



NISQUALLY LAND TRUST

Telephone: (360) 489-3400

Fax: (360) 489-3333

www.nisquallylandtrust.org



Office Location:

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually
National Wildlife Refuge
100 Brown Farm Rd. NE
Olympia, WA

Mailing Address:

1420 Marvin Rd. NE
Ste. C PMB 243
Lacey, WA 98516-3878

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Daniel Thompson
Department of Ecology
Water Quality Program
PO Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600
daniel.thompson@ecy.wa.gov

RE: Proposed rule changes to WAC 173-98 under CR 102 17-09-078.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The Nisqually Land Trust wishes to submit the following comments regarding proposed amendments to WAC 173-98, *Uses and Limitations of the Water Pollution Control Revolving Fund*, under CR 102 17-09-078. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Specifically, we are concerned about the eligibility criteria for using Clean Water State Revolving Fund loans for land acquisition. The proposed changes to WAC 173-98-100 (20) include additions for siting of water pollution control facilities (b), for riparian-area protection (d), and for drinking-water source protection (e). We support these additions.

However, we strongly urge the addition of one further category: Watershed protection. Recent research published by Perry and Jones (2017) and validated modeling conducted in our Nisqually Watershed (McKane et al., 2016), in which the Nisqually Land Trust participated with the Environmental Protection Agency and other partners, demonstrate that management at the watershed scale is important to prevent water-quality issues.

Modeling in the Mashel sub-basin of the Nisqually has shown that when entire forested watersheds, not just riparian areas, are comprised of forests 80 years old or older, they increase summer low flows by a factor of at least five compared to watersheds with forests that are 40 years old.

These findings are particularly pertinent to our local communities, such as Yelm and Eatonville, which are severely challenged in their ability to provide adequate drinking water for their citizens.

And as research by the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the lead entity for salmon recovery in the Nisqually Watershed, has amply demonstrated, addressing stream flow at the watershed level is also absolutely critical to the survival of Nisqually Chinook

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salmon and steelhead trout, both of which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. For each species, the annual number of spawning adults is now so low that one bad year – for example, even one more year in which stream flows are as low as they were in 2015 – could well mean the loss of the species.

As the land-acquisition agent for salmon recovery in the Nisqually Watershed, we have learned that commercial timber harvest as practiced not only in our watershed but all along the west slope of the Cascade Mountains is steadily and rapidly reducing overall stand ages to levels that are significantly impacting both our human and our fish populations and must be reversed.

Standard industrial rotations produce watersheds with young forests across a vast landscape, and those younger trees use more water than older forests, thereby making less water available during critical times for salmon. Stream-flow deficits in late summer and early fall also contribute to other water-quality impairments, such as low dissolved oxygen and high temperatures, and they are a critical issue in drinking-water availability.

Ecosystem services in a healthy watershed provide a steady stream of benefits to local communities, supporting prosperous economies and a vibrant quality of life. The infrastructure provided by our forests includes benefits such as clean water and air, carbon storage, healthy fish, and timber. Other vitally important services include flood risk reduction, species habitat, and recreational values.

Maintaining and increasing these benefits requires better management of our forests, and allowing Clean Water State Revolving Fund loans for land acquisitions at the watershed scale is crucial for being able to secure that better management. Adding this category will make investing in “green infrastructures,” and the management practices that support them, more of a reality for local projects that bring together local governments, small forest landowners and other nongovernmental organizations like land trusts.

If these rule changes are successful, they could be one of the largest funding opportunities to elevate forests as infrastructure in our state. Please further amend WAC 173-98-100 (20) to include watershed-scale protection as an eligible category for land acquisition.

Sincerely,



Joe Kane
Executive Director

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