



Meeting Minutes
Nisqually River Council Meeting
January 20, 2017
UW Pack Forest
Information: 360.438.8715

Attendees:

Council Members

Chris Conklin – WDFW
Amy Cruver – Pierce County
Gary Edwards – Thurston County
Greg Ettl – UW Pack Forest
JW Foster – City of Yelm

Amber Martens – JBLM
Amber Moore – Puget Sound Partnership
Rene' Skaggs – Pierce Conservation District
David Troutt – Nisqually Indian Tribe
* CAC Representatives (1)

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Phyllis Farrell*
Ed Kenney
Fred Michelson
Karelina Resnick

Bob Smith
Marjorie Smith
Fred Michelson

Guests

Roger Andrascik – Nisq. Stream Stewards/Land Trust
Jeff Barney – Pierce County
Grace Ann Byrd – Nisqually Indian Tribe
Sarah Hamman – Center for Natural Lands Mgmt
Etusko Reistroffer – Nisq. Stream Stewards/Land Trust

Donna Turnipseed – JBLM
Ashley Von Essen – Nisqually Indian Tribe
Claire Williamson – SPS Salmon Enhancement Group
Cindy Wilson – Thurston County
Brian Zierdt – SPS Salmon Enhancement Group

Staff & Associated Nonprofits

Morgan Greene – Nisqually River Council

Justin Hall – Nisqually River Foundation

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

Call to Order – David called the meeting to order at 9:32 am.

Approval of Meeting Minutes and Agenda – There was a motion to approve the minutes from the December meeting. They were approved, as was the agenda for the day.

2. Reports

Advisory Committee Reports

- *Citizens Advisory Committee* – Phyllis reported that the CAC met on January 10; the meeting featured a discussion on water pollution led by Ed. The group also discussed the Hirst Water Case and its implications in the Nisqually Watershed.
- *Chair Report* – David reported that he and Justin arranged a tour of the Nisqually Watershed with JT Wilcox and Shelly Short in December to highlight restoration projects and discuss options to submit a legislative budget for the staffing of the NRC. Justin submitted the budget request to Representative Wilcox's office this week; he asked for approximately \$300,000 over the biennium to support the staffing and supplies necessary to operate the Council.
- *Staff Report* – Morgan announced that the Nisqually Stream Stewards MLK Day of Service event drew 87 people to toss salmon carcasses into the Mashel River. Morgan, Sheila and the NRC/NREP interns attended the Nisqually Tribe's Gathers Rain event to provide support. She has also attended several NREP Salmon Tossing field trips, and will continue to do so until they end in a few weeks. Ed and Morgan had the opportunity to view coho on Elbow Lake and Powell Creek a few months ago; there are videos and a blog post on the NRC website.

Allied Programs

- *Nisqually Land Trust* – JW reported the Land Trust wrapped up a good year on a high note, with two additional acquisitions. The first was the Jacobs Point property on Anderson Island, which is 18 acres and offers recreation opportunities while protecting salmon habitat. The project was in partnership with Forterra and others. The second property, the Bridges Property, is along the whitewater reach of the Nisqually River, close to the Nisqually Pines. It adjoins the Yelm-Tenino Trail and other Nisqually Land Trust properties. The Land Trust has a new Development Director, Susan Callendar. The annual fundraiser auction is on April 1, and will be at the South Puget Sound Community College Lacey Campus. Tickets are available now.
- *Nisqually River Education Project* – Justin reported that NREP is currently in the middle of salmon tossing. The 25th annual Student GREEN Congress is on March 23 at The Evergreen State College. To make the event extra special, Sheila is hosting a logo contest, with all submissions due on January 31; more details on the website. February 16 is winter water quality monitoring, and Sheila is also scheduling Eye on Nature trips for the spring. There will be an Eye on Nature fundraiser on February 21 at Fish Tale Brew Pub (now family friendly) in Olympia.
- *Nisqually River Foundation* – Justin reported that in November, the Nisqually River Council will celebrate 30 years! There will be a celebration/fundraiser around that time. He provided background information on the role of the NRF for newcomers, and noted that the NRF Board met in December to continue on the strategic plan work started in November. The majority of the meeting revolved around the Foundation’s purpose and mission, and shaping a blueprint for the future. The result of the planning will be brought before the NRC in February or March. The NRF staff and key partners had its annual planning retreat this week; more details on the workplan will be provided at a later date. Justin has also been working on the NRF budget (more details below).
- *Salmon Recovery Update* – Ashley reported that the new Lead Entity Grant Round has been begun. Because this is an odd year, the process only applies to SRF Board funds. Ashley has put out a call for proposals of projects that may be eligible for SRF Board funds; the RFP is open until February 28th. Submitted projects must include a presentation at the Habitat Work Group on March 1. In addition, the Yil Me Hu publication timeline has changed slightly, and first drafts are due on February 1. There is still space in this year’s publication, and any partners are welcome to submit a short article. Ed expressed interest in submitting an article on the return of coho to Powell Creek. Ashley also announced that there is a surplus of funds from the Lower Ohop Restoration Phase III, in the amount of \$75,000 of PSAR funding. The money expires on June 30, 2017. The Nisqually Salmon Habitat Work Group discussed projects the money could be put towards, and decided upon the Middle Ohop Protection Phase III. The property was purchased by the Nisqually Land Trust, with the hopes of being reimbursed with PSAR/SRF Board funds. The NRC Executive Committee has reviewed the Cost Adjustment and offered preliminary approval. Ashley sought final approval from the NRC. There was a motion to accept the cost adjustment. The motion carried unanimously. David noted that there has been talk of moving all money from salmon recovery project to school development instead. He believes its worth sending a letter from the NRC to express support in SRF Board and PSAR funding pots. David will draft a letter and send it via Morgan to the NRC for approval prior to mailing.

3. **NRF Budget** – *Justin Hall*

Justin provided an overview of the NRF’s 2017 budget. Although it has not been approved by the NRF Board, he felt the NRC would benefit from a brief overview. More details will be provided next month. The budget is composed of 6 parts: NRF Operating (costs needed to run a non-profit), Nisqually River Council (staff time/supplies to maintain the NRC), Nisqually River Education Project, Nisqually Community Forest, Ecosystem Services, and Contract Employees. The total income of \$983,866 is largely in grants and contracts, although the NRF hopes to raise \$29,000 through various fundraising efforts this year, including the Dan J. Evans Stewardship Award and a conservation breakfast. The projected expenses are \$833,130. The largest expense is staff time, the second largest goes to contract employees (including project partners), and the third largest expense is program expenses, including buses, water quality kits, plants, etc. NREP is consistently the most difficult portion of the budget to fill, although NRF reserves are sufficient enough to cover any costs that can’t be filled via grants, fundraising or other funding methods. Justin will present a more detailed budget at the next NRC meeting, and will also send it via email. Roger noted that targeting NREP “alumni” may be an untapped funding source.

4. Creative Strategies for Wetland Restoration – Sarah Hamman, CNLM

Muck Creek is one of the most significant salmon bearing tributaries to the Nisqually River, but portions of it have been choked by reed canary grass (RCG) for years, limiting available habitat. Sarah is a restoration ecologist with the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) and has been developing ways to remove the invasive grass at test sites on JBLM. Although CNLM generally focuses on prairie habitats, the organization recognizes the holistic nature of ecosystems and the importance of healthy riparian areas. Sarah noted that although RCG is considered native in some portions of the U.S., it is a non-native and invasive species in the Pacific Northwest, because it typically dominates wetlands and riparian areas, and reduces native plant and invertebrate diversity. In particular, the Oregon Spotted Frog, recently listed as endangered, relies on a healthy wetland system and cannot survive in the thick mats RCG forms.

CNLM examined different removal strategies, used in various combinations. In particular, the project compared results under Mow-Burn, Mow-Herbicide, Herbicide-Burn, Mow-Herbicide-Burn, and Control scenarios. Treatments were applied in 10m x 10m plots on three different sites on JBLM. Each site featured different hydrology, ranging from a consistently wet site, a drier site, and a typical seasonal wetland site. Treatments were applied in 2011-2013, and in 2014 20 *Juncus supiniformis* plants were planted at each site. The *Juncus* was monitored in 2014-2016.

After treatment, each site was assessed to determine the impact it had on the percent coverage of RCG. The Control sites had 80% coverage, but the Mow-Burn treatment featured almost 90% RCG. The Mow-Herbicide-Burn treatment was the most effective, reducing RCG coverage to approximately 20%. There were no sites that were treated with herbicide after a burn; all herbicide treatments happened before in order to create dead fuel to carry fire. Sarah also monitored species richness after treatment, and noted that other non-native species emerged from the seed bank once RCG was reduced. Each treatment featured a different combination of species richness, with those treatments using herbicides yielding 3-4 native species and 1-4 non-native species. CNLM monitored the thatch depth and cover after each treatment; the results ranged from 60%-0% coverage and 35cm – 0cm depending upon the treatment. Lastly, Sarah monitored survival of *Juncus* planted after the treatment; the results also varied over time and depending on the treatment. After the treatments, water quickly became visible on the surface of the plots, because RCG no longer choked the system. All thatch was left on site after treatment, but decomposed quickly due to increased UV exposure and water. Karelina was concerned about the impact of herbicides. CNLM did not include water quality monitoring as a part of this project, but used only aquatic approved grass specific herbicides.

The study highlighted the fact that RCG removal is labor intensive and requires multiple treatment methods to be successful. It also showed that reseeding is difficult, if not impossible in some places. The next phase of the project uses coconut coir pre-vegetated mats. The mats are seeded with plants in a ‘Sustainability in Prisons Program’ facility, allowing a robust root system to develop prior to being placed in the environment. As an added bonus, the mats also shade RCG and other non-natives as native plants become established. The plants are grown at a self-contained aquaculture facility that uses koi to create nutrients. Although the mats have potential, Sarah noted they provide limited coverage in the field. Ed wondered if high water would wash the mats out; he has experienced that in the past with similar materials. CNLM stapled their mats to the ground, and will be visiting them regularly to insure they stay in place.

In addition, CNLM is monitoring site hydrology. Water loggers will be placed at varying depths on JBLM prairies to track changes in water table depth after RCG removal. This will highlight any seasonal fluctuations in the water table, which is an important component for Oregon Spotted Frog survival.

Sarah noted the Nisqually Indian Tribe supported the first portion of work; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is supporting the work to place coconut mats. David noted that the Steelhead Recover Plan recommends reconnecting tribal members to prairie burns; this project may be a way to rekindle that connection. Donna noted that it would be a good idea to use the mats in combination with planting willow live stakes to restore the riparian area. Rene’ noted that the Conservation District would happily provide volunteers for such a project. Chris also noted that WDFW has completed multiple RCG removal projects, and that the impacts on fish are drastic. Rene’ is currently working with a landowner along Muck Creek who is experimenting with non-herbicide removal methods, including continual mowing and burlap sacks. The presentation is here: <http://www.slideshare.net/Nisqually/creative-strategies-for-wetland-restoration>.

5. Nisqually Steelhead Habitat Assessments – Claire Williamson and Brian Zierdt, SPSSEG

The South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group (SPSSEG) recently started a pilot project to assess steelhead habitat throughout the lower Nisqually Watershed, specifically on Brighton, Horn and Harts Creek. The project is in the analysis phase; Claire will offer a broad overview today, but will share data once it is available. As background, steelhead population sizes are currently estimated at 1%-4% compared to historic numbers. With the Nisqually Tribe as Lead Entity, multiple partners developed the Nisqually Steelhead Recovery Plan to guide actions aimed at recovering the species.

The project has three goals: to provide photo-documentation of each site assessed; add data to the Tribe's EDT model; and identify potential projects to improve habitat. Protocol was developed that meet standardized requirements, provides a useful snapshot of the habitat, and is reproducible. Data collected included the amount of large woody debris, water features such as pools or riffles, plant cover and presence of invasive species, and whether culverts are passable/accessible. Sites are located on both private and public lands; the Nisqually Tribe, Nisqually River Foundation and SPSSEG have all been involved in field assessments. All data was collected on a tablet and uploaded to an online, interactive map. The map will be shared among partners.

One of the challenges was getting access to 200+ private parcels. SPSSEG launched a large PR campaign and sent multiple letters to landowners requesting access. Although they were able to get fairly good access, there are still gaps in the data. Claire noted that SPSSEG does not want access to parcels for regulatory reasons; it is simply to assess the available fish habitat.

The project helps to highlight potential projects, including a large culvert that needs to be replaced on Harts Lake Road. In the field, SPSSEG noted varying degrees in habitat quality, ranging from poorly designed culverts and invasive species, to high quality sediment that is important for salmon. In the future, the data collection will expand to include presence of freshwater mussels, which are a good indicator for anadromous activity. SPSSEG is currently in the reporting phase of the pilot project. This includes assessing the data and creating a written report on the habitat present. Eventually, the data and online map will likely be made public. WDFW will also use the culvert data to prioritize replacement projects. As the project moves forward, SPSSEG will focus on Muck Creek, which may yield more potential habitat than those in the pilot project.

The data is not yet available, but Claire will contact Morgan when it is. SPSSEG expects to receive another grant to continue to work of the project. Claire's presentation is available here:

<http://www.slideshare.net/Nisqually/nisqually-steelhead-habitat-assessments>.

Ed wondered if SPSSEG will assess Powell Creek and other nearby tributaries; as of now, the project is focusing on tributaries downstream of Ohop Creek, and will remain focused on Muck, Brighton, Horn and Harts Creeks. Rene' noted that a WDFW crew assessed Muck Creek near her house a few years ago, and suggested looking into the data that was collected then. She also noted that this project may be a strong candidate for a NFWF 5 Star Grant application.

6. For the Good of the Order

Rene': The Farm Forum is on February 22nd; info is on the PCD website. The Annual Meeting is on March 22nd. the Farm Forum is on February 22nd, mainly geared toward commercial farmers, and the info is on their website. The annual meeting is on March 22nd. The District also received an RCPP grant that will be used to purchase easements and protect farmland, starting in the Puyallup Watershed. Rene' also shared that Brian Abbott passed away last month.

JW: Steve Craig is presenting a series of interviews called "Who's Who in the Nisqually Watershed from Mountain to Sea," at the Triad Theater. The first interviewee will be Farron McCloud, on January 26 at 7:00; the full schedule was not available but JW believes they will be monthly. The City of Yelm is proud to have a new City Administrator, Michael Graham, the previous mayor of DuPont.

Adjourn – Meeting was adjourned at 12:18pm.

*Next Meeting: Friday February 17, 2016
Yelm Community Center; NWSP Topic: Recreation*