit populations to achieve the planning targets. Based on the TRT delisting

criteria, nearshore, marine and tributaries to Puget Sound not identified as primary freshwater habitat for any of the 22 identified chinook populations should be functioning in a manner that is sufficient to support an ESU-wide recovery scenario. Specifically, this means that the contribution of Island County habitat will need to be consistent in the long term with the role for the Skagit, Stilly and Snohomish populations if these aspirations are to be met.

B. Highlights of improvements completed or underway and existing protections of ecological functions that support recovery (Note: Results for fish have not been evaluated).

1. Protection: The implementation of each jurisdiction's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program, WDFW's no net loss policy on forage fish and eelgrass and other ordinances and voluntary programs contribute to the protection of habitat functions and values that support chinook.
2. Estuarine conditions have been improved through a few initial pilot projects.
3. Restoration of tributaries: Several local groups have formed and have completed projects to open culverts, restore marsh habitats, remove invasive plant species, and improve riparian function.

C. Significant proposals – proposed strategy that strives to significantly protect or improve an important factor for recovery with actions that can be evaluated qualitatively or quantitatively for their results for fish); total cost of proposal(s)

An initial list of project possibilities has been submitted but no program with a timeframe and goal to achieve them has been provided.

Total Cost of Proposal:

A range of costs were provided for expenses associated with land acquisition, nearshore restoration, fencing, riparian plantings, culvert replacements, LWD projects, and stream bank improvements. However, no proposal was yet provided in regard to how will be necessary or likely in 10 years.

D. Poised – the watershed has designed or initiated a process that will result in the development of significant proposals to improve conditions for fish. Anticipated or resulting proposals should be included in the recovery chapter.

1. Planning: An approach to establishing a planning effort for salmon recovery was provided.
2. Protection: Eelgrass, forage fish spawning beaches, kelp forests, areas of limited shoreline development and high priority areas for chinook have

all been identified and mapped. This information is poised to be used to develop protection strategies.

3. Protection: The County Commissioners are engaged in discussions about the submittal of the draft chapter to Shared Strategy and are currently in discussion regarding their role (regulatory and voluntary) in supporting salmon recovery.
4. Protection: More than 800 acres along the shoreline have been protected through a variety of partners since 1991. The Whidbey Camano Land Trust just hired its first full-time executive director and is in the process of expanding its capacity to implement projects. The Saratoga Passage and Admiralty Inlet marine stewardship designations provide opportunities to increase the on-the-ground effectiveness of protection measures through outreach and education.
5. Water quality: The Camano Nonpoint Pollution Prevention plan is expected to be completed by 2006 which should define strategies and actions to improve water quality.