

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT IN PUGET SOUND ARE NOT WELL COORDINATED

Significant gaps in our understanding of Puget Sound's ecosystem have been identified and need to be filled to facilitate protection, preservation, restoration, and recovery efforts. The many ongoing monitoring and assessment programs throughout Puget Sound are neither well coordinated nor integrated. These existing programs can list many successes, but as individually managed programs they are typically designed to meet specific agency mandates. Thus, they do not address the monitoring needs of the ecosystem, create and communicate a comprehensive and accurate picture of ecosystem health, or inform and guide efforts to recover Puget Sound. Current levels of funding may not meet the Puget Sound ecosystem's monitoring and assessment needs. By not addressing the ecosystem, monitoring and assessment—and the policy and management decisions they are based on—will continue to lack sufficient credibility, accountability, and funding to engender broad public understanding of and support for the recovery of Puget Sound.

PUGET SOUND NEEDS A COORDINATED MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

A consortium of local, state and federal agencies, environmental groups, business organizations, and others began meeting in 2006 to envision how a coordinated monitoring program might work in Puget Sound. The group was originally convened to address NPDES monitoring requirements, but the scope has expanded, most recently to address the needs of the Puget Sound Partnership to meet its mandates for monitoring and adaptive management.

The consortium recognizes the need to build on the existing monitoring direction and coordination efforts of and the lessons learned by the Washington Monitoring Forum, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the Puget Sound Assessment and Monitoring Program (PSAMP), and others. The Puget Sound Partnership is committed to strengthening the link between science and management decisions and has endorsed the consortium as a useful process for building capacity to provide the data needed to prioritize management decisions, and to understand and report on the effectiveness of new policies and management efforts.

A COORDINATED MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM WILL BENEFIT THE PUGET SOUND ECOSYSTEM

The consortium will recommend a program that:

- Assembles key scientists and technical leaders from government agencies, universities, businesses, private organizations, and citizen groups to optimize and collaborate on sampling designs, data collection methods, data management and quality assurance procedures. Broad, inclusive participation and agreement on monitoring and assessment approaches up-front will reduce confusion and disagreement around subsequent results.
- Expands the focus to include monitoring and assessment that is directed at key ecosystem indicators and other information required to track the success and effectiveness of new management initiatives and improve the way the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Growth Management Act, and other key laws are implemented in Puget Sound.
- Reduces duplication of effort and other inefficiencies. The new program will need stable funding. New funding sources may be required, but coordinating current programs into new cooperative efforts could achieve greater results with the same funds.