



**Meeting Minutes
Nisqually River Council
August 16, 2013
Mount Rainier National Park
Information: 360.438.8715**

Attendees:

Council Members

Chris Ellings – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
JW Foster – *City of Yelm*
Rene Skaggs – *Pierce Conservation District*
Edna Fund – *Lewis County*
Randy King – *Mount Rainier National Park*
Doug McClelland – *WA Dept. of Natural Resources*
Glynnis Nakai – *Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge*
Sandra Romero – *Thurston County*

Stephanie Suter – *Puget Sound Partnership*
*** CAC Representatives (1)**

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Mary Foster
Fred Michelson

Marjorie Smith
Robert Smith*

Guests

Annette Bullchild -- *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Lisa Breckenridge – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Margaret Cook – *Thurston County Citizen*
Ed Fund – *Lewis County Citizen*

Kim Gridley – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Mason Reid – *Mount Rainier National Park*
Chris Schutz – *Pierce County*
Jackie Wall – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*

Staff & Associated Nonprofits

Justin Hall – *Nisqually River Foundation*

Ashley Von Essen – *Nisqually River Council*

1. Call to Order, Approval of Minutes and Agenda

Call to Order – JW called the meeting to order at 9:45am.

Approval of Meeting Minutes and Agenda – There was a motion to approve July's meeting minutes as presented. They were approved, as was the agenda for August.

2. Introductions, Reports

Randy took a moment to welcome the group to Mount Rainier National Park. Randy is here today taking the place of Bryan Bowden, who is out hiking the Wonderland Trail with his family.

Advisory Committee Reports

- *Citizens Advisory Committee* – Bob reported that the CAC is on still on vacation for the duration of the summer months. Marjorie added that the committee is due to meet back up in September.
- *Chair Report* – With David currently on vacation, no report was given.
- *Staff Report* – Ashley reported that she has been working the NRC's publicity and social media, particularly for the Nisqually Watershed Festival and the Eatonville Salmon Fest. She has been creating events on Facebook and designing the web pages for the two festivals, as well as piecing together flyers and programs.

She is also happy to report that the Nisqually River Foundation has been awarded an AmeriCorps Individual Placement (IP) through the Washington Conservation Corps. The NRF was one of 25 organizations to be awarded, meaning a full-time employee for a \$10,000 contribution. The IP is set to begin October 7th, 2013 and will given the task of designing a watershed-based climate adaptation plan through Climate Solutions University. This position will allow the participant to gain on-the-job training and experience that will help in building their resume and prepare them for future opportunities.

Ashley has also been working to compile a list of all watershed businesses for moving forward with the Nisqually Sustainable program. A complete list will allow those pursuing businesses to ensure none are being excluded from participation.

As part of the goals of the NWSP Committee, which will be described in more detail later in today's meeting, Ashley is beginning to create an inventory of all recreational opportunities in the Nisqually Watershed. This will include all access to the river, such as fishing and boat launches, trail systems, tours, and hunting, as well as other watershed activities.

The Eatonville Salmon Fest Committee will be meeting next to continue discussions around planning this first year festival. Focus of this meeting will be centered around preparing a festival map, deciding how the layout will be organized and making a final decision on participating food vendors.

Ashley also mentioned a letter that was penned in support of the Nisqually Land Trust's endeavors for funding from Pierce Conservation Futures Program. The idea of writing a letter was discussed at last month's NRC meeting, being approved by those in attendance. It was hoped that the letter could have been circulated to the NRC before being submitted, but due to a fast-approaching deadline, it was mailed to the Pierce County Council late last week.

Allied Programs

- *Nisqually Land Trust* – In Joe's absence, JW was very happy to announce that the NLT has received national accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, a feat accomplished by less than 15% of land trusts nationwide! JW mentioned that accreditation has been deemed almost necessary when applying for grants on a national level. The NLT's application packet to be submitted weighed 10 pounds and took two years to accumulate. This process has allowed the Land Trust to create and refine policies currently in place, making their organization stronger.

JW shared that the Land Trust's Board of Directors has expanded its membership by adding three positions, giving them a total of 12 members. Those joining the NLT include: Emiliano Perez, Tom Ginsburg, and Brad Jones.

- *Nisqually River Education Project* – Justin reported that Sheila is still on summer break, looking to come back at the end of August. She asked Justin to share that E3, an environmental education organization, has been awarded a grant from the EPA, includes funding for NREP.
- *Nisqually River Foundation* – Justin also mentioned that the Foundation has been awarded an AmeriCorps Individual Placement, who will work directly with Climate Change University. NRF was conditionally accepted into the program, but has been awaiting the AmeriCorps announcement due to the full-time staff needed to run the program. Funds still need to be acquired to move the program forward. As the project unfolds, NRF will be looking to watershed partners for input in developing steps to efficiently adapt to climate change.

The Ecosystem Services Committee is looking for their next move after receiving the news that the City of Olympia was backing out of attempts to acquire a parcel near Lake St. Clair.

The Nisqually Community Forest is currently in its second phase of the project, which includes the formation of the organization that will maintain ownership. The committee is still looking at the possibility of forming a subsidiary of the Land Trust. The project is looking to make a purchase at the

end of 2014. The committee is considering a visit to a successful community forest project in Maine this coming October.

Justin will cover the progress of the NWSP Goal Setting Committee towards the end of today's meeting.

- *Stream Stewards* – Don Perry was unable to make it today. In his absence, Chris reported that this year's Stream Stewards class had a great turnout with over 20 graduates.

Also, the Tribe's Salmon Watcher program is right around the corner. This year's program is anticipated to be great due to the high numbers of pink salmon expected to return.

The Stream Stewards have been collecting in-stream samples of benthic macroinvertebrates, excellent indicators of water quality. While floating past the mouth of Ohop during a recent knotweed survey, Chris had the opportunity to witness volunteers collecting samples in the field. This data will be used by Pierce County for their annual Water Quality Report Card, which incorporates multiple components of water quality, including the Benthic Index of Biotic Integrity (BIBI).

- *Salmon Recovery Update* – Has he shared during the Stream Stewards report, Chris recently floated the river as part of PCD's knotweed removal process. The program is an excellent example of a true success story in the invasive species control world. They took a break last year from floating the river, to focus efforts on the Nisqually's tributaries. Surveys from this year have shown very little new growth. This shows that if an aggressive approach is taken with knotweed, it can be controlled with low-level maintenance. The Tribe may look into sharing this success story with other watersheds. Knotweed has to have many negative effects on salmon and should be a part of a watershed's overall maintenance plan.

The Nisqually's mainstem weir is functioning. It has been another year of learning, with the first fish being tagged just days ago. With rain being predicted in the upcoming forecast, more fish should be just around the corner.

Chris also mentioned Salmon Recovery's Adaptive Management and Monitoring Plan. This project will not only update Nisqually Salmon Recovery Plan, but will work to develop a comparable plan for the South Puget Sound's recovery efforts. It is their intention to use program funding to hire a full-time staff to develop these plans, ensuring they use consistent language and create regional standards.

Until the mid-90's, steelhead numbers hovered around 6,000 fish returning annually. Today, only 600 to 700 fish are coming back to spawn, an estimated 4% survival rate. A sizable grant through the Salish Sea Marine Survival Project has given the Tribe the opportunity to see what has been effecting steelhead populations after they finally hit the ocean. The Tribe has used these funds to develop a Steelhead Recovery Plan, now in its final stages, and will continue to use them over the next 2 years to purchase necessary materials, acquire the most up-to-date technology, and perform data analysis. An event, taking place in Seattle August 21st, will mark the kick-off for this program. Once this phase is complete, a research project will begin to look at where steelhead mortality is taking place. It is thought that populations are being preyed upon at Admiral Inlet. The study will also look at potential issues including genetics, disease, and predator pits. Chris will make sure the NRC is kept current on all findings.

Chris also shared that there are pinks in the river, but this is not yet the peak of the season. They are expected to be coming in at high numbers within the next month, especially if there is more rain. The forecast still looks very good, however Nisqually may not see the 750,000 fish predicted to return.

3. Mount Rainier National Park Update

Randy King, Superintendent, Mount Rainier National Park

With sequestration effecting all federal agencies, Randy has been focusing his attention on planning the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. For Mount Rainier, this means a \$600,000 reduction from base operating funds, necessities for keeping the gates open, the lights on, and the roads cleared. Snow removal during the winter months alone costs the park upwards of \$1 million/year. Administration is anticipating at least another 8% in federal cuts and was given three weeks to put together a contingency plan to propose how the park would acclimate to these budget trends. This plan is still in the approval phase.

The operating budgets for FY 2012 hovered right around \$12 million. This includes funds that are channeled to park headquarters and human resources at offsite locations. Actual operating costs lie somewhere closer to \$10.5 million, which has been whittled back over the years from \$12.4 million. The annual number of park visitors has continued to remain stable despite these harsh cuts. 2013 has been an exceptional year due to the amazing weather western Washington has been experiencing.

Due to these cuts, the Ohanapecosh Visitor Center's doors are closed for the first time, with camping remaining open. Guests can also expect to find reduced staff and hours at other visitor centers and gift shops as well. Administration is attempting to make cuts that will have the least amount of impact on park visitors, while sustaining access. Shuttles to and from Paradise have also been eliminated this year, which has been effective in taking the edge off the park's most visited parking.

With similar cuts being seen across the nation, parks are now looking to share ecologists and biologists with each other, but will need to think creatively about they will be able to do this. The park is always looking for ways to form new partnership and alliances, as well as continue to increase their pool of volunteers. With 300 employees, only 100 of them permanent, Mount Rainier relies very heavily on the 1,800 to 2,000 volunteers who participate each year. The park is looking to channel resources to this program, including maintaining a full-time volunteer coordinator and supplying volunteers with their own "stewardship camps." (With showers!) Administration not only recognizes the importance of their volunteers, but how rewarding stewardship opportunities can be for participants.

Bryan has been working with the park's Seattle office to validate the services offered in the park, while outlining a hierarchy of park needs. This will allow the administration to not only develop an overall planning document for the park, but also will prioritize their efforts, creating short-term and long-term goals. An example of where such planning is needed is the Carbon River land acquisitions. The goal is to develop long-term recreation and conservation objectives by bringing together local organizations and communities to decide what is needed in the Carbon River Corridor. July 6th, the National Park Service held a dedication for the new Carbon River Station. The old station was in a very vulnerable location due to the river's migration zone. After purchasing a parcel from the Thompson's, their family home was converted into new ranger headquarters.

Randy also mentioned the Mount Rainier Institute, an environmental education and overnight camping opportunity for students through UW's Pack Forest. The NPS and UW have hired John Hayes to lead these efforts, develop curriculum, and organize trips for student groups. The first trips are set to take place this fall.

Mount Rainier, in thinking about the park's future and potential obstacles created by climate change, has joined the North Cascadia Adaptation Partnership, along with North Cascades NP, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie NF, and the Okanogan-Wenatchee NF. This purpose of this partnership is to increase awareness of climate change, assess the vulnerability of cultural and natural resources, and incorporate climate change adaptation into current management of federal lands in the N. Cascades region. Crystal Raymond and Dave Peterson have prepared a report, available at: www.northcascadia.org. Randy mentioned that this could be a great presentation opportunity for a future NRC meeting.

Next year, construction will begin to rehab the main road from the Nisqually entrance. This will mean 17 miles of construction over the next 3 years. Construction on Stevens Canyon Road will finally be completed this summer.

4. Mount Rainier NP Wildlife Research Update

Mason Reid, Wildlife Ecologist, Mount Rainier National Park

Mason will be sharing two studies today: Cascade red fox populations and fisher reintroduction.

The Cascade red fox is the world's most terrestrial carnivore, being found throughout North America. Originally believed to be a transport from Europe, recent genetic testing has shown that they are actually native to the area, including two post-glacial colonizations (east and west).

There are two types of western red foxes, lowland and mountain varieties. Lowland species can be seen around Puget Sound, introduced in the early 1900's for hunting and fur farming. There are 4 sub-species of the native montane species, which are found in upper elevation pockets. Through genetic analysis, it has been learned that montane foxes were the first to colonize North America and are both behaviorally and morphologically adapted to upper elevations, so much so that they always remain above 3,500 feet.

The Cascade sub-species, a fox known to live in only three separate populations throughout WA State, has the most visible and possibly most significant populations at Mount Rainier. This species is soon to be listed as a state, and possibly even federal, species of concern. These animals usually weigh between 7 to 12 pounds and have a diet of small mammals, birds, fruit, and insects. They breed in mid-February and whelp in mid-April. They have small litters, ranging from 3 to 4 pups. Their home range is generally around 5 square miles and they live approximately 5 years in the wild.

Through DNA analysis, the park is attempting to estimate populations using scat samples, remote cameras, hair snares, winter tracking, and scat surveys. The main goal of this research is to evaluate the impacts of the visitor-used spatiotemporal range of the foxes. Wildlife indicators have been developed for the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP), a framework that aims to establish carrying capacities for each park, while addressing potential impacts. Over the years, the most significant dilemma posed is by visitors who are feeding the foxes. To further explore this issue, Mason and his staff recently implemented a study using GPS and radio collars to track three foxes, 2 male and 1 female, fixing in on their whereabouts every 3.5 hours.

The results of this study have allowed ecologists to analyze the home ranges of these particular foxes.

- Female: Severely food conditioned. Much of her time was spent around Longmire, Cougar Rock, and Paradise. She mostly associated with developed areas.
- Male: Found to be highly associated with Longmire and Paradise.
- Young Male: This fox was caught at Longmire. He used much more diverse habitat, spanning from the Nisqually Entrance to Paradise, utilizing a lot of natural habitat away from people.

Results further demonstrate that not only are these populations highly associated with developed areas, but that foxes tended to remain closer to roads during daylight, retreating at night. Their proximity to the road was also patterned around park and road closures, mostly due to inclement weather. The highest association with developed areas was found to be throughout daytime hours of December and January.

Mason also shared the Upper Coast Fisher Introduction, a larger project that aims to reintroduce fishers to the Cascades, Mount Rainier being one of the locations. A cousin of the pine marten and a historical species of the region, fishers are considered to be extirpated in Washington State despite not being harvested since the 1930s. Declination has been mostly attributed to habitat alterations and trapping for fur farming. A top-level carnivore, it is believed that fishers have great influence over the many species below them on the food chain. Originally listed in 1998, the fisher's status is currently under review for its ESA listing, to be about next year.

The plan, developed by the state, focuses on three main regions: the Olympic Peninsula, the North Cascades, and the South Cascades (listed in order of priority). Reintroduction at Olympic National Park ran from 2008-2010, bringing in 90 fishers from British Columbia. Animals are purchased, and tested for disease and vaccinated before release. The project appears to be successful, with wildlife cameras being installed to better document the fisher's distribution.

Reintroductions at Mount Rainier and the North Cascades, a joint process, will release 160 fishers over 4 years, beginning in 2014. The animals will be monitored and tracked by radio collar every one to two weeks.

An environmental assessment and plan overview as been written and is available for public comment through September 30th. To submit a comment, one should visit:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=46313>.

5. **Justin Hall – The Plan!**

The Nisqually River Council's planning document, the Nisqually River Stewardship Plan is filled with a number of watershed goals and indicators, but lacks an effective way to measure their progress. Justin has been facilitating a series of goal setting meetings, held every other Tuesday from 10am to noon at the Tribe's Natural Resources office. NRC members and associates should be receiving invites to these meetings, being asked to share their professional experience on specific topics. Thus far, the committee has met twice, discussing Recreation and Biological Diversity. Both meetings have led the committee to believe that watershed inventories need to be developed for each category.

Recreation:

Justin has spoke with Jen Cutler, GIS Analyst for the Tribe, who has given him a list of recreational opportunities available in the watershed. It is Justin's hope to flush out these opportunities, creating a brochure or interactive map for the NRC webpage, which could provide recreational information without creating any overlap with other available sites. Once an inventory has been taken, the committee will be able to identify what is needed as far as watershed recreation.

Biological Diversity:

Chris Ellings had an idea for taking a biological diversity inventory at 4 major points along the watershed, the Refuge, JBLM, Pack Forest, and Mount Rainier. Talking to biologists and ecologists at each of these locations will give a general sense of habitats present in the watershed and critical species of each.

Chris suggested that status reviews might be necessary for each of the 12 topics associated with the NWSP. This would allow a standardization of each the Plan's indicators.

With 12 NRC meetings and 12 indicators of the NWSP, it is Justin's goal to align these components, assigning an indicator to each month and focusing presentations towards the chosen topic, leaving room for reports and updates.

6. **For the Good of the Order**

The Nisqually Land Trust's Annual Salmon Bake and Meeting will take place September 15th at Oddfellows Park. There will be a brief program on the Land Trust's accomplishments. A \$10 donation is suggested. More information about the event is available on there website: www.nisquallylandtrust.org.

Glynnis Nakai, the new manager for the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, took a moment to introduce herself to the group. She is very excited to be here and will be attending NRC meetings to get more familiar with the area, as well as the people and organizations of the watershed.

The 24th Annual Nisqually Watershed Festival takes place Saturday, September 28th, from 10am to 4pm, at the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge.

The first ever Eatonville Salmon Fest takes place Saturday, October 19th, from 10am to 3pm, at Mill Pond and Smallwood Parks.

Thurston County has contracted with WSU-Extension to be the lead on their Voluntary Stewardship Program, which aims to increase the health of the watershed. They will be putting together a stakeholder membership group very soon. Thurston and Chelan Counties were the 2 counties selected of the 30 which submitted programs.

Adjourn – Meeting was adjourned at 12:02pm.

*Next Meeting: Friday, September 20, 2013, 9:00am – 12:00pm
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge*