



# CONCLUSION

The past two years have seen some good news and positive trends. Yet the future of Puget Sound remains at risk. The Sound's overall trajectory, as charted in this report, continues to be one of decline, with continuing harms to the clean water, abundant habitat and intact natural processes that are the foundations of a healthy environment.

The pace of growth in the region, coupled with associated increases in impervious surfaces, alteration and loss of habitat, and pollutants in the air and water, continue to drive a silent crisis. While the Sound appears beautiful, its web of life is at risk.

To continue our current path will mean further losses in the Sound's wildlife such as the orca, rockfish and marine birds as well as the loss of opportunities to enjoy the Sound through harvesting of oysters and clams, swimming at its beaches and watching the salmon swim upstream to spawn.



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PHOTOS: (top to bottom) Gravel shoreline at Fort Worden State Park. | Rae A. McNally; Paddling a kayak across a Puget Sound bay. | Shutterstock.com/Alan Heartfield; (opposite page) Winter dawn, Seattle. | Shutterstock.com/Candice Cusack.

But a healthy Puget Sound is within our reach if we make significant changes in the way we develop the land, use resources and dispose of our wastes. We must manage our own behaviors and activities in ways that protect public resources and our natural heritage. The choices are ours, but they are not easy ones to make.

There are, however, reasons to be optimistic. The past two years have seen many important improvements. The achievements are the result of the work of thousands of people throughout the region who dedicate their time and energies to the protection and restoration of Puget Sound. We greatly appreciate their contributions. Their work has been essential to the preservation of a functioning ecosystem.

As we continue to make strides in reducing our impact on the environment, the playing field is always changing. As known threats are reduced or eliminated, new threats and challenges emerge. For example, flame retardants in fish, mammals and people was a compound we did not even track a decade ago.

Protecting and restoring a complex and dynamic ecosystem like Puget Sound, with an equally complex and dynamic human civilization threaded throughout, is a permanent challenge. We will never reach the point where the Sound is “recovered” and we can turn our attentions to something else. Sustaining a healthy Puget Sound requires perpetual effort and vigilance.

In the final analysis, saving Puget Sound is not just about Puget Sound. What affects Puget Sound affects our lives and our future as well. Taking care of Puget Sound is taking care of our homes and our economy. It is taking care of the place that gives us shelter, provides food, maintains our health and makes our lives richer.

Taking care of Puget Sound is also taking care of the most important legacy we have to give to our children and grandchildren. We do not own Puget Sound, we have only borrowed it from our children and grandchildren. We owe it to them to pass on the Sound in a healthy and thriving condition.



CLIFF DEPUTY



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PHOTOS: (top to bottom) Passengers on a ferry in Central Puget Sound. | Shutterstock.com/Cliff Deputy; Barge on Thea Foss Waterway, Tacoma. | Rae A. McNally.