

# THE PUGET SOUND-GEORGIA BASIN INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE

Washington, U.S. – British Columbia, Canada



Source: Environment Canada, Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative

## INTRODUCTION

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Combined with burgeoning economic opportunities in trade and technology, the natural beauty of its oceanfront and forest landscapes have drawn much attention to the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin ecoregion. The Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force (Task Force) is one of the many regional initiatives focused on protecting the area's precious natural resources in the face of increasing development. What has made the Task Force particularly effective in its ability to implement true ecosystem management is its *mandate* to work on a transboundary basis. No aspect of this region's environment can realistically be separated from the larger Sound-Basin ecosystem, and the Task Force recognizes this reality. Shared equally between the State of Washington

and the Province of British Columbia (B.C.), this marine complex is inherently binational.

Spawned from the landmark Environmental Cooperation Agreement signed between the state and province in the early 1990s, the Task Force provides a good example of how government agencies in countries with clearly different management regimes and operating procedures can *effectively* coordinate the joint stewardship of natural resources. Additionally, the Task Force proves that government can respond to ecological challenges when commitment and strategic planning are part of the process.

### **Why Transboundary Management?**

For those agencies with jurisdiction over environmental issues in the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin region, it only makes sense to operate under the rubric of a single, binational ecosystem. As was stated by an employee of the B.C. Ministry of Environment, “what we really have here is a joint ecosystem, and we have to admit that.”<sup>1</sup> While B.C. and Washington follow different governmental frameworks and operating procedures, agency practitioners working within the region realize the need for both sides to work toward common, ecosystemic goals. Clearly, the marine resources do not acknowledge the political boundary between Washington and B.C. Consequently, the agencies managing these resources have found it futile to ignore this reality, making transboundary management efforts virtually necessary.

Since the inception of the Task Force, individuals, from political leaders to on-the-ground practitioners, have been a driving force behind sustainability and effectiveness. In addition, the organization’s structure works with and not against the distinct government structures of the two countries involved. This has been a particularly important aspect of the Task Force’s operations, for without an acceptable coordination mechanism, the fate of the Sound-Basin ecosystem remains subject to the whim of disjointed management styles.

## **CONTEXT**

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### **The Puget Sound-Georgia Basin Ecosystem**

The shared waters of British Columbia and Washington form one large hydrologic system composed of three natural basins. To the north lies the Strait of Georgia; to the south, lies Puget Sound; and connecting the two with the Pacific Ocean is the Strait of Juan de Fuca.<sup>2</sup> In combination, these systems form an estuary, “where seawater from the open Pacific Ocean is diluted by fresh water from numerous rivers... originating high in the surrounding glaciated mountains.”<sup>3</sup> The muddy shores of the inland sea created by Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia provide habitat for commercial and recreational shellfish such as oysters and crabs.<sup>4</sup> The upland habitats, from the water’s edge to the highest mountains, play a particularly critical role in maintaining the health of the ecosystem.

## Land Ownership Pattern

Both Washington and B.C. were once heavily forested, which has helped to shape the land ownership patterns of the region. Today, the U.S. Forest Service and forest products industries are the main commercial forestland owners in Washington, at 31% and 26% respectively.<sup>5</sup> In the Puget Sound area, the majority of land is not owned by the federal government but is divided between the state, counties, and corporate and individual private landowners.<sup>6</sup> The situation in B.C. is simplified by the fact that the Provincial government owns 97% of the commercial forestlands and much of the province is forested. For example, 91% of Vancouver Island, home to the City of Victoria and one the Georgia Basin's major land masses, is under forest cover. As of 1993, only 20% of the Island, forested or not, was privately owned.<sup>7</sup>

## Ecological and Economic Values

The scenic beauty and rich natural resource base of Puget Sound and the Georgia Basin are inextricably tied to the region's thriving economy. Regardless of whether or not business owners have a personal interest in environmental protection, many of their livelihoods depend on the health of the area's ecosystems. In particular, commercial and tribal fisheries, shellfish growers, agriculture, forestry, recreation and tourism-related industries, and real estate development benefit from, and even rely upon, a high quality natural environment to succeed. Salmon fishing from Puget Sound area streams alone brings in over \$80 million per year, while the Sound's oyster industry is one of the top sources of commercial oysters nationwide.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the mild climate, outdoor amenities, and favorable economic conditions have attracted many workers to the region, leading a number of industries to relocate there. For example, companies with interests in aerospace, advanced technology (such as software and wireless communications), and international trade now comprise the majority of the urban-based regional economy.<sup>9</sup>

## Ecosystem Stresses

In the past 25 years, the population of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin region has more than doubled, and it is predicted that in the next 15 years, the population may double again, putting enormous pressures on the area's environment. "With rapid population increases, rich agricultural land is lost to housing and roads, wildlife habitat is lost or destroyed, and some species are put at grave risk."<sup>10</sup>

Increasing urbanization is among the factors that have led to further decline in species populations already listed as either threatened or endangered by the U.S. federal government. These include: the gray wolf, grizzly bear, bald eagle, northern spotted owl, leatherback and loggerhead sea turtles, the Oregon silverspot butterfly, and several plants and fish species.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly at risk are the 200+ species of fish and other aquatic organisms that live in the inland sea's waters. The current controversies surrounding salmon and hydropower interests in the Pacific Northwest indicate the strong influence of fish populations on the regional economy and ecology. Unfortunately, "many of these [species] are now less

abundant than they were just a few years ago – in some cases, alarmingly so.”<sup>12</sup> Declines in regional marine fish stocks can be linked primarily to overfishing, although changes in climate and ocean conditions have taken their toll as well.<sup>13</sup> In addition, many of the oysters, clams, and mussels are contaminated by bacteria and viruses derived from urban sewage and agricultural runoff. Birds living on the shores of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin system and feeding from its waters have also been negatively affected. Chemical contaminants are blamed for eggshell thinning and deformities in some bird populations.<sup>14</sup> Other threats to the region’s ecology include exotic species (brought in with ballast water), freshwater diversions, and oil spills.<sup>15</sup>

### **History of Regional Cooperation**

Fortunately, both B.C. and Washington have a history of transboundary environmental successes from which to draw the strength to fight these current ecological battles. B.C. has the distinction of being the Canadian province engaged in the most transboundary agreements, participating in 38% of all state-provincial interactions.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Washington is the state most active in transboundary collaboration - often in partnership with B.C. - with 34 agreements to its name.

At the local level, the governments of San Juan County in the U.S. and Canada’s Gulf Islands have been working together to develop shared Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within their jurisdictions.<sup>17</sup> There is a Memorandum of Agreement between these jurisdictions, specifically stating that efforts will be made to designate and manage a transboundary MPA.

In addition, Native American First Nations and tribes in the region are inherently transboundary and, as a general rule, do not distinguish themselves as different populations on each side of the arbitrary line which splits their homeland. Working on a transboundary basis is second nature for groups like the Coast Salish. In fact, the Coast Salish word for “border” simply means “fence” or “the division down the middle of a house.”<sup>18</sup> Such a definition clearly diminishes the perception of the U.S.-Canada border as any sort of insurmountable barrier.

### **History of the Task Force**

As the 1990s approached, U.S. and Canadian concerns regarding the declining health of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin ecosystem escalated, and the need to build from past collaborative efforts became glaringly important. Officials in the U.S. were particularly worried about the Canadians “apparent lack of progress” in sewage treatment and the destructive impact that continual discharges from large, waterfront cities like Victoria and Vancouver would have on the quality of the marine environment.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the Canadians had concerns about U.S. activities in the shared waters, including supertanker shipments of Alaskan crude oil to the lower 48 via Puget Sound and their potential for catastrophic and permanently damaging oil spills. In addition, terrestrial and aquatic systems on both sides of the border were beginning to feel the negative effects of a recent population boom experienced across the northern Pacific coast. As pressures on the region’s natural resources intensified, issues of growth management assumed top priority in both Washington and British Columbia.

Wishing to address these concerns, policymakers in the U.S. and Canada began talking to one another about devising a proactive plan. Clearly, “the old patterns of intermittent and ad hoc activity, or reliance upon reactive federal mechanisms after problems reached a critical stage...were going to be inadequate to meet the needs of a growing region that places a high value on its natural environment.”<sup>20</sup> With that in mind, executives in the B.C. Ministry of Environment and the Washington Department of Ecology met informally in May of 1991 to discuss options for what might best encourage more effective cooperation among the various jurisdictions relevant to the situation.<sup>21</sup>

This meeting opened the channels of communication between agencies on both sides of the border and clarified the responsibilities assumed by each.<sup>22</sup> It also made evident the existence of an “institutional gap” regarding how to most appropriately administer transboundary environmental management. The feeling among those at the meeting was that an upper-level political endorsement, perhaps in the form of a mandate for information sharing, was needed.

Sparked by that initial meeting in 1991, Washington Governor Booth Gardner and B.C. Premier Mike Harcourt signed an Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA) in May of 1992.<sup>23</sup> The ECA laid the groundwork for the state and the province to work together on transboundary environmental problems.<sup>24</sup> In 1999, U.S. EPA Administrator Carol Browner, and Canadian Minister of the Environment David Anderson, signed their own statement of regional environmental cooperation.<sup>25</sup> This agreement, which is not limited to marine issues but also includes growth management and air quality issues, has been fully blessed by both federal governments as a formal international agreement.

### Significant Milestones

- 1991-** Initial meetings between Washington and B.C. officials to discuss joint management options for the Sound-Straits ecosystem.
- 1992-** Environmental Cooperation Agreement signed by Governor of Washington and Premier of British Columbia. Environmental Cooperation Council created.
- Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force established.
- 1999-** Agreement signed by U.S. EPA Administrator and Canadian Minister of Environment.

## APPROACH TO TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

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### Involved Stakeholders

Recognizing the need to build permanent bridges for effective information exchange across national boundaries, the first action under the ECA was the establishment of an Environmental Cooperation Council, which in turn created the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force (the Task Force).<sup>26</sup> Upon initiation, the Task Force included representatives of U.S. EPA, the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Environment Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Washington Department of Ecology, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Puget Sound Water Quality Authority, the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.<sup>27</sup> Task Force co-chairs are the B.C. Ministry of Environment and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team.

The most recent additions to the Task Force include the Coast Salish First Nations in B.C. as well as the Northwest Straits Commission, an organization based in the San Juan Islands that is concerned about protecting and improving the natural environment of the region's northern straits.<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of these groups lengthens the reach of the Task Force into important Native American and local communities.

### Task Force Members

- U.S. organizations represented:
  - Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
  - Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NOAA)
  - Northwest Straits Commission
  - Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team
  - Washington Dept. of Ecology
  - Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
  - Washington Dept. of Natural Resources
  - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
  - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Canadian organizations represented:
  - B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands, & Parks
  - Coast Salish Sea Initiative
  - Environment Canada
  - Fisheries and Oceans Canada
  - Parks Canada

The official involvement of the Northwest Straits Commission is particularly interesting because they are the only local government representatives on the Task Force. The U.S. Congress established the Commission two years ago to protect and restore the marine resources of northern Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.<sup>29</sup> This work is done through seven Marine Resources Committees (MRCs), which were established under legislation passed by the county commissioners in each of the seven counties in this geographic area. These committees enjoy a diversity of stakeholders, including local scientists as well as leaders from industry, conservation, and government. The Commission provides technical assistance and funding to the MRCs and helps to coordinate special regional projects between them. The authorizing report which created the Northwest Straits Commission calls for joint action with Canadian counterparts when appropriate. As a result of their appointment to the Task Force, the Northwest Straits Commission is now well positioned to make the contacts that can help facilitate such cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

Having the Coast Salish First Nations sitting at the Task Force table is another important step toward furthering transboundary collaboration in Puget Sound-Georgia Basin. The Coast Salish are Native Americans whose traditional territory spans the B.C.-Washington border. The binational Coast Salish family includes 55 Canadian First Nations and 30 U.S. tribes.<sup>31</sup> They are represented on the Task Force by the Coast Salish Sea Initiative, a policy forum which addresses environmental issues, like air and water quality, that are important to Coast Salish communities.<sup>32</sup>

While the Task Force has broadened its membership to include non-traditional governmental entities like the Coast Salish Sea Initiative, there have been no official appointments of completely non-governmental partners to date. However, such

organizations have been active in Task Force work groups. For example, Adopt-a-Beach and People for Puget Sound are both involved in exotic species eradication and education efforts organized under the larger Task Force umbrella.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Task Force's Organizational Structure**

As indicated by the agencies it represents, the Task Force tends to focus on state- and provincial- level activities rather than those that occur at the local level.<sup>34</sup> There are over 120 cities within the entire Puget Sound-Strait of Juan de Fuca area alone, and the Task Force is simply not equipped to address the individual challenges of all these local municipalities. Instead, Task Force work groups try to engage local governments on issues that specifically affect them. These work groups address various dimensions of habitat restoration, the protection of marine life, and the eradication of exotic species.

Task Force meetings are held on a biannual basis, alternating between being held the U.S. and Canada. Despite this attempt to equitably distribute meeting locations, it is often difficult for Task Force members to attend those meetings which are not held in their country. The area covered by the Task Force is large and “all the water in the middle makes it hard to get around.”<sup>35</sup> The meetings are open to the public and have occasionally attracted members of environmental and other public interest groups.

The B.C. Ministry of Environment and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team are Task Force co-chairs in perpetuity.<sup>36</sup> These positions stay within these agencies regardless of whether or not the individuals currently serving as co-chairs remain agency employees. This stipulation demonstrates the seriousness of commitment to the Task Force on the part of both the Province of British Columbia and the State of Washington.

### **Goals and Strategies**

The Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force has both policy or process-based objectives as well as on-the-ground, ecological benchmarks it hopes to achieve. Often times these goals are pursued simultaneously and, as one of the Task Force co-chairs has stated, “you can never be too sure of where one takes over from the other.”<sup>37</sup> When asked about the Task Force's strategies for goal achievement, the Canadian co-chair told the following story:

There was this one case where there was boat coming in from Michigan through Washington State and it had zebra mussels attached to it, and it was spotted down in the States. The guy who spotted it wasn't quite sure of his authority and knew if he exceeded his authority he could be fired. So, the boat made its way into Canada, but this guy helped us find out its license, its destination, and that sort of thing, and we were able to prevent that boat from being launched before we got it cleaned up. Now, is that the result of technical on-the-ground know-how or is it because we had a policy that we work together on trying to prevent that from happening? I don't know. It's probably both.

## Operating Procedures

The Task Force is an effort that has truly been shaped by its circumstances. The difficulty in traveling around the region combined with the divergent governmental arrangements and policies employed by the U.S. and Canada has led the Task Force to adopt a parallel tracks structure. Essentially, this means that each side works within the guidelines of its jurisdictional authorities – no new governmental structure has been created. However, the Task Force’s mission of “promoting and coordinating mutual efforts” requires that its members communicate regularly to make sure they are on the same track.<sup>38</sup> Most of the communication between Task Force members is over the phone although face-to-face interaction occurs at least quarterly if not more often for various work group activities.

The details of cross-border coordination introduced complexities that Task Force founders were unable to fully foresee. Although Task Force work groups were intended to be truly *transboundary*, it has been structurally and logistically impossible for these groups to actually accomplish anything based only on *in situ* interactions with each other. Despite the fact that “the speed of light does not actually change at the border,” the link provided by common scientific understanding of the problems at hand is not strong enough to overcome institutional difference.<sup>39</sup> The governmental structures within which the B.C. and Washington contingencies are working are so profoundly different that it has generally seemed irrelevant to have the groups struggle to meet jointly as long as they are working in parallel.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Task Force has been able to generate good, defensible ideas through its integration of the science and policy surrounding many of the region’s pressing environmental concerns, it is not a body whose decisions have any particular official authority.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, the Task Force is non-threatening, which has facilitated more willing participation by some of its members. It has not been, nor will ever be, an adversarial forum within which, for example, “the Americans try to get the Canadians to treat Victoria’s sewage or the Canadians try to get the Americans to not over-fish salmon.”<sup>42</sup> The Task Force is about sharing information and jointly investigating common problems. Through this process, each side will hopefully learn to do things better.

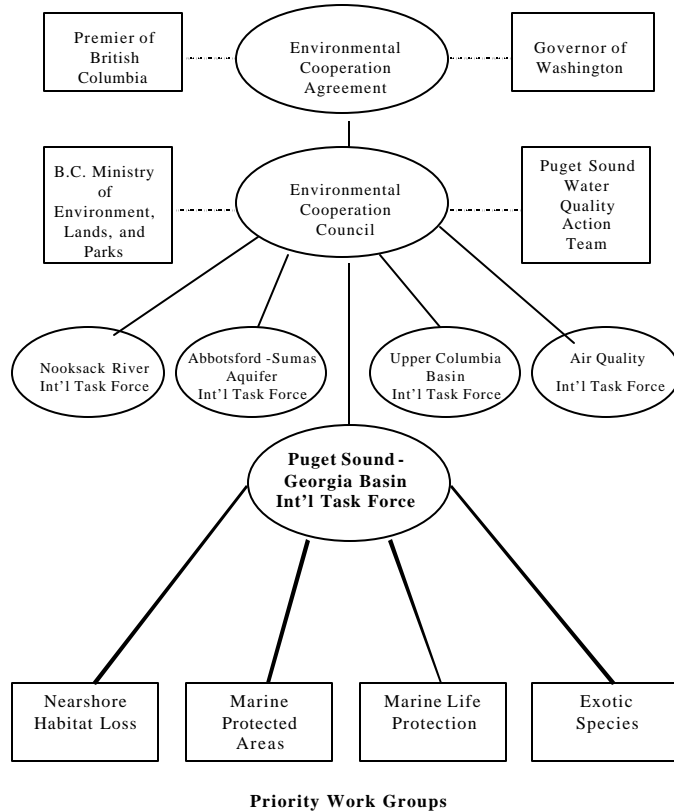
The Task Force reports to the Environmental Cooperation Council whose members have the ability to endorse recommended policies and actions. Such endorsement lends legitimacy to the Task Force itself and makes it easier for its member agencies to lobby for funds in support of various transboundary projects like near shore habitat restoration, to give a recent example. In the simplest terms, “they either endorse stuff that we [the Task Force] come to them with or they help us [the Task Force] get stuff done.”<sup>43</sup>

Both Task Force co-chairs utilize appropriate government channels to further the Task Force’s mission. For example, the B.C. Ministry of Environment is involved in a multi-agency project called the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative (GBEI) which it hopes use as an mechanism to implement some of the work identified by the Task Force. Much of



the Task Force’s agenda regarding habitat restoration and toxic pollution prevention is being carried out, on the Canadian side, via GBEI.<sup>44</sup>

### Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force



### Barriers to Working Across Borders

A significant barrier to the Task Force’s transboundary operations was the one-year withdrawal of British Columbia from all Task Force activities.<sup>45</sup> At the time the Pacific Salmon Treaty was being renegotiated, B.C. Premier Harcourt became very upset over what he considered to be unjustifiably high fish take limits on the part of the U.S. Even though the Task Force does not address the Pacific Salmon Treaty specifically, B.C. banned its members from participating until the debate over fishing allotments was settled. What ensued was that the Washington leaders of the Task Force’s workgroups moved ahead, conducting studies and making recommendations, while the B.C. contingency fell behind. When B.C. rejoined the Task Force a year later, there was little else to do but simply set up a parallel but clearly separate structure on the Canadian side of the border.

In addition, some have cited the formidable nature and “awkwardness of government-to-government types of structures” like the Task Force as problematic.<sup>46</sup> Although the Task Force is diverse in its governmental representation, there is no explicit detailed

description of the responsibilities and appropriate point people for each agency. It has been suggested that a matrix containing this information could have a phenomenal impact on facilitating transboundary collaboration.<sup>47</sup> However, it is often the case that responsibilities are not evenly matched among counterpart agencies. For example, a local agency in the U.S. with a mandate to maintain fish habitat may have the authority to designate a Marine Protected Area while its Canadian equivalent does not.<sup>48</sup>

There have also been issues with data sharing. Canada does not have a Freedom of Information Act like the U.S., making it so its government agencies have a lot more difficulty legally sharing information with others. In terms of swapping technical data across the international border, further complications have arisen due to the utilization of different, and often incompatible, data set formats in each country.<sup>49</sup>

Lastly, the unresolved treaty negotiations among the Coast Salish First Nations and the Canadian federal government have added layers of complexity and uncertainty to the work of the Task Force. The majority of treaties in place in B.C. are pre-confederated treaties, and, in fact, most of the First Nations in the Georgia Basin region are not covered by treaties.<sup>50</sup> This situation leaves the Canadian Coast Salish unsure of which of their rights, if any, are being protected by the government. On the U.S. side, however, the Coast Salish enjoy greater clarification on this issue. The U.S. Coast Salish have agreements in place for fisheries management, zoning, and water quality among other things.

### ***Opposition to the Task Force***

While the Task Force has not made any truly harmful enemies, the main criticisms against it have come from the U.S. side. Environmental groups, such as the American Oceans Campaign, have lodged complaints stating that the Task Force is not pushing the Canadians to do their part in tackling the tough environmental issues facing the shared ecosystem.<sup>51</sup> These environmental advocacy organizations will occasionally comment on this issue at the Task Force's public meetings.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

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In spite of the challenges it has faced, the Task Force has been particularly successful in opening the lines of communication between concerned parties in both B.C. and Washington. The practice of information sharing has seemed to benefit the Canadians in particular, since it has brought together agencies and organizations in B.C. that have never before worked together.<sup>52</sup> However, in addition to greatly increasing the frequency of interaction between various governmental entities on the Canadian side, the Task Force has also been the forum within which U.S. participants have been able to push ahead on the latest wave of more comprehensive ecosystem management-based initiatives.

Participants credit the Task Force specifically with facilitating effective cross-border communication. At Task Force meetings, each member present delivers an update on the

recent activities of his or her agency. This not only provides a direct conduit for information sharing, but it also allows individuals to be brought up to speed on important regional issues which with they may not be intimately involved.<sup>53</sup> In light of these benefits and in the face of various logistical challenges, the fact that the Task Force meets on a regular basis is a major accomplishment in and of itself. Fifteen years ago, it was considered a big deal for someone from “the other side” to attend a meeting of one side’s practitioners with the purpose of sharing information. Thanks in large part to the Task Force, this practice has become second nature to those working on environmental issues throughout the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin region.<sup>54</sup>

Short of eliminating the international border all together, the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force is “probably working better than any other thing you could do” to effect transboundary ecosystem management.<sup>55</sup> Genuine effort has been made by parties on both sides of the border to be inclusive in all efforts that are relevant to the work of the Task Force. For example, U.S. members have been invited to attend meetings of the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative, while, likewise, the leaders of the Puget Sound Research Council have redefined their scope to reflect the interconnected nature of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin ecosystem complex.<sup>56</sup> These occurrences indicate a clear shift in the mentality of working on transboundary environmental issues in the region. In the last 10 to 15 years, practitioners have gone from barely talking to their counterparts on the other side of the border to actively participating in each other’s activities. Exemplified by the work of the Task Force, this trend toward ecosystem thinking has pervaded organizations throughout the region and has perhaps been the greatest and most far-reaching of its accomplishments.<sup>57</sup>

While some believe that the significant outcomes of a process like the Task Force are more about inclusive cross-border participation than specific ecological results, the Task Force has enjoyed numerous ecological successes. As discussed earlier, open lines of communication between countries prevented zebra mussels from spreading throughout the Georgia Basin and up into the Fraser River. In addition, the results of B.C.-based efforts to monitor the effects of hatchery-raised salmon on native populations have been shared with colleagues in Washington.<sup>58</sup>

The ease with which agencies on both sides of the border are able to learn from each other is one of the more significant outcomes of Task Force involvement. The U.S. and Canada have a historically competitive relationship, as nations of similar stature often do. In light of this reality, it is encouraging and almost surprising that Task Force participants have not been hesitant to borrow ideas from “the other” country. A good case in point is the free-flowing exchange of information between two Task Force work groups.<sup>59</sup> A U.S. official on the Marine Protected Areas work group essentially copied the successful and well-tested Canadian model and adapted it to meet Washington State standards. This Task Force member was then able to return the favor by lending her expertise on specific protection strategies for marine plants and animals to her Canadian colleagues involved with a different work group.

## Special Factors Facilitating Transboundary Action

In a deliberate effort to not reinvent the wheel, the Task Force essentially followed in the footsteps of the Environmental Cooperation Council (ECC) and has greatly benefited as a result. The ECC has been remarkably successful, “attracting the attention of bodies such as the CEC [Commission on Environmental Cooperation] and the IJC [International Joint Commission] as a model of transborder cooperation.”<sup>60</sup> In its unobtrusive manner, the ECC has been able to catalyze real action and improve lines of communication among a host of stakeholders, ranging from government to the scientific community to citizen interest groups.<sup>61</sup> Like the ECC, the Task Force built from existing governmental frameworks, avoiding the unnecessary and unwelcome extension of bureaucracy throughout the region.<sup>62</sup> Such simplification has had the unanticipated consequence of requiring that officials in both B.C. and Washington learn more about each other’s differences and seek more creative options for problem solving.

The role of individuals cannot be overstated in a discussion of what has made the Task Force successful in transboundary resource management. In particular, the friendship between Washington Governor Booth Gardner and B.C. Premier Mike Harcourt as well as their personal commitments to environmental causes have been heralded as key to getting the Task Force up and running.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, this political endorsement lent prominence and legitimacy to an endeavor with high hopes but no definitive plan for how its goals were going to be achieved.

Individual Task Force members have also been credited with providing critical momentum to the joint effort.<sup>64</sup> Specifically, an enthusiastic participant from U.S. EPA has been cited as especially essential to the perpetuation of the Task Force. If he had retired six or seven years ago as he had originally planned, it was feared that the whole process would fall apart. However, he only just retired two years ago, leaving a stable and functioning Task Force in his stead. His visionary ecosystem view has now become “engrained in the bureaucratic mentality” of those agencies involved in the Task Force, ensuring that they will work together to protect the viability of the holistic unit.<sup>65</sup> However, it is still important for the Task Force to be able to rely on its individual members to take the initiative to make things happen within their respective agencies.

## CONCLUSION

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The Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force has many bragging points, from establishing effective cross-border procedural strategies to achieving on-the-ground successes in ecological protection. In addition, the precedent set by having a state and province initiate and then enter into what was to become a successful template of a transboundary agreement is particularly significant. The subnational leadership of the Task Force is important to the assertion that not all transboundary work needs to be derived from the federal level.<sup>66</sup> Although federal participation was sought, Task Force initiators made it clear that they were committed to proceeding with their agenda regardless of whether or not federal officials were involved.

Both observers and participants claim the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force has been an overall success to date. The Canadian co-chair cites the 2000 U.S. EPA-Environment Canada agreement, which was modeled after the ECA that established the Task Force, as case in point that this is a model that works.<sup>67</sup> Although each cross-border region in North America has its own particular details to wrestle with, the experience of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin Task Force provides a road map for others struggling with the issue of reconciling differing governmental structures for the sake of thwarting impending ecological threats.

## Lessons

The Task Force story highlights a number of lessons that can be helpful, when applicable, to future transboundary ecosystem management initiatives:

- **A formal structure can be powerful.** Utilizing established governmental frameworks can be an advantage in that the transboundary effort has direct access to policy and decision makers.
- **Working within existing government frameworks facilitates effective transboundary management.** The U.S. and Canadian partners engaged in this effort are constantly learning from each other and copying each other's best management practices, instead of "reinventing the wheel" or forcing the creation of a new international governmental agency.
- **Political support can get things started.** This project clearly benefited from the fact the Premier and Governor were friends committed to helping each other solve joint problems.
- **Individuals involved at all levels are important.** Beyond political leaders, there are key individuals that have helped keep the Task Force going. Without commitment, from both sides, to the goals of a joint mission, it is doomed to fail.
- **Risk-taking is part of the process.** Transboundary ecosystem management is a tricky and uncertain endeavor, often requiring a leap of faith from where most agency practitioners are used to operating. Its rewards can be great, but only if participants are willing and able to take chances.

### Interview Contacts

- **Tom Cowan**, Task Force member (U.S.), Executive Director of the Northwest Straits Commission
- **John Dohrmann**, U.S. Co-Chair of the Task Force, Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team
- **Gordon Hanson**, Task Force member (Canada), consultant to the Coast Salish Sea Initiative
- **Les Swain**, Canadian Co-Chair of the Task Force, B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Les Swain, Canadian Co-Chair, Puget Sound-Georgia Basin International Task Force, personal communication, January 24, 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Shared Waters: The Vulnerable Inland Sea of British Columbia and Washington,” <http://www.epa.gov/region10/www/regional/pugsnd/bcwaswl.html> (September 11, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Matt Dadswell and Tom Stewart, Ph.D., “Regional Environmental Planning and the Land Exchange Process,” proceedings from the 1999 American Planning Association National Planning Conference, <http://www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings99/DADSWELL/DADSWELL.HTM> (March 7, 2001).
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- <sup>7</sup> British Columbia Land Use Coordination Office, “Vancouver Island Summary Land Use Plan: Introduction,” <http://www.luco.gov.bc.ca/slupinbc/vanisle/1.htm#1> (March 7, 2001).
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- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>11</sup> National Estuary Program, [www.epa.gov/nep/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep/nep) (September 11, 2000).
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<sup>63</sup> Kiy and Wirth (1998), pp.59, 70.  
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