

# **GAO Review of Puget Sound Restoration Efforts**

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## Origins of the Review

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- Date of Request: June 2016
- Source: Chair and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
- Request part of GAO's larger body of work on ecosystem restoration efforts nationwide



# Research Objectives

The report examined:

- 1) Puget Sound restoration efforts and related expenditures for fiscal years 2012 through 2016
- 2) How federal and nonfederal entities coordinate their restoration efforts
- 3) The framework for assessing restoration progress
- 4) Key factors that may limit the success of Puget Sound restoration

## Puget Sound Basin



# Initial Challenge of Engagement Design: Stakeholder Complexity

15 federal entities, including:



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®



More than 100 nonfederal entities:

- Puget Sound Partnership and other state agencies
- Tribal entities
- Local governments
- Nongovernmental organizations



## Methodology

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- Analysis of laws, regulations, and agency documentation
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Site visits to restoration projects



# Primary Coordination Groups and Planning Documents

## Intergovernmental



### Puget Sound Management Conference

- Led by Washington State’s Puget Sound Partnership
- Members: federal, state, tribal, local, Canadian, and nongovernmental entities



### The Action Agenda for Puget Sound

- Lays out primary framework for assessing restoration progress

## Federal



### Puget Sound Federal Task Force

- Consists of a national-level leadership group, supported by regional leadership and implementation teams



### The Puget Sound Federal Task Force Action Plan

- Identifies federal actions to help protect and restore Puget Sound

## Finding #1: Federal and Nonfederal Funding

- We identified 153 federal and state efforts that supported Puget Sound restoration from FY12-16, but total expenditures are unknown
- Many restoration projects, such as the Qwuloolt Estuary Restoration Project shown below, obtained funds from multiple federal and nonfederal sources



The breaching of a levee (left) helped to restore estuary habitat (right) that supports salmon and other species.

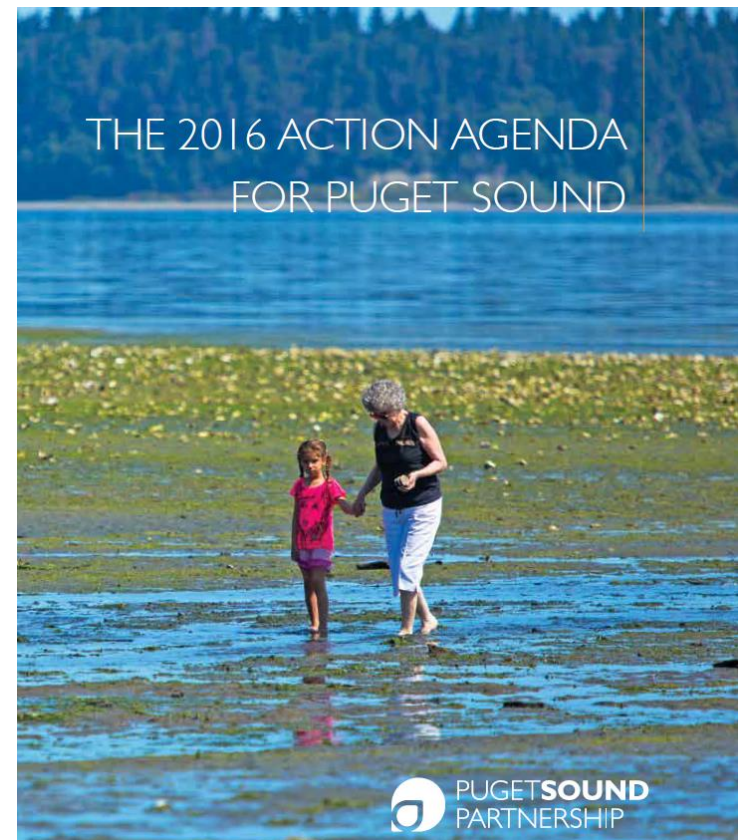
Source: Tulalip Tribes. | GAO-18-453



## Finding #2: Assessment of Progress

- The Partnership's ability to assess restoration progress has been limited, in part because the management conference has not established recovery targets for 16 of the 47 performance indicators

*Recommendation: Develop targets for the highest priority indicators where possible*

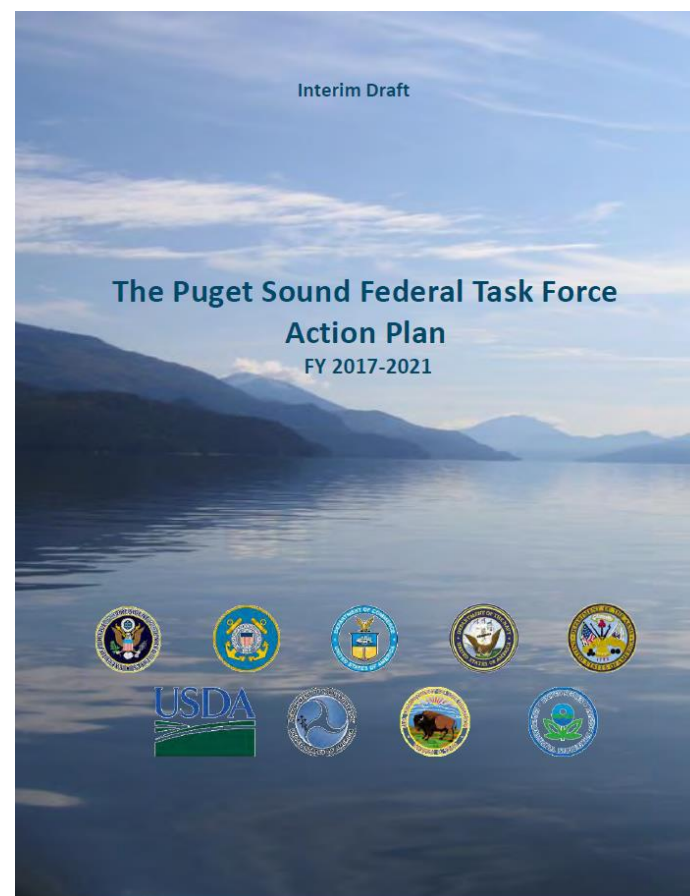




## Finding #3: Assessment of Federal Contributions

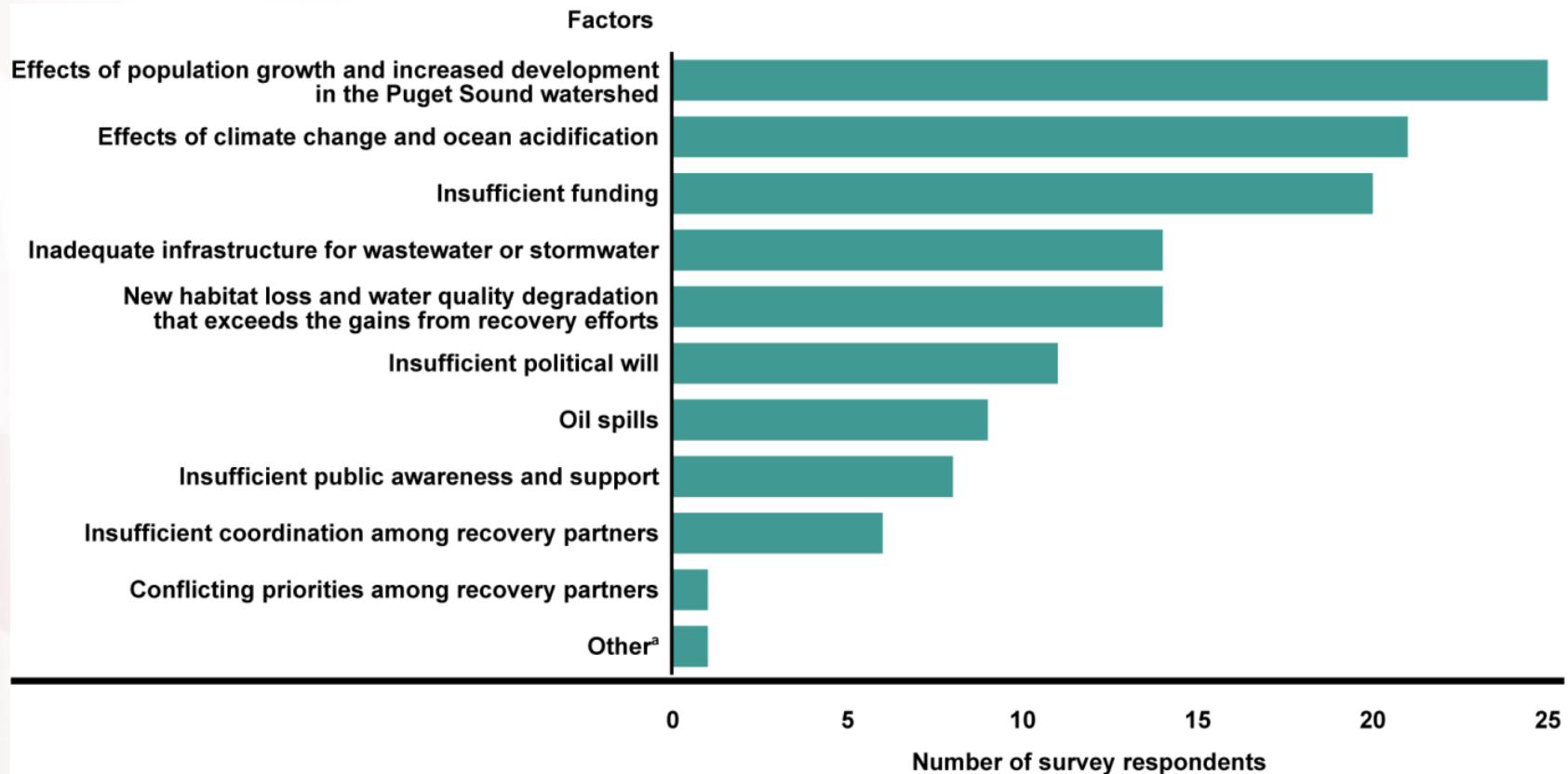
- The Action Plan’s priority federal actions are not linked to the restoration goals, indicators, and targets in the Partnership’s Action Agenda
  - This limits the Federal Task Force’s ability to assess federal contributions to restoration progress

*Recommendation: Link the priority federal actions to the Partnership’s framework for assessing restoration progress*



# Finding #4: Risks to Puget Sound Restoration

Federal and State Survey Respondents Identified Factors that Pose a Great Risk to the Long-Term Overall Success of Puget Sound Restoration Efforts



Source: GAO analysis of survey responses from 15 federal entities and 12 state entities. | GAO-18-453

# GAO Report on Puget Sound Restoration



United States Government Accountability Office  
Report to the Committee on  
Transportation and Infrastructure,  
House of Representatives

July 2018

## PUGET SOUND RESTORATION

Additional Actions  
Could Improve  
Assessments of  
Progress

GAO-18-453

- Report issued July 2018
- [GAO-18-453](#)
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