



**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

HILARY S. FRANZ
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

DNR BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS



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EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN / DNR BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS April 2023

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This plan was crafted with input from many public servants at DNR with guidance from community partners across Washington. We acknowledge their contributions in crafting this vision for the agency and thank them for their passion for our public lands and environmental justice.

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EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

DNR BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

VISION

To serve, respect, and respond to Washingtonians by:

1. Maintaining a body of advisory groups that is reflective of our state, our collective lived expertise, and responsive to the public and overburdened communities.
2. Implementing an agency-wide equitable community engagement strategy for boards and commissions that prioritizes meaningful public participation and environmental justice.

In order to achieve this vision, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will utilize the following strategies and embedded methods.



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

HILARY S. FRANZ
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS



STRATEGY

1 Eliminate barriers to equitable and meaningful public engagement with and on DNR boards and commissions



METHOD

1.1

Modernize the application and appointment process through the implementation of an online candidate form for members of the public who wish to be considered for appointment to DNR boards and commissions.

Environmental Justice Analysis: There is no generic DNR board application form that is publicly available or publicly advertised. The selective nature of who is “in the know” or approached to apply for positions is inherently unjust and creates a gap for the public in their understanding of who serves and how to participate. This gap violates core transparency and public policy principles of environmental justice and inhibits direct input from the public. Moreover, it perpetuates an informal, internal appointment process that encourages agency decision-makers to recommend the appointment of individuals from within personal networks. The outcome of the current system generates largely homogeneous boards that may not be reflective of our state’s geographic, racial, socioeconomic, or gender diversity.

“The boards and commissions that advise our agency play an important role in fulfilling our commitments to environmental justice. This Action Plan takes concrete steps towards ensuring those boards are reflective of Washington’s residents and invites the broadest spectrum of knowledge to help DNR serve all Washingtonians.”

ELISEO (EJ) JUÁREZ
DIRECTOR OF EQUITY
AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



METHOD

1.2

Reduce barriers to, and streamline participation opportunities that empower the voice of Washingtonians through public comment and formal decision making processes.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Direct dialogue with the public promotes transparency and provides DNR with feedback on boards and commissions decisions, processes, and practices. Boards and Commissions are able to set public participation at their discretion. Often, these bodies may not include public comment or make easily accessible, the opportunity for the public to participate. By identifying and enforcing a standard for conducting and promoting public comment/participation, DNR will receive better guidance from the public.

METHOD

1.3

Streamline a Department-specific process for appointments, decision making, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities.

Environmental Justice Analysis: When government approaches appointments with a lack of internal standards governing the approval process, it encourages an inefficient and inequitable approach to producing high performing and reflective advisory bodies. Streamlining the approval and decision-making process may allow DNR to be more responsive to engagement from the public and set clear standards for approval, thereby generating outcomes that are more equitable.

METHOD

1.4

Ensure that DNR boards and commissions subject to the Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30.240) and/or the Open Public Records Act (RCW 42.56) are in compliance with such laws.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Compliance with such laws is critical to agency transparency surrounding board operations. Transparency builds trust with the public, creates opportunities for dialogue, and facilitates accountability through civic oversight.



M E T H O D

1.5

Ensure boards and commissions are operating in a transparent manner; with minutes, notices, agendas, charters, and accessibility options easily available to the public in languages that match communities impacted by decisions on the agenda.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Overburdened communities, and the public at large, should be able to access information concerning DNR boards and commissions as well as the work of the boards providing guidance to the agency. Transparent board operations create an accountability mechanism that engages the public, produces recommendations that incorporate a broader range of perspectives, and cultivates trust in state government. This also allows the public to measure progress on compliance with stated goals and objectives.

M E T H O D

1.6

Adopt and implement the Office of Equity's *Community Compensation Guidelines* in order to mitigate participatory barriers to low-income individuals with an interest in state government.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Removing financial barriers for community members increases access to government, enriches public policy discussions, and produces more equitable policy outcomes. DNR will compensate individuals that are providing expertise and guidance to the agency who are not being compensated through an employer or organization to serve.

Addressing environmental injustice in natural resource management is a long journey and requires strong leadership—and the best way to get that strong leadership is through our boards and committees. I'm excited to apply this Action Plan to the Forest Health Advisory Committee as we work to improve the health and resilience of our forests for all Washington."

TERRA RENTZ
FOREST HEALTH ADVISORY
COMMITTEE CHAIR



STRATEGY 2

2 Ensure that DNR boards and commissions reflect the populations we serve.



METHOD

2.1

Collect, track, and report annually on demographic survey data concerning the composition of existing DNR boards and commissions, total number of applicants and related demographics of all candidates applying for positions. Demographic variables tracked will include race/ethnicity, gender, geography, tribal representation or affiliation, overburdened community member status, and others.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Data collection provides DNR with baseline numbers that will yield valuable insights into assessing the composition of agency boards and commissions. In aggregate, these bodies should be representative of the state of Washington. The Office of Equity and Environmental Justice shall seek to ensure that, to the extent possible, the racial and gender makeup of DNR boards matches U.S. Census population estimates for the state of Washington.

METHOD

2.2

Require the Office of Equity and Environmental Justice to create additional standing or time-limited boards and commissions that specifically address environmental justice issues—a report on the matter shall be due to the Commissioner of Public Lands on January 31, 2024.

Environmental Justice Analysis: The Office of Equity and Environmental Justice may determine that additional boards may bolster DNR’s efforts to comply with the HEAL Act and engage the public more substantively on environmental justice issues. This report will be informed by existing community steering committees, staff, boards and commissions.



STRATEGY

3 Embed environmental justice and equity practices into board governance documents and operations.



METHOD

3.1

Require that all agency boards and commissions collaborate with DNR’s Office of Equity and Environmental Justice to review and update existing charters, bylaws, and/or other articles of association governing board operations where possible.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Setting parameters for engagement and participation through charters, bylaws, and articles of association helps to formalize and routinize more equitable board practices and procedures. It may also eliminate barriers or practices that create environments or bias that impacts how these bodies operate. This process may result in the addition of new seats or the addition of practices that embed equity and environmental justice into the work of each board or commission.

METHOD

3.2

Where possible, add “public member” seats to existing boards and commissions in order to create space for additional input from members of the public.

Environmental Justice Analysis: There is significant precedent for the inclusion of “public” or “community” member seats on boards and commissions. State laws concerning gubernatorial or other executive-level appointments allow for at least one “public” member seat on a council. Possible barriers to this change may include restrictive RCW language, concerns over board size, or the highly technical nature of certain boards. Benefits of the addition of this seat include expanded learning opportunities for the public and DNR staff, additional oversight of state government processes and operations, and expanded opportunities for DNR to diversify existing boards.



METHOD

3.3

Unless otherwise set in statute, incorporate term limit requirements, consideration of “community-friendly” meeting times and locations, and “plain talk” into board and commission operations;

Environmental Justice Analysis: Term limits allow for healthy turnover within systems and the introduction of fresh perspectives. The Office of Equity and Environmental Justice may opt to include a provision for “term extensions” that may be granted by CPL when and if a board deems it necessary to retain a board member (e.g. to retain institutional knowledge or help the board through a transition period). More flexible scheduling and meeting location considerations may also incentivize more public participation. Many boards meet at times that may reduce participation rates among low-income individuals and/or those with less flexible working hours. Members of the public may also be deterred from participating in state government as a result of the use of agency or industry-specific jargon during board meetings. Executive Order 05-03 requires the use of “plain talk” (i.e. easily understood language) when communicating with the public. “Plain talk” need not come at the expense of technical or scientific explanations for certain concepts.

METHOD

3.4

Engage and train DNR board staff on best practices for engaging with the public and overburdened communities as outlined in the Provisional Community Engagement Guide.

Environmental Justice Analysis: Outreach to communities should be proactive, emphasize trust-building, prioritize unheard perspectives, avoid tokenism, meet people where they are, and ensure that communication is ongoing. The Office of Equity and Environmental Justice should provide clear guidance to DNR staff as they engage with overburdened communities through training all staff with Environmental Justice 101 and Public Meeting Management courses required in the Learning Center platform for employees.



STRATEGY

4 Expand candidate pathways for service on DNR boards and commissions.



METHOD

4.1

Cultivate and nurture authentic relationships with community groups, social service and faith-based organizations, local and ethnic media outlets, disability rights groups, advocacy coalitions, tribes, and individuals representing overburdened communities.¹

Environmental Justice Analysis: Candidates for DNR boards and commissions positions exist in every community in the state – A failure to deliberately recruit women, candidates of color, LGBTQ+ identifying persons, and other historically marginalized individuals’ results in lower participation on the part of these groups on these critical decision-making bodies, which in turn, generates less equitable policy outcomes.

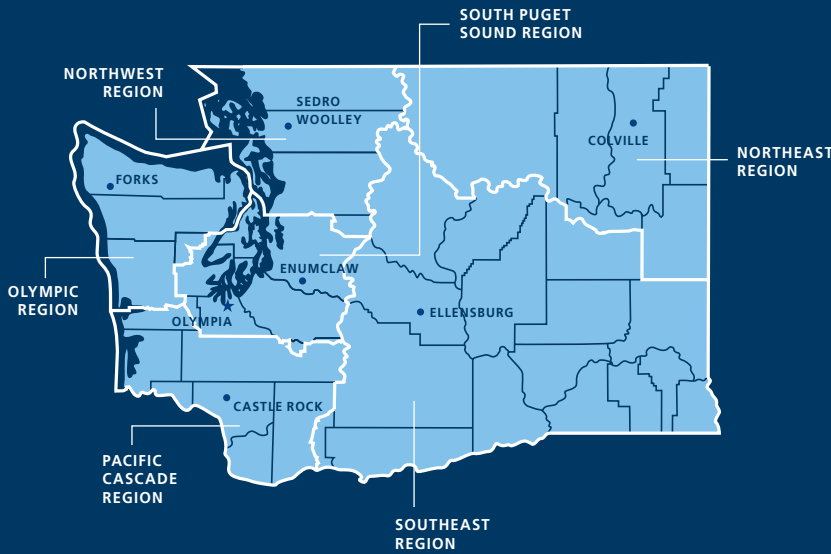
METHOD

4.2

Embed public engagement and recruitment opportunities for boards across DNR operations;

Environmental Justice Analysis: A ‘whole of agency’ approach to candidate recruitment and environmental justice will increase candidate pathways for service on DNR boards, while also complementing existing public engagement initiatives. Advertisements for application opportunities should be available at the region level, at DNR sites, during community engagement and listening sessions, on social media, and in other settings deemed appropriate.

¹ Overburdened Community is currently defined as ‘...a geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and includes, but is not limited to, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW 19.405.020.’ Community is defined by a geographic location (e.g., a census tract, a county, a region) that can be identified on a map (Provisional Community Engagement Plan). We can understand “overburdened communities” to be geographic areas where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts. This is an evolving definition that may not have universal application across all boards. DNR’s Office of Equity and Environmental Justice awaits further guidance from the Environmental Justice Council and other HEAL-covered agencies to define this term.



Contact DNR

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