

Local Integrating Organization Coordinators Ecosystem Coordination Board Management Brief

August 15, 2019 – Topic # 4

TOPIC:

Local Integrating Organizations Engagement in the Development and Implementation of the Puget Sound Action Agenda

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TYPE OF PRESENTATION:

- Oral presentation for a decision
- Oral presentation for discussion
- Oral presentation for information only
- Written briefing only
- Other: _____

ISSUE/QUESTION:

The current NEP funding model lacks meaningful and effective input from the Local Integrating Organizations (LIO) and the elected officials, agencies, Tribes, and other key Puget Sound recovery participants that they represent. LIOs request that the Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB) support LIOs in their quest to be meaningfully engaged in the development and implementation of the Puget Sound Action Agenda, to create a more effective Puget Sound recovery system. LIOs further request that the ECB express support for the following LIO objectives, to advance a joint proposal to the Leadership Council.

LIOs seek ECB support for the following specific objectives:

1. Elevate the stature of LIOs to enable greater input in decision-making, and provide clarity around roles and responsibilities in Action Agenda development and implementation.
2. Provide LIOs with more capacity to meaningfully participate in the Action Agenda process through broader collaboration and expanded partner engagement.
3. Revise the funding model to reflect the LIOs' and Tribes' 2014 proposal to EPA in order to optimally leverage the members' vast expertise and the trust of their communities. The proposed funding model, which was similar to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board model, takes

advantage of local plans and LIO expertise in influencing NEP funding investments towards Puget Sound recovery.

Achieving these objectives is a priority for the LIOs, and possible approaches for how best to achieve them have been an ongoing discussion within and among the LIOs. Some of the discussed approaches include:

1. Elevating the stature of LIOs:
 - a) Strengthen the role of LIOs written in the Puget Sound Partnership statute(s). Create another Board (LIOs) for the Partnership process.
 - b) Leadership Council recognizes LIOs as the group that is substantially and significantly involved in the development and implementation of the Action Agenda, similar to the status/stature of the SRC.
2. LIOs should be seen as a partner in Action Agenda development and implementation, and as such, have greater engagement in actions such as Implementation Strategy development and priority setting. LIOs will need additional capacity to support this level of engagement.
3. Implement the funding model proposed by LIOs and Tribes in 2014. The proposed model encourages a regional/local allocation similar to the State Salmon Recovery Funding Board model (70% Watershed/30% Regional Funding Split). A funding model such as this enables LIOs to better support local-regional engagement (see attached support letters).
4. LIOs should be involved and engaged in the development and implementation of the various Action Agenda Implementation Strategies. The current LIO involvement in the ECB Land-Use Sub-committee is a positive first step.
5. EPA contracts directly with LIOs to fulfill their respective missions using the NEP funds that support implementation of the Action Agenda. This would provide more local autonomy to conduct the roles of being an LIO similar to the way Strategic Initiative Leads (SILs) provide Action Agenda services. Contracting directly with EPA would be more efficient and relieve administrative burden.

BACKGROUND AND KEY CONTEXT:

In late 2008 a task force of state agencies, tribal governments, counties and cities provided recommendations to enhance local implementation of the Action Agenda. This document coined the term “**Local Integrating Organization**” and called for “a local structure and process that facilitates integration of the efforts of all groups in each sub-area of Puget Sound.” Building on these recommendations the Puget Sound Leadership Council, starting in 2009, has recognized ten Local Integrating Organization LIOs around Puget Sound.

During the 2014 Legislative Session, an Operating Budget proviso directed the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) to “...*collaborate with interested parties to review the roles of local watershed and salmon recovery organizations implementing the action agenda and provide legislative, budgetary, and administrative recommendations to streamline and strengthen Puget Sound recovery efforts.*”

In a memo from the Partnership to the State Legislature dated December 1, 2014 regarding the proviso, Priority Recommendation #1 was to *Formally establish Local Integrating Organizations in statute and incentivize participation.*

RCW 90.71, which establishes and describes the Partnership states in part that *“The partnership shall develop the action agenda in part upon the foundation of existing watershed programs that address or contribute to the health of Puget Sound.”* *“... the partnership shall rely largely upon local watershed groups, tribes, cities, counties, special purpose districts, and the private sector, who are engaged in developing and implementing these programs.”* ... *“The participating groups should work to identify the applicable local plan elements, projects, and programs, together with estimated budget, timelines, and proposed funding sources, that are suitable for adoption into the action agenda.”*

Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) were created by the Puget Sound Partnership (Partnership) to serve as the local body that helps to coordinate governments and organizations working on ecosystem protection and recovery at the local level. LIOs are a critical building block of the recovery infrastructure, providing an important link between local and regional priorities. Designation of LIOs by the Partnership began in 2009. Ten years later LIOs are feeling that the reasons for being an LIO have yet to fully materialize. While LIOs have noted some steps toward greater collaboration and communication, they are not treated as full partners in the development and implementation of the Action Agenda. Instead, they are being drawn further away from forward-looking implementation in lieu of a largely administrative, tracking and review role. In addition, LIOs have not experienced meaningful engagement within the National Estuary Program (NEP) Funding Model and regional Strategic Initiative Lead (SIL) processes. Some LIOs are concerned that these same experiences will be repeated as new Mobilizing Funding efforts are advanced and implemented. Listed below are some more specific concerns from LIOs of note:

- The current \$75,000 per LIO is insufficient capacity to effectively operate an LIO that can engage meaningfully with the Partnership and all partners involved in Action Agenda development and implementation.
- The annual \$100,000 NEP local allocation is insufficient to implement effective projects and justify the selection process and/or LIO participation.
- Local partners are reluctant to come forward or continue to participate, because the lack of dedicated funding is so minimal/not commensurate with the time it takes to engage in the process. As a result, LIOs are losing human infrastructure and participation in the process.
- LIOs are not being considered in the Action Agenda prioritization process, are blind to the criteria that guide the outcomes, and unclear what criteria are used to make funding decisions. Transparency around these processes is needed to maintain/build trust with local partners including NTA owners, and to maintain engagement in the Action Agenda.
- EPA and the Partnership had previously noted that once LIO Ecosystem Recovery Plans were developed and in place that this would result in greater collaboration with the LIOs. We are now well past that point, and results have not yet materialized. It's now time to circle back to EPA and the Partnership to revisit this issue.
- This is a bigger issue than simply the NEP Funding Model. This is also a Partnership issue because the Partnership's Leadership Council created and officially recognized each of the LIOs. LIOs are under-funded, under-powered, and under-supported. The Partnership is missing a valuable opportunity to take full advantage of LIOs and their broad membership base.
- There is a hope that the Partnership will be advocating for the LIOs. LIOs are looking for the Partnership to take a clearer more assertive role when advocating for LIOs now that the LIO Ecosystem Recovery Plans are an integral part of the Puget Sound Action Agenda (and the federal Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Puget Sound).

- LIOs are looking for additional partnership opportunities within the NEP funding model and Action Agenda implementation processes more broadly.

LIOs believe this is a moment of crisis for Puget Sound ecosystem protection and recovery. The Puget Sound Partnership needs coordinated and integrated involvement of Tribal and local officials, expertise, skills, and communities that LIOs provide at the local level. Additional capacity, NTA funding, and recognition as proposed by the LIOs is critical to success. Without this we will continue to experience disengagement and lack of participation from LIOs and their member organizations. Without this level of local involvement, the protection and recovery Puget Sound will not occur, will be ineffective, and expose a risk of losing Puget Sound and all that it embodies.

ANALYSIS:

Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) were designated by the Puget Sound Partnership's Leadership Council to provide input, expertise and skills from the local level in the development and implementation of the Action Agenda.

LIOs membership and partners includes local and Tribal elected officials; representatives from local organizations and community groups, local expertise and experiences; and extensive knowledge of the ecosystems and landscapes that in total truly make up Puget Sound.

- LIOs now have locally sourced ecosystem recovery plans designed to contribute to overall Puget Sound regional recovery. Collectively, we cannot achieve Puget Sound recovery without this local influence, input, knowledge, gravitas, and expertise.
- LIOs provide a foundation, structure, and ready forum to marshal these attributes, passion, and desire. LIOs know what needs to be done and can get it done.
- The Partnership is missing an opportunity to take full advantage of LIOs and the membership and technical expertise that they offer.
- The way LIOs are currently being under-used, under-supported, underfunded, and underappreciated is driving away its' membership and the desire to continue.

There are some LIOs and LIO member organizations that are frustrated, disappointed, and ready to give up. Member organizations are not showing up at meetings and work sessions because they do not feel it is beneficial and worth their precious time and effort. They want to do what is best for Puget Sound recovery, but they are seeing that pathway disappearing. They have begged for tools and assistance to help do the right thing, but those calls are going unheeded. They need more capacity, NTA funding, and recognition to fully engage in a meaningful way with the Partnership, EPA, and the various State and Federal agencies working on Puget Sound recovery at the regional level.

Supporting this request from the LIOs will ensure effective and prioritized Puget Sound protection and recovery and successful implementation of the Action Agenda.

FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPACTS:

Implementation of the LIO proposal will save money for PSP as they will no longer need to provide contract management administrative support.

Action Agenda development and implementation will be more effective.

NEXT STEPS:

Representatives of the ECB and LIOs go before the Leadership Council to present the LIO proposal and seek Leadership Council support.

ATTACHMENTS:

LIO Memorandum to EPA dated November 26, 2014, RE: Comments on EPA's Straw Funding Models for EPA Puget Sound Geographic Program Appropriations in FY16 and Beyond ([linked here](#))

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Letter to EPA dated December 1, 2014, RE: Comments and Recommendations on EPA's Proposed Changes to the National Estuary Program Appropriations for FY16 and Beyond ([linked here](#))

Alliance for a Healthy South Sound, Hood Canal Coordinating Council, and Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network LIO Letter to EPA dated February 19, 2015, RE: National Estuary Program (NEP) Funding and Implementation Strategies ([linked here](#))

Washington State Coastal Counties Caucus Letter to WA State Agency Directors dated March 2, 2015, RE: Support for NWIFC/LIO National Estuary Program (NEP) Funding Model ([linked here](#))

Washington State Coastal Counties Caucus Letter to EPA dated March 2, 2015, RE: Support for NWIFC/LIO National Estuary Program (NEP) Funding Model ([linked here](#))

Alliance for a Healthy South Sound Letter to EPA dated March 26, 2015, RE: EPA Decision on NEP Funding for Puget Sound ([linked here](#))

Alliance for a Healthy South Sound Letter to EPA and Puget Sound Partnership dated March 9, 2016, RE: National Estuary Program (NEP) Funding for CCMP Implementation ([linked here](#))

Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network LIO Letter to EPA dated March 10, 2016, RE: March 15, 2016 EPA PSP LIO Leadership Meeting – Strait ERN LIO Questions on the 2016 National Estuary Program Near-Term Action Funding Model ([linked here](#))

San Juan LIO Letter to EPA dated March 30, 2016, RE: Response to Puget Sound draft 2016 Action Agenda Ranking and EPA Funding Model ([linked here](#))

Alliance for a Healthy South Sound Letter to JLARC dated September 30, 2016, RE: JLARC Audit of the Puget Sound Partnership ([linked here](#))