



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the November 12, 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, Diane Hennebert
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Brian Robson
- **Others Attending:** Dana Oster, NWSC; Lynne Wenberg-Davidson (MRC Membership Applicant); Jason Morgan, NWSF; Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Lucas Hart, NWSC; Craig Olson, volunteer; Katie Harris, NWSC; Mathew Colston, Island County; Rachel Best, Padilla Bay NERR

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:** October 08, 2020, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written after a few minor edits.
- **Public Comments:** None

Harbor Porpoise Study in Burrows Pass: Matthew Colston, Island County Natural Resources

The Island County Natural Resources Department is collecting data in collaboration with Biota Maxima's (formerly Pacific Biodiversity Institute) Harbor Porpoise study in hopes to better understand their birthing cycles, what they eat, and what their status is compared to other marine mammals in Puget Sound. Preliminary results indicate seasonal movement and distribution of this species. Their presence at Burrows Pass is continuous all year with a maximum peak in the winter months with their calves. They migrate to Port Townsend during the summer months. Matthew said they would like to collect enough research data to help get the harbor porpoise listed on the State's Threatened Species list. Biota Maxima's research includes collecting visual observations and acoustic recordings of harbor porpoises to determine their abundance, distribution and behavior at Washington Park in Anacortes. They are also studying how harbor porpoises react to boat noise. Pete pointed out that a group of volunteers used to help collect observation data of harbor porpoises at Washington Park for Aileen Jefferson with Pacific Biodiversity Institute several years ago. The volunteers would likely be willing to help with this effort again if there was an organized and coordinated effort to collect the data. Matthew said they would be willing to train, coordinate, and work with citizen scientists to collect data. Matt Castle said that Cindy Elliser with Pacific Mammal Research was recently seen at Washington Park collecting harbor porpoise observation data with a small group of volunteers. Matthew said that Aileen was planning getting in touch with Cindy if she hasn't already done so. Since forage fish are a major food source of harbor porpoises, Matthew is interested in working in collaboration with Skagit MRC to collect forage fish data in the area where harbor porpoises frequent to see if there is a correlation between their migration patterns and forage fish densities. Pete said Bowman Bay is probably the closest spot where we are currently surveying forage fish, but the Skyline beaches in Anacortes would be a great location to start sampling if we can get permission, permits, and authorization from the NWSC to do so. Matthew will also be looking at historical forage fish maps. More information about the Harbor Porpoise project can be found online at this link. <http://www.harborporpoiseproject.org>.

Northwest Straits Initiative Communications Plan: Katie Harris

Katie provided a brief overview of the Northwest Straits Initiative's (NWSI) Communications Plan and walked the Committee through the draft NWSI Fact Sheet starting with the elevator pitch and 5 key messages. The Communications Plan helps to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the different arms of the NWSI and how they interact. The NWSI Fact Sheet is for MRC members to use as reference to help ensure common messaging when communicating the NWSI's mission as a whole. Katie said if the MRC is interested, she could also help develop an elevator pitch and talking points that are more specific to Skagit MRC to help clearly communicate our work to the Board of County Commissioners and other elected officials. As part of the NWSI Communications Plan, the Commission will start offering the NWSI 101 Presentation more often throughout the year. The next 101 presentation is scheduled for December 15 at noon. The Commission is also developing a toolkit to help with

onboarding new MRC members, outreach materials for special events, and strategies to help grow the NWSI electronic monthly newsletter base. The final Communications Plan and Fact Sheet will be wrapped up by the end of the month. Comments can be sent to Pete or can be sent directly to Katie. Pete suggested including the word “county” when referring to the MRCs since they are all county based entities. Kevin said the names of the Northwest Straits Commission and Northwest Straits Foundation are very similar and might be a source of confusion for some folks outside the organization. Katie and Jason said there has been some discussion about the name confusion, but no good solutions have been identified so far. Katie said she would be happy to come back and talk to the MRC about the final Communications Plan and go over the toolkit materials that will be available in more detail.

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

The last NWSC meeting was held October 29, via Zoom conference call (10am – 12pm). Around 25 people attended.

- **NWSC Representative:** Pete reminded the MRC that we will need to elect a new NWSC Representative in January.
- **NWSI 22nd Anniversary Virtual Happy Hour:** November 20, 2020 4pm-5pm via Zoom. Stay tuned for the agenda. <https://nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>.
- **Welcome from Rep. Debra Lekanoff:** Debra gave an inspiring talk about the work of the NWSI.
- **Ecology SEA Program Awards:** Allie Simpson received the 2020 First Responder award for her work on European green crab in Drayton Harbor, and Dana Oster received the 2020 Outstanding Achievement award for the Puget Sound Kelp conservation and Recovery Plan.
- **Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Update and Presentation:** The [2020 State of the Watershed](#) update is now available. Washington Hatcheries presentation.
- **Congressman Rick Larsen’s Visits:** Congressman Rick Larsen visited the 5 MRCs in his District to learn about some of the MRC projects that are going on. There was an article about it in the recent NWSI newsletter.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- December 11** (no meeting in November)

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

- **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.
- **Derelict 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. Because 73% of the crab pots lost in this area are from the commercial sector, the Foundation’s outreach campaign will be focused on commercial crabbers rather than recreational crabbers. The Foundation will be partnering with NRC, Swinomish Tribe (and potentially other tribes) and commercial fleets to give them the tools they need to help reduce crab pot loss and to remove derelict pots on their own. The Skagit MRC voted by consensus to provide a Letter of Support for this project proposal before December 3, 2020, at the request of the Northwest Straits Foundation.
- **Nearshore Monitoring:** The monitoring season has wrapped up for the Foundation. Data is being compiled and analyzed and will be included in a report that will be finalized in March 2021. The report will be co-authored by the Foundation and the UW and will include results of monitoring effort Puget-Sound wide. Bowman Bay seining will resume in January, 2021 with staff support only until its safe for volunteers to help again.
- **Salish Sea Strings:** The Foundation is launching a new series on November 12 at 6pm called Salish Sea Strings. It’s a pre-recorded combination of live music and interview with a conservationist from each of the seven counties that will be streamed on Facebook. The first episode features live music from a rock band from Bellingham, Bob Fossil, and an interview with Jason Morgan. The next episode will be an online holiday party with more interviews and music.
- **Virtual Orca Forum:** The Foundation hosted a virtual orca forum in partnership with Whidbey Island Conservation District, the WWU/Salish Sea Institute, and Island MRC that was attended by 135 households from 4 states and BC. Presenters included Rich Osborne, Jacques White and Deborah Giles.
- **Communications Grants:** The Foundation received two grants totaling \$12K for virtual communications during the pandemic to support community engagement while they can’t connect in person.

- NWSF Partnership Project Plan: The Foundation created a template to use for project collaboration with the MRCs to create consistency, transparency and accountability for projects funded in whole or part by the Foundation.
- Virtual NWSF Retreat on Nov 28

MRC Chair / Vice-Chair Meeting Report : Jay Lind

Jay attended the MRC Chair/Vice-Chair meeting to discuss how other MRCs are continuing communication and engagement with MRC members during these challenging times. All MRCs are holding regular meetings virtually and all MRCs had to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions to continue with projects.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards: A final report for the 2020 Salish Sea Stewards program is now complete. The 2021 training will start February 23- May 25. The training will be based on a hybrid model with virtual and in-person beach experiences for small groups. 10 virtual classes will be held Tuesdays from 1pm to 3:30pm and 3 field sessions will be held 1pm - 5pm. Sara Brostrom is working on securing speakers for the 10 training sessions. The 11 member SSS Advisory Committee is working on publicity flyers and the registration form and will be updating social media sites and arranging for newspaper coverage of the upcoming training to try to reach our goal of 25 class participants. The SSS Advisory Committee will continue to meet every month through March to help plan and coordinate the 2021 SSS Training Program. The Committee is also exploring the possibility of recruiting volunteers to take on some of the tasks of a Volunteer Coordinator, to keep the larger group of Salish Sea Stewards informed, engaged, and connected. They are also consolidating a master volunteer contact list, updating the categories in Volgistics for reporting volunteer hours, and developing a vetting process for accepting submissions in The WAVE. Padilla Bay NERR education staff recently hosted the first virtual Salish Sea Stewards social on October 14th. Around 19 people attended this event which provided an opportunity to introduce the new class of 2020 Salish Sea Stewards to the veteran volunteers. They shared some of their experiences and stories and enjoyed a virtual tour of the Padilla Bay Aquarium room with their new touch pool exhibit. Padilla Bay received a lot of positive feedback from the attendees. Salish Sea Stewards were also invited to attend a virtual Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve meeting on November 4th with the Friends of Skagit Beaches to learn about volunteer opportunities.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: The Fidalgo Bay Day 2020 Scavenger Hunt was extended through October 31, 2020. The event website will stay up and running through October 2021. Over 280 people visited the website and 150 Activity Guides were printed and distributed, but only one family reported that they completed the activities and nobody completed the online survey. The project report has been finalized and is available on the Skagit MRC website (www.skagitmrc.org). A Fidalgo Bay Day Subcommittee planning meeting will be scheduled soon to start planning next year's event. The 2021 event date is tentatively set for Saturday, August 28 (11am-3pm) and the Fidalgo Bay Resort facility has been reserved. Jay suggested also reserving the facility for Friday, August 27 for setup, assuming we will be able to host part of the event indoors. It is still unclear what the coronavirus situation might be, so we will need to consider a variety of scenarios, options, and alternatives and we are looking for some ideas. Please 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. We will need to try to recruit and train one or two lead volunteer stewards to maintain the site. It is yet to be determined whether or not a contract will be needed next year. The Puget Sound Partnership just released a new video and article about the Bowman Bay restoration project in their new online magazine "[Making Waves](#)" this week. There is also an article about kelp.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys: Kelp surveys are now finished for the season. Our survey sites include Biz Point, Shannon Point, and Coffin Rock. Each site was surveyed at least three times between June and September. Brad Smith deserves an extra shout out for taking time to try to engage the new Salish sea stewards in the kelp surveys. 2-3 new Salish Sea Stewards participated this year and there are even more interested in participating next year. Brad is also considering leading a scouting mission to a potentially new kelp bed survey site at Hope Island. Dana said the NWSI is primarily interested in sites that are more in inland/sheltered waters, rather than those that have a lot of ocean mixing. The river outflow influence can also have local effects on kelp. Dana and Suzanne are currently working on processing the kelp data and plan to schedule a virtual meeting in December for all the kelp volunteers to share data summaries and talk about the next season.

- Forage Fish Surveys: Forage fish surveys continue at all of our restoration sites and 3 index sites with a smaller number of volunteers and using COVID-19 safety protocols. Four new Salish Sea Stewards have been out a few times to help with the forage fish surveys this year. Spawning season is really starting to wind down for surf smelt at our survey sites. On October 17, the Salish Sea School students learned all about forage fish from the volunteers at the Fidalgo Bay resort. Craig Olsen brought his microscope with the giant screen for kids to get a close look at the surf smelt eggs. Some were freshly hatched larvae and others were right at the stage of hatching!
- Kids on the Beach: The final report for the 2019/2020 Kids on the Beach program is now complete. Program materials are available on Padilla Bay's Facebook page for educators and the [Skagit MRC website](#). Planning is underway for the 2020/2021 Kids on the Beach program. Under the current circumstances, it has been difficult to get teachers and students actively engaged in the KOTB program materials. Instead of trying to get the program in the schools this fall, Annie will focus on implementing the KOTB program next spring. 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 middle school students during the late fall, winter, and spring forage fish KOTB investigations.
- Pinto Abalone Recovery: Field work is now complete for the season. The report is now available on the [Skagit MRC website](#). Field work will start up again in February 2021. The Sub-Award Agreement with Puget Sound Restoration Fund has been drafted and waiting for signatures.
- 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 wrote an article for the Skagit County Clean Water electronic newsletter that currently has over 800 subscribers. Jay said there was also a recent article on Olympia oysters in Fidalgo Bay in the Skagit Valley Herald and the Vancouver Washington newspaper.

Project Planning Discussion: *Tracy*

The Northwest Straits Commission recently released their 2021-2023 MRC Grant Proposal Timeline. The draft project list from MRCs is due January 2021. It is uncertain what the funding will look like at this time so we will need to consider what we can get done under various funding scenarios. Tracy asked the Committee to start thinking about what our priorities are and if there are current projects we would like to continue through 2021-2023 and if there are any new project ideas to add to our wish list. Priority will be given to those projects that have MRC Project Leads to help carry out the project. Although no decisions were made at the meeting, the Committee expressed interest in continuing all of our current MRC projects under the next MRC Grant, with the exception of Bowman Bay which will not likely need any funding. Pete suggested two new project ideas to consider including a Skagit MRC Intern, similar to Clallam MRCs intern program, and stormwater sample testing at outfalls for contaminants.

MRC Membership Application (Lynne Wenberg-Davidson): *Betsy*

The Committee voted unanimously by consensus to make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint Lynne Wenberg-Davidson as the newest member of the Skagit MRC. Lynne will be replacing Phyllis Bravinder as the new MRC Project Lead of the Kayak Kelp Surveys.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- Salish Sea Strings- The Melody of Conservation: The Northwest Straits Foundation's virtual fundraiser airs Nov 12 at 6pm, streaming live on Facebook, featuring an interview with Jason Morgan, and musical guest [Bob Fossil](#).
- San Juan MRCs Oil Spill Risk Consequences follow up discussion- November 19th at 4pm: This meeting will be a follow-up discussion from San Juan MRCs symposium discussion on their oil spill risk consequences assessment, to review existing resources and consider what roles MRCs can play in oil spill prevention and response.
- Northwest Straits Initiative Happy Hour- Celebrating 22 years: November 20, 2020 from 4pm-5pm via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held December 10, 2020