



Alliance for a Healthy South Sound Council Meeting
December 18, 2025, 10:00AM - 12:00PM
Virtual Zoom Meeting

Participants

Amy Hatch-Winecka, WRIA 13 Lead Entity Coordinator/Thurston Regional Planning Council	Jaal Mann, Pierce County Kym Foley, City of Olympia
Barbara Ann Smolko, Pierce County	Lisa Spurrier, Pierce County
Brian Combs, Mason Conservation District	Monea Kerr, Puget Sound Partnership
Brittany Poirson, WA Department of Natural Resources	Noah Roland, Mason County Public Health
Chanele Holbrook, WA State Department of Ecology	Mary Krauszer, Pierce County
Cynthia Harbison, WA Department of Natural Resources	Pat Tarzwell, Mason County
Daniel Einstein, Oly Ecosystems	Rachel Latchford, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife/Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead
Desiree Radice, City of Tacoma	Tanya Truong, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
Emily McCartan, WA State Department of Ecology/Stormwater Strategic Initiative Lead	Tom Kantz, Pierce County
	Tye Menser, Thurston County
	Vladimir Nekrutenko, Mason County Public Health

Meeting Facilitation

Kristen Durance, Puyallup-White River LIO
Haley Morris, Alliance for a Healthy South Sound

Meeting Summary

The Alliance for a Healthy South Sound Local Integrating Organization (AHSS LIO) Council met virtually on December 18, 2025. Discussion was as follows.

I. DNR Kelp and Eelgrass Health Plan.

Cynthia Harbison, Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is leading the development of a [DNR Kelp and Eelgrass Health Plan](#) which will identify 10,000 acres of priority kelp and eelgrass habitat. The purpose of the Health Plan is to mitigate stressors and monitor trends with a goal of conserving and recovering these habitats by 2040. This work aligns with regional strategies like the Puget Sound Kelp Recovery Plan and eelgrass recovery initiatives, focusing on ecological, sociocultural, and economic values.

So far, Cynthia has prioritized collecting data on the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca but is now shifting site selection to the South Puget Sound. In the South Sound, the Squaxin Island Kelp Protection Zone which contains a historic kelp bed, has been identified by the Squaxin Island Tribe as one of the South Sound priority areas which DNR is supporting in partnership with the Squaxin Island Tribe to conserve and recover the kelp bed. Current efforts include collaborating with local partners to define conservation and recovery goals, gather data, and leverage existing projects to identify potential priority areas. After initial data is collected from partners, Cynthia will schedule meetings and open houses, allowing partners to integrate feedback into a decision-making framework and assist in developing action plans to address stressors and implement conservation and recovery strategies. Cynthia asked AHSS LIO participants to share how DNR can support local priorities and to name where priority kelp and eelgrass areas for conservation and recovery are in the South Sound. View Cynthia's Presentation [here](#).

LIO Member Comments/Questions:

- Barbara Ann Smolko shared that conservation districts and health departments are working on developing a South Sound Shellfish Recovery Project to identify how to reduce sources of bacteria and serve as a coordination opportunity.
- Cynthia asked whether the Chambers Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant outfall will be included in the South Sound Shellfish Recovery Project, as it could be useful for the DNR Kelp and Eelgrass Health Plan to map where the outfalls are located.
 - Barbara Ann stated that the outfall will not be included in the project.
- Desiree Radice noted two eelgrass locations in Commencement Bay at the end of Foss Waterway. Desiree also mentioned a Restoration and Resilience Master Plan for Commencement Bay that the City of Tacoma is developing.
 - These projects should also be included in the Puyallup-White River LIO Healthy Shorelines Action Plan. Kristen and Haley will work to integrate them into the existing plan.

II. Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project

Amy Hatch-Winecka, WRIA 13 Lead Entity Coordinator, provided an overview of the draft WRIA 13 Floodplains by Design grant application to help fund phase one of the Deschutes River Watershed Recovery project. The 2027–2029 grant round applications are due in May of 2026. The Deschutes River runs 52 miles from the headwaters in Lewis County to downtown Olympia where it empties into Bud Inlet. The limiting factors in the Deschutes River watershed include frequent flooding in the winter, with extensive low-flow periods in the summer leading to high temperatures, poor water quality, and a lack of in-stream wood, harming habitat for coho which this project aims to improve. This proposal is for phase one out of five and will start in the lower watershed where partners will conduct a feasibility study and alternative analysis for planned restoration projects. For phase one, the middle river will address the most immediate risk of land development through landowner outreach and a flood reduction assessment, while the upper watershed will include the implementation of full-spanning log jams.

LIO Member Comments/Questions:

- Tye Menser asked why the average age of agriculture producers in Thurston County (age 57) is relevant to this project.
 - Amy shared that this statistic was included because there is a huge risk of development in this watershed as producers begin to retire. Agricultural producers often rely on the value of their land for retirement, putting pressure on those landowners to sell to developers. Partners such as Oly Ecosystems and Capitol Land Trust are working with these landowners to purchase land at fair market value to preserve agricultural production and reduce conversion to development.
- Chanele Holbrook asked whether the project team is aware of conversations around transfer of development rights and how the group can support long-term preservation of agriculture lands to ensure they stay highly priced and are being conserved.
 - Amy noted that they will reach out to the Community Farm Land Trust to assist with the leasing potential in any lands that are conserved.
- Commissioner Tye Menser acknowledged that this project tells a powerful story of how each phase fits into a whole watershed plan. The funding information and potential impact on communities up and downstream will help lawmakers understand the broader goals for the watershed and how specific projects work towards recovering the entire watershed.

III. Floodplains and Estuaries Action Plan Process

The next Action Plan for the AHSS LIO will be Floodplains and Estuaries, which will be the LIOs third Action Plan. Action Plans serve as a bridge between regional strategies and local efforts, helping to ensure that funding is directed toward community-identified priorities. They also offer LIOs an opportunity to collectively review and update their Ecosystem Recovery Plans and allow regional funders to use the plans to better understand local needs and align funding opportunities accordingly. So far, the AHSS LIO has developed an On-Site Septic Action Plan and a Healthy Shorelines Action Plan, both of which have resulted in funding to support local projects.

Moving forward, the Action Plans will start advancing actions from the 2026-2030 Action Agenda which will be under public review starting on January 5.

LIO Member Comments/Questions:

To begin scoping for the Floodplains and Estuaries Action Plan, LIO members were asked the following questions:

Who is doing floodplains and estuaries planning work?

- Tom Kantz shared that the Pierce County Long Range Planning Division is planning for the 2029 shoreline update. There's also planning and design work happening right now for the Chambers Bay Estuary Restoration project.
- Daniel Einstein noted that Oly Ecosystems will be submitting a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant proposal to conduct restoration planning and design on a 3-mile river stretch. Floodplains by Design will advance this work in the final design and permitting phase.
- Barbara Ann Smolko asked what 'planning' means in this context? Does it encompass planning around the Growth Management Act (GMA) and zoning? Or is it more in line with Shoreline Master Program work?
 - Kristen Durance explained that we want to capture local/regional/state barriers and projects and opportunities that are not fully funded and need fiscal or legislative support. We don't need to fully capture the breadth of all the GMA or Shoreline Master Plan work but rather identify the floodplains and estuaries components that we want to amplify for funding opportunities, collaboration, or to flag for regional support at the legislative level.
- Barbara Ann Smolko noted that some Biodiversity Management Plans may look at different habitats and species which could be helpful to glean information from for the Floodplains and Estuaries Action Plan.

What barriers have been identified?

- Barbara Ann Smolko described that the South Sound encompasses many pocket estuary habitats that are attractive for development. There is tension between doing many small projects that have a lot of impact across the landscape versus focusing on larger projects that bring in more funding.
 - Kristen Durance explained that we need to identify how to spotlight pocket estuaries and connect with other LIOs as they are experiencing the same barrier. She flagged this as an item to bring the LIO coordination group.
- Lisa Spurrier noted the restoration project at Sequelitchew Creek where there is a BNSF crossing that has a National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant in limbo.

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- Kym Foley asked how we address the lack of staff and capacity to manage projects, apply for grants, and implement plans in smaller jurisdictions?
 - Kristen answered by describing that capacity is a large barrier that many jurisdictions are facing. Making this connection can help to articulate why additional funding is needed and to provide a specific “ask” that could potentially be taken to the Leadership Council or the Ecosystem Coordination Board.
 - Vladimir Nekrutenko chimed in to note that the messaging should come directly from Washington state, especially for smaller counties like Mason County due to limited resources.
 - Rachel Latchford shared in the chat that capacity building is a big part of the Floodplains and Estuaries Implementation Strategy too. The Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead (HSIL) ran a capacity building funding opportunity last year. They just posted [this blog](#), highlighting some of the work that organizations have been able to complete with new staff and training from the funding.
 - Barbara Ann Smolko acknowledged the challenge of sharing resources as it takes a tremendous amount of time and energy to move money between different project partners. It could be helpful to identify a model to reduce that administrative burden.
 - Barbara Ann Smolko noted another barrier of not incorporating natural resource priorities into other aspects of planning such as transportation, resulting in restoration efforts being implemented later in a project as an afterthought.
 - Tom Kantz responded by highlighting last year’s presentation to the Leadership Council which introduced flooding issues and expanded into discussions on floodplain management, particularly for highly flood-prone areas like the Puyallup and White Rivers. The benefits of levee setbacks and restoration projects were mentioned while emphasizing the challenge of coordinating diverse approaches across multiple jurisdictions for a regional strategy.
 - Chanele Holbrook recognized that there is a common conversation across Puget Sound around pulling information together in a website, archive, or some sort of hub to house this information so that partners can be pointed to one area to access information.

IV. LIO Updates

- **Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB) Local Forum** – On November 5, the AHSS LIO held a Local Forum at the ECB meeting in Olympia. The Local Forum was focused on the history and future of estuary restoration in the South Sound to highlight why South Sound estuaries are so important and how local collaboration has led to successful cross-jurisdiction estuary restoration projects. There were five AHSS LIO partners who presented to the ECB and provided examples of the successful South Sound estuary restoration collaborations, future opportunities, and next steps on how the ECB can help. The following speakers included:
 - **Scott Steltzner, Sqauxin Island Tribe**, shared the successes of the Oakland Bay and Whiteman Cove restoration projects.
 - **Chris Ellings, Nisqually Tribe**, highlighted the Nisqually Estuary Project and the BNSF Causeway Restoration.
 - **David Troutt, Nisqually Tribe**, provided suggestions on how the ECB can help contribute to continued estuary restoration projects.
 - **Tom Kantz, Pierce County**, shared why South Sound estuaries are important and informed LIO members of goals for the Chambers Bay restoration project.
 - **Cole Baldino, South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group**, provided insight into the Deschutes Estuary Restoration project.

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- **Funding for AHSS LIO Healthy Shoreline Projects** – Each LIO received \$150,000 from the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) to support one or more shoreline projects from their Action Plans. The South Sound Technical Team, made up of technical experts from the Nisqually and Squaxin Island Tribes, City of Olympia, Pierce, Thurston, and Mason Counties, Lead Entity Coordinators from WRIs 10/12, 11, 13, 14, and 15, and Thurston, Mason, and Pierce Conservation Districts narrowed down and recommended four projects that they identified as appropriate for this one-time funding opportunity to the AHSS Executive Committee. Recognizing constraints to fund each of the four projects, the Executive Committee decided on allocating funding to the following three projects:
 - **A shoreline armor assessment.** This project will be led by multiple LIOs, PSP, the HSIL, and other regional partners to understand the magnitude of un/under-permitted shoreline structures in the South Sound.
 - **An ongoing Bluff Recession GIS Analysis for Restoration/Resilience/Relocation (BRGAR) project.** This project aims to identify and quantify Puget Sound waterfront bluff parcels with structures located close to bluff crests that may be threatened in the coming years due to sea level rise and other climate impacts. The project was on hold pending securing \$45,000 in matching funds required for the Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program. Other LIOs are also contributing funds which means they can continue the analysis to look at the South Sound shoreline, which the project has not yet monitored.
 - **The development of a South Sound Shoreline Futures Shoreline Vision.** This will explore how current zoning and development plans align with the conservation and restoration priorities identified in the Nearshore Project Selection Tool, Coastal Catchment Analysis, and WRIA-scale salmon recovery plans and identify areas of alignment as well as areas for improvement. This work will be led by the South Sound technical team, facilitated through the AHSS LIO.

V. Round Robin

- Rachel Latchford shared that the HSIL is working on updating the Floodplains and Estuaries and Land Development and Cover Implementation Strategies, which they are hoping to complete by next June. There are two coffee chats scheduled for LIOs and LIO members to share local priorities that relate to the implementation strategies and any updates that are needed to the strategies.
 - The Floodplains and Estuaries Coffee Chat is scheduled for January 13 from 9am-12pm. [Register here.](#)
 - The Land Development and Cover Coffee Chat is scheduled for January 15 from 1-4pm. [Register here.](#)
- Vladimir Nekrutenko shared that Mason County is working on a shellfish recovery grant. They are currently preparing a proposal to the Mason County Board of County Commissioners to request an increase in Clean Water District fees and extend its sunset date beyond early 2027 to continue to maintain clean waters for commercial and recreational shellfish.
- Kym Foley noted the City of Olympia is currently working on a Fish Passage Barrier Removal Project at Ellis Creek in Squaxin Park. The city is planning to apply for design funds in the upcoming Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board grant round.

VI. Next Steps

The meeting calendar for 2026 will be sent out in the new year. If you have suggestions for agenda topics, please email Haley Morris, hmorris@rossstrategic.com.