



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes of the May 14, 2020, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Webex Meeting

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Tracy Alker, Jay Lind, Pete Haase, Rachel Best, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Kathy Thornburgh, Betsy Stevenson, Kevin Anderson, Brian Robson
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Diane Hennebert, Jude Apple, Phyllis Bravinder
- **Others Attending:** Caroline Gibson, NWSF; Sasha Horst, NWSC; Darla Gay Smith, 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:** April 9, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.
- **Public Comments:** Tracy thanked the MRC members for continuing to stay engaged and for finding creative ways to keep our projects moving forward during these challenging times. Tracy reminded MRC members that she can schedule Webex or Zoom meetings for MRC members who would like to discuss topics in more detail.

## Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Pete Haase*

*The last NWSC meetings was held April 26 Webex Conference Call*

- **Legislative Update:** Senator Liz Lovelett provided the legislative session update and some of the things she would like to bring forward in the future such as proposed changes to carbon pricing, hybridization of ferry systems, and land use issues impacting Puget Sound Protection.
- **Communications Audit and Plan:** The NWSC Communications Committee contracted with a firm for the communications audit and plan development project to help improve communications of the MRCs and increase visibility in the local communities. The firm will be interviewing members from each MRC. Pete Haase was recently interviewed as the representative of Skagit MRC.
- **MRC Economic Interests:** The NWSC discussed filling the economic interest seats of the MRCs. Skagit MRC's economic interest seats are currently filled by Jay Lind, representing the commercial fishing industry, and Brian Robson, representing Shell Puget Sound Refinery.
- **Virtual MRC Symposium Series:** The NWSC is hosting a 1.5 hour Zoom video-conference every two weeks for MRC members to share project information over a seven week period. The first one featured Jefferson MRC and the second one featured Skagit MRC. Betsy provided an overview of the Skagit MRC, Paul gave a presentation on pinto abalone restoration and Pete and Annie gave a presentation on the Kids on the Beach program. Tracy thanked Betsy, Paul, and Pete for the amazing job they did presenting at the May 7<sup>th</sup> MRC forum. They really made the Skagit MRC proud!
- The next Symposium will feature Whatcom MRC and will highlight their North Sound Stewards and oyster restoration projects on May 21<sup>st</sup> at 3:30pm. Don't forget to register!
- **Next NWSC Meeting (Webex)- May 29.** Some MRCs will be presenting projects at the May and June NWSC meetings. Paul Dinnel will be presenting Skagit MRC's Pinto Abalone Restoration project at the May 29, NWSC meeting.

## Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Jay Lind and Caroline Gibson*

- **Fundraising:** The Foundation's Fiscal year ends in June 30th. Unfortunately, the Foundation's fundraising and outreach activities that were planned for this spring have been put on hold due to COVID-19. They are now trying to come up with a whole new fundraising strategy for the next couple of years that will focus on raising funds for specific projects. They are working with the MRCs to find out what the top project priorities are for each MRC. The proposed fundraising plan and budget will be approved by the Foundation's Board next month. Unfortunately, they do not

have enough funding right now to support the MRC Opportunity Funds. The good news is, they've applied for and received protection grant funds to keep their staff fully employed.

- Orca Forums: Originally planned to hold forums in Island, Whatcom, and Skagit Counties. The Orca Forum will now be a virtual forum held the last week of June. Caroline has lined up a panel of three speakers. Caroline is seeking feedback from the MRCs regarding the best time to hold the forum. Please let Caroline know whether you would prefer a late afternoon or early evening forum.
- Shore Friendly Workshops: Lisa is exploring options for hosting web-based Shore Friendly workshops.
- Nearshore Monitoring: Most of the nearshore monitoring activities are still on hold for a while as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic. The Foundation staff will likely start conducting some monitoring on their own, without the help of volunteers, until it is determined safe for the volunteers to participate again.

## **Project Status & Discussion**

- Salish Sea Stewards: 23 participants are taking the virtual Salish Sea Stewards training via Zoom. Some of the presenters were unable to reschedule, so the 40 hour training program was shortened by 6 hours. The class participants were given task assignments and a list of training resources to make up for those hours to help fill the gap. Sara Brostrom was recently hired as Padilla Bay NERR's new Coastal Training Program Coordinator and has taken the lead on the Salish Sea Stewards training program. In addition, Rachel Best has been hired as the new Office Coordinator at Padilla Bay and will be supporting the Salish Sea Stewards program this month as well! The class graduates will each receive a Salish Sea Stewards t-shirt, name badge, and certificate in the mail.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: This year's event was originally scheduled for Saturday, August 29, 2020 at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Unfortunately, Fidalgo Bay Day has been canceled this per the recommendation of the Skagit County Department of Health to cancel all large events this summer. The Fidalgo Bay Day planning committee will be meeting next week to discuss potential alternatives.
- 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. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) has canceled all volunteer activities until mid-July, including the plant maintenance work parties at Bowman Bay. SFEG staff still plan on watering and weeding monthly at Bowman Bay after Phase 2 re-opening.
- 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, many of the survey sites have been closed to public access. Volunteers are waiting for permission to start monitoring again.
- Kids on the Beach: Annie has been doing great work getting KOTB learning opportunities online. The curriculum includes 30 minutes of activities online and 30 minutes of activities offline. There is a mix of videos, games, coloring pages, science journals, and questions and answers. Annie has also developed a special curriculum just for students that are unable to access the internet. Four teachers and over 200 elementary and middle school students are participating from Sedro Woolley, Concrete, and La Conner Schools.
- Pinto Abalone Recovery: Field work has been temporarily put on hold during the statewide stay at home order due to COVID-19 health concerns. We are currently working with PSRF on a detailed QAPP required by the MRC Grant. Paul gave a presentation on the Pinto Abalone Recovery project at the MRC Symposium on May 7 and will also be presenting the project at the May 29 NWSC meeting.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration: Paul gave a presentation on Olympia Oyster Restoration as part of the Salish Sea Stewards training. Paul and his son retrieved oyster cultch bags in Fidalgo Bay to monitor oyster recruitment. There appears to be strong settlement from last year. Paul plans to continue collecting and assessing oyster cultch bags over the next couple of months and plans to put out few new bags this year as well as settlement tiles for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys: A kelp survey WebEx meeting was held on May 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss the 2020 survey season and to discuss safety and volunteer liability coverage through the Northwest Straits Foundation. We will need to confirm county guidelines to start kelp monitoring in light of COVID-19. Before volunteers go out on the water they will be asked to review the safety materials from the NWS Foundation including several videos. On the day of the survey, volunteers will need to go through the safety checklist as a group on shore. Volunteers must sign and return a copy of the volunteer agreement form to the NWS Foundation.

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

- FREE online training – June 9: Skagit EcoNet is offering a free online training, June 9, 2020 at 10:00am: “Brain Rules and Best Practices for Presenting Science and Data” presented by Cathy Angell. It will cover best practices that help staff design presentations that are engaging, with content that will stick in the minds of audience members.
- Salish Sea Ecosystem Presentations Available Online:
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement Update: Washington Department of Natural Resources, the City of Anacortes, the Samish Indian Nation, and the Army Corps of Engineers are working together to move forward on plans to replace the Fidalgo Bay Trestle and Causeway. They recently gave a presentation on the project proposal to the Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP) for consideration of future funding.
- MRC Webex Symposiums- May 21, 3:30pm: The next one will feature Whatcom MRC. They will be highlighting their Oyster Restoration project. Don’t forget to register!!
- Tuesday Evening Zoom presentations – 7pm hosted by Friends of Skagit Beaches in collaboration with the Anacortes Library. The presentations are recorded and links past presentations are posted on the Friends of Skagit Beaches website: <https://skagitbeaches.org/>. The next two talks scheduled:
  - May 19, at 7pm “Birds of the Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve” presented by Neil O’hara.
  - June 2 at 7pm “Culture: The Real History of Deception Pass” presented by Jack Hartt.

**The meeting adjourned at 9:48 am. The next MRC meeting will be a Webex video-conference call held June 11, 2020**