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## Salmon

Gov. Gary Locke recently released the first complete draft of his salmon recovery strategy, which ultimately may avert severe federal clampdowns on business and development in most of Washington.

Winning approval from the National Marine Fisheries Service of a recovery plan presumably would allow for economic activity that the feds otherwise might constrain. The idea, according to the governor's office, is to avoid blanket, one-size-fits-all federal restrictions.

Such restrictions would stem from the imminent listing of salmon under the Endangered Species Act across three quarters of the state, including the Puget Sound region.

Locke's new draft, released Jan. 19, follows release of the first draft last fall. The governor plans to submit the final draft this summer.

To gain approval from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Locke has indicated a state recovery plan must include substantial habitat protection and conservation measures, funding for these measures and means of monitoring them.

The governor will not produce another draft until after the close of this year's legislative session. His proposed 1999-2001 budget includes \$201 million to implement a recovery plan. Also, Locke is asking for legislation, called Water for People and Fish, that would change state water laws.

The governor has declared that his goal is not only to improve salmon, steelhead and bull-trout habitat – as required by the Endangered Species Act – but to restore these fish to “healthy harvestable levels.”

While his recovery plan focuses on salmon habitat, it deals with the effects of fishing, fish hatcheries and dams as well. Fishing, for instance, would be limited to ensure enough salmon reach their spawning grounds. Hatcheries would produce fish less likely to compete with wild salmon.

Locke's plan would affect everyone. Homeowners probably would have less water for yards. Timber companies would have to leave more trees along streams. Commercial fishing would face shorter fishing seasons. Developers would have to protect wetlands from stormwater runoff. Farmers would have to make irrigation more efficient.

Yet nothing guarantees that even if habitat is improved, threatened salmon stocks will greatly recover. Declining stocks “are the result of many factors,” Locke's draft recovery plan observes. “Some, such as poor ocean conditions, are beyond our control.”

Some legislators and lobbyists have asked what the recovery plan would do about such salmon predators as terns and sea lions.

Various interest groups are still weighing their responses to Locke's latest draft, while recognizing that the recovery plan is a work in progress. At this point, business interests seem more concerned about the planning process than about particular aspects of Locke's plan.

The Association of Washington Business and the Washington Association of Realtors, for instance, want to see “stakeholder” groups and more legislators involved in drafting the recovery plan. The Building Industry Association of Washington implies much the same in saying that homebuilders want to ensure that a recovery plan “promotes more affordable housing.”

The Washington Water Policy Alliance, which represents businesses as well as municipal and other interests, says a salmon recovery plan should include provisions promoting smarter use of water, such as allowing the transfer of water rights; better conservation of salmon, through restrictions on the amounts and methods of fishing; and projects yielding the biggest bang for the buck, such as buying back commercial fishing licenses.

Environmental groups, too, are still assessing Locke's second draft and whether it materially differs from the first one, which they heavily criticized. One, Save Our Wild Salmon, credits this draft with beginning to describe a vision, indicating what actions the state must take and calling for budget provisions to support them.


What's lacking, according to this group, are timelines, rigorous rankings of priorities and measures to protect existing healthy salmon habitat from degradation. Also wanting is a well-defined structure for coordinating the activities of state, county and city governments and the tribes.

Locke has completed drafts of a recovery plan with the help of 11 state-agency directors comprising his Joint Natural Resources Cabinet, organized last July. Earlier last year, the Legislature created the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office, now headed by Curt Smitch, Locke's natural resources special assistant.

Locke has not asked for the Legislature's blessing of his first two drafts, nor will he seek legislative approval of the final recovery plan forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service. State lawmakers will make their mark on the recovery plan through dealing with the governor's proposed budget and requested changes to state water law.

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