

June 23, 2026

*Submitted electronically*

Dear Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft recommendations for the Clean Energy Siting Coordination Council's (Council) 2026 annual legislative report. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is committed to policies that lead Washington to build the transmission and clean energy infrastructure at the pace and scale necessary to decarbonize the grid and broader economy, as directed in state law. Our Power of Place research shows that this can be done while preserving the most critical natural and working lands.

Last year, in our comments on the 2025 draft recommendations from the Council, we wrote:

“TNC believes that achieving these joint goals will require the guidance, planning, and policy that this Council is tasked with bringing to the legislature. Our state's communities, ecosystems, and economic stability depend on (both) prudent planning and incentives to protect prime natural resources *and* the rapid build out of a larger and non-emitting electricity grid to power our future. We urge you to consider it the collective and individual duties of each agency and as a council to accelerate the pace and scale at which projects are sited and built in Washington, to incentivize lower-conflict development opportunities, and to always be cognizant of ratepayer and taxpayer costs.”

TNC's perspective remains, here in mid-2026, very similar to our perspective from last year. If anything, the stakes have only continued to rise; we are facing a hot, dry summer that puts us at [increased risk](#) for electricity shortfalls; greater consumer stress over the [price of electricity](#); a federal administration which is increasingly unpredictable as it is hostile to renewable energy development; and all of this against a backdrop of “what will likely be [the most challenging budget](#) any of us has...faced” in years.

Overall, many of these recommendations appear thoughtful and it is clear this Council is building a more complex understanding of the barriers to clean energy deployment. Thank you for your work in pulling these draft recommendations together. We offer the following feedback in the hopes of strengthening the final report and increasing its impact and usability.

## GENERAL & CROSSCUTTING FEEDBACK

1. First, Governor Ferguson's [Executive Order 25-11](#) related to clean energy deployment resulted in the Joint Clean Energy Acceleration Team ([JCEAT](#)), which was tasked with assessing (and helping overcome) barriers to clean energy projects. In light of that important work, TNC hopes strongly that in its final recommendations the Council can include some items that reflect the JCEAT's learnings (this could be a policy suggestion, a budget suggestion, or something else entirely). If there are, in fact, already recommendations on this list that specifically arose from learnings from the Joint Task Force, it would be valuable to highlight those in order to better prioritize recommendations that address issues that have directly impacted known projects. More generally, some prioritization of the 13 recommendations in the draft report would really be valuable here in a challenging budget year.
2. Second, The Nature Conservancy continues to be concerned that the Council has adopted the following criterion for its recommendations: "Promotes coordination across multiple agencies (not agency-specific actions)". While we certainly appreciate the need for cross-agency action and coordination, we don't believe that the recommendations in the report should, nor were they intended by the legislature, to be exclusive of recommendations for single-agency action. We note that there is not a recommendation on single agency actions which may be a partial explanation for why it has been difficult in previous years to move some of the Council's legislative recommendations into a specific agency decision package or request-legislation.

As such, we are concerned that excluding single-agency actions/recommendations may run contrary to the language in HB 1216, which tasks the Council to develop recommendations for "ANY needed policy changes to help achieve the deployment of clean energy necessary to meet the state's statutory greenhouse gas emissions limits, chapter 70A.45 RCW, and the clean energy transformation act requirements, chapter 19.405 RCW, and to support achieving the state energy strategy adopted by the Department of Commerce". Agency-specific needs and actions are likely serving as bottlenecks to the deployment of clean energy at a pace and scale necessary to comply with state laws.

We would encourage the Council to re-evaluate the decision to exclude single-agency actions in the final report, if not for specific recommendations this year, then to set the stage for next year.

3. Finally, given the current budget outlook we would like to better understand why some of the recommendations in this list could not be moved forward with agencies' ongoing, baseline budgets. We've tried to reflect in our feedback on specific recommendations below where we would like clarification from agencies why the work in the recommendations could not take place with current, ongoing budgets and staff. In the present fiscal reality, we would strongly encourage the Council to better clarify why, specifically, some of these recommendations cannot move forward without dedicated funding.

## SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

| No. | Recommendation (brief)                                              | TNC feedback                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| 1   | Continue funding for agencies on clean energy siting and permitting | <i>Is the Council planning to name (and/or prioritize) specific programs and/or staff positions that it considers critical?</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2   | Develop Washington's clean energy information portal                | <i>TNC supports this concept; going one step further, while we hope it would be helpful for agencies and project developers, we believe such a tool may be even more valuable to the general public in order to help foster transparency and awareness of the clean energy transition in our state. We would encourage agencies to explore if this portal could be built without additional appropriations from the legislature. Additionally, our organization, and perhaps others, may have the means, under an MOA with Commerce, to develop such a prototype tool, such that the agency need only provide oversight and subsequent updates which might be far less time intensive and possible within existing resources.</i> |

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| 3 | Produce a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) and provide technical assistance for local and tribal planning for stand-alone battery energy storage systems | <i>TNC thinks that battery energy storage systems (BESS) progress is critical for resource adequacy while we await more transmission capacity. While we believe a PEIS would be valuable, we anticipate that it will be difficult to get funding for this biennium. If additional resources are not appropriated, we strongly encourage that, at a minimum, the Council create a list of best practices, providing informal guidance in this area. .</i>                                                                                                                                             |
| 4 | Develop public information to address safety and other concerns regarding clean energy technologies                                                                        | <i>We support this effort, but believe (at least for now) that this should be done with existing staffing resources to the extent possible. We would consider this a useful resource but a lower overall priority.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 5 | Create a toolkit for developers to guide them through the pre-application, development, engagement and permitting process                                                  | <p><i>Is this a barrier to development? Are developers asking for this toolkit? Could this be developed with existing resources?</i></p> <p><i>One concern is that the policies governing these various phases of the application process have and will continue to change, perhaps significantly, in the recent past and near future. If resources are put towards developing this, we believe agencies involved should plan for the resources needed to ensure that any toolkit that is produced could be easily updated and continuously checked for consistency with current/new policy.</i></p> |
| 6 | Identify opportunities and risks for siting emerging clean energy technologies through a collaborative process                                                             | <i>TNC supports this recommendation and urges the Council to recommend this scoping process for: a more expanded</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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|   |                                                                                                | <i>geographic scope for all forms of geothermal energy; small modular nuclear reactors; long-duration energy storage; and stand-alone battery energy storage systems.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 7 | Advance community benefit agreements by collaboratively developing guidance and best practices | <i>TNC supports this recommendation, but see Recommendation 11 for more detail.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 8 | Promote energy development in agricultural pivot corners                                       | <i>TNC strongly supports this recommendation and we consider it a top priority on this list. Additionally, Commerce should issue guidance on the use of Agricultural Lands of Long-term Commercial Significance for all counties and energy projects using existing resources. We urge Commerce not to wait for specific legislative direction to do this, as we believe Commerce has authority for this and should prioritize.</i>                                                                                                     |
| 9 | Reduce barriers to transmission planning, siting and permitting                                | <i>TNC was a strong supporter of establishing the Washington Electric Transmission Authority and we support these recommendations. Our feedback here would be to distinguish between work that the WETA (as supported by Commerce) is already statutorily committed to doing, and which recommendations listed here should or need to be supported by other agencies and/or are not supported by the legislation that established WETA. In other words, which of these (or other) tools and resources does the Council specifically</i> |

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|    |                                                                                        | <i>see itself as playing a critical role in executing?</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 10 | Encourage siting of clean energy facilities near emerging large energy use facilities. | <i>TNC agrees with this framing and supports the intent. However, we're unsure what current practices and policies serve as a barrier or obstacle to this at present. According to our understanding, developers of clean energy facilities have a natural incentive to locate, if possible, near customers (including ELEUFs) and/or transmission interconnection points. Based on our current understanding of this recommendation, we would not see this as a high priority.</i>                                                                                                                                                         |
| 11 | Assess opportunities to reduce litigation delays                                       | <i>Litigation delays and uncertainty in project timelines are a major challenge in encouraging clean energy developers to site and build the projects we need in order to meet our statutory energy requirements in WA. Yet changes to litigation processes must be done carefully to maintain protections from avoidable harmful impacts. We specifically support the Council and its member agencies in exploring how to link reduction in litigation delays to projects that have formal pre-application engagement with Tribes and community and that commit to and deliver net-benefits for Tribes, communities, and conservation.</i> |
| 12 | Support geothermal collaborative process recommendations                               | <i>TNC supports this recommendation.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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| 13 | Identify mechanisms to effectively protect vital habitat, including shrub steppe, while supporting clean energy development | <p><i>TNC is deeply aware of the need to balance the protection of sensitive, natural and working lands and the life they support, with the need to rapidly build clean energy resources to meet in-state climate laws and to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions, so we appreciate the inclusion of this recommendation in the Council’s report.</i></p> <p><i>When it comes to the Council’s specific suggestions for this, we have a few suggestions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>• The final report should specifically describe how it (and other bodies) can meet the recommendation to “Consider the value” of habitat; and/or identify specific points in existing siting processes where this consideration is not currently present and should be added.</i></li> <li><i>• Regarding mitigation opportunities, we would urge the Council to consider a state-level, flexible clean energy compensatory mitigation banking or fee program. This should include strong avoidance and minimization requirements, but should also <u>clearly</u> result in more clarity and certainty for project developers, as we recognize this as one of the biggest problems with current siting processes in Washington.</i></li> <li><i>• We urge consideration of a legislative proposal to explore and establish a compensatory bank for certain habitat types, in partnership with land trusts and</i></li> </ul> |
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|  |  | <p><i>conservation organizations, as well as Tribes.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Finally, with respect to funding for the WDFW guidelines, we hope any funding that goes towards the guidelines could be utilized in making some changes and updates to the current guidelines, and to ensuring that the guidelines meet the need of creating certainty for developers who are considering projects in WA.</i></li> </ul> |
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The Nature Conservancy thanks staff and council members for their time and efforts in drafting these recommendations and we are grateful for the opportunity to share these comments.

Sincerely,

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