

WRIA 8 Updates and Committee Reports

September 20, 2018

- **Puget Sound Regional Update** – The **Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council (PS SRC)** last met on July 26. The meeting focused on presentations on the Hood Canal Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan and the Governor’s Orca Task Force, and discussing recommendations for ‘bold actions’ to focus and accelerate salmon recovery in Puget Sound. The Council also heard updates from Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) on “Puget Sound Day on the Hill” highlights and PSP’s ‘mobilizing funding’ request for proposals to hire a contractor to reinvigorate the Foundation for Puget Sound as a means to solicit private funding for Puget Sound recovery. The PS SRC meets next on September 27. Diane Buckshnis, Edmonds City Councilmember, and Jason Mulvihill-Kuntz represent WRIA 8.
- The **South Central Action Area Caucus** last met on September 5. The meeting focused on reviewing final near-term action scoring, discussion and approval of a process to identify and direct \$100K in available funds to a regional priority near-term action, next steps in the formation of a WRIA 10 (Puyallup/White River) local integrating organization (LIO), presentation and discussion of Puget Sound Regional Council’s Regional Open Space Conservation Plan and Vision 2050 planning process, discussion of priorities for the Caucus Group’s 2018/2019 work plan, and general updates from Puget Sound Partnership and members. Jason Mulvihill-Kuntz currently attends to represent WRIA 8. The Caucus Group meets next on November 7.
- **Governor’s Orca Task Force** – Puget Sound’s endangered Southern Resident Orca population is at grave risk. In March, the Governor signed an executive order creating a Orca Task Force to develop policy recommendations at the regional, state, and federal level to reduce major threats and improve conditions for Orcas. Final recommendations are due November 1. The three primary threats to Orca survival are lack of Chinook salmon, their primary prey; toxic contaminants; and, vessel traffic and noise. Salmon recovery actions are key to what is being considered for the prey availability recommendations. While a large emphasis has been placed on increasing hatchery production of Chinook salmon to make more salmon available for Orcas, determining how and where to do this without impacting recovery of wild Chinook populations is incredibly complex. Conversely, increasing habitat restoration is fundamental to the objective of improving salmon populations now and into the future to achieve salmon recovery goals and to support Orca recovery. WRIA 8 is tracking this issue closely, and supporting, as a member of the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council, a strong emphasis on habitat restoration actions in the Task Force’s development of recommended actions.
- **Cooperative Watershed Management 2018 grant recommendations approved** – On September 4, the King County Flood Control District approved the funding recommendations for the 2018 Cooperative Watershed Management (CWM) grant program. The WRIA 8 recommendations—approved by the Salmon Recovery Council at the May 17 meeting—will

provide over \$1.4 million to habitat restoration projects, \$300,000 for ongoing monitoring activities, and approximately \$50,000 to outreach and education programs.

- **Federal agencies propose changes to the Endangered Species Act** – On July 19, U.S. Fish & Wildlife and NOAA Fisheries proposed a set of changes to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Comments are due by September 24. Some proposed changes are minor, but some have attracted the attention of news media, state and local agencies, and environmental organizations as problematic. While the proposed changes most directly affect future species listings under ESA, some think there may be a longer-term potential for the changes to affect species currently listed as threatened or endangered, such as Puget Sound Chinook salmon. Some reported concerns with the proposed changes include:
 - Language that may make it more difficult to factor climate change projections into species determinations.
 - Removes the prohibition on mentioning economic impacts when considering listing. (Currently considerations must focus strictly on scientific assessments of the species.)
 - Changes that may make it easier for cumulative, small-scale impacts to habitat that could make recovery more difficult.
 - Appears in some sections to take a less precautionary approach to protection of species and habitats.

WRIA 8 staff are tracking this issue closely and will keep partners informed. Numerous organizations and entities are submitting comments on the proposed changes. WRIA 8 staff and committees are **not** proposing WRIA 8 submit comments independently, but support signing onto a potential letter from the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council.

- **Salmon SEEson** – The 12th annual Salmon SEEson program is underway, coordinating and promoting salmon viewing opportunities for the public throughout King County watersheds. New sites this year include Laughing Jacobs Creek on Lake Sammamish, Miller and Walker Creeks in Normandy Park, and a few sites on the Snoqualmie and Tolt Rivers near Carnation. WRIA 8 manages the program with sponsorship from the Saving Water Partnership. The program receives additional support from Duwamish Alive, King County, the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watershed, and the Snoqualmie/Skykomish Watershed. A press release is planned for mid-September, and we are looking into opportunities to promote the program through various social media.
- **Salmon returns update** – Historically, 99.9% of the **sockeye** salmon run has passed through the Ballard Locks by this time. Sockeye salmon numbers are extremely low this year: as of September 9, about 32,100 sockeye are estimated to have entered the Lake Washington system (20 year average is over 179,000). The outlook for sockeye viewing in 2018 appears dim, though some will be seen in the Cedar River this year. **Chinook** salmon typically are about 92% through the Locks by this time. So far (as of September 9), around 6,600 Chinook have been estimated to have passed into the Lake Washington system (20 year average is 9,300). While that number is low, note that the 2017 return also seemed low (7,100 on September 9) yet ended up as the second highest return on the Cedar River since 2000. We

are not yet sure whether the higher proportion of Chinook returning to the Cedar River is a trend indicating improved habitat conditions or just a single-year occurrence.

- **Survey of WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council meeting times and printing procedures** – In response to a suggestion to consider alternative WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council meeting times, a survey is currently being administered to identify a meeting time that will work for the most members. Any changes to the meeting time will likely take effect in 2019. The survey also includes questions about material printing preferences.
- **E-news** – The August 24 WRIA 8 E-news included information about Salmon SEEson, funding for critical Ballard Locks repairs, orca recovery efforts, Endangered Species Act changes, grant opportunities, and links to several relevant news stories. Please send ideas for the October edition of E-news to Laura West at lwest@kingcounty.gov by October 5. E-news distribution now includes over 900 recipients.

WRIA 8 Committee Reports

- **WRIA 8 Technical Committee** – The Technical Committee met on August 8. Meeting topics included a presentation on the Willowmoor restoration project, and ongoing discussions regarding implementing the WRIA 8 monitoring and assessment plan (MAP) and monitoring priorities in WRIA 8.
- **WRIA 8 Implementation Committee** – The Implementation Committee met on August 7 and September 11. Meeting topics included general WRIA 8 updates, presentation from Seattle Public Utilities on the status of the Cedar River Habitat Conservation Plan, presentation from King County on the Riverbend Floodplain Restoration project on the Cedar River, presentation on the Willowmoor Floodplain Restoration project on the Sammamish River, review of draft letters to be considered by the Salmon Recovery Council, review of funding recommendation for WRIA 8 to convene a stakeholder process to identify concepts to address elevated water temperatures and low dissolved oxygen in the Lake Washington Ship Canal, and review of the agenda topics for the September 20 Salmon Recovery Council meeting.