

PROJECT: 20-1134 A, WRIA 6 Nearshore Protection Tool Implementation

Sponsor: Whidbey Camano Land Trust Program: SALMON ST PROJ Status: Board Preliminary Approved

MEETING: Initial Review

Shared: 7/20/2020

Review Status: Needs more information

Considerations: Scope concern

Topics	Comments
Review Panel Comments - Initial	
Improvements to Make Project Technically Sound (response required)	
	<p>Despite the recent update to the WRIA 6 protection strategy, the Review Panel is concerned that the process lacks the specificity required to ensure that acquisitions provide the highest benefits to salmon recovery. For example, the protection strategy provides the highest scores to parcels within Priority Geographic Area 1, but that still covers a significant amount of area with hundreds of parcels. The process also does not really account for the benefits of blocking up several parcels to protect a broader shoreline area. The strategy also does not consider the state of community engagement or likely landowner willingness for conservation easements or fee-simple acquisitions. Given the small amount of annual funding going to Island County, acquisitions will generally occur one parcel at a time. The protection strategy should consider WRIA 6 salmon habitat protection/restoration goals over the next 10 years and identify more specific areas where a number of parcels can be realistically purchased to either protect intact shoreline processes or allow for restoration along a stretch of shoreline. Otherwise, the parcels will just end up being scattered around the islands with little continuity in protection or restoration opportunities. The project selection criteria are fine for dealing with opportunistic projects, but a truly strategic plan should have more specific habitat-based objectives with a time-frame for accomplishing the objectives.</p> <p>While we recognize the need to have funding in place to pursue high priority acquisition projects, the protection strategy should have greater geographic specificity that is related to habitat objectives (e.g., protection of feeder bluffs, pocket estuaries, or forage fish spawning areas) and explicitly consider community engagement and landowner willingness in determining priorities, not just habitat or ecosystem factors. An updated protection strategy with more geographic and habitat specificity will provide greater assurance that future acquisitions will provide the greatest benefits to salmon recovery, while still providing flexibility for project sponsors to engage with different landowners and reduce the time necessary to purchase properties.</p>
	<p>Reply: In response to SRFB Review Panel comments, the Whidbey Camano Land Trust is refining the habitat and geographic specificity of the WRIA 6 Nearshore Acquisition Tool Implementation Project (RCO #20-1134) , as well as addressing landowner willingness, to ensure both acquisition success and the greatest benefits to salmon recovery from the project. To achieve this, the Land Trust is proposing specific acquisition targets of estuarine and former estuarine habitat within the Livingston Bay area, a sub-unit of Geographic Priority Area 1 of the WRIA 6 (Island County) Multi-Species Salmon Recovery Plan. The project site is located on the eastern side of Camano Island within Port Susan Bay and the Greater Skagit and</p>

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Stillaguamish River Delta, which encompasses two of the 16 major river deltas in the Puget Sound.

Since this application was originally submitted, the Land Trust has identified multiple willing landowners in the Livingston Bay area, including the Leque parcel, which ranked in the top one percent of all WRIA 6 Nearshore parcels by the Nearshore Protection Tool. Furthermore, the Land Trust and project partners have already secured partial funding and applied for the remainder of funds needed for completion of the project, from compatible grant programs that highly leverage the requested salmon recovery funds. Specifically, the project will permanently protect 25 acres of tidelands owned by the Livingston Bay Association, and over 1,700 feet of barrier beach owned by the Leque family, that are sustained by sediment input from active, exceptional feeder bluffs, to advance salmon recovery for multiple species of salmonids including Puget Sound Chinook. Furthermore, protection of the 34-acre Leque property, which includes 25 acres of wetlands immediately behind the barrier beach, is critical for securing the future opportunity for a regionally important estuary restoration project on the larger project worksite, involving multiple adjacent ownerships and nearly 300 acres.

The Leque property scored among the top 50 parcels in Island County (out of over 6,300 parcels in total), under the newly adopted WRIA 6 Nearshore Protection Tool. In addition to being a top local priority, the above mentioned estuary restoration project at Livingston Bay, including the Leque property, is one of the top priorities of the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project (PSNERP). Therefore, in an effort to advance both local and regional priorities, as well as priority acquisition and future restoration, the Land Trust is refining the scope of this project to focus on acquisition of the Leque parcel, and its associated nearshore habitat at Livingston Bay.

Additional project updates include clarification of the local review and vetting procedures, to be conducted by the WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizens Committee's (SRTCC), that are needed to ensure that acquisitions proposed for implementation of the Nearshore Protection Tool are consistent with the WRIA 6 Multi-species Salmon Recovery Plan. These are more appropriately addressed by the WRIA 6 Lead Entity Coordinator.

This updated project focus, emphasizing established habitat and geographic priorities identified by the WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan and the Nearshore Protection Tool, will build upon years of successful conservation and restoration efforts by multiple partner organizations in the Greater Skagit and Stillaguamish Delta and Port Susan Bay. More than 7,500 acres of tidelands and tidal marsh have been protected and restored by the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Stillaguamish Tribe. The refined project focus area is contiguous with the above described protected lands and represents a significant opportunity for expansion of nearshore protection, and an opportunity for future restoration, in an area identified as a top priority by multiple regional plans and the WRIA 6 (Island) Protection Strategy and Nearshore Protection Tool.

Project Review Comments

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	<p>We hope this addresses the Review Panel's previous concerns.</p>
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