MASHEL RIVER PROTECTION PROJECT

STATE PROGRAM: Washington Department of Ecology

ASSISTANCE RECIPIENT: Nisqually Tribe

ASSISTANCE AMOUNT: $14.2M

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Within the foothills of Mount Rainer lies the Mashel River, the primary salmon-spawning tributary of the Nisqually River. The Mashel River is an important site for salmon habitat. The River also serves as the direct source of water for the Town of Eatonville and is the indirect source for many rural residents. The largest sub-basin and headwaters for the Mashel River is the Busy Wild Creek, which is a declared federal critical habitat site for spawning and rearing of the listed Endangered Species: Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Trout. The forests around these headwaters are commercially logged, and sections of the forest remain in a state of recovery from massive clear-cut logging from the early and mid-1900s. These practices impact the headwaters by reducing water retention, elevating stream temperatures, reducing the woody-debris accumulation needed for spawning habitat, and through extensive sedimentation that fills spawning pools. These impacts to the river affect the Nisqually River Basin, which is home to the Nisqually Indian Tribe. Salmon is a prominent part of the Nisqually culture, and they rely on treaty-reserved fishing rights to sustain their fishing practices in the river.

To restore river quality and salmon habitat in these headwater forests, the Nisqually Tribe received a $14.2 million loan from the Washington State Department of Ecology to purchase 1,240 acres of land along the North Fork of Busy Wild Creek. This land purchase adjoins next to nearly 3,000 acres of forested land managed by the Nisqually Land Trust and the Nisqually Community Forest. Future forest growth will permanently protect the entirety of the Busy Wild Creek headwaters and help restore critical salmon habitat for the Mashel River.

To read more about this case study, please visit https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-02/2021-pisces-compendium.pdf.