



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 27, 2007

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Nisqually Watershed Awarded EPA Grant for Collaborative Market-Based Conservation

Seattle (August 27, 2007) - The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today that the Nisqually Watershed Sustainability Project is one of only 16 projects nationwide selected as a finalist to receive the agency's Targeted Watershed Grants. Under this highly competitive program, the Nisqually River Foundation will receive \$883,000 for several collaborating partners to promote market-based conservation and sustainable land use in forestry, agriculture, and residential development that will preserve the habitat and water quality of this relatively pristine Puget Sound watershed.

"The Nisqually watershed is now a poster child for cooperative community-based conservation" said David Burger, Executive Director of Seattle-based Stewardship Partners, one of the main project partners in this effort. "The use of market-based incentives is an innovative approach that will allow us to preserve this ecologically vital area while we still have the chance."

The Nisqually River watershed encompasses approximately 720 square miles (460,000 acres), ranging in elevation from sea level to 14,480 feet. From its origins on Mount Rainier, the Nisqually River flows 78 miles through an amazing variety of habitats - from subalpine meadows and old-growth Douglas fir forest through forested foothills, and across lowland prairies to its estuarine reaches and tidal mudflats where it enters the Puget Sound near Olympia. With its headwaters in Mt. Rainier National Park and its delta in the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, the Nisqually River is a direct link between the summit of Washington's highest peak and the marine waters of Puget Sound. Between these protected areas exists a vibrant landscape that includes small towns, forestland, farms, hydropower dams, the Fort Lewis military base, and the Nisqually Indian Reservation. The Nisqually Sustainability Project seeks to preserve the ecological integrity of the watershed while simultaneously promoting rural economic vitality.

The EPA grant builds on the work of the Nisqually River Council and community partners to develop the Nisqually Stewardship Plan, a collaborative approach to preserving this unique and nearly intact watershed. The three year effort, lead by Stewardship Partners, strengthened the capacity of local

organizations, introduced a suite of incentives for landowner-based conservation, and brought together diverse interests, including the tribe and the farming community, to develop a common vision guided by their mutual sense of place.

The Nisqually Sustainability Project will move this effort forward by implementing sustainable land use strategies and developing markets for local, environmentally produced products. Third party certification and labeling programs such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Salmon-Safe agriculture as well as a local watershed branding strategy are key components of this effort. The project will also look at ecosystem service markets such as water quality credits, whereby forest owners or farmers could be paid for their implementation of best management practices by an industrial polluter. Low Impact Development (LID) guidelines will encourage residential developers to manage stormwater on site instead of allowing it to flow off of impervious surfaces into local waterways.

Four main project partners are collaborating in this comprehensive approach to watershed sustainability: The Nisqually River Council is a network of 20 local, state, and federal agencies, the Nisqually Tribe, organizations, and citizens. The Nisqually Land Trust preserves ecologically sensitive lands through acquisition and conservation easements. The Northwest Natural Resource Group is implementing a program to certify forest landowners in the watershed under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) label and market their certified forest products to local consumers. Stewardship Partners is implementing a program to certify and market agricultural producers under the regional Salmon-Safe program and is also introducing Low Impact Development techniques to developers in the watershed.

This project will help implement the goals of the Puget Sound Partnership, a new state agency charged with clean-up of Puget Sound. The Nisqually provides 56% of the fresh water in South Puget Sound and its intact estuarine delta system is one of the most important nursery grounds for juvenile salmon.

“The Nisqually Sustainable Watershed project is a model for integrating sustainability and collaboration, as well as leveraging resources to achieve results in forestry, agriculture and Low Impact Development in urban areas that are threatened by overdevelopment” said Benjamin Grumbles, an Assistant Administrator with the EPA at a recent event supporting the Puget Sound Partnership. “The significance of the project is to demonstrate effective tools to promote water quality while serving as an example to other watersheds in the Northwest and elsewhere.”

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