

RIPARIAN MEMO

To: Evergreen MPA Faculty

Subject: Riparian Habitat Restoration in Washington State

Sam Miller

Sound Government Solutions / 3110 Ruston Way Suite F

Sam Miller's Policy Memo

Protecting our environment is something I am incredibly passionate about, and the impact of climate change is felt by more than just humans. In Washington State, salmon populations declined in the 19th and 20th centuries from overfishing, followed by the timber industry harvesting land, which negatively impacted the salmon habitats across our state (Anderson & Connolly, 2022). Salmon are in trouble, but through sensible riparian restoration, changes can be made to help reverse the negative impacts of climate change. Riparian restoration occurs when habitats are restored by planting native trees to give streams and rivers shade to bring water temperatures down.

I have had personal experience with this issue. During the last legislative session, our firm, Sound Government Solutions, worked on behalf of our tribal clients with tribal leaders, key legislators on both sides of the aisle, and key agricultural stakeholders to reach an agreement on language to incentivize landowners to create riparian buffers on their land voluntarily. During the prior session, a partisan bill was introduced that would have required mandatory buffer zones using a specific scientific calculation called "Site Potential Tree Height." Agriculture interests opposed the bill, and it did not pass. Our client's goal this year was to introduce and pass bi-partisan legislation and, ultimately, funding to go along with it. While this year's legislation also did not pass, the bi-partisan language was placed in the capital budget, which allocated \$50 million for the voluntary riparian habitat protection program (LEAP, p.128 & 134). The Governor signed the capital budget with the riparian habitat language included. This isn't a permanent solution; since the capital budget funding is only in effect for the two-year cycle, it is an important step forward. This was a bipartisan, collaborative effort, so

Sam Miller's Policy Memo

farmers and other landowners are more likely to want to participate in the program. Many falsely assumed that if the funding is there, farmers will participate. Through hours of dialogue, we learned that would not be the case. They needed to have confidence that the program would be fair and would not ultimately result in efforts to mandate their participation. If this bipartisan program results in farmers participating, accessing the funding, and creating riparian buffers on their land, this will be a positive step for salmon restoration.

Sam Miller's Policy Memo

References

- Anderson, C., & Connolly, S. (2022, June 7). *Salmon...A pacific northwest icon: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*. FWS.gov. <https://www.fws.gov/story/2022-06/salmon-a-pacific-northwest-icon#:~:text=Through%20the%2019th%20and,habitat%20in%20rivers%20and%20streams>
- Capital Budget*. /biennium/2023-24/PDF/bills/. (2023, May 17). <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/pdf/Bills/>
- Why habitat restoration?* North Olympic Salmon Coalition. (n.d.). <https://nosc.org/restoration/>