



Summary Report of Input from Puget Sound Riparian Professionals Climate Resilient Riparian Systems Lead

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For the **Shorelands and Environmental Assistance
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Related Information

- CR2SL Investment Plan
- CR2SL Tribal Engagement Plan
- CR2SL Funding Guidelines

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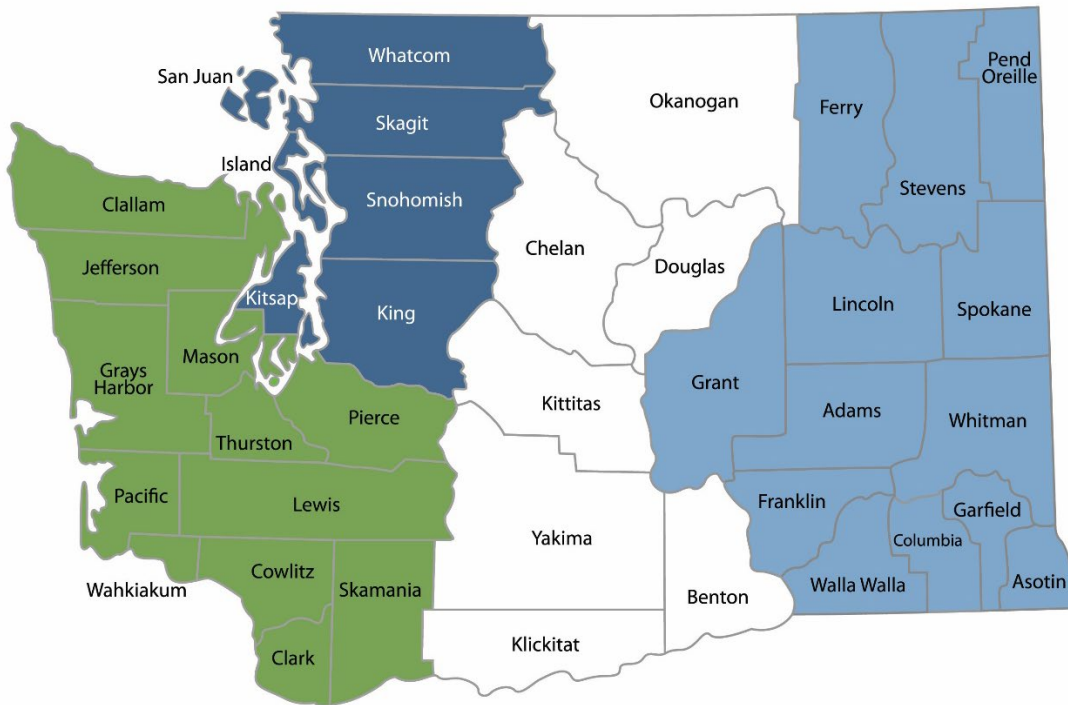
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DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables	6
Figures.....	6
Tables.....	6
Acknowledgements	7
Introduction.....	8
Key Takeaways	8
Engagement Activities	9
Summary of Engagement Activities.....	9
Meetings with Local Organizations.....	10
Tribal Engagement.....	11
Riparian Workshops.....	13
Themes Identified.....	15
Engaging private landowners to increase riparian protection and restoration.....	15
Long term site stewardship and monitoring.....	17
Support for native plants and propagation	18
Implementation and organizational capacity	20
Conservation and enhancement of intact, quality riparian areas	22
Riparian Restoration Needs and Funding Priorities, Follow-up Worksheet	23
Follow-up worksheet results.....	23
Follow-up Worksheet Key Takeaways	30
Summary of Input Regarding Grant Administration.....	31
Unique Geographic Considerations.....	32
Limitations.....	33
Role of Puget Sound Riparian Professional Feedback in Investment Plan Development	33
Collaborative opportunities for the future	33

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 1: Watershed distribution of riparian worksheet participants..... 24
Figure 2: Results from Question #3 of the follow-up worksheet. 26
Figure 3: Results from Question #5 of the follow-up worksheet. 28

Tables

Table 1 - Summary of early CR2SL engagement activities to inform program development 9
Table 2 - Completed tribal engagement activities and general timeline of completion.....**Error!**
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Table 3 - Worksheet participant agency or organization affiliations 23

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- The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
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Introduction

The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), and Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF) formed a partnership coalition to serve as the Climate Resilient Riparian Systems Lead (CR2SL). The CR2SL seeks to establish a subaward program that is supported by Puget Sound decision makers and landowners. To achieve this, the CR2SL Team sought feedback from the network of implementers, funders, and managers that will eventually apply for or coordinate with this program.

This report provides a summary of the initial engagement meetings and data collected that will help inform the early investment priorities of the CR2SL Team. In addition to the information contained in this report, early investment priorities will be informed by the intent of the funding, the funding terms and conditions, and through additional vetting with Tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC).

Engagement efforts included outreach to tribal, local, state, and federal partners early in the development of the CR2SL program. While the initial investment priorities and funding solicitation that the CR2SL will develop won't be able to include everything we heard through this engagement process, this feedback has been instrumental in helping the CR2SL develop its early priorities. Engagement will continue throughout the 7-year program period to adaptively manage the program and refine future investment priorities. As grantees make on-the-ground progress, the CR2SL team will work with local partners, the Core Team (a group of agency representatives advising on program development), and other policymakers to share impact, successes, and lessons to inform future funding initiatives.

Key Takeaways

Between November 2023 and June 2024, members of the CR2SL Team attended workshops, and Local Integrating Organization and Lead Entity meetings to learn how they could structure a new riparian funding program to meet the needs of the riparian restoration and protection community. Riparian practitioners across Puget Sound expressed a desire for funding support in the following areas (listed in no particular order):

- Engaging private landowners to achieve more riparian restoration and protection
- Long term site stewardship and monitoring
- Support for native plants and propagation
- Implementation and organizational capacity
- Conservation and enhancement of intact, quality riparian areas

A subgroup of workshop participants also provided input in an electronic follow up feedback worksheet, where they were asked to identify and rank barriers to their work. Respondents to this form shared the barriers they'd like to address most with near term funding are:

1. Workforce capacity

2. Post implementation project support
3. Collaborative capacity
4. Post implementation project maintenance and monitoring beyond year 3

Additionally, throughout the engagement process, the CR2SL team asked the riparian community how the funding opportunity could be structured for success, which prompted suggestions including:

- Recognize and incorporate local recovery plans
- Minimize administrative burdens on project proponents whenever possible
- Scoring criteria needs to be consistent with the questions being asked
- No match helps balance inequities for nonprofits and tribes
- Competitive funding models leads to partial implementation instead of fully funding and implementing Ecosystem Recovery Plans or Salmon Recovery Plans
- Consider how timing of RFP aligns or conflicts with critical work elements
- Funding needs to be sustained

Engagement methods, themes, barriers, specific ideas, and results of the follow up worksheet are discussed in more detail in the body of this report.

Engagement Activities

Summary of Engagement Activities

Feedback from meetings with local organizations, tribal engagement, and the four regional riparian workshops, is synthesized in this report. The engagement input will be used by the CR2SL advisory Core Team as a foundation for the development of the program Investment Plan. Each type of engagement is explained in more detail below.

Table 1 - Summary of early CR2SL engagement activities to inform program development

Engagement Activities	Date
Local Implementation Workshop – Sno-Stilly LIO	11/29/23
Presentation to Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission	01/16/24
Presentation to Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Riparian Work Group	03/22/24
Presentation & Mural Board at Strait ERN Meeting	04/19/24
Presentation & Mural Board at WRIA 8 Meeting	05/08/24
Presentation & Mural Board at South Central LIO Meeting	05/21/24
Tribal Listening Session 1	05/21/24
Tribal Listening Session 2	05/22/24
Presentation & Mural Board at Stillaguamish LIO Meeting	05/22/24
Local Implementation Partner Workshop – North Puget Sound	05/28/24

Presentation & Mural Board at Snoqualmie Watershed Forum	05/30/24
Presentation & Mural Board at Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Meeting	06/06/24
Presentation & Mural Board at San Juan LIO/LE Meeting	06/06/24
Local Implementation Partner Workshop – South Puget Sound	06/07/24
Virtual Implementation Partner Workshop - West Puget Sound	06/11/24
Presentation & Mural Board at Stillaguamish LE TAG meeting	06/12/24
Presentation & Mural Board at WSPER Working Group Meeting	06/25/24

Meetings with Local Organizations

Between January and June 2024, the CR2SL Team sought input from local groups engaged in riparian habitat protection and enhancement, agricultural resilience and engagement, and salmon recovery in Puget Sound, primarily through [Local Integrating Organizations](#)¹ (LIOs) and [Lead Entities](#)² (LEs). Members of these groups include representatives of local Tribes, local government, conservation districts, community based organizations, nonprofits, and others.

More specifically, individuals from the CR2SL Team attended 10 LIO/LE meetings where they delivered a brief presentation about the CR2SL’s overarching structure, goals, and process. The remaining time in these meetings was spent discussing local needs and reflections from members of the group. Ideas were captured during these meetings on a series of Mural boards and notes taken by CR2SL Team members. Department of Ecology staff used an online engagement tool (Mural.com) to ask several questions to any of the local forums or organizations who participated in the engagement process.

The preliminary topics for discussion included:

- Incentives for Landowners
- Best Management Practices and Plantings
- Ongoing Maintenance and Invasive Species
- Workforce and Capacity to get it done
- Native Plants and Propagation

Prompting questions for each of the preliminary topics included:

- What are the needs for your organization, tribe or forum?
- What types of activities can funding help with?
- What are some of the limiting factors to success?
- How can the funding opportunity be structured for success?

¹ <https://www.psp.wa.gov/LIO-overview.php>

² <https://rco.wa.gov/salmon-recovery/managing-organizations/lead-entities/>

During each meeting, participants added sticky notes in the Mural platform to the appropriate question and topic with their idea. While the group discussed their ideas, the CR2SL team took notes to incorporate questions and comments that were raised verbally or through the chat feature of the virtual meeting. The amount of time spent on the discussion varied for each local organization or group, ranging from 5 minutes to 55 minutes. Each group was invited to add ideas to the Mural board for up to a week after the meeting to invite further participation. Some comments were emailed back to Ecology staff and added to the board.

Tribal Engagement

In addition to dialogue with natural resource employees and other representatives of Puget Sound Tribes sought during the general public engagement processes, Ecology also maintains a Government-to-Government relationship with Tribal governments based on our unique relationship.

The CR2SL program is developing a Tribal Engagement Plan to guide engagement and consultation with Puget Sound Tribes throughout the program's development and implementation. In recognition that Tribal interests in the program may change over time, ongoing communication is built into the Tribal Engagement Plan. Tribal engagement is important to guide the development and implementation of the CR2SL program because of the potential direct and indirect impacts to Tribal interests. Given Tribes' time immemorial connection to the land, Tribal interest in the program may arise from many different factors. More information about the goals of CR2SL Tribal engagement and planned Tribal engagement activities can be found in the Tribal Engagement Plan (*in draft, to be published*).

Summary of Tribal engagement activities

The following Tribal engagement activities have been completed and were carried out to gather Tribal input during program development:

1. Notifying Federally recognized Tribes within the Puget Sound program footprint of CR2SL program initiation and inviting Government to Government consultation.
2. Presenting to Tribes at meetings coordinated by the NWIFC early in program development and soliciting input to guide development.
3. Engaging a Tribal Liaison to participate on the Lead Team to provide advisory support regarding inclusion of Tribal concerns and interests at decision making points throughout all stages of program development and implementation.
4. Inviting a NWIFC representative to participate on the advisory Core Team to provide high-level thinking input at all stages of program development.
5. Hosting virtual listening sessions for Tribal members and staff to describe the funding opportunity and solicit input from Tribes and their technical staff on program development.
6. Distributing a Tribal listening session follow-up worksheet to solicit additional details on Tribal concerns and program development.

Summary of Tribal Recommendations Received to Date

None of the Tribes or Tribal organizations that provided recommendations noted any potential harms from the new program. Tribal recommendations about the new program development were received from high-level Tribal government leaders, workgroups, a Tribal liaison, and natural resource staff. Recommendations provided by individuals are not attributed to them or the Tribe they represent out of respect for privacy. Recommendations provided by individuals during a meeting hosted by the NWIFC are anonymized. Tribal recommendations are sorted below under three categories:

Tribal engagement recommendations

- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: Advised CR2SL staff to not assume that NWIFC represents Tribes and to do direct Tribal outreach as well.
- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: Celebrated previous integrated efforts like Floodplains by Design that allowed Tribes to effectively engage with the agricultural community.
- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: Overarching sentiment of desire for an effective model to engage Tribes on this effort. Caution against an overemphasis on process, and a desire to as rapidly as possible make tangible improvements for the benefit of salmon populations.

Tribal funding priorities

- Tribal Liaison: There is a general fatigue around riparian incentive programs not being effective, and Tribes may be worried that this program will continue the status quo instead of trying to break it. They don't want this process to be an added layer of resistance to that change.
- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: The Tribes are aware of at least 5 riparian programs right now, 4 of which include funding. The Tribes are working to track and connect processes so they can provide consistent messaging. The question was posed if CR2SL could fund a position at NWIFC to coordinate this work.
- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: The Tribes prioritize protection of existing quality habitat or investments to restore and protect degraded habitat.
- NWIFC Riparian Workgroup: The Workgroup provided three priorities:
 1. Plant materials availability
 2. Protection of existing quality habitat
 3. Investments in science-based buffers
- Long term protection of plantings is critical. They have to reach that mature stage. Easements, some other mechanism to guarantee committed owners that will let it grow.

Tribal restoration implementation needs and challenges

- There is a lot of riparian funding available right now, funding is needed to support capacity building.
- Funds to support maintenance on existing sites, including at 10-15 yr. stewardship point.
- WCC program challenges with staff turnover, loss of historic knowledge, but also a good model with built in infrastructure support.
- Soil sterilization equipment for native plant nursery to adapt to new climate change pests.
- Bigger equipment for bigger scale projects such as forestry style machinery and vehicles, to increase efficiency of existing workforce.
- New landowner incentive programs that fully fund all of the work, maintenance, and pay a reasonable rental fee that is higher than currently offered options.
- More support of local coordination on landowner engagement, recruitment and messaging.
- Flexibility into the funding to support the needs of different watersheds, because the challenges are different in different areas.
- Challenges with the availability of archeologists to perform required cultural resource analysis and tracking those processes. Supportive of a conversation around those requirements for low-impact projects, the costs and delays they can cause.
- Funding to support a subcommittee developing best practices for forest migration.
- Funding to support coordination with nurseries to grow plants for assisted migration.
- Infrastructure investments to support growing our own native plants, including plant material specific to the region, and culturally significant plants that are not traditional restoration species.
- Funding for plantings that think beyond shrubs and conifers, for weed suppression and pollinator support.

Riparian Workshops

The CR2SL team supported the formation of and attended three riparian workshops in May and June 2024. Workshop structure was inspired by a gathering hosted by the Snohomish-Stillaguamish LIO in November 2023, which the CR2SL team attended and notes from which have been incorporated into this report. Workshops took place in the following locations:

- North Sound: Combined workshop between Whatcom and Skagit Lead Entities
- South Sound: Hosted by Alliance for a Healthy South Sound, also included partners from Kitsap Peninsula and the Puyallup-White River Watershed.

- Olympic Peninsula: Joint effort between Strait ERN, North Olympic Peninsula LE, and the Hood Canal Coordinating Council. Due to capacity constraints, this workshop was held virtually.
- Snohomish Basin: Hosted by Snohomish – Stillaguamish LIO with participation by a contingent of South Central LIO practitioners engaged in Snoqualmie Basin restoration.

In total, the four workshops had approximately 200 unique attendees, 22 ignite style presentations, and 33 in depth breakout discussions. Ignite presentations were brief presentations on high level challenges, new ideas, and areas of interest brought forward by local riparian professionals. The topics of these presentations informed breakout group discussion topics where ideas and issues were explored in greater detail.

All materials referenced in this document including detailed notes from workshops, mural boards, and follow-up workshop feedback form responses are accessible via a [folder of materials](#)³ that are supplemental to this report.

³ <https://app.box.com/s/1sfs8qkx2cpj41odise57zrtblkhneu4>

Themes Identified

Engaging private landowners to increase riparian protection and restoration

Across Puget Sound, project sponsors identified private landowner engagement as critical for the successful restoration of riparian areas. Much of the degraded riparian habitat in Washington is in private ownership, and restoring these areas is necessary to achieve statewide and watershed level recovery plans. This topic came up at all four workshops, and in multiple discussions with other groups. Riparian buffer restoration is currently done on a voluntary basis, often through partnerships between landowners and Tribes, conservation districts, fisheries enhancement groups, and/or non-profits. With so many different programs and standards, it is necessary to present a coordinated and compelling case to landowners as to why they may want to participate.

Barriers:

- Diverse goals of private landowners.
- Confusion or lack of trust around the types of incentives available and funders.
- Administrative burdens associated with signing up for buffer programs.
- Rules surrounding minimum buffer widths, and capping of some payment programs beyond certain maximum widths and stream types.
- Lack of funding to support ongoing maintenance of project sites.
- Lack of funding for staff time for local project planners to build relationships and establish trust with landowners.
- Discomfort with terms of some permanent protection mechanisms.

Through this engagement process, the CR2SL Team asked local practitioners to identify actions to improve the ways outreach and incentives to landowners is funded and supported. Participants emphasized the need to spend significant time developing relationships rooted in trust. Along with time, trust with landowners was described as being built upon clear and consistent communication about different incentive options and flexibility in buffer BMPs to deliver both habitat benefits and outcomes that meet the landowner's goals. There is an appetite for employing innovative mechanisms to engage more landowners to achieve long term riparian protection and enhancement.

Many ideas emerged around how to work with landowners to achieve better riparian outcomes and foster community acceptance of riparian restoration, a selection of which are included below:

Funding needs:

- Engaging private landowners to achieve more riparian protection, including social marketing.

- Social marketing research and informed outreach to provide assistance to landowners based on their wants/needs.
- Highlight the non-financial benefits to landowners in buffer program messaging, such as bank stabilization and protection, decreased regulatory risk and pollinator habitat.
- Offer flexible funding to support coordinated landowner engagement.
- Clearer communication about what achieving the recovery plan goals looks like in a given location. Need private properties to be included in the vision and the owners to be included in envisioning the work. Increasing riparian forest acres might include you. Here's what it looks like.
- Change public and landowner dialogue from commodity basis to community basis.
- Support and fund youth programs that educate future stewards about riparian areas.
- Funding for long-term maintenance of existing projects and crew capacity for maintenance.
 - Fund maintenance of "old" projects, or any previously funded salmon project funding (include x acreage). Be more creative in how we report on long-term maintenance of existing sites.
 - Provide funding for direct payments to landowners and maintenance.
 - Fully fund work and maintenance fees. Try to provide incentives for non-environmentally minded landowners.
- Funding long-term riparian and instream restoration effectiveness monitoring and research, perhaps involving property owners and demonstration projects.
 - Provide opportunities for community science and/or sharing riparian restoration data with communities in a digestible way.
 - Fund long-term riparian and instream restoration effectiveness monitoring.
 - Fund landowner incentives specific to hosting pilot and demonstration projects.
 - Get farmers involved by performing “on-the-farm research” to experiment with different vegetation approaches and look at their effectiveness.
- Multiple benefit landowner incentives.
 - Fund riparian projects as part of larger holistic farm specific approach.
 - Fund riparian projects as part of larger holistic watershed approach.
 - Provide agroforestry as an incentive for ag producers, especially on smaller farms and if paired with other incentives. Products could include understory mushrooms, maple syrup, selective timber harvest, floral greens, and grazing.
 - Pay private landowners enrolled in existing riparian incentive programs to grow native plants for future harvest and project areas.
 - Provide funding flexibility for private property riparian improvements.
- Structural or programmatic considerations.

- Create a program that will work and incentivize landowners with a good return on investment (ROI).
- More compensation per acre and/or stackable incentives, tied to local inflation or consumer price index and stable over time.
- Model restoration property owner agreements.

Long term site stewardship and monitoring

This topic came up at every workshop and in most discussions with local groups that the CR2SL team had throughout the partner engagement process. Currently, most of the government funding for riparian restoration and protection exists as capital funding. This money is very useful for discrete projects like acquisition and buffer installation, but this model is out of step with the reality that projects are implemented within a system that requires continuous stewardship. Grant funding for implementation typically allows for 3-5 years to plant and initially maintain installed buffers. However, riparian buffers will be subject to dynamic change such as invasive species, competing land use priorities, changes in hydrology on the site, site altering use by wildlife like beaver, and climate change, and so to be successful, these installed buffers require ongoing stewardship. Riparian project planners know that many landowners will benefit from ongoing support and that better project support leads to improved neighbor relations that can increase participation over time.

Stewardship efforts include monitoring and tracking the success of projects over time, which is also underfunded. Monitoring and tracking poses the additional challenge of coordinating among implementation partners at scale to ask the right questions about what is happening on project sites and why. Some local partners coordinate their monitoring protocols and analysis at a watershed scale, while others apply systems managed by individual organizations. The results can meaningfully move the professional practice of restoration forward and may provide invaluable lessons on best practices for climate resilience. Tracking is often project specific and designed to report on the required metrics identified by various funding programs, which are not always consistent.

Barriers:

- Lack of funding to support long-term, adaptive site stewardship and monitoring.
- Lack of shared language, targets and metrics among funding programs.
- Monitoring is conducted and reported across a wide gradient of protocols, metrics, and scales.
- Noxious weed treatments are often wrapped into project work, when a coordinated, landscape scale approach may be more effective in many cases.
- When long-term maintenance is unfunded, responsibility falls to the landowner, which can be a deterrent to initial participation and create relationship challenges in the future. Relying on landowners to provide maintenance reduces the likelihood that the project will receive the attention it needs over time, leading to a less effective and visually unattractive project.

Riparian project managers understand that they are working to restore and protect ecosystems that may not reach maturity for 200 years, and they envision a funding system that supports long-term site stewardship to get them there. They acknowledge a high degree of uncertainty around future conditions and are urging funders to consider what it will take to manage sites adaptively to achieve shared recovery goals in a changing climate. While there is not yet a shared vision for the right scale and depth of monitoring that is needed, there is consensus that funding programs should not add unnecessary burden to project proponents through uncoordinated or excessive monitoring requirements without properly funding ongoing maintenance and monitoring capacity.

Many ideas emerged around how to address the challenges of long-term monitoring and maintenance. These ideas were collected and compiled, a selection of which are included below:

Funding needs:

- Support for projects already implemented.
 - Complete funding from planning, planting, and maintenance to increase the likelihood of success.
 - Stewardship of sites originally planted with other funding (ie WQ, SRFB, CREP, other).
 - Funding to enhance existing buffers and floodplain natural areas.
 - Emphasize long term site function in stewardship agreements through things like linked maintenance funding, standards that emphasize quality over quantity, and setting achievable benchmarks.
- Public outreach and education about invasive weeds.
 - Invasive weed identity and native plant education is really needed. Landowners generally want to do the right thing and often don't know what that is.
 - Approaching urban riparian restoration holistically through invasive weed control and remediation.
 - More workshops and public outreach on invasive weeds (including knotweed, blackberry, butterfly bush, reed canary grass).

Support for native plants and propagation

The native plant supply chain is a current point of anxiety among Puget Sound restoration project planners. While no one has cited plant shortages creating major issues for project implementation yet, the Tribes, conservation districts, fisheries enhancement groups, and others we talked with have all experienced species specific or stock type shortages and are worried about what the recent infusion of capital funding into the system will mean for plant availability in the coming years.

Currently, a handful of large wholesale native plant nurseries supply most plant materials for the Puget Sound region, and beyond. Practitioners may supplement these plants with orders

from smaller nurseries and seed collectors, and by developing “holding sites,” or small organizational nurseries where they grow plants out for their restoration sites. Many implementation partners described the native plant procurement process as a puzzle that takes significant time to piece together. The development of the Washington State Conservation Commission’s [Riparian Plant Propagation Program](#)⁴ (RPPP) has recently emerged as a welcome support structure to connect project planners with nurseries and provide contract growing agreements.

Barriers:

- Timelines for ordering plants do not align well with timelines for project planning and funding allocation.
- Limited availability of regionally identified plant stock; implications for climate adapted plantings.
- Shortages are a reality; hard to predict what and when.
- Lack of seed availability, seed collectors, and access to land for wild collections.
- Limited availability of commercially grown species that are important to Tribes but are not commonly used in restoration projects.
- Limited funding for nursery infrastructure and supplies.
- Holding sites can be opportune environments for the spread of pests and pathogens.
- Limited capacity of RPPP.
- Current funding structures create undue administrative burden by requiring project managers to tie per plant costs to specific sites.
- Lack of best management practices for establishing new nurseries or holding sites.

When asked what actions could be taken to address barriers in the native plant supply chain, practitioners shared a diverse array of opinions. Many acknowledged that existing, large wholesale native plant nurseries are good at what they do and saw value in investing in these to expand their capacity and promote innovative practices. Others had a vision of small to medium scale operations that encompassed other ownership types and business models, which could present an option for agricultural producers to convert their existing operations to more sustainable native plant production. All agreed that genetic and stock type diversity is important, and that scaling Puget Sound restoration will put stress on the native plant procurement ecosystem as it exists now.

Many ideas emerged around how to scale the native plant supply chain throughout the conversations the CR2SL team had with local group, some of which are included below:

Funding needs:

- Support for native plant production, seed collection, and native plant propagation.

⁴ <https://www.scc.wa.gov/programs/rppp>

- Funding for nurseries to propagate plants from non-local sources that might provide better adapted stock under future climate scenarios
- Funding for nursery activities, infrastructure, and supplies,
- Funding to hire seed collectors to increase diversity of stock,
- Pots, plants, irrigation, weeds, water costs are always needed to run the nurseries. SRFB will pay for work hours. New riparian funding does some nursery. Other needs that can't be accounted for each plant or side.
- Ensuring plants that are installed will survive temperature changes in the next decades and centuries.
- Need workgroup to support discussions around assisted migration. Who is doing studies? What are we learning? What are the policy areas we need to work on?
- Incentives for farmers/private landowners to transition to native plant production,
- Need a survey to assess need of native plants from primary nurseries (Conservation Districts, Tribes, RFEs, Webster Nursery).

Implementation and organizational capacity

Riparian project sponsors across Puget Sound are facing capacity challenges in a few key areas, and this topic was discussed in some way across all of our engagement activities. First, practitioners in some geographies do not have access to enough high-quality implementation labor to complete projects. Riparian projects are currently implemented by Conservation Corps type crews, private contractors, full or part time staff crews, volunteers and interns to varying degrees by different organizations.

Second, the capital nature of most riparian funding limits the programmatic capacity of many organizations to do the legwork necessary to plan high quality projects in a way that leads to long term success, and manage them adaptatively once implemented, as noted above. Project planners must contact and build relationships with landowners, track down or develop implementation BMPs, write grants, and more to put forward fundable projects. Most of these activities are unfunded by current riparian funding programs. Practitioners also reported that participating in collaborative knowledge sharing and strategic planning efforts is important to advancing climate adaptation, developing shared understanding around BMPs, more effectively deploying resources and more; however, this work is quite difficult to fund under the current project driven structure.

Barriers:

- Timeline mismatch of project funding and planning with crew request timeline.
- Rising costs of living & lack of housing affects restoration worker retention and quality of life.
- Administrative burden of managing crews and/or developing structures to share crews between organizations.
- Uncertainty of future funding.

- Current funding options do not prioritize pre-project legwork of landowner communications, proposal development, BMP development, etc.
- Lack of funding for participation in cross-organizational collaborative efforts.

Across engagement forums, riparian practitioners expressed a desire for more available capacity funding to approach restoration programmatically. They identified a need for full time staff to address watershed scale restoration goals strategically, and a well-trained, reliable, and adequately compensated labor pool to implement and maintain riparian restoration sites long term.

Many ideas emerged around how to address capacity shortages throughout the conversations the CR2SL team had with implementers, a selection of which are included below:

Funding needs:

- Ongoing program support of the programmatic needs of riparian restoration.
 - Many investments in our area have been to fund programmatic work to fund outreach and education - the biggest gap we have is for landowner outreach and education,
 - Adaptive management to get to the original intent of the project over time. Check existing projects accountability,
 - Every riparian grant has 10-12% of unspecified outreach and education funding, up to funder for how to best use this for our area - ability to be creative, work with the funder to create a plan that works best for the project,
 - The new riparian funding takes a tremendous amount of landowner outreach and relationship building ahead of time and that is not reimbursable in the current system,
 - This is unfunded work for the most part, but this provides a big barrier to entry for under resourced communities and organizations don't often have the ability or capacity to do this (e.g. stewardship plans in the new state fundings)
- Workforce development and organizational capacity.
 - Need more year-round crews that have a livable wage and housing,
 - Professional workforce for riparian restoration: ongoing collaboration space dedicated to workforce development,
- Develop a green job pathway.
 - Are there other types of jobs in the conservation corps pathway that can be supported? How to train and develop and future workforce (Career Connect WA-Gov Office on Workforce Development),
- Need to connect with other entities identifying workforce needs for enviro work, then assess future needs, then approach Career Connect WA to establish a center of excellence.

- Invest in cooperative survey organizations working in the riparian area to better understand the concerns and frequency of labor shortages, explore housing options, and create a database,
- Train Riparian Specific Practitioners within organizations for increased success,
- Invest in other job models.

Conservation and enhancement of intact, quality riparian areas

The riparian community acknowledges that high quality riparian habitat exists in areas that are essential for salmon recovery which are not currently protected from counter-productive land uses. The riparian landscape in Puget Sound is highly fragmented, with mixed land ownership across the region. Currently, several mechanisms exist for medium to long-term protection including the encumbrance of land with easements, enrollment in programs like CREP, and fee-simple acquisition by a conservation focused organizations like land trusts, state/federal agencies, and local governments. These programs have successfully protected many riparian areas, but the pace of habitat loss still exceeds that of gains made through restoration activities.

Barriers:

- Acquisition can be costly.
- Challenges around how to fund easement monitoring, enhancement/maintenance and enforcement in perpetuity.
- Long timelines needed to build relationships with potential sellers.
- When land is acquired and held for conservation purposes, funding for long term stewardship can be hard to access.

Throughout the CR2SL Team’s engagement efforts, groups expressed a desire for more effective protection mechanisms. They shared that these mechanisms should be meaningful and supported in perpetuity to ensure protected lands are enhanced and/or retain the high-quality characteristics for which they were protected. There is receptivity among this community to employ innovative protection mechanisms that offer incentives for protection like ecosystem service payments, public benefit rating systems, transfer of development rights, and other tools to achieve long term preservation.

Several ideas emerged around how to support the protection of existing riparian habitat throughout the conversations the CR2SL team had with implementers, a selection of which are included below:

Funding needs:

- Implementation funds: conservation of intact quality riparian areas.
 - Need funding for planning and design,
 - Need implementation funds for acquisitions and easements,
 - New riparian easement program designed to be simple, efficient and nimble,

- Preserve larger riparian buffers and suitable beaver habitat.

Riparian Restoration Needs and Funding Priorities, Follow-up Worksheet

CR2SL distributed an online follow-up worksheet to hear from workshop participants individually and get more information about barriers and potential funding uses. The questions asked participants to rank the significance of barriers they experience to riparian restoration, and to rank those same barriers to reflect the likelihood that they would apply near-term funding to address that issue. The supplied list of barriers for ranking reflected challenges brought up in prior partner engagements.

It took an average of 20 minutes for a total of 29 participants to complete the follow-up worksheet. Participants included partners located across the Puget Sound watersheds, such as tribes, state and local government, conservation district staff, and local nonprofits that implement riparian restoration. The majority of worksheet participants had attended one of the riparian workshops and had prior knowledge of the CR2SL program goals and how their feedback would be considered. Worksheet questions and detailed results are included in a [folder of materials](#)⁵ that are supplemental to this report.

Follow-up worksheet results

Question #1

What organization or agency are you affiliated with?

Participants provided the name of the organization or agency they are affiliated with. The majority of participants were either local government employees or conservation district staff. Table 1 displays the participant count for each organization or agency type. The survey was hosted online and open to anyone who had access to the link, which was shared via email to the riparian workshop attendees. Participation by both a riparian landowner and a local college staff person indicate that the survey may have been shared with individuals that did not attend a workshop, however we cannot confirm this. Neither were the intended audience for this follow-up engagement and may not have had the same context in mind while answering questions. However, workshop participants may have chosen to identify themselves in this way. The responses from these two individuals follow the general trend and are obviously well informed. For this reason and for lack of identifying information, the responses from those two individuals are included in the following results.

Table 2 - Worksheet participant agency or organization affiliations

Organization or agency type	Count
Tribe	3

⁵ <https://app.box.com/s/1sfs8qkx2cpj41odise57zrtblkhneu4>

Conservation District	7
Local government	10
State government	2
Federal government	1
Local nonprofit	4
Local college	1
Riparian landowner	1

Question #2

Which Puget Sound watershed(s) do you primarily work in? Select all that apply.

Worksheet participants included riparian professionals that work in and across the 19 watersheds in the Puget Sound basin, displayed in Figure 1 by WRIA. Most participants indicated that they work in multiple watersheds. The three watersheds with the most worksheet participation were WRIA 17 Quilcene/Snow (8), WRIA 7 Snohomish (7), and WRIA 1 Nooksack (7). The five watersheds with the least worksheet participation were WRIA 2 San Juan (1), WRIA 9 Duwamish/Green (1), and WRIA 6 Island (2), WRIA 10 Puyallup/White (2), WRIA 11 Nisqually (2).

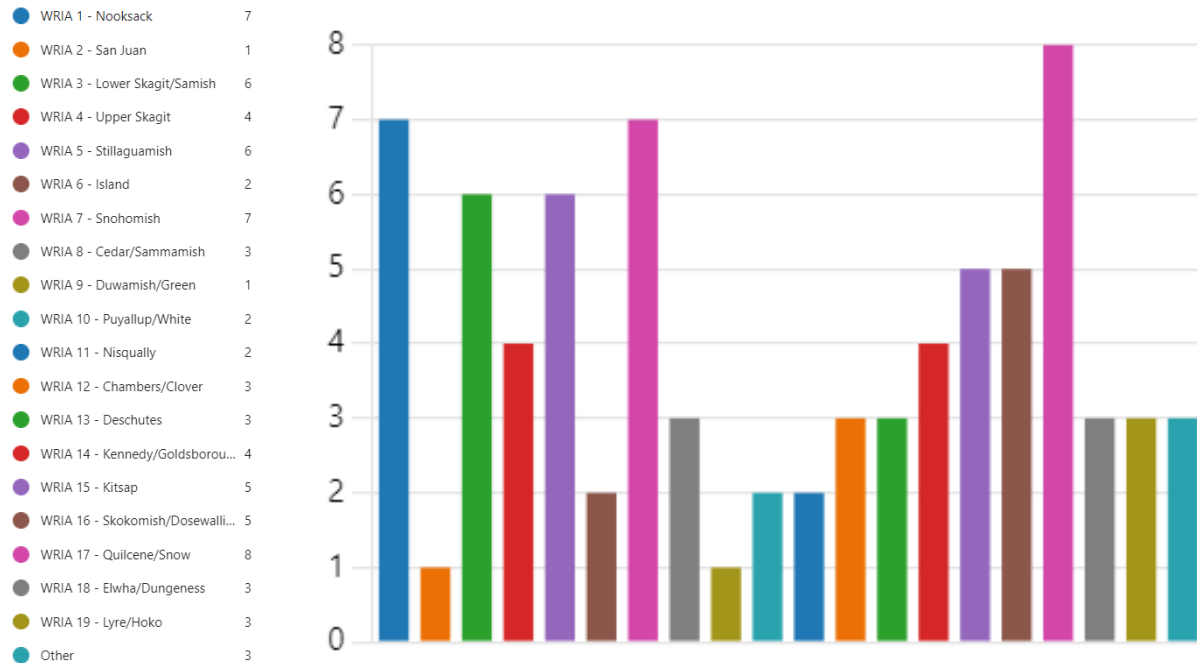


Figure 1: Watershed distribution of riparian worksheet participants.

Question #3

The following is a list of barriers and needs to implementing effective riparian restoration projects that we drew from meeting agendas and discussions. Please reorder the challenges listed below to rank their significance to you and your work, starting with the most significant barrier/need at the top.

Top six ranked barriers

1. **Workforce capacity:** Nearly 50% of the responses indicated that workforce capacity issues are in their top three barriers, with 35% placing it at their number one barrier. This capacity concern includes challenges with planting and maintenance crews, nursery crews, project managers, outreach teams, etc.
2. **Post implementation project support:** Nearly 52% of the responses also indicated that post implementation project support issues are in their top three barriers, with 48% of respondents placing it in the 2nd and 3rd place. This barrier includes challenges with interplanting, weed management, and monitoring, among other things.
3. **Collaborative capacity:** Nearly 38% of the responses indicated that collaborative capacity issues are in their top three barriers, with 21% placing it as their top barrier. This barrier includes difficulties with procuring funding to convene and develop specific riparian restoration plans, strategies and relationships.
4. **Post implementation project maintenance and monitoring beyond year 3:** About 38% of responses indicated that challenges with post implementation project maintenance and monitoring is in their top three barriers, with 7% placing it as their top barrier. This barrier includes challenges with funding photo point collection, plot sampling, and desk-based cover analyses.
5. Tied between:
 - I. **Landowner incentives:** About 35% of responses indicated that landowner incentives are in their top three barriers, with 14% placing it as their top barrier. This issue includes a need for funding land rental payments, higher payment rates, flexibility in project design such as buffer width and species composition, agroforestry options, and others.
 - II. **Conservation of intact quality riparian areas:** About 35% of responses indicated that issues with conservation of intact quality riparian areas are in their top three barriers, with an 21% placing it as their 1st and 2nd barrier. This barrier includes a need for funding for easements, acquisitions, and funds to apply for other grants to establish innovative finance funds.

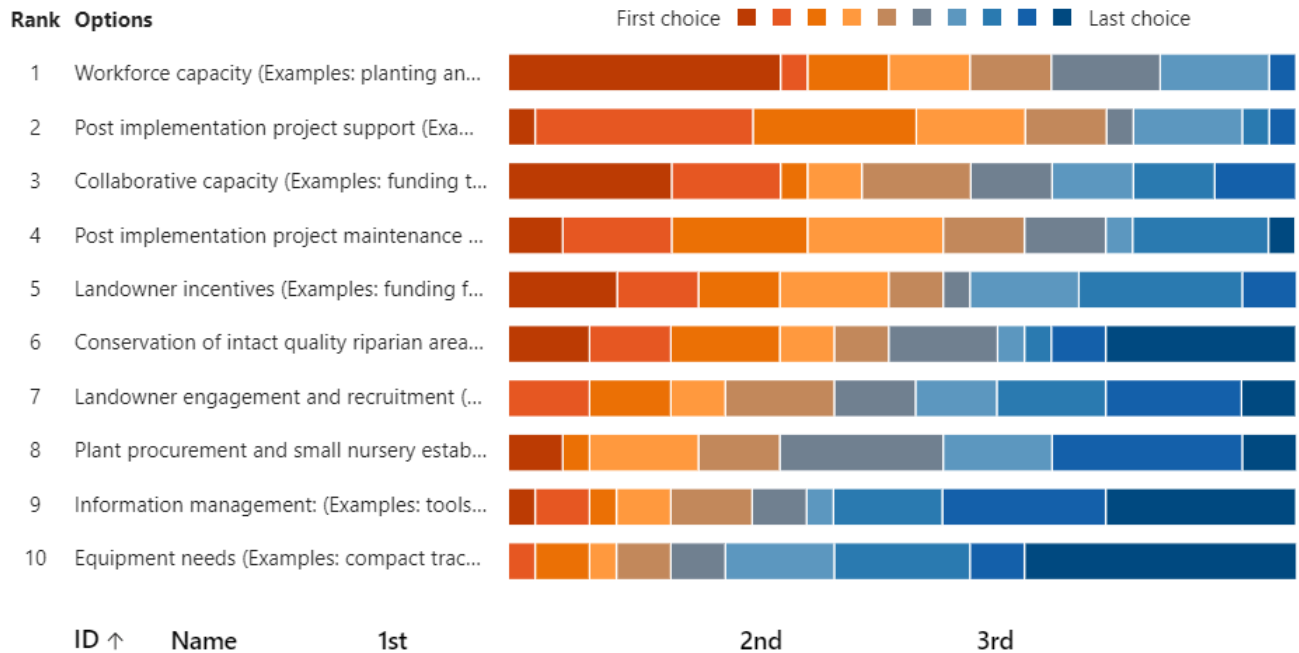


Figure 2: Results from Question #3 of the follow-up worksheet.

Question #4

If the most significant barrier you face is not listed above, please describe it here.

Eight worksheet participants provided written responses to this question that explained the barriers they experience. These responses spoke to a need for increased public awareness, partner coordination and data sharing, and difficulties with policy and regulations. A selection of excerpts from those responses is included below. The complete collection of responses is available in a [folder of materials](#)⁶ that are supplemental to this report.

“Landowners not believing there is any problem with fish habitat conditions in the stream on their property . . .”

“. . . There is enough money out there now that folks can operate in silos and not be forced to work together. This creates a very confusing menu of options for landowners and practitioners. . .”

“Better coordination by state agencies and partners to create data sharing platforms, to create websites with organized materials, to create better incentives and make a less confusing system for landowners, and to create economies of scale by providing templates, websites, technical support etc. to add to the limited capacity locally. . .”

⁶ <https://app.box.com/s/1sfs8qkx2cpj41odise57zrtblkhneu4>

“ . . . To improve participation in riparian restoration programs, stream and wetland buffers should be reclassified as integral use so that a smaller property can implement a functional buffer without the threat of financial penalty. . . ”

Question #5

Now please re-rank the barriers below to reflect which challenges you would be most likely to use near-term funding to address over the next 1-4 yrs. For this hypothetical activity, you can assume that the necessary costs or activities are eligible for funding.

Top four ranked barriers to be addressed by near term funds

- 1. Workforce capacity:** For 50% of the responses, partners placed workforce capacity issues in their top three barriers to use near term funding to address, with 29% placing it at their number one choice. This capacity concern includes challenges with planting and maintenance crews, nursery crews, project managers, outreach teams, etc.
- 2. Post implementation project support:** Over 53% of the responses placed post implementation project support issues in their top three barriers to address with near term funding, with 46% of respondents placing it in the 2nd and 3rd place. This barrier includes challenges with interplanting, weed management, and monitoring, among other things.
- 3. Collaborative capacity:** About 47% of responses placed challenges with collaborative capacity in their top three barriers to address with near term funding, with 18% placing it as their top choice. This barrier includes difficulties with procuring funding to convene and develop specific riparian restoration plans, strategies and relationships.
- 4. Post implementation project maintenance and monitoring beyond year 3:** For about 39% of responses, partners placed challenges with post implementation project maintenance and monitoring in their top three barriers to address with near term funding, with over 14% placing it as their top barrier. This barrier includes challenges with funding photo point collection, plot sampling, and desk-based cover analyses.

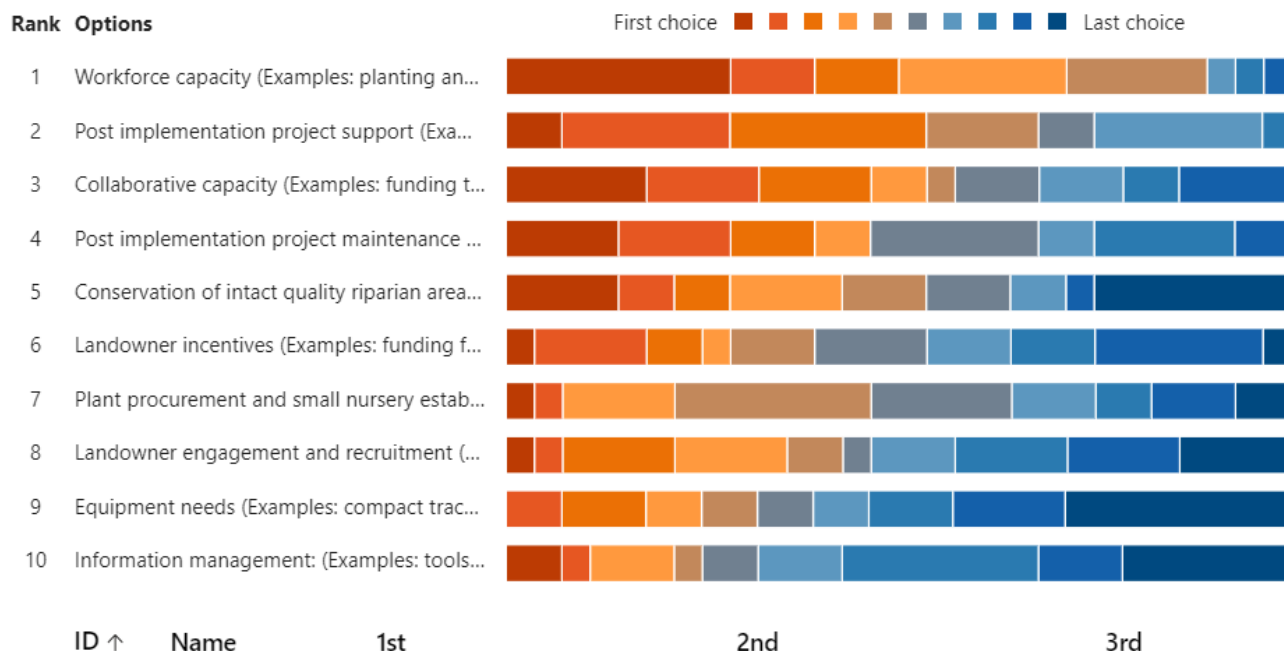


Figure 3: Results from Question #5 of the follow-up worksheet.

Question #6

Specifically how would you apply funding to address your top barrier? Please state the barrier followed by your proposed solution that near term funding could be used to address.

Twenty-three worksheet participants provided detailed, written responses to this question that gave insight into their ideas on how near-term funding could be used to address the stated barriers. Some of the ideas shared reflect desired structural, programmatic and policy level changes that would have a meaningful impact. Two selections of excerpts from responses are included below: the first selection includes ideas that could feasibly be addressed by near-term funds, and the second selection includes high-level ideas that cannot be addressed by near-term funds. The complete collection of responses is available in a [folder of materials](#)⁷ that are supplemental to this report.

Selection 1 – Ideas that could feasibly be addressed by near-term funds

“... provide funding for a conservation easement the full width of SPTH with the requirement to keep the planted area intact and remaining unplanted area in open space protected by the easement leaving open the opportunity to plant the full SPTH in the future...”

⁷ <https://app.box.com/s/1sfs8qkx2cpj41odise57zrtblkhneu4>

“ . . . We would use near-term funding to purchase plants to fill our recently-expanded riparian plant nursery with NOSC so that we have project-ready plants whenever grant funding comes through. . . ”

“Coordination of regional restoration practitioners who can convene regularly to discuss opportunities, match and combine funding, sharing knowledge of place and people.”

“ . . . If funding were received, I would put it toward new equipment and continuing to hire seasonal interns and WCC crew time, so that the department can continue to expand its area of influence and its resources for habitat restoration while engaging with the community.”

“Purchase high priority riparian/nearshore properties first then purchase conservation easements.”

“The number 1 priority is to sustain funding for our riparian restoration crew. Continuity and employee retention greatly improves efficiency and effectiveness of our work. This is also by far the highest cost of maintaining a riparian program.”

“Funding would be used to create dedicated capacity at DNR for a strategic, watershed-scale approach to riparian restoration. Initial focus would be invasive control (primarily knotweed) in the summer/fall and riparian planting in the fall/winter/spring, as well as landowner outreach to work with upland parcels. . . ”

“ . . . I would apply funding to strategically formulate specific restoration projects and needs whilst communicating and collaborating with other partners to optimize the effectiveness of the projects being undertaken.”

“I can envision a geodatabase to gather and maintain riparian restoration project-related information for planners, project managers, and practitioners in the Stillaguamish Basin. Funds would be used to 1) convene a group of key stakeholders in the basin to define the purpose, use, and constraints; and 2) hire a contractor to build the database.”

“ . . . Long-term, we would like to develop our own in house work crews that would perform similar activities as WCC crews, but would be potentially be a more steady and knowledgeable workforce due to the fact that the crews wouldn't turn over from year to year. Long-term our industry needs to invest and properly compensate crew positions and make it a more attractive career path similar to many trade professions. . . ”

“ . . . I believe that building new partnerships and trust with private landowners requires a more serious investment of money that will give us more ability to respond to interested landowners when they reach out to us, and to do research, outreach, and communicate with new private landowners, too.”

“ . . . I would use funding to secure additional crews to help with post-implementation needs. It would be great if funds could support crews that aren't tied to a specific site or project, but could instead be allocated towards where the maintenance needs are greatest. . . ”

Selection 2 – High-level ideas that cannot be addressed by near-term funds

“Developing a long-term viable state CREP-replacement program is an essential next step . . . I think there is a leadership gap in coordinating all the options and programs and agencies involved. And it probably will work best if someone who is not directly trying to implement all this is helping to coordinate and facilitate that approach. . . ”

“ . . . Long term maintenance is needed, and should be funded in a programmatic way. Many sites that have received considerable investment of restoration funds and effort and are generally on a good trajectory still need at least some degree of weed control and other intervention occasionally. In many cases this may amount to only a few days per year of actual work, but the need will always be present. As result these activities are hard to fund as stand alone projects. An ideal funding solution would be extremely flexible and might look more like funding a position or team that has latitude to work on a huge variety of projects as needed. This need may be better met by developing internal agency capacity within jurisdictions rather than a more "standard" grant round.”

“ . . . The most near-term solution is to expand our WCC crews, this would be the easiest to just add additional labor capacity. However, WCC is in high demand and getting additional crews assigned to us has not happened. . . ”

Follow-up Worksheet Key Takeaways

1. Workforce capacity concerns were ranked as both the number one barrier to riparian restoration and the preferred barrier for partners to apply near term funding towards. As expected, many of the responses to Question #6 included ideas on how to address workforce capacity issues with near-term funds.
2. Workforce capacity and post-implementation project support are barriers that intersect. It is difficult to acquire funding to perform project maintenance, monitoring and other support activities on existing projects, and if funded, these activities would require additional crew capacity that is also difficult to obtain.
3. Existing work crew programs (ex: WCC, Earth Corps) are critical to getting riparian work done, however issues with crew member retention, the annual turnover of staff to train, and the number of crews available are common difficulties with this model. Partners are exploring options to hire permanent restoration crews to address these concerns and increase efficiency.
4. Post implementation project support and maintenance needs were ranked as the 2nd highest barrier to riparian restoration and as 2nd preferred barrier for partners to apply near term funding towards. It is possible that participants did not recognize the

difference between the two post implementation support barrier options, as one of them indicated “beyond year 3”, while the other did not. Due to this potentially confusing wording and the fact that both options ranked in the top four barriers, it is possible that maintenance needs would have ranked as the top barrier if it had been represented by a single, broader option.

5. Respondents indicated a need for increased coordination, both at the state and local level, in order to share knowledge and data, and plan the efficient use of funds available as opportunities arise. Many of the responses to Question #6 included ideas on how to use near term funds to increase local collaboration, build partnerships and share data.
6. Respondents ranked the likelihood that they would apply near term funds to landowner incentive programs lower than their ranking of the issue as a barrier to riparian restoration. This could indicate that there are additional barriers to implementing landowner incentive programs that respondents did not believe the near term funding could adequately address.

Summary of Input Regarding Grant Administration

Workshop and meeting participants provided insight on ways for riparian funding opportunities to be structured that would reduce administrative burden on applicants, while also soliciting well matched proposals from proponents. These may be relevant as the CR2SL Team develops its granting program, as well as for other new and existing grant programs that wish to reduce administrative burden on applicants.

Those ideas include:

- Acknowledge limitations of riparian work, don't overpromise, make sure expected outcomes are clear,
- Focus more on how a functioning riparian impacts human health, food sources, flooding, etc.
- Consider using PRISM rather than EAGL.
- Capture lessons learned. Keep up monitoring, then communicate those lessons for new projects,
- Be mindful of how these are informing or complementing local prioritization efforts
- Ability to apply for smaller amounts that are site specific, or allow for a larger pot that is flexible (can go to any salmon riparian projects),
- Include mechanisms for future operations and maintenance or a specific opportunity to go back to previous sites to do weed management,
- Ensure that there is community buy-in in the process, or perhaps engaged prior to the RFP,
- There may be existing temperature Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) in watersheds that can provide direction on site priorities and restoration targets; make connections with TMDL leads in those areas.

- Trees alone are not enough. Need more creative in-stream work along with riparian work (engineering design of off channel areas, planting mix, riparian).
- Scoring criteria needs to be consistent with the questions you are asking,
- No match helps balance inequities for nonprofits and tribal challenges,
- Need to provide time for people to digest the RFP and apply for funding,
- Competitive funding models leads to partial implementation instead of fully funding and implementing Ecosystem Recovery Plans or Salmon Recovery Plans,
- Funding decisions at a state level would likely fund statewide priorities which may not align with regional priorities,
- Look into what states are the most successful in pulling in big amounts of grant funding, they have the most efficient grant reporting systems,
- Block grants that can fund long-term/ongoing maintenance,
- Regionally coordinated QAPPs to reduce administrative burden and align metrics,
- Consider how to allocate funding on a timeline that supports crew request timing, plant ordering timing, and the application windows for other grant programs,
- Need more funding for capacity to apply for grants, especially thinking about equity and justice, there is an imbalance for who can afford to apply,
- Funding needs to be sustained

These recommendations will be shared with the CR2SL Team and the Core Team when considering the timeline, sequencing, communicating about the funding opportunity, and championing for future grant funding opportunities.

Unique Geographic Considerations

Puget Sound contains a range of riparian areas, from highly constrained areas within the densely developed I5 corridor, to the agricultural areas of many lower watersheds, to the forestlands and mountain terrain of headwater streams and tributaries. These zones and the gradients in between contain unique opportunities, challenges, and costs to restore.

Practitioners who work primarily in urban watersheds expressed that the cost to restore and/or protect these areas typically far exceeds that of projects in rural areas. They also shared that because these systems tend to be highly constrained by surrounding, often essential infrastructure, the minimum buffer widths currently tied to implementation funding do not offer the flexibility needed to restore urban stream buffers. Likewise, they shared that smaller property sizes and therefore increased number of landowners to perform outreach and work with are challenges to restoration in urban watersheds.

The issue of available and affordable housing is closely linked to workforce capacity. Entry, and sometimes mid-career level restoration workers are finding it increasingly difficult to access safe housing due to the combination of low wages, inflation, and limited housing stock. This issue is prevalent across Puget Sound but was a larger part of the conversation with groups that work in rural geographies.

Limitations

Due to time constraints to gather this feedback to inform the initial grant solicitation, the CR2SL team could not attend in person workshops in every Puget Sound geography. The CR2SL team attempted to attend local LIO and LE meetings in areas that were unlikely to attend the in-person workshops, but the focus and engagement at the in-person workshops tended to be deeper and produced more detailed feedback.

The May Tribal listening sessions were not well attended, with four natural resource staff from three Tribes in attendance the first day, and no Tribal staff or representatives attending the second day. Tribal staff were, however, present at most of the workshops and LIO/LE meetings.

Role of Puget Sound Riparian Professional Feedback in Investment Plan Development

The recommendations in this report and detailed notes from each of the engagements are the foundation upon which the Climate Resilient Riparian Systems Lead program will take its next steps. The feedback on each of the preliminary themes along with the intent of the funding, the funding terms and conditions, and additional vetting with tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission will help inform the investment priorities for the 2024 Investment Plan. The Investment Plan will be published and shared with partners in October 2024 and will include both the high-level concepts discussed during the engagements and some details that emerged directly from participants.

In order to align partner feedback with the intent of this funding, an ad-hoc group of CR2SL Team members compiled a Mural board that included all unique ideas generated through the engagement process and shared this with the CR2SL advisory Core Team. Ideas were categorized and clustered by themes, then a title was included to show the common idea among the cluster of ideas. These titles were used to generate draft investment themes, with the activity details and ideas for funding included along with the theme. The CR2SL team will continue to adapt the funding opportunity based on input from local practitioners, tribal governments, the advisory team, and the coalition of partners developed to guide the process.

Collaborative opportunities for the future

While it is not possible with limited funding to meet all of the needs, barriers, and challenges identified by regionwide partners in this report, it is the goal of the CR2SL Team to support the development of a collaborative and more consistent programmatic approach to restoring and maintaining riparian buffers throughout the Puget Sound region. There are many different funding sources, both state and federal, that support riparian buffer implementation, each with their own set of guidelines and conditions. There are also many policy discussions happening on this issue. These funding programs and policy approaches are not always well connected nor are they grounded in a deeper understanding of the needs of the on-the-ground partners who are on the front lines of getting this work done. While the CR2SL Team and associated funding

may not be able to meet all of the identified needs, over the remaining 6-years of the project period, the CR2SL Team will use this report to help inform adjacent funding and policy programs to work towards a more coordinated, programmatic approach to support the long-term success of riparian restoration and salmon recovery. The CR2SL is committed to harmonizing with and supporting the overarching riparian efforts in Puget Sound and will adaptively manage the program to best meet needs across the region.