



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

4/8/2022

Agenda item:

Pinto Abalone Recovery Plan Briefing

Presenter(s):

Hank Carson, Fish and Wildlife Research Scientist, Katie Sowul, Abalone Biologist, Chris Eardley Puget Sound Shellfish Policy Coordinator, and Aaron Dufault, Puget Sound Shellfish Manager

Background summary:

Pinto abalone are large marine gastropods (snails) that live on rocky reefs and kelp forests in the San Juan Islands and Strait of Juan de Fuca. They graze on drift kelp and rock surfaces, maintaining clear space for new kelp to grow. Their meat and beautiful shells were the subject of state recreational harvest from 1959 – 1994, after which the fishery was closed due to low densities resulting from legal and illegal harvest. Unfortunately, densities were so low in 1994 that free-spawning individuals were not close enough together to supply the population with new abalone, and densities continued to decline while average age increased. A recovery partnership between the department, Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF), and others was formed in 2002 to develop captive breeding protocols and pilot outplants. The species was listed as state endangered in 2019, mandating the development of a recovery plan. The recovery plan we present today includes criteria for de-listing, and specific tasks to get there. The tasks include scaled-up hatchery supplementation, protection of kelp forest habitats, research, and diligent monitoring and enforcement to protect wild or hatchery-origin spawning aggregations.

Staff recommendation:

Staff seek feedback from the Commission on the recovery plan, which will be adopted by the Director.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

N/A – briefing only

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

Current abalone restoration activities are primarily funded through legislative proviso expiring in 2023. Fish Program conversations are in progress regarding ongoing funding requests to meet the recommendations of the recovery plan and the future of abalone recovery.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The recovery plan went through three rounds of review – invited peer review, tribal review, and public comment. We received comments from 10 organizations in the U.S. and Canada, as well as tribes and individual citizens. Many additions were suggested and incorporated, and all comments were supportive. Changes made were substantive, including changes to the delisting criteria and recovery tasks.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

No commission action is requested. Next steps will be to continue pinto abalone research and restoration with existing proviso funding 2021 – 2023, while seeking a scale-up of the effort with ongoing funding.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Post decision communications plan:

Post the final recovery plan on the website and conduct outreach to media and interested parties notifying them of the availability of the final plan.
