Introducing the
ECOSYSTEM RECOVERY PLAN
for the Snohomish-Stillaguamish Local Integrating Organization

Credit: Puget Sound Partnership
Partners and stakeholders in Sno-Stilly LIO Ecosystem Recovery Plan development:

Snohomish County  City of Arlington
King County  City of Snohomish
Tulalip Tribes  City of Duvall
Stillaguamish Tribe  Stillaguamish Watershed Council
Snoqualmie Tribe  Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Forum
Port of Everett  Snoqualmie Watershed Forum
City of Everett  City of Stanwood
King Conservation District  Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board
Snohomish Conservation District  Snohomish County Marine Resources Advisory Committee
Pilchuck Audubon Society  Snohomish Health District
Sound Salmon Solutions  Stillaguamish Clean Water District Advisory Board
Snohomish Camano ECO Net  WSU Snohomish County Extension
A Local Focus and a Contribution to Puget Sound Recovery

Key goals of long-term planning for ecosystem recovery:

- Ensure that funding is targeted at the highest priority local strategies and actions
- Coordinate recovery actions across local areas and the region

To advance these goals, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is supporting the Puget Sound region’s Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) in developing focused, strategic Ecosystem Recovery Plans. The Snohomish-Stillaguamish (Sno-Stilly) LIO Committee members have been working together—under the vision and guidance of the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP)—to develop such a Plan.

The geographic area covered by the Sno-Stilly LIO includes the Snohomish River watershed (WRIA 7) and the Stillaguamish River watershed (WRIA 5). These basins contain rivers and habitat that are important to local people and livelihoods; critical to numerous species of fish, shellfish, and wildlife; and central to the recovery of Puget Sound.
Understanding the Local Priority Ecosystem Needs

The Ecosystem Recovery Plan (Plan) was developed to answer the following questions:

- What ecosystem and human wellbeing components are important in the LIO action area?
- What are the LIO’s goals for future habitats, species, and ways of life?
- What are the biggest challenges to reaching the goals?
- What is the LIO doing, and what should the LIO do to reach the goals?

The Plan includes an assessment of ecological and human wellbeing problems, developed by LIO Committee members with a mix of technical and policy backgrounds. It represents the LIO’s common understanding of what needs to be accomplished and how success will be achieved. The Plan documents both local ecosystem needs, and how local priorities relate to the Puget Sound Action Agenda and contribute to regional PSP recovery targets.

Once the ecosystem needs and goals were determined, LIO committee members examined root causes, defined hypotheses about why problems have developed, and created conceptual models to describe the social, political, and ecological conditions contributing to the persistence of specific ecosystem-degrading pressures.

Strategic Planning to Guide, Manage, and Evaluate Local Actions

The strategic plan was developed to guide strategies and appropriate sequencing of actions.

The LIO’s approach is focused on crosscutting opportunities—to address pressures that impact multiple ecological and human wellbeing components—for maximum impact.

The Plan prioritizes the most effective and efficient strategies to address evolving challenges, and notes barriers, opportunities, and solutions to achieving success. It includes tools that document how current and previously approved work, combined with planned actions, is intended to achieve intermediate and long-term results. The Plan is primarily focused on a 5- to 6-year time frame, but adaptive management is anticipated to provide ongoing improvement of the approaches to protection and restoration of the local watersheds, human wellbeing, and the larger Puget Sound ecosystem. Many of the broader goals and strategies also include a longer-term horizon such as 10 or 20 years. Monitoring and performance evaluation needs and gaps are included, and measures to track and communicate progress are being built in to the strategic planning approach.
Ongoing Efforts Are Leading to Improvements

Work is underway and there are improvements on some measures of progress. The Plan incorporates, works in coordination with, and builds on other planning processes and programs such as: Chinook and steelhead recovery plans, watershed health efforts by local stakeholders, Floodplains by Design, Shoreline Master Programs, Stormwater Management Plans, Comprehensive Plans, and many more. The Plan’s approaches have been focused through the experience of experts and lessons learned from more than 20 years of recovery efforts, and the Plan documents how recovery is expected to proceed if efforts stay on track.

We are beginning to build resilience into the natural system so our communities can adapt, grow, and remain vital.

Highlights of previous recovery work consistent with the goals of this Plan:

• The Snohomish watershed will soon meet its 10-year, 1,237-acre benchmark for restoring estuarine habitat as outlined in the 2005 Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Plan, thanks in part to the combined investments of tribal, federal, state, and local partners in the Qwuloolt Estuary Restoration Project, and the Smith Island Restoration Project.

• Significant progress has been achieved in the Snoqualmie watershed toward the Snohomish Salmon Plan’s mainstem river edge habitat goals. Nearly 2 miles of levees and revetments have been removed or set back, opening up more than 330 acres of floodplain thanks to the completion of the Stillwater Levee Removal, Lower Tolt River Floodplain Reconnection, Chinook Bend Levee Removal, and Upper Carlson Floodplain Reconnection projects.

• Progress in the Stillaguamish watershed is being achieved through approximately 500 additional acres of estuary habitat by the fall of 2018—to reach a total of 1,976 acres, exceeding the 2025 benchmark—through the Port Susan Bay Dike Setback, Leque Island Restoration, and z is a ba Estuary Restoration projects. Floodplain and riparian areas, along with large woody debris, have been added at numerous locations along the North Fork and some locations in the South Fork. Side channel restoration has progressed in the mainstem Stillaguamish.
The Plan Supports Decision Making

The Plans use a common language—standard nomenclature developed by PSP and used by all the LIOs—to ensure transparency, accountability, and trust in the Plan and actions. Improved consistency in managing Puget Sound recovery is a critical step toward increasing shared opportunities, leveraging existing efforts, and ultimately improving the collective regional recovery effort. Use of a common language will also enable more effective incorporation of local priorities in regional products such as Implementation Strategies, the Action Agenda, the State of the Sound, and the Biennial Science Workplan.

The Plan identifies local ecosystem needs and recognizes the importance of human values. Our communities and natural systems are interconnected, and the Plan considers the trade-offs associated with different natural resource management options. We hope decision-makers will feel confident enacting recommended policies and funding local and regional project implementation because of the inclusive, iterative, transparent, defensible approach taken throughout Plan development.

Further Investments Are Essential to Continued Progress Toward Recovery

Funding is a leading barrier to implementing further actions. The LIO’s ability to outpace the ongoing degradation and accelerate efforts to recover ecosystems and species, and sustain communities depends on commitment and investment to maintain the recovery effort. The Plan supports an efficient allocation of additional resources as they are identified and ensures smart investments through a shared vision, science-based structure of measurement and monitoring, and a system that promotes accountability, effectiveness, and progress.
Local and Regional Partners Working Together for Ecosystem Recovery

Stakeholders in the Snohomish and Stillaguamish watersheds have a long history of collaboration. The LIO includes members from the area’s counties, tribes, cities, special purpose districts, and interest groups, and membership overlaps with the Snohomish River Basin Salmon Recovery Forum, Snoqualmie Watershed Forum, and Stillaguamish Watershed Council. The expertise of these members was combined to make decisions and develop the Plan.

PSP believes that the LIO Plans are important to the overall Puget Sound protection and restoration effort. This work is further supported by EPA, Washington State, local municipalities, and the area’s treaty tribes.

For more information
Visit the LIO website at [www.snohomishcountywa.gov/831/Local-Integrating-Organization](http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/831/Local-Integrating-Organization) or contact Jessica Hamill (Snohomish County Surface Water Management) at 425-388-6476.
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