
A Shared Strategy For Recovery of Salmon In Puget Sound

— D R A F T —

October 17, 2000

This "Shared Strategy" is a proposal to people working to save salmon in the Puget Sound region on how to combine our efforts and enhance our ability to be successful. It was developed following a meeting at Port Ludlow in the fall of 1999 of over 150 salmon leaders from throughout Puget Sound. At the Port Ludlow meeting a group representing tribes, federal, state, and local government agreed to develop this draft Shared Strategy to facilitate a coordinated regional approach to salmon recovery.

The proposed strategy is to:

- Develop a collaborative Recovery Plan in two years that meets our broad interests for salmon in Puget Sound.
- Establish an organizational structure to link recovery efforts, complete a recovery plan, and guide its implementation.
- Identify and support important ongoing near-term efforts to protect Puget Sound salmon.

We propose to convene a meeting of salmon leaders in January 2001 to discuss and finalize a Shared Strategy. Prior to January, a broad-based steering committee is being formed to develop a charter and structure for the next two years. The Strategy needs your suggestions, improvements, and support to be successful. Please direct your comments and questions to Gail Gatton at (206) 447-1805 or Jim Kramer at (206) 706-7289. You can also comment directly via a form on our website at <http://www.sharedsalmonstrategy.org>.

INTRODUCTION

Federal, tribal, state, and local leaders are not new to the salmon crisis. Over the past two decades, in response to dwindling populations and a commitment to sustainable fisheries, treaty Indian tribes and Washington state have worked together to reduce harvest of Puget Sound salmon by as much as 90 percent. Local governments have also made strides to protect salmon through land use, storm water, and growth management authorities. More recently, spurred by the ESA listings and new legal requirements, local governments have begun to work with other stakeholders in their watersheds to develop comprehensive strategies that meet the needs of people and salmon. Several large landowners and industry sectors are also stepping forward to pioneer better ways to achieve business objectives while protecting and restoring salmon habitat. But as the complexity and number of processes increase, as more and more levels of government and private landowners launch salmon related initiatives, recovery efforts are missing important opportunities for collaboration and increased efficiency, risking redundancy, confusion and erosion of public support.

Puget Sound salmon recovery leaders believe that a strategy is needed to link together our individual efforts to protect and restore salmon runs. Any strategy to link Puget Sound salmon recovery efforts must be guided by clear and specific goals. The Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDF&W) and the Puget Sound tribes, as co-managers of salmon fisheries, are working to establish goals for all Puget Sound salmon. At the same time, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has initiated a process to set goals for those Puget Sound salmon runs currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This Shared Strategy integrates federal and co-manager goal setting processes.

A successful Shared Strategy must also establish a collaborative process to identify the best means to achieve recovery goals once established. The Strategy does this by ensuring that local governments, watershed groups, and private sector representatives work together with co-managers and federal agencies to develop a recovery plan for Puget Sound. While the Shared Strategy does not diminish federal agencies, tribes, and state authorities to establish recovery goals for the Puget Sound, it links local governments, watershed groups, and others to the critical process of identifying how to achieve these goals. By establishing a forum to discuss on-the-ground watershed efforts and important policy initiatives, the Strategy helps move us together along the same road to recovery.

NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are responsible for developing a recovery plan for ESA-listed Puget Sound salmon and bull trout, respectively. NMFS and USFWS are also federal trustees for Indian tribal salmonid resources. The Services believe the Shared Strategy is both an effective process for developing a recovery plan and an efficient means to involve those essential to its success. They are committed to participating as full partners so long as the ESA is satisfied and the process and its results are consistent with treaty rights and the federal trust responsibility to tribes. As co-managers, treaty Indian tribes are committed to the return of salmon stocks to a level that meets treaty rights.

The relationship between federal, tribal, and state resource managers is complex. So too is the relationship between Indian treaty rights and the state and federal laws designed to protect and recover salmon. The exact parameters of these relationships have not been clearly defined in all instances. Notwithstanding these areas of uncertainty, participating tribes, the state, the federal agencies and others in the Puget Sound region are committed to working together to protect and enhance salmon runs. At the same time, each participant in the Shared Strategy understands that this collaborative effort is not intended to diminish, expand, or define the rights of any participant. The tribes, as well as the other parties, reserve the right to seek different or additional measures viewed as necessary to carry out treaty promises and/or effect compliance with other state or federal laws.

The proposed Strategy focuses on the Puget Sound basin, its individual watersheds, and groups of Puget Sound fish whose genetic, ecological, and life histories distinguish them from other groups within their species. The initial goal setting process of the Strategy focuses on Puget Sound species listed under the Endangered Species Act: Puget Sound chinook, Hood Canal summer chum and bull trout. Other Puget Sound salmon species are in trouble, and the Shared Strategy will work to promote the continued health and recovery of these species and to avoid further ESA listings. It will address broad biological and social needs by supporting an ecosystem-based approach to salmon recovery, an approach that addresses the needs of salmon and people through protections and improvements to the land and water we need to survive.

To achieve the region's overall goal of self-sustaining harvestable Puget Sound salmon, the Shared Strategy sets forth: (1) a step-by-step approach to establishing recovery goals and identifying actions to achieve those goals through a comprehensive recovery plan; (2) a means to help guide near term actions to protect salmon while the recovery plan is under development; and (3) an initial structure to start the Shared Strategy effort.

REGIONAL RECOVERY PLANNING: SETTING GOALS, IDENTIFYING ACTIONS, AND MAKING COMMITMENTS TO ACHIEVE THEM

The primary intent of the Shared Strategy is to establish a collaborative process for developing a recovery plan for Puget Sound salmon that achieves the following objectives:

- The recovery and maintenance of an abundance of naturally spawning salmon at self-sustaining, harvestable levels;
- The broad distribution of naturally spawning salmon across the Puget Sound region; and
- Genetic diversity of salmon at levels consistent with natural evolutionary patterns.

To be useful, these broad objectives must be translated into specific goals for each watershed and for the Puget Sound basin. In addition, we must gain a more complete understanding of how salmon interact with their habitats and the impact of humans on this relationship. This requires an ongoing scientific endeavor that will reduce – but not resolve – uncertainty in planning for recovery. The recovery plan must be conservatively drawn in favor of protecting fish while embracing an adaptive management approach to ensure it improves with growing knowledge and experience. The plan must also provide predictability and consistency, and reflect an understanding of what is socially and economically supportable.

Outlined below is a process to build and implement a recovery plan for Puget Sound salmon over the next two years. Each step includes a series of technical and policy issues that must be addressed along the way. Effective communication is essential, as each step in the process will require the interaction between science and policy, and new groups and structures for dialogue will have to be created to support the work in the most efficient manner. While the steps are linear and will incrementally build the decisions necessary for the ultimate recovery plan, there must be continuous interplay between local watershed and regional Puget Sound-wide focus. A number of the activities for each step will continue into the future, and it will be necessary to use new information to improve the process as it unfolds.

Step 1: Clarify Roles and Responsibilities, Identify the Content of a Recovery Plan, and Begin to Connect Multiple Planning Efforts. There are several important salmon-related planning activities occurring in the region, including watershed habitat planning, water resource planning, hatchery reform, harvest management, Tri-County ESA and Hood Canal Coordinating Council planning, Puget Sound Technical Review Team, and bull trout recovery. The first step in developing a recovery plan for Puget Sound salmon is to outline the essential elements of the plan, identify our various roles and responsibilities in producing the plan elements, and connect ongoing recovery efforts clearly and explicitly so that all the pieces fit well together.

A group of technical and policy experts representing various ongoing activities will be convened to accomplish this task. At a minimum, this step must involve the National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Washington, Puget Sound tribes, local governments, and watershed councils. The work under this step can be accomplished in late Fall 2000. This coordination task will result in an understanding of what each planning effort will contribute to a comprehensive recovery plan, if there are gaps and how to fill them, and the geographic boundaries we will use to set specific goals for individual salmon populations.

Step 2: Identify Recovery Goals for Each Watershed. Recovery goals are being developed for all watersheds in Puget Sound through the combined efforts of the tribal and state co-managers, and, for ESA-listed species, by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This combined effort will establish initial recovery goals for species listed under the ESA. With input from local and regional technical efforts, it will involve estimating historic and current characteristics of salmon populations in Puget Sound watersheds, will provide a technical estimate of the abundance, productivity, diversity and spatial distribution necessary to achieve self-sustaining, naturally spawning salmon at harvestable levels. The combined effort in goal setting will also provide a means to link habitat conditions to numbers and diversity of salmon.

The goal setting process will begin with the co-managers establishing interim goals for chinook in most watersheds by November 2000. This will be followed by the completion of the co-managers goal setting for the remainder of Puget Sound watersheds and the merging of these goals with the work of NMFS and USFWS by April 2001. This effort will result in clearly documented recovery goals that address the requirements of the co-managers and federal agencies. Local governments and watershed groups must work with the co-managers and federal agencies to identify critical scientific or policy concerns raised by these goals and collaborate on the next steps in the recovery planning process to finalize them. Through the processes described in the following Steps 3-5, the co-managers and federal agencies may modify these interim recovery goals. Draft recovery goals developed in Step 2 will be based in part on developing connections between habitat conditions and fish productivity; connections that will help us measure the individual and cumulative effects of our actions.

Step 3: Begin to Identify the Actions Necessary to Achieve Recovery Goals. Public and private sector representatives responsible for habitat, hatchery, and harvest activities in each watershed will need to work together, using the recovery goals as targets and identifying the actions necessary to attain them. Early understanding of what is needed and what is attainable will help identify the level of effort necessary to achieve goals for each watershed and for the entire Puget Sound. Most of the work in this step will be done at the watershed level across the programs for habitat, harvest, and hatcheries. In each watershed, existing or newly formed groups will need to assess the potential effects of the goals and identify the actions necessary to achieve them. The Shared Strategy will need to provide a structure to ensure watershed efforts are integrated at the regional level in an effective and efficient manner. This step will conclude with an understanding of where the goals can be easily met and where it will be more difficult to achieve them. It will also improve our understanding of the relationships between numbers of fish and the ability of specific actions to support them through management of habitat, harvest, and hatcheries. This step should be completed by December 2001.

Step 4: Identify Regional Recovery Options. Based on the assessment in Step 3, Step 4 will take a more regional focus and support policy makers and scientists working in harvest, hatcheries, and habitat planning to identify coordinated approaches that facilitate local and regional attainment of the goals. This must include a scientific and policy assessment to determine whether combined efforts will add up to recovery for the Puget Sound. Several options may need to be explored for each watershed and each population to identify the more promising choices of actions needed to obtain the desired goals and what assistance the Puget Sound region is willing to provide local watersheds to meet their specific goals. Consistent with treaty rights, this step will also develop options for addressing any conflicts between harvest, hatchery, and habitat management practices for meeting the goals. The work of this step will need to be accomplished through a Puget Sound forum that does not yet exist and will need to be created as part of the Shared Strategy. There will need to be interplay between the watershed interests and a more regional focus. This step should be completed by September 2002, and result in regional consensus on the best means of supporting watershed and Puget Sound-wide efforts to meet desired goals.

Step 5: Commit to Watershed and Regional Recovery Goals and the Actions Necessary to Achieve Them. The objective of Step 5 is to choose a recovery strategy for Puget Sound from among the options developed in Step 4. Tribal and state co-managers, NMFS, and USFWS will finalize a set of recovery goals consistent with treaty rights and the ESA through collaboration with local governments and watershed groups outlined in Steps 3 and 4. Goals will be finalized at the individual population level and across the Puget Sound. Achieving the combination of population characteristics needed for recovery will involve difficult decisions about habitat, harvest, and hatchery actions. Technical support from the TRT, co-managers, and watershed groups will be necessary to evaluate the anticipated results of actions. The goals and the actions necessary to achieve them will comprise the recovery plan that will guide the region's efforts. All parties responsible for implementing the plan must help define and commit to the actions they are responsible for implementing. This step must result in a firm timeline for implementation and a final set of recommendations in a recovery plan that can be considered for formal adoption by all the necessary parties. This step will be completed by December 2002, at which time the Services will publish the results as a proposed Recovery Plan for listed stocks and proceed with its promulgation of public hearings.

Step 6: Carry out our Commitments, Monitor Results, and Adjust the Strategy. Once the goals and actions to meet them have been established, we must ensure that we follow through on our commitments and produce desired results. Adjustments will have to be made as we implement the recovery plan, and the capacity to monitor and evaluate results at multiple levels of the effort must be built. Monitoring and evaluation programs will be necessary to ensure specific actions are implemented in the right manner and they are achieving the right outcomes for fish. There will also need to be an effective monitoring and evaluation system for each watershed, the marine areas, and the whole region to ensure our collective efforts add up to recovery. The monitoring and evaluation process used in Puget Sound must be consistent with a statewide strategy under development by the Independent Science Panel. We will need to develop the institutional capacity to track results, interpret information, and facilitate adjustments at the watershed and regional level. This step will conclude with a specific program and the commitments necessary to conduct the ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and adjustments necessary for success, and will be concluded in March 2003.

Questions to the reader: Do these steps provide a clear means to develop a recovery plan for the region that will meet the ESA and be consistent with treaty rights? Will the process help you in your responsibilities for salmon recovery?

NEAR TERM ACTIONS TO PROTECT AND RECOVER FISH

While a recovery plan is critical to long-term planning and success, there is no reason to wait for its development to begin recovering Puget Sound salmon. Indeed, many actions are currently underway and others will be taken to reverse some of the more significant harmful impacts on fish. These actions are occurring (or need to occur) in five critical areas: (1) habitat protection and restoration, (2) enforcement, (3) federal rules implementing the ESA, (4) improvements in harvest management practices, and (5) hatchery reform. Over the next two years, actions in these areas must protect and improve the base level of wild populations that now exist and the habitat conditions on which they depend. The strongholds of key habitats and populations in Puget Sound must be immediately secured if we are to be successful in rebuilding salmon populations over the long-term.

A Shared Strategy can help the region in these five areas by identifying where common approaches would facilitate local actions. It can also help coordinate and provide policy and technical support for actions that need to occur across watersheds, and can establish a communications strategy to raise awareness, support, and increasing individual and collective responsibility and stewardship. Resource managers must work across each element of recovery – habitat, harvest, and hatchery management – to ensure their actions are complementary. The Shared Strategy provides a forum to facilitate this coordination.

The Shared Strategy can provide a forum to discuss salmon recovery needs in each of these areas, including how practices could be improved to advance the recovery plan. Where there is common agreement, guidelines will be developed and supported by federal agencies in their implementation of the ESA.

Habitat Protection and Restoration. Local governments are reviewing land use practices that govern impacts to salmon habitats. At the state level, the shorelines management program is being revised to address the use of river, estuarine, and near shore environments. The July 2000 rule issued by NMFS under section 4(d) of the ESA will impact land use. Tri-county and other local governments are working with NMFS to agree on effective practices. A number of hydropower facilities will require license renewal, a process that provides opportunities to improve conditions for fish. Through a Shared Strategy we can inform each other of these and other contemplated changes and develop a better sense of the cumulative results of policy decisions. We can also identify elements of land use better addressed in a comprehensive manner. This region-wide interaction should improve the overall results for fish and people, and will raise awareness of both the positive and negative impacts of land use activities on salmon habitat.

Over the next two years, several hundred projects will be undertaken to preserve and restore important habitats in Puget Sound. If these projects follow a watershed and regional Shared Strategy there is more assurance that critical projects are being approved using the best knowledge of the watershed and the needs of the fish. Regional and state funding organizations like the Salmon Recovery Funding Board should encourage and support watershed and regional priorities that guide project investments across Puget Sound. The Shared Strategy can provide a forum for reaching regional consensus on capital funding priorities.

Harvest Management. Harvest practices need to continue to evolve and be implemented in a manner that is consistent with salmon recovery. Efforts should be undertaken to make harvest management decisions and processes more widely understood and accessible to the general public.

Hatchery Reform. There are over 100 hatchery facilities in Puget Sound, all of which play an important role in support of the sport and commercial fishing economy and in meeting tribal treaty harvest obligations. A hatchery reform process is underway to better understand how hatcheries can help recover and conserve naturally spawning populations and support sustainable fisheries. During the next two years, hatchery facilities will develop plans for achieving the objectives of the reform project.

Enforcement. There are many laws to protect salmon and salmon habitat in Puget Sound. It will be difficult to stimulate more actions from landowners and others unless current laws are implemented fairly and effectively. Enforcement must occur that supports common regional goals and strategies. In addition, there must be regional support for the institutional capacity and funding to do the job. Working together in a Shared Strategy we can identify important enforcement actions and provide support to step-up current efforts.

ESA Implementation. NMFS and USFWS have begun the implementation of ESA rules. These efforts will help focus recovery actions as they pass through the lens of federal law. The federal agencies must

work with the region to establish effective and clear standards and support an orderly process that concentrates efforts in the most important places. This concentration is especially critical during the next two years while we develop a regional recovery plan and public support for it. NMFS and USFWS should develop processes to expedite the approval of actions that do not harm fish. Working in partnership with others in the region, federal agencies can improve their implementation of the ESA by finding ways to facilitate actions that are beneficial to fish and fish habitat.

Questions to the reader: Are these the important near term areas to focus our shared work? Are there others? What can we do to help you be more effective and efficient?

INITIATING THE SHARED STRATEGY: STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

There is no single group or organization by itself capable of achieving salmon recovery in Puget Sound. A regional effort guided by a Shared Strategy for developing and implementing a recovery plan is critical to restoring the fish back to healthy levels. Leadership for the effort must be shared, and must come from many groups and individuals that (1) represent the diversity of interests from both the public and private sectors, (2) efficiently link recovery efforts, and (3) effectively communicate with the general public and the large and growing number of people working to save salmon.

If a Shared Strategy is to be successful, leaders must agree and commit to the substantive outcomes and steps to developing a recovery plan. We also need to create the structure to facilitate its implementation. The next step in our process will be to work with a broad-based steering committee representing the diversity of groups working on salmon recovery. With the help of the steering committee, we will organize a working session of 150 or more people in January 2001 to agree on a strategy and obtain support to carry out its initial stages. Both the steering committee and the participants at the working session would be asked to inform others of the Strategy and bring their input into the discussions. The steering committee will develop a proposal for implementing the Shared Strategy over the next two years.

Questions to the reader: Is this the right approach to initiating the Shared Strategy and gaining broad support to begin the effort? How can it be adjusted to improve understanding and support for the Strategy across the region?