

2023 Keystone Fellowship Position Description

Project Title: Advancing Environmental Justice in the Salish Sea

Host office location

Puget Sound Partnership
Hybrid with offices in Seattle, Tacoma, and Olympia

Name and affiliation of the official fellowship mentors and key partners

Co-mentor: Alison Agnes, alison.agnes@psp.wa.gov; Puget Sound Partnership

Co-mentor: Mindy Roberts, mindy@waconservationaction.org; WA Conservation Action

Additional support from and engagement with:

- Bridget Ray, Salish Sea Collective
- Melissa Schutten, Puget Sound Partnership
- Annalise Del Rio, Puget Sound Partnership
- Lea Anne Burke, Puget Sound Partnership

General Background

The Salish Sea is a significant estuary that provides cultural, economic, and natural resources and relationships to those past, present, and future who consider the Puget Sound region home. Puget Sound is unhealthy: the marine life and surrounding communities suffer as a result. Partners across disciplines have been working together to protect, preserve, and restore the Puget Sound. Representing the collective work of federal, tribal, state, local, nongovernmental, and private organizations, the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) facilitates the development of the Action Agenda, which outlines strategies and actions to achieve a healthy and resilient Puget Sound.

As the work to heal Puget Sound becomes more critical and urgent, so does the recognition that the communities most impacted should inform and guide the protection and restoration of Puget Sound. The organizing work of the Salish Sea Collective, co-facilitated by Washington Conservation Action (WCA), has advanced community leadership in Puget Sound restoration by ensuring that the goals of environmental justice (EJ) are reflected within the Action Agenda. This Keystone Fellow builds on the efforts to integrate EJ into decision-making and priority setting for healing Puget Sound by supporting engagement that is focused on contextualizing EJ in Puget Sound, and by developing a framework of equity and EJ for funding of Puget Sound restoration.

Project Elements

1. Salish Sea Environmental Justice
2. Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration
3. Professional development and networking
4. Mentorship

1. Salish Sea Environmental Justice (~ 40% of Fellow's time)

Background

The Salish Sea Equity and Justice (SSEJ) Symposium was held in fall 2019 to address inequities and identify strategies toward environmental justice (EJ) within the environmental movement and workforce. The symposium was the culmination of years of relationships and work that followed a conference panel at the 2018 Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) that focused on 1) structural racism and inequity in the environmental field across the Salish Sea; 2) power structures and dynamics that influence knowledge production; and 3) ethical and equitable community engagement.

The mission of the SSEJ Symposium was to center historically underrepresented and marginalized voices within the environmental field in the Salish Sea and Pacific Northwest Coast, and to create space for ongoing dialogues related to DEI issues in the environmental field for collective environmental progress. The following EJ themes emerged:

- It is critical to acknowledge and honor tribal sovereignty
- Everyone benefits from a more racially diverse environmental field
- Equitably prioritizing multiple sciences and knowledge production systems can help shift power dynamics
- Evaluation criteria for funding programs can lead to inclusive and equitable outcomes
- Community empowerment can lead to more equitable, ethical, and culturally relevant practices and outcomes

The SSEJ symposium was ahead of its time in 2019 and the understanding and conversation has since transformed beyond DEI to include a larger emphasis on EJ.

Fellowship Goals and Activities

With mentorship from Mindy Roberts and in partnership with the Salish Sea Collective, the Keystone Fellow will lead the coordination of a new iteration of the SSEJ symposium by designing the Salish Sea Environmental Justice Workshop to be held in fall or winter 2023. The workshop will focus on what conservation looks like now and may include engaging around questions such as: what does it mean to be part of the Puget Sound recovery community? What does environmental health mean across different communities? What does community-led healing of the Salish Sea look like?

Aspects of this role may include:

- Coordinating and engaging across EJ partners, community leaders, and professionals
- Supporting the creation of a workshop advisory committee, and facilitating agendas for the advisory committee meetings

- Supporting partnership development with community-based organizations to contextualize environmental justice within the Salish Sea
- Plan dialogues and develop engagement tools focused on the themes elevated from the SSEJ symposium
- Assessing, synthesizing, and communicating workshop objectives and outcomes

2. Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (~ 40% of Fellow's time):

Background

The Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) program was created in 2007 by Washington State Legislature, which has allocated \$300 million through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) over the last 15 years, to identify and implement the most important habitat protection and restoration projects in the Puget Sound region. The Salmon Recovery Council (SRC) defines the high-level priorities for the PSAR funds and local entities identify and submit candidate projects. In collaboration with the Salmon Science Advisory Group (SSAG), projects are ranked based on criteria to identify projects with the greatest benefit for salmon.

The last 15 years of PSAR funding provides an opportunity to learn from the projects that were funded, projects that were rejected, and how policy priorities and ranking criteria have changed the outcome of funded projects. Currently, the program is being evaluated on its achieved outcomes of funded projects relative to proposed outcomes and will evaluate interactions with policy priorities and criteria. The results are anticipated to help PSP and the SSAG improve ranking criteria and help the SRC define future investment priorities in its strategic planning.

In collaboration with key partners, PSAR is undergoing the development of a 10-year strategic plan. The objectives include: 1) develop a business strategy for growing the PSAR program; 2) develop an adaptive management strategy to make the program more effective over time (informed in part by the 15-year review); and 3) be compliant with the HEAL Act. Integrating a framework for equity and environmental justice (EJ) within the PSAR 10-year strategic plan is important for meeting these objectives and the Partnership's statutory goals.

Fellowship Goals and Activities

The Keystone Fellow will play a key role in the development of the equity and EJ framework for the PSAR 10-year strategic plan. Aspects of this role may include:

- Reviewing the 15-year review to inform an equity analysis
- Developing an equity analysis and framework for the PSAR 10-year plan
- Engaging with the SRC and other partners to support buy in and consensus building
- Supporting relationship building with overburdened communities, tribal engagement processes, and analysis of HEAL Act compliance
- Coordinating feedback, comments, and distributing updated information

3. Professional development and networking (~20% of Fellow's time)

The Fellow is encouraged to participate throughout PSP programs, including attending and engaging in all-staff meetings and Salmon Recovery Council meetings. Depending on Fellow interest, there are opportunities to attend organizational or statewide trainings, attend conferences focused on Salish Sea restoration, participate in interagency workgroups or coalition meetings, attend Salish Sea Collective meetings, and engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion gatherings and workgroups. Both PSP and WCA support the fellow in gaining experience and deeper understanding in program evaluation, community engagement, partnership development, science communication, multi-benefit environmental restoration, and ecosystem-based management.

4. Mentorship

The Keystone Fellow will work under the umbrella of the Salish Sea Collective as a representative of both WCA and PSP. Alison (PSP) manages PSAR, which aims to align with the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan and Action Agenda. Mindy (WCA) serves as a co-vice chair of the Salmon Recovery Council, which advises on the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan. Together, they will provide coordinated mentorship on the development and implementation of recovery planning and evaluation. This unique partnership will support the Fellow to explore the coordination and application of environmental restoration efforts between governmental and nongovernmental organizations, The Salish Sea Collective's director, Bridget Ray (Ojibwe), collaborates across organizations that work to explore a community-centered approach to Salish Sea recovery. With strong support from Bridget, the Fellow will engage with the Salish Sea Collective and its members, which offer an expanded network of practitioners, community-leaders, and professionals who seek an equitable recovery of the Salish Sea.

Keystone Program Alignment Statement

The Puget Sound Partnership began its journey to incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and environmental justice (EJ) into our work in 2018. We formed a DEI Working Group, which contributed to an Executive Director's Memorandum in 2019 that committed to adopting DEI throughout the agency and adopting goals, objective, and policies for DEI in the context of PSP, among other accountability commitments.

The DEI Working Group also created a policy paper in 2020 that led to their development of a 2021 legislative budget request, which, together with the passage of the HEAL Act, allowed us to create our Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Program and hire the Partnership's EEJ Manager, Tribal Affairs Manager, and EJ Coordinator to create the new EEJ Team. The passage of the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act (SB 5141) in 2021 identifies PSP as one of seven agencies across the state mandated to develop policies and programs most directly impactful to environmental justice.

HEAL further establishes environmental justice obligations for the Partnership, including requirements to participate in the state’s Environmental Justice Council and interagency workgroup, develop and implement community engagement and tribal consultation frameworks, incorporate environmental justice into implementation plans and budget development processes, and reporting on impacts and outcomes of environmental justice.

Washington Conservation Action recognizes that “as a historically white-led environmental organization that still holds structural power today, WCA is committed to dismantling systemic racism and advancing racial equity and environmental justice in all we do.”

Over the past five years, WCA has transformed its processes and priorities to center environmental justice and equity in the work we do. We recognize the systems and institutions that exploit and destroy the natural world are often the same ones that burden and harm communities. As a historically white dominant environmental organization, we must acknowledge environmental issues at the root. We must address the legacy and impacts of institutional racism in our communities, political systems, and environment in order to restore our connections to ourselves, each other, and the environment.

Our vision is that through equitable structures and systems created by statewide, collaborative efforts, everyone in Washington lives in a healthy and just environment, community, and economy. Our mission is to develop, advocate, and defend policies that ensure environmental progress and justice by centering and amplifying the voices of the most impacted communities. We are working to dismantle unjust systems and seeking far-reaching, inclusive collaborations to build solidarity that benefits everyone across race, class, zip code, and identity.

We work to protect clean water for communities and wildlife by reducing toxics and other pollution from stormwater, wastewater, and legacy pollution sites across the state. With partners and Tribes, we accelerate transitions to healthy shorelines and thriving salmon habitat. Finally, we ensure the public’s voice drives policy priorities through action alerts, public comment periods, and community-based events, environmental lobby days, and volunteer opportunities.