

Orca Recovery – Briefing for Snoqualmie Watershed Forum

September 12, 2018

Background

Governor Jay Inslee's Executive Order 18-02, issued in March 2018, convened a task force to recommend policies, programs, and priority actions to recover Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKWs).

- SRKWs live in the Salish Sea and off the coast of the US and Canada in the Pacific Ocean.
- Chinook salmon are the SRKW's primary source of food; recent science suggests that lack of food is the main threat to their continued existence.
- Other threats include vessel noise, which makes it difficult for them to hunt and communicate, and contaminants.
- The task force is developing recommendations for all three of these threats.
- In draft task force materials, very little attention has been given to the need for increased investment in habitat to support both natural and hatchery production of salmon in rivers.

Updates and more information are available on the web site:

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/energy-environment/southern-resident-killer-whale-recovery-and-task-force>

Schedule for Task Force Deliverables to Governor Inslee:

Draft Report due October 1, 2018

Final Report due November 1, 2018

Decision Item

Would the Snoqualmie Watershed Forum like to direct the staff team to write comment letters to the SRKW Task Force and Governor to encourage them to build on habitat investments and strongly support immediate actions to accelerate habitat protection and restoration?

Timing: The first draft of the task force report is expected to be available September 25. Comment letters would be developed and sent to the task force and the Governor between Sept. 25 and November 1. Staff will circulate a final draft of the letter via email for Forum members comments.

Proposed comment items:

- Maintain and consider increasing funding for salmon habitat projects via Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration program, Floodplains by Design, and Fish Barrier Removal Board.
- Prioritize habitat projects that support the marine food web, e.g., removing bulkheads and overwater structures. Prioritize projects that open up streams and rivers and their floodplains and estuaries for spawning and rearing.
- Monitor and adaptively manage for hatchery effects on wild salmon. Require marking of all hatchery fish and closely monitor their presence and abundance in fresh and marine waters.
- Regulations are not protecting habitat as was assumed when Chinook recovery plans were written. Make education and enforcement of habitat protection a bigger priority.
- Protect existing aquatic habitat by increasing the authority for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to enforce Hydraulic Permit Approvals.