



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

*Minutes of the June 14, 2018, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting, held at the Port of Anacortes*

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Jay Lind, Paul Dinnel, Tracy Alker, Sarah Tchang, Pete Haase, Lynne Jordan, Morty Cohen, Phyllis Bravinder, Nathan Biletznikoff; Rachel Best
- **MRC Members Absent:** Matt Reynolds, Julie Barber, Todd Woodard, Jamey Selleck, Jude Apple, Betsy Stevenson
- **Others Attending:** Gina Johnson, Salish Sea Stewards (Rachel's Alternate); Amy Carey, Sound Action; Jason Morgan, NWSF; Annie Thomas, NWSF; Tarrell Kullaway, NWSF; Darla Gay Smith, Salish Sea Stewards

**Call to Order and Introduction:** Paul Dinnel called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

**Approval of Minutes:** May 10, 2018, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.

**Public Comments:** None.

## **Sound Action:** *Amy Carey*

Sound Action contacted the Skagit MRC to share information about the work they are doing to protect the nearshore habitats in Puget Sound. Amy expressed her appreciation of the work that the MRCs do and said that she would like to see the Northwest Straits Initiative (NWSI) model be expanded to the south Puget Sound area. Sound Action's work as a regulatory watchdog started up in 2013 out of concern for the loss of nearshore habitat, one of the biggest threats to the health of Puget Sound. In Washington State, the Hydraulic Code is the primary law governing nearshore habitat protection. The Hydraulic Code specifically calls for the protection of forage fish spawning areas when considering HPA permit decisions which is why forage fish surveys are so important for documenting forage fish spawning habitat. Projects that involve any in-water work (e.g. construction of docks, bulkheads, marinas, bridges, dredging operation, etc.) require a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) permit under the jurisdiction of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The main goal of Sound Action is to review each and every one of the shoreline HPA permits to make sure that the regulations are being followed and the best available science is being used in the permit approval process to ensure the protection of the fish and fish habitat in Puget Sound. Sound Action takes an exhaustive approach by researching the scientific data, historical records, making site visits, and working with consultants. They typically review over 500 permits each year. HPA permits can be accessed on WDFW's website under APPS: [www.wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/hpa/](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/hpa/). According to Sound Action, almost all of the HPAs get approved, but only around 20% of them actually meet the no net loss of habitat requirement. If Sound Action finds that important science-based information was missing or overlooked and regulations weren't followed for approving a particular permit, they will work with WDFW to address and resolve the issues through an informal appeal process. If the permit still gets approved without appropriate provisions to protect fish and habitat, Sound Action will take legal action through the formal appeal process. To learn more about the work of Sound Action or to join their email list go to:

<https://soundaction.org/>.

## **Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report:** *Nate Biletznikoff*

- Nate was unable to attend the last NWSC meeting. Instead, he reported on a recent meeting with NOAA and the National Marine Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Sand Point as part of the orca recovery effort. Fisheries biologists from several different agencies discussed the scientific data and opportunities surrounding the prey availability and priority areas for the southern resident killer whales. Kelp recovery, forage fish, and eelgrass are all important components in the recovery effort for southern resident killer whales (SRKW) and are a top priority of the NWSI. This was all done in advance to prepare for the Governor's SRKW Task Force Meeting that will focus on prey availability.
- **Next NWSC Meeting:** The next Commission meeting will be held Friday, June 29 in Coupeville from 9am-3pm. Each MRC will be presenting one of their project proposals for the 2018-2019 MRC Grant. Pete Haase will be presenting the Kids on the Beach project proposal on behalf of the Skagit MRC. MRC members are welcome to attend.

## Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Tarrell Kullaway and Jay Lind*

- **New NWSF Interns:** NWSF recently hired two new interns; Dana Oster, Nearshore Restoration Intern, and Annie Thomas, Monitoring/Citizen Science Intern. A new communications internship is now available which will focus on coordination and promotion of MRC work that supports the recovery of Southern Resident Killer Whales.
- **Social Media:** The NWSF now have their own social media profiles on Facebook (@NWStraitsFND), Twitter (@NWSFoundation) and Instagram (@NWStraitsFND). Please like and invite others to like them!
- **Seeking New Board Members:** The NWSF Board is seeking candidates with non-profit experience for board membership.
- **MRC Opportunity Fund:** Skagit MRC's proposal for the Salish Sea Stewards retreat is currently under review. They will make their decision within the next week or two.
- **Boeing Grant Opportunity:** The NWSF applied for a \$50k Boeing Grant for MRC stormwater management projects in Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties. In addition, Boeing will donate \$250 for every 10 hours a current Boeing employee volunteers which the NWSF is eligible to receive.
- **Fundraising:** Tarrell will continue to work to solicit private localized support for each MRC.
- **Derelict Crab Pot Removal:** Morty shared an article that was recently in the Anacortes American about the Northwest Straits Foundation's derelict crab pot removal project in the Guemes Channel that recently took place. The Skagit Valley Herald, NPR and Komo 4 News also covered the story. Information can also be found on the Foundation's Derelict Gear Facebook page. 614 derelict crab pots were identified and targeted for removal. However, Jason said that because of the mucky bottom, their operations much slower so they were only able to remove around 450 pots. Some of the pots that could not be removed were disabled so they could no longer trap crabs. Around 80% of the crab pots that were removed in the Guemes Channel were commercial pots, most likely due to vessel traffic and gear conflict. This was unusual because in most cases, the derelict crab pots they have found have been recreational pots. Recreational pots are usually lost due to user error. The NWSF was able to identify and return most of the commercial crab pots back to their owners. The pots that were still in good shape, but had no identification were donated to the local Puget Sound Anglers group to use for fundraising. The pots that were in really bad shape were taken to Skagit River Steel, a salvage yard for recycling. Jason will provide a project report once all of the data is finalized.
- **Kukatali Reserve Restoration Project:** The Northwest Straits Foundation is providing some grant funding that was left over from the Shannon Point Restoration project to support the Kukatali Reserve Restoration project. Construction on the tombolo will begin in July. Volunteers will help with some of the pre-construction monitoring in June including beach wrack, large woody debris, and forage fish surveys. Monitoring will continue after construction is complete.

## MRC Administrative Report: *Tracy Alker*

- **Joint MRC Meeting:** Island and Whatcom MRC expressed interest in having a joint meeting with Skagit MRC in July. Tracy requested feedback regarding potential dates, times, location, agenda items, etc.
- **2017-2018 MRC Grant Progress Reports- Due July 10:** MRC progress reports and volunteer hours are due July 10<sup>th</sup>. All state funds in the current MRC Grant must be spent in the April-June reporting period. Those funds will expire if not used by June 30. Extensions are not possible.
- **2018-2019 MRC Grant Applications:** Comments have been received. Tracy is working on the revisions. The MRC Grant will likely be finalized in August. The Grant start date will be October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019.

## Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards- *Morty Cohen*:** The last class was held on May 22, 2018 at Padilla Bay. 26 very enthusiastic new volunteers graduated from the program this year. Class evaluations will be reviewed and results will be considered for developing next year's program. The MRC's goal of linking volunteers with volunteer opportunities has been working out really well. Morty suggested the MRC take a look at volgestics to see how many of the people who take the classes end up volunteering and how long they actually continue to stay engaged. Darla Gay Smith said that happens quite frequently with the WSU Beach Watchers in Snohomish County as well. WSU actually interviews volunteers for the Beach Watchers training program which helps with team building, volunteer commitment, and engagement. Morty said that might be something to consider when recruiting new volunteers for next year's Salish Sea Stewards training. Jason noted that volunteer participation in nearshore monitoring has been increasing each year. A volunteer appreciation picnic sponsored by the Friends of Skagit Beaches was held at Washington Park in Anacortes on June

12<sup>th</sup>. It was well attended by over 50 volunteers. Joan Drinkwin provided a brief update to the volunteers. The Salish Sea Stewards planning committee will be meeting soon to start planning next year's training.

- **Bowman Bay Nearshore Restoration- Jay Lind:** We now have a contract with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to continue working with volunteers throughout this summer to water and weed the plantings at Bowman Bay. A volunteer weeding and watering work party will be held at the site on Friday, June 22 from 10am to 1pm. RSVP Kelsey Taylor at [ktaylor@skagitfisheries.org](mailto:ktaylor@skagitfisheries.org).
- **Fidalgo Bay Day- Pete Haase:** Fidalgo Bay Day will be held September 15 this year at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Volunteers are starting to line up to help with different tasks. Betty Carteret, with the Friends of Skagit Beaches has organized the Passport Activity and prizes for Fidalgo Bay Day for many years. This year, Betty volunteered to help the MRC organize the Passport Activity and purchase prizes with MRC Opportunity Funds. She was able to acquire several copies of the Seadoc Society's new kids' book "Explore the Salish Sea: A Nature Guide for Kids" to give as prizes for the discovery station passport stations. Betty is also taking the lead in putting together an educational marine plastics display with MRC Opportunity funds for Fidalgo Bay Day in partnership with Zero Waste Washington. The display will be used for other events as well.
- **Kids on the Beach Pilot Project- Pete Haase:** Mira Lutz with One Ocean Environmental has done an excellent job developing and implementing the Kids on the Beach Pilot Project for the MRC. 50 eighth grade students from Conway Middle School participated in the program this year. This project taught the eighth graders how to write research proposals, conduct field research, sort through historical data, and perform statistical analysis. The students presented their findings at the Science Symposium this Friday, May 11 at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. The students seemed to have a pretty good understanding of the scientific process and the different environmental variables related to nearshore restoration. There was an excellent article in the Skagit Valley Herald about the program. Pete shared a poster that the Conway Middle School students created about what they learned from this project. Pete and Mira are working on a final report. The program will be expanded to other schools next year. Pete also shared a poster created by the kids from Anacortes Island View Elementary School who came to the Fidalgo Bay RV Beach to learn about forage fish surveys on May 24<sup>th</sup>.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration- Paul Dinnel:** Paul created a new native oyster restoration poster that was presented at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Open House on May 19<sup>th</sup>. Field season is going really well. Volunteers are collecting quadrat samples of shells along transects for post larval settlement of native oysters this month. Native oysters are counted and measured to provide density and size data. Lots of new oyster settlement!
- **Pinto Abalone Recovery- Paul Dinnel:** The field work is now complete. The data will be analyzed and a final report will be generated before the end of September.
- **Forage Fish Index Site Surveys- Pete Haase:** Monthly surveys continue at Skagit MRC's three Forage Fish Index sites: Ship Harbor, Similk Bay on the Swinomish Reservation, and Samish Island. Pete said we are at the point now where we have enough trained volunteers and gear that we will probably add one or two more sites to survey. The sites will need to get approved as index sites by the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). WDFW held a forage fish survey training for 25 Northwest Straits Initiative volunteers on June 1 at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. There was even a waiting list for the training because it was so popular.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys - Phyllis Bravinder:** Phyllis has been working with Suzanne Shull, Bob Weathers, Joan Drinkwin, and Tracy to try to get a better handle on who is doing what. We are also trying to connect some of the new Salish Sea Stewards volunteers who have expressed interest in this project with the volunteers who already have experience with the kelp surveys. The lead volunteers for each site will schedule their own surveys which will likely start in July. Survey sites include: Coffin Rocks, Biz Point, and Shannon Point. The Northwest Straits Commission hired Emily Bishop to help oversee this project and to make sure the volunteers have what they need.



#### **Certificate of Appreciation to Morty Cohen:** Sarah Tchanga

Sarah presented Morty Cohen with a Certificate of Appreciation for his five years of service on the MRC. Since 2013, Morty contributed over 810 volunteer hours!! We are extremely grateful for Morty's leadership, dedication, enthusiasm, and fresh perspective that he brought to the MRC along with the many countless hours he contributed as the Project Lead for the Salish Sea Stewards program. Morty said he learned a lot as an MRC member and still plans on being an active volunteer in the community.



### **Miscellaneous Events and Announcements:**

- Fidalgo Shoreline Academy- October 20: The Friends of Skagit Beaches will hold its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Fidalgo Shoreline Academy on October 20<sup>th</sup> at the Fidalgo Bay Resort in Anacortes. It will be a full day of workshops focused on our marine ecosystems, regional watersheds, and wildlife, as well the rich cultural heritage of our region. The Keynote Speaker will be Dr. Jude Apple.

**The meeting adjourned at 11:12 a.m. The next MRC meeting will be a joint potluck MRC meeting with Island and Whatcom MRCs held Wednesday, July 18, 2018, 11am-1pm at Padilla Bay**