Declining Salmon Populations
There are still at least 12 salmon and other salmonid populations listed as endangered or threatened in Washington State. We believe that the Department of Natural Resources is uniquely positioned to contribute meaningfully to salmon recovery.

Salmon live in and rely on habitat across the whole landscape of our state: from mountain headwaters to forests, cities, and the Puget Sound. Salmon are integral to our communities, our economy, our cultural traditions, and to the health and well-being of many other species that live in Washington, including orcas.

Something needs to change. We must work beyond traditional government agency and program siloes to implement a tree to sea mindset that works cross-sector and recognizes that it will take everyone – government agencies, tribes, private industry, and community leaders – working together to improve salmon habitat and contribute meaningfully to salmon recovery. Pushing for resources for community-developed projects that promise the largest return-on-investment, and continuous assessment of impact to salmon recovery as a whole are critical. We see tremendous opportunities in public-private partnerships.

DNR’s Salmon Strategy: A Watershed Approach
Our aim is to leverage DNR’s relationships and role as the second largest landowner in the state to make meaningful contributions to salmon recovery in targeted watersheds. We believe that targeting salmon recovery efforts within key watersheds will lead to more impactful, large-scale change. We are piloting this idea in Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 7 – the Snohomish watershed. This watershed specific approach will allow us to harness the power of community expertise and historical knowledge, alongside statewide resources and the business community. We also intend to pursue this work in ways that contribute to additional strategic priorities including climate resilience, environmental justice, and forest health.

The Snohomish Watershed (WRIA 7)
The Snohomish watershed covers an area of approximately 1,856 square miles in both King and Snohomish Counties, and is the second largest river system draining into Puget Sound. It is one of the primary producers of anadromous fish in the state, home to nine salmonid species, three of which are currently protected under the Endangered Species Act – Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Salmon face numerous limiting factors in this watershed, including lack of access to spawning and rearing habitat, as well as water quality and quantity limitations, fish passage barriers and more. In a watershed with significant population growth – expected to reach 530,000 by 2030, up 59% from 2005 – pressures on quality salmon habitat continue to grow. While recovery projects have led to many site-scale successes over the last 20 years, many environmental indicators continue to decline showing the need for additional action.

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Defining the Need
Our first step in our salmon recovery strategy has been to fully understand the needs. This included identifying and defining known limiting factors to salmon recovery in the watershed and mapping those in relation to the types of land and landowners. We have worked across agency partners and local entities to identify a list of projects in the Snohomish watershed that when implemented would contribute to salmon recovery.

Charting a Course - SalmonLink
We are using this project data to create an online project dashboard for WRIA 7 called SalmonLink (launching spring 2021). Using this tool, we will work with partners to identify and implement high-impact projects that contribute to salmon recovery. SalmonLink will help to:

- Communicate multiple-benefits of projects, including importance for salmon, and co-benefits including job creation, environmental justice and climate resilience
- Connect high-need, high-impact projects to potential partners – so that landowners, businesses, and others can identify areas where their help can contribute to solutions.
- Identifying new policies, programs, and partnerships that will tackle big-picture challenges for salmon recovery that we can confront with all key partners.

Developing DNR’s Action Plan
We are currently finalizing our Action Plan for this watershed, which has been developed in consultation with the Lead Entity, Tribes, federal, state and local governments, Conservation Districts, and partners like Long Live the Kings. The plan will be released in spring 2021. It includes high level goals and success metrics, and near-term and 10-year actions.

Shovel-ready Opportunities include:

- **Land conservation**: Purchase remaining in-holdings for Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) (approximately 200 acres, $650,000);
- **Small forestland owner supports**: Fund Forest Riparian Easement Program wait list in WRIA 7 – three landowners (approximately 20 acres, $100,000), and Family Fish Passage Program wait list for fish barrier correction (61 barriers, $10.6M);
- **Invasive species removal to improve forest health**: Mount Si and Middle Fork Snoqualmie NRCA with a focus on fish streams and wetland complexes with known infestation (40 acres, $125,000);
- **Water quality screening study**: Partner with The Nature Conservancy to study the most effective water quality interventions in Everett to guide urban water quality project development with return-on-investment lens (approximately $40,000);
- **Improving Snohomish Estuary habitat**: Targeted derelict vessel removal (15 vessels), Vessel Turn-in Program, riparian planting, and targeted creosote removal based on Snohomish Estuary Creosote Piling Prioritization Plan (at least $7 million, scalable);
- **Fish passage barrier inventory**: For small forest landowners (approximately $165,000).

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