

## **WRIA 8 Update**

January 17, 2013

- **Puget Sound Regional Update** – The **Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council** (PS SRC) met on November 29. The meeting included adoption of the PS SRC 2013 work plan, a presentation on social marketing and behavior change approaches, a presentation on an EPA-funded Floodplains by Design Project that seeks to coordinate multiple benefit floodplain restoration efforts, and discussion of legislative strategy regarding support for Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration funding and a possible study bill to explore alternative local and regional funding sources for salmon recovery, like the Watershed Investment District concept. The PS SRC also created a subcommittee to assist in the effort to develop adaptive management and monitoring plans in Puget Sound watersheds. Scott Stolnack, WRIA 8 Technical Coordinator, will participate on this subcommittee. The PS SRC will meet again on January 27.

The **South Central Action Area Caucus** met on December 10. Agenda topics included: Caucus Group 2013 work plan, creating a subcommittee to develop a process for refining priority local actions for implementing the updated Action Agenda, state and local funding for Puget Sound recovery, and discussion of process to set interim Puget Sound recovery targets.

- **Knotweed designation on Cedar River** – On January 16, the King County Noxious Weed Board held its annual Noxious Weed List Public Hearing at the Mercer Island Library. The purpose of the hearing was to review the 2013 Washington State Noxious Weed List and consider whether to require control of any listed noxious weeds in addition to those designated by the State Weed Board. In particular, the Noxious Weed Board approved classifying knotweed on the Cedar River as a noxious weed for which control is required. This reclassification makes private landowners responsible for controlling knotweed on their properties, but only as long as resources and support are provided by King County Noxious Weeds.
- **Grant funding update** – On December 10, 2012 the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) awarded WRIA 8 \$778,356 in SRFB/Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) funding for the following five projects:
  - River Bend Floodplain Acquisition (King County) - \$299,000
  - Confluence Parks/Issaquah Creek Restoration (City of Issaquah) - \$225,000
  - Cedar River Belmondo Reach Acquisition (Seattle Public Utilities) - \$150,000
  - Bear Creek Reach 6 Restoration (Adopt A Stream Foundation) - \$74,356
  - Little Bear Creek Knotweed Assessment (Snohomish County) - \$30,000
- **Trees for Streams update** – As part of the overall riparian strategy approved by the Salmon Recovery council, WRIA 8 is supporting a National Estuary Program Watershed Protection and Restoration grant proposal by Seattle Public Utilities, King County Noxious Weeds, Forterra, and Friends of the Cedar River Watershed to continue the Stewardship in Action partnership to work with public and private landowners to control knotweed and restore riparian areas along the Cedar River.

- **Legislative Priorities Update and Next Steps** – On December 18, Governor Gregoire released her 2013-2015 biennial budget. Her proposed budget included significant support for salmon and Puget Sound recovery efforts, including all of the funding priorities on the WRIA 8 legislative agenda. Of particular note, is inclusion of the full \$80 million request for Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration funding. This is just the first step in the legislative process. Next it will be important to track whether Governor-Elect Inslee includes PSAR in his budget. It is important to encourage legislators in the Senate and House to support inclusion of PSAR in their respective budgets.

At the November meeting, the WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council approved adding support for a **Watershed Investment District (WID)** study bill this legislative session to the WRIA 8 legislative priorities. Subsequently, the Public Issues Committee (PIC) of the Sound Cities Association (SCA – formerly the Suburban Cities Association) convened a subcommittee to consider support for a WID study bill. The subcommittee recommended that SCA support formation of a stakeholder group by the state legislature, to develop a consensus bill to authorize formation of watershed investment authorities for consideration in the 2014 legislative session. The PIC unanimously approved the recommendation, which will be presented to the SCA Board of Directors at the February meeting.

- **Ballard Locks Fish Passage Improvements** – In September, the WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council received an update that new Army Corps of Engineers safety regulations may prevent the smolt flumes from being installed next spring. Corps staff are studying alternative ways to provide safer passage for juvenile salmon over the Locks and are committed to finding a solution before next spring’s migration period. WRIA 8 and King County will continue to monitor the issue and engage with the Corps as appropriate. As a first step, WRIA 8 staff met with Army Corps of Engineers staff on January 15 to discuss and better understand Locks operations, priority infrastructure improvements, schedule of near term projects, and the status of the study of fish passage alternatives to the smolt flumes. The information shared at this meeting will help shape updates to the WRIA 8 federal legislative priorities regarding support for Locks operational improvements, as well as establish the basis for future communication between WRIA 8 and Corps staff on several topics related to fish passage priorities.
- **Salmon SEEson** – The sixth annual Salmon SEEson finished at the end of 2012. Almost all the partners noted that 2012 was a very good year, with lots of fish to see in most locations. The program received coverage from several local news websites and Carkeek’s program was featured in a November [Seattle Times story](#).

The Cedar River Salmon Journey noted that: “Salmon SEEson makes a huge difference for the Cedar River Salmon Journey program. Due to limited staff and funding, publicity is often very challenging and we rely heavily on the efforts of the Salmon SEEson campaign to get the word out.” There were 10,312 visitors at Cedar River Salmon Journey sites, a 21% increase from last year. The Carkeek program also had strong participation from the public, with Salmon Stewards talking with 2,739 people. School field trips attracted 20 Seattle-area schools, and students from

Shoreline Community College and University of Washington served as volunteer Salmon Stewards.

School groups continue to be a significant proportion of the visitors at several of the sites, and the program plans to expand promotion of Salmon SEEson to schools and teachers. Partners also suggest sending information to Chambers of Commerce, and encourage elected officials to visit the sites more.

- **NOAA proposes Puget Sound Steelhead critical habitat** – NOAA-Fisheries Service has released its proposed critical habitat rule for Puget Sound steelhead and requests comments by April 15. This designation is a necessary step in the process toward the creation of a recovery plan for Puget Sound steelhead. Essentially all of WRIA 8 was a candidate for critical habitat designation, but **ONLY THE CEDAR RIVER WATERSHED IS PROPOSED FOR CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION**. The Lake Washington, Sammamish River, and Lake Sammamish (including Issaquah Creek) watersheds are proposed to be excluded from critical habitat designation due to economic impacts of inclusion outweighing the conservation benefits.
- **Fish Numbers** – 2012 Chinook redd surveys are complete, with 409 Chinook redds in the Cedar River system, which is 7.6% above the 13-year average of 380 redds. The Bear/Cottage Lake system had 148 Chinook redds, which is 18% above the 11-year average of 125. About 85% of Bear/Cottage Lake Creek spawners were hatchery-origin fish. Returns in both systems exceeded forecasts, though the numbers returning are well below our conservation goals. Preliminary estimates of **juvenile Chinook outmigrant** numbers in 2012 are looking surprisingly good, well above long-term averages and (for the Cedar population) the best we've had since monitoring began. WDFW estimates 902,000 juvenile Chinook left the Cedar system in 2012<sup>1</sup>. This is more than five times the 13-year average. Approximately 22,00 juvenile Chinook left the Bear/Cottage Lake system in 2012<sup>2</sup>, slightly above the 13-year average. We are currently meeting our 10-year goals regarding juvenile Chinook survival rates in both the Cedar and Sammamish populations.

### **WRIA 8 Committee Reports**

- **WRIA 8 Technical Committee** – Met December 12 and January 9. Agenda items included discussion of WRIA 8 fish data and potential analyses, and potential changes to improve the WRIA 8 Three Year List.
- **WRIA 8 Implementation Committee** – Met on January 8. Agenda topics included updates on WRIA 8 staffing, legislative priorities, adaptive management and monitoring, discussion of policy feedback on the 2012 WRIA 8 Three-Year Work Plan update with Puget Sound Partnership, potential amendments to the Salmon Recovery Council operating guidelines and letterhead, and preparation for the January Salmon Recovery Council meeting.
- **Green Shoreline Steering Committee Meeting** – The Committee will meet in late January to determine how it can continue in the future without WRIA 8 staffing.

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<sup>1</sup> Data are provisional and subject to revision.

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