



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the October 8, 2020, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) GoToMeeting

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members Attending:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Darla Gay Smith, Kathy Thornburgh, Jay Lind, Jude Apple, Paul Dinnel, Kevin Anderson, Matt Castle
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Diane Hennebert, Brian Robson
- **Others Attending:** Dana Oster, NWSC; Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, SSS; Silvi Thorstenson, WSU Shore Stewards

**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:** September 10, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.
- **Public Comments:** Silvi Thorstenson manages the WSU Skagit County Extension's Shore Stewards program and is interested in collaborating with the Skagit MRC and Northwest Straits Foundation.

## Phyllis Bravinder's Letter of Resignation: Betsy Stevenson

Phyllis Bravinder offered her letter of resignation to the MRC. Phyllis has been actively involved with the MRC since 2016. She was the MRC Project Lead for Kelp Surveys, served as our NWSC Alternate Rep, and served on several MRC subcommittees, and contributed countless volunteer hours helping with various projects and special events. Jay said Phyllis was a valuable member with her optimism, dedication, and reliability. Everyone shared Jay's sentiment. She will be greatly missed!

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

The last NWSC meeting was held September 24, via Zoom conference call (10am – 1pm). 23 people attended.

- **NWSC Representatives:** Pete reminded everyone that his second term as the Skagit MRC representative on the NWSC will end the end in January and a new MRC rep will need to be appointed. Pete said Phyllis was his NWSC Alternate, but he thinks he can cover the rest of the NWSC meetings through the end of the year. He is willing to be the NWSC Alternate for the next NWSC Representative in 2021.
- **European Green Crab Update:** The green crab team trapped over 200 green crabs in Drayton Harbor and over 1,000 on the Lummi Peninsula. The team will start ramping up trapping efforts on the Lummi Peninsula where they are seeing the larger numbers.
- **NWSI Communications Plan:** The internal Communications Plan for the NWSC has been finalized. A one page fact sheet and elevator speech about the NWSI will be provided to the MRCs. MRC members are encouraged to memorize the elevator speech and attend the NWSI 101 session that is usually offered at the annual MRC Conference, but will likely start being offered twice per year. MRC members are also encouraged to subscribe to the electronic [NWSC newsletter](#) to stay better informed.
- **NWSC/NWSF MOU Discussion:** The primary topic of discussion at the September 24 NWSC meeting was the NWSC/NWSF Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU was approved by the NWSC Executive Committee and the NWSF, but requested additional feedback from the MRCs before making it official.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- October 29**

## Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: Jay Lind

- **Passport to Marine Adventures:** The Foundation came up with this new fun idea in conjunction with local businesses to encourage folks to get outside and explore our marine shorelines during the pandemic. It will include three locations in each of the seven MRC counties that are accessible to the public. Particularly places where the MRC or partner in the NWSI has done a project or activity. The passport will be in pdf or online. Participants will get a stamp for their pictures/tags on social media. The Foundation will be reaching out to local businesses for tokens that help get people out and about.

- Crab Pot Removal: After submitting a Letter of Intent, the Foundation has been invited to provide a full proposal for a two-year grant to remove crab pots from Anacortes-Padilla Bay area with a commercial crabber targeted outreach campaign. They will be partnering with NRC, Swinomish Tribe (and potentially other tribes) and the State commercial fleet.
- Salish Sea Strings: The Foundation is launching a new series on November 12 called Salish Sea Strings. It's a pre-recorded combination of live music and interview with a conservationist from each of the seven counties. The first episode features live music from a rock band from Bellingham, Bob Fossil, and an interview with Jason Morgan.
- NWSF Board Members Update: Jay's term as a Foundation Board Member is up in December and will no longer be able to provide updates to the MRC. He recommended inviting Foundation staff to provide the updates at MRC meetings. Betsy thanked Jay for all of his years of service on the Foundation's board and for always keeping the MRC informed.

#### NWSC/NWSF Memorandum of Understanding: *Pete Haase*

To help provide some clarification regarding the roles, responsibilities, and areas of collaboration between the Northwest Straits Commission and the Northwest Straits Foundation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was created. This document is also meant to serve as a tool for MRC members and others to understand the relationship between these two arms of the Northwest Straits Initiative. MRC members have been asked to review the document and provide comments to Lucas and Don by October 16<sup>th</sup>. Tracy forwarded the MOU to Skagit MRC members prior to the meeting for discussion. The overall consensus was that the MOU was well written and a valuable process because it helps eliminate some of the confusion. MRC members commented that the MOU explained the collaborative relationships, but it would also be good to be more explicit in describing the differences between the two parties. Others said it would be helpful to have a similar document that provides more clarification about the Foundation-MRCs working partnership.

#### Voluntary No Anchor Zone Update and Discussion: *Dana Oster*

Jefferson MRC initiated the Voluntary No Anchor Zone back in 2004 to protect the eelgrass beds and shellfish beds from anchor scour. Navigational buoys were deployed to delineate eelgrass beds and good depth zones to encourage boaters to voluntarily comply and anchor in deeper water outside of the eelgrass beds. Dana started looking into ways to collaborate and expand this into a regional project after Jefferson MRC's presentation at the MRC Symposium sparked a lot of interest from other MRCs. [Jefferson's No Anchor Zone video](#) is available on the NWSC Vimeo and YouTube pages. Dana applied for a two year grant for this project and made it through the first cut with the initial letter of intent. She is now in the process of writing a full proposal and has been making the rounds to all of the MRCs who have expressed interest and put forward potential sites for this regional project. The full proposal is due November 6. Dana will not be seeking letters of support because the funders are only interested in letters of commitment for match (in-kind and non-federal funds). If selected, the funding for the two year grant would start January 2021. The NWSC would lead regional management of this project in collaboration with the NWSF and MRCs. Dana would be the regional Project Manager and Lisa Kaufman would take the lead in permitting. Katie Harris would develop a social marketing campaign and branding. The MRCs would each need to appoint a project lead and or a subcommittee, identify key community members to do consultations with, and help with community engagement.

Dana said the first year of the grant would focus on an in-depth analyses of the feasibility of the potential sites to determine what the stressor are, if buoys would be beneficial, and what the vessel use in the area is and if it is causing anchor scour of the eelgrass beds. Skagit MRC is considering the Cap Sante Marina as a potential location for this project. Kevin said the Port of Anacortes would be very supportive of this community project and could provide photos/videos of vessel use at the Cap Sante Marina as well as eelgrass survey data. Volunteers could also help count vessels in the area or take underwater video of the eelgrass beds before buoys are deployed to get a snapshot of the "before". Dana said there is a volunteer pilot with Island MRC who could take aerial photos of the eelgrass bed.

In Year two, the potential sites brought forward by the MRCs would be ranked as tier 1 and tier 2 priority sites. Tier 1 sites are those locations that would benefit the most and have lots of community support. The tier 2 sites are those locations where it is unclear if there is community support or if the buoys would be effective. Paul pointed out that the area around the Cape Sante Marina is really shallow so boats might have to anchor out at a substantial distance which could be an issue. Dana said if this is the case, we could try to find project partners who would be willing to provide mooring buoys for vessels to tie up to. Or another potential option would be to allow anchoring in a smaller designated area within the eelgrass bed to help limit the

amount of damage. In some locations maintenance or replacement of buoys and mooring lines might also be required due to excessive biofouling. Volunteers could be recruited to monitor buoys for maintenance needs. Buoy maintenance would require experienced divers. Dana suggested reaching out to local dive groups to see if there might be any interest in adopting a site to help monitor and maintain the buoys. Another possible option might be to take the large buoys out during the winter months and replace them with little marker buoys like they do in Port Townsend. The project details will continue to get fleshed out as we move forward if we are awarded the grant.

## Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards:** A final report for the 2019/2020 Salish Sea Stewards program will be available before the end of this grant period in September. Some of the new volunteers have recently gotten involved in the forage fish surveys, kelp monitoring surveys, the Friends of Skagit Beaches stormwater outfall monitoring project, and four joined the SSS Advisory Committee. The SSS Advisory Committee met on Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> to continue planning for 2021 Training starting mid Feb/early March. The training will be based on a hybrid model with virtual and in-person beach experiences. The Committee will be working on publicity flyers and forms for several months and will be updating social media sites and arranging for newspaper coverage of the upcoming training. Background checks will continue to be paid by the trainees. Although there is a recognized need for volunteer program coordination, it is outside the scope of work in Padilla Bay's contract. They do not currently have the staff capacity to take on that task. The Committee is exploring different options to help fund a Volunteer Program Coordinator position or designate one or more volunteers to fill that role to keep the larger group of Salish Sea Stewards informed, engaged, and connected. Padilla Bay will host a virtual social for all of the Salish Sea Stewards on October 14<sup>th</sup>.
- **Fidalgo Bay Day:** The Fidalgo Bay Day 2020 Scavenger Hunt was extended through October 31, 2020 to give families more time to complete the activities to earn a certificate. Although the MRC grant ended September 30, we were able to use funding from Skagit County Clean Water Funds to keep the event website up and running through the end of October. Tracy will try to find out how much it will cost to keep the website up and running through next year. So far we've had over 280 unique visitors to the site, but we have no idea how many actually completed the activities. We distributed over 150 Activity Guides. The Activity Guides were also available on the event website as well as the MRC website. We created an Instagram account and an online survey to help evaluate the event, but so far we haven't gotten any feedback. Tracy is working on the 2020 Fidalgo Bay Day Final Report. We will need to schedule a Fidalgo Bay Day Subcommittee meeting soon to start planning next year's Fidalgo Bay Day event. Let Tracy know if you are interested in helping with the planning process.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration:** Plant maintenance at the Bowman Bay restoration site is done for the season. Skagit MRC will need to recruit and train one or two lead volunteer stewards to maintain the site. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group created a "Hand Book" for volunteers to use as a guide for maintaining the site. The NWSF staff will resume beach seining at Bowman Bay in January.
- **Forage Fish Surveys:** Forage fish surveys continue at all of our restoration sites and Index sites with a smaller number of volunteers. There has been a lot of spawning activity in Fidalgo Bay with good survival rates. Several 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. According to feedback received from teachers, the students are having a difficult time engaging in the virtual setting. Annie is working with teachers on more fun and engaging program materials with a little less hard science. She is developing a program with a mix of live virtual classroom instruction along with pre-recorded videos of beach seining and forage fish spawning surveys to help engage students in collecting data. Annie has also been working closely with coordinators of the Swinomish "Between Two Worlds" program on a bridged learning opportunity where Tribal youth will serve as mentors for LaConner middle school students during the late fall, winter, and spring forage fish KOTB investigations.
- **Pinto Abalone Recovery:** Field work is now complete. The final report is now available on the [Skagit MRC website](#).

- Olympia Oyster Restoration: Field work is finished for the season. The data has been collected and processed. Overall, oyster settlement appears to be pretty average for the year. Paul Dinnel gave a virtual presentation on Native Olympia Oyster Restoration in Fidalgo Bay on October 7, 2020.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys: Kelp surveys are now finished for the season. We will need to find a new MRC Project Lead for the kelp surveys to replace Phyllis. Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, a recent Salish Sea Stewards graduate, expressed interest and requested additional information.

#### 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.
- Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve and FOSB meeting Nov 4<sup>th</sup>- The Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Citizen Stewardship Committee is hosting an informational Zoom volunteer recruiting meeting on November 4<sup>th</sup> to help drive their existing projects forward. The meeting is open to MRC members. Contact Eleanor Hines for more information at eleanorth@re-sources.org.
- Congressman Larsen Visit- October 14<sup>th</sup> (9:30am) at Padilla Bay- Congressman Larsen is visiting with the MRCs in his district to learn about the projects the MRCs are working on and the impact of federal funding support. Skagit MRC scheduled a visit on October 14<sup>th</sup> at Padilla Bay to highlight the Salish Sea Stewards and Kids on the Beach programs in collaboration with Padilla Bay NERR. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic mandates, the visit will be limited to just 5 people. MRC member and Padilla Bay NERR Director, Jude Apple will host the visit at Padilla Bay. Susan Wood will share information about the Salish Sea Stewards program, Annie England will share information about the Kids on the Beach program, and Sasha Horst will share information about program funding.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:30 am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held November 12, 2020**