

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair  
The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen,  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
and Related Agencies, U.S. Senate

The Honorable John Culberson, Chair  
The Honorable José Serrano, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
and Related Agencies, U.S. House of  
Representatives

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair  
The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Ken Calvert, Chair  
The Honorable Betty McCollum,  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives

April 29, 2017

Honorable Chair Shelby, Murkowski, Culberson, and Calvert, and Ranking Members Shaheen, Udall, Serrano, and McCollum:

The recovery of Puget Sound is at a critical juncture. To date, this effort has been lauded as an example of partnership and innovation, receiving bipartisan support and federal designation as an Estuary of National Significance. We want to communicate the importance of sustained federal support, and make sure that you are aware of the damage—economic, cultural, social, and ecological—that will result if the President’s proposed federal budget cuts are implemented.

The successful and continued implementation of this large-scale restoration effort has been due in large part to the **Puget Sound Geographic Program**, which has enabled implementation of a regional (and federally approved) recovery plan. This plan is built with extensive partner engagement and is technically reviewed, ranked, and tracked for results by the Puget Sound Partnership (the Partnership). Like 27 other national estuary programs around the country, the Partnership is sustained by **the National Estuary Program (NEP)** base funds, with a modest but consistent \$600,000 per year. Additionally, the multi-state **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF)**, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has enabled focus on salmon recovery.

**These funds are managed in an integrated fashion, achieving greater results together than they could achieve alone. The loss of any of these critical pieces will significantly impact this whole system.**

Last year, our shared local, regional, tribal, state, non-profit, and business actions became even more powerful by the formation of a Puget Sound federal task force, which aligns and leverages federal efforts with the regional recovery plan. Federal partners recognized the value of collaborating in an effort that is:

- **Creating jobs** in a variety of industries (including food, hospitality, sustainable forestry, international trade, and international oil transport protection and spill prevention). Specific examples include:
  - Washington state leads the nation in production of farmed clams, oysters, and mussels, employing more than 3,200 people and providing an estimated \$270 million in economic impact.
  - The state’s marine industry, which includes fishing fleets, ports, and seafood processors, generates \$30 billion annually.

- The natural assets in Puget Sound provide a competitive advantage to key industries that compete globally for highly skilled talent.
- Of the state's tourism and recreational spending, 80 percent is tied to Puget Sound.
- Helping to fulfill the federal government's **trust obligations to the 17 Puget Sound tribes and protecting tribal treaty rights and reserved treaty resources.**
- Emphasizing **incentive-based, non-regulatory approaches** to reach recovery goals.
- Sharing learning from **continuous innovation** with recovery efforts across the nation.
- Strongly driven by **local engagement and local decisions.**
- Focused on investments that **benefit a wide range of interests**—including aquaculture, agriculture, safety, public health, recreation, employment, preservation of cultural identity, and human welfare.
- **Leveraging funds** from multiple sources, resulting in high returns on investment.
- Ensuring that decisions are informed by **learning, technical expertise, and science.**
- Providing a strong basis for **encouraging British Columbia and the Canadian government**, with whom we share this Salish Sea, to increase their provincial and federal investment.

It would be devastating to the Puget Sound ecosystem and economy for the federal government to disinvest in this work at this time. If our efforts are disrupted now, the options left to us in the future are not only more expensive, but may also prove ineffective after further degradation. Our ecosystem is balanced on the edge of potentially irreversible changes beyond which critical and cherished species—such as our resident orca whales and the salmon upon which they depend for survival—may not recover.

Our local governments already invest heavily in protecting Puget Sound through stormwater management, critical area designations, shoreline protection, and other programs and investments. The state has similarly engaged in its responsibilities for clean and healthy water resources that support the economies and jobs that depend upon them. Tribal governments throughout Puget Sound provide important leadership, investments, and valuable technical expertise toward achieving recovery goals. **We ask for continued and commensurate partnership by the federal government.**

As Congress completes its work on funding for fiscal year 2018, the undersigned ask you to ensure that the final appropriations measure includes:

- Level funding of \$28 million for the **Puget Sound Geographic Program.**
- Level funding of \$65 million for the **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund**, for which Alaska, California, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington compete.
- Level funding of \$26.5 million for the nationwide **National Estuary Program**, including \$600,000 for each estuary of national significance.

Details of the President's budget proposal are not yet clear, but we are concerned that these critical investments are in jeopardy. We thank you for your past support and urge your continued support for Puget Sound recovery.

Thank you for considering our request.

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