

Summit to plan future of fish revival

SUSAN GORDON; The News Tribune

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About 600 people are expected to meet in Tacoma this week to celebrate progress in what organizers describe as a community-based effort to revitalize Puget Sound salmon.

The Shared Strategy summit takes place today and Thursday at the Greater Tacoma Convention & Trade Center.

It's an opportunity for government and tribal officials, business representatives, property owners and others involved in salmon restoration to rally around progress in 14 Puget Sound watersheds, organizers said.

When it comes to saving salmon, "It's up to us to decide what the future is all about," Bill Ruckelshaus, chairman of the Shared Strategy development committee, told members of The News Tribune editorial board Monday.

Ruckelshaus, a former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administrator, also serves as chairman of the state Salmon Recovery Board, which doles out government money for fish conservation.

He and others launched Shared Strategy several years ago to coordinate a voluntary response to federal Endangered Species Act listings of Puget Sound chinook salmon, Hood Canal summer chum and bull trout. All three have been threatened with extinction since 1999.

The Endangered Species Act requires federal officials to map out plans to revive declining species. But leaders of Shared Strategy said they've tapped the expertise of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – for salmon – and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – for bull trout – to create a homegrown plan that will meet federal requirements.

Shared Strategy's goal is to complete a Puget Sound fish revival plan by June.

NOAA Fisheries isn't expected to produce its draft recovery plans for salmon until the end of this year. The Fish & Wildlife Service has already drafted a plan for bull trout, but no date has been set for the final report. Spokesmen for both agencies said Shared Strategy's work could influence the outcome.

Among the goals of this week's summit is to prioritize regional salmon recovery efforts over the next 10 years, said Jim Kramer, Shared Strategy executive director.

The cost is likely to be to twice as much as government now spends for habitat improvement projects. The state Salmon Recovery Board currently approves about \$50 million annually, Kramer said. Of that, about 65 percent is federal money.

Ruckelshaus said the Shared Strategy blueprint is the kind of plan needed to ensure future financial support from lawmakers.

Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, which represents tribes with treaty-based fishing rights, also endorsed the Shared Strategy process to restore self-sustaining fish runs. "It takes all of us to do it," he said.

Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg said he would like to boost all kinds of salmon runs, not just those in danger of extinction.

“People that don’t fish want salmon in the rivers,” he said. “The political will is there to do this.”

What: Shared Strategy for Puget Sound summit

When: Today-Thursday

Topics:

- Financing
- Federal requirements
- Hatchery management
- Habitat restoration
- Shoreline protection
- Forest land management
- Farmland conservation
- Water quality

Attendance: Anyone who hasn’t paid and registered to attend will not be admitted. The conference has reached its capacity for participants, organizers said.

Information: www.shared_salmonstrategy.org/index.htm

Susan Gordon: 253-597-8756

susan.gordon@thenewstribune.com

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