

46th District Democrats Legislative & Statewide Questionnaire

Candidate Information

Candidate Name: **Mary Verner**

Office sought: **Commissioner of Public Lands**

Mailing address: **P.O. Box 3914**

Spokane, WA 99220

Phone: **509-994-7206**

Email: **teamverner@maryverner.com**

Campaign Manager Name: **Christopher Friend**

Consultant(s):

Website: **www.maryverner.com**

Facebook: **<https://www.facebook.com/MaryB.Verner/>**

Have you read the 46th LD Democrats Draft 2016 Platform? Yes ___X___, No _____

(Go to http://www.46dems.org/2016_ld_caucus and click "Draft Platform")

Why are you running for this office?

Washington's public lands are precious resources that underpin our state's character and economy. Our forests, waters, agricultural lands and outdoor recreation spaces need and deserve careful stewardship to protect their value for present and future generations of Washingtonians. My career in managing natural resources within large, complex governmental organizations, combined with my lifelong commitment to sustainable resource management, create an ideal fit for me to serve as the head of the state's Department of Natural Resources.

The priority challenges facing our public lands fall into three broad categories: Forest Health and Wildfires; Impacts of Development; and, Climate Change. The office of Public Lands Commissioner holds immense responsibility and vast opportunity to make a meaningful difference for present and future generations. As a results-driven leader, with the experience and vision to bring people together for positive change, I will pursue actions to address these challenges with a tenacious urgency.

Please briefly describe your qualifications for this office and your personal and professional background.

During the years I served Inland Northwest Indian Tribes (Spokane, Colville, Kalispel, Kootenai, and Coeur d'Alene), I played a key role in managing forests sustainably (integrated resource management plans and their implementation), protecting clean water (federally-enforceable Tribal water quality standards), and restoring fish and wildlife habitats (Columbia River salmon and resident fish).

As a citywide elected Mayor of Spokane, and formerly a City Council member, I led the charge with other elected leaders, labor organizations, businesses, and academia to maintain financial stability for our local economy during the deep global recession. I maintained steady leadership of the city

through natural, economic, and legal storms. At my direction, the city fostered innovative public-private- NGO partnerships to develop a clean-energy and environmental-sustainability emphasis in the greater metropolitan service area. We combined urban forest and stormwater plans to design aesthetically-pleasing and low-cost catchments for contaminated runoff that significantly reduced water pollution. And much more. Just as I deployed the powers of the Mayor's office to achieve tangible improvements for the metropolitan area, I am ready to similarly act as Commissioner of Public Lands to apply the power of community to achieve multiple beneficial values from Washington's public lands.

Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Have you ever been a member of another party? Have you been actively involved with the Democratic Party?

I have always been a member of the Democratic Party because Democrats value public participation, include multiple perspectives, and strive to provide equal opportunity for all people. I have held non-partisan elected office upholding these values, and have served as a volunteer Democrat (PCO and other activities) in both Spokane County and Pierce County.

What's your plan to win?

Building on existing widespread support throughout Eastern Washington, I am introducing myself and sharing my message in all areas of the state. My Seattle-based Campaign Manager is overseeing our outreach strategies and fundraising. My campaign will rely on earned and social media and direct mail to carry my message state-wide. As the candidate, I am personally engaging in every forum I can possibly attend, and sending a surrogate when schedule conflicts cannot be resolved.

What do you see as the most important functions of the position you are running for? What qualities do you possess that make you the candidate best suited to this role?

The most important function of the Commissioner of Public Lands is to effectively lead a large state agency, with fiscal accountability, motivating and overseeing employees, and engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the sustainable and visionary management of millions of acres of public lands. As the former Mayor of Spokane, and previously Executive Director of Tribal natural resource agencies, I have successfully led large workforces, incorporated diverse stakeholder interests, and achieved tangible results. I already understand the agency's complex administrative functions, political landscape, and trust responsibilities. I am prepared to lead the Washington Department of Natural Resources immediately upon being elected, knowing the scope of the Commissioner's duties and authorities from the outset.

If elected what would your top three priorities be?

Forest Health. Hundreds of thousands of acres of our state's forests are in decline due a combination of factors, including: past harvest practices, disease and insect infestations, and encroaching development. Unhealthy forests exacerbate related conditions, including: increasing risks of catastrophic wildfires, deteriorating habitats for fish and wildlife, declining outdoor recreation options, and the loss of economic value (land assessments, timber and associated jobs, revenue to local governments and schools). As Public Lands Commissioner, I will engage with federal, tribal, local, non-government and business leaders to pursue an action agenda to restore the forests of the Evergreen State to good health.

Development Pressures. Washington is a state filled with opportunity and, unfortunately, the accompanying pressures on our natural resources. With population growth, urban-to-rural expansion, and perpetual demand for jobs, we need corresponding plans to channel and manage these opportunities in a way that maintains individual freedoms while avoiding further decline of the essential natural assets that we all share in common. Conversion of agricultural and forest lands, construction of homes in wildfire-prone forests, development of communities in geologically-hazardous areas, surface water runoff into streams and oceans – these cascading impacts of human activity take their toll on the underpinnings of Washington’s greatness. As your Commissioner, I will proactively partner with other elected officials and leaders to find solutions, to accommodate our state’s growing diverse population in the present, while maintaining opportunities for future generations.

Climate Change. Global climate conditions compel a new plan for Washington’s natural resources. Changes in ocean conditions, variability of the four seasons, unpredictable extreme weather, and other factors are accelerating, with sweeping implications. With your support, I will be your Public Lands Commissioner who takes bold and innovative action – with partners such as the US Department of Defense, business alliances, and national environmental organizations – to change the underlying economic models that impede our response to the climate crisis. As the head of Washington’s Department of Natural Resources, I will vigilantly monitor the impacts of climate change and constantly reevaluate management strategies. I will work hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for Washington’s lands, waters, and communities in these challenging and uncertain times.

How will you support women and families’ economic opportunities? Would you support legislation closing the wage gap, funding childcare options, and requiring paid family leave?

Having already been responsible for DNR’s Human Resources Division, I have ensured that the Division and Regions provide genuine equal opportunities for all, in recruitment and in the workplace for those who are hired. DNR has advanced and supported wage increases for public employees. I personally support legislation that closes the wage gap, particularly as a woman who has experienced for many years the gender disparity in professional compensation. I strongly believe in fair wages and family and medical leave, and will ensure that DNR implements laws and policies to benefit the agency’s workers.

How will you work to address racial equity?

I am dedicated to make Washington’s public lands work for everyone. If elected Commissioner of Public Lands, I will work proactively to engage all communities both to raise their awareness of the availability of public lands for their benefit, and to seek their input into how our public lands are managed. Also, with my many years of working with Washington’s Tribes, I have been personally immersed in addressing environmental justice for Native Americans. While working for the Spokane Tribe full-time, I completed law school and we made global giant Newmont Mining responsible to clean up uranium that had been dumped on the reservation, and we adopted federally-enforceable Tribal air quality and water quality standards that have helped force cleanup and pollution controls for the entire region. As Executive Director of Upper Columbia United Tribes, I coordinated efforts to restore the member Tribes’ rights to clean water and return of the salmon fisheries. I will honor the

Tribes' sovereign rights with a deep understanding of their meaning for present and future generations.

Describe your stance on Washington's tax structure. What needs to be changed? What should stay the same?

Tax exemptions should serve a tangible and quantifiable public purpose. Foregone revenue is an expense to the taxpayers, and should be accounted on the books as such. Exemptions should sunset after periods long enough to calculate their actual public benefit; at their sunset term, the legislature and public can determine whether or not exemptions should be extended for additional terms.

While I will not have direct responsibility for tax code reform as Commissioner of Public Lands, if elected, I will engage with others in the discussion and the important role that DNR plays by providing money for schools through DNR's management of public lands to generate revenue for the state.

Are there issues that you've worked on or are excited to work on that are not receiving much media attention?

The media attention on alternative energy has waned, and this is an issue I am both passionate about and have been engaged in for many years. To address the underlying causes of climate change, we must re-focus on the underpinnings of energy supplies.

There also is good work occurring, with WA DNR playing an important role, in preservation of natural areas and public use of these areas for research. Concepts such as Community Forests and designation of forested areas for carbon sequestration research can be replicated, and there is opportunity to gain support for these projects with more media attention. Scientific research is essential to help land management agencies make sound decisions for the future of our forests, waters, and habitats.

How will you combat climate change?

Energy consumption is the fundamental driver behind climate change. Society's predominant reliance upon fossil fuels must transform, rapidly. Pursuit of clean energy options has been in my portfolio for years as an executive for Tribes and the DNR. As Commissioner of Public Lands, I will steadfastly pursue energy conservation and alternative energy as a DNR priority.

I will use the authorities of the Commissioner's Office to reinvigorate statewide engagement in solution-finding for Washington to be a leader in clean energy. On a regional level in the Spokane metropolitan area, I have proven my ability to bring government, business, and community organizations together to reduce energy consumption and demonstrate the business case for energy conservation and alternative fuels.

These successes can be replicated and expanded within DNR's core mission of natural resources management. An effective market mechanism also is needed to reduce carbon emissions, and I will work with the Governor, our federal delegation, state legislators and stakeholders to overcome obstacles that have caused our state to defer adoption of incentives and disincentives that will make a meaningful difference.

Immediate reductions can be achieved by avoiding the smoke that blankets our state with unhealthy and carbon-filled emissions during wildfires. Wildfires in 2015 were exceeded only by transportation

as a source of emissions for Washington. My experience leading the state’s wildfire program through the last two historically unprecedented wildfire seasons tells me that important changes must be made to successfully prevent emissions and other devastating damages of wildfires across our state. I am already embarked on a series of tangible changes, and will steadfastly pursue short and long-term improvements in our state’s wildfire program.

| Question | Support | Oppose | Qualify, if needed |
|--|---------|--------|---|
| Do you support or oppose Raise up Washington’s initiative to increase the minimum wage? | X | | The initiative alone seems reasonable and appropriate; I have not researched opponents’ concerns regarding potential adverse ramifications. |
| Do you support or oppose access to safe and legal abortion? | X | | |
| Do you support or oppose amending Washington’s Constitution to require a two-thirds vote to raise revenue? | | X | |
| Do you support or oppose allowing coal or oil to be exported from Washington State’s ports? | | X | Disallowing such exports will not be simple; legal issues abound, and attempts to block exports will succeed or fail based on multilateral strategies. Parallel concerted efforts must be made to reduce coal and oil consumption, lowering the demand for fossil fuels in both domestic and foreign markets. Aggressive energy conservation an alternative fuel sources are essential corollaries to opposing exports. |
| Do you support or oppose making two years of community college or technical school tuition-free? | X | | Budget realities will make this goal difficult to achieve; basic K-12 educational needs still have not been fully met. WA Dept. of Natural Resources makes important contributions to school construction funds. |
| Do you support or oppose requiring paid vacation and sick/safe leave? | X | | Leave accrual rates may need to allow for sliding scales to avoid unintended consequences of mandatory leave accruals. |
| Do you support automatic voter registration? | X | | |
| Do you support or oppose the death | | X | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| penalty? | | | |
| Do you support or oppose barring employers from asking criminal history questions in job applications? | | | Yes, I support for the vast major of job applications. There are positions for which criminal histories are relevant disclosures due to the nature of the work/workplace. |
| Do you support or oppose legislation to fix Washington's "three strikes" law? | X | | |

Commissioner of Public Lands

In 2015, Washington faced the largest and most destructive forest fires in history. What will you do as Lands Commissioner to prevent or respond to wildfires?

Two types of improvements are needed: prevention, and response.

To prevent wildfires, DNR and other landowners must aggressively address the forest health crisis. Land management tools must be employed to reduce fuels in dead, diseased, and overstocked stands. Where forest materials cannot feasibly be repurposed, prescribed burning should be used when fuel and meteorological conditions allow.

Traditional wildfire education approaches still work – educate children about the serious risks of playing with flammable materials; inform shooting enthusiasts about the risks of starting wildfires when using incendiary materials; remind citizens in all parts of the state of their important roles in wildfire prevention. I will partner with others to leverage resources and resurrect a vibrant public education campaign. In addition, I will embark in dialogue with local building officials and county/city governments to encourage greater awareness of FireWise techniques and how “fire adapted communities” are essential in areas of the state that are prone to wildfires.

With population growth, development on forested lands, and climate change, it is inevitable that wildfire risk is growing. Thus, prevention must be augmented by aggressive and effective wildfire suppression response. I will continue to work with state and federal legislators, stakeholders, and DNR’s partner firefighting agencies to increase the number of trained, equipped, and response-ready forces who can quickly suppress small fires and rapidly contain those fires that escape and grow larger. I am already deeply engaged in this important work, and reformation of state wildfire response will remain a paramount public safety initiative if I am elected to head the DNR.

Timber, many parts of the state, is a hot button issue. While some want to protect our forest canopy, others see jobs and resources for building schools as more important. Where do you land in this debate? How will you use your position to find compromise?

I am well respected by environmental organizations for my record as a conservationist. Forest products industry leaders also see me as a common-sense collaborator. My own responsibilities have included the paradox of protecting forests for non-timber values and logging forests for wood products and jobs. This is a familiar area for me in which I’ve led organizations to achieve the balance for sustainable forest management. I do not see the issues as either-or, but as points of common ground from which we can launch meaningful dialogue. I am experienced bringing people together to build consensus, and I am confident in my ability to navigate difficult compromises.

