

Lead Entity Advisory Group Report

to the
Salmon Recovery Funding Board, February 2008
Prepared and Submitted by LEAG Chair, Richard Brocksmith

The Lead Entity Advisory Group (LEAG) held our most recent meetings by conference call on December 18, 2008 and by video conference on January 13, 2009. As usual, a variety of topics were discussed and acted upon, including a review of the 2008 Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) grant process with an eye towards any needed reforms for the 2009 SRFB grant process, budget updates, SRFB strategic planning, Habitat Work Schedule, monitoring, and outreach, among other topics.

For the purposes of this LEAG Report, however, we've chosen to focus solely on the topic of SRFB strategic planning and how lead entities play an integral role in implementing the mission of salmon recovery. We'd like to overview with this report the core role of the lead entity program as defined by statute, expanded roles that have come or will need to come in the evolution of this program, the efficiencies and leverage that the lead entity program brings to salmon recovery currently, the support we need to help local, regional, and statewide salmon recovery be successful, and finally, some initial ideas that may be helpful in increasing efficiencies within our existing human capacities. This report will be as concise as possible, recognizing much work has already been done to document many of these topics (e.g. multiple surveys, LEAG papers, SRFB strategic planning process, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Lead Entity 2009-2011 Decision Package, etc.), and that this report serves as a starting point for expanded discussions on all of these topics.

I. Core Roles of Lead Entities

Lead entity core roles are tasks that are explicitly defined in Chapter 77.85 RCW. By performing these activities, a lead entity is meeting the basic requirements established by statute.

- **Form and maintain a lead entity:** Lead entity organizations are self-determined by counties, cities, and tribes. Lead entity coordinators develop sufficient administration, facilitation and coordination capacity to support specific tasks (as defined below) of the lead entity and local and regional salmon recovery processes.

Typical tasks include: Establish and maintain an office and point of contact, act as the representative of the lead entity organization in a variety of settings, and provide purchasing, accounting, reporting, coordinating with project sponsors, etc.

- **Assemble, facilitate and administer a citizen committee of representative interests:** Lead entity coordinators are responsible for assembling and supporting a citizen committee of diverse salmon habitat and community interests. Chapter 77.85.050 RCW identifies counties, cities, conservation districts, tribes, environmental groups, business interests, landowners, citizens, volunteer groups,

regional fish enhancement groups and other habitat interests as potential committee members. This role is really the heart and soul of the local phenomenon that is salmon recovery in Washington State.

Typical tasks include: Lead entity coordinators perform outreach to ensure diverse membership, arrange meetings, create agendas, facilitate meetings, perform staff assignments, develop summary minutes and other materials, etc.

- **Solicit project applications:** Lead entity coordinators, in conjunction with their respective citizen committees, perform adequate community outreach within their geographic areas to ensure the public is knowledgeable and has reasonable opportunity to submit eligible salmonid habitat projects for funding, while encouraging project sponsors to implement strategic projects from habitat strategies.

Typical tasks include: Develop program criteria consistent with SRFB guidelines, establish clear and consistent lead entity guidelines for grant processes, advertise grant cycles, process applications, copy and distribute applications for review by the technical advisory group and citizen committee(s).

- **Create a habitat project list for the SRFB:** A habitat project list is the culmination of one year's effort by the lead entity and lead entity organization to implement their habitat strategy or salmon recovery plan. It is the citizen committee that is ultimately responsible for adopting a single, prioritized habitat project list for the lead entity's geographic area. Habitat project lists have the highest potential for meeting the needs of fish when scientific knowledge and social values are effectively combined to generate community support for salmon recovery.

Typical tasks include: Initiate and facilitate committee prioritization meetings, prepare and organize materials, develop program timelines, compile project rankings, provide feedback to project sponsors, ensure project applications are complete, develop responses to SRFB questions, prepare habitat project lists and applications, deliver lists to SRFB, and create oral, written and graphic presentations.

- **Create a habitat work schedule:** Lead entity coordinators, in conjunction with the lead entity organization, create and maintain a schedule (or database) where project information is stored. Lead entities have recently expanded this role to include populating an online database that facilitates implementation of many of our core and expanded roles. The schedule consists of salmon habitat projects funded by many different programs active within the geographic area.

Typical tasks include: Develop a hierarchy for categorizing projects, enter projects into the online database, work with sponsors to update projects as appropriate, etc.

- **Develop, implement, and adaptively manage habitat strategies/plans:** Working with technical and citizen committees of representative interests, lead entity coordinators facilitate the development of a salmon habitat restoration and protection strategy appropriate for local watersheds and salmon populations that meet the goals

established for those populations. In many places, these strategies become part of ESA-mandated Salmon Recovery Plans. In all watersheds there is recognition that our strategies and/or plans must be implemented, assessed, and constantly improved to address changes in knowledge, fish populations, ecosystems, and community values, though the degree to which that is done currently is very much a function of local capacity.

Typical tasks include: Develop and update collaborative, science-based goals, priorities, and actions; track implementation or lack thereof of projects, and progress towards meeting goals; identify and fill data gaps in knowledge needed to refine habitat strategies; and update implementation schedule portion of strategies.

II. Expanded Roles of Lead Entities

Expanded roles of lead entities are those that are either inherent in meeting the core roles but weren't made explicit in the statutory or contractual process, have evolved as the regional processes have developed, or have evolved to increase the effectiveness required for lead entities to meet our salmon recovery goals. Given funding limitations and local situations, these roles are neither defined consistently nor implemented everywhere across watersheds. How lead entity organizations have chosen to define the degree to which they implement these roles creates disparity across the State.

- **Develop and advocate for high priority projects:** This function includes expanding the role that lead entity organizations undertake in developing strategic concepts into ready-to-go projects and then advocating for the steps needed to implement those projects. Without this function being met in some way, regardless of how good the local habitat strategy and/or recovery plan is, there is less chance that the SRFB will see high priority functions. This may involve technical assistance on project design, working with local landowners, integrating city or county planning into salmon recovery planning (or vice versa), identifying additional funding opportunities and submitting grant applications, and potentially integrating regulatory processes such as land use or mitigation into project implementation.
- **Adaptively manage strategies to ensure they remain strong:** This is probably the most complex role in salmon recovery, and is a challenge we need to meet in the coming decade. As spelled out above in lead entity core functions, basic adaptive management of strategies/plans is explicit in statute in that we need to know what we have accomplished already before we propose new projects. However, we also have to know how effective our actions are; use new data to fill gaps of uncertainty related to fish, habitat, or fish/habitat linkages; and assess progress towards meeting goals to re-focus our priorities, all within a monitoring and adaptive management framework where we are testing our hypotheses. These expanded roles are achieved differently across the State, either by lead entity organizations, by regions, by both, or not at all.
- **Support coordination of regional and statewide salmon recovery:** Expanded roles have become apparent for salmon recovery since the Salmon Recovery Act was passed, and include integration of habitat actions with habitat regulations, harvest,

hatcheries, and hydropower, as well as coordination of multiple water resource issues such as water quality/quantity, marine resources planning, etc. These needs evolved through ESA salmon recovery planning (i.e. regional planning) and by the more recent development of an ecosystem based approach to salmon recovery in Puget Sound, among other reasons. In some watersheds, these roles are performed mostly by lead entities, while in other watersheds these roles are performed solely by regional recovery organizations. Regardless, most lead entities have experienced increased needs for supporting regional and statewide salmon recovery planning and watershed planning.

- **Coordinate public outreach and education:** Salmon recovery is premised upon an education process that increases support for necessary actions, which is best accomplished at as fine of a scale as possible. Lead entity organizations are in a key position to educate the public by performing outreach and facilitating education opportunities within their geographic areas. Minimally, lead entities are contractually obligated to make the public aware of local project activities as well as encouraging support and participation. Optimally, most lead entities would like to perform additional broad-based outreach that develops understanding of salmon habitat limiting factors, how we can limit those effects, and develops political support for enhanced activities.
- **Manage additional local project funding processes other than SRFB:** Given lead entity core functions, we are ideally situated to manage other project funding processes that need a strong science foundation and citizen support and implement high priority projects according to habitat recovery strategies/plans. This expanded function, already currently in operation across the State but mostly unfunded, provides significant leverage for additional funding to meet our salmon recovery needs. Examples include Community Salmon Fund, Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration Fund, Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership, mitigation funds, local conservation funds, etc.

III. Current Efficiencies and Leverage Provided by Lead Entities

The most important efficiency that lead entities provide today is an effective, locally-appropriate, scientifically and socio-politically-defensible process for developing a final list of salmon habitat recovery projects for areas identified by a statutorily-defined mandate. This is a direct result of the visionary, grass-roots experiment developed 10 years ago by the Salmon Recovery Act where the Legislature recognized that to achieve change in the trajectory of habitat declines we must empower the citizenry by building their organizational capacity and technical knowledge to create and achieve their own goals for local salmon populations.

Not only does the lead entity program result in a list of projects to be funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, but it “leverages local capacity.” By that, we mean:

- Building community and political support for salmon recovery through local ownership; empowering the people
- Drawing out local expertise about salmon and their habitats

- Building trust, respect, and cooperation between legal regimes, project sponsors, and non-traditional partners like private landowners, cattle ranchers, etc.
- Ensuring project sponsors have all the technical resources and capacity needed to successfully propose, develop, and implement high quality projects
- Recruiting donated citizen, technical, bureaucratic, and manual labor
- Leveraging local funding sources and staff time
- Leveraging strong policy changes at the local level, beyond just projects
- Building institutional capacity to drive the local changes needed for salmon recovery
- Working at the finest scale that is financially-feasible to bring about behavioral changes
- Expressing commitment for salmon recovery just by being present locally

Another important efficiency that is realized through the commitment of operational funding for lead entities is our ability to leverage financial resources well beyond SRFB's funds. With the development of the Habitat Work Schedule and lists of high priority projects ready to go, we have become the go-to, watershed-level source for funding organizations at all scales of government and the private sector. Several watersheds estimate that their project sponsors and lead entity process bring to the table between \$5 and \$10 for every \$1 that SRFB provides in project funding. Without a centralized organizational structure focused on implementing salmon habitat recovery strategies/plans, those external funding sources would be much less effective in meeting the salmon recovery mission.

The clear roles, responsibilities, and coordination between lead entities and regional recovery organizations in most of the State further the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. Lead entities have always been the "project people", while most regional recovery organizations have focused on filling other over-arching needs necessary for achieving comprehensive salmon recovery, including habitat regulatory reforms; ESA planning; hatchery, harvest, and hydropower integration and reforms; and monitoring and adaptive management programs. As discussed below, we believe there are areas where efficiencies can be found through better coordination and planning within these scales, but for the most part, we are already well coordinated.

Given the magnitude of the problems facing salmon recovery, we will not only need to be more efficient, but we will need even more resources in order to meet our salmon recovery goals.

IV. Support Needed to be Effective

In order to ensure habitat project development processes carried out by the lead entity program continue to be effective, we have created a bulleted list of items describing necessary support. These reflect both a minimum level of support to keep an effective statewide program viable, but also some value-added support that would drastically improve effectiveness and efficiency. In meeting these support needs, it is important to try to maintain some institutional memory in their administration.

- Fiscal Support
 - Contract management and troubleshooting
 - Invoicing
 - Higher level grant and operational funding consolidation and pass through
 - Provide Lead Entity Program accountability
- Logistical Support
 - LEAG facilitation such as meeting notes, agenda development, logistics
 - Lead Entity Day with the Legislature
 - Lead entity catalog/directory
 - Lead entity training and workshops
 - Publicity/media outreach
 - Project conference planning, specifically for sharing lessons learned
 - Other conferences to continue to increase lead entity profile
 - Habitat Work Schedule administration and conceptualization
- Policy Support
 - Clear understanding of salmon recovery technical issues and implications so our parent State agency can effectively advocate for supporting policies
 - Integration with existing programs, including communicating relevant science and policy initiatives
 - Washington Dep't of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Watershed Stewards
 - Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups
 - WDFW Habitat Engineering and Technical Assistance
 - WDFW Growth Management Biologists
 - WDFW Habitat Area Biologists
 - Co-manager and federal hatchery and harvest technicians
 - Salmon recovery regions
 - Other agencies
 - ESA focus versus Non-ESA focus
 - RCO grant making policies, including fiscal policy
- Political Support
 - Clear understanding of what it is we do
 - Active support for lead entities as an integral role in salmon recovery

V. Initial Ideas Towards Finding Further Efficiencies

Members of LEAG and the Council of Regions (COR) have had a series of brainstorming discussions about potential ideas for finding further efficiencies in our programs. We have begun to list out the pros and cons of each of these ideas from the LEAG perspective at our last LEAG meeting in January, but it should be recognized that neither LEAG nor COR have tried to achieve consensus on these ideas. It should also be noted that there is a strong desire to support both the lead entity and regional recovery organizations and their roles from most corners of the State and not to let this potential opportunity for reform become a public battle over resources. We hope SRFB and RCO have the same goals.

- **Change lead entity contracting agency from WDFW to RCO:** This has serious implications for LEAG capacity and effectiveness that would need to be addressed

upfront, thoroughly, and with some certainty before any organization involved would be satisfied. The main purpose of Section IV above is to outline an initial list of topics to be addressed by LEAG, RCO, and WDFW in considering implementing this administrative change. Any apparent savings in administrative fees would clearly have to be weighed against the impacts on the support services LEAG needs. At the broadest level, does RCO have the policy support processes in place to backfill WDFW's support, and will they actively support operational capacity for the watershed-level coordination of project development that lead entities provide?

- **Integrate lead entity contracts with regional recovery organization contracts, where the organizations are the same:** This may decrease administrative and reporting burdens, and may increase flexibility to meet salmon recovery priorities as defined regionally. This example could apply to the Snake River, Yakima Recovery Board, Lower Columbia, and Hood Canal. Of concern to LEAG would be that this efficiency approach may result in decreased participation/coordination of these areas in statewide LEAG operations, affecting our efficacy and viability. This idea would also be of significant concern to the Klickitat Lead Entity, if it was enacted in a way that affected their resources and capacity to deliver high quality projects.
- **Improve coordination between lead entity and regional recovery organization contracting and work planning:** In some regional areas, there are clear improvements that can be made by gathering parent State agencies, regional recovery organizations and the lead entities in those regional areas and “rightsizing” lead entity and regional contracts to reflect integrated roles and priorities for the local conditions. This collaborative approach can help in eliminating any real or perceived duplication, finding additional efficiencies, and building consensus on contract tasks, deliverables, priorities, and costs. This also allows for SRFB's human infrastructure to continue evolving differentially given the disparity of conditions and issues facing salmon recovery around the State.
- **Reduce both lead entity and regional recovery organization operational grant sizes:** Reductions in operational grants among SRFB's human infrastructure could save money for additional habitat projects, but there are significant implications for this idea. This could be operationalized by equitable cuts, cuts to organizations who can afford it, cuts to organizations that haven't typically spent their funding, cuts to organizations that implement both lead entity and regional recovery roles, and/or merit-based cuts. However, from the lead entity perspective, other than the idea of merit-based cuts, these ideas bring absolutely zero efficiency forward, and in fact threaten the loss of efficiencies described in Section III above. Given the already low and constantly diminishing (through inflation) funding provided to lead entities already, cuts in operational grant sizes would at best decrease our ability to deliver our roles and at worst virtually eliminate entire watershed programs that local governments and tribes may not be able to afford to backfill anymore.
- **Explore options for integrating LEAG and COR functions and meetings:** The roles and needs of these organizations are fairly distinct so this idea may not flesh out

as an efficiency. However, there are a significant amount of meetings with cross representation, as well as time required for coordination and reporting.

- **Offset travel expenses by increasing video and teleconferencing opportunities:** This could apply to LEAG, COR, SRFB, and SRFB Review Panel, among others.
- **Consider block grants to lead entity organizations:** This could streamline and integrate operational and habitat capital grants to lead entities, while allowing SRFB continued discretion to allocate resources to regional recovery organizations and monitoring. Accountability for technical review could be delegated down to local and regional processes that have been certified by the SRFB. Administrative savings could be realized by this process.