



**Meeting Minutes  
Nisqually River Council Meeting  
May 15, 2020  
Online Meeting**

*Attendees:*

**NRC Members:**

Dan Calvert – Puget Sound Partnership  
Stacey Dixon – UW Pack Forest  
Becky Kowalski – JBLM

Glynnis Nakai - BFJNNWR  
Rene’ Skaggs – Pierce Conservation District  
David Troutt, chair – Nisqually Indian Tribe

**CAC Members:**

Phyllis Farrell  
Howard Glastetter  
Paula Holroyde

Ed Kenney  
Lois Ward

**Guests:**

Roger Andrascik – NLT/NSS  
Brad Beach – Nisqually Indian Tribe  
Molly Carmody – City of Yelm  
Davy Clark - BFJNNWR  
Yanah Cook – Love Abounds  
Michelle Cornwell – Ohop Lake Improvement Club  
Brittany Corpuz – Cougar Mtn Middle School  
Ruthie Donnaway – Cougar Mtn Middle School  
Chris Ellings – Nisqually Indian Tribe  
Cathy Hamilton-Wissmer – JBLM

Daniel Hull – NRNC  
Larry Leveen – Forever Greenway  
Martin McCallum – NLT/NSS  
Anna O’Brien – Cougar Mtn Middle School  
Paul Reid – Bethel School District  
Kurt Roblek - BFJNNWR  
Eric Rosane – Nisqually Valley News  
Ashley Von Essen – Nisqually Indian Tribe  
Kim Williams – Cougar Mtn Middle School

**Staff:**

Justin Hall – NRF  
Joe Kane – Nisqually Land Trust  
Emily McCartan – NRF

Sheila Wilson – NRF  
Maya Nabipoor - NRF

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

David called the meeting to order at 10:01am. Minutes from the previous meeting were approved, as was the agenda for the day.

**2. Committee Reports and Updates**

**Advisory Committee Reports:**

*Citizens Advisory Committee – Phyllis Farrell*

The CAC did not meet this month.

*Chair Report – David Troutt*

By request, David shared information responding to questions in the broader community about why salmon and steelhead returns are so low, and whether tribal fishing is responsible.

The Nisqually Tribe has not caught a steelhead in over 25 years, since the tribal fishery was closed in 1994. Non-tribal recreational fishing on Nisqually steelhead continued until 2007. The population is still at a catastrophically low level, with many contributing factors including pollution and environmental conditions. Data indicate a high mortality rate for outmigrating juvenile steelhead from seal predation. Only 8% of juvenile steelhead make it out of Puget Sound in an average year, but survival can increase to 30-40% in years when Biggs (transient) orcas are present to deter seals. Claims that tribal gill-netting are responsible for low returns are not founded in the facts.

The Nisqually Tribe is working with the Nisqually Community Forest on a scope of work for the \$14.2 million Clean Water Revolving Fund grant from Ecology. Expect the scope to be finalized this summer, and then to move on to landowner outreach and purchase.

David and Chris met with USGS to discuss their research findings and potential scenarios regarding I-5, flood risk, and sediment delivery in the Nisqually Valley. USGS will be invited to present to the NRC on this topic.

David is engaged in long-term discussions about the challenges facing Puget Sound, and the difficulty getting funding to address a growing environmental crisis. COVID has proved that we're willing to do extraordinary things when people understand the stakes. It suggests that we need a major education campaign across the state to raise broad awareness about the crises for salmon, orca, and the economies and ecosystems that rely on them. In the Nisqually, NREP, volunteer and outreach programs have shown success in increasing public knowledge and changing attitudes. Puget Sound Partnership could take the lead on educational media and outreach to landowners and others that could help leverage greater support for major investments in funding, management practices, and infrastructure needed to save the ecosystem.

- *Discussion:*  
It's important that our restoration efforts are made visible to the communities here in the watershed. In the past, the Tribe and other entities sent newsletters to landowners in high priority restoration areas, although there is less funding for these initiatives now. Landowners are often contacted about opportunities to harvest trees on their properties, and it would be good to share alternative options for conservation or restoration. This kind of effort should be made around Puget Sound.
- Love Abounds is a group working with homeless individuals who camp near the river. Economic pressures are increasing and will increase homelessness. Yanah would like to share a message about environmental stewardship – many homeless people want to help, and need means and resources to do it.
- Thurston County is updating its Shoreline Management Plan and discussing a lot of shoreline armoring issues. Support from the Tribe and public would help with environmentally beneficial changes. Some are proposing bulkhead and dock expansions that would further damage the shorelines.
- Yelm received wide support for tax increase for expanding transit last year, because it was advertised heavily on Facebook and elsewhere. Widespread public messaging is crucial.

- People perceive Puget Sound as beautiful. This is to some extent a “hidden” crisis because it’s not immediately apparent. It’s a challenging message but essential to connect people to what we’re doing and why.
- A communications subcommittee for the NRC will be discussed at the July retreat.

*Staff Report – Emily McCartan*

The NRF is sending photo postcards and doing online outreach and “friendraising” to give people opportunities to connect with us and the watershed during quarantine. Visit [nisquallyriver.org](http://nisquallyriver.org) for some ways to connect and give back that don’t necessarily involve a financial donation.

WRIA 11 partners submitted 8 streamflow restoration grants to the Department of Ecology by April 30. Many emphasized the need for further data collection and project development, because the Nisqually streamflow plan was developed under such a short timeline and didn’t receive the same level of technical support from Ecology that other watersheds are getting.

WSDOT study report on I-5 through the Nisqually Valley is completed and published online at: <https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/studies/i5/tumwater-mounts-road/home>. The report has a chapter dedicated to environmental and land use issues in the Nisqually Delta and notes that further study on sedimentation and salmon impacts is ongoing with the Nisqually Tribe. The next step for WSDOT will be a “Planning and Environmental Linkages” study of the recommended scenarios. One of the top recommendations involved land use goals, which will require significant coordination and action from county and local governments.

*Thurston County Planning – Maya Teeple (updates provided by email)*

- Nisqually Subarea Plan – The Board of County Commissioners recently went through their docketing process. All items that were incomplete from the last docket cycle rolled over for re-consideration. The Nisqually Subarea Plan is still included on the official docket for work. The Board prioritized this item as a lower priority, so work won’t likely pick up on it again until early 2021.
- Recycled Asphalt Policy – This item was also carried over onto the new 2020-2021 docket. The Board ranked this item as medium priority. Work is continuing on this item, and Maya is still the staff-person if folks have questions. Staff is hoping to begin the public review process of this item mid-summer with the Planning Commission. When that begins, Maya will go over the proposal and go over all comments received to date, including the October 2019 comment from the Nisqually River Council requesting on-the-ground studies. Once a Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for review of this item and comments, Maya will pass along to the NRC.
- Mineral Lands – Planning Commission review continues on this item. Additional stakeholder group meetings were held in February and March to discuss code language, and the Planning Commission is working towards options to move forward to a public hearing. This will be part of a bigger public hearing on other items (parks, long term forestry designation review, and the health chapter), tentatively in mid-summer. Phyllis has attended meetings and noted that there is no current agreement on reducing the 1,000 foot buffer for parks and critical areas, and whether land trust

properties would be included in critical area designations. Mining interests want that to be addressed at the permit level, which would make it more difficult to enforce.

### **Allied Program Reports**

#### *Nisqually Land Trust – Joe Kane*

NLT is working on several acquisitions. Other work has slowed down, with tubing and staking this year's plantings finished last month. This year's action will probably not be a live event, and other options are being explored. The hope is to open up volunteer events when Washington is in Phase 3 of the Governor's reopening plan.

#### *Nisqually River Education Project – Sheila Wilson*

NREP shifting content to online platforms for all current grants. The NOAA CLAMSS grant held a teacher professional development workshop online and Nearshore field trip partners are launching a Canvas course so teachers can select curriculum tools to use with their students. Summer Institute for Teachers will be a "Stay IN-stitute" focused on actions to improve ocean health, including workshops combined with socially distanced volunteer activities. For the No Child Left Inside grant, NREP is collecting resources about the places to visit when lockdown is lifted. Eye On Nature fundraiser will be a virtual experience coming in June with guest speaker and silent auction online. Next school year status is still unknown, but NREP continues to work with North Thurston Public Schools to bring every 5<sup>th</sup> grade class out for a field trip for water quality monitoring (virtually if necessary).

#### *Nisqually River Foundation and Nisqually Community Forest – Justin Hall*

NRF staff continue to work from home. The Foundation did not apply for a Payroll Protection loan given that we have stable funding through the end of the year, but is anticipating budget challenges with funders in the future. The Community Forest Clean Water Revolving Fund Loan scope of work is in development. Whatcom Land Trust is looking at us as model for their community forest. NCF is also looking at pursuing carbon sequestration project. Puget Sound Partnership is interested in setting up a virtual tour of the Nisqually Community Forest for legislative stakeholders.

#### *Salmon Recovery – Ashley Von Essen and Chris Ellings*

Six projects are moving forward for SRFB and PSAR funding. Ashley will share ranked project list in June or July. The Nisqually Watershed Festival has been cancelled this year, which is sad but necessary for safety. The Festival committee will be meeting this month to discuss virtual options. The Nisqually Tribe's planting crew finished planting 12,500 trees on three parcels, and NLT finished tubing all of them.

Chris is part of a committee working on updates to the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan. The original recovery plan, from the mid-2000s, focused on preventing the loss of commercial forestland, while deferring management practices to Forest and Fish law. That backstop has been inadequate to meet the recovery needs. In the update, the goal is to identify specific subwatersheds critical for summer streamflow, large woody debris, and other important factors, and develop forest management practices for recovery strategy. Other items under discussion are integrating growth infrastructure investments into ecosystem recovery so that growth pays for recovery (i.e. any dollar spent to improve

infrastructure/roads should be partly dedicated to improving the ecosystem, not as mitigation, but integrated into planning). Another essential goal is rehabilitating the Puget Sound shoreline by relocating the BNR rail line along the coast. Those items need to be called out, even if they are major and expensive changes. PSP and other entities are anticipating a very challenging budget year, and noted that it will be critical for recovery advocates coordinate goals and engage early with legislative officials to press for funding. The Nisqually Tribe and others have been advancing messages about using capital infrastructure as a lever for improving baseline environmental conditions and integrating environmental recovery into planning for a long time, and momentum seems to be building.

### **3. Educating on the Wild Side**

*Davy Clark, Education Program Manager, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge*

Environmental education is part of visitor services at the Refuge. It's one of six wildlife-dependent activities available for human refuge visitors, along with hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and interpretive programs. The role of environmental educators is to awaken in students:

- A sense of wonder, awe and delight for nature with respect for all life forms and the interdependent relationships in ecosystems.
- A sense of belonging to a special human niche in the natural world.
- A feeling of accountability for human impacts on the environment, in age-appropriate terms. David Sobel: "If we want to ask children to save the world, they first need the chance to love it."
- Sensitivity toward diverse interests and culture perspectives, built into science-focused education (students bring lived experiences that can enhance their learning and are exposed to a variety of perspectives on the natural world).
- Skills to identify and solve environmental problems.

Field trips are a chance to inspire connections with students. The Refuge has a unique set of resources: trails through unique mosaic of habitats, staff and volunteers with content expertise who can lead student discovery and share enthusiasm about nature, and materials not found in classrooms (binoculars, microscopes, taxidermy, animal artifacts that students can handle). Field trips are intended to support classroom learning on the trails. Davy challenges every group to come back from their trail walk and share one thing they've never seen before in their life, even if they've walked the trail before. Students will describe robins and other common birds that they may have seen, but have never been invited to slow down and observe it before. Bald eagles flying so close they can feel the air move. Volunteers help them spot things that would be easy to miss, which can make for some showstopper moments. Trail walks make their world a bigger place.

Pre-trip planning is essential and most of the work that goes into a successful visit. Visiting classes are required to be working on a continuing unit of study about the natural world, so the field trip ties into their classroom experience and follow-up. 50-100 students visit the Refuge almost every day during the school year. The Refuge also works hard to recruit volunteers and parent chaperones, who are trained to participate in the learning and enable small group activities that are very impactful. When they arrive, students have a brief

orientation with an educator explaining that the Refuge isn't a zoo, and they are guests in the home of wild creatures. Because even the adults don't know where the wild animals are, it creates a sense of adventure and discovery. Students rotate between small group activities in the education center and on the trail, and always end with a closing reflection. Teachers have to do a lot of work to make field trips happen, so it's important to make sure there is no wasted time and students have the maximum ability to follow their own curiosity.

By the numbers, the Refuge's education program annually delivers:

- 10,000 program participants (students, teachers and parents)
- 2,500 volunteer hours (by about 40 volunteers)
- 750 Every Kid Outdoors Passes issued to 4<sup>th</sup> graders – free entrance to all federal lands
- 11,000 miles walked by kids

This level of education program is fairly unique to the BFJNNWR, made possible by its unique location close to I-5 and neighboring communities. From establishment in 1974, staff recognized this would be a good place for schoolkids to visit. The Environmental Education Center was opened in 2009 - most refuges don't have a dedicated facility for education. The Refuge does not do a lot of recruitment outreach to schools, but has relationships with many district staff in the surrounding areas. Every first grader in North Thurston Public Schools visits the Refuge. The heart of the program are people, including a dedicated group of about 40 volunteers including many retired teachers. Davy noted that the Nisqually community has many people who understand the value of education and outreach, and that makes this a fun place to work.

Feedback from student letters and comments shows why these programs are so important: "What I saw that I thought was cool was the blue heron. I learned that life is more important than anything in the world. My favorite part was going on the walk. I felt like I belonged there."

#### **4. Water Quality Monitoring Presentation**

*Ruthie Donaway and Anna O'Brien, Cougar Mountain Middle School Science Club*

Although Student GREEN Congress was cancelled this year, students had begun preparing their water quality monitoring presentations. Kim Williams is the science club advisor at Cougar Mountain Middle School (Bethel School District) and is here with science club students Ruthie and Anna to present their results. Ruthie and Anna have participated in water quality monitoring with NREP for 5 years. CMMS Science Club does several environmental service projects, including, this year, planting 290 trees to restore nearby salmon habitat, planting native plant species to restore prairie habitat, and tossing 350 cold, dead salmon to reintroduce nutrients into streams.

Their current monitoring site at CMMS is near the headwaters of the north fork of Muck Creek in the Nisqually Watershed, located on the Morse Wildlife Preserve. The surrounding environment is a mix of suburban and country with issues including population growth and pollution. Data was collected in Fall 2019 and Winter 2020. Indicators to celebrate were optimal water temperature, pH levels, and turbidity. Hot spots included nitrates, which were high in the severe/fatal range for salmon and can cause harmful algal blooms. Nitrates may

be coming from animal feces or fertilizer, from a nearby farm and from houses with pets and lawns being fertilized. Dissolved oxygen levels were also too low, possibly because the water is flowing slowly at this testing location due to a beaver dam and invasive reed canary grass. Actions suggested to remedy these issues could be taking out reed canary grass and planting trees to shade out the grass, and educating local people about animal and fertilizer impacts on water by putting up signs, encouraging fencing and picking up waste.

*Discussion:*

- Has this changed the way you look at the world? – Yes. It shows you what you do in your own yard, such as using too much fertilizer, can impact everywhere.
- Does salmon tossing add to the nitrates to the water? – Depends on the location and type of nutrients in the water. We are consuming so many salmon that they aren't making it to their full life cycle into the streams where they are tossed.
- What are your career goals? – Ruthie wants to be an environmental engineer. Anna wants to be a zookeeper/biologist.

## **5. For the Good of the Order**

Pierce Conservation District celebration dinner is now cancelled. They will share profiles of award winners, which include lifetime achievement award for George Walter.

WSDOT's I-5 Tumwater to Mounts Road Study report is complete and available here: <https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/studies/i5/tumwater-mounts-road/home>

Ecology is currently seeking project ideas that will prevent or reduce nonpoint source (NPS) pollution in Washington's lakes, rivers, streams, and marine waters. Letters of Intent are due June 15 and applications are due by October 13.

Nisqually Land Trust Director hiring update: Over 20 candidates applied. 10 are holding interviews with the recruiters and the board committee will select the top three to move to the next stage.

Yelm has hired a new public works director, Cody Colt. He was a sitting member of city council and has a naval engineer background, working on water reclamation, interested in environmental considerations. Molly is encouraging the City Council to consider removal of grass along city roads and reseeding with native plants to help pollinators.

The Nisqually Aquatic Reserve expansion is still pending at DNR. The Nisqually Reach Nature Center was approached by the Pew Charitable Trust about a sea grass protection initiative and will have more information at a future meeting.

Today is Endangered Species Day: a message at the heart of the NRC's work.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.

*Next meeting: June 19, 2020, via Zoom.  
Stay home and stay healthy!*