

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to provide the Habitat Strategic Initiative Advisory Team an update on the Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy development process and the themes that have emerged from the initial plan analysis to inform discussion at the January 2025 HSIAT meeting.

Background

During the fall of 2024, HSIL and the Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy Core Team began synthesis of the existing strategies and priorities into the [Puget Sound Eelgrass Recovery Strategy](#) and the [Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan](#). Additionally, through this review process opportunities to uplift understanding and actions related to climate and human dimensions were explored.

The preliminary analysis resulted in four areas of focus: research and monitoring; protection; restoration; and outreach. The following is a high-level summary of the preliminary analysis, which includes early themes and questions. This is not meant to be a comprehensive of all the themes, considerations, barriers and questions within the analysis, but a summary to facilitate conversation at that HSIAT meeting.

Research and Monitoring:

- Working Strategy Title - Implement targeted research initiatives to understand the short- and long-term factors driving changes in marine vegetation.
- Summary - Many information gaps remain for understanding marine vegetation and their stressors. Although scientists have created conceptual models for stressor impacts, additional research is critical to understanding relative importance of and interaction between stressors during observed population declines. Continuing to fill research and monitoring needs is critical to moving all marine vegetation conservation and recovery strategies forward.
- Preliminary Themes:
 - Expand stressor - response research capacity to understand and isolate contributing factors responsible for observed site-specific losses and expansion.
 - Marine vegetation distribution and trends are monitored to inform spatial planning, project planning, and regulatory implementation.
 - Conduct research to better understand ecosystem services provided by kelp and eelgrass, including human wellbeing and climate considerations
 - Enabling conditions for this strategy include – building capacity and support for Tribal science and community science programs.
- Question(s)

- o What strategies and actions could be taken to ensure that kelp and eelgrass research and monitoring information sharing is coordinated, inclusive and effective?
- o How can the “right data/findings reach right people in right format at right time”?
- o What are the attributes of targeted research initiatives that meaningfully addresses kelp and eelgrass social-cultural data gaps?

Protection:

- Working Strategy Title - Fully implement available protections for marine vegetation through existing regulations, programs, and policies.
- Summary - Conservation and protection of kelp and eelgrass is fundamental to long term recovery of Puget Sound marine vegetation. Effective protection strategies include implementing and strengthening current regulations and policies, as well as establishment of priority habitat areas. Marine vegetation in Puget Sound is managed within a framework of ownership, regulations, and trust responsibilities. Successful protection strategies must navigate a shared management landscape between Tribes, states and federal management agencies, and county and municipal governments.
- Preliminary Themes -
 - o Improve and evaluate implementation of shoreline/nearshore regulatory programs (e.g. Shoreline Management Act, Hydraulic Code,) to ensure new development does not contribute to incremental losses
 - o Expand marine vegetation compatible boater infrastructure to reduce damages to habitat
 - o Protect marine vegetation in existing and new reserves, refuges, and protected areas
 - o Design new or retrofit of existing in-water or over-water structures to avoid impacts to existing and historic kelp and eelgrass habitat.
- Question:
 - o The recovery plans point to strengthening enforcement and compliance of existing laws and regulations, close loopholes, and increase interagency coordination – what are actions that could advance these areas of concern?

Restoration:

- Working Strategy Title – Accelerate recolonization and expansion of marine vegetation at sites shown to possess suitable conditions using effective restoration methods.
- Summary - Marine vegetation can be restored through a combination of efforts to both reduce stressors and direct enhancement. This strategy is heavily reliant on the protection strategy that works to eliminate or minimize the stressors that contribute to the current documented losses. Since restoration methods and best practices are still being developed, in particular for kelp, and long-term success is still unknown, it is critical that we continue to support research and monitoring of restoration sites.
- Themes -
 - Coordinate and leverage research and monitoring efforts with restoration partners to identify and evaluate the areas ecologically and culturally suitable for restoration efforts.
 - Increase long term monitoring of restoration sites to evaluate success and inform restoration best management practices.
 - Implement process-based and ecosystem-approach restoration projects to address the large-scale issues of nearshore habitat connectivity.
 - Support the development of seed banks and donor sites for use in genetically appropriate restoration.
 - Conduct multi-benefits restoration projects that increase climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience.
- Questions
 - How do we balance restoration sites and practices that uplifts sites of ecological and cultural (e.g. human wellbeing, place attachment, local foods and/or economic vitality) importance?
 - How to uplift enabling conditions for marine vegetation restoration that are shared across other habitat types (streamline restoration permitting, available and accessible funding)

Outreach and Education:

- Working Strategy Title – Target outreach and education to foster stewardship and collective action to benefit marine vegetation conservation and recovery.
- Summary - Strategic outreach to local governments, planners, recreational boaters and other user groups is essential for supporting responsible stewardship of kelp and eelgrass habitat. During the preliminary analysis this was one of the strategies flagged for needing the most work since some prior actions have been completed, audiences could be better refined, and human wellbeing connections were not well developed.
- Themes

- o Expand boater awareness campaigns to promote marine vegetation-friendly boating practices.
- o Expand accessible outreach and information on the importance of marine vegetation and sustainable harvesting methods.
- o Expand partnerships between educational institutions, restoration practitioners, and community stewards to foster collective action for marine vegetation protection and restoration efforts.

Draft schedule of remaining activities:

- January 2025 - Mid-May 2025:
 - o Iterative strategy development and coordinated input through existing workgroups and local groups, such as but not limited to the following: WA State Kelp Research and Monitoring Workgroup, PSEMP Nearshore Workgroup, DNR Kelp and Eelgrass Health and Conservation Plan executive work group, Marine Resource Committees and Local Integrating Organizations
 - o Dialogue with and input from individual tribes outside existing groups if desired by Tribes. Tribal Briefing in February to provide early input on strategies.
- Mid-May 2025 – June 2025:
 - o Draft integrated strategy based upon existing plans and input from Tribes and partners is completed. The draft strategy will be used to inform 2026-2030 Action Agenda development.
- July 2025-December 2025:
 - o Finalize strategy through various review processes, including Tribal, science and public.

Contact

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Homework

- Please review the [HSIAT June 2024 briefing and presentation slides](#) for background information on stressors impacting kelp and eelgrass; the Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy development process; the Puget Sound kelp and eelgrass strategic framework and recovery collaborative framework.