Evaluation Proposal
Acquisition Project

Applicants must respond to the following items. The local citizen and technical advisory groups will use the evaluation proposal to evaluate your project. Applicants should contact their lead entity for additional information that may be required.

Up to eight pages may be submitted for each project evaluation proposal.

(SUBMIT INFORMATION VIA PRISM ATTACHMENT PROCESS)

1. BACKGROUND

Describe the fish resources, the current habitat conditions, and other current and historic factors important to understanding this project. Be specific—avoid general statements. When possible, document your sources of information by citing specific studies and reports.

With regard to this specific project area, the *Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan* (2005) states that, "This site has the highest landscape scale connectivity of any pocket estuary with restoration potential." The project is located within one ebb tide (a day's migration) from the Skagit River Delta and all six Skagit Chinook salmon stocks currently rear in Skagit Delta and pocket estuary habitats. Restoration of pocket estuary habitat can partially mitigate delta density dependence and improve survival of naturally occurring fry migrants. (Beamer, et al 2005). Chinook and chum rely heavily on shallow, nearshore habitats with juveniles from these stocks making up a large component of the salmon using the Whidbey nearshore. Nearly 50% of the federally threatened Puget Sound Chinook spawn in the Skagit and Stillaguamish Rivers (SASSI 2004).

The central location of WRIA 6 means that most Puget Sound juvenile and adult salmon and trout populations utilize WRIA 6 marine and nearshore waters. The Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish rivers, which terminate into the protected waters of Whidbey Basin (in which this project is located), are home to 47 salmon and trout stocks, which comprise over 20% of the stocks in Puget Sound. Ten of the 47 Whidbey Basin stocks are Chinook stocks and eight are fall chum stocks**.**

PROBLEM STATEMENT

State the nature, source, and extent of the problem that this project will address and help solve. Address the primary causes of the problem, not just the symptoms. When possible, document your sources of information by citing specific studies and reports.

This project addresses the protection of a historic pocket estuary habitat with the goal being to keep the property from being further degraded thus protecting restoration options in the future that will benefit salmon and other species. The loss of estuarine habitat in the Puget Sound has been identified as a leading cause of declining salmon numbers. The protection and future restoration of estuarine habitats has been identified as a primary tool needed to recover salmon stocks and other native fish species. The nearshore area in WRIA 6 provides the greatest number of functions to the greatest number of salmon and trout stocks and life history stages. The highest priority in WRIA 6 is to protect existing healthy nearshore processes and habitats because this will benefit all juvenile and adult salmon. The focus of this project is to protect future restoration opportunities by assuring that the subject property is not developed in the future. This project's historic pocket estuary has been identified by experts as being an important restoration area that is linked to Skagit Chinook salmon recovery goals (Oct. 2005, Beamer, McBride, et al). In the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan,

"completed restoration at this site could increase nearshore habitat fish capacity by an estimated 26,025 smolts annually. It is expected that juvenile salmon would use the lagoon immediately following completion of restoration." Further, the Plan states that, "This site has the highest landscape scale connectivity of any pocket estuary with restoration potential." (SCRP 2005). This is the pocket estuary selected by the Skagit River Cooperative for conducting a restoration feasibility analysis with a 30% design completed, as required under the Skagit Bay Pocket Estuary Assessment from a previous SRFB grant.

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

List the project's objectives. Objectives are statements of specific outcomes that typically can be measured or quantified over time. Objectives are more specific than goals (visions of the desired future condition) and less specific than tasks (the specific steps that would be taken to accomplish each of the objectives). For example, the objectives of an acquisition project might be to protect a forested riparian buffer, to protect a steep slope, to protect a floodplain, to protect a channel migration zone, and to extinguish timber, development, and agricultural rights. Explain how achieving the objectives will address and help solve the problem identified in #2 above.

The objectives of this project are to protect healthy functioning salmon supporting habitat by:

a. Acquiring a conservation easement (or, if required, fee rights) to 30.6 acres that contain a former pocket estuary in order to allow for future salmon restoration opportunities that are compatible with adjacent private properties.

b. Acquiring a conservation easement to 1.26 acres that includes the link and tidegate between the historic pocket estuary habitat and Skagit to protect and will allow future salmon restoration opportunities that are compatible with adjacent private properties.

Acquiring conservation easements on these proposed lands will protect existing habitat from development and will retain the opportunity to restore the site to benefit juvenile and adult salmon, as well as other native fish. Future restoration will likely involve removing fill from the blocked estuary and opening the outlet channel to the historic pocket estuary habitat, creating tidal channels and marsh, wherever possible. As indicated above, this pocket estuary has been chosen by the Skagit River Cooperative for doing a restoration feasibility analysis and a 30% design under another SRRB grant. Protection in this area is listed as a high priority in the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan and the WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan.

2. PROJECT APPROACH

- **Briefly describe the geographic setting of the project (marine nearshore, estuary, main stem, tributary, etc.) and the salmon life cycle stage(s) affected**.

This is a marine nearshore and estuary acquisition protection project, located on Skagit Bay, which is in Island County on the northeast side of Whidbey Island. The project area is located within Geographic Area 1, identified and designated as the top priority for protection in the WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan. According to the Salmon Recovery Plan, this area is utilized by the largest number of Chinook fry migrants from the Stillaquamish, Skagit and Snohomish rivers during their first days of nearshore migration. The shorelines are primary pathways for bull trout migrating between these rivers. In addition, Geographic Area 1 is used heavily by juveniles and adults from the 47 salmon and trout stocks that originate in these rivers, which comprise over 20% of the stocks in Puget Sound. (WRIA 6 SRP 2005). Future restoration will especially benefit the fry migrant history type of salmon, including all six Skagit Chinook stocks.

- **Briefly describe the habitat types on site (spawning, rearing, forested riparian/floodplain, wetlands, tributary, side-channel, off-channel, uplands, etc.) and their size and quality.**

This project includes historic pocket estuary habitat and the connecting property to Skagit Bay which will, in the future allow opportunities to restore large areas of nearshore that provide rearing, shelter from predators, migration and physiological transition areas. Future restoration of the historic pocket estuary habitat will provide future shelter for salmon from predators, refuge from high-energy waves, and key areas for food production. These areas are particularly important for young salmon life stages. Future restoration will connect large areas of mudflats that are extremely productive and provide plankton for young salmon and forage fish and are most important early in the out-migration season. In addition, it will connect the historic pocket estuary habitat to productive and healthy eelgrass beds that provide shelter for young fish, food, and cover for migration during low tides, and spawning areas for herring.

- **Briefly describe adjacent habitat types (upstream, downstream, across stream, upland) that are in protected status and their size and quality.**

Property A is surrounded to the north, east and west by subdivisions that are mostly built out with homes. The southern boundary of Property A is adjacent to large wooded residential parcels. The Dugualla unit of Deception Pass State Park is located adjacent to the southeast corner of Property A. Property B is adjacent to a large segment of tidelands owned by Island County and is the connection between Property A and Skagit Bay. The project area is just south of the mouth of the North Fork Skagit River and the Swinomish Channel.

- **Briefly describe the extent to which habitat to be acquired is currently intact and fully functioning and/or needs restoration; the timeframe in which responses or improvements in habitat functioning are expected; and the continuity of the proposed acquisition with other protected or functioning habitat in the reach.**

The historic pocket estuary habitat of Property A and the Property B connection to Skagit Bay will be protected from future development until they can be restored to provide appropriate habitat for the fry migrant salmon life history and many additional salmon and other wildlife habitat functions. It is likely to take several years to design a restoration project that meets the needs of salmon, Island County and the nearby residents. The next phase is to submit a SRFB application to do this design work. Following successful completion of the design work, a SRFB application will be submitted to restore the functioning of the historic pocket estuary habitat to benefit salmon. It has been estimated that total estuarine habitat will increase by 2.55 hectares and channel habitat could increase by 2.4 hectares. In addition, completed restoration could increase nearshore habitat fish capacity by an estimated 26,025 smolts annually. Juvenile salmon are expected to use the lagoon immediately following restoration. (Beamer, et al., 2005).

- **List the individuals and methods used to identify the project and its location.**

Both the WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan and the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan identify this area as an important protection priority. The Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan, which specifically identifies this project area as a high protection priority, also underwent a long and arduous development process with significant public review at all levels. The WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan (SRP) was developed and approved after a long and arduous process that involved numerous studies, committees, public input and hearings, etc. The subject project area is located within Geographic Area 1, the top priority area for protection, enhancement and restoration actions according to the SRP. Area 1 is located within 5 miles of the mouths of the main salmon bearing streams (Stillaguamish, Skagit and/or Snohomish rivers). According to the WRIA 6 SRP, this area is utilized by the largest number of Chinook fry migrants from these rivers during their first days of nearshore migration. The shorelines are also primary pathways for bull trout. In addition, this historic pocket estuary was identified as one of the highest priorities for protection and future restoration in the Whidbey Watershed in a study that was part of the SRP process.

- **Describe the consequences of not conducting this project at this time and describe the current level and imminence of risk to habitat. Provide the current zoning and Shoreline Master Plan designation. For multi-site acquisition projects, identify all the possible parcels that will provide similar benefits and certainty and provide a clear description of how parcels will be prioritized and how priority parcels will be pursued for acquisition.**

The owner of Property A, an Estate, has announced its plan to sell the subject property on the open market. The properties may be listed within days and the Whidbey Camano Land Trust is meeting with the executor on July 12, 2007. This project is a rare opportunity to protect a large area of future salmon supporting habitat from just one owner. If the property is sold, management of salmon supporting habitat becomes much more complicated and opportunities for future restoration are drastically reduced or eliminated. Property A is zoned for high density Rural Residential development and Rural 5 acre homesite development. Property A could be immediately further subdivided and sold for residential development. There is no replacement for this one-time protection opportunity. The owner of Property B is the homeowners association who has voted to work to protect Property B and is interested in habitat restoration in the future.

- **Describe how the site(s) was identified for acquisition.**

The site was identified through the goals and objectives of the WRIA 6 SRP and the specific identification of this site in the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan as an important priority for salmon recovery. It was also identified in the Whidbey Camano Land Trust "greenprint map" process which over more than a year, resource data was gathered from local, state, federal and other organizations and knowledgeable individuals about the priority landscapes in Island County requiring protection. This area was identified through this process as a high protection priority.

- **Explain how the project's cost estimates were determined.**

The cost estimates were based on previous grant applications, current market values of comparable properties, and information on what the appraised market value of the property is from the executor of the Estate for Property A.

- **Describe other approaches and opportunities that were considered to achieve the project's objectives.**

There are no other opportunities that would be more cost effective to protect salmon habitat than acquiring this nearshore habitat that prevents future development and provides for future salmon supporting habitat restoration opportunities. As cited in the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan, "This site has the highest landscape scale connectivity of any pocket estuary with restoration potential." (Beamer, et al 2005).

- **List project partners. When appropriate, include a letter from each participating partner briefly outlining its role and contribution to the project.**

The major project partners include the Dugualla Bay Heights Homeowner Association, private property owners located adjacent to the project area, and the Ducken Estate. However, the project has the support of multiple partners, such as Wild Fish Conservancy, Skagit River Cooperative, and WA Department of Fish and Wildlife.

- List all landowner names. Include a signed form from each landowner acknowledging their property is proposed for SRFB funding consideration

Ducken Family LLC – see attached form

Dugualla Bay Heights Inc. – see attached form.

- **Describe your approach to long-term stewardship of the facility or land. Projects should be consistent with habitat forming processes in the watershed, requiring reduced up-keep and long-term maintenance over time. Identify any planned use of the property including upland areas.**

Property B, with the historic pocket estuary habitat will be protected from future development and will be evaluated after protection for salmon restoration opportunities to increase its value for salmon habitat. This will be done in coordination with the Dugualla Bay Heights homeowners association and neighbors. Depending on future discussions, the likely scenario is that the underlying land is owned by the homeowners' association or interested adjacent landowners. The conservation easement, protecting the property for adverse development and permitting the future appropriate restoration of the land, will be owned and managed by the Whidbey Camano Land Trust. There is a chance that a small portion of the most upland portion of Property B could potentially have a private storage building on it. However, such a structure would not be located in future salmon restoration habitat areas.

- **When known, identify the staff, consultants, and subcontractors that will be implementing the project, including their names, qualifications, roles and responsibilities. If not yet known, describe the selection process.**

Patricia Powell, executive director of the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, has over 16 years of experience in successfully acquiring lands and waters for conservation purposes. Christine Hilton, land protection specialist for WCLT, has over six years of acquisition-related experience and ten years of conservation experience. Both Chris and Pat will be the primary people working on this acquisition. There will be no consultants or subcontractors.

3. TASKS AND TIME SCHEDULE

List and describe the major tasks and time schedule you will use to complete the project.

Acquire preliminary title reports:	September 2007
Enter into option agreements:	January 2008
Surveyor review of legals:	December 2007
Acquire appraisal:	January 2008
Acquire properties:	March-August 2008

4. CONSTRAINTS AND UNCERTAINTIES

State any known constraints or uncertainties that may hinder successful completion of the project. Identify any possible problems, delays, or unanticipated expenses associated with project implementation. Explain how you will address these constraints and the likelihood of success.

Success of the project always depends on successful negotiations with the owners and will also depend on good coordination and cooperation between the homeowners and WCLT.