

2019 ISSUE PAPER: FORESTS AND RIVERS

Position statements

The League of Women Voters of Washington believe:

- The benefits of all the forests—ecological, human and economic—are inextricably interconnected. Supports healthy forests that are essential habitat for a diversity of plant and animal life, to the hydrologic cycle, and to carbon storage to mitigate global warming. Laws and policies to ensure that forest management is carried out in a manner that will sustain healthy forests, streams and habitats.
- Supports Columbia River Basin comprehensive basin-wide planning for optimum utilization, conservation, development and management of water resources. Machinery is needed to provide coordinated planning, administration and conflict resolution among the federal, state and other agencies. Wise planning for the use of water in the Columbia River Basin requires an inventory of the basin water resources. This inventory should include water-related information such as ground and surface water sources, viable water rights, current use and projected future needs. This information should be readily available to concerned agencies and the general public. Minimum stream flows should be established as a public right and maintained on all streams in the Columbia River Basin and all other river basins in the state.

The League of Women Voters United States position on Natural Resources:

- Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest. Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government. Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment. Supports policies that reflect the interrelationships of water quality and quantity, groundwater and surface water and address the potential depletion or pollution of water supplies.

Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

FORESTS

Wildfires have become a serious and escalating problem in all of Washington State. Increasing summer temperatures and a history of fire suppression have resulted in drier, more combustible forests. In 2018 there have been 1700 wildfires, most being put out before they spread by rapid response, but smoke from wildfires in neighboring BC and Idaho resulted in health advisories and damage to some crops. In 2016 a bill passed to fund DNR firefighting efforts with more joint agency firefighting training, firefighters and equipment. In 2017 a bill passed that instructing DNR to comprise a risk assessment list of forests for fire prevention treatments of prescribed burning and thinning. Our State Trust forestlands, which are 3 million acres, are managed by DNR to fund school construction. This is unsustainable and there are many calls for change, so our schools could be funded by less environmentally destructive alternative means.

There also is an increased appreciation of the role of Pacific Northwest forests in climate change by the sequestration of carbon resulting in a reduction of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Therefore, there will be more efforts to preserve all remaining old growth forests and lengthen rotation harvest times. We will also follow efforts at the federal level that would undermine protection of our national forests, including the Pacific Northwest Forest Plan (1994).

We support increased Department of Natural Resource funding for both preparations to fight wildfire to keep them from spreading and for prevention through prescribed fire and thinning in identified high risk forests. Hilary S. Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands, is requesting a \$55 million from the operating and capital budgets. New preparation initiatives would include: outreach to educate the public to make communities and homes more fire resistant, more training and firefighters and more fire engines. Prevention methods include outreach to educate the public to make communities and homes more fire resistant, prescribed burning and thinning for high risk forests. There also will be a bill on developing new Community Forests for multiple local rural community benefits. The Teanaway Community Forest is our first and only Community Forest now.

RIVERS

We support legislation that protects our river systems water quality, quantity and aquatic life.

Climate change has resulted in more frequent drought and warmer and lower instream flows for our salmon and aquatic life. We have supported Oil Transport Safety bills that adequately protect our marine waters, the Columbia River and Puget Sound. We oppose motorize suction dredge mining and hydraulic projects in our streams. We support the removal of the Snake River dams for endangered salmon and orca recovery and oppose bans on dam removal.

We are also following the **Yakima Basin Integrated Plan** and support its goals of increasing water supplies for irrigation and for fish, and for water conservation, crop changes and fish habitat protection. But we have serious concerns about the lack of public process, reliance on costly new dams for more water storage, and destruction of the Bumping old growth forest.

LWVWA is also working with the NPO Caucus for the **Columbia River Treaty** (1964), which is now being renegotiated by the State Department with Canada. Our goals are to expand the public hearing process, ensure the Northwest Regional Recommendation of including ecosystem function as a co-equal goal with hydropower and flood risk reduction is included and have Columbia River tribes included in the negotiating process for a modernized treaty.

We anticipate a bill on protecting Puget Sound from oil spills. We could see more bills to prevent any dam removal, especially the Snake River dams. There will be more funding requests for the Yakima Integrated Plan.

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