



Statement from Director Kaleen Cottingham on the recommendations of the Governor's Southern Resident Orca Task Force

November 19, 2018

The Governor's task force recommendations for recovering orca whales are a significant achievement and will build on and complement our existing salmon recovery efforts.

Southern resident orca whales depend on salmon and salmon depend up on high quality habitat. It is reassuring that the recommendations about increasing prey (salmon) availability have a strong emphasis on restoring and protecting habitat and restoring fish passage so salmon can reach that vital habitat. These are the same recommendations in salmon recovery and conservation plans that have been adopted for the various regions across the state (on the Coast, in the Columbia River basin, and within Puget Sound).

All across Washington there are salmon recovery partners working with landowners, local governments, Tribes, and agencies. They know what needs to be done to recover salmon but have been substantially underfunded, receiving only about 16 percent of the documented funding needed for critical projects. The challenge ahead of us is getting the political will, support, and funding to execute the recommendations.

It has been stated that the best time to double down on our habitat restoration and protection efforts was 30 years ago, the next best time is now. The science is clear that salmon flourish when there is healthy habitat for salmon, including floodplains, estuaries, near-shore, and river habitat. When added together, these habitats result in healthy ecosystems that are critical not only for salmon, but for shellfish, orcas, other wildlife, and us.

I am optimistic that that our Legislature and Governor will turn these recommendations into action as our southern resident orca whales can wait no longer. Our army of salmon recovery partners stand ready to get the job done.