

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

The San Juan salmon recovery plan describes and cites information about the presence of all 22 chinook populations listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in San Juan County. All other species of salmon can also be found in these waters during part of their migration to and from the ocean. San Juan County is also home to resident chinook (blackmouth) who spend the duration of their life in inland waters and San Juan County. San Juan County has one of the best functioning marine systems in Puget Sound and in the next 25 years the human population is expected to swell by 66% with close to a million visitors coming to the islands annually.

### **II. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Addressing protection is the most important recommendation in the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound Salmon Recovery plan and in the local chapter for San Juan County. It is a primary recommendation in other state and national assessments such as those produced by the Pew Oceans Commission, the US Commission on Ocean Policy, and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. Each of these efforts recognized the Puget Sound Region and in many cases specifically the San Juan Islands as critical to a healthy ecological future and the preservation of key listed species such as chinook salmon. At the local level, early information coming from the Marine Resources Committee and the Nature Conservancy efforts show that key indicators of San Juan ecosystem health, and key to protection and restoration of salmon, are showing downward trends of concern. Continued growth and heavy use by residents and visitors put serious pressures on resources of local, national and international value.

Each of these reports notes the importance of conserving areas of high biodiversity, reducing threats and stressors and using ecosystems as the basis for managing resources. They note that the investments likely to have the greatest return are those that arise out of an approach that moves beyond single, often habitat-focused fixes and develops a comprehensive suite of actions that take into account the larger human and environmental systems as well as the connectivity of the land and the sea.

The Puget Sound salmon recovery plan itself and the countless conversations that its development generated reinforced the high uncertainty that our current system of protection efforts provides. The factors behind this lack of confidence are largely:

- Poor coordination between regulatory programs and other programs like education, incentive and voluntary approaches
- A lack of understanding and recognition of the results of current and past efforts to protect natural resources
- A complicated and confusing set of regulations that focuses mostly on what can not be done resulting stymied creativity, little certainty to businesses and private property owners and conflicting guidance from state, local and federal agencies
- A lack of a structure that allows citizens, scientists, policy makers and managers to make the best use of all available protection tools (regulations and voluntary, incentive and education programs) to create new and creative solutions to tough issues such as cumulative impacts of

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

- docks, marine and other buffers, agency coordination on permit processes, and effectiveness of efforts
- A lack of a coordinated plan to conduct further analysis and research to best increase the certainty of protection and the appropriate areas to focus restoration

The San Juan Initiative is a proposal to try a different approach to protection that would address the concerns identified above. While one of the criteria for ranking the approach by the SRFB process is that methods have been tested – it is of more importance to note in the case of protection nearly everyone agrees that our current approach is not working. Without testing something new our certainty of success on the issue cited by scientists as most critical to salmon recovery will not likely improve.

The Initiative will be lead by a group of local, state, federal and tribal policy makers, business representatives and private property owners in San Juan County affected by and interested in protection measures, land managers, and local leaders focused on preservation of ecosystems and natural resources. There is a window of opportunity in San Juan. Numerous protection efforts (assessments, research, regulations, voluntary and incentive efforts, etc) are currently underway but aren't coordinated and expected comprehensive and site specific results linked to the policy makers who can implement them are unclear. A path to protection that delivers a higher certainty of success can be forged by site-specific analysis of the past and future effectiveness of these protection efforts and creating a process that allows the community to combine management tools and craft solutions that meet multiple interests. Just a few examples of efforts already underway are: San Juan Critical Area Ordinance update, Resource Manager Working Group, the Stormwater Ordinance, the Nature Conservancy and MRC "5-S Planning process", the Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan development, the Marine Stewardship effort and numerous assessment and research activities. Each of these science based efforts will, coordinated and linked, better leverage conservation actions and serve as a regional model for how communities can work together to increase protection efforts while meeting the broad base of other community interests necessary to lead to successful implementation.

### **III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the Initiative is to create a coordinated system of site specific actions and protection programs across voluntary, incentive, education and regulatory approaches that result in an increased certainty within the San Juan Community and across Puget Sound that the natural resources (salmon and other species) and other community values like private property rights will be protected into the future.

#### **Major Objectives**

To meet the goals stated above, specific objectives for the initiative are listed below.

- Establish measurable ecosystem-based protection objectives and a process for monitoring results over time
- Assess the past and future effectiveness of existing protection programs to determine site specific actions and programs that need to be continued and gaps that must be addressed

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

- Engage stakeholders, policy-makers, resource managers, scientists and the general public in defining collective protection goals, agreeing to assess the effectiveness of their past efforts, working with those key to implementing solutions to develop the solutions
- Integrate and leverage regulatory, voluntary and incentive programs to develop an overall protection program that will be broadly supported and will achieve desired results for people and the ecosystem (including salmon)
- Gain commitments from implementing organizations
- Increase clarity about additional research and assessment priorities

San Juan has experienced a tumultuous past in how land-use decisions have been made and the divisive result to local community suggests a longer-term solution is needed. Several key opinion leaders locally have stated the irony of the strong conservation focus of most San Juan County residents and yet the increasing disparity in the ability to find acceptable means to determine *how* best to achieve protection of natural resources while also protecting individual rights and other community concerns.

The Initiative seeks to deliver in a two year timeframe a package of programs that work in concert to meet community and ecological needs. This package will be developed by the leadership group to determine their collective baseline of what is necessary to protect, where they have been successful and where there are gaps in meeting their protection goals, and solutions to gaps developed by those most invested in the area of concern. The hope is that by involving those able to make the solutions reach the ground and be effective (policy-makers, land managers, business and private property advocates, and environmental interests) in defining the problem, establishing and participating in an assessment of the past effectiveness of protection effort and then crafting solutions that the package of programs will, through its development, lead directly to implementation. The other hope is that such a process will increase the capacity of those in San Juan County and the state and federal agency staff working in this County to find new and creative ways to work across traditional divides to advance incredibly complex social and environmental issues.

### **IV. PROJECT APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

Protection of salmon into the future is a human not a scientific issue. The lack of certainty that these precious resources will exist into the future is less about scientific uncertainty than social uncertainty. Thus the methodology and approach to improving the certainty of protection focuses predominately on how does one establish a process and a structure that takes the existing science and information and brings people together in a manner that results in the application of the science in a manner most likely to be implemented on the ground by the policy-makers, citizens and land managers responsible for taking the action.

To meet the objectives and analysis of the problem stated above, this proposal suggests staging decisions around the management and administration of a community-based ecosystem management program into two steps. The first step is the determination made by the San Juan County Council in March 2006 regarding management and administration of the initiative through December 2007 by Shared

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

Strategy for Puget Sound. The second step is for the San Juan County Council, in partnership with the Policy Group (described below), to determine the on-going management and administration at the conclusion of the initial planning process.

Staging decisions in this manner allows San Juan County to initiate the process and get started while allowing resource managers, community-based organizations and key stakeholders to participate in shaping the longer-term structure. Experience gained during the planning phase will also inform the group as they decide whether to pursue a formal public-private partnership or to use governmental authorities and infrastructure. Broader engagement and involvement in establishing the on-going structure will further ensure plan implementation and support.

### **Structure and Roles**

The following sections describe the structure and roles of the groups necessary to make the Initiative successful.

#### **Project Sponsors**

San Juan County, in partnership with Shared Strategy for Puget Sound, will create the foundation for the leadership group (Policy Group) to be successful. The roles of the two project sponsors are described later in this section.

#### **Policy (Leadership) Group**

Under this recommendation, the policy work of the San Juan Initiative would be guided and accomplished through the collaborative work of a Policy Group comprised of people key to making commitments to action and influencing opinion across the spectrum of management tools: voluntary measures, incentives, acquisition, and regulation. This will include key policy-makers or influencers representing local, state, tribal and federal resource managers, community-based groups, key stakeholder and citizen interests and a County Council representative. The group will also be informed by structured engagement and involvement of key stakeholders and San Juan County's local communities in problem definition, problem solving and committing to solutions. Members will seek consensus on a protection package that speaks to human and ecological needs.

This group will be comprised of representatives from key existing organizations, current task forces or efforts. These groups may be asked to take the lead, provide significant guidance or information on various topic areas. For example, the Water Resources Committee has already made significant advances in wetlands and aquifer issues that can be included in the process and/or the Marine Resources Committee is in the process of a significant effort focused on marine areas health that can form the foundation of the Initiative work. Additionally, current membership of these broad-based and successful efforts will likely be called upon to serve as a further sounding boards for the County Council or the Policy group as they set objectives, review proposed solutions, finalize the package and seek commitments.

Roles for this group include:

- Refine and finalize Initiative scope

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

- Participate in an assessment of existing protection programs to determine where current efforts are successful and where gaps exist
- Reach consensus on protection objectives and a final product
- As gaps are identified, set priorities and focus areas for community engagement in crafting solutions (e.g., shoreline/CAO coordination, habitat loss, pollutants)
- Bring members' knowledge of relevant programs and data to the process
- Provide leadership in implementing the final package
- Commit to implement actions in the package relevant to their agency or organization

### **San Juan County Community**

Involving the citizens of San Juan County at all stages of the Initiative will be a key to its success. This proposal suggests two mechanisms to engage with the people and tribes of San Juan County. One approach will be town hall meetings with the communities of San Juan County. The other will be to convene citizens from across the islands to find solutions to issues that speak directly to them (riparian areas, bulkheads, docks, aquifers, etc.) Interaction between the community and the Policy Group is expected to be collaborative, dynamic and engaging.

The role of the community is to:

- Describe what they see as critical to protect
- Highlight areas where they see current efforts as being successful and identify areas where better solutions are needed
- Engage on issues of most concern and assist in developing solutions that achieve individual and collective interests
- Provide broader representation and involvement for the Policy Group

### **Technical Team**

The Technical Team will be comprised of scientists with expertise to ensure the Initiative results will likely protect ecosystem functions and values and provide guidance on the social implications of actions. The Technical Team may involve other individuals or groups with specific expertise.

Roles for the Technical Team include:

- Build a comprehensive understanding of ecosystem processes, functions and values that incorporates traditional knowledge, local experiences and existing scientific data, information and analyses
- Contribute to the discussion on what is critical to protect
- Ensure assessments are structured to evaluate those factors of most significance to protect ecological function and economic interests
- Participate in assessment, as appropriate
- Evaluate results of assessments to help determine ecological gaps and highlight items and conclusions of significance
- Work with the community ensure ecosystem functions and values are conserved as solutions to issues are crafted
- Recommend responses to available data and data gaps based on best available science and precautionary principle directives

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

- Work with consultants to assimilate best available science
- Work in concert with the Policy Group to prioritize both topic areas and actions for adapting approaches

### **Staffing the Initiative**

The Initiative will be staffed by a project manager responsible for ensuring the Initiative's goals and outcomes are achieved. The project manager will work closely with the Policy Group, San Juan County Community, and Technical Team. This person will also provide reports and updates to the San Juan County Council and Shared Strategy staff pursuant to their administrative and oversight responsibilities. The project manager responsibilities include overseeing consultants and managing the budget. The project manager job description is attached. The hiring process will incorporate feedback from the community and will be approved by the San Juan County Council and Shared Strategy Executive Director. The position has been posted on several national and international list-serves and made available locally.

There is also a need for a technical coordinator to work with the scientific team and ensure that GIS layers are brought together in a format accessible across the stakeholders. This coordinator will ensure that the scientific information is provided to citizens, policy-makers and others in a format that is clear and understandable and relevant to the decisions necessary to reach protection objectives.

Significant resources are also included in the budget for consultant work. These costs include staff to conduct the assessment of the effectiveness of the variety of regulatory, voluntary and incentive programs and in addition provide resources that can be used by local organizations to make their existing information available to the effort. It is the vision of the Initiative that these consultant dollars be used locally to the greatest extent possible to continue to build and support local capacity.

### **Oversight and Administration**

Oversight of the San Juan Initiative will be provided by the San Juan County Council in cooperation with Shared Strategy for Puget Sound as project sponsors. Shared Strategy will administer the funds for this Initiative consistent a Memorandum of Agreement with San Juan County. The two sponsors will jointly agree on significant changes in scope, budget or contracted resources. Both sponsors will play a key role in promoting the model across the region.

### **San Juan County**

San Juan County will ensure that local community interests are being addressed and their legal obligations are being upheld. It is understood that outside resources will need to be sought and received to support some of the County's staff commitments to this initiative.

Specific roles for San Juan County include:

- Project sponsorship and oversight
- Participation in the assessment
- Consideration and implementation of Initiative recommendations, including updates to Shoreline Master Programs, Stormwater Ordinances,

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

Critical Areas Ordinances and other opportunities presented by the regulatory, incentive or voluntary frameworks

- Convene and participate in the Policy Group
- Appoint a Policy Group Chair that ensures the success of the Initiative
- Provide staff to participate as needed in community workshops

### **Shared Strategy**

Shared Strategy will provide assistance to the Initiative design and implementation; secure resources to provide analysis, technical and policy work and community involvement; increase resources available to San Juan County for implementation of regulatory, incentive-based and voluntary initiatives; and engage state and regional groups in support of the process. Shared Strategy is currently funded through June 2007 but it is assumed the successor organization to the Shared Strategy will continue to support the Initiative.

### **Cost Estimates**

Cost estimates are approximations of what is believed necessary to conduct the assessment work, facilitate the policy and technical groups, facilitate island-by-island meetings and specific working groups focused on developing solutions to identified issues, and manage the project overall. Once the Policy group is convened and has a chance to consider the scope, timeframe and objectives more closely this budget may be revised based on their input and considerations. The budget will also be more tightly refined once a project manager is hired and begins more completely developing the specific tasks and support necessary to complete the assessment work.

### **Results**

It is expected that the completed set of protection programs will clearly describe where regulations provide sufficient protection of natural resources, where they are ineffective in protecting those resources and the establishment, continuation or enhancement of voluntary, incentive and education programs necessary to reach protection objectives. These findings will be spatially specific. The results of this Initiative should provide significant certainty and clarity to funders and others that specific protection efforts in the San Juans will provide the desired result because they are nested in a larger understanding and awareness of areas at highest risk, the areas of highest importance and the certainty that existing programs will be effective.

## **IV. TASKS AND TIME SCHEDULE**

### **PROCESS**

The Initiative is organized into five phases based on the type of work that will be accomplished during each period and the sequence necessary to appropriately involve policy-makers, scientists and community members. These phases also try to recognize key inputs from already scheduled local activities (such as the Marine Stewardship Area and the Resource Managers Working Group). The timing is set such that existing efforts can be included and leveraged to the greatest extent possible.

### **Phase 1: Initiative Start-Up – *January- November 2006***

## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**

During this initial phase Shared Strategy and San Juan County will formally establish their partnership and hire a project manager to initiate the pilot. The solicitation and formation of the Policy Group and Technical Team will form the broader public-private partnership and truly kick-off the Initiative. Achieving deliverables on time during this phase will be a key to leveraging funds and connecting the Initiative to already scheduled workshops and deliverables.

### **Phase 2: Laying the Foundation – *November 2006 – June 2007***

This phase lays the informational foundation for the Initiative. The Policy Group and Technical Team will work interactively with local community groups to compile best available science, program and community protection goals and objectives and conduct a performance assessment of regulatory, voluntary, incentive and educational programs relative to their goals and objectives. This phase will be critical to foster the collaborative environment necessary to constructively work with the gaps identified through the process.

The outcome of this phase will be an initial report on protection objectives and a prioritized list of successes that must be continued and gaps that need to be filled.

### **Phase 3: Setting Goals, Making Choices - *July – January 2008***

During this phase the Policy Group in conjunction with the community achieves several significant milestones. They reach consensus on what ecosystem functions and values as well as related community needs must be protected, find solutions to gaps, highlight successes and create a completed package for even broader public review and comment.

This phase is critical for using the information gathered in Phase 2 in a manner that supports those participating in the process. The manner in which policy-makers, stakeholders, communities, scientists and others are engaged will be a key to the success of this phase.

### **Phase 4: Creating a Plan of Action – *February 2008- Spring 2008***

The focus of this part of the work is to finalize the plan, secure commitments for implementation and to solidify the organizational structure for long-term implementation and management.

### **Phase 5: Celebration and Implementation – *Spring 2008 and beyond***

This phase will initiate the new management and administrative structure and is the kick-off to implementation.

## **V. CONSTRAINTS AND UNCERTAINTIES**

There is the potential that through the identification of gaps in existing protection programs that participating organizations are vulnerable to misuse of the information by groups not participating in the collaborative process and seeking to advance singular interests. This process acknowledges that risk and attempts to minimize the potential for this outcome by working directly with the key parties most invested in the outcome of the process.



## **Number 15: Evaluation Proposal: San Juan Protection Initiative**