



**Meeting Minutes
Nisqually River Council Meeting
September 18, 2020
Online Meeting**

Attendees:

Council Members:

Anne Baxter – Dept. of Ecology
Dan Calvert – Puget Sound Partnership
Stacey Dixon – UW Pack Forest

Becky Kowalski – JBLM
Darrin Masters – WDFW
David Troutt, chair - Nisqually Indian Tribe

CAC Members:

Phyllis Farrell
Howard Glastetter
Paula Holroyde
Ed Kenney

Martin McCallum
Karelina Resnick
Lois Ward

Guests:

Roger Andrascik – NLT/NSS
Jeff Barney – Pierce County
Warren Bergh – NLT/NSS
Michele Buckley
Chris Ellings – Nisqually Indian Tribe
Lloyd Fetterly – NLT/NSS

Cathy Hamilton-Wissmer – JBLM
Kathleen Mix – NLT
Eric Rosane – Nisqually Valley News
Tom Skjervold – Nisqually Delta Assn
Bruce York – Sierra Club
Jeff Zahir

Staff:

Kim Bredensteiner – NLT
Julia Fregonara – NRF
Justin Hall – NRF
Joe Kane – NLT

Emily McCartan – NRF
Maya Nabipoor – NRF
Sheila Wilson – NRF

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

David called the meeting to order at 9:04am. The minutes from August's meeting were approved as corrected, as was the agenda for the day.

2. Committee Reports and Updates

Advisory Committee Reports:

Citizens Advisory Committee – Phyllis Farrell

The CAC met on Tuesday. Members discussed concerns and questions regarding the Nisqually Subarea update regarding removing the prohibition on recycled asphalt (RAP). A public hearing is scheduled for the Thurston Planning Commission on October 7. The CAC also discussed updates on Yelm's wastewater treatment system, the Chehalis River flood control dam proposal, and a tentative agreement in the works to restore Sequelitchew Creek with DuPont, JBLM, CalPortland, the Nisqually Delta Association, and others.

Chair Report – David Troutt

David spoke to the Thurston Planning Commission's work session on September 2 on the Recycled Asphalt proposal. The NRC has previously submitted two comment letters, most recently in October 2019, expressing concern about the lack of science to determine potential impacts, but willing to move forward with sufficient BMPs, monitoring, and adaptive management in place. Lakeside, the applicant, has publicly indicated they are willing to accept BMPs and cover the RAP pile with a hard structure to prevent weather exposure and runoff, as well as willingness to do monitoring and report to us. NRC had also commented with concerns that this permitting process is going forward separately from the Subarea plan. If the policy change is approved and Lakeside proceeds to permitting, the Nisqually Tribe will insist on that no open surface connection to groundwater or mining below the water table is allowed in the subarea. Any open surface connection to groundwater is a dangerous risk for contamination with gravel mining, asphalt, or RAP production. CAC members also shared differing and additional concerns at the work session.

David continues to work with the State and other Tribes on riparian restoration. The Nisqually model demonstrates success of incentive-based programs can work with adequate support and trust. Other watersheds have lacked the watershed community and relationships to make the incentive tools as effective in protecting essential salmon habitat. Regulatory reforms, including site-potential tree height buffers for agricultural lands, are being discussed to meet goals for riparian habitat recovery. Nisqually Chinook survival is dependent on Chinook survival in other watersheds. The group has not agreed on action items yet, but will report to the Governor in December. The possibility for working/harvestable buffers in riparian areas has been discussed. In some watersheds, there are concerns about losing quality with harvesting in buffers. The Nisqually's riparian zone may be resilient enough to allow this in places. David supports the idea of paying farmers long-term to "grow fish habitat" by maintaining forested buffers, equivalent to the value of crops they could have grown on that land. Federal CREP program is only 10 years with no guaranteed renewal, which is not enough. PSP noted a need for adequate attention to the urban-rural divide and potential that rural areas are bearing a burden for more developed urban areas where restoration work is more expensive. Incentives can be extremely helpful as a core strategy. They must be fully funded to work effectively. Fish don't see UGAs – salmon need functioning habitat in urban and rural areas, and urban areas should be restored to provide as much function as possible.

The South Sound Military Community Partnership (SSMCP), Nisqually Tribe and others were briefed by USGS on their findings on hydrology and risks to the Nisqually Valley and I-5. Under the current rate of erosion and river flow, the oxbow at Wa He Lut School will eventually meet I-5 and may overtake it within 17-30 years. The Nisqually River will eventually take out I-5 – when, not if. USGS research also shows significantly increasing risk of inundating I-5 from climate change as sea level rise is compounded by increasing rain and storms (coastal squeeze). It is urgent that planners get in front of this eventual issue and not wait until freeway impacts are an emergency, which would entail an environmentally-damaging quick repair. The SSMCP is supporting a budget

request for at least \$7 million for study and design work, hoping to have construction included in the next 10-year transportation package. The total funding to preemptively address the flood risk funding is \$2-4 billion: more than 10 times the total salmon recovery investment in the Nisqually to date. This will be a major advocacy effort, but is essential to avoid a quick emergency fix that will set back the region for decades. The NRC may be asked to take a position supporting a budget request in Olympia.

Nisqually Tribal Council approved the Seattle YMCA's Mineral Lake project yesterday. They will move forward with acquisition of 2 of 4 parcels (646 acres) next year, with the remainder of the property likely to be acquired by the Tribe in 2022. This is an exciting and unique opportunity to create a mountain camp for Puget Sound youth, environmental education center, and opportunity to protect the landscape for future generations. The next phases of developing and building the camp will require fundraising from YMCA sponsors and local partners. A map will be available eventually and the NRC may be able to arrange a field trip.

Staff Report – Emily McCartan

Invitations to the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and DuPont to join the River Council are in process. Emily has been working on the Virtual Nisqually Watershed Festival, coming to the NRC's YouTube channel on September 26. She is also working on fall fundraising plans with GiveLocal.

Emily requested input from the NRC and CAC on providing a comment letter to the Thurston Planning Commission before the RAP hearing.

- Ensure adequate community oversight (possible reporting to the NRC), not just relying on Lakeside's reporting and limited county/ECY capacity to monitor.
- Desire for a SEPA study before Planning Commission makes any recommendation.
- Questions and concerns about what has changed since the original Sub-Area plan that indicate that RAP is any safer than it was when the original prohibition was enacted.
- Separate permitting issues from policy issues, which should be considered together. The RAP policy has been separated from consideration of the rest of the sub-area plan, which is a concern. Review of the sub-area plan should be expedited.
- The 1992 Sub-Area plan was made before anyone expected an asphalt plant to open in the valley. A pre-existing law allowed an asphalt plant as an accessory use to a gravel mine, which has since changed, but Lakeside's asphalt facility is grandfathered in. Holroyde's request to deepen their gravel mine below the water table has been pending for 10 years and is still active, and is a major water quality concern if RAP is also permitted.

Allied Programs:

Nisqually Land Trust – Joe Kane

The NLT's annual auction is virtual this year, with bidding opening on Sunday at nisquallylandtrust.org/party. The virtual Annual Conservation Party will be held on Zoom from 6:00-7:00pm, hosted by JW Foster. The NLT has finalized the acquisition of

the former Healey property, with one mile of natural shoreline, after many years and lots of work from partners. In total, in 2019, the NLT signed agreements for \$9.2 million in acquisition funding. Partners were also key in these accomplishments: streamflow restoration funding, SRFB/PSAR, PSP, RCO, and marine shoreline. Joe's retirement has been postponed until the end of October so Jeanette can finish wrapping up at Midsound.

Nisqually River Foundation – Justin Hall

Justin is editing and preparing to run the video stream for the virtual Nisqually Watershed Festival. He is also working on grants and fundraising. A filmmaker has reached out regarding a visit to the Refuge to highlight nature and conservation organizations later this year.

Nisqually River Education Project – Sheila Wilson

NREP is producing virtual teaching resources, including a new water quality unit for remote delivery to NTPS 5th grades, Canvas units, online water quality trainings, virtual field trips for Kennedy Creek salmon spawning, and CLAMSS professional development. Julia has made an interactive portal which she will be sharing later. Sheila is working with RCO to get approval for online changes to the No Child Left Inside Grant due to COVID, and with the Nisqually Tribal Health Center on plans for the next round of funding. NREP is partnering with the Land Trust for a major volunteer push for small group tree plantings – sign ups will be available in October.

Community Forest – Justin Hall

Harvest is continuing with approximately 60 loads gone to mill. Logger is fine and back to work after a crash when his truck's breaks failed - reminder that timber harvesting is dangerous work. Justin spoke to the major forest fires the West Coast is experiencing this year. Fire is part of the historic Northwest ecosystem. The Nisqually is on an approximately 250-year forest cycle. Some areas of the watershed burned in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The last major fire was a low-burning event along Alder Lake several ago. Climate change and warmer, drier conditions in forests around the Northwest are creating larger impacts in other places where burning had been infrequent. In addition, since the 1920s, forest management has been about suppressing fires. Previous ecosystems were fire-tolerant – species required fire to re-seed, and largest trees could usually withstand burning. Without fire, low trees and small oily shrubs proliferate and create conditions for larger fires, which now burn through older trees that could survive smaller burns. Fuels have built up over 100 years of fire suppression. It would take a massive effort on the scale of WPA/CCC programs to modify current forest conditions to allow small, low-burning forest to come through without it being disastrous again. Allowing loggers to take out larger trees to pay for harvesting smaller material is controversial. The fires that we see now tend to kill everything on the land, sometimes sterilizing the soil of microbes, which slows the process of regrowth. It is a huge task to contemplate fixing. Need something larger than the Northwest Forest Plan from the 1990s. A takeaway from all the discussion about the nature and reason of fires in recent years demonstrates that there is not one underlying cause – a combination of events including climate change and management actors are

contributing factors. If we had allowed fire all these years, we'd still have fires, but they would likely be lower intensity.

Salmon Recovery – Chris Ellings

Brian Combs of SPSSEG recently shared work funded by the Nisqually Tribe to assess restoration potential in Muck Creek. Muck is an important tributary for steelhead and winter chum in a very complicated groundwater-dependent prairie system. SPSSEG is working with consultants to better understand the basin to develop a restoration strategy. Formerly, the system had wetlands that allowed the water table to recharge as it flowed through highly permeable glacial till. There are both geological and human factors that make the stream intermittent, and restoration needs to determine what are natural features where the creek seasonally dries up, and what is a human impact that has decreased flows/habitat quality. It is a unique basin which has driven the local adaptation of Nisqually chum salmon, the latest returning salmon in the Pacific Rim and a vital winter resource to the Tribe. Strategy development will be different for different areas:

- Upper reach: primary groundwater recharge area, historically 1000s of acres of wetlands, now drained and ditched for agriculture and development, providing less recharge and making the flows shorter and flashier. Strategy is to restore wetland function, in the area seeing the fastest growth in the watershed.
- Conveyance reach: intersects with chain of glacial trench lakes where water is lost naturally. It will always have a dry period, but should have connectivity. Restoration strategies are a challenge.
- Active salmon spawning and steelhead from Roy to mouth: mix of good and degraded habitat. Restoration strategies will be more traditional riparian restoration and large woody debris, among others.

Also planning to work with JBLM on restoration strategies after Chambers Lake Dam removal. The Muck Creek basin has some of the most intact South Sound prairielands. It also was a historical Nisqually village site where Billy Frank Jr.'s father lived, until tribal members were evicted by Fort Lewis in 1917. Nisqually horsemen would race Yakamas on the Muck Creek plains.

Chris is on a committee updating the "regional plan" chapter of the overall Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan. Identifying changes in approach to human infrastructure is essential to effective recovery: the existing paradigm has failed to protect salmon habitat. Regulatory reform and changing existing infrastructure are both needed. The single largest step to take for regional salmon recovery would be removing the BNSF rail line which destroys miles of Puget Sound shoreline habitat. Growth Management Act and including salmon recovery in growth planning, including comprehensive plans and local zoning, is also essential if we are going to reach delisted, harvestable fish populations. Ecology is developing several different water quality metrics addressing salmon recovery which would be good to coordinate with this effort.

The Mashel landslide site has been treated with alder seed to help control erosion this winter. The Tribe continues to work with the landowner to identify ways to restore the

reach. Chinook returns look significantly lower than forecasted (6,000-8,000 expected versus 17,000 in forecast). There may not be enough fish at the hatchery to do adult supplementation in the river this year. Survival issues outside the river appear to be the major factor.

Chris's team has been working with WDFW on new genetic analysis called parentage assessment for salmon. Adult salmon are sampled, including natural fish, naturally straying hatchery fish, and supplemented hatchery fish (trucked). Next spring, some juveniles are captured by WDFW smolt trap and their genetics are sampled as well, showing which fish parents produced offspring. Early data show that trucked fish produce some, but not many, offspring. Management decisions should be shaped by this information as the science emerges: genetics suggest there may be a colonization effect from North Puget Sound fish, some of the last remaining resilient natural stocks, as well as numerous straying hatchery fish from Hood Canal. The science is still very preliminary, but will be an interesting and groundbreaking population assessment.

3. Virtual Water Quality Monitoring Program

Julia Fregonara, Nisqually River Education Project

Normally, NREP's water quality monitoring program takes children out to streams where they collect samples and conduct water quality tests themselves. With COVID preventing field trips, how can we take this information and put it into a virtual format that's still exciting and accessible? Teachers were asked what they found most valuable about our programs, and the common response was the hands-on access to real scientific equipment: chemicals, collecting real data local to students' community. Teachers who want to provide some of this experience will be able to give each student a take-home kit, including a small sample bottle of water from their site and equipment to do at least 2 tests at home: pH and nitrate testing strips. With guidance from teachers or NREP staff over Zoom, students will be able to test some of the parameters in the same hands-on way. Knowing that teachers and families are under a lot of pressures this year, this option may not work for everyone, so NREP has also created tools with a variety of options that teachers can implement at whatever level works for them.

Julia has built an online Water Quality Portal using StoryMap to supplement the hands-on testing with information that students would normally get from their field trips and full testing experience. The goal is to have it store data and give students something more interactive than watching a video. Features include:

- Map skills: What is a watershed? Map and video elements, locating Nisqually in the state, using the WQM site map built by NIT a few years ago with site locations and historical data.
- Site survey: 360 images of all the sites to give an idea of what it feels like to be there. Optional interactive journal to fill out using the 360 view to do a canopy survey, observe substrate in streambed, etc.
- WQ Parameters: videos will demonstrate the full tests, and each site will share data (to be collected this year by NREP staff), along with optimal values for salmon and an interactive game. Julia has created most of these.

- Simple experiments that we hope to be able to provide students with a kit of materials to do at home. It's important to address equity for students whose families may have fewer resources to actually do the activities.
- Culminating activity: Salmon Survivor Game. Choose-your-own-adventure style game trying to make choices for a salmon to keep it alive based on water quality factors.

This year is going to be complicated and challenging for teachers. We hope that this will be a tool they can use however it works best for them – maybe just a few pages, maybe as an asynchronous learning activity. The goal is to create options for some hands-on experiences and flexibility.

Discussion:

- In the future, this tool could be useful to expanding the program, to get around the transportation and logistics challenges we've had in the past. Adults could learn from it as well.
- The tool will be launched and shared with teachers at the end of September. Teachers are very overwhelmed so NREP is trying to stagger contacts to not add to their stress.
- Could this be shared with classes around Puget Sound? – NREP has shared with South Sound GREEN, which is creating its own portal with the same activities and maps of their watershed testing sites. The StoryMap can't be cloned to another watershed, but activities can be copied over individually and most are applicable to all kinds of streams.
- Suggest this be shared at the Salmon Recovery Conference.

4. Nisqually Watershed Stewardship Plan (NWSP) Update

Emily McCartan, NRC Coordinator

The NWSP was initially drafted between 2003 and 2009, as an update to the 1987 Nisqually River Management Plan. It was designed to be a holistic framework to guide the NRC's efforts towards a watershed that is sustainable for ecosystems, wildlife and humans. In 2011, the NWSP added 12 Sustainability Goals, categorized by environmental, social, and economic sustainability, with measurable indicators for adaptive management. The 2018 NWSP Report provided a status report on those goals and indicators. Using the data from the NWSP Report, the NRC identified its current core priorities as:

- Riparian habitat and salmon recovery (Goals I and II)
- Sustainable resource use (Goal III)
- Environmental Education and Participation (Goal IV)
- Recreation, Trails, and Tourism (Goals VII and XI)
- Transportation (Goal IX)

At this year's NRC retreat in July 2020, the NRC requested that staff produce an update to the 2011 NWSP, reflecting the current priorities for the Council. A draft of this update was circulated prior to the meeting. Non-substantive changes include updates to

acknowledgments, funders, and other minor edits to bring the text and graphics up to date for 2020. The 2011 Sustainability Goals have been fully incorporated into the NWSP, replacing duplicative sections held over from the 2009 plan (Pathways to Sustainability and Overall Goals sections removed). Summaries of goal status and priority rankings from the 2018 NWSP Report are also included.

Summary and discussion of substantive changes:

- Adaptive management timeline was updated to issue an NWSP Status Report every 5 years, instead of every 3, with a full NWSP update every 10 years.
- Proposed new goal addressing social and environmental justice in Social Sustainability section.
 - Members agreed to move forward with adding this goal. Language and indicators will developed later through an inclusive stakeholder process.
- Governance Section updated to clearly articulate core NRC structure and functions:
 - NRC is a voluntary coordination organization with no independent regulatory authority. It is required to hold public meetings at least annually. Information shared through the NRC is intended for informational and educational purposes for member agencies and the public.
 - The NRC is not primarily a political advocacy group, but can perform an important function by stating its position on how a policy issue would affect the Nisqually Watershed and achievement of NWSP goals. This role is similar to the guidelines that other coalitions operate under, including the Salmon Recovery Council and Washington Land Trust Association.
 - The NRC has historically and will continue to weigh in on public policy by providing comment letters and letters of support for initiatives aligned with the NWSP. Letters are approved by the consensus of participating members at an NRC meeting or via electronic comments.
 - The NRC does not endorse or take positions on electoral matters, including ballot measures and candidates for office.
 - The NRC may comment or lobby for the passage of legislation on budget or policy items with a direct impact on the Nisqually Watershed and NWSP goals.
 - NRC decisions will continue to operate by consensus of members present. There was not a desire for a formal quorum requirement, because the ability of the NRC to move forward on issues is an important strength, and the current process allows the desired transparency and flexibility.
 - Members noted that these principles are consistent with past NRC practice, and having them in writing is good for transparency.
 - Members requested the addition of language allowing an NRC member to recuse themselves from a decision or position.
 - When appropriate, NRC members may enter into additional agreements with defined scope, to include potential financial or other obligations that go above and beyond the normal advisory/informational role of the Council. This section is intended to address discussions around the watershed

planning unit and other similar coordination roles that the NRC may be able to provide as an efficient central coordinating body. Funding agreements and related voting mechanisms or work plans, if needed, would be created as needed.

- Committees: The NRC's executive committee and Citizens Advisory Committee (which has separate bylaws) are the standing committees. As decided at the July 2020 retreat, the NRC plans to absorb the WRIA 11 Watershed Planning Unit as a committee, with arrangements to be determined in discussion with Planning Unit stakeholders. The 2020 Retreat also called for the creation of a communications committee, which is pending.
- Membership: as decided at the July 2020 retreat, invitations to join the NRC are being extended to the Cities of Olympia, Lacey, and DuPont. All of the three conservation districts in the watershed may designate a voting representative if desired. The membership chart has been updated. The Nisqually Land Trust may be interested in discussing full membership in the NRC. The Nisqually River Foundation is the supporting and funding entity for the NRC and will not take on member status.
- Programs and Initiatives: This section still needs additional work to update it for the current activities and goals supported by the NRC. The original vision was that most goals would be accomplished through work done by member entities in coordination with the NRC. Through the NRF, the NRC has some internal staff capacity (for education and participation initiatives, watershed planning, and others), but that capacity is not unlimited. The NWSP should not limit its ideal initiatives based on member or staff capacity – realistic staff work plans should not constrain our vision for a sustainable watershed. Many initiatives are a collective responsibility to see enacted. The 5-year NWSP Status Report should focus on identifying next steps to accomplishing the goals.

Additional comments on the draft are welcome any time and can be sent to Emily via email. Emily will incorporate these changes into the draft document and recirculate for further review. The NRC hopes to adopt the updated NWSP by the end of 2020.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:29pm.

Next meeting: Friday, October 16, 2020
Online via Zoom