



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the December 13, 2018, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting, held at the Port of Anacortes

- **MRC Members Attending:** Sarah Tchang, Jay Lind, Lynne Jordan, Pete Haase, Paul Dinnel, Phyllis Bravinder, Darla Gay Smith (Rachel Best's Alternate) Tracy Alker, Jamey Selleck (called in)
- **MRC Members Absent:** Rachel Best, Todd Mitchell, Betsy Stevenson, Nathan Biletnikoff, Jude Apple, Todd Woodard
- **Others Attending:** Wayne Huseby, Friends of Skagit Beaches; Dana Oster, NWSC; Diane Hennebert, City of Anacortes; Matt Castle, Samish DNR

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: October 11, 2018, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written. There was no MRC meeting in November because of the MRC Conference.

Public Comments: Paul welcomed Diane Hennebert, the new Stormwater Coordinator with the City of Anacortes. Diane replaced John Franz who recently retired.

Kelp Recovery Plan Update: *Dana Oster and Jamey Selleck*

Since 2017, the Northwest Straits Commission has been working in collaboration with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF), NOAA Fisheries, Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to develop a Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan for Puget Sound. Several workshops were held last year to summarize what we know and don't know about kelp, which resulted in a lengthy literature review. It turns out there is a lot more that is unknown than known about kelp which makes it difficult to formulate a strategy for recovery. We are now heading into year two of this effort. The focus for 2019 will be on identifying the data gaps, priorities, and what can be accomplished in the next year or two with a smaller budget. To help identify the data gaps and priorities, a survey will be sent out to as many stakeholders as possible (e.g. tribes, scientists, researchers, local government agencies, etc.). The feedback from the survey will help frame the agenda for the next workshop that will be held on February 28th at Padilla Bay. The main focus of the workshop will be to look at the high priority data gaps and develop a strategy to start filling those data gaps. There will be a limited number of seats at the first workshop, but at least one member from each MRC will be invited to attend. Dana said they will also look into the possibility of setting up a WebEx to enable more people to attend. The second workshop will be held Olympia sometime in the spring or summer of 2019 which will focus on the policy side of things. There will be a discussion regarding the current management framework and how it relates to kelp, and what the state, county and tribal planners, managers, and policy makers see as challenges and needs and actions to include in the Kelp Recovery Plan. Dana encouraged MRC members to stay informed with what is going on in the kelp the recovery effort and get involved in some of the outreach.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Dana Oster*

- **Pinto Abalone Status Presentation:** Hank Carson, Research Scientist with WDFW, presented the historical overview, population status and recovery program for pinto abalone. Research shows that the pinto abalone population is on the brink of extinction in Puget Sound because there are just too few of them to reproduce on their own in the wild without human intervention. Public meetings were recently held in Port Townsend and Anacortes. WDFW is seeking public comments regarding the proposed status change through the end of March, 2019.
- **Southern Resident Killer Whale Recovery:** The San Juan MRC recently hosted a southern resident killer whale recovery community workshop to discuss the commitments and actions that have been taken since last year's workshop. The next community workshop is scheduled for January 8. The San Juan MRC will be staffing a booth at the Seattle Boat Show to support their Be Whale Wise and whale warning flag project. The Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council added orcas as the 11th vital sign in the 2018 Action Agenda.
- **Next NWSC Meeting:** January 25 in Island County.

Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: Jay Lind

- **NWSF Administration:** Caroline will be taking extended personal leave. She will be working with the NWSF board to help with some of the administrative duties while she is away. The NWSF board president, Anne Murphy, will likely take on the role as the Interim Executive Director until they can find someone else to fill that position.
- **MRC Opportunity Fund:** The Foundation approved a \$6,000 request for the Skagit MRC to conduct a volunteer program needs assessment and host a facilitated workshop for the Salish Sea Stewards program. The goal is to help identify the structural and organizational needs of the volunteer community; identify opportunities for volunteer leadership and self-governance; look at other opportunities for partnerships and sources of funding; and move forward towards a sustainable volunteer-based model. The volunteer needs assessment survey will be sent to volunteers and other organizations with volunteer programs to help identify the needs, priorities, and goals of the volunteer community. The feedback from the survey will help frame the agenda of the workshop. Keeping the volunteers actively engaged is a key component to the success of the program. Lynne suggested looking into the Islands Oil Spill Association (www.iosaonline.org) as a potential funding partner for the Salish Sea Stewards program. The timeline for the survey and workshop has not been set yet, but it will happen within the next year or so. MRC members who would like to be involved in the planning process should contact Jay or Tracy.
- **New Communications Staff:** The NWSF hired Kenny Clarkson as their new Communication Specialist. Kenny will likely be making the rounds to MRC meetings to talk about his new position.

MRC Administrative Report: Tracy

- **MRC Grant Progress Reports Due- January 11:** MRC members were asked to submit their volunteer hours and report any leveraged funding or work in kind for MRC projects to Tracy before January 11th.
- **2019 Annual MRC Workplan:** The 2019 Annual MRC Workplan is being updated and will be routed to MRC members for review and to provide input.
- **MRC Conference Reimbursements:** MRC members who attended the MRC Conference in Port Townsend were reminded to send their hotel invoices and ferry receipts to Tracy as soon as possible for reimbursement.
- **MRC 20th Anniversary Celebration:** Skagit MRC was officially established 20 years ago on May 4th, 1999. Tracy is looking for ideas to help celebrate the Skagit MRC's 20th Anniversary. Some of the ideas discussed included: sending out a press release, writing an article in the paper, and making it part of this year's Fidalgo Bay Day event.
- **MRC Officer Elections- January 10:** We will need to elect MRC Officers at the January 10th MRC meeting including MRC Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as the NWSC Representative and NWSC Alternate. Paul and Sarah can serve a second term as MRC Chair and Vice-Chair if interested. Nate and Jude both indicated they can no longer serve as the NWSC Representative and NWSC Alternate. Phyllis and Pete expressed interest in serving as the new NWSC Representative and NWSC Alternate.
- **NWSI Funding Support Strategy:** Lucas is requesting that each County MRC draft a letter for the County commissioners to sign and send to their state legislators expressing the importance of the MRC and the need for state funding. The intention of the letter is to raise awareness of the MRCs as we enter the next legislative session. Lucas provided a template that we can use and suggested we highlight a few MRC projects. Pete pointed out the importance of wording the letter in such a way that is meaningful to the legislators so they will see the value in the work that we do.

2019 MRC Conference Discussion: All

Sasha sent out a conference evaluation survey which had a good response rate and a lot of positive feedback. The NWSC is looking for ideas for future venues. The Skagit MRC was well represented at the 2019 MRC Conference. It was the NWSI's 20th Anniversary which included a celebration during the evening reception with cake. Former MRC members were invited to attend as well. Senator Kevin Ranker was the keynote speaker. There were many excellent presentations including: Tribal Treaty Rights; Southern Resident Orca Recovery; Ecosystem Health; MRC Story Crafting; Marine Debris; Sea Level Rise, and Bull Kelp. Pete and Mira also gave an excellent ignite presentation on the "Kids on the Beach" program. Phyllis said the presentation on bull kelp was excellent! Pete noted that very few people attended the MRC Story Crafting session which was unfortunate, because the MRCs seem to fall short when it comes to effectively telling our story and popularizing our message to connect to the broader community. Tarrell with the NWSF will be hosting a storytelling workshop with the Whatcom MRC at their January MRC meeting. If there is enough interest, we could invite Tarrell to host a similar workshop for the Skagit MRC. Pete suggested that the Skagit MRC consider forming an MRC Outreach Subcommittee to work on our messaging, updating and improving our display, and having a greater presence at special events.

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards:** Joan Drinkwin has been contracted to serve once again as the Salish Sea Stewards Program Coordinator. The SSS Planning Subcommittee met with Joan on December 6th to start planning the 2019 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program. The training will be approximately 40 hours spanning ten weeks, starting March 19 – May 21, 2019. In return, volunteers will be asked to commit 40 hours of volunteer time towards MRC or related projects. Classes will be held every Tuesday from 1:00pm to 5:00pm at the Padilla Bay Reserve Facility. The facility has already been reserved. The curriculum will be very similar to what it was last year, with a few minor changes. For the first day, Joan will provide a lengthier overview of how the program works and what volunteer opportunities will be covered. We are also looking for a really great speaker for inspiration on the first day. Because our budget for this project was reduced, we will need to charge the applicants a small fee to cover the cost of their background checks. The fee will be handled by the Friends of Skagit Beaches or the Northwest Straits Foundation. The Friends of Skagit Beaches has also agreed to cover some of the other costs that the MRC Grant cannot cover. The application will be available on the MRC website. The application deadline is March 1. Joan already has a list of about five names of people who have expressed interest in signing up for the 2019 training.
- **Fidalgo Bay Day:** Fidalgo Bay Resort has been reserved for next year's Fidalgo Bay Day on August 24th, 2019. Jay will be working with Pete and Gina to plan and coordinate the event. The Friends of Skagit Beaches will once again host the very popular Discovery Passport Station activity. We will also have the beach seining activity and the Shannon Point Marine Center touch tank. MRC members talked about celebrating the Skagit MRC's 20th Anniversary as part of Fidalgo Bay Day. Phyllis suggested coming up with a fun interactive activity to help visitors make the connection with the Skagit MRC.
- **Forage Fish Surveys:** The index site surveys continue at Similk Bay, Ship Harbor along Guemes Channel and Samish Island. Skagit County Intern Charlotte Turman is the MRC lead for the index sites. Although we've never found any sand lance eggs at any of our sites, this is the time of year that we might start seeing some. Pete said that we've been collecting samples in Fidalgo Bay for over six years now, so we might need to start scaling back soon. A dozen or so trained volunteers and project managers recently convened to start looking at the six years of data and figuring out the best way to analyze it. There are over 200,000 data points! Pete said that we might be able to pick up a few more index sites to survey if sampling is scaled back in Fidalgo Bay. Volunteers have been collecting forage fish survey data at the Kukatali Reserve restoration site twice a month. Pete suggested folks go check it out now that the restoration work is done. The site is really starting to change shape. Just pay attention to the tides! Wayne thanked Pete for coordinating the forage fish surveys in Skagit County for the last six years.
- **Kids on the Beach Project:** Last year we contracted with Mira Lutz to develop and implement this pilot project. Mira recently got hired with the SeaDoc Society/UC Davis as their new Education Coordinator. We are currently working on contract negotiations with UC Davis to continue to expand the program to other schools in 2019. We've gotten several inquiries about the program from other schools, so we know there is interest.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration:** We now have a contract in place with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to continue plant maintenance activities in 2019. Lisa and Tracy completed a walkthrough of the planting at the restoration site with SFEG staff on November 9th. After the walkthrough, SFEG hosted a volunteer work party to plant 300 shrubs donated by SFEG with Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant funds. Despite the horrible weather, a group of around 8 very dedicated volunteers, including Pete, showed up to help with the planting. There was also a nice article in the Anacortes American about the planting. The plants are really filling in nicely, particularly the dune grass and coastal strawberry. The shrubs are still struggling a little bit because of the harsh conditions. We will likely be planting more evergreen trees and shrubs at the site in 2019.
- **Pinto Abalone Recovery:** The 2018 report has been finalized and submitted. Tracy will post the report on the MRC website. We now have a signed contract in place with Puget Sound Restoration Fund. PSRF will continue monitoring in 2019 to look for survival, growth, and new natural recruits. So far they have not seen any naturally spawned juvenile abalone which is concerning. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is currently seeking public comment on a proposal to change the status of pinto abalone from a Species of Concern to a State Endangered Species. The preliminary status report for the pinto abalone in WA can be found online: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02031/>. WDFW recently held public meetings in Port Townsend and Anacortes to present background information, answer questions, and receive comments. The public can submit comments and

information about the species to Michael Ulrich at WDFW via email to Michael.Ulrich@dfw.wa.gov, by phone (360-902-2737), or mail at Fish Program, P.O. Box 43200 Olympia, WA 98504-3200. The public comment period is extended through March, 2019. Paul requested the MRC consider writing a letter of support for changing the status of pinto abalone to a State Endangered Species, especially since pinto abalone recovery is one of our main projects and a high priority for the MRC. Paul offered to draft the letter for approval of the MRC. Because we are an Advisory Committee to the Board of County Commissioners, we will need to make sure they approve of the letter. The Committee discussed how the letter of support might be stronger and more meaningful if we linked it to some of our other work such as kelp recovery. Elected officials would also probably like to know the economic impact.

- **Olympia Oyster Restoration:** Paul is working on the data analysis and report which will likely be done sometime in December. With funding from the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, additional oyster seed was applied across a half acre of shell along Weaverling Spit in early November. Additional shell was also distributed across half an acre near the trestle to improve substrate for oyster settlement. A new book on Goods and Services of Marine Bivalves just came out. Paul worked with Betsy Peabody on one of the sections in the book that highlighted the value of citizen scientists in oyster restoration across the United States and included a photo of Sarah Tchang. The book was shared with MRC members and is available for free online: <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319967752>.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys:** The monitoring effort has grown from just two volunteers to seven volunteers monitoring three kelp bed locations in Skagit County. Last year Joan helped connect some of the new Salish Sea Stewards volunteers with the more experienced volunteers so they could learn the kelp survey protocols. It ended up taking too much of Joan's time, so Phyllis will be taking on that role this year. The volunteers usually schedule and coordinate the surveys on their own. Phyllis said that it has been a bit of a challenge to figure out who is doing what and when.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements:

- **Storming the Sound-** January 24, 9am-4:30pm at Maple Hall in La Conner. Storming the Sound is a conference for environmental educators in the north Puget Sound region to share their interest and expertise. They are currently seeking presenters. There is a registration fee of \$10. You can register online: <http://www.pacname.org/regional-chapters/washington/storming-the-sound/#tab-id-1>.
- **Terry Stevens Retirement Open House:** January 10, 4pm-6:30pm at Padilla Bay. RSVP is required.
- **Friends of Skagit Beaches Annual Winter Lecture Series:** The first lecture will be held **January 18, 2019** at the NW Education Services District Building in Anacortes, 7pm-8:30pm. "Forage Fish in the Southern Salish Sea" presented by Dr. Todd Sandell, PhD, Senior Forage Fish Biologist, WDFW. He will discuss recent studies that will help lead to better understanding, protection, and management of these crucial fish species, their habitats, and the species that depend on them. For more information about this and other upcoming Lecture Series topics please visit www.skagitbeaches.org

The meeting adjourned at around 11:00 a.m. The next MRC meeting will be held January 10, 2019 at the Skagit County Administration Building in Mount Vernon (1800 Continental Place).