



SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE

August 16, 2021

Eleanor Ott, PSNGP Permit Writer
Department of Ecology
Water Quality Program
PO Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Dear Ms. Ott,

The following are comments about the Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit and its implications for the Squaxin Island Tribe. Please also refer to our March 15th, 2021 letter during the informal comment period, also submitted with this letter. Our comments remain the same.

We would like to address municipalities who submitted comments on the Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit during the informal comment period. The majority of their comments have common themes. They say: We have already done enough to treat wastewater, and the necessary upgrades are too costly and will be a burden to our lower income ratepayers. They say: The Salish Sea Model still lacks the precision to indicate if low dissolved oxygen in Puget Sound is due to elevated nutrients. They say: If we come into compliance with this proposed general permit, we are not certain it will improve dissolved oxygen conditions in Puget Sound.

It is predictable to watch these entities cast doubt upon the science and claim the burden of excessive cost. They are a powerful influence on this process. That makes it easy for them to externalize the cost, the burden of the dominant and ever-growing source of human nutrients in Puget Sound on the ecosystem and the humans who derive food, health, wellbeing, culture, and income from it. These are not just the Tribes of Puget Sound, but every shoreline resident, boater, swimmer, shellfish harvester, tourist, fisherman, diver, and so on. If Ecology obliges these entities, the ecosystem and human health and wellbeing will notch down, year by year, as the nutrient burden increases, and an additional 1.6 million people move into Puget Sound by the year 2050.¹

And yet these municipalities are in Tribal Country. They are in the treaty-protected Usual and Accustomed areas of so many Tribes whose members turn to Puget Sound daily as the foundation of their culture and income. Elevated nutrients in the South Salish Sea have a disproportionate impact on

¹ <https://www.psrc.org/whats-happening/blog/region-planning-18-million-more-people-2050>

Tribes. Fishermen and women of the Squaxin Island Tribe set their nets in the very inlets of South Sound that are most impacted by additional nutrients and low dissolved oxygen (Figure 1).

Regarding the science, over the past twenty years, the Salish Sea Model has been reviewed, criticized, and improved over multiple iterations. Those successive iterations have produced results that repeatedly say the same thing with more certainty: Anthropogenic nutrients are the dominant source of nutrients in Puget Sound, especially in summer, and those nutrients cause a decrease in dissolved oxygen in the heads of inlets. This is a reality right now, and so the timeline of implementation of the Puget Sound General Permit should be rapid, with load reductions from the largest dischargers addressed in the first permit cycle. The proposed extended schedule for implementation is unacceptable.

Regarding the claim of excessive financial burden to the ratepayer, we would like to point to the City of Shelton and LOTT Clean Water Alliance. Both have been able to maintain a reasonable rate for their customers, while they have planned for and implemented nutrient removal. LOTT has done this at its Budd Inlet plant, and also with its Martin Way reclaimed water plant. The City of Shelton has done this by establishing a reclaimed water plant up-watershed and away from Puget Sound. Creative and reasonable solutions are available to meet the requirements of the Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit. These communities have already invested significant resources in meeting Clean Water Act requirements. Other community owners of wastewater treatment plants should not be allowed to defer the costs of upgrades by pleading poverty. In fact, parity should be the order of the day.

Implementation of water quality trading should not result in unaddressed impairments to tribal treaty resources. State fulfillment of these treaty obligations can help address the state's legal responsibilities, in addition to its important environmental justice obligations.

We will repeat what we said in March (attached letter): Act now and act aggressively. The current circumstances violate the law. A slow, bureaucratic pace will fail to protect the health and well-being of the resources and the people who depend on them. The lack of direct action to achieve compliance with the law will compel more immediate responses from those that are seeing their culture slip away.

Sincerely,

Jeff Dickison

Assistant Director of Natural Resources
Squaxin Island Tribe

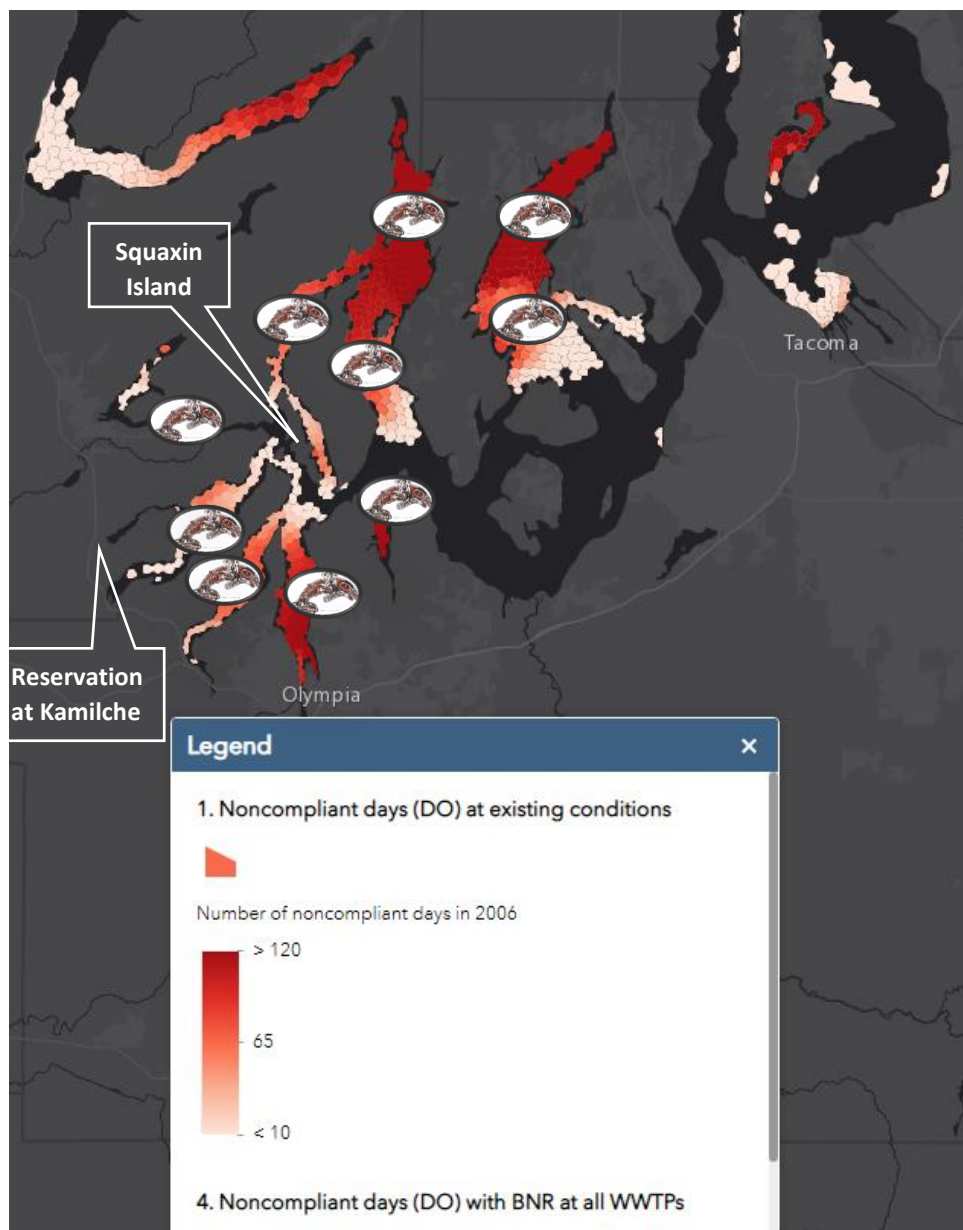


Figure 1. Output from Ecology's Salish Sea Model:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2a5d5e519a9d40df8a88f6910786c51f>



= Where impairments overlap with ancestral fishing and shellfishing areas of the Squaxin Island Tribe.

Signature:

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Squaxin to ECY PS Nutr Gen Permit





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Final Audit Report

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