

**TESTIMONY OF
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**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED
AGENCIES OF THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss Puget Sound and the National Estuary Program, or NEP.

My name is Sheida Sahandy and I'm the Executive Director of the Puget Sound Partnership, a non-regulatory Washington State agency established by the state legislature in 2007 to mobilize, guide, and accelerate Puget Sound recovery.

Puget Sound is the nation's largest estuary by water volume. The Puget Sound basin reaches to the Canadian border on the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and Mt. Rainier to the east. The enormous ecological wealth of Puget Sound—including the iconic orca whale and seven species of salmon—is matched by its economic significance to our region.

Puget Sound is our state's economic engine: an aquatic superhighway moving wheat and apples out to the Pacific Rim, leading the nation in the production of farmed shellfish, and leading the maritime industry with the third largest cargo volume in the U.S. The basin is home to Seattle, a metropolis with more than 4 million residents and home to companies such as Amazon, Microsoft, REI, and Starbucks. And, culturally, this region is hallowed ground to 17 Treaty Tribes, each of which has reserved rights to many of the natural resources of the region.

The National Estuary Program, which resides in the EPA budget, funds 28 restoration efforts like ours across the nation. It allows us the flexibility to use non-regulatory approaches to customize recovery actions that meet local needs. By doing so, we are able to significantly leverage federal investments with state, local, tribal, and non-governmental funding. At this time, NEP programs have a leverage rate of 15:1. I want to stress that point. For every federal dollar invested through the NEP program, the associated estuary entities raise an additional \$15 from other sources.

This foundational program allows leveraging of human capital as well. We at the Puget Sound Partnership work with, and help mobilize, more than 750 partners in our region. These local programs have real impact on the ground and real people who care about them. We also collaborate with staff at our EPA regional office to enhance these community-based relationships, which are needed to achieve our collective mission. We would like to especially thank Dennis McLerran and his Region 10 staff for their dedication to making all this successful.

This success is evidenced by our ability to deliver real results. Through the work of our partners and the deployment of these funds in Puget Sound, we have achieved the following:

- Since 2007, more than 25,700 acres of habitat have been protected and 70 miles of streams and rivers have been restored.
- In a single year (2010), 565 restoration projects were advanced, resulting directly or indirectly in more than 7,000 jobs.
- Since January of 2012, there has been a net improvement to more than 1,800 commercial shellfish harvesting acres.

Despite the great job our region is doing getting projects done on the ground, the reality is that the rate of damage to Puget Sound is still exceeding the rate of recovery.

This is because we are handling multiple challenges—like legacy pollution and tremendous regional population growth, as well as antiquated infrastructure (such as stormwater and transportation systems) that must be re-imagined and replaced over time.

Additionally, we face emergent issues.

- Ocean acidification appears to be negatively impacting our shellfish industry. We are seeing an alarming spread of the so-called “star-fish wasting disease,” which causes starfish limbs to melt away as they slowly die.
- Our juvenile steelhead trout are experiencing a 98-percent mortality rate leaving south Puget Sound.
- We have orcas that are starving for lack of fish to eat. Then, as they start to digest their own blubber because food supplies are low, they are poisoned by the bio-toxins accumulated in their blubber.

These are sobering realities.

So, again, the fact is that the rate of damage to Puget Sound is exceeding the rate of recovery. We have to change the direction of that equation so that we are not just managing decline, but are stabilizing and turning around the system. We need to accelerate the recovery rate so communities can enjoy healthy natural systems that support thriving economies.

To this end, we ask for your continued support for the authorization and appropriation of the National Estuary Program funds. Additionally, over time, we in the Puget Sound will seek your support to increase the Geographic Funds portion of the NEP so that this funding is commensurate with the new and increasing challenges Puget Sound faces as a body of water with national significance.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.