

# THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## **Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Review**

Conducted by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center

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*The Review Team is deeply grateful to the many individuals who gave their time and energy to be interviewed, and to otherwise inform this report.*

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### DISCLAIMER

*The following report was prepared by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a joint effort of the University of Washington and Washington State University whose mission is to act as a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and Pacific Northwest. University leadership and the Center's Advisory Board support the preparation of this and other reports produced under the Center's auspices. However, the key themes contained in this report are intended to reflect the opinions of the interviewed parties, and the findings are those of the Center's assessment team. Those themes and findings do not represent the views of the universities or Advisory Board members.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP) was established to create and support a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent approach to regional monitoring and assessment that builds upon and facilitates communication among the many monitoring programs and efforts operating in Puget Sound.<sup>1</sup> In the resolution setting up the PSEMP, the Puget Sound Partnership's (Partnership) Leadership Council required a two-year review of the PSEMP by: *an objective and independent entity to assess whether essential characteristics, particularly transparent decision-making, availability and credibility of data, and accountability and trust, are being achieved.* The Leadership Council requested that the William D. Ruckelshaus Center<sup>2</sup> (Center) conduct the review. In addition to the characteristics listed in the resolution, the Leadership Council asked the Center to assess objectivity, independence, and broad representation of the PSEMP.

A Review Team, comprised of Center-affiliated faculty and staff from the University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) carried out the review using an interview-based assessment process. The Review Team developed a set of protocols to guide the assessment process and conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the PSEMP. The goal was to capture the range of perspectives on the PSEMP's essential characteristics. The Review Team analyzed the interviews and developed key findings and recommendations, as summarized below. Recommendations focus on clarifying the PSEMP's purpose and scope; improving communication; clarifying roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority; building collective leadership capacity within the Steering Committee; and addressing staffing, resources and participation constraints. They are discussed in greater detail within the full report.

### Key Findings

Key findings in the report cover both the essential characteristics that were the focus of the interviews, as well as other important issues that arose out of the interview process.

**Overall: Interviewees reported that, for a fairly nascent program, the PSEMP is off to a good start. The vast majority favored working to improve the PSEMP's current organizational structure and processes over restructuring the effort. Furthermore:**

- It was noted that because of the PSEMP, new opportunities exist for scientists, researchers, and decision-makers to share information about monitoring. This was frequently mentioned as one of the most positive contributions of the PSEMP.
- Almost all interviewees specifically stated that the workgroups were one of the most effective features of the PSEMP, particularly the Stormwater and Marine Waters workgroups.

**Purpose and Scope: There were notable inconsistencies in the way interviewees described the purpose of the PSEMP.**

- These inconsistencies may be the result of variations in the way the PSEMP's purpose is

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<sup>1</sup> Puget Sound Partnership. "2013 State of the Sound Report: A Biennial Report on the Recovery of Puget Sound", p. 68, available from [www.psp.wa.gov/sos.php](http://www.psp.wa.gov/sos.php).

<sup>2</sup> The Center is a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the state of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, providing expertise to improve the quality and availability of voluntary collaborative approaches for policy development and multi-party dispute resolution. The Center is a joint effort of Washington's two research universities, the University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) (for more information, see Appendix A or visit [www.ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu](http://www.ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu))

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presented in its bylaws, charter, website, and within other documents and presentations.

**Accountability: Responses varied widely about whether or not accountability exists and about to whom, and for what the PSEMP is accountable.**

- Interviewees defined accountability as “Are we doing what we said we were going to do?” Many were unsure whether or not accountability exists. Some stated it is not clear what the program has or is supposed to accomplish, and others stated it was too early to determine.

**Decision-making: Interviewees spoke favorably of the PSEMP’s use of collaborative and consensus-based approaches to decision-making. However, many noted a lack of clarity about the types of decisions needing to be made, the level of agreement such decisions would need, and the overall decision-making authority of the Steering Committee.**

- Interviewees commented that decision-making has been slow, and focused on operational processes. Additional comments stated that inconsistent meeting attendance has sometimes led to the Steering Committee revisiting previously agreed upon decisions.

**Transparency: Interviewees emphasized the importance of transparency and overwhelmingly said yes, the PSEMP is transparent in its decision-making. However, concerns exist regarding the PSEMP’s capacity to maintain transparency.**

- Nearly all interviewees defined transparency as unrestricted access to the program and the information it generates.
- Many interviewees stressed that, for the PSEMP to maintain transparency, there is an ongoing need for staff support and continued active participation of members.

**Communication: Responses varied regarding the effectiveness of the PSEMP’s internal and external communications.**

- The State of the Sound, Vital Signs, the PSEMP website, and products of the Stormwater and Marine Waters workgroups were frequently mentioned as effective examples of external communication.
- Many interviewees stated that communication between the Steering Committee and the workgroups has been less effective. Reasons mentioned included a lack of clarity about who was responsible for communications, inconsistent Steering Committee participation, and insufficient resources such as staff support.
- Interviewees expressed the need for a cohesive communications strategy and more resources for public outreach.

**Resources: Nearly all interviewees identified aspects of the PSEMP they believe to be under-resourced.**

- Most frequently mentioned was the Steering Committee and its need for more resources; included here were greater staff support, web communication support, facilitation, and meeting management tools.

**Objectivity and Trust: Nearly all interviewees said the PSEMP is objective and trustworthy in its actions. They pointed to the diverse and broad representation of its participants, which**

**encourages collaboration and discourages actions that only benefit individual interests.**

- Transparency was said to be important for ensuring that trust and objectivity are maintained.
- Pointing to the fact the PSEMP does not generate monitoring data, many interviewees said it was difficult to know whether or not the PSEMP is meeting its goal to ensure monitoring data is credible, available, and can be trusted. Some noted the entities represented on the PSEMP are responsible for ensuring this goal is being met. Some also said the workgroups have been an effective venue for making sure this goal is being achieved.

**Independence: Responses varied widely regarding the independence of the PSEMP.**

- Some interviewees defined independence in terms of organizational status (whether or not the PSEMP is or should be an autonomous entity responsible for coordinating monitoring). Others focused on whether the extent and intent of the PSEMP's work was being influenced by the Partnership and its staff.
- Some interviewees noted the dependence on the Partnership for staff support to the PSEMP has led to a perception of undue influence.
- Many noted that, while the Steering Committee is chartered as an independent decision-making body of the program, there is a lack of clarity on the Committee's decision-making authority and to what entity and/or entities the Committee delivers its decisions.

**Broad Representation and Participation: Nearly all interviewees said yes, the PSEMP is broadly representative. However inconsistent participation of members, especially within the Steering Committee, can hamper broad representation in important discussions and decisions.**

- Interviewees identified five Steering Committee seat vacancies, and a lack of participation and/or representation from business and industry, agriculture, and tribes.
- Many reasons were given for why participation has been inconsistent. These include ambiguity about current accomplishments and future goals, a lack of clarity about the Steering Committee's decision-making authority, the volunteer time required and having to take personal time, and slow-moving decision-making processes. Interviewees expressed concern that diminishing participation could impact the objectivity and trust of PSEMP.

**Conclusions**

The Review Team heard a great deal of optimism about the PSEMP and support for the continual improvement of the current organizational structure and processes to ensure its future success. The Review Team concludes that there are elements of the current organizational structure of the PSEMP that if addressed, would help the program reach its full potential.

- **A shared definition of the purpose and roles and responsibilities of the PSEMP is lacking** across the various program components. The uncertainty in "what are we about," "where are we going" and "who has the authority to guide us" needs to be addressed to prevent the fracturing of common direction in the near future.
- The Steering Committee is central to the PSEMP's ability to function. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on **ensuring the Steering Committee has what is necessary to**

**successfully lead the program.** In addition, the role of the Steering Committee in relation to the Partnership Leadership Council, Ecosystem Coordination Board, Science Panel, and contributed staff is not clear, nor commonly understood, and should be addressed.

- The **PSEMP is under resourced.** It may be the case that, by addressing the issues identified above, the level of support may prove to be sufficient. But there are enough statements in the interviews to suggest that the PSEMP requires greater staff support, facilitation, and financial resources.

## Recommendations

### 1. Clarify Purpose and Scope

- Clarify the PSEMP's purpose, vision, and scope of responsibilities. Develop and use consistent language in communicating the PSEMP's purpose, vision, and scope of responsibilities throughout all levels of the organization and across documents.

### 2. Continue Improving Communication

- The Steering Committee should agree upon a realistic schedule for routinely communicating and interacting with work groups. Consider assigning a Steering Committee member to each work group to serve as an official liaison.
- Arrange for a year-end report from the Steering Committee and each work group. This information can then be combined to generate a year-end report of the PSEMPs accomplishments.

### 3. Clarify Roles, Responsibilities, and Decision-Making Authority

- Eliminate areas of ambiguity in the organizational structure of the 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. These clarifications will also serve to address some of the ambiguity surrounding accountability.

### 4. Build Collective Leadership Capacity within the Steering Committee

- The Steering Committee should decide what leadership roles it needs from its chair, co-chair, and Partnership staff support.
- Consider providing training opportunities for chairs, co-chairs, and support staff to refresh their facilitation, meeting management, and group-process skills.
- Provide a new-member orientation session. Consider developing a packet of orientation materials on the PSEMP.

### 5. Address Staffing, Resource, and Participation Constraints

- Consider increasing staff support to assist with logistics for the Steering Committee and work groups. Also consider hiring staff outside the Partnership to help diversify staff representation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP) was established to create and support a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent approach to regional monitoring and assessment that builds upon and facilitates communication among the many monitoring programs and efforts operating in Puget Sound.<sup>1</sup> In the resolution setting up the PSEMP, the Puget Sound Partnership's (Partnership) Leadership Council required a two-year review of the PSEMP by: *an objective and independent entity to assess whether essential characteristics, particularly transparent decision-making, availability and credibility of data, and accountability and trust, are being achieved.* The Leadership Council requested that the William D. Ruckelshaus Center<sup>2</sup> (Center) conduct the review. The Center is a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the state of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, providing expertise to improve the quality and availability of voluntary collaborative approaches for policy development and multi-party dispute resolution. The Center is a joint effort of Washington's two research universities, the University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) (for more information, see Appendix A or visit [www.ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu](http://www.ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu)). In addition to the characteristics listed in the resolution, the Leadership Council asked the Center to assess the objectivity, independence, and broad representation of the PSEMP.

A Review Team comprised of Center-affiliated faculty and staff from UW and WSU carried out the review using an interview-based assessment process (for a list of Review Team members, see Appendix A). The Review Team conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the PSEMP. The goal was to capture a representative range of participants' perspectives on the essential characteristics being assessed. The information gathered during the interviews was used to prepare this report. The report begins with an explanation of the review process, followed by a synthesis of the essential characteristics and other key findings gained through the interview process, and concludes with recommendations. Supplemental information is provided in the appendices.

## II. REVIEW PROCESS

### A. Interview Process and Protocol

From April through June 2014, the Review Team conducted 36 interviews with individuals who have or currently represent an interest in various councils, committees, and workgroups associated with PSEMP (see Appendix B for interview list). Those interviewed include employees of federal, tribal, state, and local governments, as well as interests representing environmental, academic, agriculture, business, salmon recovery, and consultant perspectives, among others. Interviews were conducted by telephone. A consistent set of interview questions was used for all interviews (see Appendix C for a copy of the interview protocol and questions).

The process for identifying individuals to interview was iterative. To develop a broad list of potential interviewees, the Review Team used membership lists of the various councils, committees and

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<sup>1</sup> Puget Sound Partnership. "2013 State of the Sound Report: A Biennial Report on the Recovery of Puget Sound", p. 68, available from [www.psp.wa.gov/sos.php](http://www.psp.wa.gov/sos.php).

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workgroups, online sources, team member discussions, and informed-observer input. The Review Team then developed the following criteria to guide the selection of specific individuals to be interviewed.

- Active involvement in the PSEMP
- Broadly representative of the interests involved with or affected by the PSEMP
- Representative of the diverse perspectives and views on past and future monitoring efforts
- Organizational and/or subject matter expertise and leadership
- Representative of varied tenure in state monitoring efforts
- Fit with project time and resource constraints

The Review Team also used a chain referral recruitment method to identify additional potential interviewees. In accordance with this method, each interviewee was asked to identify individuals, interests or groups that would be important to interview. A subset of interview slots were reserved for interviewees identified via this referral sampling method. The interview list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather representative. The goal is for all interested parties to trust that—whether they were interviewed or not—their perspective is represented on the interview list and in the review.

The Review Team developed a set of protocols to govern the interview process, based on university research principles and best practices in the field of collaborative decision-making. Interviewees were invited by email and/or phone to participate in an interview and received background information explaining the process, purpose, and how the interview would be used. The preliminary information emphasized that the interview would be confidential, that the results would be aggregated in a summary report and specific statements would not be attributed to individual interviewees. Notes from the interviews were not retained beyond the drafting of the report, per research protocol.

## **B. Data Analysis**

The review process is qualitative and the analysis involved the identification, organization and interpretation of key findings from the interviews. After each interview, interviewers entered summaries into an anonymous spreadsheet to enable the assessment of the results of all the interviews in combination. Individual members of the Review Team analyzed the interview results separately and then convened as a team for analytical discussions regarding observations, key findings, recommendations, and successive drafts of this report.

## **III. KEY FINDINGS**

Key findings summarized in this section of the report cover both the essential characteristics, as outlined in the interview questions (see Appendix C), as well as other important findings that arose out of the interview process. Conducting 36 interviews with individuals who have or represent an interest in various councils, committees and workgroups associated with PSEMP provided a rich compilation of perspectives, opinions, and ideas. To identify key findings, the Review Team paid close attention to issues, perspectives, and/or ideas that arose frequently across all interviews, as well as those that were notable for their diversity, uniqueness or originality. It is important to note that the key findings summarized in this report can be associated with a fairly wide range of responses in interviews, due to the qualitative nature of the review and the analysis process. The goal of this section

is to provide a summary of key findings and not a list nor detailed explanation of all perspectives and ideas.

### **A. The PSEMP's Effectiveness Overall**

The vast majority of interviewees reported that, for a fairly young program, the PSEMP is off to a good start. Almost all interviewees commented on PSEMP's effectiveness at bringing hundreds of diverse, engaged, and highly knowledgeable individuals together to address monitoring in the Puget Sound. Having this unique forum for scientists, researchers, and decision-makers to share information about monitoring was frequently mentioned as one of the most positive attributes of the program. Almost all interviewees specifically highlighted the opportunity workgroups provide for this sharing of information and stated that workgroups were one of the most effective features of the PSEMP.

Overall, interviewees were optimistic about the future success of the PSEMP. Many noted that since it was created, just three years ago, the PSEMP has already increased the visibility and importance of coordinating monitoring efforts in Puget Sound. However, interviewees frequently mentioned a lack of clarity about the PSEMP's purpose and goals, a slow decision-making process, a lack of staff to complete day-to-day operations, and a concern about dwindling participation. While some interviewees expressed a preference for a program that operates more autonomously or independent from the Partnership, the substantial majority spoke in favor of the continual improvement of the PSEMP's current organizational structure and processes.

### **B. Purpose and Scope**

A lack of clarity about the PSEMP's purpose was a concern that arose repeatedly in the course of the interviews. There were notable inconsistencies in the way interviewees described the purpose of the PSEMP. There are also notable variations in how the PSEMP's purpose is presented in the program's bylaws, charter, website, and other documents and presentations. When asked to describe the purpose of the PSEMP, many interviewees commented on how the purpose remains unclear and that not all members share a common understanding. Some stated the scope of the program is also unclear and were unsure about whether it is to support the goals and track the efforts of just the Partnership or of all participating agencies and organizations that conduct monitoring in Puget Sound. Several interviewees thought the purpose and goals of PSEMP were too broadly defined and ambitious. Nearly all mentioned the need for a clearer understanding of the purpose, scope, and vision of the PSEMP.

### **C. Accountability**

Interviewees defined accountability as *"Are we doing what we said we were going to do?"* However, responses varied widely about whether or not accountability exists, to whom, and for what the PSEMP is accountable. This variety in responses made assessing the overall accountability of the PSEMP extremely difficult.

Many thought it was too early to determine accountability because the PSEMP is still in the early stages of implementation. Often noted was how the work groups are at varying stages and not all are up and running. Interviewees who said accountability does exist often referenced the Vital Sign indicators for the State of the Sound Report to assert that the PSEMP has been accountable. Meanwhile, many noted there has not been as much progress towards accomplishing other activities because the work around the Vital Signs has required the majority of time and focus of members.

There were also many interviewees who stated it was not clear whether or not accountability exists. Some said it is difficult to attribute accountability because it is not clear what the PSEMP has or is supposed to accomplish. Several interviewees thought the goals of PSEMP were too broadly defined and ambitious, which has made it difficult to determine how to accomplish each goal. On the same note, several mentioned the need to develop and better define ways to measure and track progress toward meeting the purpose and achieving the goals of the PSEMP.

The majority of interviewees also said it was not clear to whom PSEMP is accountable. Many noted components of the PSEMP's organizational structure that make it difficult to determine accountability. These components included unclear decision-making authority, lack of clarity around what it means to be an independent program, no hierarchical reporting structure, and lack of fiscal responsibility. Most interviewees said the PSEMP was accountable to the Partnership, Leadership Council, and Science Panel. Other responses included either one or more of the following:

- All entities represented by the PSEMP
- The general public
- The Legislature
- The Governor
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- The Partnership Ecosystem Coordination Board

#### **D. Decision-Making**

Interviewees spoke favorably of the PSEMP's use of collaborative and consensus-based approaches to decision-making. Such processes were noted as being slow, but effective for making decisions and reaching agreements related to internal operations such as approving bylaws and work plans. When referring to successful decision-making, many interviewees talked about specific tasks, including compiling monitoring program inventories, identifying monitoring needs and gaps, and work associated with the Vital Signs.

Interviewees revealed a general lack of clarity about the types of decisions being made by the Steering Committee, as well as its overall decision-making authority. Many interviewees explained that, without the ability to direct money or actions, the Steering Committee lacks authority to make important decisions, leading to uncertainty about what the PSEMP is able to accomplish. Several interviewees spoke to the Steering Committee's struggle with prioritizing the monitoring gaps identified by the work groups. Many recommended decision-making could be more effective if the Steering Committee were to clarify what decisions it needs to make and pinpoint the process and level of agreement required to make each decision. Many also recommended efforts be taken to clarify the purpose of the PSEMP, which would then help identify the types of decisions that the Steering Committee needs to make as well as how to achieve program goals.

Many interviewees described how inconsistent meeting attendance has sometimes led the Steering Committee to revisit previously agreed upon decisions, for the benefit of Committee members who were absent for the initial discussion and decision process. There was also considerable mention that stronger facilitation was needed to better manage difficult conversations and help the Steering Committee reach decisions. Interviewees foresaw more challenging work on the horizon and suggested a facilitator and the use of better meeting management techniques would be valuable.

Specific recommendations about meeting management included: keeping discussions focused on agenda topics, allocating and adhering to specific time frames for the discussion of agenda items, and clarifying expected outcomes of the meetings.

### **E. Transparency**

Interviewees emphasized the importance of transparency and overwhelmingly said yes, the PSEMP is transparent in its decision-making. Nearly all interviewees defined transparency as unrestricted access to the program and the information it generates. This included the accessibility of meetings, the inclusiveness of work groups, access to materials produced by the Steering Committee and work groups, and ensuring all viewpoints are heard. However, interviews suggest that aspects of the PSEMP's external and internal communication practices pose risks to its transparency.

Regarding external communication, there were concerns that transparency could be compromised due to information not being available and posted to the PSEMP website in a timely manner. Additionally, some interviewees expressed a concern that work products and other materials available on the website are too technical and not readily understandable to the broad public.

In terms of internal communication, interviewees frequently mentioned the short amount of time Steering Committee members are given to review materials before each meeting. Many stressed that preserving the PSEMP's transparency requires members attending and actively participating in meetings, as well as sufficient resources, including staff support. Almost all interviewees recommended an increase in staff capacity to upload and distribute Steering Committee meeting materials and minutes in a timelier manner. In addition to sending basic meeting materials, some interviewees recommended sending additional information between meetings to keep people informed and promote conversation and constructive feedback. For example, the Stormwater work group sends a one page vignette with current events pertaining to stormwater monitoring in the region.

### **F. Communication**

Responses varied on the effectiveness of internal and external communications, though many interviewees noted that the PSEMP is working on improvements. The *State of the Sound*, *Vital Signs*, and the PSEMP website were frequently mentioned as effective examples of external communication. Many interviewees also highlighted products such as the Marine Waters workgroup's Puget Sound Marine Waters yearly overviews and the Stormwater workgroup's reports, strategies, and recommendations for stormwater monitoring to be effective at communicating to external audiences. Interviewees nevertheless consistently stated that the PSEMP needs a cohesive overall communications strategy and dedicated resources for public outreach.

Regarding internal communication, many reported that communications between the Steering Committee and workgroups, between the Steering Committee and Leadership Council, and across workgroups could be improved. Reasons mentioned include a lack of clarity about who is responsible for communications, inconsistent Steering Committee participation, written materials not uploaded online and distributed to participants via email in a timely manner, and a lack of capacity to implement an effective communications strategy.

To improve communication between the work groups and Steering Committee, some recommended the chair of each work group serve as an official liaison on the Steering Committee. There were

recommendations for more opportunities for work groups to interact with each other, including increased interactions among the work groups' chairs and staff leads and the Steering Committee chair and staff leads. Some recommended using the marine waters workgroup approach to increasing opportunities for internal communication. The Marine Waters work group holds an annual "Year-in-Review Kick-off Meeting/Workshop," where people from other workgroups and interested parties are invited to present data and reports from the previous year. This information is then used to compile the yearly NOAA/PSEMP *Puget Sound Marine Waters Overview*.

For external communication, interviewees recommended a number of approaches to better communicate the work of the PSEMP:

- Creating and distributing more PSEMP publications to explain and highlight the PSEMP's accomplishments.
- Peer review processes to document and publish the PSEMP's products.
- Compiling and issuing quarterly one-page summaries of the PSEMP's accomplishments and findings.
- Publishing annual reports to highlight the work of each work group and the Steering Committee, which could serve as communication and outreach materials.

## **G. Resources**

Nearly all interviewees identified aspects of the PSEMP they believe require more resources. Most frequently mentioned was the Steering Committee and its need for additional resources to help with day-to-day functions, including generating meeting notes and ensuring materials are posted on the webpage. Many noted and expressed empathy towards support staff being overloaded with tasks. Many stated facilitation and meeting management tools were needed, and some recommended hiring a professional facilitator. Some interviewees proposed hiring an "executive director", whose time would be completely dedicated to ensuring effective operations and helping increase the visibility of the PSEMP. Interviewees also recommended, almost unanimously, that the PSEMP continue to create and improve its funding strategy and assure the strategy is aligned with the PSEMP's goals. The majority of interviewees indicated the PSEMP's structure is not fatally flawed, but argued that significant additions to the current capacity of the program are needed if the program is going to be truly effective.

## **H. Objectivity and Trust**

Interviewees defined objectivity as minimal bias, balancing different viewpoints, and the ability to act independent of or not be influenced by individual interests. The majority of interviewees said the PSEMP is objective in its actions, due to the diverse and broad range of institutional affiliations represented among its participants. However, some concern was mentioned about overrepresentation of government agencies and interests on the Steering Committee and work groups.

Interviewees defined trust in terms of whether or not the information generated by the PSEMP can be trusted and as the level of trust that exists among the participants. Nearly all said that the information generated by PSEMP is trustworthy and that transparency was important to maintain trust. However, when asked about the goal to *ensure data are credible, trusted, and available with known precision, accuracy, and certainty*, some noted it was difficult to determine whether this goal

is being met because the PSEMP doesn't necessarily generate monitoring data. Some noted the individual entities that are represented on the PSEMP are responsible for ensuring data is credible and trustworthy. Some also said the workgroups have been an effective venue for making sure this goal is achieved. Overwhelmingly, interviewees said that trust exists among the participants, highlighting the knowledge and caliber of participants and the good working relationships that exist.

### **I. Independence**

Responses varied widely regarding the independence of the PSEMP, suggesting a substantial range of views and some confusion about the PSEMP's independence. Some interviewees discussed independence in terms of whether or not the PSEMP is or should be an autonomous entity responsible for coordinating monitoring, "independent" of the Partnership and other agencies. Interviewees frequently described the history of the program and the different governance models as a longstanding point of concern since the PSEMP was created. Interviewees provided examples that could serve as a model for this type of independent program, including the San Francisco Estuary Institute's Regional Monitoring Program ([www.sfei.org](http://www.sfei.org)) and the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project ([www.sccwrp.org](http://www.sccwrp.org)).

Many indicated that while the Steering Committee is chartered as an independent decision-making body of the PSEMP, there is a lack of clarity about the Committee's decision-making authority and to what entity and/or entities the Committee is to deliver its decisions. Some interviewees were unsure about whether the purpose and scope of the PSEMP are to support the goals and track monitoring related efforts of the just the Puget Sound Partnership, or to provide such support and tracking for all participating agencies and organizations that conduct monitoring in Puget Sound. Others expressed a desire for more clarity about what it means for the PSEMP to be an "independent entity," as its website declares it to be. Also mentioned was how the PSEMP was not an independent program but a collection of agencies, organizations, governments, and interested parties that each have their own governance structures and monitoring efforts. And some said it was not the PSEMP that is independent, but the Steering Committee.

Others focused on whether the extent and intent of the PSEMP's work is influenced unduly by the Partnership and its staff. A small but significant number of respondents expressed concerns about the role of Partnership staff and their ability to influence the work and decisions of the Steering Committee and workgroups. Some interviewees noted the dependence on the Partnership to provide staff support for the PSEMP has led to this perception of undue influence. Others indicated this perception exists because the PSEMP's work to date is strongly associated with the Vital Signs and Action Agenda. Also mentioned was that in efforts to avoid being viewed as influencing the PSEMP, Partnership staff have been overly accommodating or non-directive. Some recommended hiring staff outside of the Partnership to help diversify staff representation.

### **J. Broad Representation and Participation**

Nearly all interviewees said yes, the PSEMP is broadly representative, as specified in its charter. Many noted, however, that members participate inconsistently, especially within the Steering Committee. Interviewees identified five Steering Committee seat vacancies, and a lack of participation and/or representation from business and industry, agriculture, and tribes. Many reasons were given for inconsistent participation, including ambiguity about the overall purpose, current accomplishments, and future goals of the PSEMP; the Steering Committee's unclear decision-making authority; the

volunteer time required and having to take personal time off; and slow-moving decision-making processes. Some noted that since the objectivity of the PSEMP is due to its diverse representation, diminishing participation could limit its ability to maintain objectivity and trust.

Many interviewees suggested identifying more creative ways to encourage participation. Recommendations included covering travel and incidental expenses, providing coffee and refreshments at meetings, having some meetings outside of normal business hours to accommodate members who are not able to take leave time to attend the meeting, and improving collaborative technology. Some suggested stricter attendance requirements by either the primary seat holder, or a designated alternative. Similarly, formal contracts between the Steering Committee and the entity or interest that Committee members represent was suggested in order to establish formal commitments to participation by Steering Committee members. Other interviewees suggested increasing the pace of Steering Committee meetings.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this review was to assess whether essential characteristics of the PSEMP, as identified in the PSEMP charter and by the Partnership Leadership Council, are being achieved. In the previous section of this report, the Review Team summarized what was learned from 36 interviewees about their perspectives on the achievement of these essential characteristics. The Review Team heard a great deal of optimism about the PSEMP and support for the continual improvement of the current organizational structure and processes to ensure its future success. The Review Team concludes that there are elements of the current organizational structure of the PSEMP that if addressed, would help the program reach its full potential.

- **A shared definition of the purpose of the PSEMP is lacking** across the various program components. The uncertainty in “what are we about,” “where are we going” and “who has the authority to guide us” needs to be addressed to prevent the fracturing of common direction in the near future.
- The Steering Committee is central to the PSEMP’s ability to function. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on **ensuring the Steering Committee has what is necessary to successful lead the program**. In addition, the role of the Steering Committee in relation to the Partnership Leadership Council, Ecosystem Coordination Board, Science Panel, and contributed staff is not clear, nor commonly understood, and should be addressed.
- The **PSEMP is under resourced**. It may be the case that, by addressing the issues identified above, the level of support may prove to be sufficient. But there are enough statements in the interviews to suggest that the PSEMP requires greater staff support, facilitation, and financial resources.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above, the Review Team offers the following specific recommendations:

### 1. Clarify Purpose and Scope

- Clarify the PSEMP’s purpose, vision, and scope of responsibilities. Develop and use consistent language when communicating the purpose, vision, and scope throughout all levels of the

organization and across documents. Consider defining a vision that describes the desired future success of the PSEMP and its efforts.

- Define realistic goals, expectations regarding resources required, time commitments, outputs, and expected outcomes.

## **2. Continue Improving Communication**

- Use consistent language in all forms of the PSEMP internal and external communications, especially when communicating the PSEMP's purpose, vision and scope of responsibilities.
- The Steering Committee should agree upon a realistic schedule for routinely communicating and interacting with work groups. Consider assigning a Steering Committee member to each work group to serve as an official liaison.
- The Steering Committee should explore ways to increase communication outside of meetings. Consider replicating communication approaches being used by the Stormwater and Marine Waters workgroups that were highlighted by interviewees as being successful.
- Arrange for a year-end report from the Steering Committee and each work group. This information can then be combined to generate a year-end report of the PSEMPs accomplishments.

## **3. Clarify Roles, Responsibilities, and Decision-Making Authority**

- Eliminate areas of ambiguity in the organizational structure of the 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. These clarifications will also serve to address some of the ambiguity surrounding accountability.

## **4. Build Collective Leadership Capacity within the Steering Committee**

- The Steering Committee should decide what leadership roles it needs from its chair, co-chair, and Partnership staff support.
- Consider providing training opportunities for chairs, co-chairs, and support staff to refresh their facilitation, meeting management, and group process skills.
- Provide a new-member orientation session. Consider developing a packet of orientation materials on the PSEMP.
- Institute meeting management tools.
  - i. Provide meeting materials in a more timely matter, preferably at least two weeks before each meeting so members have adequate time to prepare. Distribute a list of action items within one week after each meeting.
  - ii. Label each agenda item to clarify the purpose, approach to decision-making, and desired outcomes (i.e. will the topic be sharing information, discussion, a brainstorming session, require decision-making). Also label each agenda item with the time allocated for its completion.

## **5. Address Staffing, Resources, and Participation Constraints**



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- Consider increasing staff support to assist with logistical support for the Steering Committee and work groups including meeting notes, tracking action items, and to ensure materials are distributed and posted on the PSEMP website in a timely manner. Also consider hiring staff outside of the Partnership to help diversify staff representation.
  - The Steering Committee should explore options to incentivize participation.

The Review Team was impressed with the number of highly motivated, dedicated, and knowledgeable individuals involved in PSEMP, all of whom are working towards a common desire—to improve monitoring in the Puget Sound. This report is offered in the hope that members of the PSEMP will find it useful in achieving the program’s essential characteristics. *The Review Team is deeply grateful to the many individuals who gave their time and energy to be interviewed, and to otherwise inform this report.*

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**APPENDIX A.**

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

**THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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**The William D. Ruckelshaus Center and Review Team Members**

The mission of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center is to act as a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and Pacific Northwest. The Center provides expertise to improve the quality and availability of voluntary collaborative approaches for policy development and multi-party dispute resolution.

The Center is a joint effort of Washington's two research universities and was developed in response to requests from community leaders. Building on the unique strengths of the two institutions, the Center is dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, non-profit and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. The Center also advances the teaching and research missions of the two universities by bringing real-world policy issues to the academic setting.

The Center is hosted at the University of Washington by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and at Washington State University by WSU Extension. It is guided by an advisory board of prominent local, state and regional leaders representing a broad range of constituencies and geographic locations. The board is chaired by William Ruckelshaus.

The Center envisions a future in which governmental leaders, policy makers, stakeholders and citizens in the state of Washington and the Pacific Northwest routinely employ the tools of collaborative decision making to design, conduct and implement successful public policy processes.

**Review Team Members**

**Amanda Murphy**, Ruckelshaus Center Project and Research Specialist, WSU Extension Faculty

**Meghan Bunch**, Ruckelshaus Center Graduate Intern

**Rob McDaniel**, Director, WSU Extension Community & Economic Development Program

**Stephen Page**, Associate Professor, University of Washington Evans School of Public Affairs

**Michael Kern**, Director, The William D. Ruckelshaus Center

**APPENDIX B.****Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Review Interview List**

Joe Anderson	Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Richard Brocksmith	Skagit Watershed Council
Lisa Chang	United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Alan Chapman	Lummi Tribe
Tracy Collier	Puget Sound Partnership
Bruce Crawford	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Ken Currens	Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC)
Karen Dinicola	Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE)
Rick Dinicola	United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Rob Duff	Washington State Governor's Legislative Affairs and Policy Office
Ross Dunning	Kennedy/Jenks Consultants
Ken Dzinbal	Puget Sound Partnership
Duane Fagergren	Puget Sound Partnership
Fred Felleman	Friends of the Earth
Leska Fore	Puget Sound Partnership
Diana Gale	Washington State Public Works Board
Caroline Gibson	Northwest Straights Marine Conservation Initiative
Nathalie Hamel	Puget Sound Partnership
Chris Harvey	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Kris Holm	Association of Washington Businesses
Andy James	Puget Sound Institute
Robert Johnston	United States Navy
Jerry Joyce	Seattle Audubon and Moon Joyce Consulting
Heather Kibbey	City of Everett
Martha Kongsgaard	Kongsgaard-Goldman Foundation
Kate Litle	Washington Sea Grant
Jan Newton	University of Washington
Kit Paulsen	City of Bellevue
Dave Peeler	Puget Sound Partnership
Scott Powell	Seattle City Light
Michael Schmidt	Long Live the Kings
Ron Shultz	Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC)
Jim Simmonds	King County
John Stein	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Loretta Swanson	Mason County
Heather Trim	Futurewise

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**APPENDIX C.**

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

**THE  
WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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**Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Review  
Interview Questions****Background**

The Puget Sound Partnership (Partnership) created the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP) to evaluate progress towards ecosystem recovery and serve as a foundation for continually improving the scientific basis for management actions throughout Puget Sound. PSEMP's charter describes an independent monitoring program and a Steering Committee that works collaboratively across all participating agencies and organizations and coordinates monitoring efforts to provide credible, high quality and accessible monitoring findings. In the resolution setting up the PSEMP the Partnership's Leadership Council required a two-year review of the PSEMP by: *"an objective and independent entity to assess whether essential characteristics, particularly transparent decision-making, availability and credibility of data, and accountability and trust, are being achieved."*

The Partnership has requested that the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Center) conduct the review of the PSEMP. The Center is a joint effort of Washington State University and the University of Washington, dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, non-profit and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues (for more information, visit [www.ruckelshauscenter.edu](http://www.ruckelshauscenter.edu)).

Center staff will conduct the review using an interview-based assessment process. The Center will interview involved parties and stakeholders to capture a wide range of perspectives about whether essential characteristics of the PSEMP—particularly transparent decision-making, availability and credibility of data, and accountability and trust—are being achieved. The Center will use the interview data to prepare an assessment report. As specified in the resolution, the report will outline key findings and any recommendations for improvement including information on alternative processes that may better meet the goals of the PSEMP.

You have been identified via the Center's selection criteria and/or referral, as a person with an important perspective and knowledge of the PSEMP. We are hoping you will participate in the interview. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose at any time during the interview to decline to answer a question or end the interview. In order to promote open and frank discussion, and to conform to the Center's and university research protocols, all interviews will be confidential. This means the Center's report will include a list of who was interviewed and key themes that emerged from the interviews, but names will not be associated with any of the statements. The Center's report will be made available to all those who participated in the interview process and other interested parties.

On the following page are the questions for the interview. They are provided in advance to offer you the opportunity to reflect prior to the interview. It is not necessary to prepare responses to the questions in advance.

## Questions

1. Please tell us your involvement with the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP).
2. Please give us your impression of the following:
  - 2a. Decision-Making: Is the PSEMP's decision-making process effective? If yes, how so? If no, how not? If not what changes do you recommend?
  - 2b. Transparency: Is the PSEMP transparent in its decision-making? Is yes, how so? If no, how not? If not, what changes do you recommend?
  - 2c. Communicating to Audiences: Is the PSEMP effectively communicating to audiences both within and outside of the program? If yes, how? If not, how not? If not, what changes do you recommend?
3. Acting as an objective, independent entity are essential attributes of the PSEMP. Is the PSEMP objective in its actions? Is yes, how so? If no, how not? If not, what changes do you recommend?
  - 3a. Do you view the PSEMP as an independent entity? Is yes, how so? If no, how not? If not, what changes do you recommend?
4. Accountability and trust are listed as important characteristics of the monitoring program. Do you think these characteristics currently exist? If yes, why? If not, how not? If not, what changes might you recommend to achieve accountability or trust?
  - 4a. One of the goals of the PSEMP is to "*ensure data are credible, trusted, and available with known precision, accuracy, and certainty*". Do you think this goal is currently being met? If so, how? If not, how not? If not, what changes do you recommend?
5. Is the PSEMP broadly representative? If yes, why? If not, what additional parties need to be represented?
6. What is your overall impression of the effectiveness of the PSEMP? What is the most effective feature(s)? What, if anything, needs improvement?
7. Who do you think it is important that we interview as part of this review? Why is it important to speak to him/her?
8. What else is important for us to know about the PSEMP? Is there anything we should have asked about that we did not?
9. Do you have any questions of us?