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NOAA CHIEF PRAISES SHARED STRATEGY'S PUGET SOUND SALMON PLAN, CALLS IT A "HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENT"

The head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) today said a draft recovery plan for Puget Sound Chinook submitted to the agency by Shared Strategy for Puget Sound is a "historic accomplishment."

At a July 7 luncheon in downtown Seattle celebrating the event, retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA administrator, said the plan "represents President Bush's vision for salmon recovery coming to fruition. The President's goal was to develop region-wide recovery plans from the ground up, relying on those at the local level who are closest to the issue and who best know how to fix the problems and today we have taken a giant step toward reaching that goal."

Lautenbacher added that, "unless we bring everyone to the table as Shared Strategy has done, we will not be successful in our ultimate goal of protecting Pacific salmon and the ecosystems upon which they depend and also ensuring the vitality of the local economy. This recovery plan will guide salmon policy, resource management and funding for years to come."

The draft plan, written by Shared Strategy, the non-profit group that represents broad salmon-recovery interests in the region, is part of a what will be a dozen more watershed-level recovery plans that will eventually form the foundation for NOAA Fisheries Service's own comprehensive, regional plan for salmon and steelhead in the Northwest.

The Endangered Species Act, which protects more than a dozen salmon populations in the region, requires NOAA Fisheries Service to produce recovery plans.

Lautenbacher said the Administration's recovery plan would help guide how the region's share of \$100 million from the federal Pacific Salmon Recovery Fund is spent. The fund has already resulted in improvements to Puget Sound that include more than 52,000 acres of salmon habitat and 126 miles of streamside habitat. Money from the fund was used to acquire over 8,000 acres of land and 232 acres of wetlands to protect and restore salmon.

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Bob Lohn, Northwest regional director of NOAA Fisheries, said, "Salmon recovery is within our grasp. Favorable ocean conditions have combined with an aggressive set of recovery strategies to help many salmon stocks return at record levels. A comprehensive, coordinated regional strategy will go a long way in continuing this success and I thank Shared Strategies for their contribution."

Last April, NOAA Fisheries Service officially endorsed another recovery plan, for the Washington side of the Lower Columbia River. Endorsement of the Puget Sound plan could come as early as September.

Elements from over 60 subbasin and watershed plans from across the Northwest are in the process of being incorporated into the first-ever comprehensive, science-based regional recovery plan for salmon and steelhead in the interior Columbia Basin, the Snake River Basin, the Oregon Coast and Puget Sound.

The agency said it expects to receive further draft plans from various recovery teams later this year.

NOAA's Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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