



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the April 9, 2020, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Webex Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Tracy Alker, Jay Lind, Pete Haase, Diane Hennebert, Phyllis Bravinder, Rachel Best, Jude Apple, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Kathy Thornburgh, Betsy Stevenson, Kevin Anderson
- **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson, Todd Mitchell
- **Others Attending:** Jason Morgan, NWSF; Dana Oster, NWSC; Lucas Hart, NWSC; Kimberly Cauvel, SVH; Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Darla Gay Smith, FOSB & MRC Alternate

Call to Order and Introduction: Betsy Stevenson called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

- **Approval of Minutes:** February 13, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written. Skagit MRC's March 12 meeting was cancelled due to COVID 19 health concerns.

Public Comments: No comments

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Pete Haase, Lucas Hart, and Dana Oster*

The last NWSC meetings were held February 28 and March 27, 2020 – Webex Conference Calls

- **NWSC/NWSF Retreat Webinar:** The retreat that was originally scheduled for March 26-27 at Padilla Bay was postponed due to COVID-19. Instead, the Commission hosted a Webex Conference call on March 27. Lucas has been working with Hilary Wilkerson, the retreat facilitator, on putting together a two-hour webinar that will focus on one of the topics that would have been covered at the retreat such as: how the Commission and Foundation can support the MRCs, how to improve communications to help raise a higher profile of the MRCs in the community, and filling economic seats on the MRCs. They will also be discussing the impacts of COVID-19 and making adjustments for moving forward in the face of this pandemic. The date of the webinar has not been set yet.
- **MRC Virtual Project Sharing:** The NWSC is working on a plan to host a 1.5 hour Zoom video-conference every two weeks for MRC members to share project information over a seven week period. The goal is to give each MRC an opportunity to highlight one or two of their projects and to share a short overview about how each MRC works followed by a question and answer period. The presenters from each MRC would be identified ahead of time. Dana is seeking feedback from the MRCs to see if this is something they would be interested in. Several Skagit MRC members expressed interest.
- **Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan:** The Plan is close to being finalized. A notification will be sent out to the MRCs when the final Plan is released later this month.
- **MRC Conference:** The Conference date has been changed to November 13-14 at the Maritime Center in Port Townsend. **Note: The Friday after the MRC meeting, the NWSC announced that the 2020 MRC Conference has been postponed and will be rescheduled in 2021. This decision was made due to the recent guidelines and concerns regarding public gatherings, and new fundraising challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.*
- **Next Monthly NWSC Meeting:** April 24 (WebEx Conference Call 10am – 12pm).

Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Jay Lind and Jason Morgan*

- **NWSF New Video Series:** The Foundation recently released a new video series called “Salish Seafresh” that highlights the local region and the work that we do. The first video featured Aslan Brewery and Nerka Sea-Frozen Salmon in Bellingham. The video can be viewed on the Foundation’s website. www.nwstraitsfoundation.org. The Foundation is in the process of planning their next video that will feature Taylor Shellfish and Semiahmoo Resort and are looking for ways to help fund it.

- **Fundraising and Outreach:** The Foundation's fundraising and outreach activities that were planned for this spring have been put on hold due to COVID-19. They are currently working on different ways to stay engaged and connected with their members including live webinar presentations on various projects and weekly highlights featuring volunteers and staff.
- **Nearshore Monitoring:** Most of the nearshore monitoring activities have been put on hold for a while as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic. The intertidal monitoring training that was originally scheduled for May 3 will be rescheduled for June or early August. The intertidal surveys that were supposed to take place at the end of May at the trestle and Fir Island have been postponed. The intertidal surveys in Fidalgo Bay and Bowman Bay are still planned for August 2nd and 3rd. Jason said that if these social distancing requirements continue through the summer, he could potentially conduct the beach wrack, large woody debris, and forage fish surveys on his own if necessary as long as he can still get access to the sites. This will be the fifth year of monitoring at Bowman Bay so the original plan was to take next year off. However, if most of the monitoring gets postponed this year, it will resume again next year and then be reduced after that. The Foundation currently has funding for nearshore monitoring through March 2021. Jason applied for additional grant funding to continue nearshore monitoring through March 2023. He has also been busy working on the monitoring data and hopes to get a report finished soon.

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards:** 26 participants registered for the Salish Sea Stewards training. Classes started March 10th. All of the speakers and topics were top notch and well received including Sasha Horst and Pete Haase who presented an overview of the NWSI and Salish Sea Stewards. The participants were very enthusiastic and asked a lot of great questions. Unfortunately, due to COVID 19 health concerns, the rest of the classes through March were postponed. The remaining classes will be held through Zoom video-conferencing. The field training will take place later this summer after it is determined safe to do so. The first Zoom class was held August 7, with around 34 participants online. Jude facilitated the class which included a quick overview on how to use Zoom and a presentation about marine debris and beached seabird surveys presented by Hillary Burgess with the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team and a presentation about plankton presented by Chandler with Padilla Bay NERR, followed by questions and answers in the chat box. Darla and Rachel thanked Jude, Susan and Chandler for doing such an excellent job putting the training together and for finding alternative solutions to keep it going! Jude announced that they recently hired Sara as the new Coastal Training Coordinator at Padilla Bay. Sara, will be starting in a couple of weeks and will be involved with the Salish Sea Stewards training program. In addition, Rachel Best has been hired as the new Office Coordinator at Padilla Bay and will be starting May, 1, 2020!
- **Fidalgo Bay Day:** The date for this year's event has been set for Saturday, August 29, 2020 at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Skagit County's new intern, Aida Miller, is coordinating Fidalgo Bay Day this year. Jay Lind is the MRC Event Chair. The Fidalgo Bay Day Planning Subcommittee held a meeting on March 2 to get an update on task assignments. We are still in need of volunteers to take the lead in planning and coordinating the chowders and kids craft activities. A half page ad was placed in the 2020 Skagit Valley spring/summer Recreation & Activity Guide that will go out in the Anacortes American, Skagit Valley Herald, and at www.goskagit.com in April and run through August. The Shannon Point Touch tank will likely be available for the event this year, but students and/or volunteers will need to be recruited to help with the activity. Diver Laura confirmed that she will host her virtual reality diving experience. Rosie Cayou's no-host salmon BBQ lunch and fry bread has also been confirmed. The Friends of Skagit Beaches will once again be sponsoring and coordinating the Discovery Passport activity. However, we might need to be prepared to make adjustments for social distancing or cancel the event this year depending on the COVID-19 situation.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration:** Beach seining and forage fish surveys at the restoration site have been canceled until further notice due to COVID-19 health concerns. The next plant maintenance party is scheduled for May 29th to coincide with Skagit Water Weeks, but that will likely need to be canceled as well.
- **Forage Fish Surveys:** Forage fish surveys have been canceled until further notice due to COVID-19 health concerns. Although social distancing could be practiced while doing the forage fish surveys, most of the survey sites have been closed to public access.
- **Kids on the Beach:** The classroom visits for Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley and Concrete School Districts were originally scheduled to take place later this month and the beach activities were supposed to take place in May. The planning, logistics, and curriculum are already to go. However, now that the schools have been closed for the remainder of the school year due to COVID-19, Jude said they will need to discuss other options for moving forward

with the Kids on the Beach program. They might be able to shift the programs that were planned for this spring into the fall. They are also looking into options for a virtual classroom program.

- **Pinto Abalone Recovery**: Surveys started up again in February. Paul said he is waiting for an update from Josh Bouma with Puget Sound Restoration Fund to find out more details about the work that has been accomplished. Josh is currently working on a detailed QAPP required by the MRC Grant.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration**: Paul will be starting field work in a couple of weeks to collect cultch bags in Fidalgo Bay to monitor oyster recruitment. It is uncertain whether or not more cultch bags will be put out for next year. It will likely be a minimal sampling year. Paul has been working on updating data from the work that was done last year and has also been working on his upcoming presentations for Skagit MRC's Salish Sea Stewards training through Zoom.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys**: A kelp WebEx meeting was held on Friday March 6th from 9:30am-11:30am to review the MRCs' 2019 kelp monitoring season data. Surveys will likely start again in July 2020.

MRC Administrative Report: *Tracy*

- **MRC Grant Reports Due**: MRC Grant reports are due this Friday including quarterly progress reports, volunteer hours and the 2019 MRC Annual Report. MRC members were also reminded to submit their volunteer hours if they haven't already done so. Tracy thanked the project leads for reviewing and editing the annual report and thanked Betsy for providing a really nice blurb about the MRC's 20th Anniversary.
- **MRC Grant Amendment**: The MRC Grant has been amended to include the Kids on the Beach and Salish Sea Stewards projects and added funding for year two of our ongoing projects through September 30, 2021. However funding and deadlines for year one projects could not be extended. State funding for the year one projects must still be spent by June 30, 2020. We are working on an Interlocal Agreement with Padilla Bay for the Salish Sea Stewards and Kids on the Beach programs.
- **MRC Project Presentations**: MRCs usually present their Grant projects to the Commission in June. Commission staff will be evaluating alternatives for presenting projects if we are unable to have a meeting in-person.
- **NW Straits Foundations Opportunity Funds**: Deadline for applications was originally May 8, 2020, but has been extended to June 15. Grants are competitive, are not guaranteed, and are funded entirely through individual contributions. Currently, a total of \$20,000 is available. All seven MRCs are eligible to apply. The projects must: engage volunteers in the community, specify a clear marine conservation, restoration, and or/ stewardship goal; and identify outcomes and measurable results.
- **Orca Forums**: Caroline is taking the lead on coordination for the Orca forums. She is working on securing the speakers. They were originally considering having the forums in early June before the funding runs out, but will depend on the status of the coronavirus situation.
- **MRC Staff Meeting**: The major topic of discussion was how each of the MRCs are handling COVID 19. All MRCs have put field work and in-person meetings on hold. The MRCs have been conducting meetings remotely with Zoom, Webex, and conference calls. Some County budgets for MRCs have also been reduced and have had hiring freezes to deal with the COVID outbreak. Volunteer liability insurance coverage within each County was also discussed. Kelp kayaking liability coverage from the NWS Foundation will be requiring basic level of safety training for all participants.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- **Photography and Art Contest- April 20th (Earth Day)**: Sponsored by Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. [Http://www.skagitfisheries.org/event/earth-day-photo-contest/](http://www.skagitfisheries.org/event/earth-day-photo-contest/).
- **Marine Biotxin Volunteer Monitoring Program**: Rescheduled- May 7th and 8th (subject to change). For more information contact the Skagit Conservation District.
- **Free Webinar**: "Restoring Native Oysters on North America's West Coast" April 21, 2020 12:00-1:00PM.
- **Herring Spawning Observations**: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife had to suspend herring spawn surveys due to the Governor's orders to stay at home. They ask that if you observe any activity that looks like herring spawning, please take video and pictures, note the location and date, and send them to Adam Lindquist (Adam.Lindquist@dfw.wa.gov).
- **2019 Report on Forage Fish Surveys in Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve** – The report is now complete. The link to the report was sent to MRC members.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 am. The next MRC meeting will be a Webex video-conference call held May 14, 2020