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Dear Friends of the Nisqually Land Trust:

This is a tough note to write.

Sometime later this year I'll be stepping down as executive director of the Nisqually Land Trust. I made this decision – a very difficult one – a few months ago, and I gave our board a flexible departure date, to provide adequate time to find the right new leader for the organization.

Then came COVID-19, and everything changed, everywhere.

So we're starting the search for my replacement next week, but I'll be here for however long it takes to make a smooth transition. And underneath it all we have a solid organization with a strong board and staff, loyal and generous supporters and volunteers, and a rich web of partners. That won't change.

That said, it has been a great ride and a tough decision.

Many of you have no doubt heard the maxim that so famously (or infamously)

drove the growth of Facebook: “Move fast and break things.” Well, here in the Nisqually Watershed, we go slow and fix things. When you restore a river, you don’t design for quarterly financial returns. You design for centuries of salmon returns.

And sometimes going slow and fixing things means changing direction.

I’m stepping down because I’m slowing down. It’s time to pass the baton or pass out; I’m at that stage of life when I need more Saturdays and fewer Mondays. And I don’t think of it as leaving. I think of it as re-defining the relationship. I’ll always be part of things Nisqually. As we like to say, in so many ways our precious Nisqually River Watershed really is the center of the universe.

My own Nisqually journey started way back in 1996, when I moved to Olympia from San Francisco. I didn’t know a soul other than my wife and our two very young daughters. But I had one name and one phone number – for my wife’s sister’s best friend’s husband’s brother’s wife’s sister’s husband.

That was George Walter, the founder of the Nisqually Land Trust.

So I called George.

“We’re having a party at my friend Billy’s house this weekend,” he said. “Why don’t you and your family come on over?”

So we did. Billy, of course, was Billy Frank Jr., and I met George and Billy, and Billy’s wife, Sue Crystal, and their young son Willie, and David Troutt, then as now the director of the Nisqually Tribe’s Department of Natural Resources, and a whole bunch of other Nisqually folks.

I walked out of that party late that night thinking, *these are some really smart people, and they're doing really interesting things.*

Now, I'd been around. I'd worked in New York and San Francisco. I'd traveled the world writing for magazines like *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, and *Outside*. I'd spent years in and out of the Amazon, the world's biggest watershed, and published two books about it.

So I'd often been a fly on the wall in some rooms where some pretty big thinkers were tossing around some pretty big ideas. But it was only years later that a friend articulated for me what I sensed that night at Sue and Billy's home: Here were people putting a lot of those big ideas into *action*.

And I'd been around enough to quickly grasp, too, what a jewel the Nisqually Watershed was.

I got active in the Land Trust, and a few years later I joined the board – a first for me. A few years after that we won grant funding to hire an executive director. I was on the hiring committee, and when our new hire didn't work out, I offered to step in and answer phones and generally keep the lights on until we could find someone else.

That was fifteen years ago, and I've been here ever since.

I was, of course, spectacularly unqualified for the position. I'd never run any sort of organization, and two years on the staff of *Rolling Stone* magazine was the closest I'd come to what anyone might consider a real job. But no one in the great webwork of the Nisqually Watershed partnership – the Nisquamily – seemed to care about that. Tell the truth, keep your word, be generous: We're all in this together, and we're glad to have you here. That was the Nisqually way.

My oddball skills and quirky attitudes had found a home.

And, as I said, it's been a great ride. Twenty years all told – five as a board member, fifteen as executive director. I have enjoyed myself immensely. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful to have held this job and, especially, to have worked and become friends with so many outstanding people. I've had more fun, and sheer satisfaction, than I ever anticipated.

The Nisqually way is all about cooperation and collaboration, and, together, we've accomplished some amazing things. We've protected a lot of land. We've restored a lot of land. With bold initiatives like our community forest and our carbon project we've helped expand the conservation toolkit statewide. And we have species alive in the watershed today that might not be here without us. I can't thank you all enough. It's been an honor and a privilege to walk this path with you, and I hope that as soon as time and circumstance allow, one way or another, I can tell each of you that in person.

Meanwhile, there is still a lot of good work to do, and it's more urgent now than ever. I plan to keep my shoulder to the wheel. I'll see you on the river.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Kane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Kane".

Joe Kane

Executive Director