



**Dave Upthegrove Urbanist Questionnaire 2024**  
Washington State Lands Commissioner

**How do you envision the role of the DNR in addressing environmental justice issues, particularly in communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation?**

When I launched my campaign last year, I identified the pillars upon which the foundation of our campaign would be built. At the center was environmental justice. This core value is embedded in the campaign and will be incorporated into all of our work at the department. We've sent a clear message by not accepting campaign contributions from the timber industry, their corporate executives or lobbyists. We are running a grassroots people-powered campaign. As the campaign progressed, we worked with community to turn these environmental justice values into concrete steps I will take as Lands Commissioner. Many of the steps are described in later questions. The bottom line is that I will embed equity and social justice into all operations and programs. Washington's environmental justice law exempted many of the activities at DNR. I intend to go beyond the requirements of the HEAL Act and conduct environmental justice assessments on many of those major agency actions currently exempt from the law. I also intend to use the leasing authority of the Commissioner to ensure not only positive environmental outcomes but also to protect and enhance opportunities and outcomes for marginalized communities. This work requires urgency and steadfast commitment.

**What specific strategies do you propose to ensure that public lands managed by the DNR are accessible and beneficial to all communities, regardless of socioeconomic status or race?**



Our public lands are an incredible public resource and we need to make sure everyone has equitable access. I want to facilitate expansions and new partnerships similar to King County's "Trailhead Direct" program to connect urban transit to popular recreation areas. I want to support and build out DNR's new Youth Education and Outreach Program which provides outdoor learning experiences on state lands, particularly for marginalized communities. And I will continue to champion partnerships with community based organizations that connect people from all backgrounds to outdoor activities. In South King County alone, we have groups like African Community Housing & Development (ACHD), Eagle's Nest, Living Well Kent, and Y.E.T.I. which are already doing this work. I will champion stable legislative funding and facilitate these partnerships. Racial equity also means ensuring tribal members have access to public lands within the traditional territory of their tribe.

**Would you sign into law a bill implementing or allowing for rent stabilization?**

**Why or why not?**

Was this meant for Lands Commissioner candidates? If I were still a state legislator, I likely would have voted for the bill in Olympia this past year because it was a reasonable approach to a serious problem that would have improved the lives of many people by providing a modest amount of housing stability.

**How will you prioritize the management of public lands to support urban green infrastructure and promote healthy, sustainable cities?**

Urban forestry and tree cover in urban areas, especially low-income and diverse communities, enhance environmental justice by improving air quality, reducing heat islands, fostering biodiversity, and creating healthier, more equitable living environments.



When I was in the Legislature, we passed the Evergreen Communities Act, which promoted urban forestry by encouraging communities to develop and implement urban forestry management plans, providing grants and technical assistance, and fostering public awareness.

This work often has been hampered by lack of legislative funding. Fortunately, a few years back, the Legislature revitalized the program by increasing funding for urban tree planting and maintenance, expanding technical assistance for communities, and putting a stronger emphasis on equitable distribution of urban forestry benefits, particularly targeting underserved and low-income areas. Much of this work is implemented by DNR, and so I will continue to champion funding and support full implementation.

I also will build upon the current work of the agency to partner with willing cities to facilitate the development of affordable housing on appropriate DNR properties in urban areas, as this is another way the department can support healthy sustainable cities.

**What initiatives do you plan to implement to enhance the connection between urban residents and public lands managed by the DNR?**

I also will build upon the current work of the agency to partner with willing cities to facilitate the development of affordable housing on appropriate DNR properties in urban areas. This will involve advocating in the Legislature for infrastructure funding as well as using my experience and relationships as a local elected official to build public support among jurisdictions where DNR has appropriate land. My housing priority will be the same as it is as a current County Councilmember: maximum units and the maximum affordability.



I also want to expand recreational opportunities on state lands—and promote those opportunities—particularly to community members who often don't have opportunities—and want to enhance transit connections like the Trailhead Direct program. I also want the department to partner with educational institutions and workforce programs in urban areas to provide economic opportunity and pathways while helping the department and private industry meet the workforce needs of the future.

**What steps will you take to ensure that communities historically marginalized or underserved have a voice in the management and use of public lands under the jurisdiction of the DNR?**

The Department of Natural Resources needs a culture change to be a more inclusive and community-connected agency. I intend to start by hiring the most diverse staff in the history of the agency— and a staff that shares this priority. I'll also work to ensure DNR's nearly 100 advisory committees and task forces reflect our state's diversity— and that we listen to them. I'll work with women and minority owned businesses to identify and reduce barriers to contracting with the department.

I'll improve community engagement by shifting communications staff at HQ (apparently there are 21 communications staff in DNR's headquarters) instead to community engagement positions in the regional offices for authentic, culturally-competent, community engagement and co-creation of programs and processes.

I will improve translation of DNR materials, use cultural ambassadors, and ensure accessibility in digital media and public meetings. I will honor tribal treaty rights and strengthen the co-management role of tribes. Finally, I'll work with the Legislature to



expand the membership of the Board of Natural Resources to include a public representative (ideally from a marginalized community) and tribal representation.

**What is your strategy on fire management and the labor rights (wages; career pathways; healthcare in perpetuity) of those doing that work, particularly fire fighters that are currently incarcerated?**

Improving wildfire prevention is critical to public safety and, increasingly, public health as we experience more smoke on the West side– disproportionately impacting the health of marginalized communities. We must increase forest health investments (controlled burns and thinning) and expand the work to the West side– and implement effectiveness monitoring.

As the fire season has shifted later, fewer teachers and students (who often came with insurance) work the season– making a lack of benefits a more widespread problem. We need to explore a self-insurance program, or seasonal gap insurance, or other guaranteed benefit through Washington's health care exchange. We also need better mental health support for firefighters– fully implementing critical incident stress management (CISM) to provide support and promote resilience– such as volunteer peer support and licensed mental health personnel trained to assist responders.

I don't support chain gangs; they are racist and inhumane. I do support inmate job skills programs integrated into re-entry programs. The current wildfire program appears to be the latter. When evaluating the program, I want to ensure that standards for safety are the same as other employees, inmates aren't being exploited, and that the work experience is connected to job opportunities upon release.