



## PUGET SOUND ECOSYSTEM MONITORING PROGRAM

December 2014

In early 2014, the William D. Ruckelshaus Center conducted an independent review of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP). Their final report can be found here:

<https://pspwa.app.box.com/file/391711879410>

The Ruckelshaus Report offered five recommendations, including two (recommendations #2 and #3) that specifically addressed the need to:

- Clarify (and use consistent language when communicating) the purpose and scope of PSEMP
- Eliminate areas of ambiguity in the organizational structure of PSEMP by clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of the Steering Committee, Partnership staff, workgroup leads and members, Leadership Council, Science Panel, and the Ecosystem Coordination Board.

This paper is intended to clarify and concisely state PSEMP's purpose and scope, core functions, and our roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority given our experience to date.

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### **Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program is to improve and coordinate the existing system of environmental data collection and evaluation in Puget Sound, including assessing the condition and changes over time of the Puget Sound ecosystem as well as the effectiveness of recovery actions, strategies, and programs.

The responsibility for environmental monitoring in Puget Sound is distributed across many dozens of different agencies, organizations, tribes, citizen groups, and others. PSEMP serves as an over-arching, voluntary body of representatives sharing a common goal to coordinate, improve, and focus these many independent efforts in support of the state's goals to protect and recover Puget Sound. PSEMP does this by providing a venue for collaboration, coordination, collective guidance, communication and discussion among monitoring agencies and organizations operating at different scales to meet a variety of (often narrowly mandated) goals and objectives.

The Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program charter stresses our collective intent and commitment to work *"in a collaborative, transparent fashion with all monitoring partners... to better coordinate and integrate monitoring programs (existing and new) across Puget Sound and the rest of the Salish Sea."* (PSEMP Charter "Goals"; Page 6).

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## **PSEMP's Functions:**

PSEMP:

- 1) **Enhances coordination and promotes collaborative interactions** through a diverse network of monitoring partners and data users (including state, federal, tribal, local, academic, private, non-profit, and volunteer organizations). PSEMP provides a venue for communication, discussion, collaboration, and coordination across and between monitoring partners and data users.
  - 2) **Provides collective guidance and recommendations related to monitoring** – to monitoring entities, management agencies and organizations, policy boards, and others. It does this primarily through collective discussion and deliberation, consensus building, coordination, and joint communication.
  - 3) **Supports Assessment and Communication** – Compiling and evaluating data sets, reporting Vital Sign indicators, assessing effectiveness of actions, reporting and publishing monitoring results to improve understanding and inform decisions.
  - 4) **Provides a service function** including publishing joint, multi-agency documents; compiling summary materials and technical assessments; identifying and seeking monitoring funding; as well as providing other technical resources and tools.
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## **PSEMP Roles, Responsibilities, and Decision-Making Authority**

The PSEMP Charter (especially Appendix 1) details the roles and responsibilities of PSEMP (including the Steering Committee, Work Groups, Monitoring Entities, PSP Staff, and main policy boards). The following section summarizes the roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority of the Steering Committee and Work Groups in practice over the last three and a half years (refer to the Charter for a more complete description of these elements).

### **Steering Committee**

*Role* – The PSEMP Steering Committee is the organizing body that oversees and guides the development and implementation of PSEMP as a voluntary coordinating body acting primarily through communication, collaboration, and persuasion.

*Responsibilities* – The Steering Committee provides guidance, makes recommendations, and helps communicate issues related to monitoring and assessment of the Puget Sound ecosystem. It encourages coordination of work group activities and integration across topics related to monitoring in Puget Sound. The Steering Committee may identify priorities and recommend funding to support regional monitoring, and lead or assist in the development of a regional monitoring and assessment funding strategy.

In making its decisions and recommendations, the Steering Committee may seek input from the Work Groups, Science Panel, Ecosystem Coordination Board, and others.

*Decision Making Authority* – The Steering Committee can create its own by-laws, recommend revisions to its Charter (the Leadership Council endorses PSEMP's Charter), can develop and approve its own work

plans, and can provide non-binding guidance, findings, and recommendations to monitoring agencies/entities, technical and policy boards, the Science Panel, the Ecosystem Coordination Board and Leadership Council, technical work groups, and others.

### **Work Groups**

Work Groups are chartered by the Steering Committee to focus on ecosystem elements and are composed of monitoring entities (those entities actually conducting monitoring activities), academic and research organizations, data users, and others. Work groups are typically supported by PSP staff with funding provided by EPA through PSP.

*Role* – Work Groups are the primary venue to assemble the many entities from across Puget Sound that are responsible for and implement actual environmental monitoring efforts.

Work Groups:

- Provide a venue for discussion, data sharing, communication, and program coordination among scientists, monitoring program managers and practitioners, data users, and others.
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring across the Sound through collaborative interactions.
- Support the participating organizations' individual and independent needs for monitoring
- Contribute to meeting the larger regional data assessment and information needs of state and federal agencies, recovery organizations, and others.
  - They serve as the expert (technical) forums to evaluate and recommend monitoring
  - Help develop monitoring questions and hypotheses within topics
  - Contribute individual and joint data assessments, technical analyses, interpretations, and other support

*Responsibilities* – Work groups are responsible for convening monitoring specialists and technical experts from across Puget Sound within their specific topic areas, and for creating venues to discuss and share ideas, plans, data, analyses and interpretations, hypotheses, identify monitoring gaps etc.

*Decision Making Authority* – Work groups can create their own by-laws, develop and approve their own work plans, and can provide non-binding guidance and recommendations to monitoring entities, technical and policy boards (e.g. the Science Panel and Leadership Council), and others. Work groups can develop joint products including publications and web tools, and can forward proposals and recommendations to the Steering Committee for approval or endorsement.

### **PSEMP Staff**

*Role* – PSEMP staff provide dedicated support for the PSEMP Steering Committee and Work Groups, which otherwise operate as essentially voluntary organizations. The Puget Sound Partnership houses and supports PSEMP staff, including financial and contracting support as provided by U.S. EPA National Estuary Program funds.

*Responsibilities* – PSEMP staff organize, support, facilitate, and ensure coordination between different program components. Staff assist with analyses, assessment, synthesis, roll-ups, and communication of monitoring results across scales and topics.

*Decision Making Authority* – Staff priorities are guided by the Steering Committee and Work Groups and focus on supporting the work and priorities of the Steering Committee and its Work Groups. Decisions regarding PSEMP remain with the Steering Committee and Work Groups according to the Charter and By-Laws.