

Puget Sound Habitat Workshop Summary

NOAA Fisheries hosted a workshop focused on engaging the recreational fishing community in fish habitat conservation in the Skagit, Stillaguamish, and Snohomish basins. These three watersheds in the North Puget Sound area of Washington are essential for recovery of threatened Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and steelhead. The area has a strong presence of recreational fishing as well as a number of completed fish passage, river, and estuary restoration projects. The workshop provided an opportunity for NOAA Fisheries to share information about its habitat activities in these areas, for anglers and partners to share their habitat conservation priorities, and to identify areas for future work and collaboration. Workshop goals included:

- Identify topic areas where NOAA's interests and expertise around habitat conservation align with the priorities of the recreational fishing community.
- Identify potential collaborative project concepts and/or research priorities.
- Raise awareness among recreational fishing groups of NOAA's habitat conservation work, including restoration, monitoring, and research.
- Increase NOAA's understanding of habitat issues of greatest importance to the recreational fishing community.

The workshop was hosted virtually on November 3, 2021. Participants included private anglers, representatives from recreational fishing clubs and organizations, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, regional fisheries enhancement groups, non-governmental organizations, and other local stakeholders.

At the beginning of the workshop, NOAA Fisheries staff gave a presentation on current habitat restoration and conservation efforts in the Skagit, Stillaguamish, and Snohomish basins and estuaries. Staff highlighted projects where NOAA Fisheries partnered with local organizations to remove or modify passage obstructions such as dams, tidegates, and culverts to restore fish access to historically accessible habitat, including floodplain and marsh habitat; support instream and floodplain habitat complexity as well as off-channel habitat. NOAA Fisheries staff also highlighted some potential opportunities for angler involvement.

The group then moved into breakout groups to identify priorities for habitat restoration and conservation and discuss opportunities for future collaborative work to improve habitat.



Major takeaways from the discussions:

Focus on the Stillaguamish Basin. Participants noted that our recovery strategy is designed to recover all watersheds simultaneously. However, participants felt that a higher priority on the restoration of watersheds that are most limiting to Puget Sound fish populations, including Puget Sound Chinook salmon, is needed. They recommended carrying out a hyper-focused approach on the Stillaguamish basin to speed up recovery efforts with the greatest benefit to fish and fisheries.

Importance of a big-picture, all-hands approach to restoration. Participants also recognized that Endangered Species Act-listed salmonid recovery is tied to ecosystem health and expressed the need for a full river ecosystem recovery approach. They noted that healthy rivers and a healthy Puget Sound all contribute to recovery. A focus on a basin-wide approach, benefiting many different ecosystem components would ensure the most benefits to all fish and wildlife. Participants expressed willingness to participate in additional nutrient recycling of salmon carcasses programs, and recognized a need for off-channel habitat enhancement, as well as addressing sedimentation that causes water to jump banks. Further, participants noted a need to ensure projects will be of value over the long term given a changing climate, providing an example that projects within estuaries may be underwater in 100 years with sea level rise.

Importance of public education. Participants expressed a need for NOAA Fisheries to simplify and demystify restoration and salmon recovery issues for the public to increase understanding, participation, and success. Participants noted that education in schools can be a start, while also noting that any reductions of fishing opportunities for young anglers could mean a gap in angler volunteers later on. Participants also voiced that post-restoration monitoring should be a necessary component of any project to gauge success. Further, communication of those short and long term project results and success are helpful for the public to understand while driving support for more volunteer participation (also applicable below).

Public engagement in projects. Participants shared how they currently volunteer across all levels of recovery and conservation. However, participants noted there is more opportunity to connect angler organizations with project needs. Participants acknowledged that many projects require permits, funding, and time that can generally only be accomplished by organizations with dedicated staff, and requested help in identifying projects that are the right size for the right group. In that sense, participants noted smaller groups like fishing clubs are willing to take on smaller projects if they can be identified. The success of large groups of angler volunteers on existing projects were noted by other participants.

The workshop energized old and new partnerships to maintain momentum in the North Puget Sound area, and NOAA Fisheries is excited to continue building on these discussions with the recreational fishing community.

For more information or to get involved, please contact:

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Links and subject area contacts

[West Coast Habitat overview](#)

[NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation, How We Restore and Funding Opportunities](#)

[Restoration of Salmon and Steelhead Habitat on the West Coast](#)

Partners and Efforts

- [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)
- [Puget Sound Partnership](#)
- [Puget Sound Anglers](#)
- [Coastal Conservation Association Washington](#)
- [Evergreen Fly Fishing Club](#)
- [Long Live the Kings](#)
- [Trout Unlimited](#)
- [Backcountry Hunter and Anglers Washington](#)
- [Wildcat Steelhead Club](#)
- [Skagit River System Cooperative](#)
- [Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group](#)
- [Skagit Watershed Council](#)
- [Sound Salmon Solutions](#)
- [Skagit County](#)
- [Snohomish County](#)
- [Western Washington Agricultural Association](#)
- [Washington Water Trust](#)
- [Native Fish Society](#)