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Response to follow-up questions from the Seattle public meeting:

1. You asked for further elaboration on "ecosystem management" and what the federal government can do to implement this concept.

It may be arrogant to think that ecosystems can be managed, but human activities should be managed with ecosystem concepts in mind. This is in contrast, for example, to managing human activities with only one or several species of plants or animals in mind.

In the case of the marine ecosystem, there are species whose needs help define what the ecosystem as a whole needs to be healthy, but we have had a hard time looking beyond one endangered species at a time. The federal government has an important role to play, because it has tended to wait until species are on the brink of extinction before addressing problems that are systemic (ecosystemic, actually) in nature. And then because the ESA is the driver and NMFS is a very reluctant implementer, management responses tend to be as little as possible.

And in the absence of ESA listings, very little is done at all as the marine ecosystem collapses around us. In an ideal (or at least better) world, the federal government would evaluate and take action to protect the marine environment before we get to the point of ESA listings.

Managing with ecosystems in mind goes hand in hand with the precautionary principle, another concept that the federal government struggles with, because of its reluctance to regulate.

And another way of thinking about more systematic management is to put together what needs to be done for habitat restoration and protection, with what needs to be done to eliminate toxins from the environment and from ongoing discharges, with what needs to be done to restrict harvests and establish protected areas. These things occur in their separate boxes, and thus government actions have had limited success in protecting or restoring marine environment health.

Restoration of wild salmon runs could in fact be a decent vehicle for restoring ecosystem health, if done properly. As could the restoration of the health of the Southern resident community of orca whales. Because of their places in the food web and because of the habitat needs of their prey as well as themselves, not much is left out if these species are truly restored. But it has been extremely difficult for NMFS to bite the political bullet of a comprehensive approach. Most of their attention has been in the fresh water, and as they narrow down to specific watersheds and specific runs, the ecosystem as a whole figures less and less into their thinking.

2. You also asked for a list of activities and events that hinder state actions to protect and restore the health of marine waters. Here are a few:

Slow pace and lack of action on Superfund sites

Coast Guard resistance to state-initiated oil spill prevention programs EPA providing no backup on Clean Water Act implementation, even in the face of non-performance by the state State budget crisis.