

Dear Watershed Planning Groups and Other Parties Interested in the Nearshore:

The marine waters, beaches, shallow bays and shorelines in Puget Sound are critical to the recovery of salmon as well as other critters and plants. A number of watershed groups and individual organizations have inventoried, analyzed and developed recommendations for actions to improve the quality of Puget Sound's nearshore and marine waters.

Over the last year, the Puget Sound Action Team has led a regional effort to develop consensus on the goals, actions and research necessary for the nearshore to support current and future salmon populations. This letter and the attachments are a summary of the discussions that have occurred between scientists, policy-makers, interested parties and staff from the Tribes and other governments. I ask for your review of these materials and help to improve the overall direction for protection and restoration of marine waters and nearshore areas in support of salmon recovery.

In October of this year, the Shared Strategy work group with the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team provided feedback to watershed planning groups. One of the hopes stated in the feedback document is to confirm consensus on regional recovery needs at the Shared Strategy Summit on January 26-27, 2005.

The Summit will be the place for elected officials, watershed leaders and others to affirm their commitment to salmon recovery in the long-term. The Summit also is an opportunity to confirm the objectives for the next ten years, the conditions necessary to gain commitments, and the funding needed for implementation. By April 30, we would like to have final watershed chapters, including actions and commitments for the nearshore.

To stimulate some discussion on local and regional actions for the nearshore and marine waters, we have attached two documents for you to consider: a draft protection and restoration strategy for the nearshore, and sub-basin summaries that provide a synopsis of fish use, landscape conditions and actions. These are based on the information compiled to date by the Puget Sound Action Team as they develop the nearshore and marine chapter of the regional recovery plan, information from watersheds, and input from the Technical Recovery Team and NOAA Fisheries scientists.

Protection and Restoration of Puget Sound Marine Environments for Salmon Recovery:

The attached strategy is a general summary of what we have learned so far, what this knowledge suggests for protection and restoration, and the results that could be achieved in the 10-year timeframe and long-term. *The fundamental thrust of the strategy and the immediate priority is to protect existing estuarine and shoreline functions.*

This approach will keep options open for restoration in the future, when more science is available and a regional assessment of restoration needs will be completed by the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Program, an effort being led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

There is much more we need to learn about the nearshore and how it can be restored to support more salmon in the future. In the interim, the current functions provided for salmon in the nearshore and marine waters are a critical starting point if we are going to have a chance to restore the capacity of these environments to support salmon.

Many shoreline areas are not developed yet, but growth pressure is inevitable. Consequently, it is important that we protect what we have now. We know that for NOAA Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to accept the regional recovery plan for listed salmonids, we must demonstrate that the nearshore will be protected.

Most of the work needed is at the local government level, and there are two primary tools--regulatory programs and conservation incentives. With regard to regulatory programs, most protection is provided through critical areas ordinances and shoreline master programs. There is a significant opportunity over the coming months and the next several years to increase protections where necessary as local governments update these key regulations.

The attached documents are intended to help understand what needs to be protected. We know that some of the material, like the potential protection actions, may be new information to you. Please use it to evaluate the level of protection that the regulations in your watershed provide and identify how gaps in the level of protection for key functions can be filled.

Sub-basin Summaries: These concise, geographically-specific summaries are more useful at this time than the draft nearshore and marine chapter (on which there is not yet scientific consensus) as the basis for discussion on needed actions. Your feedback will add to the development of the regional nearshore chapter and will help ensure that it reflects local knowledge and concerns. (For those that are interested, we can provide additional information on the steps leading to completion of the nearshore chapter.) A map showing the eleven sub-basins is attached.

We'd appreciate your comments on the nearshore sub-basin summaries, along with the results of the regulatory gap analysis described above, by the end of December 2004. Please send your comments to the Watershed Liaisons, Margaret Duncan or Elaine Kleckner.

We will be sponsoring a work session focusing on shoreline protection with regulatory tools for land use planners and watershed planners on December 7, 2004. In this work session we would like attendees to share the status of current protection efforts so we can all learn from each other and advance the strategy for the nearshore and marine waters.

Thanks again for working with us on the local and regional elements of salmon recovery. We look forward to your comments on the attached documents and to more discussion.

Sincerely,

Jim Kramer

Jim Kramer

Shared Strategy for Puget Sound

