

# Conclusions



ARTWORK: ANDREA BIDDLE, 8TH GRADE STUDENT FROM GIG HARBOR

The decline of wild salmon began over a hundred years ago. As the Pacific Northwest saw settlements by Euro-Americans, people changed the landscape by farming, logging, and developing land and water to support their growing population. Unfavorable natural conditions such as droughts and fires contributed additional stress.

1991 brought the first listings of salmon in Washington under the federal Endangered Species Act, and within eight years over 75% of the state had salmon populations listed. In 1998 the Legislature and Governor Locke undertook some aggressive programs and funding to address the causes of decline, and by 1999 projects were being implemented on the ground to tackle the problems. Fishing was reduced, and hatcheries were being evaluated to discover what they could do to contribute to solving the salmon crisis.

### **Today we have made some remarkable progress:**

- ▶ We have returned more than 300,000 acre-feet of water to streams where salmon need it.
- ▶ We have removed more than 1,480 barriers and opened more than 1,600 miles of habitat to salmon for spawning.
- ▶ More than 64% of our fish hatcheries meet requirements of the ESA.

- ▶ More than half of the watersheds in our salmon recovery regions have a good index of water quality for the needs of salmon.
- ▶ We have funded more than 480 projects to restore and protect salmon habitat.

Because it takes salmon two or more years to grow, travel to the sea, and return to freshwater, we have limited information to judge the success of our efforts. It is just too early to tell if we are recovering fish for the long-term; for example, adult Chinook from areas that saw habitat improvement projects completed in 1999 have only been returning for one or two years. We know that more juveniles are surviving in freshwater habitat, and we know that we are removing barriers and opening significant amounts of habitat for spawning and rearing.

While we have made some significant progress, we have much left to do to recover these fish. The first salmon recovery plans are just being completed, and they will have many gaps. We must fill in the holes of our knowledge about the landscapes in which these fish spend their time, and how our actions can affect processes that change the habitat they rely upon. We must apply that information to developing and implementing the best practices possible to restore and protect the territory we share with these

// The food chain links us all. It starts with the salmon, but ends with us. Don't watch them all go down the drain. Swim, swim, swim... They feed us all, they feed the world. Our ecosystem won't be the same without them. Salmon are alive, keep it that way. //

—LIZ KOSSMAN, 12TH GRADE STUDENT FROM PUYALLUP

creatures. We must continue to change our hatchery practices to ensure we are complementing wild fish survival, not competing with it. We must allow sufficient numbers of fish to return to improved habitats to spawn, thus giving ourselves a margin of safety to protect against natural events over which we have no control. And, perhaps most importantly, we must monitor what we are doing, study the relationships between cause and effect, and use the information to make better choices about the future of salmon.

**But, how will we know when salmon have recovered?  
What does salmon recovery look like?**

The answer to that question likely depends on your viewpoint.

► If you are a salmon, recovery means you have access to sufficient cool, clean water and streambeds to create your nests, lay your eggs, and die in your native stream. Your young have quiet areas where they can feed and grow and prepare for the profound physical changes necessary to travel to the sea. At sea, the oceans will feed and sustain you until, as adults, your kind will repeat the cycle and return as your parents did to spawn in the streams of your birth.

► If you are a fisher, recovery means fishing seasons that promise a catch in your creel or the hold of your boat. It means you can pass on the joy of fishing to your children, along with the love of being outdoors and seeking that wily prize.

► If you are a landowner, recovery means you can grow crops, build and enjoy your home and community with the knowledge that you are not harming fish. You know that you are a good steward of the land, and your actions contribute to the continuing well-being of creatures that rely on the land and nearby waters.

► And, for the next generation to whom we pass this legacy, in the words of 19-year old Liz Kossman from Puyallup Washington:

"We all live downstream... Helping salmon helps ourselves. Food, water, life, air, earth, universe. The food chain links us all. It starts with the salmon, but ends with us. Don't watch them all go down the drain. Swim, swim, swim... They feed us all, they feed the world. Our ecosystem won't be the same without them. Salmon are alive, keep it that way."



ARTWORK DETAIL: TAMARA SLATER, 10TH GRADE STUDENT FROM ANACORTES



