

Mason County Climate Justice

<https://www.masoncountyclimatejustice.org>

AI Generated (GLT Reviewed) Summary

Mason County Climate Justice (MCCJ) is a community-based nonprofit in Mason County, WA, focused on climate justice and serving diverse, underserved populations, including Tribal and BIPOC communities. Founded in 2018, MCCJ engages in initiatives such as building community food forests, youth leadership development, and protecting legacy forests to promote environmental sustainability and social equity. Through its programs, MCCJ impacts over 1,000 people annually by fostering local food security, advocating for policy changes, and empowering youth to take active roles in their communities.

Q1: What does your organization do?

[Mason County Climate Justice](#) (MCCJ) is a multiracial, multigenerational, community-based nonprofit based in Mason County, WA, and the sovereign Skokomish and Squaxin Island Nations. Co-founded in 2018 as an all-volunteer grassroots collective, MCCJ grew into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2023. We currently have two paid staff members and dozens of volunteers.

We collaborate to build community food forests, teach workshops, provide a rural perspective on policy, defend legacy forests so that they become old growth, develop a Just Transition, and organize our community to take charge of our shared future.

Our Mission:

Mason County Climate Justice envisions and co-creates local climate solutions that regenerate healthy ecosystems, benefit everyone in our rural community, and align with climate justice movements around the world.

Our Programs:

- 1. Cedar Stewards of Mason County** (a.k.a. CSMC, pronounced "cosmic") is Mason County Climate Justice's youth leadership development program focused on environmental/climate justice, housing justice, civic engagement, and community organizing. Named by the youth themselves, CSMC began as a way to bring youth voices to Mason County's comprehensive plan update. In CSMC, young people are treated like the experts they are of their own lives and communities. They read and interpret RCWs, suggest edits to proposed policy documents, offer public comment, collect data, give presentations, and organize communities. Over the last few months, CSMC youth identified housing and the climate crisis as the top ways that current government policy is failing them and their future. The youth have begun to identify and advocate for solutions. Through CSMC, the youth gain knowledge of how the system works, explore avenues for positive change, deepen their relationships with one another, receive intergenerational mentorship, and prepare themselves to take leadership now and in the future.
- 2. Regenerative Agriculture:** Mason County Climate Justice's Regenerative Agriculture Program increases local food security through collaborative community food forests, gardens, and plant giveaways. In 2024, we gave away/planted more than 6,500 fruit trees, nut trees, berry bushes, and native plants to local communities, prioritizing collaborations with our underserved communities. Furthermore, regenerative agriculture builds healthy soils, creating a healthy soil carbon sponge that soaks up and filters water, which in turn reduces flooding, reduces drought, improves water quality, and increases access to local fresh food not dependent on long supply chains that can be disrupted by climate impacts. Our fruit tree plantings in our community food forests also provide protection from heat waves through shade and transpiration.
- 3. Legacy Forest Defense:** One of our biggest local defenses against climate change is the protection of our legacy forests, which are clearcut logged at an alarming rate in our county. Colloquially known as "the old growth of tomorrow," legacy forests retain significant biological, structural, and genetic legacies of the natural and old growth forests that once

dominated the area. If our legacy forests are allowed to return to their natural old growth state, they will once again sequester more carbon per acre than the Amazon rainforest ([source](#)). MCCJ has successfully passed a local resolution to protect legacy forests, blocked a local resolution aiming to clearcut more forests, saved one public forest from clearcut logging, used formal legal defense strategies, and educated/organized hundreds of community members, including Tribal members who are concerned about loss of their cultural traditions.

4. **Land:** Land is a key strategy for addressing the root causes of inequities.

- *Skokomish Land Back Project:* Despite being just 5% of the global population, indigenous-controlled land safeguards 80% of biodiversity on this planet ([source](#)). Due to legacies of genocide, broken treaties, and outright land theft, many Tribal reservations have “checkerboard” gaps in them where the land is not owned by the Tribe but rather by individuals, which weakens Tribal sovereignty. With approval of the Skokomish Indian Tribe, MCCJ is in process of purchasing privately-owned land on the Skokomish reservation so that we can return the land to the Tribe.
- *Land Conservation Project:* Mason County Climate Justice is currently under contract to preserve 70 acres of legacy forest, a salmon-bearing stream, multiple biodiverse ecosystems, and native plants important for Tribal cultural traditions. We have 5 years to raise the funding to pay off a generous seller-financed loan. We hope to pay it off sooner so that we can spend our funding on programs rather than interest.

Q2: What communities does your organization serve and how does your staff, leadership, advisors and board reflect these communities?

MCCJ serves the rural and small-town communities of Mason County, WA and the sovereign Skokomish and Squaxin Island Nations, with specific accountability to our frontline communities (Tribal, BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color], low-income, disabled, youth, immigrant, unhoused, LGBTQ+, and other underserved communities). As a climate justice organization, we address racial, gender, economic, and other inequities by focusing on root causes.

We reach more than 1,000 people annually through our fruit tree giveaways, community food forests, environmental justice workshops, legacy forest protection, youth civic engagement, and other community organizing to ensure a livable and equitable future for all.

MCCJ is by, of, and for our local communities. Founded as an all-volunteer collective by BIPOC community members in 2018, MCCJ grew to become fiscally sponsored in 2021 and gained our own 501(c)(3) status in 2023. Our current leadership is 100% local and rural, as well as majority disabled and majority BIPOC. 100% of staff are BIPOC women. In addition, we have a 100% Tribal/Indigenous Advisory Council, who bring their perspectives as individual members of the Skokomish, Squaxin, and Q’anjó’al Nations. Our 2025 Board of Directors is multiracial (50% BIPOC and likely to increase to 60% BIPOC later this month), multigenerational, gender-diverse (women, men, and non-binary), mixed-class, and mixed LGBTQ+/heterosexual.

Our organization started as an all-volunteer collective with a \$0 budget in response to the lack of existing local frontline-led multiracial, multigenerational, mixed class community organizing. Each phase of our growth has come from listening to our local communities. For example, our first fundraising effort was for a PO box requested by incarcerated students who wanted to stay in touch after we held a series of educational workshops in the Shelton prison. Our Regenerative Agriculture Program was launched because a mixed Native young adult who grew up in Belfair had a vision of abundant fresh food in his hometown. Our youth civic engagement program exists because high school students (Latino, Black, and white) said they wanted to participate in government meetings and have an opportunity to make positive change.

Because everyone involved lives, works, learns, plays, and/or prays here, we are committed to the long-term success of our shared home.

Q3: How is your organization addressing root causes of inequities to drive change?

To understand how MCCJ addresses root causes of inequities, it’s important to understand our rural context. Mason County is a place where white supremacist and white nationalist organizing is visible and, in many cases, socially acceptable. It’s a place where almost all non-Tribal positions of power are filled by older white men. Mason County is also home to two Tribal Nations

and one of the largest concentrations of indigenous Mam and Q'anjob'al immigrants in the entire United States. Furthermore, statewide and national movements sometimes propose urban-centric policies that unintentionally exacerbate inequities in sparsely populated, under-resourced rural communities like ours.

Here are just a few examples of how we address root causes of inequities in our programs and operations:

- 1. Government Accountability:** We hold our local government accountable to statewide laws intended to address inequities. We do this through community organizing, youth leadership development, public comment, and data collection/analysis/presentation. For example:
 - HB 1220 requires local jurisdictions to identify and end racial inequities in housing, so we are advocating for proper implementation in the Comprehensive Plans of Mason County and the City of Shelton. We used American Community Survey census data combined with WA Center for Real Estate Research data to uncover the fact that Mason County has less than half the subsidized housing compared to our neighboring counties (Kitsap, Thurston, Jefferson, and Grays Harbor counties).
 - We currently have an affordable housing survey to get input from everyone in our community on their lived experience with housing barriers and their vision for the future of local housing. For equity and accessibility, that survey is offered in 3 written languages (English, Spanish, and Q'anjob'al), and we held three events with interpretation in English, Spanish, Q'anjob'al, and Mam (a traditionally oral-only language). We offered gift cards as appreciation for survey participants whose first language is not English or who are unhoused.
- 2. Local societal attitude shifts:** As appropriate, we release position statements that provide leadership and perspective for our community. These position statements are tied to real-world action and serve to shift the cultural attitudes that create the conditions for ongoing inequities. For example, we recently jointly released this statement with a partner organization:
"On Jan 13, 2025, Mason General Hospital was notified that someone spray painted trees on their property with swastikas, the N-word, and '1488,' a white supremacist reference to Hitler. MGH immediately did the right thing and covered it up. We at Mason County Climate Justice and the Mason County HOST Program believe that our community is one that should not tolerate racism, religious oppression, or any other form of hate. Each of us has a role to play in ensuring a safe and welcoming community. We know that not every property owner has the means to take care of vandalism on their property, so we are offering volunteer labor and donated supplies to help any property owner that needs support cleaning up after an act of oppression. We hope that others in the community will join us in shared action. Together, we can help create the welcoming Mason County that we all deserve."
- 3. Coalition work:** We work with coalitions such as Front and Centered and the Pacific Northwest Forest Climate Alliance. We benefit from strength in numbers and learning from other coalition members. We also contribute a rural BIPOC perspective on policy proposals.
- 4. Operations:** Our leadership is intentionally diverse and based on local community. We value lived experience in hiring staff and recruiting board members. We have a 100% Native/indigenous Advisory Council made up of individual members of both our host nations (Skokomish and Squaxin) and a member of the Q'anjob'al Maya Nation. In addition, our Code of Ethics provides guidance for how all Board, staff, super volunteers, contractors, youth leaders, and interns can work towards addressing root causes of inequity (for more details, see our [Code of Ethics](#) and our [Youth Code of Ethics](#)).
- 5. Cedar Stewards of Mason County (CSMC):** Although the program is less than a year old, we have had some huge successes. Some of our proposals have already become official policy of Mason County, including the following items added to the Countywide Planning Policies:
 - "Prioritize mitigating the [climate change] impacts on vulnerable populations and overburdened communities."
 - In the context of encouraging public participation in policy decisions, we successfully got the word "citizen" replaced with the phrase "widespread community," to ensure that the needs and wisdom of all Mason County residents, not just citizens, are included in policy-making.

In addition, a 17-year-old Black CSMC participant is on his way to officially serving on the City of Shelton's Comprehensive Plan Update Steering Committee. As far as we know, this would be the first time that a youth has served on a local government committee outside of a school board. Furthermore, Shelton is a former sundown town

and some neighborhoods still have (currently illegal and unenforceable) racist covenants forbidding Black people from living there, so his appointment in this role would be a major systemic shift.

Q4: How would this award impact your organization and the communities served?

We are applying to many different grants right now to sustain our recent growth. This award would be used wherever the biggest funding need is after all restricted funding is announced/allocated.

Here are some examples of how additional funding could impact our programs and our organization:

1. **Cedar Stewards of Mason County:** The current funding source for our youth civic engagement program ends after June 2025, but we are committed to continuing this program and expanding it to additional schools. Additional funding could support the continuation of this successful program. The youth themselves are already planning for future years, and we want to continuously support their leadership. Furthermore, we hope to eventually hire a Tribal or bilingual/bicultural Youth Civic Engagement Program Manager to support the growth and reach of this program.
2. **Regenerative Agriculture:** In 2025, we hope to purchase land to create a community hub that is easily accessible to underserved communities (BIPOC, immigrant, non-English-speaking, poor, disabled, etc.). This hub will provide demonstration gardens, a safe gathering space, and mutual aid areas for sharing resources, such as compost, building supplies, and plants. Purchasing land will protect our community's long-term access to clean air and water, fresh food, and more. Because our current regenerative agricultural projects are on shared land, MCCJ's existing projects are vulnerable to economic pressures and changes in our organizational partners' leadership. For example, our oldest food forest is located on church-owned land. In 2023, the church had financial struggles and seriously considered selling the land, which would have ended the local community's access to free, fresh food. This would have forced us to rebuild from scratch, as the fruit trees were already too big to relocate. By purchasing land for our Regenerative Agriculture Program, we can ensure that our underserved communities see the fruits of their labor and enjoy the benefits for generations to come.
3. **Land Conservation Project:** This funding could cover 20% of the total costs of our upcoming 70-acre land purchase, reducing overall costs (by reducing the principal) and allowing staff/volunteers to spend more time on programs and less time on fundraising. This land will be for the benefit of all through climate change mitigation/adaptation; preservation of contiguous habitat and biodiversity; and access to recreation, education, and healing. It will serve to address historical and current inequities by providing opportunities for Tribal traditions, a safe place for BIPOC, and more. View pictures and videos of the property [here](#).

Q5: Does your organization partner (or plan to partner) with other organizations?

Yes! Much of our work happens in partnership or mutual support. Thus far, we have worked together with:

- Squaxin Island Tribe's Salish Roots Farm
- Skokomish Indian Tribe's Housing Department
- Skokomish Indian Tribe's Tuwaduq Family Services
- Hoodspout Timberland Library
- Shelton Timberland Library
- North Mason Timberland Library
- Grapeview School
- Pioneer School District
- Cedar High School
- CHOICE High School
- The Evergreen State College's Sustainability in Prisons Project
- The Evergreen State College's Center for Climate Action and Sustainability
- CIELO
- Evergreen Mobile Homeowners Cooperative
- Mason County Master Gardeners
- Legacy Forest Defense Coalition

- Shelton Veteran Village/New Horizon Communities
- Shelton United Methodist Church
- Shelton Faith Lutheran Church
- Belfair Pride
- Allyn Days
- Recovery Cafe
- Mason County HOST Program
- Next Steps Collaborative
- ...and more!

We are currently exploring new partnerships, such as with the Shelton YMCA, more organizations in North Mason, and local Tribal smokehouses (traditional spiritual houses).

Q6: Is there anything you'd like to tell us that we haven't asked?

We were not able to find a way to enter the primary contact's email address in Section 3 of this application. The primary contact's email address is julianne@masoncountyclimatejustice.org

Thank you very much for this opportunity!

Reviewer Notes

How does this organization build community power?

-

How does this organization build individual capacity?

-

How is this organization altering systemic structures and behaviors

-

Other Notes

-

Your Rating

Unreviewed

Update Notes

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