



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**

# **KELP AND EELGRASS ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

## **(2SSB 5619)**

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RCW 79.135.440

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In response to dramatic loss of kelp and eelgrass in Washington, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 5619, which directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to create a statewide Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Plan (referred to hereafter as “the Plan”). The goal of the Plan is to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of kelp forest and eelgrass meadow habitat by 2040, advancing high-priority strategies identified in both the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan and the Puget Sound Eelgrass Recovery Strategy.

DNR will develop this plan through a collaborative planning process to proactively assess and prioritize areas for coordinated conservation and restoration activities of kelp forests and eelgrass meadows throughout the Puget Sound and along the Washington Coastline.

To guide this collaborative process, DNR has created the following Kelp and Eelgrass Engagement Plan which identifies pathways, tools, and opportunities for engagement of tribes, the public, and stakeholders in development of the Statewide Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Plan.

This Engagement Plan provides a roadmap for the duration of development of the Framework for Prioritizing Conservation and Restoration Areas, which is to be submitted to the legislature by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Beyond this date, DNR will engage in feasibility analyses and community outreach to collaboratively select at least 10,000 acres for implementation of conservation and restoration.

The Engagement Plan outlines a spectrum of engagement which provides four pathways for participation at varying levels of commitment. The four pathways for public engagement, from least involved to most, are:

- **RECEIVE:** Receive information on Plan development and finalization
- **REVIEW:** Review the final plan and provide feedback
- **INFORM:** Inform development of the priority areas and other aspects of the Plan during plan development workshops
- **STEER:** Steer creation of the Plan in regular working meetings with DNR staff

Tribes will be invited to participate at any of the pathways in the spectrum of engagement, as well as through staff-level discussions, formal consultation and additional opportunities for input and review of the draft text.

Alongside experts from DNR, these groups will provide iterative input and guidance during development of the Plan to ensure the diverse values and needs surrounding kelp and eelgrass are accurately reflected.

## **BACKGROUND**

Washington Senate Bill 5619, also known as the *Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Bill* and signed in March 2022, tasks the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with collaboratively developing a plan which identifies at least 10,000 acres of priority kelp and eelgrass habitat for conservation and restoration by 2040.

Kelp forests and eelgrass meadows are diverse and productive nearshore ecosystems, providing critical habitat for a wide array of marine life, including threatened and endangered species such as salmon, rockfish, and abalone. These marine forests and meadows play an important role in climate mitigation and adaptation by sequestering carbon and relieving ocean acidification. In addition to these ecological benefits, kelp and eelgrass have important cultural value to Northwest native people, playing a prominent role in traditional fishing, hunting, and food preparation and storage.

As a milestone within development of this Statewide Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Health and Conservation Plan (“the Plan”), DNR is required to submit an Engagement Plan to the legislature by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 alongside a schedule for Plan development. The document presented here represents fulfillment of that requirement.

This Engagement Plan provides a roadmap for the duration of development of the Framework for Prioritizing Conservation and Restoration Areas, which is to be submitted to the legislature by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Beyond this date, DNR will engage in feasibility analyses and community outreach to collaboratively select at least 10,000 acres for implementation of conservation and restoration.

Within this Plan and in future deliverables, DNR will approximate the boundaries of Puget Sound to include all salt waters of Washington State inside the international boundary and lying east of the junction of the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Juan de Fuca as described in RCW 90.17.010. All remaining salt water west of this boundary will be defined as the Coast (Figure 1).

DNR’s vision for this Engagement Plan is to inspire collaborative stewardship and collective action to conserve and restore Washington’s kelp forests and eelgrass meadows for the benefit of current and future generations. DNR seeks to collaboratively build the Engagement Plan for kelp and eelgrass health and conservation which reflects the most up-to-date scientific knowledge as well as priorities of the communities who interact with kelp and eelgrass in the life, work, or recreation and the native nations for whom kelp and eelgrass have cultural significance.

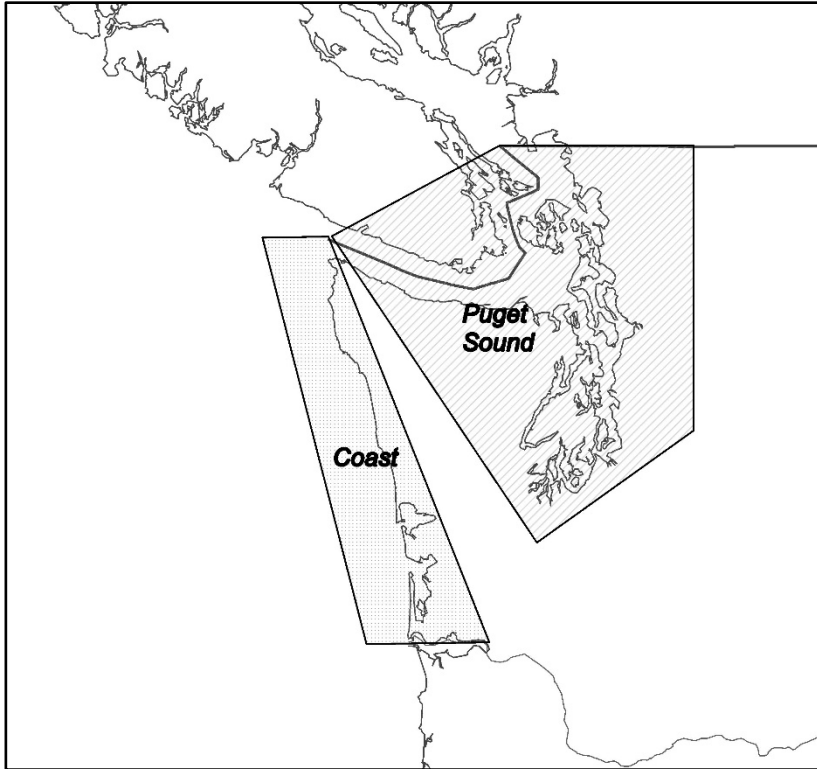


Figure 1: An outline of the areas defined as the Coast and Puget Sound for the purposes of this plan. All salt water within these polygons and belonging to the State of Washington is included in these areas.

DNR will engage with stakeholders and holders of rights, treaties, and titles on a spectrum of participation which presents four levels of engagement, each with associated goals and promises to the public. These goals and promises will serve as a framework for modes of communication and actions DNR uses to share, receive, and respond to information during Plan development. In addition, DNR presents a parallel pathway for Tribal consultation and review, though Tribes are invited to also participate in the public pathways according to their interest.

In all activities, DNR seeks to be transparent and actively focus on incorporation of community input, implementing a collaborative model for priority development where feasible.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY**

Environmental justice and equity are key components of DNR's approach to engagement for the Statewide Kelp and Eelgrass Plan. DNR's mission to sustain and protect Washington's natural resources, including kelp and eelgrass, requires equitable and just prioritization and involvement of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations in development of management plans.

The Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, passed by the state legislature in 2021, aims to reduce environmental health disparities and improve the health of all Washington state residents by providing recommendations developed by the state Environmental Justice Task Force for prioritizing environmental justice in state government.

### ***How DNR will engage with overburdened communities and vulnerable populations***

To promote environmental justice and equity within the context of kelp and eelgrass habitats, the agency has followed the guidance provided within the DNR Provisional Community Engagement Guide in development of this Engagement Plan. This guide directs agency plans and strategic decisions to consider equitable community engagement along a spectrum of involvement, which has served as a framework for the Kelp and Eelgrass Engagement Plan. The Engagement Plan seeks to elevate communities to their desired level of engagement along the spectrum wherever possible, as described below in *Pathways of Engagement*.

In crafting the Engagement Plan, DNR has used the evaluation guide published on page 29 of the Provisional Community Engagement Guide, adapted from the Department of Health. This evaluation guide recommends reflections before, during, and after community engagement as a pathway toward establishing a more just process.

In reviewing the evaluation guide, DNR has taken steps to identify or address the following:

- Barriers to engagement
  - Many communities most invested in the health and conservation of kelp and eelgrass lack the time or capacity to engage meaningfully with DNR. To mitigate this barrier, DNR has established multiple pathways for engagement with varying degrees of time commitment. Communities can self-select their level of participation and change pathways at any time.
  - This Engagement Plan will use workshops to solicit input from communities on their values related to kelp and eelgrass health and conservation. DNR recognizes that physical attendance and community calendars can be a barrier to engagement. To mitigate this barrier, DNR has established a webpage which provides ongoing information digitally and offers individuals the opportunity to contact DNR to provide comment at any time in the process. DNR will share notes and information from workshops publically where appropriate to do so and as allowable by the Public Records Act, with special note to protect

sensitive cultural information which may be shared by Tribes or locations of endangered or threatened species.

- Individuals and communities who seek to participate in this process have varying levels of background knowledge about kelp and eelgrass. To ensure the process is accessible to all levels of background knowledge, DNR has made plain-language information available on its webpage, and will provide a plain-language review of the current state of knowledge at the initial workshop. The workshop presentations will be recorded and made available online, as well as a summary of input from the workshops.
- Communities with limited English proficiency may be excluded from the process if materials are provided only in English. DNR will strive to offer translation to communities with limited English proficiency when requested, and commit to translating key deliverables, including the Plan and final list of 10,000 acres of habitat, and relevant outreach materials.
- Recognition of power dynamics
  - Individuals and communities with more capacity to participate in the process may tend to dominate the conversation surrounding kelp and eelgrass. To mitigate this power imbalance, DNR will seek to promote less-commonly engaged voices by ensuring multiple avenues for participation which elevate less-commonly engaged communities. Tools will include targeted outreach and opportunities for individual feedback via digital venues.
  - The marine community can experience funding and data imbalances between the Puget Sound and the Coast. To ensure communities from all regions are heard, DNR will host geography-specific workshops.
  - Location and staffing of physical workshops can represent a power dynamic which may prevent individuals or communities from feeling comfortable in participating. To mitigate this power dynamic, DNR will seek to host open public workshops in physical spaces which limit representation of State or colonial power and instead center Indigenous or local communities. DNR will seek to use a third party facilitator for these workshops to remove perception of power imbalance in the conversation.
- Centering the most-impacted people
  - DNR may be unaware of communities which are most-impacted by kelp and eelgrass health and conservation or relevant communities which are overburdened or vulnerable. To identify these communities, DNR will use the Washington State Health Disparity Mapping Tool and the Washington Department of Ecology's Water Quality Mapping Tool.
  - Communities which may be most-impacted by kelp and eelgrass health and conservation may not be commonly included in conversations surrounding kelp and eelgrass, or DNR may have insufficient relationships with communities identified as vulnerable or overburden. To mitigate this, DNR will release an open call for additional partners, promote a transparent process documented online, and provide multiple opportunities to engage. DNR will also seek to use its existing



relationships with partner organizations to promote participation from these communities in the Plan development process.

### ***Tribal and Indigenous People and environmental justice***

DNR recognizes tribes as important partners in managing Washington's natural resources. Kelp and eelgrass have important cultural value to Northwest native people and have provided diverse marine resources that have sustained and inspired Indigenous traditions over generations. DNR will seek tribal input during development of the Plan through consultation consistent with DNR's Consultation with Tribal Governments Process on the cultural and ecological importance of native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows now threatened by urbanization or other disturbances.

### ***Commitment to ongoing engagement and improvement***

A commitment to environmental justice and equity is continuous work. DNR strives to ensure that environmental justice and equity, in relation to kelp and eelgrass, is not an action which is achieved upon submission of the Plan, but rather an ongoing process which frames work from establishment of the 10,000 acres through 2040 and beyond. In addition, effects of both action and inaction may create overburdened groups who are not apparent today. To that end, DNR will seek ongoing engagement with tribes, communities, the public, and stakeholders to ensure that the Plan and its implementation continue to accurately reflect the values and needs of the diverse groups relevant to this Plan.



## PATHWAYS FOR ENGAGEMENT

		<b>RECEIVE</b>	<b>REVIEW</b>	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>STEER</b>
<b>WHO</b>		Interested in final result, does not want to engage in development	Interested in final result and wishes to provide feedback on results and process	Invested in result and wants to provide input on creation of prioritization framework and reporting	Invested in result, and wants to drive creation of framework, monitoring, and reporting plans.
<b>WHAT</b>		May reference plan after public release.	Will provide feedback on draft plan after public release.	Will provide input on framework considerations, and review draft plan after public release.	Will help create framework with DNR, and review Plan before draft release.
<b>PATHWAY</b>		One-way*	Two-way	Two-way	Two-way
<b>TOOLS USED</b>	<b>Mailing List</b>	X	X	X	X
	<b>Website</b>	X	X	X	X
	<b>Public Input</b>		X	X	X
	<b>Workshops</b>			X	X
	<b>Working Group</b>				X
	<b>Active review</b>				X

\* Communities engaged in one-way communication will have the opportunity to provide comments or feedback through digital communications if desired.

## **RECEIVE**

The goal of the RECEIVE pathway (Figure 2) is for DNR to “provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Use for Kelp and Eelgrass***

Definition: The largest group of stakeholders will be in this inform category, which represents those with an interest in the result of the Kelp and Eelgrass Plan but who do not choose to play an active role in its development.

Goal: To inform the public on progress and outcomes of the Plan and provide the opportunity to move to “REVIEW” if the relationship develops or valuable interactions are identified.

Potential Tools:

- Informational webpage
- Communicate via mailing list
- Informational webinars

Example Groups in the *Receive* Category:

- Interested general public
- Those outside Washington state with an interest in kelp and eelgrass

## **REVIEW**

The goal of a REVIEW process (Figure 2) is for DNR to “obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.” In this process, participants contribute their viewpoints, opinions, or preferences, and DNR will then use this information to inform agency decisions.

### ***Use for Kelp and Eelgrass***

Definition: This category consists of stakeholders and parties with rights, treaties, and titles relevant to kelp and eelgrass and are directly involved in work or life relevant to kelp and eelgrass within Washington State, including environmental conservation, climate, fishing and shellfish, or use regular use of kelp and eelgrass, or these parties are deeply involved in kelp and eelgrass preservation, but have loose ties to Washington State. They may reference the Plan in the work after its publication.

Goal: To inform parties and obtain feedback on Kelp and Eelgrass Plan, or receive input on alternatives and decisions. Identify where, if at all, feedback is incorporated into plan or provide explanations as to why feedback was not accepted. Provide the opportunity to move to “INFORM” if the relationship develops/interactions are identified.

Potential Tools:

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<sup>1</sup>This and following category descriptions are adapted from the International Association for Public Participation’s *Spectrum of Public Participation* (<https://www.iap2.org/>).

- Informational webpage
- Communicate via mailing list
- Informational sessions
- Public review

Example Groups in the *Review* Category:

- Members of the kelp-and-eelgrass-interested public
- State and local governments
- Representatives of federal agencies
- Representatives of marine or aquatic-focused non-profits
- Representatives of industries associated with kelp and eelgrass habitats

## **INFORM**

The goal of an INFORM process (Figure 2) is for DNR to “work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.” In this process, participants are actively involved in a decision-making process organized by leaders such as school administrators and public officials.

### ***Use for Kelp and Eelgrass***

Definition: This category includes parties who hold rights, treaties, and titles within Washington State or usual and accustomed areas which overlap the jurisdiction of this plan, or represent stakeholders who are invested in kelp and eelgrass conservation and restoration within Washington State, or use kelp and eelgrass or operate in activities which directly affect or are directly affected by kelp and eelgrass areas. They will interact with the Plan on a regular basis after publication.

Goal: To directly engage with parties to receive input and feedback on alternatives. To ensure interests and concerns of parties are reflected in the Plan and to provide feedback from parties on draft products. Ongoing input after plan publication will be to provide input on implementation and adaptive management. Parties in the INFORM category have the opportunity to move to “STEER” if the relationship develops/interactions are identified.

Potential Tools:

- Informational webpage
- Communicate via mailing list
- Informational sessions
- Workshops
- Public review

Example Groups in the *Inform* Category:

- Members of the kelp-and-eelgrass-interested public
- Aquatic interest groups
- Tribal members and Indigenous groups\*
- Academic scientists and researchers
- State and local governments

- Representatives of federal agencies
- Representatives of marine or aquatic-focused non-profits
- Representatives of industries associated with kelp and eelgrass habitats

\* Tribal Nations are invited to participate in consultation and review as part of the Tribal pathway described below, but are also invited to join any of the public pathways.

## **STEER**

The goal of a STEER process (Figure 2) is for DNR to “partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.” In this collaborative process, the lead organization (DNR) works in partnership with members of the public to identify problems and develop solutions.

### ***Use for Kelp and Eelgrass***

Definition: This category includes parties who hold rights, treaties, and titles within Washington State or usual and accustomed areas which overlap the jurisdiction of this plan, or represent stakeholders who are invested in kelp and eelgrass conservation and restoration within Washington State, or use kelp and eelgrass or operate in activities which directly affect or are directly affected by kelp and eelgrass areas. They will interact with the Plan on a regular basis after publication. This group differs from the Inform category in the level of time and commitment required to achieve the goals and objectives of this communication pathway.

Goal: To directly engage with parties on overall goals and to collaborate together on direction and solutions. Iterate on and incorporate advice into decisions to maximum extent possible. Ongoing input after plan publication to advise on implementation and adaptive management.

Potential Tools:

- Informational webpage
- Communicate via mailing list
- Informational sessions
- Workshops
- Working group
- Active Review

Example Groups in the *Inform* Category:

- Members of the public with knowledge of their community’s values surrounding kelp and eelgrass
- Tribal members and Indigenous groups\*
- Academic scientists and researchers
- State and local governments
- Representatives of federal agencies
- Representatives of marine or aquatic-focused non-profits, industries, or lobbies invested to restoration and conservation of marine vegetation and kelp

\* Tribal Nations are invited to participate in consultation and review as part of the Tribal pathway described below, but are also invited to join any of the public pathways.

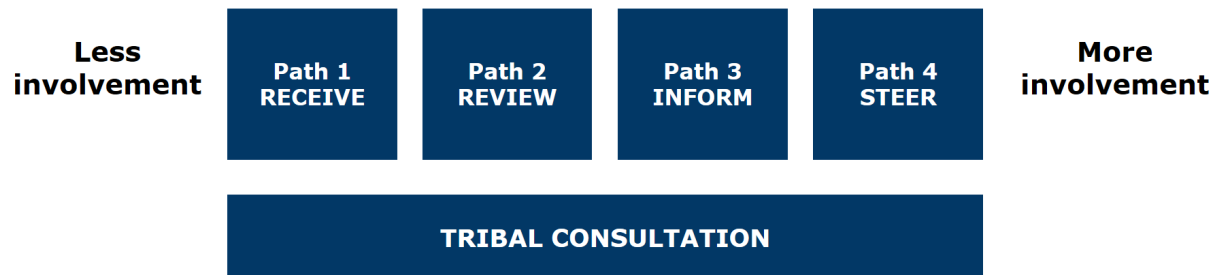


Figure 2: Paths for engagement, represented on a spectrum from less involved (left) to more involved (right) are offered to capture varying degrees of interest and capacity from partners. Tribes are invited to participate in any of the public paths (1-4) as well through consultation.

## TRIBAL PARTNERS

DNR recognizes tribes' shared stewardship of Washington's lands and waters, their shared geography with Washington State as sovereign nations, and their vital role as knowledge holders who are critical partners in achieving the goals and objectives of the Plan. DNR further recognizes tribes have integral and interdependent relationships with their natural areas beyond the historical and contemporary provision of subsistence.

DNR maintains government-to-government relations with the 29 federally-recognized Indian tribes residing in the State of Washington as well as Indian tribes who have Usual and Accustomed Areas within the state of Washington. The department works toward collaborative relationships and good communication with tribes in all its programs.

The department recognizes the tribes' separate rights and authorities and commits to work to resolve problems, and to develop relations at all levels of the department to assure good communication and availability of technical and policy expertise.

DNR recognizes that the identities and recognition status of Indigenous people and tribes are complex, and will seek to engage with Indigenous communities in a manner consistent with the Consultation with Tribal Governments Process. DNR seeks to meaningfully consult with tribes early and often throughout the Plan development process. This will be accomplished through staff-level consultation, special work sessions at future DNR-Tribal summits, as well as invitation to participate in any aspect of the spectrum of engagement as described above.

DNR will host a webinar and share a notification in the fall of 2022 which will include an overview of opportunities to participate in development of the Plan. Tribes will be invited to engage with DNR using any pathway of public participation alongside the established tribal pathway for participation.

#### Associated Tools

- Informational webpage
- Communicate via mailing list
- Informational sessions
- Tribal review
- Workshops
- Working group
- Active Review
- Staff-level consultation
- DNR Tribal Summit special work session

## **ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION**

### **ENGAGEMENT TOOLS**

#### ***KELP AND EELGRASS WEBSITE***

A public website will be made available to serve as the main conduit of communicating updates and information regarding the Plan to the public. This website, hosted at [dnr.wa.gov/kelp-and-eelgrass-plan](https://dnr.wa.gov/kelp-and-eelgrass-plan), will provide information on upcoming events and opportunities for the public to participate in development of the Plan and host draft documents for review, as well as the finalized Plan. The public can sign up for a mailing list for updates at this website.

#### ***PUBLIC WORKSHOPS***

A series of workshops will be held in winter 2023 that will inform the Plan's prioritization framework by working with stakeholders from the "INFORM" and "STEER" category to create a shared vision and values for the Plan, as well as identify priorities around kelp forests and eelgrass beds. Detailed agendas and facilitation plan will be developed with the Working Group. The workshops will be successful if we have representative participation from overburdened communities and tribal communities.

- **Kick Off Workshop**

Goal: Develop a shared vision on priorities and values that will inform the overall prioritization framework for identifying priority areas for conservation and recovery of kelp forest and eelgrass meadows.

Format: This workshop will be virtual, held in late January or early February 2023, and may be available in two sessions to accommodate both day and evening schedules.

- **Puget Sound Workshop**

Goal: Solicit input on Puget Sound-specific prioritization values. May identify stressors and develop initial list of tools and actions for restoring or protecting future identified priority areas.

Format: This workshop will offer both an in-person and virtual option, held in March of 2023.

- **Coast Workshop**

Goal: Solicit input on coast-specific prioritization values. May identify stressors and develop initial list of tools and actions for restoring or protecting future identified priority areas.

Format: This workshop will offer both an in-person and virtual option, held in March of 2023.

### **SEPA**

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requires timely environmental review when an agency proposes an activity that may impact the environment. The SEPA process will likely occur in 2024 and include a public comment period. SEPA represents an additional tool for public and tribal participation. Those interested in being notified for SEPA review processes relevant to the Plan are invited to send their contact information and the area or proposal type of interest to [sepacenter@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:sepacenter@dnr.wa.gov) to be added to the relevant mailing lists.

### **WORKING GROUP**

The Working Group will consist of stakeholders from the Steer Category and represents those most actively invested in the Kelp and Eelgrass Plan development. Working Group members will self-nominate through an application process that will run through fall of 2022, and a group of 10-12 members will be selected after review of applications by at least three DNR staff members associated with plan development.

This Group will meet regularly with accepted responsibilities to:

- Convene with DNR leads to advise on content and vision of the Plan
- Provide technical expertise relevant to kelp and eelgrass conservation and recovery
- Assist in crafting selected text for the Plan
- Help disseminate information relating to the Plan to their networks

Working Group members should possess expertise/knowledge in at least one of the following:

- Stressors of kelp and eelgrass;
- Current and historical kelp and eelgrass coverage;
- Ongoing kelp and eelgrass recovery efforts;
- Human uses of and relationships with kelp and eelgrass;
- Values and priorities of their community relevant to the marine environment; or
- Other knowledge or abilities relevant to the job of the working group.

## ENGAGEMENT PLAN MILESTONES

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Approximate Date</b>
Tribal Engagement	October 2022 to September 2023
Working Group Recruitment	Fall 2022
Tribal Consultation	December 2022 to June 2023
Working Group Regular Meetings	December 2022 to September 2023
Kick Off Workshop	January 2023*
Puget Sound Workshop	February or March 2023*
Coastal Workshop	February or March 2023*
Review of the Plan by Tribes & Indigenous interests	July 2023*
Review of the Plan by the Public	August 2023*
Submit Plan to Legislature	December 1, 2023

\*Dates to be updated when final details are available

## TIMELINE FOR ONGOING ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT

This Engagement Plan outlines the process leading to development of the collaborative framework for prioritizing kelp forest and eelgrass meadow habitat for conservation and restoration. Following development and application of this prioritization framework, DNR will work to conduct a feasibility analysis on the prioritized habitat. This feasibility analysis will include extensive community outreach which will require more detailed information on the geography and demography of the priority areas for complete planning. Plans for community outreach specific to each targeted priority area will be made available following prioritization, beginning in 2024. Feedback from community outreach will inform selection of the final list of at least 10,000 acres for conservation and restoration.

DNR intends to provide ongoing engagement opportunities beyond those described in this Engagement Plan informing the final prioritization process. Tools specific to ongoing engagement include:

- Digital feedback solicited through the Kelp and Eelgrass Plan Website
- SEPA Review
- Feedback on biennial monitoring reports to the legislature
- Presentations to relevant groups, conferences, and meetings
- Ongoing tribal consultation
- Additional to-be-determined implementation workshop(s)

The Working Group may continue to meet to provide additional guidance on next phases of the Plan, which will include additional workshops and other engagement opportunities in 2024 and beyond.





## PLAN DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

	2022	2023												2024+	2040
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec		
<i>Submit Engagement Plan to Legislature</i>															
Recruit Working Group															
Meet with Tribes for 1 :1 Staff Consultation															
Working Group															
Kick off Workshop															
Regional Workshops															
Draft Prioritization Framework for initial review															
Draft Monitoring Plan for review															
Tribal Review of Draft Prioritization Framework															
Public Review of Draft Prioritization Framework															
Finalize Draft Prioritization Framework and Monitoring Plan															
<b>Submit Plan to Legislature</b>															
Feasibility and Community Outreach															
10,000 Priority Acres Identified															
Biennial Reporting															
<b>At least 10,000 Acres Conserved or Restored</b>															