

HEALTHY HABITAT



HEALTHY ORCAS



Improve habitat for wildlife and future generations: Salmon and orca are in crisis

With our beloved orcas facing extinction and Puget Sound falling farther behind on the road to recovery, bold action is needed to increase salmon populations and restore local waters. After decades of development-related habitat loss, we seek passage of a new standard, Net Ecological Gain, to protect and restore habitat, and leave our environment better than we found it for future generations. We will work with state and local governments to implement this key Orca Task Force recommendation to accomplish results now and in the future.

Habitat is already too damaged to support once-abundant salmon runs, due to inadequate protection from decades-old laws. For years, Washington has tried to achieve No Net Loss of habitat as the state grows, but it is clear that No Net Loss is not working. Salmon runs have declined by 90% from their historical numbers, leaving fewer fish for communities and endangered Southern Resident orcas. We are losing habitat faster than we can protect and restore it. Forest cover, ecologically important lands, and kelp beds are critical to the survival and recovery of salmon and orcas, yet all have declined measurably in recent years.

POLICY GOALS TO IMPROVE HABITAT

- Modernize state land use, development, and environmental laws and regulations to result in a net gain of ecological health
- Create a state plan for how to implement the shift to Net Ecological Gain efficiently and effectively
- Close habitat mitigation loopholes

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STATUS QUO MEANS EXTINCTION FOR SALMON AND ORCAS

Salmon have nourished people and orcas for millennia, but existing laws have led to rapid declines in habitat. Several factors contributed to the decline of salmon, but the loss of habitat means that rivers and shorelines around the region cannot support enough salmon today. As our region continues to grow, development pressure further threatens the little remaining habitat.

Orca Recovery Task Force recommendation

The Task Force specifically recommended shifting from No Net Loss to Net Ecological Gain. Doing so would increase habitat protections by reducing impacts from development, and accelerate restoration of critical habitat and sensitive ecosystems for Southern Resident orcas and their food web.

Development pressures increasing

Washington state has experienced incredible growth rates, which are expected to continue. The Puget Sound Regional Council predicts over 1.5 million more people by 2050 in Snohomish, King, Kitsap, and Pierce counties alone, with even more expected in the remaining eight Puget Sound counties. With a new policy of Net Ecological Gain we can grow and flourish with an increasing population.

Multiple benefits

Improving habitat also decreases pollution in rivers, lakes, and marine waters like Puget Sound – the same solutions benefit both habitat and clean water.

HABITAT HEALTH IS DECLINING

- Puget Sound region loses on average over 800 acres of forest each year
- Nearly 2,000 acres of ecologically important lands are damaged each year
- Salmon have declined by 90% from historical levels
- Puget Sound herring, which feed salmon and other animals, are at about 50% of the 1978 levels

