



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the September 10, 2020, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) GoToMeeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Darla Gay Smith (MRC Member Applicant), Brian Robson, Kathy Thornburgh, Matt Castle, Jay Lind, Jude Apple, Rachel Best
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Diane Hennebert, Paul Dinnel, Phyllis Bravinder, Kevin Anderson
- **Others Attending:** Dana Oster, NWSC; Amy Eberling, Salish Sea School

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:** August 13, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.
- **Public Comments:** No Comments.

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

The last NWSC meeting was held August 28, via Zoom conference call (10am – 1pm). The meeting was extended to three hours to provide opportunities for additional conversations in break-out groups at the end. Over 28 people attended. The meeting highlights and minutes will be shared with MRC members when they become available.

- **NWSC Representatives:** Pete reminded everyone that his second term as the Skagit MRC representative on the NWSC will end the end in December this year and a new MRC rep will need to be appointed. He said he has really enjoyed being a part of the NWSC and highly recommends other MRC members consider giving it a try.
- **NWSC Committee Reports:** The Executive Committee is formalizing a policy about using and providing matching funds. We have to be careful not to use the same matching funds for more than one opportunity, particularly when it comes to federal or state money. The Science Advisory Committee discussed how the framework for Actions to Impacts can be scalable to the MRC level and how the MRCs work ties into the work of the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification.
- **Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Update:** The updated [State of Our Watersheds Report](#) will be published in December, 2020. The last report was released in 2016.
- **County Budget Discussion:** Several Counties are struggling with budget shortfalls due to COVID-19 that could have a future impact on the MRCs. Project funding for MRCs is currently stable through September 30, 2021.
- **MRC Symposiums:** The MRC Symposiums are now done and were very successful. Planning for future symposiums is currently underway.
- **Puget Sound Partnership Update:** PSP is trying to determine how they can help partners, such as the MRCs, in implementing projects or campaigns designed to change attitudes and behaviors. They will be sending a questionnaire to the MRCs to identify the barriers and challenges that are faced in social marketing approaches.
- **Kelp Aquaculture:** Emily Buckner from NOAA presented their recent research on the environmental benefits and risks of kelp aquaculture.
- **NWSI Communications Plan:** The Communications Plan is progressing quite well. The final report to the NWSC will occur in September. NWSC staff are evaluating how the contractor may be able to help implement communications actions from the plan.
- **Next NWSC Meeting (via Zoom)- September 24**

The Salish Sea School Update: *Amy Eberling*

The Salish Sea School just launched their first student summer program this year “The Guardians of the Salish Sea”. They awarded over \$12,000 in scholarships to underserved students from grants and donations. The mission of The Salish Sea School is to create student leaders in marine conservation. Their boat-based and island excursion programs include an unplugged experiential science curriculum, research and citizen science, mindfulness in nature practices, natural journaling, environmental service projects, and advocacy /writing to state legislators. This year they held six sessions with 22 students ranging in ages from 10 to 17. Each session was four days long from 9am to 5pm. The 22’ boat was launched out of Cap Sante

Marina in Anacortes with a different research adventure and action each day. The sessions included: a [eBird Survey](#) using a smart phone app; a tufted puffin survey at Smith Island; intertidal exploration; nearshore habitat exploration; plastics impacts on our oceans followed by a beach cleanup and plastic nurdle search; stormwater pollution and rain gardens; biomagnification in marine mammals; harbor porpoise survey; visit to the Center for Whale Research; squid and salmon belly dissection; and writing letters to elected officials. At the end of the four day session, the students each received a hat with the trident symbol and were told to remember they are protectors of the sea. Amy said this year's program was a huge success, thanks to the help of volunteers, partner organizations, donations, and sponsors. The long-term goal is to make this a year-long program, not just a summer camp. For those who want to get involved, The Salish Sea School is interested in forming focus groups to start brainstorming the next steps beyond the summer Guardian of the Sea programs.

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards:** We held the first virtual Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting on August 26, to start planning for the 2021 SSS training. Sara Brostrom, the Coastal Training Program Coordinator for Padilla Bay and SSS Training Coordinator, reported on the 2020 Salish Sea Stewards training survey results. 100% of the participants agreed that the virtual training went well overall. Most of the new SSS graduates expressed concern about meeting their 40 hour volunteer obligation because of a lack of opportunities due to Covid-19. The Advisory Committee recognized there is a need to have one person who is dedicated in the role of the volunteer coordinator to continue to keep the volunteers engaged and connected. The Advisory Committee will try to fill that role for now. SSS Advisory Committee meetings will continue to be held once a month to help plan and promote the 2021 SSS training and recruit speakers and new class participants. The 2021 training will begin mid-February or early March and will likely be virtual.
- **Fidalgo Bay Day:** The Fidalgo Bay Day 2020 Scavenger Hunt finally launched last week! 14 organizations that have participated in the past contributed to the scavenger hunt activity guide book that can be downloaded from the event website: www.fidalgobayday.com. Hard copies are also available at the new Skagit Valley YMCA in Mount Vernon, the Burlington Library, the Boys and Girls Club, and in the front entryway of the Skagit County Administrative Building in Mount Vernon. The YMCA said the activity guide has been pretty popular and they even posted it on their Facebook page. Flyers with the QR Code have been posted at Washington Park, at the food Co-op and at the Fidalgo Bay RV Resort kiosk. We will be able to track the number of visits to the event website and QR Code scans. A reporter from the Skagit Valley Herald is interested in writing an article about this year's event.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration:** Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group staff hosted a volunteer plant maintenance work party on August 21 with a small number of volunteers. They also did the year-end walk-through of the site with Tracy and several new Americorps last Friday. The site is looking great! Watering might not even be necessary next year and weeding parties can be reduced to just two or three.
- **Forage Fish Surveys:** Forage fish surveys continue at all of our restoration sites and Index sites with a smaller number of volunteers. More extensive surveys are taking place at Bowman Bay. Four surf smelt eggs were found at Bowman Bay but they did not appear to be viable. There has been a lot of spawning activity in Fidalgo Bay with good survival rates. Two new Salish Sea Stewards are helping with the forage fish surveys this year. Amy Eberling will be bringing students from her class to look for forage fish eggs at Fidalgo Bay for a couple of hours in October. Craig Olson will bring his microscope so the students can get a closer look at the eggs.
- **Kids on the Beach:** A final report for the 2019/2020 Kids on the Beach program will be available before the end of this grant period in September. Planning is underway for the 2020/2021 Kids on the Beach program which will likely be virtual again.
- **Pinto Abalone Recovery:** Field work is now complete. A final report will be completed before the end of this grant period in September.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration:** Paul will be giving a free virtual presentation on Native Olympia Oyster Restoration in Fidalgo Bay hosted by the Padilla Bay Foundation on October 7, 2020 at 4pm -5pm. Jude will forward the registration information to MRC members.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys:** Kelp surveys took place in July and August at Shannon Point, Coffin Rocks, and Biz Point and will continue through September, despite having several weather delays. Some of the new Salish Sea Stewards

participated in the surveys. John Freeto has been working on a few short video narratives at the Biz Point kelp beds that will be included in social media posts about kelp.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- Orca Recovery Forum: Orca Recovery Day is Saturday, October 17. As part of that region-wide effort, the Northwest Straits Foundation will host an Orca Forum on October 14 and an Orca Trivia Night on Thursday night, October 15.
- Voluntary No Anchor Zone Grant Application Update: The NWSC and NWSF applied for the NEP Coastal Watershed Grant with a letter of intent to expand the Voluntary No Anchor Zone project to other county MRCs. They recently received an invite to submit a full proposal which is due November 6th. Dana said she will be reaching out to the MRCs in the coming weeks as they iron out the details for the full proposal.
- Presentation on "Restoration of the Native Olympia Oyster in Fidalgo Bay": Please join the Padilla Bay Foundation on October 7, from 4pm – 5pm, for a free virtual presentation on Olympia oyster restoration in Fidalgo Bay presented by Paul Dinnel. The presentation is made possible by the Lane Christopher Smith and Benjamin Fisher Aguero Memorial Fund. To register for this free event, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/PBFolympicOysterTalk>.

MRC Membership Application: *Darla Gay Smith*

The Committee voted unanimously by consensus to make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint Darla Gay Smith to the Skagit Marine Resources Committee to replace Rachel Best. Rachel will continue serve as Darla's alternate as needed.

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