

The
Oregon
Plan

Boiled down for a little fish...

Story and Illustrations by **Jay Nicholas**

the **Oregon Plan**

Boiled down for a little fish...

The Oregon Plan is a document of nearly 3,000 pages that describes a new way of managing natural resources in a manner involving all the citizens of the state. The Plan emphasizes coho and steelhead, but it is really about restoring watersheds that are healthy for people, fish, and wildlife in Oregon.

This is how I came to understand the true meaning of the Oregon Plan...

Story and Illustrations
by
Jay Nicholas

It started one May morning
in 1997.

I was walking along the sandy
tidflats near the mouth of a
small coastal river.





Eventually, I wound up on my hands and knees, looking at ripples in the sand, admiring the uncountable squiggles and holes that signify life of some kind, hiding under the surface.

As I neared the river's edge, a coho salmon smolt squirted out of the water and landed, flip-flopping, right under my nose.

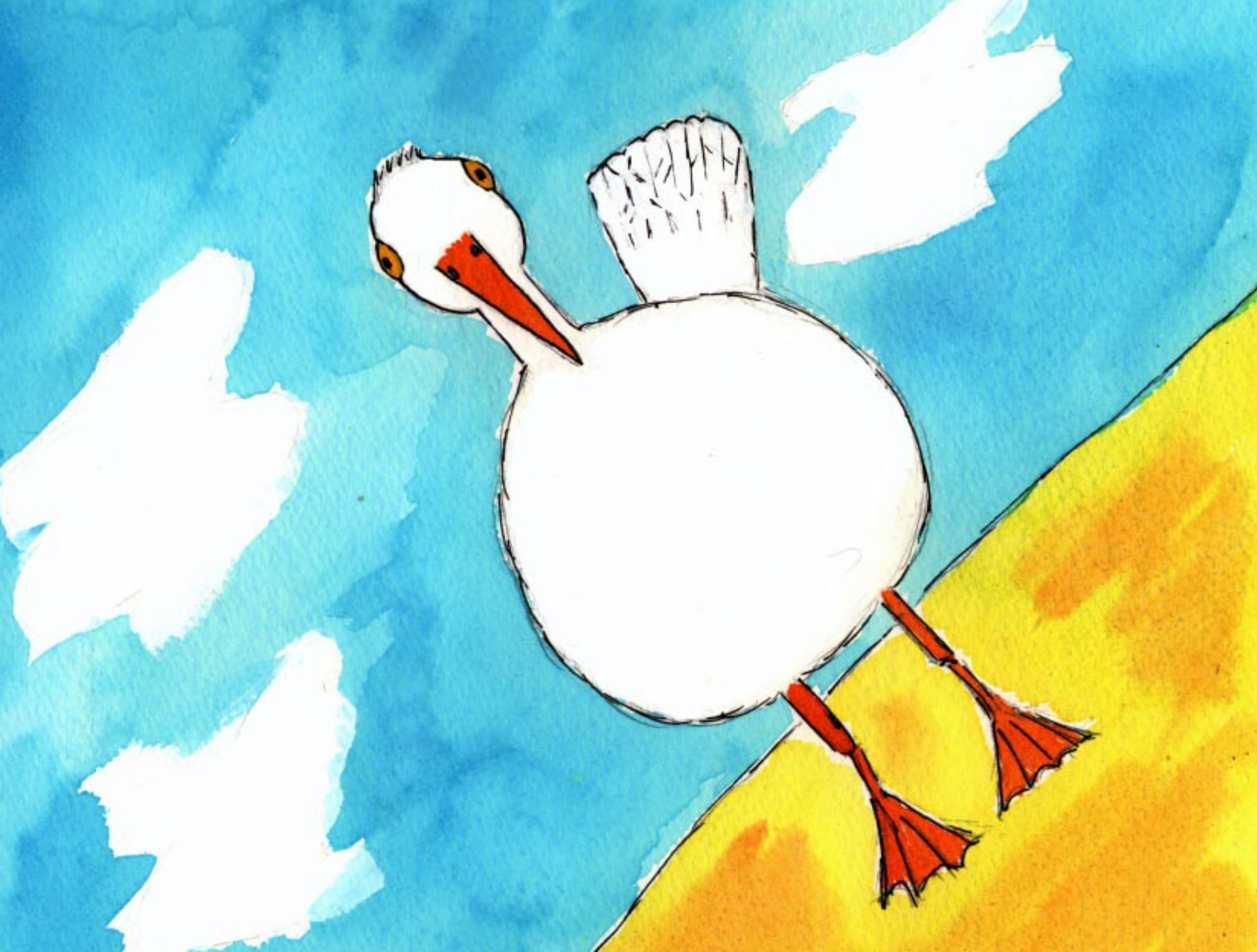
Needless to say, this startled me greatly, but I quickly went about trying to gather the little fish up in my hands and get him back in the water. Well, this process did not go smoothly. What with all his wiggling and my cold fingers, it took a long time to get hold of him. By the time I had cupped him in my hands, he was barely twitching. I was alarmed to see silvery traces of scales and his protective slime scattered about the area where he landed.

So instead of just tossing him back into the river, I knelt in the shallows and submerged my hands, letting all four inches of him rest there, hoping he would be OK if he could rest for awhile. He was on his side, his gills pumping furiously to catch his breath.

As I peered into the water watching him, I thought I could hear a faint voice saying...

“Are you the one?”





I looked around me, but there was only a seagull watching, no doubt hoping for a tasty morning snack.

Returning my attention to the wounded fish, I heard the voice again, a little stronger now. “I said, are you the one?”

“Huh?” I replied, articulate as ever.

“Are you the one who knows so much about the Oregon Plan?”

“Are you talking to me, little smolt?” I said, knowing that fish can’t really talk, but wishing that they could.

“Unless seagulls are writing conservation plans these days, I’m talking to you,” the little fish said.

I was taken aback by the little talking salmon, but decided to answer him.

“Well, yes,” I said, “I am the principal writer of the Plan. Mind you, I didn’t write the whole thing myself. I had lots of help from many people. But I probably know as much about the whole plan as any one person.”

“Oh, thank goodness I’ve found you,” the little fish said. “I have been sent by all my brothers and sisters to ask you, please, to explain what the Oregon Plan is all about. We have heard little bits and pieces of it, hints and innuendo, rumors and all.

“Some of what we have heard sounds good, but some if it doesn’t make any sense.

“We are making our smolt migration and want to understand how our future will change because of this plan as we continue our life journey.”

“Wow!” I said.

“You came to the right place to get the straight story on the plan. In fact, if you wouldn’t mind waiting, I can drive back to Corvallis and get a complete copy of it for you and your friends to share.”

“That would be wonderful,” said the little fish. How long will I need to wait with Mr. Seagull over there?”





“It will take a couple of hours to get back to the office, copying nearly 3,000 pages shouldn’t take half a day, then there’s the index tabbing, hole punching, the binders... why, I should be able to get back here by low tide about this time tomorrow!”

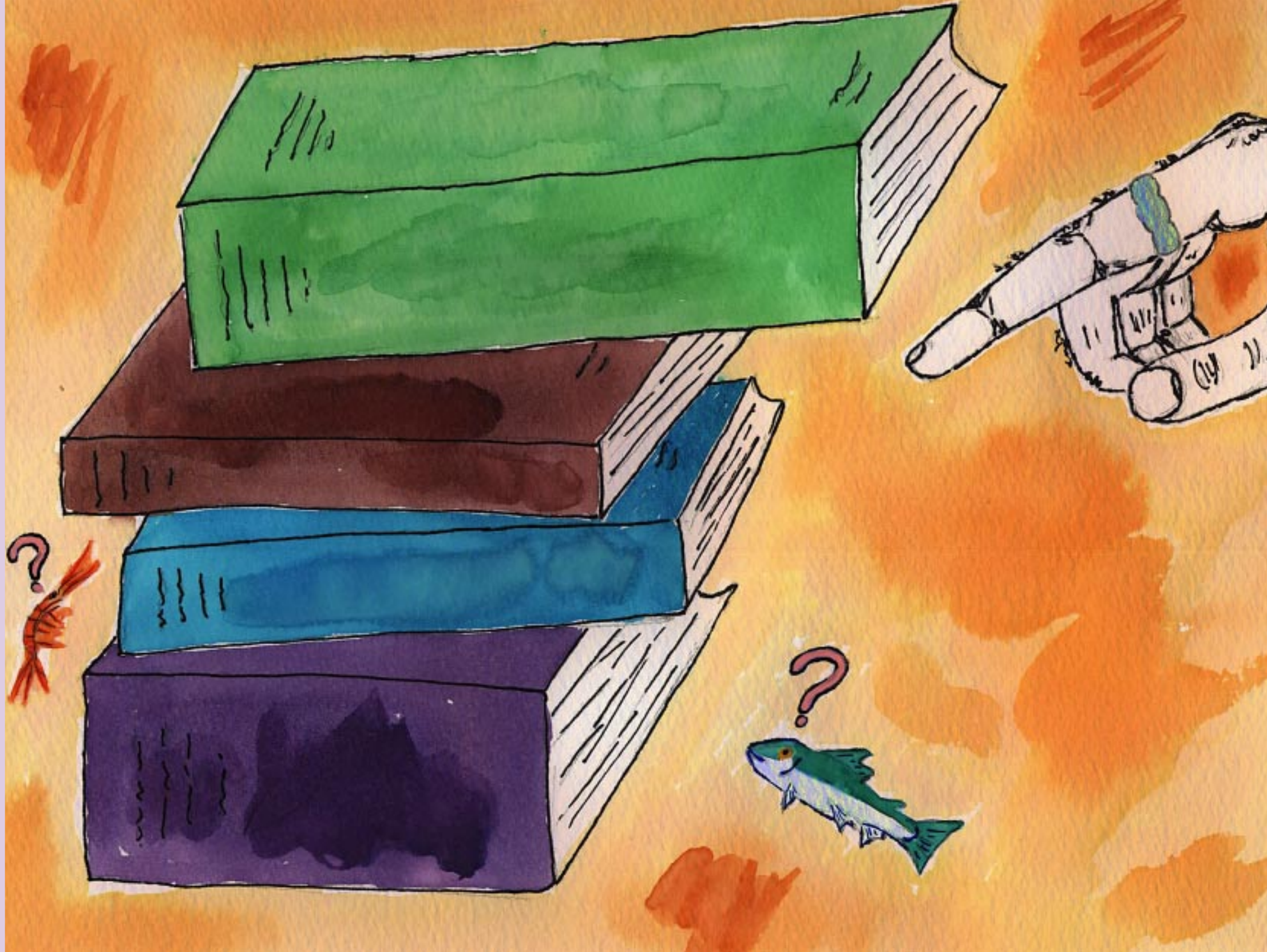
“I don’t think you quite understand, Jay. You see, I am just a little fish, and I really can’t handle all that paper in those heavy binders. Can’t you boil it down for me?” He was starting to right himself now, and his fins were stirring up little grains of sand in the water.

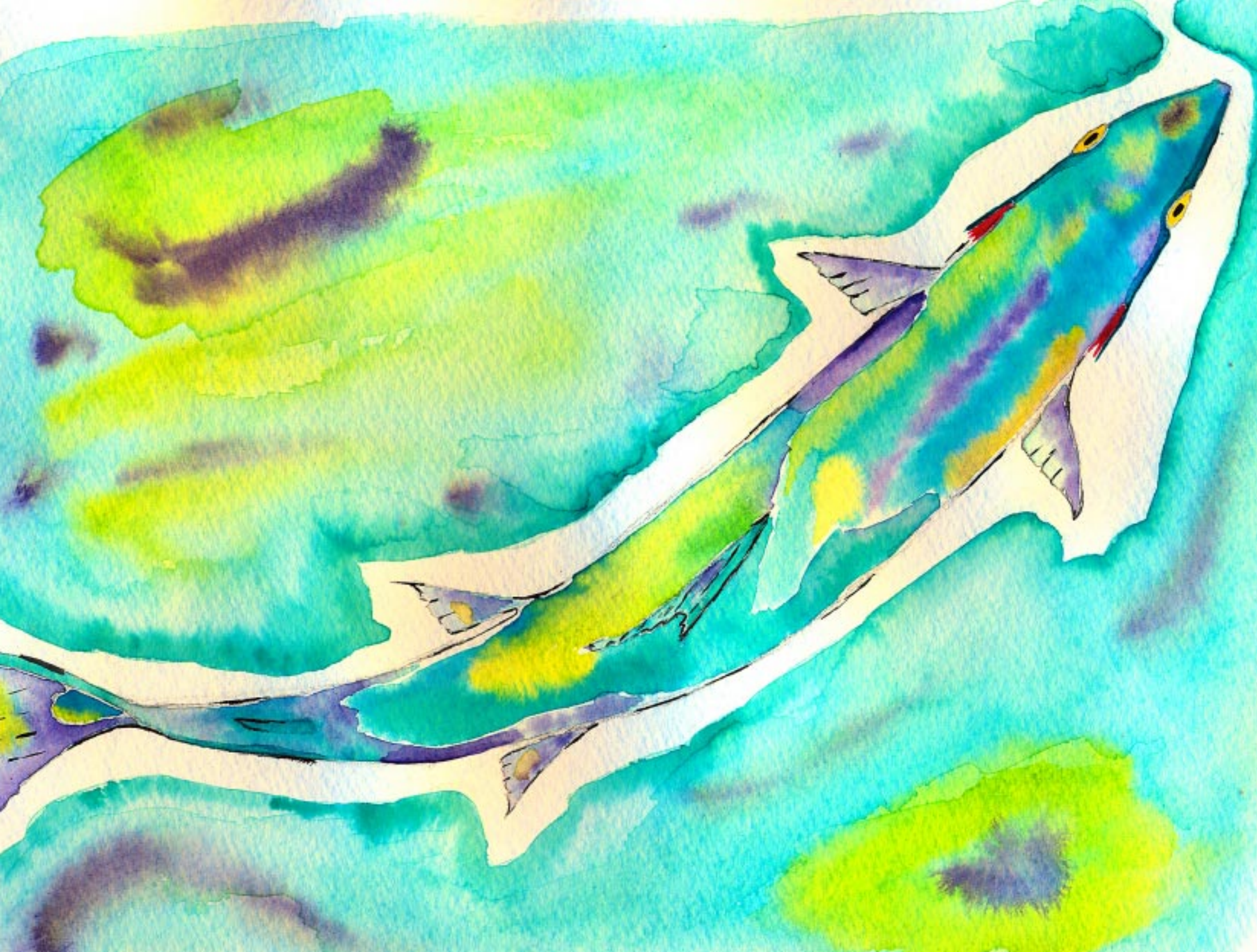
“Oh. Yes. Of course. How silly of me. Of course you don’t need the whole plan. A lot of it is technical and administrative documentation. Some of it is repetitious. It is all useful in some way, but you needn’t see it all. Goodness no, you don’t need to see it all to get the real meaning of the Plan.”

What if I get you a copy of Volume I?" I asked, hopefully. "It isn't much over an inch thick, and it fits in a single binder. It reviews the history of how the salmon problem developed over the last century, summarizes key elements of the Plan, and highlights some real obstacles to solving the salmon problem."

"Hello, Jay." The fish said, sounding a little irate now, and looking quite feisty again. His back was a brilliant blue-green, his belly the cleanest cloud-white you will ever see. "You don't seem to be getting the picture. I am just a little fish. I can't cope with one binder any better than with four! Can't you boil it down for me?"

"Oh. I see." I said. "I'm so very sorry. Yes, of course I can boil it down. We have a very nice executive summary that is less than twenty pages, with an illustration of a coho on the cover, and maps, and charts. It's sort of an overview of the whole Plan."





“Well, maybe I could handle the executive summary,” the fish said, bravely.

“Great! In fact, I have a copy in my briefcase right here.”

I pulled out the summary for the little smolt. I talked about the Plan, hit the highlights, emphasized the huge scope of the effort. I mentioned contributions by grassroots groups, landowners, and the timber industry. I noted that fishing seasons had almost been eliminated. I explained how important it was that government agencies were working together better than ever before. Finally, I told him that the state promises to monitor the results and change the Plan if needed.

The salmon was starting to become fidgety.

“I really must be getting on with my migration,” he said. “If you would be so kind as to give me the summary, I will take it back to my fellow salmon.”

Seeing that the little smolt was looking quite strong now, I took a piece of eel grass and tied the summary to his tail.

To my disappointment, though, the little fish tried and tried but just couldn't budge it.

"Maybe I could boil it down more," I said, untying the tired fish. "Maybe, if I really, really boil it down, I could describe the Plan on a single piece of paper."

The smolt looked frazzled and settled down to rest on the waterlogged summary. Grains of sand and tiny creatures settled onto the surface. The ink blurred on the cover.

While he caught his breath, I pulled out my laptop and began to write.

The whole Plan on one page.

Over a year in the making.

Government agencies and private landowners. Scientists and students. Industry and conservation groups. The Governor. Thousands of people contributing.

The future of salmon in Oregon, some say, at stake.

Boiled down to one page.

Quite a task.





The tidal water was cold. Every once in awhile, a wave rolled over the top of my hip boots as I knelt there in the shallows. The pockets of my faded wool coat were dragging in the river. The little salmon moved around under me in the water, finning over the keyboard as I typed, watching intently as words appeared on the half-submerged screen. Sometimes I bumped him as I reached for the mouse with my thumb.

“Excuse me,” I muttered, and went on typing.

Beads of sweat stood out on my forehead. The little fish was mostly quiet, turning his head from side to side, reading as I worked. Sometimes, when I used a very big word, he asked me to explain what I meant. Once he asked me to tilt the screen a little, to ease the glare. The little salmon was very patient.

Finally, my back cramped and fingers wrinkled-up by the salt water, I was done.

The Oregon plan.

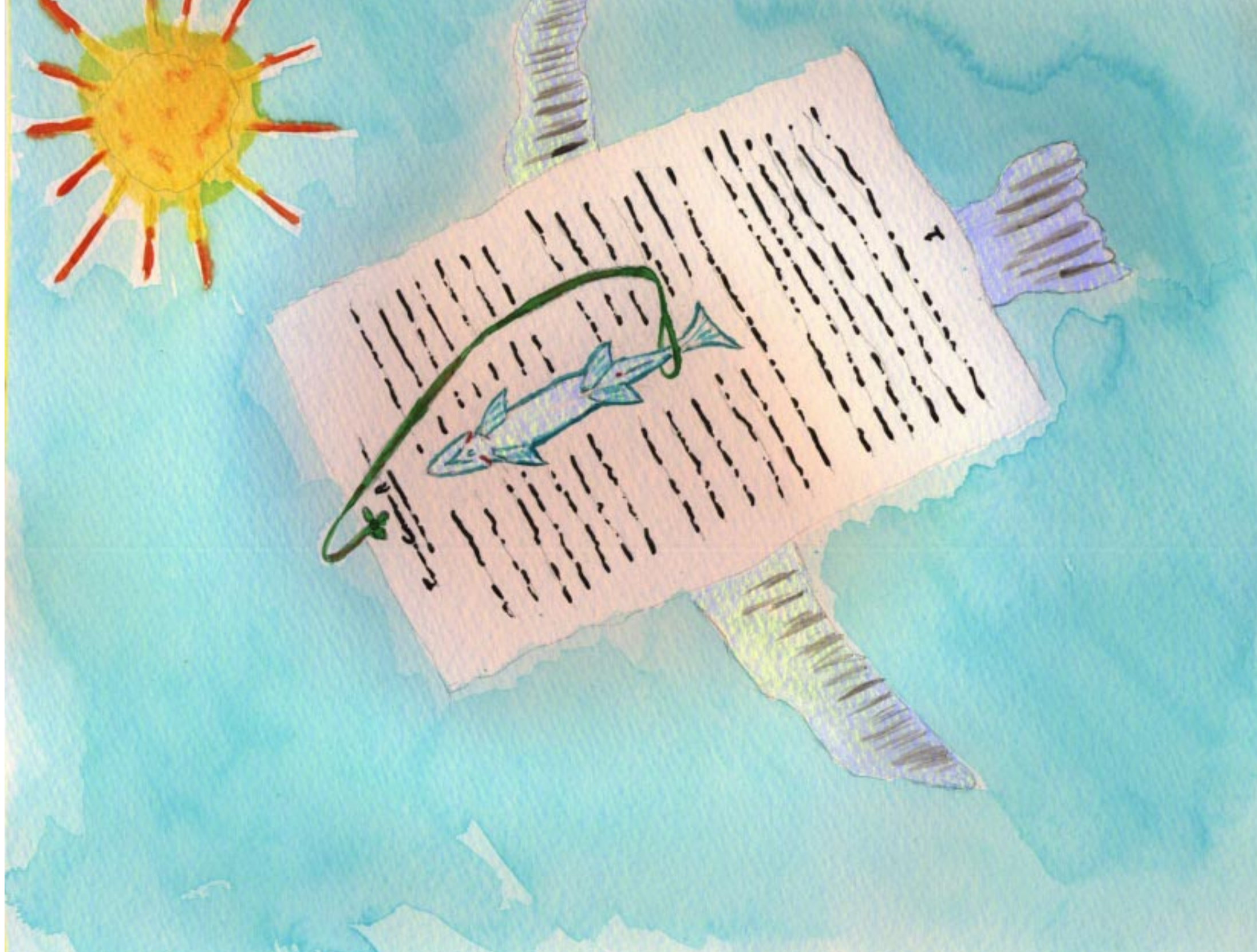
On a single page.

“I see, I think,” said the little fish. “But it is still quite a lot to digest. I think I’d better take this summary with me so I can study it, think about it, and let it sink in for awhile.”

“Wonderful!” I said, and started to set up my infrared-linked portable printer in the water beside the laptop. Naturally, I used waterproof paper. In an instant, I was securing the single piece of paper to the little fish’s tail.

“Thank you! I’ve got to be going now. My ocean-rearing phase and all that.” And the little fish swam off.





That is, he tried to.

Even though it was only a single sheet of paper, it foundered the little fish, and soon he was struggling at the surface, not making any headway at all.

Mr. Seagull saw this and made a dive at the little fish, who escaped at the last moment only by hiding under the paper.

I chased Mr. Seagull off and retrieved the little fish, freeing him from his burden. I sat there in the river with him, water up to my armpits. Neither of us spoke for quite a while.

“Don’t suppose that you could boil it down anymore?” Said the little fish.

It was a question. I had no answer.

“If you can’t, you just can’t.”

Faintly now, he continued. “I... we... salmon will understand that you have tried.”

“I must be going now.”

The incoming tide was surging up to my neck.

“I really must be going.

“Now.”





“Wait!” I shouted. “Give me one more chance.”

The current was swirling around us; my face was completely underwater to see the screen.

Staghorn sculpin were chasing little sand bugs hiding in the keyboard.

I had only one single sentence to write. One sentence to describe the Oregon Plan.

A pledge.

When I was finished, I reduced the font-size, slipped a single fine thread of eelgrass into the printer, and activated the print icon.





The little salmon was swimming in circles around the printer, hiding from a cutthroat trout, who clearly wanted to eat him. When the eelgrass emerged from the printer, the little salmon caught one end of it on a tooth in the corner of his mouth. It lay so smoothly against his side that it was no burden at all.

“Wow! Yippee!” The little salmon shouted, and dashed off into the estuary with his very own copy of the Oregon Plan.

I was calling to him now. “Wait! Remember that this is just an unofficial draft! I need to take it back to the office and send it out for review by the technical staff, the policy experts, and the political advisors.”

But the little salmon was gone now, off on the rest of his life journey.

“You do your part, and I’ll do mine,” the little salmon shouted over his shoulder, leaping through the surf.





I felt around in the sand for my laptop, but I couldn't find it. Ghost shrimp were already laying eggs in the keyboard. A one-armed crab pinched at my fingers as I groped around in the murky water.

The printer had washed ashore with the surge of the tide, and Mr. Seagull was perched on it. He startled as I lumbered out of the river, **pooped mightily** on the printer, and flew off.

I turned again and shouted at the ocean, "Don't you want to know if coho salmon were listed as threatened by the National Marine Fisheries Service?"

Apparently, the little salmon did not hear me.

The waves washed away my footprints as I made my way to shore, hissing as they followed me across the flats.

I didn't have a copy of the pledge I had given the little salmon. But I didn't need it.

Even I could remember the one-sentence version of the Oregon Plan.

We, the people of Oregon,
promise to do our best,
to understand and respect the needs of salmon,
and to make some change
in the way we live our daily lives,
in the hope that both salmon and people,
will survive and flourish,
together,
in the future.





Acknowledgments

This book honors the efforts of all the people who have helped develop the Oregon Plan.

Production of this book has been supported by:

- Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation
- Oregon Trout
- Starker Forests Inc.
- Fox Blueprinting Company (Salem)
- Weston J. Becker, editor and designer



DOWN TO THE SEA

by Jay Nicholas

"...a treasure, appealing to all ages through exquisite illustrations and delightful text. The message is as timely as it is timeless."

Rose Marie Davis, Educator



Reviews for *Down to the Sea*

We all know children are our future. *Down to the Sea* playfully helps our children understand they are the salmon's future.

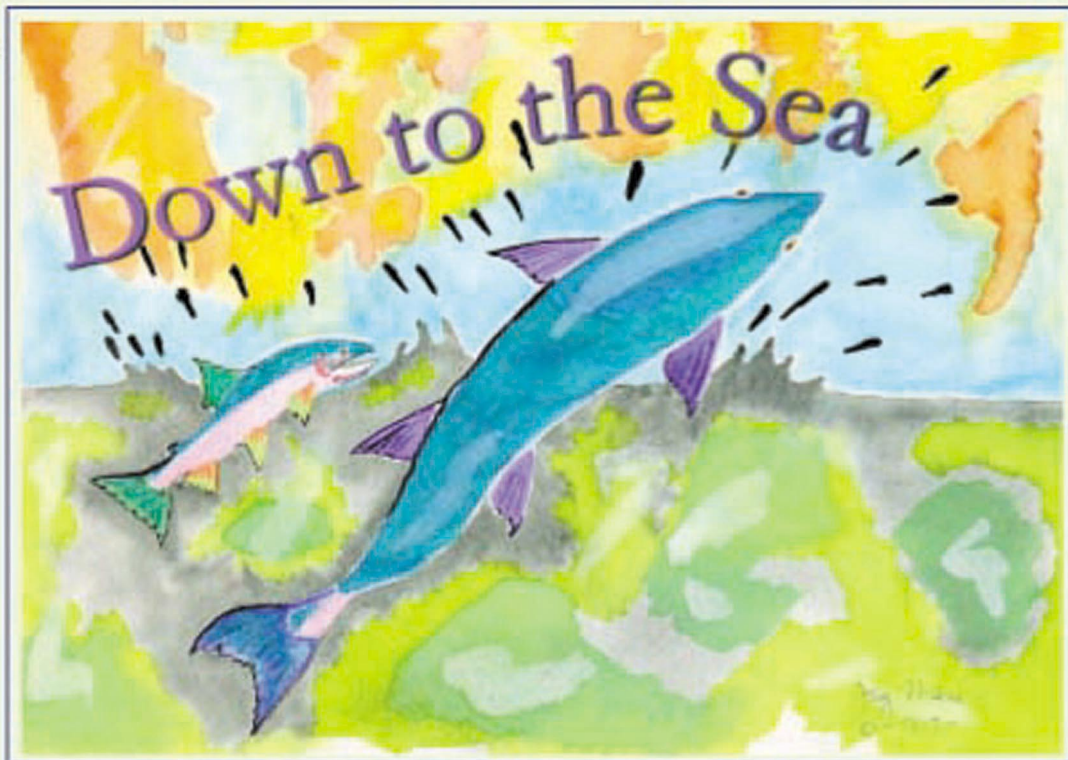
Bill Bradbury, Executive Director,
For the Sake of Salmon

This little story and its imaginative illustrations make me smile and give me hope that we will succeed.

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.,
Governor, State of Oregon

My grandson said this book is "neat," – "It's really good." Eight-year-olds are brutally honest. He was genuinely pleased with the book—thanks for sharing it with our family.

Courtland Smith, OSU Professor



Layout and design by John Ledges



About the Book

Educational and entertaining, *Down to the Sea* is a vividly illustrated primer for children, parents, and teachers dedicated to building a healthy world for people and salmon. The story unfolds as a conversation between a long-winded scientist and a get-to-the-point fish – a little salmon who needs help keeping his neighborhood safe.

Down to the Sea captures the imagination as man and fish strive to discover the true meaning of “saving salmon” while the forces of nature swirl about them.

Format: 8 1/2" x 10 1/2"

56 illustrated pages



About the Author

Jay Nicholas is the principal writer of Oregon's statewide Plan to restore healthy watersheds for salmon and people. As a fisheries biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, he has studied wild salmon and trout for over 20 years.

He lives in the Willamette Valley with his family, including two beautiful, spoiled cats.

Yes! Send me _____ copy(ies) of *Down to the Sea*. Enclosed is my check, credit card or money order for \$15.00 each, plus \$3.50 postage/handling.

Visa MasterCard American Express

Card # _____

Expiration date ____/____

Phone _____

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Credit Card Orders:

Phone: 800-895-7323

Fax: 503-682-8684

Return this form to:

BookPartners, Inc.

P.O. Box 922

Wilsonville, OR 97070

Phone: 503-682-9821

Proceeds support Oregon Youth
Conservation Corps Watershed Projects

