

## 2003 Georgia Basin/Puget Sound Research Conference Challenge and Directions Statement

### Securing a Sustainable Region

#### THE CONTEXT

The Georgia Basin – Puget Sound region is one of the most diverse regions of North America: diverse in its ecology, its landscape, and its peoples. This region is also a place where common concerns and responses must transcend jurisdictional boundaries and cross disciplines to secure a sustainable region.

There are nearly 7 million people in the region now, increasing to an expected over 9 million by 2020. As a result of past rapid growth and in the face of continued growth, cultural icons such as wild Pacific Salmon and resident killer whales are and will be increasingly threatened, as will other important natural resources and local ecosystems.

The 2003 GB-PS Research Conference has demonstrated that although much has been done to stem toxic pollution and to contain urban growth, as well as to protect and restore ecosystems in this outstanding region, many environmental health and ecosystem function issues remain and emerging ones are being recognized. More needs to be done to minimize the ongoing degradation and loss and to protect, recover, and restore the natural qualities of this regional ecosystem if we are to secure its sustainable future.

#### THE CHALLENGE

Our region has undergone change and will continue to experience change. Our challenge is understanding the change and its impact on the overall health of the ecosystem and to develop measures to adapt to or manage the change.

Securing a sustainable region from **environmental perspectives** means:

- Minimizing or stopping ongoing damage, degradation and loss;
- Protecting at-risk landscapes and sensitive ecosystems; and,
- Restoring degraded environmental and ecosystem conditions.

Securing a sustainable region from **social and economic perspectives** means:

Generating, reporting and using science-based, traditional and local environmental knowledge in decision-making;

Understanding, informing and engaging people (through their governments, their for profit and not-for profit organizations, and as individuals) in a dialogue about the importance of environmental, ecosystem and species health to the region's social and economic well-being; and,

Promoting and supporting the effective use of decision-support tools and procedures aimed at triple bottom line policy, planning and implementation strategies – **those that integrate social, economic and environmental considerations to deliver sustainable results.**

## THE CONFERENCE

An international and multidisciplinary group of over 800 scientists, planners, administrators and others representing all orders of government, non-governmental organizations, learning and research institutions, and communities gathered at the Westin Bayshore in Vancouver, B.C from March 31-April 3, 2003 to define and respond to the challenges facing the environmental health and ecological sustainability of the Georgia Basin / Puget Sound region.

Canada's Minister of Environment, the Governor of Washington State, British Columbia's Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection and First Nations / Tribal Leaders gave their strong commitments to a shared approach to addressing the environmental and ecosystem concerns in this region.

Leading global experts advocated a place-based approach – an approach that involves building a strong community awareness of the qualities of this region, forging a strong identity with this place, and taking responsibility for its sustainability by ensuring the protection of human health, communities, natural resources, and supporting ecosystems.

Three hundred presentations, including an unprecedented and highly welcome presentations from Coast Salish delegates were made. Hearing about how Coast Salish peoples lived in balance with the resources in this region for thousands of years provided valuable insight about the principles and practices needed today to secure the region's future. In addition, students from the region's universities and colleges made presentations giving assurance that future research; policy advice and action will receive ongoing commitment from established and new researchers and advisors.

## DIRECTIONS

The conference called for:

1. Continued basic scientific research, more integrated and applied scientific research, and the use of traditional and local knowledge to improve understanding about the complex environmental, biological, chemical, cultural, social and economic dynamics in the region.

2. Public education about these dynamics and the role individuals can take to protect and restore healthy environmental and ecological conditions.

3. Continued development and increasing application of decision support tools to help governments, the private sector, and individuals take the actions necessary to secure a sustainable region.

Decisions made today are tomorrow's legacy. By building on a solid record of years of cooperation and coordination among disciplines and across jurisdictions, these steps will lead to improvements to marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystem and will contribute to ensuring and enhancing our economic and social well being.

### **More research is needed on:**

*Climate change, impacts and adaptation responses  
Technologies for improving air quality, minimizing stormwater and hydrological impacts, understanding pathways and remediating toxins in the system, and preventing and controlling invasive species  
Basic biology, ecology, and stressors of threatened and endangered species  
Ecosystem-level tools for conservation, such as marine protected areas, terrestrial wildlife corridors, and watershed protection plans  
Understanding the long-term threats to health-environment-energy-economic linkages.*

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April 2003