

Narratives

Executive Summary

This planning grant will be used to develop an AmeriCorps program which will engage AmeriCorps members to improve at-risk ecosystems in the Nisqually Watershed. Members will address the needs of Nisqually Tribal members for a functioning ecosystem resulting in improved water quality, salmon survival, and wild salmon population restoration. Program activities will primarily be in the area of Environmental Stewardship.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

Problem Description

The immediate problem that the proposed project will address is the need for the coordination and planning effort required to develop a successful, sustainable conservation corps program. The Nisqually Tribe has a strong track record of successful implementation of habitat restoration projects in the Nisqually watershed, both through the direct effort of our experienced conservation staff and through coordinating the efforts of our partners in the region. These projects are ongoing and would benefit significantly from the sustained and dedicated effort possible through additional conservation crew staffing. But managing a crew of young adults requires a significant element of planning, training, and logistical support that is not currently available.

The ultimate problem we want to address is the decline of salmon in the Nisqually River. Salmon are the traditional staple food source of the tribe and are critical to the physical and cultural survival of the Nisqually people. The Nisqually River supports five species of Pacific salmon--chinook, coho, pink, chum, and steelhead--as well as sea-run cutthroat trout. These species require very specific habitat conditions: clean, cool water, a stable environment, plentiful food supplies, and clean gravel. These habitat conditions have been historically degraded by intensive logging and mining in the watershed; and they continue to become degraded as a result of continuing development and human activities that undermine water quality.

The Nisqually Indian Tribe is taking the lead in developing and implementing recovery plans for chinook, which was listed as endangered by the National Marine Fisheries Service in 1999. The 2001 Nisqually Chinook Recovery Plan provides the strategic direction for recovery efforts and is updated every three years. Habitat restoration is a crucial component of the recovery plan, and the Tribe coordinates a comprehensive habitat restoration strategy in the watershed. The proposed AmeriCorps

Narratives

members will work directly on conservation projects in the Nisqually watershed that support habitat restoration and Chinook recovery.

In addition, the proposed planning program will address the Tribe's need for effective workforce development for tribal and community members. None of the Tribe's biologists are tribal members. We do not have enough tribal members who are aware of the career opportunities in natural resources and who have the ability to pursue the required education and training to succeed as resource managers in today's highly technical natural resource management regime.

Evidence problem exists

According to the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan, "habitat degradation is one of the primary reasons for the decline of Chinook in the Nisqually basin" and "Nisqually Fall Chinook are beginning to benefit from the results of a twenty year effort to protect and restore critical habitat". The mean of natural spawning abundance across 5-year periods for Nisqually Chinook has shown a marked increase over time: 602 (1986-1990), 753 (1994-1998), 1295 (2000-2004), 2070 (2005-2009). An effective long-term recovery strategy includes emphasizing restoration of ecosystem processes -- restoring hydrology, installing engineered log jams to spur additional large wood accumulation and habitat complexity, and replanting riparian areas. Riparian vegetation contributes to many functional attributes of stream and river habitat by stabilizing stream banks, increasing habitat complexity, contributing to the food web and improving water quality. Specific restoration goals and priorities are guided by the Nisqually Chinook Recovery Plan and Ecosystem Diagnostic and Treatment Model results.

In 2012, 35 acres of riparian planting was installed and over 100 acres of existing plantings were maintained. Additional crew would allow for increased maintenance on another 100 acres of existing plantings as well as more intensive monitoring and watershed-wide weed control.

How AmeriCorps members will be used to meet the need

AmeriCorps members will work on a variety of habitat restoration projects throughout the Nisqually watershed. Potential projects would be consistent with evidence-based priorities identified in the Chinook Recovery Plan. Some sample projects might include:

* Removal of invasive aquatic species at priority spawning habitat reaches of the Nisqually, Ohop, and Mashel

Narratives

- * Maintenance of existing habitat replanting projects, including removal of vegetation tubes, weed control, and irrigation installation and management.
- * Establishment of new native planting projects in areas where invasive species have been removed.
- * Repair or removal of legacy logging roads that are contributing sediment and degrading water quality.
- * Identifying, cataloging, and monitoring sources of water quality impairment in critical stretches of habitat.
- * Fencing livestock out of creek and river areas in cooperation with private landowners.
- * Supporting ongoing efforts to educate the tribal community and members of the public who live in the watershed about the importance of ecosystem resiliency and daily living practices that support ecosystem health.
- * Support ongoing efforts to improve water quality in the Nisqually River, including, potentially, household hazardous waste collection efforts.

AmeriCorps members would coordinate with the Tribe's own Natural Resources Restoration Crew, a five person crew who installs, maintains and monitors riparian plantings as well as provides fish monitoring support and support to the hatcheries. They would likely work directly with this crew in certain instances.

They would also work closely with the Tribe's partners in the watershed, including:

Nisqually Land Trust

The Nisqually Land Trust protects over 3,850 acres of salmon habitat within the Nisqually Watershed and frequently partners with the Tribe on conservation and restoration projects. There are many opportunities for an AmeriCorps crew to work closely with the Land Trust on habitat restoration projects within the watershed.

Nisqually River Foundation

The Nisqually River Foundation has a very active educational initiative and partners with schools in the watershed to engage students in environmental education and service projects along the river. Annually, the program provides over 1000 students with field experiences in the Nisqually Watershed.

Narratives

Nisqually State Park

The Tribe is partnering with the State in the development and management of a new 1200 acre state park in the heart of the Nisqually watershed. The park includes high quality salmon habitat which is threatened by invasive species. The State has adopted a Stewardship Plan for the park which identifies priority restoration projects that could be suitable for an AmeriCorps crew.

Target communities the program would serve

The target community to be served is the Native American community served by the Nisqually Indian Reservation in the South Puget Sound area of Washington State. The Reservation is 5,000 acres in size and includes areas of protected riparian habitat, upland forest, community residential, and commercial services. The Reservation provides health, social, and educational services to over 7,000 Native Americans who live in the adjacent Thurston and Pierce counties. The project site locations would be within the Nisqually watershed, an area of about 460,000 acres, primarily in Pierce County, that encompasses a diversity of elevations and habitat types. The Nisqually watershed is unique in that both the headwaters and estuary are federally protected (Mt. Rainier National Park and Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, respectively.)

There are 758 enrolled Nisqually tribal members with treaty fishing rights on the Nisqually River who will directly benefit from improved salmon survival resulting from the proposed project. The Native Americans living in the Reservation service area could potentially benefit from the workforce development opportunities created through the project.

2. Detailed description of planning process

Quarter 1

The project will start with the recruitment of an experienced AmeriCorps crew leader as the project coordinator. The position is expected to start in mid-September in time to participate in the national grantee meeting. Either a peer program coordinator in natural resources or a financial coordinator for the Tribe will also go to the national meeting. After the grantee meeting, the coordinator will provide orientation to tribal administrative, program, and financial staff who will be involved in required administration activities for both the planning grant and the program grant period. Initially, the coordinator will focus on orientation to the Tribe's Natural Resources department and to the Tribe's

Narratives

partners in the region. The coordinator will spend as much time as possible directly in the field observing current habitat restoration project work and identifying typical crew equipment, supply, and logistical support needs. The coordinator will begin to develop a preliminary list of project sites for the program.

Quarter 2

In the second quarter the project coordinator will begin to work with direct service providers and directly with the tribal community to identify potential AmeriCorps member interest. The coordinator will complete focus group style meetings and individual meetings to determine the skill level of the potential AmeriCorps members in critical program elements; and to identify any gaps that may need to be addressed through member development activities during the program phase. Midway through this quarter, the coordinator will determine the proposed size of the crew and scale and scope of the program. The coordinator will begin to identify potential training and development providers in the region. The coordinator will visit with AmeriCorps program sites that focus on environmental stewardship in the region this quarter, and will also visit tribal AmeriCorps programs if possible. The Hoopa TribalCorps program, in particular, may be close enough for a visit. During this time the coordinator will continue to develop the project sites and field program for the members and will also begin to identify evaluation measures for each activity. By the end of this quarter the coordinator will have a preliminary cost estimate for an AmeriCorps program.

Quarter 3

In the third quarter the coordinator will present the proposed training and project plan to the tribal community for review, comment, and consideration. There are a number of effective pathways for community input including presentations to tribal committees and commissions and community dinners. The coordinator will work closely with core tribal staff in natural resources, finance, planning and administration to complete the application for the AmeriCorps program as well as to secure any other sources of funding as may be required to implement the program.

Quarter 4

During this quarter the coordinator will develop the detailed procedural and personnel manuals required for the AmeriCorps program, including financial procedures and program activity tracking. By this time the coordinator will be able to identify specific field sites for the member with a greater

Narratives

degree of certainty and can finalize partner agreements for field sites as well as for member training. The coordinator will develop a community-specific recruitment plan as well as detailed orientation and training modules for new members. By the end of the quarter, the coordinator will also have detailed procedures for recording project outcomes and evaluating project benchmarks.

Developing our capacity to manage AmeriCorps

The Tribe has a successful history of managing complex federal funding programs and our Natural Resources department has a successful history of managing habitat restoration projects, but we do not have experience with the administrative requirements of an AmeriCorps program. The planning period will allow the project coordinator and key members of our staff to become familiar with these requirements and develop the systems we need to administer a successful AmeriCorps program. By attending the grantee training early on in the planning period and utilizing the extensive network of successful AmeriCorps programs nationally, the project coordinator will be able to build effective systems into the program plan as the plan is developed. For example, the coordinator will work with the Tribe's financial staff to identify and develop specific financial reporting tools that work with both AmeriCorps requirements and the Tribe's financial accounting system.

The planning period is very important for the coordinator to be able to develop relationships with the Tribe's field staff, natural resource management, community outreach staff, administrative and financial staff, as well as with the Tribe's habitat restoration partners in the region. By participating directly in select habitat restoration activities, the coordinator will be able to identify and develop the materials, supplies, and logistical support required for the AmeriCorps member crew.

Developing relationships with the tribal community for effective member recruitment and development is also very important. We don't know yet what types of member training and development will be needed, and will need to explore that during the planning period.

Determining most appropriate member activities

We have a preliminary idea of what kinds of activities members might be engaged in, but the planning period will allow us to develop these ideas in sufficient detail to support field work. We will be looking for projects that won't otherwise happen, since AmeriCorps funds do not displace existing resources. We will be looking for projects that provide the greatest impact for our objectives of salmon

Narratives

habitat protection and restoration. We will also be seeking projects that provide significant learning opportunities for our members. Whenever possible we will seek to integrate technical skill development into our activities, so that members learn not just to remove invasive species from a riparian area, for example, but to characterize habitat, identify characteristics of healthy habitat, identify basic riparian geomorphology, and survey and monitor vegetation and assess habitat quality, as well. We will also begin to identify potential training opportunities for members in specific skill areas such as ethnobotany, forestry basics, use of GPS and GIS, search & rescue, wilderness first responder and first aid, and wild land firefighter.

Member characteristics and recruitment strategy

One of the most important elements of the planning phase will be the time we will be able to devote to creating an effective member recruitment and development strategy. This effort will begin with discussions with our community advisory partners, including the tribal members who compose the Tribe's Parks, Culture, and Community Development committees. We will convene focus groups of tribal and community youth in the target age range to central issues of program and training design. These may include: What types of projects are most interesting for potential members? What type of technical, educational, and life skills training are most important to include in the program? What are the most effective methods of reaching potential applicants? Once we have identified the elements of the training, development, and recruitment program we will test it out with youth focus group members to refine it before implementation.

Performance measurement system

Our natural resources programs are very familiar with performance based tracking of their projects. They have been successfully competing for state and federal habitat restoration funds for years now, and those programs all require detailed performance based tracking and reporting. However, the performance measurement requirements of the AmeriCorps program are new to us. During the planning period the coordinator will develop performance based metrics for the project and will also spend some focused time with other tribal staff in making sure our internal systems for tracking and reporting on these metrics meets the AmeriCorps requirements.

Orientation and Training

The planning period will allow us sufficient time to develop quality orientation and training modules

Narratives

for the members. On a very preliminary basis, we can anticipate that the orientation will include technical, cultural, and leadership development elements. We would also like to incorporate specific skill-building modules in each of these areas throughout the service year.

Organizational Capability

Record of accomplishment

The Natural Resources Department has a significant track record in successful accomplishment of complex habitat restoration projects, from planning to implementation. Each project typically requires the assembly of multiple funding sources and compliance with multiple funding restrictions as to eligible uses of funds, record keeping, and performance-based reporting. The most recent habitat restoration projects include:

* 2009 Red Salmon Slough Restoration Project Phase II: removal of 6000' of dikes restoring tidal influence to 110 acres of the Nisqually estuary and revegetation of 54 acres of surge plain. Cost of Project: \$437,000. Duration: 24 months.

* 2010 Eatonville Mashel Project Phase II: design and installation of 23 logjams on Mashel River to recreate salmon spawning habitat. Cost of Project: \$1,382,000. Duration: 24 months.

* 2011 Ohop Phase 1 Project: Restoration of 1 mile of creek meander as salmon habitat from former channelized status and revegetation of 100 acres of floodplain to reduce erosion and sedimentation. Cost of Project: \$2,200,000. Duration: 24 Months.

Prior experience administering federal funds

Currently the Tribe administers over \$30 million in federal funds, including over \$11 million in natural resource funds, and has successfully implemented hundreds of grant-funded projects over the past 30 years. The Tribe is successfully managing over 50 separate grants and contracts.

Prior experience in proposed area of programming

Since 2005, major restoration efforts have included several phases of dike removal on Red Salmon Slough addressing 160 acres of wetland and surge plain; recreating the meander in over 1 mile of Ohop creek channel, and installing over 30 log jams on the Mashel River. Over the course of five years, the Tribe's restoration crew has re-vegetated over 200 acres with approximately 157,000 plants. Additional maintenance work is performed on other restoration plantings installed by the Nisqually Land Trust. Together, Nisqually River recovery partners have protected over 75% of the Nisqually

Narratives

mainstem shoreline.

Management and staff structure

The AmeriCorps coordinator will report to the Tribe's Natural Resource director and coordinate closely with the Natural Resource program managers. The coordinator will also have access to other tribal staff who are committed to the success of the AmeriCorps program. These include staff in the Tribe's Administrative, Planning, Education, Operations, and Parks programs.

This proposal has grown out of direct input from tribal leadership about the importance of establishing a youth conservation corps to address habitat concerns in the watershed and to provide workforce development opportunities for tribal youth. The idea of a youth conservation corps was identified as a priority in the Tribe's 2013 Vision Plan. Tribal Council is strongly supportive of the proposed project and will be available to ensure its success through reviewing the program proposal and identifying sources of continuing funding.

The Nisqually tribal government structure includes various committees and commissions that provide policy and programmatic advisory functions to staff. These groups serve as an important conduit for community input and recommendations about proposed programs. As part of the planning process the coordinator will present the proposed program to these groups, which will help to spread the word about the upcoming project and identify community concerns and guidance. This type of communication early in the project will help with later member recruitment and development efforts.

Programmatic and fiscal oversight

Programmatic oversight will be provided by the Tribe's Natural Resource department director, who has over 25 years' experience in this position, in conjunction with our habitat restoration manager, who has been with the Tribe for over five years.

Fiscal oversight will be provided primarily by our grants and contracts officer, who is a member of our financial services department. The Tribe's organizational structure and management systems provide for separation of policy-making and management functions and provide clear lines of authority within the organization. The accounting function is carried out by our Financial Services Department which utilizes cost-accounting software to manage restricted-purpose funds.

Narratives

Appropriate backup documentation and vouchers are required for all expenditures, which are reviewed by both program and financial staff. Checks are signed by any two of the seven bonded Tribal Council members. The Tribe is not delinquent on any federal debt. The Tribe's most recent audit (CY 2011) is completed and contained no significant findings related to its financial management systems.

The Tribe's Chief Financial Officer has over 25 years accounting experience with special emphasis on governmental accounting. The Financial Services Department includes twelve other staff who provide for property/procurement, grant/contract compliance, accounts receivable, payroll, and other financial management functions. The Tribe completes an annual A-133 Audit, which includes a certification of tribal management systems.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Diverse resources and plans to develop a cost-effective program

During the planning period, we will identify the cost elements involved in creating and sustaining a successful AmeriCorps program. Once we have a cost projection we will identify alternative and diverse sources of funding for the program. Potential sources of future funding for the program could include direct funding from the Tribe and the Tribe's gaming enterprise; matching funds or in-kind resources through our partners in the watershed; funding from other tribal foundations in the region (there are 29 tribes in Washington State, and most of them have some type of charitable giving program); and funding from philanthropic resources in the Puget Sound region.

Adequacy of budget

The proposed budget is modest but adequate to support the proposed project. The first critical factor in the success of the project will be recruiting a highly capable and qualified coordinator with a track record of performance in managing a conservation crew. The proposed salary figure of \$39,000 will be competitive for an experienced coordinator and was determined through surveying successful AmeriCorps projects in the region.

The coordinator will not need much material support during the planning period, and the budget reflects the basic elements of workstation, computer, and phone; and required national travel as well as a modest amount for the local travel required to visit potential partners and project sites in the watershed. The Tribe's natural resources department has an inventory of field gear and equipment that will be available for the coordinator. The value of this equipment (for example, use of waders or

Narratives

GPS units on an interim basis) is difficult to determine and so is not included in the project budget, but the coordinator will have access to all the incidental equipment they will need to explore potential field sites.

Although the Reservation is economically distressed, it is located within 60 miles of Seattle, which is home to the major philanthropic resources in the Pacific Northwest, and thus within easy visitation reach of the potential funders there.

The proposed uses of funds for this project are as follows:

Personnel Expenses. Project coordinator, 100% FTE, 12 months, \$39,500 per year salary plus \$3,950 per year vacation and holiday benefits. The position description will require demonstrated experience with AmeriCorps crew leadership; experiential learning leadership; AmeriCorps administration; natural resource education and work experience; and experience in a tribal community.

Payroll costs and other insurance expenses consist of health insurance (\$8,200); life insurance (\$100); FICA of 7.65% (\$3,324); workman's compensation of 2.81% (\$1,221); state unemployment of 0.01% (\$435); disability insurance (\$169.80); and retirement contribution of 4% (\$1,738).

Staff travel. \$4,080 is included for one trip for two people to attend required program meetings in Washington DC. This trip includes round trip airfare to and from Seattle; parking or shuttle service to Seattle and in DC; 4 nights lodging in DC; and per diem at the federal rate during the travel period. \$720 (1440 miles at \$0.50/mile) is included for local staff travel. Local travel throughout the Nisqually watershed and in the Puget Sound region will be required to visit potential field sites and regional training partners.

Equipment. \$3,079 is included for equipment in order to support acquisition of a computer and workstation for the employee. The Tribe will contribute any necessary field equipment (boots, jackets, hats and gloves) for the coordinator as in-kind.

Utilities. \$1200 is included for monthly phone charges for the coordinator.

Other Program Operating Costs also includes \$175 for the required background checks for the employee.

Narratives

Indirect costs. The Nisqually Tribe has an approved federal indirect cost rate agreement, but has authorized an indirect rate of 15% for this project.

Economic distress

An estimated 22.5% of the on-reservation tribal population is unemployed, which is more than 4 times the 2010 unemployment rate (4.80%) of neighboring Thurston County (American Community Survey, U.S. Census, 2007-2011, most recent year available). The estimated number of persons living on poverty on the Reservation is 21.6%, or twice the local area poverty rate of 10.5% (American Community Survey). Many tribal families rely on salmon fishing for subsistence as well as ceremonial purposes.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

NA

Clarification Summary

On July 12, 2013, we made the following clarifications:

1. Criminal background checks. We researched the cost of the required checks and it is approximately \$175. We have included that in the budget and budget narrative as an Other Program Operating Cost.
2. RE: Personnel fringe benefits. There were some rounding errors in the original proposal due to the way our internal software calculates fringe costs. These have been corrected in the resubmitted proposal.
3. RE: Travel costs. The travel cost line item has been changed to reflect travel for 2 staff to a single CSY sponsored national meeting rather than to 2 meetings.
4. Budget updates resulting from these changes are incorporated in the budget and narrative. There are slight decreases in budget totals resulting from the reduction in travel costs. We re-arranged how some of the line items are proposed to be paid for (CNCS vs. grantee) in order to maintain the required match percentage from the Tribe after reducing travel costs.
5. The source of funds has been updated to accurately reflect the matching funds.
6. The current approved indirect cost rate agreement is still from 2011. The 2012 & 2013 agreements are still being negotiated.

Continuation Changes