



Nisqually Land Trust

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2016-2020





Nisqually Land Trust Strategic Direction 2016-2020

Adopted by the
Nisqually Land Trust Board of Directors
September 17, 2015

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CONTENTS

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

<i>Executive Summary</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Letter from the Director</i>	<i>Page 7</i>
<i>Vision Statement</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>Mission Statement</i>	<i>Page 10</i>
<i>Values</i>	<i>Page 10</i>
<i>Goals and Strategies</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
<i>Benchmarks</i>	<i>Page 12</i>





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CHALLENGE

The Nisqually River Watershed remains one of Washington's most pristine river habitats despite being located in a landscape that is extensively and increasingly urbanized. Since our founding 26 years ago, the Nisqually Land Trust has permanently protected over 5,000 acres of superior wildlife habitat and over 35 miles of salmon-producing shoreline. Since adopting our first five-year strategic plan, in 2009, we have grown exponentially. We have more than doubled the amount of land and shoreline under our permanent protection; the size of our stewardship program; the number of volunteers we engage; and our staff. But the Nisqually Watershed has been – and will continue to be – one of the most rapidly developing regions of Puget Sound, and the need for smart conservation has grown only more urgent.

OUR RESPONSE

In 2015, the Nisqually Land Trust Board of Directors launched a planning process to help increase both the quality and the pace of our land-conservation work and to create a road map for our organizational growth in 2016-2020. The result is this strategic plan. We thank the many individuals and organizations who helped us develop it.

Our vision is to continue to protect, restore and manage the natural and essentially wild aspects of the Nisqually River Watershed while collaborating with our local communities to support an ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable way of life, now and for generations to come. Our mission is to acquire and manage critical lands to permanently benefit the water, wildlife, and people of the Nisqually River Watershed.

To guide our work and to respond to the urgent challenges facing us, the Land Trust will structure its conservation services to meet five goals:

1. **Permanently protect critical lands in the Nisqually Watershed.** The Land Trust will accelerate its permanent protection of critical lands by developing and pursuing both traditional and innovative conservation strategies, expanding our scope to include the marine environment, and increasing our funding partnerships.



2. **Actively manage Land Trust properties and conservation easements.** The Land Trust will continue to make land stewardship a primary function of the organization and move aggressively to maintain and promote the ecosystem health of our lands.
3. **Grow the Land Trust's role as a community institution.** The Land Trust will expand its collaborative work with local communities and develop new and innovative ways to get people out on our lands and involved in permanent protection of critical lands.
4. **Ensure the financial sustainability of the Land Trust.** To support our mission now and over the long term, the Land Trust will expand its philanthropic relationships, increase revenues from grants and our own assets, and build our financial reserves.
5. **Ensure organizational effectiveness.** The Land Trust will manage its operations efficiently, effectively, and accountably.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Land Trust thanks the Jane Willits Trust, the Burning Foundation, the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, and the Land Trust Alliance for their support. Our strategic planning process would not have been possible without it.

Our thanks also to Colleen Gillespie, Marc Smiley and Anne Udall for their guidance and to the many community members and conservation partners who participated in our focus groups and interviews:

Joanna Aldridge	Jeff Gadman	John McCarthy
Gina Anstey	Michael Garrity	Ryan Mello
Sharon Babcock	Michael Grayum	Jessica Moore
Shelly Badger	Justin Hall	Allison Osterberg
Steve Barger	Kirk Hanson	Mike Ruth
Doug Beagle	Linda Hoffman	Chris Schutz
Dwight Bergquist-Moody	Daniel Hull	Sarah Scott
Rich Carlson	Eileen Kennedy	Sheila McCartan
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Chris Ellings	Julia McCain-Burmeister	Jacquelyn Whalen
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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

This past summer, for the first time in the 20 years I've been in the Nisqually Watershed, I saw forest fires burning out of control.

It was a sobering reminder that while in many ways we have it all – a wild, complex river system that starts in a national park, ends in a national wildlife refuge, and from end to end produces clean water, inspiring vistas, and diverse habitats for people, plants, and animals – there is also no doubt that our watershed is under assault.

Climate change, extreme weather, real-estate development, resource extraction, and any number of other factors are taking their toll. Seven of our native species are now listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Our glaciers are melting and our rivers and streams are drying up, heating up, and silting up. Many of our communities find their water supplies restricted and their economies recovering slowly, if at all, from the Great Recession. The health of Puget Sound continues to deteriorate.

How can we assure that our Nisqually Watershed's precious natural treasures will be passed along to the next generation, and the generations after that?

Back in 2009, to help answer this question, we launched our first formal five-year strategic plan. By 2014, as we celebrated our 25th anniversary, we had more than doubled the amount of lands under our permanent protection, the size of our stewardship program, our staff, our volunteers, and our financial resources.

And we realized that we had a lot more work to do.

So we went out and started again. We convened focus groups, interviewed key stakeholders, and held facilitated retreats and study sessions for our board and staff.

Here is some of what we heard:

Continue your core mission of private, voluntary conservation: *"You're great at what you do. But do even more of it."* *"Stay the course—stay focused!"*

Be a bridge-builder and convener – grow your partnerships, increase your work with local communities, develop your role in bringing different interests to the table: *"Be a resource that pulls people together."*

Increase public access to the land, but don't compromise its conservation values: *"It's the best way to get friends."* *"Go through the pros and cons with the community."* *"Keep growing your volunteer program."*



Communicate, communicate, communicate – *“You do wonderful work, but people don’t hear enough about it, especially in Pierce County.” “Tell your story!”*

Take care of yourself – your work is long-haul, marathon work: *“Keep an eye on the burnout factor!”*
“Build your fundraising base and support your staff.”

This document is a result of that long, intense, and highly rewarding process. It shows where we intend to go over the next five years, and it defines our mission, goals and values and the benchmarks by which we will measure our success.

There’s a lot to do. But we’re looking forward to it, and we hope you are, too.

Joe Kane
Executive Director



VISION STATEMENT

The Nisqually River watershed remains one of Washington's most pristine river habitats despite being located in a landscape that is extensively and increasingly urbanized. Our vision is to protect, restore, and manage the natural and essentially wild aspects of this river basin while cooperating with watershed communities to support an ecologically sustainable way of life.

We envision:

- Clean and abundant drinking water;
- Self-sustaining wildlife populations;
- Abundant stocks of wild salmonids;
- Diverse native ecosystems;
- Sustainable working forests and agricultural lands;
- Inspiring scenic vistas; and
- A human population that is healthy, whole, and committed to good stewardship of the land and water that supports us all.

To meet this challenge, we envision for the Land Trust:

- Broad membership and community support;
- A wide range of proactive and mutually beneficial partnerships;
- A diverse board of directors committed to conservation leadership;
- A professional staff with the capacity to fulfill the board's vision; and
- A stable, sustainable organization that can make the long-term security of the Nisqually's clean water, scenic beauty, and native plant and animal populations a legacy to future generations



MISSION STATEMENT

The Nisqually Land Trust acquires and manages critical lands to permanently benefit the water, wildlife, and people of the Nisqually River Watershed.

VALUES

CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP: We are a conservation leader and have a responsibility to pursue bold and innovative conservation strategies.

ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRITY: We practice sound management. We are honest, effective, efficient, and fiscally responsible.

PARTNERSHIP: We collaborate with individuals, organizations and communities to identify opportunities and challenges, devise workable solutions and achieve mutual goals.

RESPECT: We base all of our relationships—within our organization, with our conservation partners, with individuals, businesses, communities and the land itself—on respect, trust, and tolerance.

STEWARDSHIP: We steward our lands to protect their conservation values and viability now and forever.

SUSTAINABILITY: We practice conservation that supports productive local economies, vibrant local cultures, and a healthy natural environment.



GOALS AND STRATEGIES

PROGRAM GOAL

1. Permanently protect critical lands in the Nisqually Watershed.
 - a. Identify and prioritize the most strategic lands for protection.
 - b. Proactively implement permanent protection for high-priority lands.
 - c. Respond to exceptional opportunities to protect lands outside high-priority areas.
 - d. Cultivate and expand partnerships that support permanent land protection.
 - e. Explore and develop innovative conservation strategies.
2. Actively manage Land Trust properties and conservation easements.
 - a. Maintain the conservation values of all property interests acquired by the Land Trust.
 - b. Develop appropriate public access to Land Trust properties.
 - c. To the fullest extent possible, restore the ecosystem health of Land Trust properties.
 - d. Cultivate and expand individual and organizational partnerships that support sustainable management of Land Trust properties.
3. Grow the Land Trust's role as a community institution.
 - a. Proactively engage with communities within or connected to the Nisqually Watershed to understand their needs and achieve mutual goals.
 - b. Educate regional residents about the Nisqually Watershed and the roles they can play in supporting the Land Trust.
 - c. Provide opportunities for the public to experience Land Trust properties.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

1. Ensure the financial sustainability of the Land Trust.
 - a. Cultivate relationships with individuals that lead to long-term support of the Land Trust.
 - b. Maintain and expand programmatic and operational grant revenues.
 - c. Develop revenue streams from Land Trust assets.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL

1. Ensure organizational effectiveness.
 - a. Recruit and support a diverse group of volunteer leaders.
 - b. Build, support, and retain a professional staff capable of fully executing the policies and practices adopted by the board of directors.
 - c. Manage Land Trust operations efficiently, effectively, and accountably.



BENCHMARKS TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

1. LAND PROTECTIONa. **Prioritization** – long- term outcome:

The Land Trust has identified and prioritized conservation properties in the watershed and its nearshore (marine) environment and planned for their permanent protection.

Benchmarks

1. The Land Trust's Conservation Criteria and priorities incorporate the Nisqually nearshore environment and expanded public-access considerations.
2. The Conservation Criteria and priorities are reviewed and updated annually.
3. The conservation values of each protection project are evaluated using the Conservation Criteria.
4. The Land Trust has a comprehensive strategic conservation plan that prioritizes properties for proactive protection, defines areas outside the high-priority zone for opportunistic protection, and sets a timetable for implementation.

b. **Protection of high-priority lands** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has permanently protected high-priority conservation properties in the watershed and its nearshore environment.

Benchmarks

1. Annual work plans guide high-priority protection projects in the Lower Nisqually Watershed, Upper Nisqually Watershed, and Nisqually Nearshore.
2. The Land Trust protection of the Nisqually River mainstem has increased by 15%; total shoreline protection of the Mashel River has increased by 50% and of Ohop Creek by 25%.
3. 500 additional acres of forest habitat are protected in the Upper Nisqually
4. The Land Trust has initiated protection of the Nisqually marine environment.

c. **Responsive land protection** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has responded appropriately to conservation opportunities outside of high-priority areas.

Benchmarks

1. The Conservation Criteria are used to evaluate the “exceptional” nature of projects.



2. Adequate funding and organizational capacity are in place to pursue three exceptional projects.
3. Landowners outside of high-priority areas have clear alternatives to Land Trust-led conservation.

d. **Partnerships** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has cultivated partnerships of a quantity and quality sufficient to meet its land-protection goals.

Benchmarks

1. Initial project steps have been defined and pursued to support open-space protection by two local governments.
2. Partner organizations are engaged and consulted at least once per year regarding priority projects.
3. The Land Trust has engaged five new potential acquisition-funding partners.
4. The Trust has supported at least five conservation projects by other organizations.

e. **Innovative protection strategies** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has developed and deployed new conservation strategies to increase its conservation effectiveness and influence.

Benchmarks

1. At least one new ecosystem-services project developed to protect conservation lands.
2. Initiate landscape-scale land acquisition and management by the Nisqually Community Forest.
3. Explore two new approaches to permanent protection for high-priority lands.
4. Develop at least one new financing mechanism for permanent land conservation.

2. STEWARDSHIP

a. **Maintain conservation values** – long term outcome:

The Land Trust has maintained the conservation values of its properties.

Benchmarks

1. Stewardship needs and premises liability evaluated and funding secured for initial stewardship and risk-management tasks for all new protection projects prior to acquisition.
2. Risk assessment completed for all Land Trust properties and all prioritized risk-management tasks addressed.



3. Initial stewardship tasks completed for new properties within two years of acquisition.
4. All stewardship activities identified in Land Trust policies have been completed in a timely manner.

b. **Public access development** – long-term outcome:

The public engages with the Land Trust through its lands.

Benchmarks

1. The Land Trust has developed criteria and policies for public-access projects.
2. Public access opportunities and costs evaluated for all new protection projects prior to acquisition.
3. Public access opportunities and costs assessed for all existing Land Trust properties.
4. At least three designated locations provide opportunities for people to experience the work of the Land Trust.

c. **Restoration** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has implemented plans to restore native ecosystems on all of its properties where restoration is appropriate.

Benchmarks

1. Restoration opportunities for each newly acquired property identified in its management plan.
2. Four grants pursued annually for restoration projects through past and current funding partners.
3. Applications submitted to two new potential funding partners each year.
4. Restoration projects led by partner organizations participated in where funding and organizational capacity allow.

d. **Stewardship Partnerships** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has cultivated new partnerships for land stewardship and expanded existing partnerships.

Benchmarks

1. At least two new organizational partners (community groups, schools, businesses, etc.) recruited each year to participate in stewardship and/or restoration activities on Land Trust properties.



2. Comprehensive volunteer-management procedures established and implemented for volunteer stewardship program.
3. At least four South Puget Sound community events participated in each year to recruit volunteers.
4. Maintain current volunteer stewardship activities and engage at least 300 volunteers annually.

3. ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

a. **Regional Engagement** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust understands the needs of local communities and collaborates with them to achieve mutual goals.

Benchmarks

1. Participate in at least ten meetings and events held by South Sound community groups with mutual interests
2. In odd-numbered years, convene at least one listening session with partner organizations
3. Meet one-on-one with community leaders from throughout South Puget Sound at least six times each year
4. At least once per year meet with elected officials from Lacey, Yelm, and Eatonville; the Nisqually Indian Tribe; the Ashford community; Thurston, Pierce and Lewis counties; and Nisqually Watershed state and federal districts.

b. **Regional Outreach** – long-term outcome:

The majority of conservation-minded residents in the region surrounding the Nisqually Watershed know who the Land Trust is and understand and support its work.

Benchmarks

1. Develop and implement an organizational-communications plan.
2. Publish at least two print and four electronic newsletters each year.
3. Participate in at least four South Puget Sound community events each year to tell the Land Trust story.
4. Give at least four presentations each year to regional community groups that are not active Land Trust partners.
5. Engage at least 400 volunteers annually.

c. **Opportunities to experience Land Trust properties** – long-term outcome:



The public learns about the Land Trust through its lands and develops a personal connection to them.

Benchmarks

1. Host at least ten Nature Walks or similar events annually on Land Trust properties.
2. Establish an annual in-the-field open-house event.
3. Host three in-the-field events with new partner organizations interested in passive recreational activities.
4. Develop and maintain a “Stories from the Field” blog and an online library of Land Trust photos and videos.

5. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

a. **Cultivate Relationships** – long-term outcome:

Funding for the Land Trust meets the operations and program requirements of the strategic plan and maintains adequate reserves.

Benchmarks

1. The Land Trust Fundraising Plan is reviewed and updated annually.
2. All board and staff members attend at least one philanthropy training annually.
3. A Planned Giving program is established and at least 10 donors are cultivated annually.
4. The number of individuals and organizations from Pierce County who make in-kind and monetary contributions increases by 10 percent annually.
5. The number of individuals and organizations who make an annual monetary contribution of \$250-\$1,000 increases by 10 percent annually.
6. The number of major donors – individuals who make an annual monetary contribution of \$1,000 or more – increases by 5 percent annually.
7. At least two endowment funds are established.

b. **Secure grant funding** – long-term outcome:

Grants provide a significant level of support for annual operating expenses.

Benchmarks

1. Each staff member participates in writing at least one grant proposal each year.
2. At least two proposals are submitted each year to funders who provide operations support.
3. Programmatic grants underwrite at least 40 percent of staff salaries each year.

c. **Revenue from Land Trust assets** – long-term outcome:



Land Trust assets provide reliable annual revenue.

Benchmarks

1. Explore at least two new revenue-generating fee-for-service opportunities.
2. Sustainably harvest timber from forest stands where appropriate.
3. Explore at least two new ideas for generating revenue from Land Trust assets.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

a. **Voluntary Leadership and Participation** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has built and supported a diverse and committed board and strong volunteer participation at the program level.

Benchmarks

1. Establish a trustee program with at least 10 members
2. Increase board of directors membership to 15 and provide all new board members with orientation.
3. The board writes a work plan and board members write personal work plans annually.
4. Each board member participates in at least one board training each year.
5. Standing committees meet at regular intervals and accomplish annual work plans.

b. **Staff capacity and support** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust has built a professional culture of transparent communication, support, and success and a professional staff that can meet the goals and vision of the board and fulfill its strategic plan.

Benchmarks

1. Each staff member attends at least one position-appropriate training or conference each year.
2. Each staff member participates in an annual evaluation and job-description review.
3. Staff participates in a communication- and team-building activity at least once each year.
4. Staffing is maintained at appropriate levels and expertise necessary to achieve the goals of the five-year strategic plan.

c. **Operations** – long-term outcome:

The Land Trust's programs, systems, and plans build and maintain its efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability.



Benchmarks

1. The Land Trust assesses facilities, equipment, and technology annually and remains current.
2. Annual work plans are written each year as part of the budget process.
3. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure compliance.
4. The Land Trust is always current and in good standing with the Land Trust Alliance.