



June 22, 2022

Laura Blackmore, Puget Sound Partnership Director
Larry Epstein, Puget Sound Partnership Deputy Director
Stephanie Suter, Puget Sound Partnership
Dan Stonington, Puget Sound Partnership

Dear Ms. Blackmore and team:

The Snohomish-Stillaguamish Local Integrating Organization (LIO) was formed in 2012. We serve as a local forum through which diverse stakeholders can work collaboratively to develop and coordinate actions to improve the health of the Snohomish and Stillaguamish watersheds, advance the [Puget Sound Action Agenda](#), and restore the environmental health of Puget Sound. We have been committed to continuing the process that the Partnership has put forth to work collaboratively to recover Puget Sound.

When the Partnership and US EPA introduced the idea of a “Forum” to better collaborate, build trust, share and implement unique and creative ideas in support of the additional \$500,000 per LIO, we jumped at the chance to help shape this exciting and unique opportunity. After roughly six months of planning, three Forums workshops, and lots of creative thinking, we received notice on June 15th that the Partnership and US EPA had created a plan outside of the Forum framework for the Partnership to keep each of the ten LIO’s \$500,000 — for a total of \$5 million — to use as funding for the Partnership to hire additional staff.

It is likely that every LIO understands the pressing need for additional staff and would support the Partnership in the identification and advocacy for additional staff capacity. At the same time, we are deeply disappointed in this abrupt decision to pursue staff capacity funding through diminishment of local LIOs and encourage you to reconsider your current plan. Given the anticipated influx of federal funding, the need for building capacity at every level, from distributing this funding to local project implementation, should be a shared effort. Based on capacity needs at both State and local levels, we believe that helping both the Partnership and LIOs build staff and financial capacity is a mutually beneficial path forward, with many potential ways that we can share resources, build economies of scale across all the LIOs, *and* ensure that LIOs have the resources they need to continue to bring local partners to the table.

If the \$500,000 allocation for each LIO is eliminated as proposed, (along with previous elimination of near-term-actions), then the role and purpose of the individual LIOs becomes less clear. As a result, the ability and incentive to keep stakeholders engaged in the local LIO process becomes

much more challenging. Without the support and engagement of local partners to implement the goals of the Action Agenda, our impact as a region to recover Puget Sound will be limited.

We ask that the decision to reduce LIO funding in favor of increasing PSP staffing be revisited. We make this request in the spirit of PSP's longstanding collaborative partnership with LIOs in the firm belief that unity will be essential in finding a wise path to effective distribution of the new Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) funding in these days where urgent action is needed.

We would also request clarification as to why limiting LIO funding is needed to plan for and distribute the new Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) funding rather than to use or redirect current Partnership resources or request additional funding from the legislature for this important task.

It is imperative that LIOs are given an opportunity to provide meaningful input and participate in the decision making that effects our collective role in Puget Sound Recovery. New structures and communication mechanisms are recommended to allow this input and contribution from the LIOs.

As we look to resolve this current funding situation, we do want to acknowledge the work you do on behalf of Puget Sound and look forward to many more productive years of collaboration ahead toward rebuilding the health of the Sound.

Sincerely,



Gregg Farris

Co-Chair, Snohomish-Stillaguamish LIO
Executive Committee



Joan Lee

Co-Chair, Snohomish-Stillaguamish
Executive Committee

cc.

Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers

Melissa Geraghty, Executive Assistant, Snohomish County

Lacey Harper, Executive Director, Snohomish County

Tom Teigen, Snohomish County Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Director

Ron Wessen, Whatcom County Councilmember and Whidbey Action Area Representative