



Meeting Minutes
Nisqually River Council
March 28, 2014
Pack Forest
Information: 360.438.8715

Attendees:

Council Members

Roger Andrascik – *Mount Rainier National Park*
Bob Burkle – *WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife*
Amy Cruver – *Pierce County*
JW Foster – *City of Yelm*

David Troutt – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Cindy Wilson – *Thurston County*
Sandra Romero – *Thurston County*
*** CAC Representatives (2)**

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Phyllis Farrell
Fred Michelson
Rosalea Pruitt
Steve Pruitt*

Jean Shaffer*
Marjorie Smith
Robert Smith

Guests

Chris Ellings – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Ashley Von Essen – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*
Dave Stepetin – *Nisqually Indian Tribe*

Glynnis Nakai – *Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge*
Rene Skaggs – *Pierce Conservation District*

Staff & Associated Nonprofits

Morgan Greene – *Nisqually River Foundation*
Justin Hall – *Nisqually River Foundation*
Nathan Mead – *Nisqually River Ed. Project*

Sheila Wilson – *Nisqually River Ed. Project*

1. Call to Order, Approval of Minutes and Agenda, Introductions

Call to Order – David Troutt called the meeting to order at 9:34am.

Approval of Meeting Minutes and Agenda – There was a motion to approve February's meeting minutes as presented. There were some corrections added to clarify Thurston County's current actions with beekeepers. Under item 6, changes were made to reflect that Sen. Jewell's visit was for park staff. Minutes were approved, as was the agenda. Ashley did not receive confirmation about Pierce County representatives attending today's meeting; Chris Ellings will report about Steelhead Recovery efforts instead. Pierce County's updated Comprehensive Plan can be found at www.piercecountywa.org/realize2030.

During introductions, Glynnis shared details about an Urban Refugue Initiative to look at partners and current audiences to target groups not coming to the refuge, and to figure out ways to bring those people in. The refuge has been looking at current watershed activities, and is identifying ways to reach outside of the Nisqually. The primary focus is outreach into Pierce County. The refuge will likely be asking for letters of support. Applications are due April 15th. Currently, they're working with partners to start new projects, and starting to look at new partnerships too. Tacoma is the main focus, but that doesn't necessarily limit the possible partners.

Sandra shared that Thurston County just released their Bountiful ___ that starts at the refuge to draw people to the refuge. They have a draft brochure that might work for the grant application. They will be looking for letters of support at some point.

2. Reports

Advisory Committee Reports

- *Citizens Advisory Committee* – Steve shared that CAC is looking at what its role should be as the Stewardship Plan is being revised and implemented. They have had a history of bringing people in with information, which will continue, but they are looking at other ways they can be of services. The operational year will now align with the NRC retreat schedule; they will be electing new officers in the summer at the NRC retreat. If this requires a change in rules, it can be figured out this summer.

At the last CAC meeting, there was a motion to look into a boat ramp at the Nisqually State Park. It was in the original plans but was cut in the recent plan. River access has always been a part of the NWSP, but is currently lacking. Thus, the motion was to ask the Council to lend a hand for a proposal to add some form of boat launch, perhaps on Ohop Creek. That way the actual boating would not take place in the new State Park itself. It would require a safe take off downstream before the dam. Fred mentioned that this motion was not looking to install a permanent concrete ramp, and would not allow motor boats. Instead, it would allow small, un-motorized boats to launch safely. The motion was approved.

David mentioned that during January's meeting, the idea of a River Trail was mentioned, and Bryan Bowden would start working on a proposal. It seems like this is a great way to work on both projects. It could be a watershed based planning effort.

- *Chair Report* – David had an opportunity to give a presentation to the House Environment Committee on collaborative resource management and funding relevant to Puget Sound restoration. They are interested in driving funding to the local level to drive local priorities. Right now, state agencies are getting funding and determining priorities. Creating something new would allow alternative funding to reach the watershed. He also talked to EPA staff who has requirements for how money can and cannot be spent. David is working on finding ways to make it work.

David worked on some legislation that was not successful in getting passed but did spark some conversation with policy makers. He also reported yesterday to the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council that wanted a report of statewide efforts as well as watershed level efforts. He will continue to do that for the next few weeks.

A recent opinion article in the Seattle Times claimed that too much money is spent on salmon recovery when there are other ESA species in the area. In response, David shared that he is drafting a letter for the Salmon Recovery Fund that explains why salmon recovery money is still entirely necessary.

- *Staff Report* – Ashley shared that she accepted a new job as the Lead Entity Coordinator with the Nisqually Tribe. She has been winding down her tasks at NRF while at the same time learning new tasks that she will have with the Tribe. She was also able to participate with Student GREEN Congress on March 21. She led a bug class with students and had a blast. She is very excited about her new position and looks forward to continuing to be a part of the Nisqually community.

Morgan shared that she will be stepping into Ashley's role at the end of her WCC term in October. She is excited to be a part of the Nisqually Community, too.

- *Climate Adaptation Planning*—Morgan shared that she has been working on a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Nisqually Watershed. She is still in the beginning phases on the plan, and has gotten great help from Justin Hall and Jean Schaffer. Morgan also wants to use NRC meetings to receive input from all members. If anybody would like to become more involved, however, please contact her at morgan@nisquallyriver.org.

Last week, Morgan and Justin were able to attend a climate change symposium hosted by Mount Rainier National Park. It featured about 10 different researchers who shared their findings related to climate change within the park.

Allied Programs

- *Nisqually Land Trust* – JW Foster offered the report, as Joe was out of town. The Land Trust’s annual auction is April 26. If you have not received an invitation, please let him know so contact info can be updated. It benefits the Forever Fund, which is vital to running the land trust.

At the end of March, the Land Trust will be closing at the Petersen Ranch property, which is just down river from Yelm. It includes the mouth of Yelm Creek—a sensitive area.

Land stewards and other land trust members have been busy with projects, including ivy pulling along the Mashel River. This is a great way to get involved and improve properties. Also, Bio Blitz is on April 5th, so there is still time to sign up with Don Perry. In this event, volunteers go to an area to document the species that utilize it. This helps in identifying how restoration efforts are working.

JW also mentioned that as a city council member for Yelm, he was able to help engineering firms with a water reclamation facility. Yelm has the biggest Rain Garden in Cochrane Park, which helps to purify wastewater, which then returns to an aquifer. The facility needs to be upgraded; the new goal is to discharge all water in a potable condition back into the Nisqually. It will be Class A water, so it will not contain any nitrates or other contaminants. They want to be ahead of regulations on what can be discharged into rivers.

Yelm’s work aligns with a number of other projects. For example, LOTT is conducting a study that measures pharmaceuticals in water. Thurston County Waste Water is also doing a lot of great work. It might be a great idea to have a NRC presentation around Storm Water Regulations.

- *Nisqually River Education Project* – Sheila reported that the Student GREEN Congress took place March 21. Over 430 students attended! It received great press coverage from Olympia, including a YouTube video. Although there was a shortage of Evergreen students, Eatonville High School students volunteered to help with the media.

This year, a new professor helped out, but might not return next year. However, another professor has already agreed to be involved. The keynote speaker was ____ who spoke to the students about climate change. It was a great way to introduce Nate’s job, who is working to follow-up with students after Congress to come up with action projects so their suggestions can become projects. For example, many students want to install pet waste stations and plant trees. Rain garden installation would also be a great option. If anybody has other ideas, Nate is looking for good projects that could involve students. Email ideas to Nathan@nisquallyriver.org. One of the first projects will be the afternoon of Monday, March 31 to clean up the 6th Avenue river access site.

Near Shore Field Trips are another exciting, first time project. South Sound Green has been doing this for a while to help students learn about estuaries, but it is a pilot project for the Nisqually education program. The local shellfish community invited NREP to engage and educate students about shellfish and estuaries.

Eye on Nature projects are also coming up at the Refuge. There is a volunteer meeting on April 2nd. There are morning and afternoon sessions. Students are split up into small groups and learn tips to identify plants and animals.

There are 4-6 raingardens being installed in Eatonville, dates TBD. Also, the ____ has luckily been secured for the time being. This is a recent update; funding was questionable for a little bit.

Summer Teach Institute takes place this summer with the theme “Summer Teacher Institute Takes Action”. Sign up has not occurred yet.

- *Nisqually River Foundation* –Justin is working on contracting with the Tribe for grants. The Land Trust agreed to house a wholly owned subsidiary organization to seek funding for the Community Forest; they are currently developing a board for it. Ecosystem services will also play an important role. There is a

property somewhere that has an interested buyer. It will hopefully lead to a successful grant report at the end of the project.

- *Stream Stewards* – Don is at a Bio Blitz meeting. Chris shared details on his efforts.
- *Salmon Recovery Update* –The Tribe has identified all the funding needed to start construction in the lower Ohop Valley. Construction on the first half starts this summer! The remaining half will be completed the following summer. Currently, the Tribe is working to obtain the necessary permits. This time next year, some of the first images will be available.

The Tribe also purchased several game cameras that will be placed in Ohop Valley, which will help to document wildlife using the valley.

Chris shared that the Tribe has started a zooplankton sampling project which is a part of the South Sound estuary monitoring project that's been in the works for a while. The hope is to establish South Sound specific zooplankton indexes to predict the return of salmon to the area. Zooplankton are an important food source, and will also be important for planning crab harvesting too.

The Tribe is in the final stages of putting together a Steelhead Recovery Plan, the only one in the Puget Sound Region. Yesterday, Chris presented details to the Puget Sound Recovery Council, and will also present to NRC today. The plan will allow unique projects to start. It will also align with regional plans, once the relevant entities develop their own.

David added that it is time for the annual negotiations of harvest rates. This will take up much of his time for the next few weeks. He will report again in May on the results.

3. Nisqually Tribe Riparian Restoration Plantings

Cathy Sampselle, Salmon Recovery Restoration Biologist

Cathy is a restoration biologist for the Nisqually Indian Tribe. She began by sharing the tribe has had a year round restoration crew since 2007, which allows thorough maintenance to occur. This monitoring is critical for plant survival, and increases the annual acreage planted. The crew has many different partners, including the Nisqually Land Trust, the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and private landowners.

Since 2007, the crew has planted 260 acres, including 2-3 years of maintenance after installation. A GIS database houses As-builts and monitoring data, which enables the Tribe to monitor survival rates and canopy cover. These measurements, particularly canopy cover, relate to plant vigor.

At each plant site, the crew strives for 80% survival after the first year and 70% survival after 3 years. The biggest factor in loss is getting through droughts in the first two summers following planting. To help mitigate drought effects, the crew performs weed control to suppress competitive vegetation, and, where possible, irrigation.

Cathy described several of the planting sites to highlight successes and failures. The Braget planting is on tribal property and co-managed with the refuge. Dikes surrounding 100 acres were removed in 2006, and 53 acres received a planting treatment the following year. Three years later, the site had 70-80% survival rates, with the exception of a 3-acre area with complete mortality. Native salt marsh plants are decolonizing much of this area, so the tribe has no intention of replanting. The areas that did experience success featured a high water table, resulting in low drought stress. The last active maintenance occurred a year ago, with the removal of plant tubes.

Assessing canopy cover remotely. Exposed sights: ArcMap is trained to classify images passed on colors and shadows which returns a count of cells that relate canopy cover. This will be done every other year in the future.

Wilcox flats is struggling, largely because the site has very sandy soil with little organic matter, making droughts extra tough in the summer. In addition, there are a lot of animal issues. As a result, plants aren't doing too well. About 44 acres have been planted there through the years. Even after a few years, trees have about a 66% survival

rate. In certain areas, plants have been mulched, which helps conserve soil moisture. Other areas have limited access, so mulching is hard. Replantings are planned for winter 2015.

In 2012, another planting occurred, and tall live stakes were tried. The hope was they would quickly root and reach water table, as well as quickly outcompete vegetation. There was a huge response from wildlife, including beaver and elk, which made it more difficult. Live stakes were painted with latex and mason, but they elk preferred these for rubbing. Rooting quickly also didn't happen, so a replanting of bareroot took place. Another planting will be scheduled. Green Mountain Coffee gave free burlap sacks for weed control, much better than herbicide.

Ohop plantings: 100 acres, 70,000 plants, 2009-2012. The largest planting thus far. Includes construction on a new channel, extensive plantings. They have a USFW monitoring grant, which ends this year. But led to the establishment of permanent monitoring plots. This requires a large volunteer component: major planting events 2x per year. Work with NREP, NLT, Pierce CD. They are adding to the 100 acres each year, too!

Year 3: 70-90% survival rates, with 15-25% canopy cover, depending on the species mix. The crew measures the planting there in person to measure the canopy cover. Willows and cottonwood are the best species for surviving. By measuring both, they are able to notice trends. Alder generally has high initial mortality, but the ones that survive often become very robust specimen.

There are problem areas though. Areas that received a lot of traffic during construction were heavily compacted and is mostly weeds right now. There is an active weed program in the works, and a replanting will occur after.

Next, the Ohop Project continues. It will be 1.4 miles of new channel and 70 acres of planting over the next 3 years. Compaction will be addressed by established detailed haul routes. Construction on the first half will be June-July.

700 x 260 plants planted since the start of the program!

4. Nisqually Steelhead Recovery Planning

Chris Ellings, Salmon Recovery Program Manger, Nisqually Indian Tribe

Chris has been leading the way for NIT to develop a Steelhead Recovery Plan, which is the first one in the Puget Sound region.

Steelhead abundance in the Nisqually plummeted in the early 1990s. Historical runs showed up to 7,000 wild steelhead in the river. Currently, numbers are closer to 1,000. In the late 1980s, there was a huge drop in the survival of Steelhead. It went from an average of 5,000 returning to an average of 500 Steelhead. This crash happened throughout the state, which suggests large scale changes in a marine shift. Since the mid 1990s, the coast and the Lower Columbia river has started trending towards recovery, but Puget Sound stocks have been hovering around a 1% SAR. The Nisqually is around 10% of their pre-crash return rates. Trends also show the survival gets worse through Puget Sound; it gets worse as you go further south.

Several years ago, the tribe started a Steelhead Early-Marine Survival study to track survival rates through Puget Sound. As the fish moved north through the sound, more and more fish died; almost all were dead by the time they left the Sound, 14 days later. Other research shows that mortality of the remaining fish slows significantly after leaving. Although frightening, this is also hopeful. To focus on Puget Sound regions, increasing fish survival rates is possible.

As a result, the Nisqually Steelhead Recovery Plan was started. It identified goals and objectives, evaluated historical and current biological information and will be integrated into current management processes. Then, once a federally approved recovery plan is developed, this plan will flow seamlessly into efforts.

An important takeaway: freshwater survival is very good. Chris attributed much of this smolt survival rate to past actions of the NRC and the citizens who decided protecting forest, water and riparian resources was important. Without this past action, the freshwater survival would be much less and the situation would be even more dire.

To put it in perspective, historical survival rates were between 10 and 15%, as opposed to 1% currently. Tributaries are very important for steelhead. In the Nisqually, the major change was that current efforts are largely based on the

mainstream. In the past, the tributaries played a major role; it is important to maintain a high level of habitat in tributaries too.

In light of the recent, tragic mudslide, its important to put natural disasters into an ecological sense. To manage fish into the future, its important not to rely on the mainstream. In the Nisqually, MORA places significant risk of natural disasters; healthy tributaries provides additional habitat in the case of an emergency.

Priorities: mainstem protection priority similar to Chinook; Mashel restoration of upper reachers emerging as top priority; Muck Creek and Pariaire Tributaries are priorities unique to Steelhead. The planning process is starting to highlight other restoration priorities that are related to other sectors, like forestry. Because Chinook and Steelhead have different lifecycles, things that weren't important for Chinook are suddenly arising as very important for Steelhead.

Chris ended by mentioning that the Nisqually had seen many successes over the years, which has kept Steelhead populations afloat. More action in necessary, and in particular, a strong regional commitment is essential.

5. NWSP Discussion – Community Wellness

Justin introduced today's NWSP topic: Community Wellness. Morgan has been continuing her work on collecting baseline data on the indicators, although Community Wellness topics are one that NRF is lacking data on.

6. For the Good of the Order

Adjourn – Meeting was adjourned at 12:05pm.

Next Meeting: Friday, March 28, 2014, 9:30am – 12:30pm @ UW's Pack Forest