The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chair The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen,  The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member

Ranking Member U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on

U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related

Agencies The Honorable José Serrano, Chair

  The Honorable Robert Aderholt,

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chair Ranking Member

The Honorable Jeff Merkley,  U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Ranking Member Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,

U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on and Related Agencies

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug

Administration The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr., Chair

  The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry,

The Honorable Betty McCollum, Chair Ranking Member

The Honorable David Joyce, U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations

Ranking Member  Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural

U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Development, Food and Drug Administration

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and

Related Agencies

**DATE**

**Honorable Chairs and Ranking Members:**

We, the undersigned, represent a broad range of partners from state agencies, local government, tribes, ports and nongovernmental organizations, who are working for a healthy Puget Sound. Normally, we’d be visiting you this spring to thank you in person. However, to protect human health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are sending you this letter instead.

We thank you for recognizing the importance of increased funding for Puget Sound recovery in federal fiscal year (FFY) 20 and we respectfully request much needed additional annual appropriations detailed in this letter for FFY21.  Specifically, we're grateful for increased funding for two key programs in FFY20: the Puget Sound Geographic Program and the National Estuary Program.  We’re also grateful for the funding necessary to begin work on the design for federally required downstream fish passage at Howard Hanson Dam. We are putting that funding to good use already.  However, our journey is not over: increased federal support for Puget Sound recovery programs remains a critical need.

Puget Sound is in serious decline. Despite the significant investment of energy and resources from federal, tribal, state, and local governments, the primary barriers to recovery continue to be lack of funding and political will. Scientists say that we can still recover Puget Sound, but only if we act boldly now. **We know what we need to do – and the actions we take to recover Puget Sound create jobs in a wide variety of sectors suffering from the economic shutdown,** including food, hospitality, sustainable forestry, international trade, and international oil transportation safety and spill prevention**.**

Our local governments invest heavily in Puget Sound through preventing stormwater pollution, enacting ordinances to protect critical areas, protecting shorelines, and supporting other programs. Similarly, the state invests in programs that support clean and healthy water resources and habitats and that promote businesses and jobs that depend upon those resources. Tribal governments are co-managers of the salmon resource in the Puget Sound region and provide steadfast leadership, generous investments, and valuable technical expertise in their commitment to achieving recovery goals. **We appreciate a commensurate partnership from the federal government to support ongoing work and the investment by people locally that is saving a national treasure while sustaining living-wage jobs.**

Our shared recovery effort of federal, state, local, tribal, and non-governmental partners is an example of broad-based, effective partnership and innovation, and has for many years received bipartisan support.  In order for these collaborative efforts to succeed, we need full and on-going funding for ecosystem and salmon recovery programs.

Federal support of Puget Sound recovery is comprised of many important federal, state and local programs. Today, we wish to highlight four important components that are critical to Puget Sound recovery planning and implementation:

* **Puget Sound Geographic Program**. Managed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), this program has been essential to carrying out the large-scale, regional, federally approved recovery plan for Puget Sound. Extensive partner engagement lies at the foundation of the recovery plan, and the actions it includes are technically reviewed, ranked, and tracked for results by the Puget Sound Partnership. It also supports tribal participation in scientific research, resource recovery planning, and implementation and policy discussions on issues that affect tribal treaty rights.
* **National Estuary Program (NEP)**. Congress designated Puget Sound as an Estuary of National Significance in 1988.  The Puget Sound Partnership, like the lead agencies and organizations for the other 27 designated Estuaries of National Significance around the country, stewards critical sustaining support from the NEP funds. This non-regulatory program fosters innovation and idea transfer as it allows each location's program to be structured and governed according to local conditions and needs.
* **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund** **(PCSRF)**. Administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), this is a multi-state, multi-tribe program that has provided crucial support for salmon recovery efforts throughout the Pacific coast region.
* **Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST).** This treaty is critical to meeting the provisions of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), addressing tribal fishing rights, and maintaining sustainable U.S. fisheries that provide 26,700 full time equivalent jobs and $3.4 billion in economic value annually. Signed by the United States and Canada in 1985, it provides a framework for the two countries to cooperate on the management of Pacific salmon, and is revisited roughly every 10 years to reflect current conditions and address new challenges. The revised Annex Chapters of the PST (2018/2019-2028) reflect the international commitment to ensure a better future for salmon and Southern Resident orcas.

In addition, the **U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) voluntary conservation programs** for working lands also make important contributions to Puget Sound recovery. These programs help reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters.

The **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ (USACE)** aquatic ecosystem restoration business line and continuing authorities program support the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project to design and implement large-scale and smaller-scale habitat restoration projects. These programs will leverage already-secured state funds to improve the health of nearshore habitats and their ability to support shorebirds, shellfish, salmon, orca, and humans.

NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service programs also play a critical role. In particular, we wish to highlight the important role of the Pacific Salmon-Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan (HGMP) line. NMFS uses the information provided by HGMPs to evaluate salmon hatchery contributions to ESA-listed salmon and steelhead populations. The lack of improvement in salmon stocks means hatchery operations are even more important to achieving recovery goals and maintenance of salmon fisheries, and they also must perform to exacting standards. This line item helps NMFS, the state and tribes to expedite development, review, and implementation of these plans.

Through **reauthorization of the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act),** Congress should establish a discretionary funding program to help states and local governments improve the resilience and function of highway facilities for extreme events, while also restoring natural processes, fish passage, and stream channel migration.  It is well established that improved culvert design can have a profound impact on fish. There is also growing evidence that nature-based designs, such as larger culverts with more natural streambeds and banks, can make transportation systems more resilient to extreme weather events.

**Working together, these funds and programs enable an investment strategy that leverages support for large-scale projects or series of interconnected projects that maximize benefits and outcomes, achieving more than would separate, uncoordinated investments. The loss of any of these critical components would impact the effectiveness of the overall recovery system.**

Federal partners have recognized the value of collaborating in these Puget Sound recovery efforts, which:

* **Create jobs** in a variety of industries, including food, hospitality, sustainable forestry, international trade, and international oil transportation safety and spill prevention. Washington State leads the nation in production of farmed clams, oysters and mussels. Puget Sound contributes 79% of the dollar value and 69% of the pounds of farmed shellfish produced statewide.
  + The state’s marine industry, which includes fishing fleets, ports, and seafood processors, generates $30 billion annually.
  + The natural assets in Puget Sound provide a competitive advantage to key industries that compete globally for highly skilled talent.
  + The average annual gross domestic product of recreation and tourism in Puget Sound is $3.2 billion.
* Help fulfill the federal government’s **treaty obligations to the 17 Puget Sound treaty tribes, protecting tribal treaty-reserved rights and resources.**
* **Promote resilience** of human communities and thriving coastal economies against natural disasters.
* **Repair and update crumbling infrastructure** and support innovative approaches and technologies such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, green roofs, and other Green Storm Water Infrastructure (GSI) to reduce the impact of our growing population on the Puget Sound ecosystem.
* Emphasize **voluntary, non-regulatory approaches** to reach recovery goals as a complement to regulatory approaches.
* Share learning from **continuous innovation** withrecoveryefforts across the nation.
* Value and integrate **intergovernmental engagement and decisions.**
* **Benefit a broad range of interests**—including shellfish aquaculture, commercial fisheries, agriculture, public safety, public health, recreation, employment, preservation of cultural identity, and human welfare.
* **Leverage funds** from many sources to increase returns on investment.
* Ensure that decisions are informed by **science, technical expertise, effectiveness monitoring, and learning.**
* R**educe nutrient pollution** in support of the Clean Water Act.
* Collaborate with **British Columbia and the** **Canadian government**, with whom we share the Salish Sea, to increase investments in recovery on both sides of the border.

A federal government retreat from investing in Puget Sound recovery at this time would be devastating to the ecosystem and economy, severely disrupt ongoing shared efforts, and limit options for action.  **Disinvestment now would only result in increased costs in the future to recover an ecosystem that at this time can still be saved**.

Puget Sound is close to undergoing irreversible changes. In 2018, the Pacific Northwest’s Southern Resident orcas were the focus of international attention, when their critical struggle for survival culminated in the death of a newborn calf whose mother grieved over her calf’s body for an unprecedented 17 days and 1,000 miles.  The Southern Resident orca population has now declined to 72 individuals. Scientists have estimated that 70 may be the limit beyond whichthe population may not be able to recover. The Southern Resident orca’s primary food, Chinook salmon, is also perilously threatened.

You can act to prevent the loss of these national treasures. As Congress contemplates funding for Fiscal Year 2021, the undersigned respectfully ask you to ensure that the final appropriations measure includes:

* A modest increase in funding to **$35 million for the** **Puget Sound Geographic Program (EPA).**
* A modest increase in funding to **$70 million for the** **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (NOAA)**.
* A modest increase in funding to **$750,000 for each** **National Estuary Program, including the Puget Sound Partnership, plus $4 million for competitive grants and programs.**
* A minimum increase in the Commerce appropriation of **$10 million for the Pacific Salmon Treaty relative to the FY20 level.** To fully implement all of the terms of this complex ten year international treaty, including the issues associated with the Endangered Species Act, **a total Commerce appropriation of $79.3 million, an Interior appropriation of $6 million, and State appropriation of $5.8 million** will be needed.
* Maintain level funding of **$56.4 million for the NOAA Habitat Conservation and Restoration Program.**
* At least level funding for the **voluntary conservation programs for working lands (USDA).**
* An increase in funding to **$2.5M for the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Business Line – Investigations Account** and new funding of **$0.5M for the Continuing Authorities Program (USACE)**.
* **Reauthorize the FAST ACT and establish a discretionary funding program** to help states and local governments improve the resilience and function of highway facilities for extreme events through nature-based solutions that restore natural processes, fish passage, and stream channel migration.
* **A modest increase in funding to $72 million for the Pacific Salmon line within the NOAA’s Protected Resources Science and Management program,** with $7 million directed to support and improve the timeliness and overall efficiency of the **Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan** approval process, the re-initiation of consultations, and to implement recommendations from ESA consultations.

The undersigned thank you for your past support and respectfully request your support for these requests.

*Signatures appear on following pages.*