



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **July 13, 2017** Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting, held at the Skagit County Administration Building in Mount Vernon.

Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Jay Lind, Paul Dinnel, Morty Cohen, Julie Barber, Nathan Biletznikoff, Sarah Tchang, Todd Woodard, Tracy Alker, Phyllis Bravinder, Kit Rawson, Jude Apple, Jamey Selleck, Betsy Stevenson
- **MRC Members Absent:** Matt Reynolds
- **Others Attending:** Pete Haase (Morty's alternate); Gina Johnson, Salish Sea Steward; Richard Brocksmith, Skagit Watershed Council; Clair Cook, PBNERR; Charlette Thurman, SCPW; Katylani Siplin, SFEG; Marta Green, San Juan County LIO

Call to Order and Introduction: Jamey Selleck called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: The June 8, 2017, MRC meeting minutes were revised to include the discussion about the lack of science behind the "Orca Friendly" labeling.

Public Comments:

- **Oil Spill Response: Dispersants Workshop:** MRC members Phyllis Bravinder and Nate Biletznikoff attended the workshop on June 13th at Friday Harbor, San Juan Island and provided a brief summary. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together different stakeholders to share information and elicit feedback about oil spill response, dispersant science and decision making. Although there is a lot of concern about the use of dispersants and their environmental impacts, federal and state agencies indicated that they would prefer to leave the option of using dispersants in the toolbox, but only as a last resort. Will King, a UW Friday Harbor Labs grad student is working on a dispersant literature review for San Juan County marine waters. As a follow-up to the workshop, Will is scheduled to present his findings at the San Juan County MRC meeting on August 2nd at 8:30am in the Council Chambers at Friday Harbor. MRC members suggested inviting Will to our next MRC meeting to present his findings, or try to get a recording of Will's presentation.
- **Killer Whale Research and Conservation Program 2017 Request for Proposals:** Nate announced that Shell Oil Company is contributing \$250,000 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Killer Whale Research and Conservation Program this year and has committed funding for this program for three years. The other funding partners include Sea World Entertainment Inc. and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Foundation Killer Whale Research and Conservation Program recently sent out a [Request for Proposals](#) which are due July 14, 2017. Grants won't be awarded until December. They anticipate awarding up to \$900,000 in funding for grants this year. The majority of awards under this program will fall in the range of \$50,000 to \$150,000. A minimum of a 1:1 match of cash and/or in-kind services is required. Projects may extend from one to three years. The priorities will be the proposals that implement the three strategies that aid in the recovery of the Southern Resident killer whale population of the Salish Sea including: increase prey availability, improve habitat quality, and strengthen management through research. The Northwest Straits Foundation indicated that they plan to submit several proposals.

Orca Protection Outreach Campaign: Marta Green, San Juan County Local Integrated Organization (LIO) Coordinator

- Southern resident orcas are threatened by a trifecta of issues including: a lack of prey (Chinook salmon), noise and disturbance from vessels, and pollution. In an effort to help protect southern resident orcas, a group of environmental organizations filed a petition with NOAA to establish a federal [Whale Protection Zone \(WPZ\)](#) along the west coast of San Juan Island. There is currently a [Voluntary Whale Protection Zone](#) in place to try to keep boats a quarter mile away from the shoreline when orcas are present, but the program is not well known or observed.
- The San Juan County Council decided not to support the petition to establish a federally mandated WPZ because of concerns about the potential economic impacts on the whale watching companies, effects on recreational anglers, potential conflicts with tribal treaty rights, and the difficulty of enforcement. Instead, San Juan County wants to try to find an alternative to the WPZ by taking local action in orca conservation. The San Juan County LIO currently has enough funding for one year to accomplish some of their goals.

- The first step they are taking is to initiate community engagement and develop an outreach campaign to determine the willingness of folks to change their behavior such as: staying further away from the whales, slowing down vessels in the presence of whales, limiting the number of whale watching vessels, etc. They hope to accomplish this by reaching out to different interest groups, hosting educational workshops, and increasing boater awareness (particularly visiting boaters) by promoting the [Soundwatch Boater Education Program](#) and their [Be Whale Wise program](#), and installing interpretive signage at boat launches and marinas. In addition to education and outreach, they plan to work with WA Department of Fish and Wildlife to increase active enforcement of the regulations already in place.
- Another way they plan to take action is to help promote the [Port of Vancouver BC initiated a voluntary Vessel Slow Down trial](#) that will be starting August 7, 2017 – Oct 6, 2017 in the Haro Strait. The purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of slowing vessels down to reduce acoustic impacts on whales. Potential financial and operational impacts to the shipping industry will also be evaluated. Several shipping companies have already confirmed their participation. MRC members discussed the role of the pilots and the importance of communicating this program to them so they will talk to the ship captains about slowing their vessels down.
- Marta said they would like to extend the awareness campaign to other neighboring areas such as Skagit County. Sarah suggested that Marta present this information to the Port of Anacortes Marina Advisory Committee and possibly the Washington Public Port's Annual Environmental Meeting in September. Pete suggested getting in touch with Beam Reach Marine Science and Sustainability school because they are involved in working with other partner to try to reduce acoustic impacts on whales. Skagit MRC members discussed different places where the 'Be Whale Wise' brochures could be distributed in Skagit County including: the Port of Anacortes, local marinas, boat charters, the Anacortes Visitors Bureau, and marine supply stores. Salish Sea Steward volunteer Gina Johnson offered to help distribute the brochures. Phyllis suggested that we try to keep the outreach message focused on this as a voluntary effort, not regulatory. Skagit MRC members also discussed the possibility of seeking funding to provide 'Be Whale Wise' signage at public boat launches and marinas. Unfortunately, because Skagit County does not currently have an LIO, Skagit MRC cannot apply for some of the funding available through the Puget Sound Partnership's Near Term Action Agenda. However, there are opportunities to partner with other counties that do have LIOs such as San Juan County.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Jamey Selleck and Jay Lind*

- Snohomish MRC's MyCoast App: Snohomish MRC developed a new smart phone app "[MyCoast app](#)" which can be used by citizen scientists to share photos and location data points for king tides, abandoned boats, storm surge, creosote logs and beach change. It could also have potential applications for other MRCs.
- MRC Funding: State funding for MRCs was approved by the state legislature for the 2017-2019 biennium, thanks to Tom Cowan and Senator Kevin Ranker. This funding will help supplement the 2017-2018 MRC Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)/Puget Sound Partnership.
- 2018 Action Agenda Update and Near Term Action (NTA) solicitation process: The public comment period is now open for the Action Agenda update. This year there is a single solicitation period and technical review for the NTAs. The official request for project proposals will be issued September 28. The Partnership's State of the Sound report will be out in September.
- Salish Sea Studies Institute: Ginny Broadhurst is the Director of the newly established Salish Sea Studies Institute at Western Washington University. Ginny will be working to build connections and improve communications with a diverse group of local and regional partners and resources.
- Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference sessions: Lucas and Jamey submitted a conference session proposal that aims to highlight citizen science projects and kelp. Jamey also submitted a conference session proposal on rockfish.

Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Jay Lind*

- NWSF Operations/Administration: There has been some discussion about moving the Foundation office from Bellingham to Padilla Bay to share office space with the NWSC in order to save money. Heidi Lehman, Administrative Coordinator, left the NWSF mid-June for a new position. Nicole Jordan is now working with the NWSF one day a week as communications coordinator.
- New Animated Short Film: Caroline is looking for ideas on venues to roll-out their new animated short film created by Andrea Love about the Northwest Straits Initiative (NWSI). Please send ideas on venues to roll-out the new film to Caroline at gibson@nwstraitsfoundation.org.
- 2017-2018 Budget: The NWSF approved their 2017-2018 Budget at their June meeting.

Administrative Report: Tracy Alker

- MRC Progress Reports- Due July 18th (next Tuesday). Please send Tracy project updates and MRC related volunteer hours!
- MRC Staff meeting next Tuesday, July 18th
- 2018 Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference- The call for session proposals has been extended to July 28, 2017. The theme for this year's meeting is "Ecosystem Recovery in an International Transboundary System". The conference will be held in Seattle this year. There might be some funding available for some MRC members to attend the conference.
- MRC Display Help: We need volunteers to help host the MRC display and games at events. Please let Tracy know if you are interested in hosting the display at Fidalgo Bay Day (Aug 12th 11-3) and/or the Skagit River Salmon Festival (Sept 9th, 10-6). Please share ideas for updating posters and activities and for hosting activities.

Project Status & Discussion

- Bowman Bay Nearshore Restoration: A planting party hosted by the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group was held July 11th. Beach seining and forage fish surveys continue to occur on a monthly basis. The intertidal and woody debris monitoring took place on July 10th. They had a really great turnout of volunteers! Lots of park visitors were asking questions about the monitoring, so it was a great opportunity to do some outreach.
- Tide Pool Interpretive Sign: The panel was printed and sign base fabricated and delivered to Washington Park in Anacortes. It is anticipated that the sign will be installed by August 15th. A dedicated group of eight Salish Sea Stewards from the class of 2017 is in the process of developing a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the sign.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: The event will be held Saturday, August 12, 2017 at the Fidalgo Bay RV Resort. The event is being widely advertised in the paper and online. A crew of volunteers has also been putting up posters all over town. Thanks to Nate, Shell Puget Sound Refinery is providing some funding for Fidalgo Bay Day this year through the Friends of Skagit Beaches. The money will be used to pay for some things that the MRC Grant can't be used for. Some of the highlights of this year's event include: Shannon Point Marine Center's aquarium touch tank, beach seining demonstration, educational displays and activities, kid-friendly crafts and games, discovery stations along the Tommy Thompson Trail, passport activities and prizes, complimentary samples of local seafood, and Samish no-host BBQ salmon lunch. New this year, visitors will get to create luminarias with tea lights for a lighted procession to be held later in the day. Visitors and event participants will also have an opportunity to help create a large mural that will be hung on the wall. Katylani Siplin, an AmeriCorps with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, designed the Fidalgo Bay Day mural which will be cut into large squares for each person to color and place on the wall as one large mural. At the MRC meeting, Katylani shared a similar mural that she did as a project with one of the local elementary schools. She also shared a small sketch of what the Fidalgo Bay Day mural will look like. Unfortunately, Katylani will be starting graduate school soon so she will not be able to attend Fidalgo Bay Day to see the finished product. Pete confirmed most of the displays. It looks like we will have a full house of displays and activities! Gina Johnson is the new food service lead. Morty is in charge of the parking crew and Sarah is the lead for face painting. Pete is looking for volunteers to help with the craft tables. Tracy could also use some help with the MRC display and games.
- Salish Sea Stewards: 26 out of the 34 new Salish Sea Stewards graduates completed a two page survey. The planning committee will be meeting in September to review the survey results and where the volunteers are contributing most of their volunteers in order to help develop and improve next year's training program. Two new Salish Sea Stewards, Gina Johnson and Rachel Best, joined the Salish Sea Stewards planning subcommittee. Morty said that one of the challenges has been in recruiting volunteers to help with intertidal monitoring. Although the intertidal monitoring at Skagit MRC's Bowman Bay restoration site was well attended, only a few new Salish Sea Stewards showed up to help with the monitoring at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve this year. The thought is that it could be due to the physical demands for some of the older volunteers, the long hours, and the comfort level of volunteers in species identification. It should also be noted that the Salish Sea Stewards are primarily being encouraged to support MRC projects so there is less emphasis on recruiting volunteers to support non MRC projects such as DNR's Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve.. The only intertidal monitoring that the MRC is involved in is at Bowman Bay and March's Point.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration: Most of the monitoring has been completed. The oyster settlement from last year was very good (about the third highest in 15 years!). Paul is working with the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife to put out stacks of tiles to test a new type of substrate for oyster settlement to compare how it does in conjunction with shell strings and cultch bags. They will be collecting data every two weeks, instead of just once a year. They've already started seeing settlement of a few native oysters around the first of July. Paul plans to check the sample bags out at Cypress Island next month.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration: The field work was done in early spring. The final report will be completed by September 30th.

- Forage Fish Index Site Surveys: Monthly surveys continue at Skagit MRC's three Forage Fish Index sites: Ship Harbor, Similk Bay on the Swinomish Reservation, and Samish Island. Surf smelt eggs have been observed at the Similk Bay sites, but no smelt eggs have ever been found at the Ship Harbor or Samish Island sites.
- European Green Crab Monitoring: Monitoring continues. To date, only two green crabs of the same cohort have been found in Padilla Bay.
- Weaverling Spit Beach Nourishment Restoration: The Weaverling Spit Restoration project was originally scheduled to be completed last fall, but had to be delayed for another year due to permitting issues. Unfortunately, the project bids came in much higher than the original cost estimates so Todd had to request additional funding from the Samish Indian Nation's Tribal Council. Fortunately, they were extremely generous and approved additional funding to help move this project forward. The bid has been awarded and they should be under contract with the bid winner in a week or two. Construction will begin September 5th and is anticipated to take just two weeks to complete.
- Recreational Crabber Outreach: Gina reported that Salish Sea Stewards conducted crabber outreach to 342 crabbers at boat launches on opening weekend. Outreach packets included a crab gauge, WDFW regulations, escape cord sample, and 'Catch More Crab' rack cards. Volunteers documented the comments and questions received and made suggestions for improving crabber outreach in 2018. Gina suggested that it would be great for the volunteers to have some kind of crabber outreach training prior to going out and talking to crabbers. It would be good for the volunteers to have a clear understanding about how to rig a crab pot properly with biodegradable escape cords, and to be familiar with some of the regulations. The Committee recommended volunteers check out the crabber outreach [videos](#) created by the Northwest Straits Foundation. They also suggested that the volunteers don't answer regulatory questions but instead should refer the crabbers to contact the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). WDFW has a lot of great information about crabbing, including an informative [video](#), on their [website](#). Articles about the NWSI crabber outreach were published in the [Anacortes American](#) and the [Skagit Valley Herald](#).
- Kayak Kelp Surveys: Zoe Zilz was hired by the Northwest Straits Foundation in June as the summer kelp coordinator. MRC kelp survey volunteers recently participated in a phone conference with Zoey. Three new Salish Sea Stewards and volunteers from the Anacortes Kayak Club will be helping with kelp monitoring this year. With the additional help we will be able to increase the number of survey sites to three this year including: Coffin Rock, Shannon Point, and Biz Point. Kimberly Cauvel, a reporter with the Skagit Valley Herald, is interested in doing a story about the kelp monitoring.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements:

- Marine Renewable Energy Seminar Series- August 8 at Padilla Bay (6:30pm-8:30pm). Other dates include: August 15 at the Olympic Natural Resources Center, Forks (7:00pm-9:00pm); and August 21 at the Northwest Maritime Center in Pt Townsend (6:00pm-8:00pm). Seminars are free and open to the public! Learn about the current status of marine energy research, and what forces will shape its development, particularly in Washington State. Discuss the environmental, social and engineering challenges (and opportunities!), as well as current research to understand and proactively address these issues. This series is coordinated by Washington Sea Grant (WSG), in partnership with the Northwest Straits Commission and the Skagit, Jefferson and North Pacific Coast Marine Resources Committees.
- Taste of Padilla Bay – with a Hint of Maine- Aug 19: The Padilla Bay Foundation will hold their auction dinner fundraiser on Saturday, August 19th at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. This year's fundraiser will support a Touch Pool Experience in Padilla Bay's aquarium room as well as the Coastal Volunteer Partnership Program. The event will feature a sumptuous buffet and both a silent and live auction with live music by Jumbled Pie.

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m. The next MRC meeting will be held Thursday, August 10 2017, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort in Anacortes (4701 Fidalgo Bay Rd, Anacortes)