



**Patrick DePoe Urbanist Questionnaire 2024**  
Washington Lands Commissioner

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

I was honored to be appointed by Governor Inslee to the Environmental Justice Council and served as its Founding Co-Chair. DNR must embrace environmental justice as a lens for every aspect of its work from public land trust management, wildfire prevention, clean energy projects, and developing a government-to-government relationship with Tribal Nations.

In my community, we say that the land and the people it sustains are one. You can't take care of one without uplifting the other. To me, environmental justice means all people deserve a safe home, good paying job, healthy nutritious food, and clean air and water. When communities have what they need to thrive, they are less reliant on carbon emissions, we build a stronger coalition to fight climate change, and we maximize our opportunity to transition to a sustainable future for everyone.

I live on the Makah Reservation and have seen firsthand how public policy impacts our environment and livelihoods. Communities like mine are on the front lines of climate change, environmental degradation, and economic inequality. DNR needs a leader that understands environmental justice is a framework for every aspect of our work, not a separate competing policy area that we get to when it's convenient.

**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?**



At DNR, one of my roles is to organize the Tribal Summit where last year we had our Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan (OARR) kick off, the first of its kind co-developed with our Tribal partners. We are currently putting together our yearly Tribal Summit to hear directly from Tribal leaders where we can continue in improving our approach and build off of past years success.

Previously, our office did not have a statewide strategy to increase accessibility of our public lands but rather 10 separate landscape-level plans. These plans did not have meaningful input from partners in Tribal Nations, immigrant communities, and others that must be engaged if we really want our lands to be accessible and beneficial to everyone. As a result of this work we created draft goals that will inform DNR's approach including conserving and enhancing cultural resources from diverse communities, cultivating stewardship through education and community engagement, respecting the rights all groups on these lands, securing financial stability for management and infrastructure, and mitigating climate impacts to build resilience.

We are just beginning. We need leaders at the highest level with experience operationalizing community engagement, cultivating relationships, and generating actual policy change.

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

**Why or why not?**

Absolutely. During the pandemic, I was Vice-Chair of the Makah Tribe of Indians. When people lost their jobs, their homes, and their livelihoods I was on the frontlines of working to prevent suicide. We lost the lives of so many of our Tribal Citizens and with it a piece of our culture, identity, and community. Rent stabilization is about ensuring people's right to shelter isn't compromised to maximize the profit and greed of a handful of wealthy landlords taking advantage of people. This isn't some



extreme position either, in this past session we were on the cusp of passing rent stabilization at the state level and one of my opponents was the critical vote to kill the bill. That's unacceptable to me and demonstrates a lack of understanding in the ways these issues are intersectional and inter-related to DNR's public land management, environmental protection, and climate change transition work.

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

Rural and urban communities have to work together to address climate change and chart a sustainable future for everyone. Some of the most important projects at the city level are how we greenify our working waterfronts and ports, ensure we are increasing tree canopy to reduce urban heat islands and provide relief particularly for unhoused populations, and innovative approaches like lidding I-5 which would reduce carbon emissions, create tens of thousands of affordable housing units, prevent stormwater runoff, and more.

DNR can be a partner for these efforts not just in Seattle but in cities across the State. We have public land that is underutilized in every corner of Washington. Through our trusts or agreements with state agencies and community partners, they can be leveraged to support projects that will have transformational impacts on promoting healthy and sustainable cities.

We need to press DNR's mandate to truly have a triple-bottom line. That is not just the need to generate sustainable revenue, but to protect our environment for future generations, and provide as broad a benefit to Washingtonians as possible. My approach to managing our public lands is to consider whatever strategies we have at our disposal to use that authority to promote a sustainable future for everyone.



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

Initiatives that help people in urban areas access our lands, and deepen their relationships with it and all communities in our state, is critical because it also strengthens their commitment to environmental policies and fighting climate change.

I am a big advocate of the transportation pilot programs that connect urban cores to our parks, hiking trails, and our natural beauty. However, they need to be expanded and made more accessible! As a minor example, many of the buses don't have bike racks or allow pets and they have few run times so it's hard to plan a trip around. We can do better and the DNR can play a role in helping to fund and facilitate this work, while having appropriate consultation and engagement with our Tribal Nations to ensure we move appropriately and not impact cultural resources.

At DNR we've also championed how to expand our mission to include funding childcare, gun violence prevention, affordable housing and other issues that are pressing for urban communities through our public land trusts. I believe this is a critical area for us to continue pushing the envelope because it creates a stronger connection between all communities and our public lands work.

**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?**

My current role at DNR is the Director of Tribal Relations. I'm tasked with working to build a government-to-government relationship with Tribal Nations, and to elevate the voices of historically marginalized communities. My approach has been to press our DNR team to see this not as a separate component of our work, but deeply



integrated into every aspect of our public land management, habitat restoration, species and environmental protection, sustainable harvest processes and more.

In contrast to the other candidates in the race, I actually have experience operationalizing how we not only listen to but give real decision making power to underserved voices. The key here is that we aren't just acknowledging their needs, or saying a nice speech at the start of our meetings but we are actually transferring power, wealth, resources, and authority to BIPOC communities so they can advocate for their own needs. We can't just listen to marginalized communities when we agree with what they have to say, but rather especially when it is inconvenient or difficult.

**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?**

Wildfires pose an existential threat to millions of acres of our forests, degrade air quality for all Washingtonians, and are particularly dangerous for rural communities like mine. Home insurance premiums for rural residents have been skyrocketing as a response to this risk, and we are even seeing home insurance policies being dropped entirely as well.

In my time at DNR we've worked to pass historic investments in wildfire prevention and response. We staffed up from less than 7 full-time firefighters to nearly 40. We also increased technology and infrastructure— stationing our resources around the state using best available data on risk, and embracing cutting-edge AI and other predictive measures for early detection. We started with just three helicopters (all from the Vietnam war), and all stationed in Western Washington. Now we're better resourced to respond.



We have a long way to go to build on this work. Particularly because DNR firefighters are not classified with the same union protections as others in the same field. This is deeply unacceptable to me. These folks are literally putting their lives and health at risk, and they deserve the same wages, benefits, and rights to be collectively organized as their peers.