



Nisqually River Council Report March 20, 2020

--Meeting canceled due to coronavirus--
Information: info@nisquallyriver.org

The standing Nisqually River Council meeting scheduled for March 20, 2020 was canceled due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. We hope everyone in our NRC community is able to stay safe and well during this crisis. We're extremely grateful to the health care workers on the front lines, and appreciative of all the efforts to reduce the spread of the virus, limit the strain on hospitals, and keep our collective spirits up.

Chair Report – *David Troutt*

This is a crazy and uncertain time we are facing. What is certain that I love each and every one of you and want you all to be safe above all. The Nisqually Watershed will be there when we return to normal operations. I want all of you to be there too. Be safe and take care of yourself and your families. Mahalo nui loa.

South Sound Magazine published a feature this week on the unique successes in habitat protection, restoration, and salmon recovery in the Nisqually watershed. It highlights the leadership of the Nisqually Indian Tribe as well as the work of the Nisqually Land Trust and other volunteer efforts. Please read and share widely: <https://southsoundmag.com/to-protect-and-preserve/>

Citizens Advisory Committee Report – *Phyllis Farrell*

The CAC did not meet this month. Members are continuing to monitor local and county issues and hope to check in via phone or web meeting soon.

Staff Report – *Emily McCartan*

At this time, we expect that the NRC meeting scheduled for April 17 is also canceled. We are looking into online/phone meeting alternatives. In the meantime, please continue to share any news or updates with emily@nisquallyriver.org to pass along.

Emily provided comments to WSDOT on their draft I-5 study, consistent with the letter the NRC sent earlier. WSDOT has been very responsive to our feedback about I-5 impacts on the Nisqually Delta and overall regional planning issues relevant to NWSP goals.

Streamflow Restoration grants are in process and due March 31. The Nisqually Planning Unit continues to work very collaboratively to identify projects that will have multiple benefits for salmon habitat as well as streamflow in the watershed. Grant applications this year include several Community Forest acquisitions, match for an Ohop protection project and an assessment of water rights in Muck/Prairie tributaries by the Nisqually Land Trust, a basin-wide strategic study of Muck Creek Basin, several potential restoration projects in Thurston County, and a proposal to support the core functioning of the Planning Unit itself to develop future projects. The last proposal is particularly important because the Nisqually group had only one year to

complete its streamflow plan, in contrast to other most watersheds, which received three years and additional technical support. Without ongoing funding, we are concerned about our capacity to do the needed research and coordination to fully implement the plan. Long-term discussions also include the potential to bring watershed planning under the NRC, with an agreement for financial support from member governments.

Nisqually Land Trust – *Joe Kane*

The Land Trust auction and dinner has been postponed to September 26. Work parties are currently on hold.

Nisqually River Education Project – *Sheila Wilson*

All field trips and events (Student GREEN Congress, Eye On Nature, CLAMSS trips and teacher professional development/trainings) through April 24th are cancelled. Beyond that, scheduling is tentative as we await word from our participating school districts. Sheila and Maya are working on collecting and sharing resources for online learning about the watershed while schools are closed: <http://nisquallyriver.org/blog/2020/03/19/at-home-activities-for-school-closures/>

State of the Rivers Facilitator Training at the Refuge was well attended. So many fine minds come together year after year to make Student GREEN Congress better and better, and we look forward to being back next year.

Volunteer Salmon Toss on February 29 had great participation from a Yelm Scouts group and a few Stream Stewards. Eatonville's middle and high school GRITS students also came out to toss (get a sense of the experience, minus the smell, in this short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cInDGJoKvf0>). GRITS is a science, PE, and Career & Technical outdoor education program based at Kjelstad Farm in the Ohop Valley, which the school district recently took over from the Nisqually Land Trust:

<https://dispatchnews.com/Content/News/News/Article/Nisqually-Land-Trust-Plot-Flourishes-under-Eatonville-School-District/26/337/4617>

Hiring for the new NREP program coordinator is in process. 23 amazingly qualified applicants were winnowed down to 6 interviews. We expect to make an offer with the understanding that they won't start until schools are back in session.

Nisqually River Foundation and Community Forest – *Justin Hall*

Over the last month the Nisqually River Foundation had its annual staff planning retreat. We have continued to support the Streamflow Restoration planning effort and have been working on preparing two streamflow grants for planning and project development, and two for potential community forest purchases. Foundation staff have been interviewing for the NREP coordinator position.

The Nisqually Community Forest was invited to talk with the Chimacum Ridge Community Forest planning process and share what our experiences have been. We have also been assisting the Nisqually Indian Tribe with work towards accepting the Clean Water Revolving Fund Loan.

NRF staff are working from home until further notice.

Salmon Recovery – *Ashley Von Essen*

The Nisqually Land Trust, along with some NIT/NRF staff, were able to host a tube removal work party in the Lower Ohop Valley on March 4th. About 20 volunteers came out and pulled tubes on hundreds of plants that were installed as part of the Phase III restoration project. We regret to announce that the work party scheduled for March 18th has been canceled and we are expecting to cancel the April 1st event as well. We are looking forward to rescheduling these events in the future!

On February 26th, the Nisqually Lead Entity and Salmon Habitat Work Group hosted members of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board Review Panel on a tour of projects being considered for this year's grant round. The group heard both office presentations and visited projects on site to learn the potential salmon habitat benefits for each of the seven projects hoping to be funded by Nisqually's allocation of Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration funding, estimated at about \$1.8 million.

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge – *Glynnis Nakai*

The Refuge is suspending operations of the facilities and programs operated by volunteers until further notice. This includes the Visitor Center, interpretive programs, biological volunteer programs, and visitor services programs that place volunteers in direct contact with the public. The Friends' Flyway Newsletter is on its way, and this issue includes the spring schedule for guided walks – please note, these walks are suspended until you hear from the staff.

With school closures, the environmental education programs have discontinued, at least until April 24 when schools are scheduled to reopen but that timeline may be extended. When schools reopen, we may still experience changes in the field trip schedule as teachers reassess their required curriculum with limited class time. The Washington Conservation Corps is suspending field service through April 2. The Grays Harbor Shorebird and Nature Festival has been postponed until next year.

With the closure of businesses and other indoor venues, we expect to see an increase in refuge visitors, especially as we enter into spring with nicer weather. The trails at both Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually NWR and Grays Harbor NWR will remain open for people to get outdoors and where social distancing can be followed. Refuge operations, behind-the-scenes, will continue as long as the staff remains healthy and exposure can be managed. Suspension of visitor center operations and other notices will be posted on the refuge websites and Friends website, and partners will be informed of changes in refuge operations.

Pierce Conservation District – *Rene' Skaggs*

We wanted to let you know that after considering the best public health guidance around the COVID-19 outbreak and the governor's recent ban on large gatherings, we have postponed our annual Conservation Celebration until June 3, 2020.

Our Board of Supervisor elections will still take place on March 25th, 4-8 p.m. outside our office at 308 West Stewart Ave, in Puyallup with precautions taken to help ensure public safety. If you

already requested a “by-mail” ballot, just make sure it is post marked by March 25th. For in person voting, you must be an eligible voter and please bring proper identification; learn more here: <https://piercecd.org/263/Become-a-Board-Member> For questions email: Selena at selenac@piercecd.org. Thank you for your patience. We look forward to celebrating another great year of conservation with you all in the near future.