

Evaluation Proposal - Non Capital

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)

I. BACKGROUND

South Camano's orientation near the estuaries of both the Stillaguamish and Snohomish Rivers makes this shoreline an important location for migrating juvenile salmon. Island County's WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan (SRP) indicates that these two rivers support four independent Chinook populations. The east side of the south tip of Camano Island is within the area the SRP calls Geographic Area 1. This Geographic Area is ranked as top priority due to its proximity to these rivers. The nearshore portions of Geographic Area 1 are used by a large number of Chinook fry during their first days of migration and are also a pathway of bull trout moving between rivers.

The project area also includes numerous surf smelt and sand lance spawning beaches (WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife, Forage Fish Spawning Surveys, 2001-2003). Juvenile salmon are known to feed off these forage fishes. According to the SRP, protecting forage fish habitats is critical to successfully protecting Puget Sound salmon stocks. Further, natural sediment drift process must be maintained in order to sustain the beaches where forage fish spawn.

Additionally, research in the project area ranked its feeder bluffs as exceptional, and identified a pristine sedimentation point and sediment regimes that are critical to the maintenance and protection of salmon populations (Island County Feeder Bluff and Shoreform Mapping, November, 2005).

The area's upland habitat includes important riparian functions, migration corridors, and a wetland. This stretch of shoreline also includes a bigleaf maple-red alder/sword fern – fringe cup element occurrence in the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan (WNHP). This particular occurrence is one of the most important occurrences in the state due to its large size and quality. Most remaining occurrences are very small and degraded. The Global/State status under the WNHP is G2G3S2. This means that the association is considered both Globally and State Imperiled and at a high risk of extinction due to very restricted range, very few occurrences, steep declines or other factors. In combination with the feeder bluffs, these habitats support ESA listed Chinook salmon and other anadromous fish.

Habitat protection is one of the key strategies described in the Salmon Recovery Plan. As noted in the SRP, population growth is increasing the demand for shoreline residential access, and while regulatory tools, such as the Growth Management Act and Shoreline Management Act, play important roles in maintaining habitat, the WRIA 6 SRP focuses its strategies on voluntary opportunities to enhance levels of protection through acquisition, conservation easements, and stewardship. Acquisition and conservation easement are the surest method of protecting the most important habitat for the long term as they provide permanent protection. Further, conservation easements in particular can be an attractive tool for landowners as they allow the owner to maintain some rights and be paid for giving up other rights while at the same time protecting critical salmon and wildlife habitat.

This stretch of Camano Island has been identified as one of the most intact shorelines with high quality habitat. While there is a great deal of scientific data currently supporting south Camano Island and the nearshore area as a very important site for salmon, it is unknown which properties or stretches of property

would provide the greatest benefit if protected, nor is it known which landowners or groups of landowners are most willing to participate in voluntary protection. The result of this assessment would fill this data gap by specifically identifying those properties and stretches of property that have the highest importance for salmon protection and recovery efforts. Then, these high salmon protection priority lands would be further prioritized based on the importance of landowner willingness, quality of habitat and connectivity of habitat. The result will be a list, in priority order, of those properties that are most feasible to pursue for permanent protection (purchasing conservation easements and/or fee simple acquisition). This will set up the acquisition projects that we will pursue for protection in the next rounds of SRFB and other appropriate funding sources. The end goal is to have the most important stretches of the south Camano shoreline permanently protected to yield the highest benefit to salmon recovery and protection efforts.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Little, if any, formal protection planning has occurred on the south tip of Camano Island. As mentioned above, protection is a top strategy within the Island County SRP. Further, the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan (2005) advises that protection is a more certain strategy than restoration as the habitat is more likely to already support species.

The proposed landowner willingness assessment will allow us to inform the public about conservation opportunities and protection tools that exist and determine landowner interest in conservation alternatives. The work will identify which owners may be willing to consider purchased or donated conservation easements, purchased or donated fee simple, or a combination easement/fee sale. This will help to prioritize and streamline protection projects in preparation for future funding opportunities, including upcoming rounds of SRFB funding.

3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project will result in an assessment of this important stretch of south Camano Island shoreline, identify the most important areas to protect, and assess the level and location of property owners' willingness to participate in permanent protection measures, including conservation easements and fee acquisitions. The results will include a map and matrix with a prioritized list of properties, which WCLT will use to select projects to apply for the next available round of protection funding. Additionally, the project will result in a model or decision matrix that WCLT will use for landowner assessments and project prioritization in other parts of Island County. Finally, although this is not a primary objective, the project will likely also shed light on landowner willingness to participate in voluntary stewardship and/or restoration efforts.

4. PROJECT APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

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

The project area is located in Island County at the southernmost tip of Camano Island. It includes approximately 2.5 miles of Puget Sound shoreline located nine miles south of the Stillaguamish River estuary and four miles north of the Snohomish River estuary. Life cycle stages affected include forage fish spawning, juvenile and adult migration corridor.

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

Protection of south Camano habitat and processes is a high priority for the recovery of listed Chinook salmon populations as identified in WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan. The area ranked very high priority for forage fish and high priority for juvenile salmon. Further, the Island County Feeder Bluff Shoreform Mapping project identified the feeder bluffs in the project area as exceptional for their

importance to nearshore sediment sources. The bluffs are a pristine sedimentation point important to sediment regimes that are critical to the maintenance and protection of salmon populations in the Puget Sound.

- c. *Clearly state how the assessment design and methodology is adequate to answer the objective of the assessment and how it will be implemented.*

In preparing the assessment design, WCLT staff considered similar assessment projects funded by SRFB. RCO staff provided documentation on four successfully completed assessment projects. The South Camano assessment is quite similar in scope and methodology to projects successfully completed by Blue Mountain Land Trust and Skagit Watershed Council; WCLT will utilize and build from methods already developed by these organizations. While the two other assessments provided where habitat assessments that did not include a landowner willingness component, they were helpful and will continue to be utilized in developing criteria for prioritization of habitat for salmon recovery.

The assessment will determine the level of landowner interest in conservation options for their property. Current information available already supports South Camano and its biological processes as important for salmon in the Puget Sound. A synthesis of currently available data (Task 1 below) will directly result in a prioritization of properties in terms of their contribution to salmon and salmon habitat. Subsequent discussion with landowners (Task 2) will determine which landowners are willing to participate in a protection project. This may include one on one contact with landowners or information sharing with small groups of landowners. The final step (Task 3) will be creation of an implementation plan and prioritization which flows from the results of the first two tasks. Criteria used to develop the prioritization will include: size of property; habitat type and its contribution to the salmon; habitat quality; landowner's interest and willingness to participate in protection efforts; and likelihood of success. This final report and prioritization will guide WCLT's work in the South Camano project area in the coming years as a tool for selecting those properties to pursue for protection and acquisition funding opportunities that have the highest degree of importance for salmon and success for protection efforts. For example, willing landowners with larger, intact ownerships with excellent salmon habitat features would be approached first and such highly ranked properties would be submitted for SRFB and other acquisition and grant funds.

- d. *Explain how the results of the assessment will lead directly to projects that benefit salmonids or how the assessment fills a data gap identified as a priority in the lead entity's strategy or regional recovery plan.*

The proposed project will build upon existing resources rather than initiating new data collection. A significant amount of information is currently available from WRIA 6 Salmon Recovery Plan, NOAA Fisheries, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Island County Resource Management. This project will synthesize the information for development of a protection implementation plan that, when implemented, will permanently protect the physical processes and habitats important within the project area. WCLT will use the prioritization list to select projects for future funding opportunities. We anticipate actively pursuing the top ranked projects within one year of completing the analysis.

- e. *Describe the consequences of not conducting this project at this time. Explain why this project is imperative to do. For combination projects that include acquisition, also describe the current level and imminence of risk to habitat*

Protection of the south end of Camano Island must begin as soon as possible. While the population of Camano Island has, in the past, been largely concentrated toward the north end of the island, development on the south end has accelerated dramatically. The population of Island County is expected to grow 32% by 2020. As it is also the second smallest county in terms of land base, this means that increasing development pressure and density will adversely affect the south end of Camano unless protection actions are taken in the next few years. Further, the south end of the island has already been platted into small tax parcels ready for individual residences. The biological integrity of south Camano is dependent upon the local and landscape scale biophysical processes. If

the most important processes are not clearly identified and protection actions are not subsequently implemented, the critical salmon habitat may be irreversibly lost.

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

Project costs were estimated by Whidbey Camano Land Trust based on previous assessments on protection of nearshore habitat and in conjunction with environmental experts.

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

There was consideration of going straight to acquisition of conservation easements and fee title. However, landownership patterns in this area are complex and, without the compilation of biological information and a protection plan that would be accomplished in the proposed Assessment, protection results under this scenario might be piecemeal. The Assessment project will ensure that the highest priority properties that have the best chance of protection success are pursued to make the best use of limited resources.

h. *List project partners who will be contributing to the project. When appropriate, include a letter from each participating partner briefly outlining its role and contribution to the project.*

Island County Planning and Community Development

Tulalip Tribes, a property owner within the project area, has expressed support of the project and we are actively considering what role they might play in supporting the assessment.

i. *List all landowner names (if the assessment covers large stream reach or an entire sub-basin, then the landowner willingness forms are not required). Include a signed form from each landowner acknowledging their property is proposed for SRFB funding consideration. For sponsors proposing feasibility/assessment work on their own property this form is not required.*

N/A – This project is an assessment only.

j. *Describe how the assessment addresses the stages and elements in Guidance on Watershed Assessment for Salmon (Joint Natural Resources Cabinet, May 2001). Also, see Appendix E for additional definitions of design stages.*

As described below under Tasks and Time Schedule heading, Task 1 will address the steps described in the Guidance on Watershed Assessment for Salmon document. The assimilation of information and subsequent review will describe what features of the south Camano shoreline are important for salmon and their condition, describe the status of salmon use in the area, and identify any gaps in data.

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

The proposed project will be implemented by technically qualified individuals in related State, County, consulting firm and non-profit agencies, who are retained for this purpose. Whidbey Camano Land Trust will coordinate the project staffing, required consultants, and management of grant funds. Patricia Powell, executive director, will oversee the project. She has nearly thirty years of experience in both land use planning and acquisition of conservation properties, both in fee and with conservation easements.

l. *For projects that have acquisition component: Briefly describe the extent to which habitat to be acquired is currently 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. Identify any planned use of the property, including uplands. Also, provide the current zoning and Shoreline Master Plan designation.*

The proposed project does not have an acquisition component.

5. TASKS AND TIME SCHEDULE

List and describe the major tasks and time schedule you will use to complete the project. Non Capital projects should be completed within two years.

Task 1. Assessment of Existing Information and Analysis of Existing Conditions – 26 weeks

While the ultimate objective of the assessment is to determine landowner willingness, it is also important that properties pursued also contain the most high quality habitat and contribute to protection of salmon habitat. The assessment will begin with a review of existing information pertaining to the physical processes that maintain south Camano Island habitat. Gathering of existing information also includes gathering and mapping of ownership data, including: existing tax lots; land ownership patterns; location of residences and other structures; and development.

The data gathered will then be analyzed in order to identify the areas of south Camano shoreline most important for protection. The result will be a prioritization of parcels based on habitat values. Factors considered in the prioritization will include but not be limited to: quality of beach and feeder bluff; presence of eelgrass or other nearshore fauna important for salmon fry; quality of upland habitat; sediment transport regimes; presence of high quality riparian areas; and size of parcel or contiguous parcels held by same owner.

Task 2. Assessment of Landowner Willingness – 26 weeks

This portion of the project will determine the willingness of landowners to consider selling or donating a conservation easement or fee title to their property. This will include outreach to landowners via letter, phone calls, one on one meetings, or small community gatherings.

Task 3. Land Protection Implementation Strategy – 26 weeks

Finally, a strategy will be developed for protection of the south tip of Camano Island. This task will involve determining which acquisitions/easements are mostly likely to successfully contribute to protection of the most significant salmon habitat based on the current quality of the habitat and willingness of the landowner(s) to participate in permanent protection actions (including conservation easements and fee acquisitions).

Subsequently, WCLT will use the resulting Implementation Strategy to guide its work within the South Camano project area and select projects for submit for upcoming salmon recovery funding opportunities. Additionally, the assessment model will be used for additional landowner willingness assessment in other parts of the Island County shoreline, thereby reducing the costs of conducting additional assessment in other areas important to salmon recovery. With the results of this work, WCLT will pursue funding to permanently protect the top tier of properties identified as the highest importance to salmon recovery efforts with the highest degree of certainty of protection success. WCLT will pursue not only SRFB funding, but all other appropriate funding sources to ensure successful long-term protection of this important area.

6. CONSTRAINTS AND UNCERTAINTIES

There are no known constraints or uncertainties that may hinder successful completion of the project. However, potential delays could occur while trying to obtain property access and access to beach areas. To avoid potential delays, WCLT will review past, successful public outreach strategies which could be applied to inform property owners of the project. Outreach may include letters to private landowners illustrating the relevance of the assessment and the importance of protecting south Camano habitat for salmon recovery and other wildlife and as an asset to the community. An open dialog with landowners will be encouraged as the contribution of private citizens as land stewards is valued and of high importance to protection of the project areas habitat.