2005 Puget Sound Georgia Basin Research Conference, Seattle, Washington

Summary of Presentation – March 31, 2005 –
Panel C 8: Governance and Institutional Design
The Georgia Basin Action Plan: Building on Success and Meeting Ongoing Challenges –
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The five year Georgia Basin Action Plan (GBAP) started in 2003 as a partnership between the Governments of Canada and British Columbia. On April 1, 2005 they were joined by five Coast Salish First Nations. GPAP partners work with participating local governments, non-government organizations, community groups, and research and learning organizations to address the continuing stresses of high rates of population growth and development on sensitive habitats and species as well as air and water quality. Through GBAP and associated agreements, programs and projects Canadian and United States counterparts also collaborate on shared interests that extend across the international boundary to the Puget Sound area in northwestern Washington State.

GBAP builds on Georgia Basin Initiative (1992-1996) and the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative (1996-2001).

In the early nineties, the Georgia Basin Initiative (GBI), coupled with provincial/state agreements began to address the impacts of growth and development in a bioregional context. In BC for example the GBI contributed to regional growth management legislation, which corresponds in many ways to WA's Growth Management Act. It also led to the 1995 establishment of the BC/WA Environmental Cooperation Council which provided the framework for cross-border research on the environmental health and ecosystem well-being of the shared marine waters of Puget Sound, Juan de Fuca Strait and Georgia Strait.

In 1996, the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative – part of Canada's National Ecosystems Initiative program – began as a Canada/BC initiative and was expanded through an associated Statement of Cooperation between Environment Canada and the US Environmental Protection Agency strengthening earlier collaborative work. This Statement also called for and supported the proactive involvement of Coast Salish First Nations and Tribes.

Like previous initiatives GBAP is integrative and inclusive. It transcends political jurisdictions and engages organizations and individuals with a wide diversity of interests who:

- Recognize relationships among land, air, water, wildlife, and human activities
- Base decisions on knowledge derived from sound science, local knowledge and traditional ecological knowledge
- Are committed to interjurisdictional cooperation through collaborative planning and management
- Focus on results through their own core mandates and interests, contribute to others where mandates are shared or complementary and, where mandates may be in conflict, engage in consensual processes to resolve these
- Include and support citizens and communities in environmental and ecosystem protection, restoration and stewardship activities
- Promotes a precautionary approach (pollution prevention)

GBAP is addressing bioregionally significant sustainability issues which have been identified in transboundary environmental, ecosystem and species indicator reports. These are complex issues that require long term attention. With its limited financial and human resources, GBAP is giving priority attention to generating and reporting scientific, traditional and local knowledge and to supporting the transfer and use of this information in the preparation of environmentally and ecologically sound policies, strategies, plans, designs, developments and practices. GBAP is building organizational and individual capacities by focusing on education, process skill development, motivation and innovation. GPAB partners and participants are also focused on delivering early tangible results to help strengthen support and attract new support.

In the years ahead, GBAP and successive programs will be needed to continue and expand the work already underway, as well as help partners and participants and through them, residents of this region, respond to the influences of global economic systems that will influence growth and activity. One aspect of these systems is the potential – even likelihood – that private enterprises, particularly large scale corporations in the near term and small and medium-sized businesses in the longer term – will increasingly be called on by consumers to demonstrate the use of environmentally, socially and financially responsible practices in the production and distribution of their goods and services.

Now is a good time, as GBAP reaches its mid-point, to begin to outline and then discuss how to extend this highly successful collaborative governance model to private sector organizations, leading to new and broader partnerships and participants in the pursuit of sustainability in the Georgia Basin Puget Sound region.

April 27, 2005