Dear valued partners,

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources is excited to share with you the draft executive summary and outline of our Watershed Resilience Action Plan for the Snohomish Watershed. We have been working with partners for two years to deliver on the vision and intent of Commissioner Hilary Franz to support salmon recovery in priority watersheds, working across landowners and land uses to ensure a holistic approach to salmon recovery. Ultimately, this holistic approach has been reflected in the name of the plan – Watershed Resilience Action Plan: A Trees to Seas Plan for Landscape-Scale Restoration in the Snohomish Watershed. We know that salmon recovery relies on protection and restoration of habitat and ecosystem function across the entire landscape.

We have been working with Tribes and salmon recovery partners in WRIA 7 to shape this plan and have incorporated lessons and priorities that drive salmon recovery and broader landscape resilience work in this watershed. We hope that the recommendations provided to us are well-reflected in the content we are sharing for additional feedback today.

This next phase of partner review will last until December 2nd. We will take time to incorporate any changes and finalize the plan towards the end of the year. Please share this document and request with any additional colleagues you deem relevant.

I am so grateful for all of the input and lessons we have learned from partners already. We are committed to working to address any aspects of this draft plan that you believe could be strengthened or to fill any gaps.

In addition to the executive summary and outline attached, we are also providing a link to a new mapping tool called WatershedConnect. This tool is intended to help to increase implementation of all priority salmon recovery and habitat restoration projects in the Snohomish Watershed by communicating the multiple benefits of projects as a strategy to mobilize new partners and funders. We are doing a “soft launch” of this beta site to solicit feedback as we finalize the tool. You can access WatershedConnect here: https://watershedconnect.dnr.wa.gov/

You can read more about the data sources and intended uses on the landing page: https://www.dnr.wa.gov/watershedconnect

Please let us know if you would like to schedule a demo or if you have questions.

In addition to the executive summary and outline attached, please see below additional explanation
of some of the key actions in this plan. I hope they provide useful additional context about the strategies we will be working with partners to initiate to help achieve these goals and outcomes.

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**Key Actions**

DNR will implement a broad range of strategies and actions over this 10-year period in order to achieve the outcomes presented above. The full scope of actions is described throughout this plan. Some of the actions represent significant new programs and approaches for DNR. A summary of the most innovative key actions and how they will help to achieve the goals of this plan is provided below.

**Beavers and Basin Hydrology**

The presence of beavers on the landscapes can have significant benefits for salmon and watershed resilience, including creating cool, clean pools for salmon, and storing groundwater which can improve streamflow and reduce wildfire risk. On the right landscapes, beavers can be a powerful tool for watershed resilience and salmon recovery. Key strategies DNR will take include:

- Support the implementation of the Tulalip Tribes’ Living with Beavers Program
- Create a voluntary program to support beaver reintroduction on small forest landowner lands,
- Explore beaver reintroduction opportunities for DNR lands.

These efforts will combine with other actions intended to improve water storage and streamflow outcomes, in alignment with the recommendations of the Snohomish Basin Protection Plan.

**Improved quality and function of riparian zones**

Riparian zones along fish-bearing rivers and streams provide critical benefits for salmon and support a healthy stream system. While the width of riparian buffers is already highly protective on forested lands, DNR intends to take new actions to improve the quality of habitat and overall function of riparian zones throughout the watershed. Key components include:

- **New DNR large woody debris program.** Trees and especially large trees with root wads attached (also called “key pieces”) are critical for projects seeking to speed up the desired conditions in riparian zones. DNR will establish a new program to facilitate small sales of trees for in-stream large woody debris projects across the watershed.
- **Knotweed management.** DNR will support the development and implementation of a Riparian Management Strategy in WRIA 7 which is focused on addressing invasive knotweed infestations and other invasive species in riparian zones. DNR will commit resources to knotweed management and replanting efforts - especially in the headwaters - that will improve riparian zone diversity and health.

**Increasing Restoration Funding with a Multiple Benefits Lens**

Salmon recovery and restoration needs are well-understood but consistently under-funded. DNR seeks to increase the total amount of funding available for the restoration projects in this watershed, including through mobilizing new partners and funders such as private companies and
philanthropies. In order to engage new partners not already involved in salmon recovery, DNR will use a new multiple benefits communication approach to highlight the relative benefits of projects for salmon, economic impact, and environmental justice using a new interactive mapping tool called WatershedConnect. In addition, DNR will work with partners to develop landscape-scale restoration projects across multiple land owners in priority landscapes, utilizing innovative conservation finance techniques where possible.

**Job Creation and Environmental Justice**
Salmon recovery and watershed resilience must be pursued in ways that create benefits for people and communities and support environmental justice. DNR’s plan includes numerous actions that center human wellbeing. Key actions related to job creation include assessing the economic impacts of salmon and habitat projects, enhancing training and new natural resource apprenticeship opportunities, and increasing diversity and inclusion in environmental careers. Key actions related to environmental justice include working with communities to map human health benefits of restoration projects, and conducting environmental justice assessments of DNR’s restoration actions in this watershed in ways that meet or exceed requirements of the HEAL Act/SB 5141.

**Keep Washington Evergreen - Avoided Conversion and Forest Restoration**
Maintaining forested lands is increasingly challenging in the context of rapid population growth in the Snohomish Watershed. DNR will work to support small forest landowners and avoid the conversion of working forests, including through ensuring as many forested landowner parcels as possible are in permanent protected status. New policy opportunities such as the Climate Commitment Act may provide resources to support forest carbon projects in these communities, and additional policies and programs will be developed to support small landowners and working forests, while exploring ways to increase diversity and inclusion in these landscapes. This work will support DNR’s larger statewide Keep Washington Evergreen initiative.

**Kelp and Eelgrass Protection Zone**
Kelp and eelgrass are critical underwater vegetation that provide habitat for juvenile salmon and feeder fish, sequester carbon, and support a healthy nearshore ecosystem. DNR will establish the first Kelp and Eelgrass Protection Zone in the Snohomish nearshore, and will work to create net gain of kelp and eelgrass cover. This will include enhanced monitoring and assessment of the drivers of loss, as well as establishing an Ecological Learning Lab which will serve as a home for innovative research into vegetation restoration, aquaculture, and “blue carbon” projects to capture and store carbon dioxide and mitigate climate impacts.

**Public-Private Partnerships for Green and Resilient Urban Landscapes**
Urban forest cover, green stormwater infrastructure, and reducing impervious surface levels in urban areas is essential to manage contaminant levels in stormwater and improve water quality in urban streams and Puget Sound. Existing programs are often limited to public lands, but private lands also need to be part of the solution. DNR will work with partners including private companies and households to develop a public-private strategy for reducing impervious surface and increasing green stormwater infrastructure project implementation in WRIA 7. This will include workforce training opportunities and efforts to engage with community-based organizations and create health benefits for overburdened communities.
Shared Vision for Forest Health in Western Washington Watersheds
This action plan provides an opportunity to define forest health and resilience in a Western Washington Context, which varies greatly from forest health needs in Eastern Washington. DNR will focus on priority landscapes identified in the 2020 Forest Action Plan (the Middle Snohomish landscape in WRIA 7) and conduct a forest health evaluation. This will contribute to work with other major landowners across the basin to develop a comprehensive plan to achieve landscape-scale forest and watershed health, addressing climate and wildfire resilience, salmon recovery, and supporting human wellbeing.

Watershed Steward
To work effectively at the watershed level, DNR will hire new staff and direct resources to support plan implementation, outreach to partners, and responsiveness to emerging opportunities. This includes hiring a Watershed Steward, a new role that breaks down program silos within the agency and supports effective implementation across this priority watershed.

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I very much look forward to hearing back and gathering additional feedback on this draft document. Please reach out to me if you have requests for additional information or would like to schedule a meeting with WA DNR staff.

Thank you,

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