



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the July 9, 2020, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Webex Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Kathy Thornburgh, Betsy Stevenson, Phyllis Bravinder, Kevin Anderson, Rachel Best, Jude Apple
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Brian Robson, Diane Hennebert, Jay Lind
- **Others Attending:** Kari Odden, Skagit Land Trust; Lucas, NWSC; Sasha Host, NWSC; Lynne Wenberg, Salish Sea Steward; Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Lisa Kaufman, NWSF; Jason Morgan, NWSF

Call to Order and Introduction: Betsy Stevenson called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

- **Approval of Minutes:** June 11, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.
- **Public Comments:** Aundrea McBride shared three project proposals within the Skagit Delta that are currently being considered by the Skagit Watershed Council for potential grant funding that might be of interest to the MRC: 1) Pocket estuary re-creation in the Swinomish Channel to help increase fish production; 2) Habitat re-creation in the South Fork involving excavating more channels to increase fish capacity; 3) Invasive cattail monitoring in the Skagit Delta to investigate vegetation changes over time and links to fish abundance. There are several other projects that are also being considered for funding, but they are located further up in the watershed.

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

The last NWSC meetings was held June 6 via Webex Conference Call. The meeting highlights were shared with MRC members.

- **NWSC Staff Update:** State employees, including Commission staff, will be furloughed one day per week in July and then one day per month through November.
- **Communications:** The External Relations Committee contracted with a firm, Maui Foster and Alongi to conduct a Communications Audit to identify key challenges and to develop and implement a communications plan to improve internal and external communications. The Committee is working on a strategy to create connections with business interests and strengthening relationships with County Councils/Commissions.
- **Actions to Impacts:** The Science Advisory Committee has expanded their focus to look at social values rather than just ecosystem values when measuring actions to impacts for various projects.
- **Northwest Straits Foundation Update:** The Foundation developed a 2021 Visioning Strategy and more video content to replace in-person workshops (e.g. Salish Sea Fresh video series and Virtual Crabber Outreach Workshops). The Foundation is applying for grant funding for rain gardens in partnership with several MRCs including Skagit MRC, if interested. Lisa will give an update on NWSF projects at a future MRC meeting.
- **Green Crab Monitoring:** NWSC has become involved in green crab monitoring in Drayton Harbor and recently hired temporary staff to take the lead. Paul said that he and many other volunteers have been involved in green crab trapping in Skagit County under the leadership of Washington Sea Grant for several years now. Although MRC funds were used to purchase traps and to pay for volunteer coordination many years ago when the project was first initiated, it is not currently an MRC project. The Samish Indian Nation's Department of Natural Resources is also monitoring green crabs at the Sharpes Corner site in Fidalgo Bay with the Washington Sea Grant Crab Team.
- **Year-Two MRC Project Budgets:** The Commission approved the 2021 MRC budget and projects.
- **MRC Project Presentations:** Several MRC's presented their 2020-2021 projects including: Jefferson MRC project presentation "Olympia Oyster Restoration"; Island MRC project presentation "Needs Assessment and Communications Plan"; and San Juan MRC project presentation "Community-Based Efforts for Southern Resident Killer Whale Conservation". All presentations are available to download in the Northwest Straits Initiative's Box.com folder.

- Puget Sound Partnership Update: Adopted an updated set of Vital Signs and indicators for the 2022-2026 action Agenda. The Puget Sound Days on the Hill are virtual events.
- Next NWSC Meeting (Webex)- July 31

Skagit Land Trust Project Proposal: *Kari Odden*

- The Skagit Land Trust is applying to the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program and the Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP) for funding to purchase approximately 50 acres on Samish Island for protection, clean it up, control invasive species, and complete a site assessment for future restoration. The property is adjacent to Skagit Land Trust's Samish Flower Farm Conservation Area and contains agricultural lands, wetlands, and 2,500 feet of critical marine shoreline on both Samish (Alice) and Padilla Bays. This project will protect and cleanup critical shoreline, saltmarsh, and tidelands that will benefit forage fish and many bird species. A long-term goal of this project, is to re-create tidally influenced wetlands by setting back the aging Padilla Bay dikes. There might also be a great opportunity to expand conservation classroom programs at the site. The landowner is ready to sell and there is strong community support from the immediate neighbors, the County, Padilla Bay NERR, the Audubon Society, and the Samish Indian Nation. The Skagit Land Trust is also seeking a letter of support from the Skagit MRC. The Committee voted unanimously by consensus in favor of providing letter in support of this project.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards: The last class was held June 9th. 21 participants completed the virtual Salish Sea Stewards training. A survey went out to class participants to help evaluate the program. The new volunteers are all very eager to start volunteer work. Four of the new Salish Sea Stewards volunteers will be joining the Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee. An in-person gathering for all of the Salish Sea Stewards will be scheduled as soon as it is determined safe to do so. Rachel Best announced that Darla Gay Smith will be replacing her as the MRC project lead for the Salish Sea Stewards program. Darla said she is really looking forward to her new role and thanked Rachel for her leadership and all of her hard work during this challenging time. Jude also thanked Rachel for her support and said the Padilla Bay NERR team now has a really good template to work with for planning next year's program.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: As an alternative to Fidalgo Bay Day, we will be creating a Scavenger Hunt Activity Guide that will be similar to the Discovery Passport to help get families engaged in fun educational activities that focus on nature and the environment. It will be promoted in the local papers and online and will be widely distributed to local businesses that are open to the public. Past participating organizations have been invited to be part of the Activity Guide. So far we've heard back from four who have expressed interest in participating. We will create an event website and Facebook page for organizations and participants to share photos and posts about the activities and experiences. We hope to have the Activity Guide finalized by August 13.
- Bowman Bay Restoration: Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group Staff watered the plantings at the site on June 26th and will water again on July 10. The shoreline plantings are looking pretty good. The shrubs continue to struggle a little bit. The cedar tree that was planted by the Samish is getting pretty tall. Conifers have voluntarily popped up throughout the restoration area. SFEG is also working on a Bowman Bay Stewardship Guide for volunteers. PSP is working on a short video about the restoration project. The NWSF staff, Parks staff, SFEG staff, and volunteers involved in the project were interviewed for the video. NWSF staff will start monitoring again at the site soon, but without the help of volunteers for now. The Foundation might also do some filming at the site as part of their "Salish Sea Fresh" video series.
- Forage Fish Surveys: Forage fish surveys will be starting back up at Marchs Point restoration site and Fidalgo Bay sites on July 16 with a smaller number of volunteers. They are waiting for permits and permission from various lead agencies to start surveying again at the other sites.
- Kids on the Beach: Annie England with Padilla Bay NERR, did an excellent job adapting the KOTB curriculum into a virtual program that is easily accessible to teachers and students. We will be scheduling a meeting soon to determine the next steps for planning next year's program. A final report will be available before the end of this grant period.
- Pinto Abalone Recovery: Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) recently completed a detailed QAPP that has been approved by Ecology. Paul thanked Lucas and Sasha for their assistance with the QAPP process and praised Josh for

all of his hard work to get it done despite his reduced work hours due to COVID-19. A final report will be completed before the end of this grant period in September.

- Olympia Oyster Restoration: Paul and his son are conducting reduced oyster monitoring and restoration work this year. No other volunteers are involved in the field work due to COVID-19 restrictions. They distributed 20 oyster cultch bags around Fidalgo Bay and put out shell strings around Weaverling Spit and the trestle in conjunction with Puget Sound Restoration Fund's sampling methods to monitor oyster recruitment. They also put out shell tiles every two weeks to monitor biweekly oyster settlement in Fidalgo Bay for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Brian Allen with PSRF plans to do some surveys in August and might be looking for a couple of volunteers to help.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys: Kelp surveys are scheduled to take place July 17 at Shannon Point, July 18 at Coffin Rocks, and July 23 at Biz Point. Phyllis reported that several new Salish Sea Stewards volunteers are very enthusiastic about getting involved in kelp surveys. One of the new volunteers will be going out with the kelp survey crew on July 17 to observe the procedures from a safe distance.

No Anchor Zone Regional Project Proposal Follow-up Discussion: *All*

The NWS Commission is looking into the possibility of applying for funding to expand the Jefferson County MRC's Voluntary No Anchor Zone project as a regional project if there is enough interest from other MRCs. Skagit MRC members expressed interest in potentially implementing something similar in Skagit County and discussed the area outside of Cap Sante Marina as a possible location. If interested in pursuing this project, Paul suggested that the MRC should first assess the usage of boats in the area and conduct eelgrass surveys to determine if the boating activity is actually having an impact on the eelgrass beds. Paul said boat usage could easily be assessed by going out and counting boats and taking photos. Eelgrass beds could be assessed with aerial surveys and diver transects to measure eelgrass abundance and any signs of damage due to boat anchors and chains. Kevin said the Port might have some video feed of boating activity in the area that could be used to assess boat usage. Lisa said the NWSF is currently looking into costs to conduct extensive eelgrass surveys by boat as part of pre-grant application process for this regional project. If awarded grant funding, the NWSF would also take the lead in the permitting process in collaboration with Washington Department of Natural Resources.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- Virtual MRC Symposiums: July 23 (3:30pm -5pm) featuring San Juan MRC and August 6 (3:30pm-5pm) featuring Island MRC. You must be pre-registered to attend each symposium.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 am. The next MRC meeting will be held August 13, 2020