

## **CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM**

### **SUBJECT**

Briefing on the 10-year Update of the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed Chinook Salmon Conservation Plan for Watershed Resource Inventory Area 8 (WRIA 8).

### **STAFF CONTACTS**

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### **POLICY ISSUES**

In 1999, the Puget Sound chinook salmon was listed as “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). When a species is listed, the ESA requires a scientifically-based plan of actions and implementation strategies to protect and restore the species to self-sustaining populations. In response to the listing, Bellevue and other local governments, agencies, and stakeholders formed the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish (WRIA 8) Salmon Recovery Council. This group worked under an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) beginning in 2001 and in 2005 developed a 10-year plan of strategies and actions for restoring chinook salmon habitat within the boundaries of WRIA 8 (WRIA 8 Plan). Last year, the WRIA 8 Plan was updated to identify actions covering the next 10 years. The policy consideration before Council is whether Bellevue should endorse the 10-year plan update.

Bellevue elected officials have played an active role and provided leadership as members of the WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council. Former Councilmember Don Davidson was active in the early years of the salmon recovery effort and Councilmember John Stokes has served as Deputy Chair since 2016. Bellevue staff participate in technical work groups.

### **DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**

#### **ACTION**



#### **DIRECTION**



#### **INFORMATION ONLY**



No formal action is requested tonight. Staff will provide an overview of the update to the WRIA 8 Plan. Council will have an opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and give direction to staff. Ratification of the plan update would be intended to convey the City's approval and support of the plan goals and strategies. Pursuant to Council direction, action to ratify the plan update will be requested at a future Council meeting.

### **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

In March 1999, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries listed the Puget Sound chinook salmon, including the Cedar and Sammamish populations in WRIA 8, as a threatened species under the ESA. The area covered by WRIA 8 includes all the land that drains

through the Ballard Locks as well as land that drains directly to Puget Sound from the Ballard Locks north to Mukilteo (Attachment A: Map of WRIA 8). WRIA 8 is one of 62 WRIsAs in Washington state. As a result of the listing of chinook salmon as threatened under the ESA, local governments and stakeholders in the Puget Sound region began working on a response to the listing with the goal of working together to improve habitat conditions to help bring the species back to sustainable and harvestable levels.

Local governments in the WRIA 8 territory first developed and adopted an ILA in 2001 due to concerns about the possibility of the federal government directing salmon recovery actions that were not appropriate for urban areas and that could negatively impact economic development in the region. Local governments volunteered to develop the recovery plan in order to retain control through local collective action and allow a more efficient approach to addressing watershed recovery conditions that would restore the chinook species. The ILA has provided an effective structure for regional coordination and governance to implement the WRIA 8 Plan. In addition to preserving and sustaining a species important to Puget Sound, endorsing the WRIA 8 Plan helps reduce the risk of third-party lawsuits related to protection of the species.

The WRIA 8 Watershed staff team, funded by the ILA, supports the work of the Salmon Recovery Council, drafts plans, seeks grant funding, assists local government staff and stakeholders on salmon-related issues, coordinates with regional efforts such as the Puget Sound Partnership, and works to inform and educate the public about local salmon habitat recovery. The total annual budget under the ILA for 2018 is \$664,988 funded by 28 local governments with cost-shares based on population, assessed value, and size of jurisdiction. Bellevue's portion of the 2018 WRIA 8 budget is \$56,302. Additional actions and project implementation are supported by funding from local governments and regional, state and federal grants.

### **WRIA 8 Chinook Salmon Conservation Plan**

As noted earlier, the federal ESA requires a scientifically-based plan of actions and implementation strategies to restore the salmon to self-sustaining populations (Attachment B: Local Response to ESA Listing of Chinook Salmon). The WRIA 8 Plan is based on local control and voluntary actions to improve habitat that provides for the recovery of salmon within the constraints of urban watersheds.

The WRIA 8 Plan includes:

- Technical Guidance on habitat conditions that chinook need;
- On-the-ground projects to restore critical habitat;
- Guidance for conservation, incentives, and regulatory programs; and
- Outreach and stewardship projects.

The WRIA 8 Plan has the goal of sustainable, harvestable levels of chinook and eventually, de-listing of chinook salmon as a threatened species under the ESA. The WRIA 8 Plan was incorporated as a chapter of the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan and is currently coordinated with other Washington State chinook recovery efforts through the Puget Sound Partnership efforts. The Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan was adopted by NOAA Fisheries in the Federal Register as the official federal recovery plan for the species.

### **Bellevue Salmon Recovery Actions**

Aquatic habitat is the element of salmon recovery that Bellevue and other cities can influence. Bellevue has completed 22 (61%) of the 36 capital projects and 22 (58%) of 38 outreach projects identified within Bellevue in the 2005 WRIA 8 Plan comprehensive project list. The Utilities capital programs have

invested over \$17 million, including over \$750,000 of regional and state grant funds, to complete fish passage projects and stream habitat enhancement efforts to:

- Improve fish passage at six culverts, two fish ladders, and 9 weirs.
- Improve over a mile of instream habitat and streamside vegetation in Kelsey Creek.
- Improve over a mile of instream habitat within Coal Creek.
- Reduce invasive knotweed throughout Kelsey and Sunset Creeks.

In addition to improving salmon habitat, many of these projects also replaced aging infrastructure and provided other benefits such as improved trail connections, reduced flooding, or stabilized erosion.

The Parks and Community Services Department recently completed a stream daylighting project in Meydenbauer Bay. This project resulted in salmon spawning almost immediately in the new gravel at the delta. Salmon are also responding favorably to Utilities' fish passage and habitat improvements in Coal Creek.

### **Plan Update**

The plan update is a guide for the continued collaboration and voluntary salmon recovery actions in WRIA 8 for the next 10 years and continues to encourage local governments to focus on protecting and improving aquatic habitat conditions. The update includes new goals for key habitat elements to recover salmon. These new habitat goals are intended to be feasible, but still challenging to achieve, compared to current efforts. For example, there were 76.6 acres of Cedar River floodplain reconnected in the years 2006-2015. The new habitat goal is to reconnect an additional 130 acres of floodplain in the Cedar River by 2025.

A review of the original WRIA 8 Plan determined that the original strategies remain valid and the capital and programmatic project lists were updated and streamlined. There are 20 key strategies in the 10-year update that include actions such as:

- Protect and restore floodplain connectivity
- Protect and restore riparian vegetation
- Remove fish migration barriers
- Improve water quality

The WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council adopted the plan update in 2017 and is asking WRIA 8 local governments to ratify the plan by March 31, 2018.

### **Next Steps**

After more than ten years of implementation, great progress has been made on many short-term goals, but overall salmon population numbers are still far short of a level that would support sustainable and harvestable chinook salmon runs. Bellevue plans to implement WRIA 8 projects through capital programs, such as the Utilities fish passage improvement, stream channel modifications, and water quality improvement programs. Additional action at the local, state, and federal levels is needed to accomplish recovery of chinook salmon populations in our watershed. Continued support from Bellevue, and other WRIA 8 members, will help advance critical salmon recovery actions in WRIA 8.

The WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council adopted the plan update in 2017 and is asking Bellevue and the other WRIA 8 local governments to ratify the update by March 31, 2018. Once the update is ratified by

the WRIA 8 local governments, it will be submitted to the federal agencies as part of the update to the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan.

**OPTIONS**

N/A

**RECOMMENDATION**

N/A

**ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Map of the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed (WRIA 8)
- B. Background on the Local Response to ESA Listing of Chinook Salmon

**AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL DOCUMENT LIBRARY**

- A. Links to the complete WRIA 8 10-year Plan Update and appendices:  
<http://www.govlink.org/watersheds/8/reports/chinook-plan-update.aspx>