

# WRIA 6 Protection Strategy

## Introduction

This report is intended to outline and detail the WRIA 6 (Island) Lead Entity Protection Strategy, which is one component to an overarching strategy adopted with the [2005 WRIA 6 Multi-species Salmon Recovery Plan](#) (pg. 47) and supported by the [2019 Salmon Recovery Plan Update](#) (pg. 21). Other components in the overarching strategy include, restoration of nearshore processes, removal of barriers to habitat, reconnection of tidal influence to habitats that have been disconnected due to human-driven alterations and support for new and ongoing research and monitoring that better our understanding and informs our progress and priorities.

Protecting healthy nearshore processes and habitats is prioritized highly among the overarching strategy components. Protection of healthy processes and habitats is generally less expensive, provides more certainty of success and is less difficult than restoring damaged processes and habitats. This high priority status is reflected in the scoring criteria used to identify projects worth pursuing and to rank projects proposed for grant funding.

The majority of the protection work advanced by the Lead Entity is carried out through voluntary actions. The remainder of protection work is in the form of the Lead Entity's guidance and support for alignment between local land use regulations and salmon recovery efforts. However, the majority of the protection efforts by far are through the acquisition of parcels, or the securing of conservation easements from willing landowners.

The original WRIA 6 Lead Entity process of purchasing properties with grant funds was long and inefficient for landowners and project sponsors. The process was to identify properties, communicate and build relationships with landowners and then apply for grant funding. Once projects were proposed, the review, approval and contracting process took a year or longer. This meant that there was often a year and a half between the landowner agreeing to place their property into conservation and funding being received.

To overcome these inefficiencies, the Lead Entity sought a more expedient process which would encourage more landowners to participate and provide the ability to act swiftly in real estate transactions when an opportunity is identified that is time bound.

This document provides clarity around the strategy used by the Lead Entity to support protection projects, ensuring they are in the areas with the highest potential to benefit juvenile salmon, their prey, and processes necessary to maintain the habitat.

## Decision Support Framework

All projects that apply for Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) funding through the WRIA 6 Lead Entity are reviewed, then scored by the Island County Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee (SRTCC), using criteria that address Areas and Ecosystem Components, Watershed Processes and

Actions, Costs, Certainty of Success and Resiliency to Climate Change. These criteria were designed to select projects that best and most efficiently address the limiting factors and barriers to recovery in Island County. The Lead Entity also has a mechanism in place to reject projects that are not likely to be successful or address the identified priorities. A project that is funded with WRIA 6's SRFB allocation has been deemed to address high priority concerns and areas.

The project selection criteria are as follows:

- Area and Ecosystem Components (10 points possible) places highest value on projects in Priority Geographic Area 1 (NE Whidbey and North and East Camano which are adjacent to large rivers) that address pocket estuaries, stream mouths, bluffs and beaches.
- Watershed Processes and Actions (10 points possible) places highest priority on projects that provide direct connectivity to habitats, **replace barriers that are 0—33% passable by fish**, protects areas that with 60% or greater intact habitat or are directly related to the development of a capital project.
- Climate Resiliency Considerations (5 points possible) places highest priority on projects that clearly articulate resiliency considerations, impacts and how these are addressed, if necessary.
- Certainty of Success and Costs (25 points possible) places highest priority on projects that are late phase project implementation, protecting from immediate threats, have large amounts of match funding secured and positive stakeholder support.

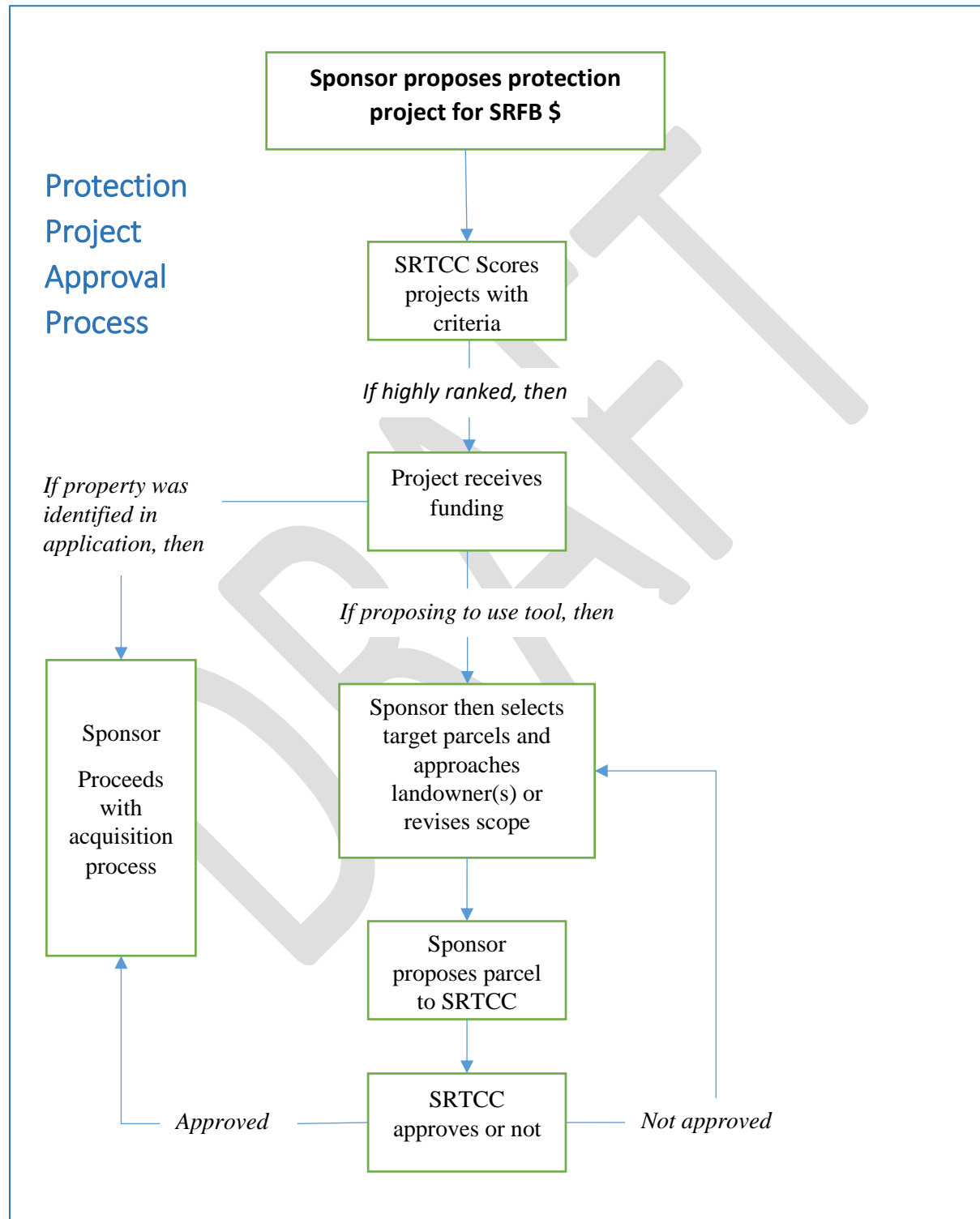
All projects that rank highly for SRFB funding address these priorities.

Protection priorities were further refined to a parcel-scale score in 2019 when the Nearshore Protection Prioritization tool was completed. This tool assigns scores to shoreline parcels for landscape context, ecosystem processes, and habitat function. Details on the tool and scoring criteria are included in the section below. The output of the tool is a score for each parcel where the higher the number, the higher relative priority for protection compared to other parcels. The tool enables comparison of parcels to other parcels at a finer, protection-specific scale than the project scoring criteria which is used to select restoration, protection, and planning projects for funding.

The tool provides the guidance necessary to sponsors, and the assurance to the SRTCC, that parcels acquired with salmon recovery funding will be of high priority and benefit. The SRTCC has stated where the priority geographic areas are in the Recovery Plan. Sponsors can apply for funding to acquire and protect parcels in the priority areas, or a subsection of the priority areas, without the need to identify a specific, individual parcel. Once an amount of funding has been successfully allocated to the project, sponsors use the tool's output scores to justify the order of acquisitions and expenditure of funds within that project area. This structure allows a project sponsor to pursue acquisitions with certainty of immediately available funding. This funding availability is a positive incentive when working with interested landowners. This addresses the inefficiencies in the original process.

Sponsors with acquisition tool implementation projects will be expected to present targeted parcels, once identified, to the SRTCC for approval before proceeding. The SRTCC will discuss the proposal at the next monthly meeting and either approve or reject the parcel. The SRTCC will provide letters of support for the sponsor to document the approval. The decision will be based on the amount of salmon funding requested compared to the amount of salmon benefit gained. The decision will also be based on the knowledge of local stakeholder support and acceptance. Projects listing parcels that are determined to

be not a good fit for salmon recovery funding, or likely to face political or stakeholder conflict, will not be successful. The sponsor will be encouraged to look to other parcels to support the project's objectives.



## Summary of Parcel Scoring in Framework

Parcel scores for protection are only used when comparing parcels to one another to inform relative values when prioritizing. The scores are not used to compare a project involving an identified parcel to a restoration or planning project. The full WRIA 6 Nearshore Acquisition Prioritization Framework Final Report is available [here](#).

Each parcel has a score out of a possible '100'. Criteria used to evaluate nearshore parcels were developed by a subcommittee of, and approved by the full SRTCC. The criteria categories were developed based on previous protection prioritization efforts by other watershed organizations. The criteria were customized and weighted to reflect the best possible habitat that Island County/WRIA 6 could provide for juvenile salmon. The framework criteria can be summarized as follows:

- Landscape Context (20 possible points)
  - Acreage of parcel
  - Parcel neighbors
  - Priority Geographic Area (proximity to big natal rivers)
  - Length of shoreline
- Ecosystem Processes (60 possible points)
  - Distance to a coastal stream
  - Salmon habitat in stream
  - Potential juvenile salmon habitat
  - Shoretype (Pocket Estuary, Feeder Bluff, Accretion Shoreform, etc)
  - Erosion potential
  - Structure near shoreline
- Habitat Function (20 possible points)
  - Eelgrass presence or potential habitat
  - Land cover/riparian vegetation
  - Forage Fish Spawning