



CHAPTER I | INTRODUCTION

WHY DO WE NEED THE ACTION AGENDA?

Puget Sound is a unique and vital part of our region. It nourishes our health, economy, environment, and quality of life. A healthy Puget Sound is essential to sustaining a vibrant economy, meeting our obligations to treaty rights, and supporting our need for connection to the natural world. But Puget Sound is in trouble.

Over the past 150 years, human use has damaged Puget Sound, causing the degradation of water quality, water quantity, and habitat. Many Puget Sound species are in decline, habitat is in jeopardy, and food webs are changing. Today, 4.5 million people live in the Puget Sound region. By 2040, a population of 7 million is projected, the equivalent of adding approximately four cities the size of Seattle to our watershed. Additionally, planned growth of fossil fuel shipping through the region will increase vessel traffic and the threat of spills. The rapid economic and population growth will lead to more land development, infrastructure, and pollution. Recovering Puget Sound will require increased focus on protecting habitat and managing land development to ensure that our restoration efforts outpace habitat loss, and begin to change the recovery trajectory of Puget Sound.

Our challenge is further complicated by uncertainty about how climate change and the stresses of ocean acidification will affect the Puget Sound ecosystem. Work we have done to clean up and restore areas—at great cost—is being undone as the chemicals we use in daily life make their way through stormwater runoff to contaminate Puget Sound waters.





Puget Sound orca whales
are among the most
toxin-contaminated
mammals on earth ^a

Salmon populations are one-third as abundant as they were in 1908 and populations continue to decline. Chinook salmon populations are so low that recreational fishing days have been significantly reduced

The Puget Sound shoreline from Everett to Tacoma is closed to commercial shellfish harvest because of pollution ^b

Shellfish beds and swimming beaches are often closed because the water is too contaminated with fecal bacteria

BEAUTIFUL ON THE SURFACE, BUT HARD TRUTHS ARE DIFFICULT TO IGNORE

Over one-quarter of Puget Sound shorelines—almost 700 miles—has been hardened by bulkheads that reduce fish and wildlife habitat

Hundreds of tons of toxic organic chemicals and metals end up in Puget Sound each year from cars, roofs, wood treatments, wood burning, boat paint, household pesticide use, consumer products, pharmaceuticals, and air emissions

The rivers and streams that flow into Puget Sound are the lifeblood of our region's ecosystems, yet only 64 percent of the major rivers in Puget Sound meet water quality standards

During the past 150 years, Puget Sound lost at least two thirds of its remaining old-growth forest, more than 90 percent of its native prairies, and 80 percent of its marshes

^a Ross, P.S., G.M. Ellis, M.G. Ikonomou, L.G. Barrett-Lennard, and R.F. Addison. 2000. High PCB Concentrations in Free-Ranging Pacific Killer Whales, *Orcinus Orca*: Effects of Age, Sex and Dietary Preference. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 40:504-515. [Available here](#)

^b However, there are some subtidal geoduck tracts approved for commercial harvest in this area, and Dash Point State Park is open for recreational harvest.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE I

The pressures are relentless and continue to take their toll on the Puget Sound ecosystem and the well-being of residents around the region. However, not all news is bad. Water quality has been maintained in shellfish growing areas. Today, safe shellfish harvesting is allowed in more areas than in 2007. Recent studies have shown that low-impact development techniques are improving conditions for coho salmon¹.

The good news is that we can preserve the vitality Puget Sound brings to our region if we work together. This collective action will test the limits of our scientific knowledge and our will as a society. In response to growing awareness that Puget Sound was in serious trouble, in 2007, the Washington State Legislature passed legislation with large bipartisan majorities to create the Puget Sound Partnership. The legislation mandated a comprehensive recovery framework to replace what was seen as fragmented attempts at recovery. Specifically, the legislation mandated that the Partnership coordinate and lead the effort to protect and restore Puget Sound through a strategic, prioritized, science-based Action Agenda “that addresses all of the complex connections among the land, water, web of species, and human needs.”

Puget Sound will never be as it was 150 years ago, and the task of saving Puget Sound is large and complex. Success requires collaboration, clear direction, and effective action. Together with our partner agencies, organizations, and citizens, we can protect and restore Puget Sound by using science-informed, prioritized actions—this is what the Action Agenda is designed to do.

WHAT IS THE ACTION AGENDA?

The Action Agenda is our region’s shared roadmap for Puget Sound recovery. The Action Agenda outlines the regional strategies and specific actions needed to protect and restore

Puget Sound. It is designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Puget Sound recovery by providing a coordinated plan of action and

creating ways to identify and apply lessons learned over time. The Action Agenda complements other local or subregional planning processes such as salmon recovery plans and watershed plans by identifying a consolidated set of priorities and opportunities for federal, state, local, tribal, and private entities to invest resources and coordinate actions. In particular, the Action Agenda has been developed with the following intentions:

- **It is a collective effort.** By gathering diverse partners from state and federal agencies, tribal governments, local governments, and business and environmental groups; agreeing on a roadmap with prioritized actions; and sharing a vision for the future of Puget Sound, the Action Agenda offers partners a roadmap for making investments that will maximize results.
- **It is informed by science.** The Action Agenda is based on decisions that are supported by science through input from regional science experts with a variety of public, private, tribal, and academic affiliations and different technical and geographic areas of focus.

For the purposes of the Action Agenda, recovery is an inclusive term that covers the protection and restoration of essential resources and functions.

¹Additional information regarding successful efforts to restore Puget Sound, visit the Puget Sound

Partnership web page for [Effectiveness Monitoring](#).

- **It guides effective investment in Puget Sound.** The Partnership adopted an adaptive management framework to ensure a scientifically rigorous and systematic approach to developing the Action Agenda. By constantly assessing the effectiveness of actions and outcomes, tracking progress, and reprioritizing needs, our roadmap is an evolving indication of the highest return on investment for recovery at any point in time.
- **It meets the National Estuary Program's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan requirements.** The National Estuary Program is the primary method through which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provides funding for Puget Sound recovery.
- **It meets the Washington State Legislature mandates.** When the State of Washington created the Puget Sound Partnership, the State mandated creation of the Action Agenda to plan and coordinate the science-informed recovery of Puget Sound. It directs the Partnership to tailor programs and activities within the region to meet Puget Sound needs.

HOW IS THE ACTION AGENDA ORGANIZED?

Two components comprise the Action Agenda: the Comprehensive Plan and the Implementation Plan.

- This ***Comprehensive Plan*** provides the roadmap for long-term Puget Sound recovery by outlining overarching strategies for successful protection and restoration. It aims to identify the full scope of actions and funding necessary for recovery and introduces the approaches by which issues and activities are prioritized, progress is evaluated, and strategies and actions are adapted over time.
- The ***Implementation Plan*** identifies actions that have been prioritized for implementation within the plan's 2-year timeframe that support the recovery goals and strategies identified in the Comprehensive Plan. It also lists the ongoing programs.

Readers can also access [supporting materials](#) that provide additional information, references, Local Integrating Organization long-term recovery plans, 2-year implementation plans, summaries of previous and ongoing planning efforts, and other related topics on the Action Agenda website. Hyperlinks to these materials are provided throughout this Action Agenda.