

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Federal Stimulus Grants

On June 30, NOAA announced 50 habitat restoration projects to be funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Of the \$167 million available nationwide, Washington State received approximately \$16.5 million (10%) for six projects. A brief description of each project follows below.

1. *Elwha River floodplain restoration* (Port Angeles) – \$2 million. Project sponsor: Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. In conjunction with the Elwha Dam removal, this project restores 82 acres of the floodplain of the lower Elwha River through the removal of dikes and culverts, re-vegetation and invasive species control.
2. *Removal of derelict fishing gear in Puget Sound* (Seattle) – \$4.5 million. Project sponsor: Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Foundation. Removes more than 200 metric tons of marine debris, including 3,000 nets, and restores 600 acres of habitat.
3. *Smuggler's Slough Nooksack River restoration* (Bellingham) – \$1.7 million. Project sponsor: Lummi Indian Tribe. Raises a roadway and reconnects tidal exchange for 493 acres of Smuggler's Slough channel that will flow to restored salt marsh and eelgrass habitat in Lummi Bay. Seven miles of slough habitat also will be opened.
4. *Qwuloolt Estuary restoration* (Marysville) – \$2 million. Project sponsor: Tulalip Tribe. Restores 350 acres of wetland and 16 stream miles to fish passage for several species of salmon on the lower Snohomish River and its surrounding tidal floodplain by removing levees, excavating channels, and planting native vegetation and trees.
5. *Fisher Slough marsh restoration* (Burlington) – \$5.2 million. Project sponsor: The Nature Conservancy. Restores 60 acres of the Skagit River floodplain by replacing antiquated agriculture floodgates and restoring 15 miles of high-quality habitat for chum, coho, threatened Chinook salmon and other species.
6. *Hansen Creek floodplain restoration* (Milltown) – \$988,000. Project sponsor: Upper Skagit Indian Tribe. Excavates and reconnects 140 acres of forested floodplain habitat and installs woody debris for chum, coho, threatened Chinook salmon and other species.

Implementation of 2009 Legislative Directives for Assessments

Both SHB 2157 and ESHB 1244 (the state operating budget) addressed efficiencies associated with salmon recovery. The RCO, in consultation with the board and other agencies, is directed to conduct several assessments. All are due December 1, 2009 to the Governor's Office

- 2157 requires the RCO to assess additional coordination and incentive opportunities with lead entities, regional salmon recovery organizations, lead agencies (under Watershed Planning efforts), and WRIA planning units.

- 2157 also requires RCO to consult with the Governor's Office of Regulatory Assistance to identify a pilot project outside of Puget Sound that will effectively integrate salmon recovery and watershed planning objectives. The pilot's purpose is to demonstrate ways to achieve efficient permitting processes.
- 1244 requires an assessment of watershed and regional-scale capacity issues relating to the support and implementation of salmon recovery. The assessment will examine priority setting and incentives to promote coordination and ensure that we use effective and efficient mechanisms for delivering board funds. The board is directed to distribute its operational funding to the appropriate entities based on this assessment. RCO is including this assessment as a subset of the broader watershed assessment required by 2157.

The RCO is consulting with many groups and interests, including those specifically mentioned in the legislation. We will be consulting with representatives from the Department of Ecology, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, regional fisheries enhancement groups, lead entities, planning units and lead agencies, regional salmon recovery organizations, and the tribes. Initial conversations have occurred to inform these entities of the legislative directive and proposed RCO process. We plan to convene a small working group of these agency and planning representatives to consult with throughout our effort. The workgroup will help identify issues and serve as an important review board.

RCO intends to organize the assessment around the regional organization geographic scale. Key participants in both the 2514 watershed planning processes and salmon recovery efforts in each region will be consulted regarding key questions such as:

- How are existing efforts currently coordinating?
- If not, what obstacles to effective coordination have local groups encountered?
- Are there opportunities for coordination and if so, what types of incentives would cause local groups to cease these opportunities?

RCO staff will keep the board informed of the assessment efforts.

Potential Requests for 2010 Legislative Session

To meet deadlines for agency request legislation, the board should decide at its August meeting whether to submit legislation for the 2010 session.

The 2010 session will be a short session, and we anticipate that the difficult economic climate will continue. Both circumstances make it difficult to advance all but the most urgent legislation. Staff recommends that unless there is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed, RCO should only monitor legislation, and respond when and where appropriate.

