**Salmon Recovery Council Update- Topics: 25-27 PSAR Large Cap RFP and West Sound Watershed Update**

**Brittany Gordon- WSPER SRC Representative**

West Sound has the opportunity to share a watershed update at the November SRC meeting. **If you have projects you would suggest highlighting, please let me know. And if you have photos to share of those projects that would be extremely helpful as well.**

As has been mentioned at previous TAG meetings, the 2025-2027 PSAR Draft RFP has been the hot topic at the last several Salmon Recovery Council meetings. In 2021, PSP introduced new language to the 2023-2025 PSAR Large Cap RFP that included prioritizing projects that benefitted certain salmon stocks- specifically, those acutely limiting harvest, those closest to delisting, and those stocks closest to extirpation. These stocks were specifically listed in the RFP language.

**After much discussion and gathering feedback from the watersheds, PSP has changed their recommendation for the 25-27 PSAR Large Cap RFP to remove the language related to priority stocks. This recommendation will go to the SRC on September 28 and move to a vote at the November meeting.**

Here is the background:

Although I was not a member of the SRC in 2021, PSP explained that tension has remained since then regarding this language. The primary concern from watershed leads is whether this language will result in inequitable distribution of PSAR large cap funding and make it even more challenging for some watersheds to compete for these funds. This language would make it more challenging for West Sound projects to compete for PSAR large cap funding.

My questions/concerns regarding this language have been more focused on recovery of wild salmon and include:

* Are we “double dipping” in the harvest bucket since stocks closest to extirpation and stocks closest to delisting can also limit harvest?
* Geographies with higher priority stocks already receiver higher funding allocations from the SRFB and the legislature- will this proposal further exacerbate that discrepancy?
* Is there solid scientific backing for this language? How will prioritizing these stocks help us recover wild salmon?
* Will recovery of these stocks simply result in more harvest and could this impact stocks that are more common in the West Sound, such as Puget Sound coho?
* Data from the Intensively Monitored Watersheds study in Hood Canal suggests that density dependence is limiting the benefits of habitat restoration on Puget Sound coho where abundance of adult spawners is too low for habitat to be a limiting factor. If this results in more coho harvest, will we further limit the potential of habitat restoration to benefit coho stocks?
* If this is politically driven to gain support from the harvest community, do we have buy in from those stakeholders?
* Have we considered the effect this proposal could have on other funding sources? In my opinion, when the Salmon Recovery Council approves a proposal, that decision carries a certain weight. Could we see this prioritization be proposed in other funding source RFPs, specifically source that West Sound and other watersheds have traditionally competed well for?

After introducing this topic to the WSPER TAG, I received similar feedback and support directly from several members, including concerns about supporting more “status quo” harvest and a question regarding why steelhead were not considered for prioritization.

I also had a long conversation with Nicole Czarnomski at WDFW (Habitat Restoration Division Manager) and I asked her directly whether there is a strong scientific backing for prioritizing these stocks to recover wild salmon. Nicole responded that the proposal was more political and did not have a strong scientific backing, to her knowledge; however, Nicole also clarified that there is also not a strong scientific backing against the proposal. Thus, the discussion is more policy-related. I thanked Nicole for the conversation and told her that if there is no strong scientific backing for the proposal, then I as a representative of West Sound was not comfortable supporting a proposal that would put our projects at a disadvantage for PSAR Large Cap funding.

At the May SRC meeting, PSP was unable to obtain consensus from the SRC regarding this proposal. Following that meeting, PSP reached out individually to SRC members and the watersheds to gather feedback. The topic was further discussed at the July SRC meeting, where PSP tried proposing a modified version of the RFP that prioritized harvest limiting stocks and stocks closest to extirpation, but removed the language prioritizing stocks closest to delisting. Following the July meeting, the SRC was still not at a place of consensus.

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Additionally at the July SRC meeting, PSP introduced language to add to the PSAR Large Cap RFP related to the HEAL act and incorporating environmental justice language into the RFP. There was some debate regarding whether this criteria should be unscored or scored and most SRC members were supportive of it being unscored criteria. This recommendation will also move to a vote at the November SRC meeting.

Finally, West Sound has the opportunity to share a watershed update at the November SRC meeting. If you have projects you would suggest highlighting, please let me know. And if you have photos to share of those projects that would be extremely helpful as well.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you!

Brittany