

HELP THE KELP: RAISING AWARENESS TO RESTORE WASHINGTON'S UNDERWATER FORESTS

ISSUE:

WASHINGTON'S NATIVE KELP FORESTS AND EELGRASS MEADOWS ARE RAPIDLY DECLINING DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE, POLLUTION, AND HABITAT DESTRUCTION. THESE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ORCA AND SALMON SURVIVAL, SHORELINE RESILIENCE, AND TRIBAL CULTURAL PRACTICES. RCW 79.135.440 SETS A GOAL OF RESTORING 10,000 ACRES BY 2040— BUT WITHOUT A PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION FALLS SHORT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REMAINS LIMITED.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

THESE REFLECT THE RESTORATION AND JUSTICE GOALS OUTLINED IN RCW 79.135.440 AND 2SSB 5619.

- ECOLOGICAL IMPACT
- PUBLIC/POLITICAL SUPPORT
- FEASIBILITY & COST
- EQUITY & INCLUSION
- SUSTAINABILITY

ALTERNATIVES:

DO NOTHING

- MAINTAINS STATUS QUO AND FAILS TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC OR SUPPORT TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP.

EXPAND MONITORING

- STRENGTHENS DATA COLLECTION BUT MISSES THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH.

PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN (RECOMMENDED)

- CO-LED BY TRIBAL NATIONS, THIS ALTERNATIVE PROMOTES AWARENESS, CO-GOVERNANCE, AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE.

RECOMMENDATION:

WASHINGTON STATE SHOULD INVEST IN A CULTURALLY GROUNDED PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN CO-LED BY TRIBAL NATIONS. THIS APPROACH BRIDGES SCIENCE WITH COMMUNITY VALUES, HONORS TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND ACTIVATES PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR LONG-TERM MARINE RESTORATION. IT IS ACTIONABLE, EQUITABLE, AND ALIGNED WITH RCW 79.135.440'S INTENT.

PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF KELP AND EELGRASS
- PUBLIC BACKING FOR RESTORATION EFFORTS AND FUNDING LEGISLATION
- ELEVATED TRIBAL LEADERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING
- COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION EVENTS AND EDUCATION
- LONG-TERM BEHAVIOR CHANGE SUPPORTING HABITAT PROTECTION

Assignment #7: Policy Brief on RCW 79.135.440 – Native Kelp Forests & Eelgrass

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Executive Summary

Washington's kelp forests and eelgrass meadows are in rapid decline, threatening marine ecosystems and the cultural practices that depend on them. In response, the state enacted RCW 79.135.440, which sets a goal of restoring 10,000 acres by 2040. However, the statute lacks a public education and outreach implementation plan, which limits community support and undermines Tribal co-stewardship efforts. This policy brief evaluates three options to address this implementation gap. It recommends a culturally grounded public education campaign co-led with Tribal Nations to connect science, policy, and communities to ensure that Washington's investments lead to lasting ecological and cultural recovery.

Issue

Washington's kelp forests and eelgrass meadows are in ongoing decline, with significant losses documented across Puget Sound and other marine areas. These critical nearshore habitats support marine biodiversity, provide nursery grounds for fish, stabilize shorelines, and play an essential role in carbon sequestration. Despite their ecological and cultural importance, kelp and eelgrass are disappearing due to factors such as water pollution, rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, shoreline development, and physical disturbances like anchoring and dredging. Without coordinated conservation efforts, this decline threatens the resilience of marine ecosystems, coastal economies, and the cultural practices that depend on them.

Problem Statement

RCW 79.135.440 mandates the conservation and restoration of 10,000 acres of native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows by 2040. However, the statute lacks an implementation plan for public education and Tribal-led outreach, limiting community engagement and undermining co-stewardship efforts necessary for long-term success.

Alternatives

1. Do Nothing

—**Description:** Continue current outreach and funding levels with no additional investment in public education or Tribal co-stewardship engagement.

—**Implications:** Maintains the status quo but risks further ecological loss and misses an opportunity to meet RCW 79.135.440's restoration targets. This alternative fails to address the identified gap in implementation related to community engagement (Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR, 2024).

2. Culturally Grounded Public Education Campaign (Recommended)

—**Description:** Develop and implement a statewide public education campaign, co-led with Tribal Nations, to increase awareness of kelp and eelgrass ecosystems and promote stewardship behaviors.

—**Implications:** Supports the intent of RCW 79.135.440 by bridging the implementation gap in public outreach. Centers Indigenous knowledge, builds long-term public support, and strengthens ecological and cultural restoration goals (WA DNR, 2024).

3. Expand Technical Monitoring and Restoration

—**Description:** Increase funding for habitat mapping, monitoring technologies, and partnerships with restoration experts to meet acreage targets.

—**Implications:** Improves scientific understanding and data access but does not directly address the lack of public engagement or Tribal co-leadership in education efforts (WA DNR, 2024).

Relationship to Results WA and Agency Strategic Plan

This proposal supports WA goals tied to climate resilience, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. It also reflects DNR’s mission to manage natural resources in ways that are sustainable and community centered (Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 2024a). But what this deeply speaks to is food sovereignty and treaty responsibility. Without healthy kelp forests and eelgrass meadows, juvenile salmon lose vital habitat. When salmon die off, so does a major food source for many Tribal Nations. This is not just about ecosystems. It is also about treaty-protected fishing rights, cultural survival, and the right to feed one's community in the way their ancestors did (Governor’s Salmon Recovery Office, n.d.; Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 2024b).

This work continues the legacy of leaders like Billy Frank Jr., whose fight during the Fish Wars reminded the state that salmon are tied to everything – culture, land, identity, and law (Library of Congress, 2022). Today, Tribal Nations continue to lead the work of marine restoration. The Squaxin Island Tribe partnered with DNR to protect the last major kelp bed in South Puget Sound (Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 2023). The Samish Indian Nation integrates traditional ecological knowledge into nearshore habitat protection. The

Port Gamble and Jamestown S’Klallam Tribes helped develop HB 1631, designating bull kelp as the official state marine forest (Northwest Straits Commission, n.d.).

This proposal does not replace those efforts. It supports them. It creates the structure and outreach to help the public understand why kelp matters and who is already doing the work. Salmon recovery is food sovereignty. Kelp restoration is part of that. This proposal creates a pathway for the public to understand those connections and take shared responsibility.

Rights Holders/Stakeholders Analysis

<i>Rights Holders / Stakeholders</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Interest</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Federally Recognized Tribal Nations (Rights Holder)	Co-stewards of marine ecosystems under federal law and Tribal sovereignty.	Protecting and restoring culturally significant habitats (kelp and eelgrass).	Sovereign rights, legal standing under treaties, required consultation. Leadership essential for RCW 79.135.440.	Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Samish Indian Nation
Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	Lead agency implementing RCW 79.135.440.	Meeting restoration targets, securing funding, coordinating monitoring and public engagement.	Controls planning, budget, and legislative reporting; collaborates with Tribes and partners.	—
Washington State Legislature	Created RCW 79.135.440 and oversees its progress.	Effective, equitable implementation; funding allocation.	Can amend law, expand funding, define agency authority.	—
Environmental Nonprofits & Advocacy Groups	Partners in restoration, outreach, and organizing.	Marine health, climate adaptation, environmental justice.	Mobilize support, influence legislation, conduct research and education.	—
Local Communities & Coastal Residents	Impacted by and involved in stewardship.	Shoreline health, fisheries, tourism, climate resilience.	Participate in community science, advocate publicly, change behaviors.	—

Scientific Researchers & Academic Institutions	Provide data, assessments, and monitoring tools.	Advancing marine science, supporting restoration methods.	Inform policy with data and research.	—
Boaters, Fishers, and Recreation Users	Users of nearshore marine spaces.	Healthy ecosystems, recreation access, fishing rights.	Directly impact habitats through actions (anchoring, pollution, etc.).	—

2025–27 Biennial Budget Decision Package

Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Title: Kelp and Eelgrass Public Education and Outreach Initiative

Budget Level: PL (Policy Level)

Program: Aquatic Resources Division – Marine Vegetation Restoration

Decision Package Summary

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in partnership with Tribal Nations, is seeking \$400,000 in General Fund-State (GF-S) support to launch a statewide public education and outreach campaign that brings RCW 79.135.440 to life. Washington’s native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows are quietly disappearing. These underwater ecosystems are essential not just for salmon and orca recovery, but for the health and resilience of our entire coastline. Their loss affects everyone – Tribal communities, fishers, boaters, and future generations who deserve to inherit thriving coastal waters. When communities understand what’s being lost, they’re more willing to step up and be part of the solution. This initiative responds to an ecological crisis already well known to Tribal Nations – declining marine vegetation threatens the survival of salmon and orca, disrupts food systems, and impacts Tribal treaty rights tied to fishing and harvesting.

Through place-based education and community outreach, we’ll empower people across the state to see themselves as part of the solution. A new full-time Outreach and Tribal Engagement Coordinator

will lead this work within the Aquatic Resources Division, partnering with existing DNR programs like the Youth Education and Outreach Program to maximize reach and impact. This is a smart, scalable investment that builds on what’s already working and invites Washingtonians to take part in protecting something that belongs to all of us.

Problem Statement

RCW 79.135.440 mandates the conservation and restoration of 10,000 acres of native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows by 2040. However, the statute lacks an implementation plan for public education and Tribal-led outreach, limiting community engagement and undermining co-stewardship efforts necessary for long-term success.

Criteria

To compare the strengths and limitations of each policy option, the following evaluation criteria have been selected. These criteria are based on statutory goals outlined in RCW 79.135.440, guidance from the 2024 Kelp and Eelgrass Legislative Report (WA DNR, 2024), and the original intent of 2SSB 5619 (2022). Each criterion reflects Washington’s ecological, equity, and stewardship goals for restoring native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows.




<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Why It Matters</i>
Ecological Impact	Contribution to habitat restoration and health	Aligns with the 10,000-acre restoration target
Public/Political Support	Likelihood of building broad public and legislative buy-in	Required for durable funding, civic engagement, and long-term implementation
Feasibility & Cost	Practicality of implementation and financial/staffing	Recognizes capacity constraints and resource allocation needs


Equity & Inclusion	Engages Tribal Nations and underserved communities	Advances co-stewardship, legal obligations, and environmental justice
Sustainability	Capacity to support long-term systems or partnerships	Reduces reliance on short-term fixes; supports generational restoration investments


These evaluation criteria were selected based on the restoration goals and implementation needs outlined in RCW 79.135.440, the 2024 Kelp and Eelgrass Legislative Report (WA DNR), and the legislative intent of 2SSB 5619.

Projected Outcomes

Investing in a culturally grounded public education and outreach campaign, co-led by Tribal Nations, would directly address the implementation gap in RCW 79.135.440 and generate the following outcomes:

-  Increased public understanding of the ecological and cultural importance of kelp and eelgrass ecosystems. By closing the statute’s public outreach gap, this campaign would build the awareness needed to support long-term restoration success (Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR, 2024).
-  Strengthened support for the restoration goals of RCW 79.135.440. When communities understand why these habitats matter, they are more likely to back marine restoration policies and advocate for continued funding and protections (WA DNR, 2024).
-  Amplification of Tribal leadership and knowledge. A co-led campaign rebalances the outreach process by ensuring that rights holders are centered, not sidelined. This supports the law’s co-stewardship intent and reinforces Washington’s broader commitments to Tribal sovereignty and environmental justice (WA DNR, 2024).

 Greater public participation in conservation activities. With clearer pathways to involvement—like community science programs, restoration events, and education efforts—more people can take part in stewarding the ecosystems this law is meant to protect.

 Deeper alignment between statutory goals and public values. Education grounded in both Indigenous knowledge and marine science can help translate the intent of RCW 79.135.440 into long-term, community-held commitments to marine health.

Fiscal Detail

Account	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennium Total
General Fund – State	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$400,000
Total	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$400,000

Object of Expenditure

Object Code	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennium Total	Description
A – Salaries & Wages	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$160,000	1 FTE Outreach & Tribal Engagement Coordinator
B – Employee Benefits	\$26,400	\$26,400	\$52,800	Estimated at 33% of salary
E – Goods & Services	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$140,000	Materials, signage, printing, video content
G – Travel	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$20,000	Tribal consultation, outreach events
J – Equipment/Technology	\$13,600	\$13,600	\$27,200	Tablets, media equipment, digital tools
Total	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$400,000	—

Financial Condition



This proposal requests \$400,000 from the State General Fund over the 2025–27 biennium to support a Tribal-led public education and outreach campaign aligned with RCW 79.135.440.

The funding would cover a full-time outreach and Tribal engagement coordinator, materials such as signage and printed resources, digital and video content, technology equipment, and travel for Tribal consultation and local engagement events. A detailed breakdown of projected costs is provided in the Object of Expenditure table in the Decision Package.


This program represents a modest and targeted investment within the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) biennial operating budget, which totals approximately \$1.06 billion, including \$365.9 million from the Near General Fund–State (Office of Financial Management, 2025). It builds on existing DNR work in community engagement and habitat restoration and aligns with the agency's mission to steward public lands and aquatic ecosystems. According to the Office of Financial Management (2025), DNR maintains strong financial health and capacity to implement this program without requiring major new infrastructure or affecting core operations. A summary of DNR's operating budget and financial position is included in Appendix B.


Impact of Our Recommendation

Minimal Fiscal Impact


-  Represents just 0.038% of DNR's total biennial operating budget, and 0.11% of NGF-S funding.
-  Does not require major new infrastructure, minimizing long-term maintenance or capital obligations.


Low Operational Risk

-  Staffed by a single full-time coordinator, this is a contained and easily monitored investment.

 Leverages existing DNR operations, staff, and outreach systems, so it's financially and logistically low-risk.

Strategic Benefits to Financial Health

 Supports Tribal consultation and co-management, which may improve stakeholder alignment and reduce legal/political risk.

 Enhances public understanding of restoration efforts, potentially attracting federal grants, nonprofit partnerships, or philanthropic co-funding in the future.

Fiscal Health Assessment

These percentages and table illustrate that the proposed \$400,000 outreach program is a highly targeted and fiscally minor investment relative to DNR's overall financial scope.

Category	Assessment
Current Liabilities	Not listed, but likely stable and managed through biennial appropriations.
Current Assets (Inferred)	\$486.8M in revenue projections; very strong outlook.
Financial Health	Strong – diversified revenue, robust state support, and strategic priorities.
Impact of Proposal	Negligible financial strain, but high strategic return on investment.

Program Cost

 ***Percent of Total DNR Biennial Operating Budget****:

$$(\$400,000 / \$1,061,700,000) \times 100 \approx \mathbf{0.038\%}$$

*This is a very small fraction of DNR's total operating budget.

 **Percent of Near General Fund–State (NGF-S) Allocation*:**

$$(\$400,000 / \$365,900,000) \times 100 \approx \mathbf{0.11\%}$$

*This reflects a modest draw from NGF-S resources.


Revenue Comparison

 **Percent of Total Forecasted Revenue:**

$$(\$400,000 / \$486,800,000) \times 100 \approx \mathbf{0.082\%}$$

 **Percent of Timber Revenue:**

$$(\$400,000 / \$486,200,000) \times 100 \approx \mathbf{0.082\%}$$

 **Percent of Aquatic Lands Revenue:**

$$(\$400,000 / \$100,300,000) \times 100 \approx \mathbf{0.40\%}$$

Package Description

This proposal fulfills a core recommendation of the 2024 Kelp and Eelgrass Legislative Report, as outlined in RCW 79.135.440. It supports a public education campaign designed to build broad, meaningful engagement in the face of declining kelp forests and eelgrass meadows. The campaign will use inclusive, culturally responsive communication strategies and center Tribal leadership to tell this story in ways that resonate with communities across Washington. By bringing stories of kelp and eelgrass to life through schools, signs, digital media, and public gatherings, this effort will create a deeper sense of connection and collective responsibility for the health of our marine ecosystems. It builds on the Department’s proven ability to deliver effective education programs, such as the Youth Education and Outreach Program, which was awarded \$1.65 million in the 2023–25 biennium to enhance outdoor learning statewide (WA DNR, 2024a).

Trade-offs

A public education initiative can yield significant long-term benefits for kelp and eelgrass restoration. It enhances public awareness and encourages pro-environmental behavior, such as reducing pollution and respecting sensitive habitats. This increased understanding fosters community support and legitimacy for restoration policies. Over time, such education can lead to cost savings by preventing habitat degradation and reducing the need for expensive future restoration. However, these benefits come with trade-offs: education campaigns require upfront investment in materials, staff time, and outreach efforts. Moreover, behavior change and measurable impacts may take time to materialize, and there's always the risk that not all demographics will be equally reached or engaged.




<i>Category</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Costs</i>
Public Awareness	Builds visibility and understanding of kelp and eelgrass restoration goals	Requires investment in materials, media, and event coordination
Tribal Engagement	Elevates Indigenous knowledge and co-leadership in implementation	Requires intentional collaboration and shared decision-making processes
Behavioral Change	Encourages stewardship actions (responsible boating, runoff reduction)	Behavior change is slow and difficult to track in the short term
Community Support	Increases civic engagement and volunteer participation	May not reach all demographics without targeted strategies


Policy Legitimacy	Enhances support for related policies, regulations, and funding.	May encounter resistance or disinterest from certain audiences.
Long-Term Cost Savings	Prevents future habitat degradation, reducing future restoration expenses	Needs upfront financial and staffing investment to develop and deliver outreach


Justification and Staffing

DNR currently has outreach staff, but they are assigned to wildfire prevention, geology education, and statewide youth outdoor learning through YEOP (Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 2024a). No existing roles are dedicated to marine-specific education, kelp and eelgrass restoration, or Tribal public engagement. This initiative calls for specialized focus and consistency throughout the biennium, which cannot be met through part-time or existing staff capacity. This proposal includes one full-time Outreach and Tribal Engagement Coordinator to lead all public-facing components of the Kelp and Eelgrass Public Education and Outreach Initiative.

Responsibilities will include:

-  Coordinating with at least five Tribal Nations to co-develop outreach materials that reflect Indigenous science, culture, and history tied to kelp and salmon.
-  Designing and implementing culturally relevant education campaigns in both digital and physical formats.
-  Organizing and attending at least 12 community events along the Washington coast, including Tribal gatherings and public school partnerships.

 Producing high-quality visual content such as short videos, signage, and educational toolkits.









 Maintaining ongoing communication with Tribes, schools, and coastal communities to ensure feedback shapes the direction of the campaign.

The proposed salary is \$80,000 annually, with employee benefits calculated at 33 percent, totaling \$52,800 for the biennium. The goods and services line item includes \$140,000 for printing, signage, materials for classroom use, and video production. The \$27,200 equipment and technology cost covers a tablet and camera for mobile content creation, editing software licenses, and website enhancements. Travel expenses of \$20,000 will support mileage, lodging, and meals for coastal travel, allowing the coordinator to maintain in-person engagement with remote communities and Tribal partners. This also allows DNR to show up, listen, and return which is something that matters when building long-term trust.

Although the coordinator will lead the initiative, they will collaborate closely with YEOP to integrate materials into schools already participating in outdoor learning. They will also work with DNR's Communications team to align design branding, avoid duplicate outreach, and share storytelling platforms like social media and newsletters. This makes the role cost-effective and better embedded within existing structures. This staffing request directly aligns with budget line items A through J, and without this position, DNR lacks the staff capacity to implement RCW 79.135.440 and support HB 1631 in a way that centers Tribal partnership, public accountability, and ecological urgency (Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 2024b; Washington State Legislature, 2025).

Performance Outcomes & Collateral Impacts

By the end of the biennium, this initiative aims to:

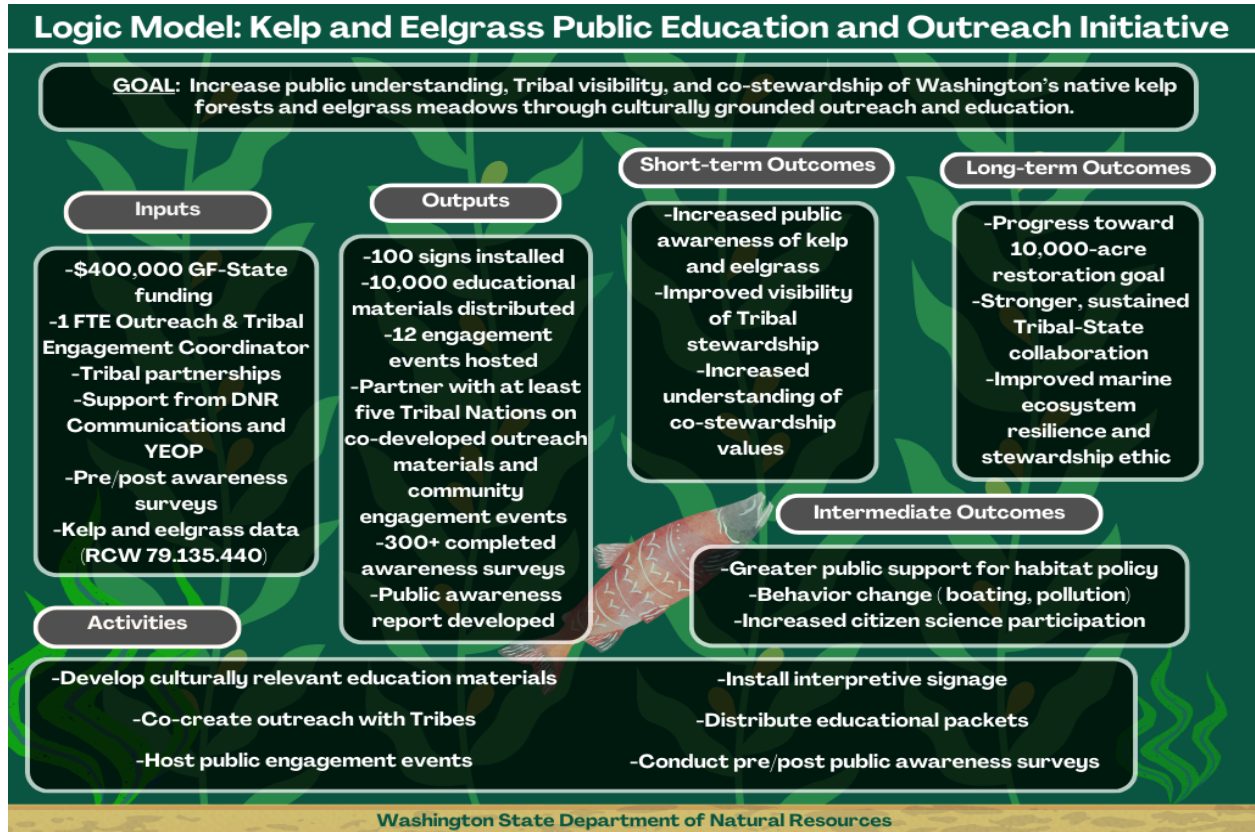
-  Reach 50,000 residents through in-person and digital education.
-  Partner with at least five Tribal Nations on co-developed outreach content.
-  Install 100 public signs and distribute 10,000 educational materials.
-  Host 12 public engagement events along Washington’s coast.
-  Improve public awareness of kelp and eelgrass by 30% (based on survey data; see Appendix A).
-  Supports implementation of HB 1631 (2025), which advances habitat protection regulations.
-  Strengthens future funding proposals by demonstrating measurable community engagement.
-  Increases citizen science participation and cross-sector collaboration.

Recommendations

<i>Option</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
<i>Status Quo</i>	Maintain current efforts with no new outreach, monitoring, or funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No additional costs – Easy to manage with existing resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continued loss of kelp/eelgrass – Likely won’t meet 2040 goals – Missed engagement opportunities
<i>Educate the Public</i>	Launch public outreach to raise awareness about the value and threats to these habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Builds public support – Encourages protective behavior – Improves visibility of efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Requires upfront investment – Impacts take time and are hard to measure

<p><i>Fill Monitoring & Funding Gaps</i></p>	<p>Expand habitat monitoring and secure stable funding to guide and support restoration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informs smart restoration – Tracks progress and threats – Strengthens partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Needs additional funding – Requires agency coordination and long-term commitment
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Washington State should immediately invest in a culturally grounded public education and outreach campaign co-led by Tribal Nations. This approach directly addresses the implementation gap in RCW 79.135.440 by bridging technical restoration efforts with meaningful community engagement. It also reinforces the statute’s core goals while aligning with the state’s commitments to environmental justice, Tribal sovereignty, and long-term ecological stewardship. A co-led campaign would center Tribal knowledge and values, foster cultural and ecological understanding, and promote community-driven stewardship behaviors. Unlike other strategies that require lengthy legislative amendments, this approach is both actionable and equitable now. By prioritizing partnerships with Tribal Nations, Washington can ensure that restoration efforts are inclusive, effective, and enduring.



Telling the Story

Restoring a Relationship with the Water

“Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.”

—Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)

This sacred bond reflects what many Tribal communities along Washington’s coast have experienced for generations. Tribal Nations have long been stewards of marine ecosystems, relying on kelp forests and eelgrass meadows for food, ceremony, and cultural identity. They observed the decline early, thinning beds, shifting tides, fewer crabs and salmon, but their warnings often went unheard.

These underwater meadows are not only culturally significant; they are ecologically essential. Juvenile salmon depend on eelgrass beds for shelter and feeding, while kelp forests provide critical habitat for rockfish, crabs, and herring. Without them, salmon populations falter. Without salmon, Southern Resident orcas lose a key food source, connecting these plants directly to some of Washington's most iconic and imperiled species.

The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe has led eelgrass restoration efforts in Port Angeles Harbor to support salmon recovery. The Samish Indian Nation continues to monitor and document kelp loss, using both traditional knowledge and marine science to guide their work (Mesa, 2024; Northwest Treaty Tribes, 2023). These efforts illustrate what's possible when Indigenous leadership is respected and supported.

Yet as the 2024 Kelp and Eelgrass Legislative Report acknowledges, Tribes are often left out of public outreach efforts, even as they do much of the work. “[Kelp and eelgrass] hold irreplaceable cultural value for many Tribal Nations,” the report states, while also serving as keystone habitats for species central to Washington's environmental identity (WA DNR, 2024). Restoration begins with relationship, and the relationship begins with listening.

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Key Terms

Samish Indian Nation – A Coast Salish Tribe headquartered in Anacortes, WA. Active in kelp monitoring and restoration across the Salish Sea. ([About Samish](#))

Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe – Based in Port Angeles, WA. Leaders in eelgrass restoration and salmon recovery near the Elwha River delta. ([Culture and History | Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe](#))

Kelp Forests – Large underwater stands of brown algae that provide habitat, absorb carbon, and help protect shorelines from erosion. (*Washington State Department of Natural Resources. 2024*)

Eelgrass Meadows – Submerged flowering plants that grow in shallow coastal waters and serve as critical nursery habitat for juvenile salmon and other marine species. (*Washington State Department of Natural Resources. 2024*)

Co-stewardship – A governance model where Tribes and government agencies share decision-making authority and responsibility over lands and waters. (*Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. 2023*)

Restoration – The process of assisting the recovery of degraded ecosystems to reestablish ecological integrity, function, and cultural value. (*Society for Ecological Restoration. 2004. The SER International Primer on Ecological Restoration.*)

RCW 79.135.440 – Washington State law mandating the development of a conservation plan for native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows and requiring biennial reports to the legislature. (*Revised Code of Washington. 2022*)

Outreach and Education – Activities aimed at informing the public, increasing awareness, and fostering stewardship of marine environments. In this brief, it emphasizes culturally relevant, community-centered communication. (*Washington State Department of Natural Resources. 2024*)

Southern Resident Orcas – A distinct and endangered population of orcas in the Salish Sea that depends heavily on Chinook salmon for survival. (*NOAA Fisheries. 2023*)

Appendix A – Example of Outreach Survey

Kelp and Eelgrass Public Awareness Survey **Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** **RCW 79.135.440 Outreach Initiative** *(Version for Pre- and Post-Program Evaluation)*

Section 1: Knowledge and Awareness

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.
(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I know what eelgrass and kelp are.
2. I understand why these marine plants are important to coastal ecosystems.
3. I am aware of the threats facing kelp forests and eelgrass meadows in Washington State.
4. I know that Tribal Nations play a role in restoring and protecting these ecosystems.
5. I have heard of RCW 79.135.440 or the state's goal to restore 10,000 acres of habitat by 2040.

Section 2: Behavior and Engagement

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

6. I know how to help protect kelp and eelgrass (e.g., responsible boating, pollution reduction).
7. I am interested in volunteering or supporting habitat restoration.
8. I believe public education is important for marine habitat conservation.

Section 3: Open-Ended (Optional)

9. What is one thing you learned today that surprised or inspired you?
10. What actions (if any) will you take after this experience to help protect marine ecosystems?

Section 4: Demographic (Optional, Anonymous)

11. Zip code: _____
12. Age group: Under 18 18–30 31–50 51–65 65+
13. Do you identify as a member of a Tribal Nation? Yes No Prefer not to say
14. How did you learn about this event/campaign? (Check all that apply)
 Social Media DNR Website Tribal Organization Community Event School
Other: _____

Appendix B – DNR Fiscal Table

DNR Fiscal Tables – Washington State DNR Statement of Financial Condition (FY 2025–2027)

Note: The revenue figures are based on projections from the March 2025 Economic & Revenue Forecast.

Category	2025–27 Biennium
Near General Fund – State (NGF-S)	\$365,900,000
Other Funds	\$695,800,000
Total Funds	\$1,061,700,000
Average Annual FTEs	\$1,776
Total Forecasted Revenue (All Sources)	\$486,800,000
Timber Revenue (FY 2025–2027)	\$486,200,000
Aquatic Lands Revenue (FY 2025–2027)	\$100,300,000
Proposed Program Request (Outreach Initiative)	\$400,000