



Summary of the February 11, 2021, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) GoToMeeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Kathy Thornburgh, Paul Dinnel, Matt Castle, Diane Hennebert, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Darla Gay Smith, Jay Lind, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Brian Robson
- **Others in Attendance:** Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Dana Oster, NWSC; Jason Morgan, NWSC; Haley Sherman, 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:** January 14, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.
- **Public Comments:** No comments

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Paul Dinnel*

The last NWSC meeting was held January 29, via Zoom conference call (10am – 12pm).

- **New NWSC Representatives:** Julia Parrish, a professor at the University of Washington, was recently appointed to the NWSC as the new gubernatorial appointee. Tim Ellis was appointed as the new representative for Snohomish MRC.
- **NWSC Staff Update:** Katie Harris, NWSC Communications and Outreach Specialist, has accepted another position. Her last day with the Commission is February 19.
- **NWSC Communications:** Katie provided an update on the NWSC Communications Plan. NWSI 101 presentations will be held on a quarterly basis to help new members get a better understanding of the Initiative. MRC symposiums were also very popular so there will be more symposiums planned in the future. Monthly NWSI newsletters and monthly NWSC meetings will continue.
- **MRC Grant (2021-2023):** A Request for Proposals will be issued in mid-March. The online grant application process will start in May. Online grant applications will be due in June. MRCs will also be asked to present one MRC project proposal to the NWSC in June.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- February 26, 2021**

Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Jason Morgan*

- **MRC staff/Chair Workshop “Working Together for the Salish Sea”:** The Foundation recently hosted a virtual workshop on January 21 for MRC staff and Chairs to address how the Foundation functions and how they can help support the MRCs including: applying for and managing grants and private donations, fundraising, contracting, training/orientation, liability insurance, and project management, etc. Workshop materials were shared with Skagit MRC members, including the new Partnership Project Plan and form. If the MRC has a project that will need support from the Foundation, we will need to fill out this form in order to create consistency, transparency, and reliability for projects funded in part or whole by the Foundation.
- **Marine Conservation Fellowship:** Jason Morgan introduced Haley Sherman, a University of Washington graduate, who was recently hired by the Foundation for their new Marine Conservation Fellow position to assist with Bowman Bay beach seining work, data management, analysis and report writing. She will also be tasked with presenting the data analysis results to the MRC at the end of her contract.
- **Bowman Bay Monitoring Report:** Jason Morgan is currently working with Jason Toft at the University of Washington on a grey literature report that analyzes the monitoring data collected at 6 restoration sites in WA, including Bowman Bay and Cornet Bay. The sites that were selected for this report each have a minimum of 5 years of monitoring data. The report will include a two page fact sheet for each site. The report will be ready for distribution by the end of March 2021. A more in depth report for peer review and eventual publication will be finalized by the end of December 2022. The nearshore beach seining data at Bowman Bay will not be included in the grey literature report but might be included in the full manuscript that will be published in 2022.
- **Marine Shoreline Restoration Story Map:** The Foundation recently launched the GIS-based Story Map on their website to illustrate their work. www.nwstraitsfoundation.org.

- **Shore Friendly Webinar – February 24:** Shoreline landowners will learn how to protect and maintain their shoreline property and access while also protecting the fish, wildlife and habitats that we all enjoy. Presenters will be Jessica Cote, a coastal engineer and Traci Sanderson, a coastal ecologist, both employed at Blue Coast Engineering. Register on the [NWSF website](#).
- **Mt. Erie Elementary School Rain Garden Grant Proposal:** Diane assisted the Northwest Straits Foundation in applying for Shell Puget Sound Refinery grant funding for the Mt Erie School Rain Garden. The grant funds would help leverage construction by the City of Anacortes, and cover the cost of native plants, signage, and 4th-5th grade curriculum. This project will also include all sorts of fun volunteer opportunities for kids, MRC members and Shell employees. They hope to find out if this project will get funded in 6-8 weeks. If awarded, the project will start this year!

Kelp Survey Update: *Dana Oster*

Dana Oster provided a summary of the 2020 bull kelp data that was recently presented at the MRC Kelp Monitoring Workshop on January 21. A link to the presentation and data was shared with MRC members. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) monitors the kelp beds in south Puget Sound and the MRCs are a huge proponent in collecting the much needed kelp data in the Northwest Straits region. 80% of the kelp beds in the south Puget Sound region have already disappeared and are now starting to disappear as far north as Snohomish County. So far the kelp beds appear to be remaining fairly stable in most of the Northwest Straits region, but it is important to continue monitoring to look for any changes. In 2020, 40 MRC volunteers from 6 counties paddled 230 miles, surveyed 22 kelp beds, and documented 416 acres of kelp! Dana pointed out that kelp surveys take a lot of effort and dedication by our amazing volunteers. In Skagit County we now have over four years of kelp data from three different locations including: Biz Point, Shannon Point, and Coffin Rocks. Each location has a designated experienced volunteer in charge of leading the kelp surveys which helps improve the accuracy of our data. The lead volunteers in Skagit have been really great at bringing on new Salish Sea Steward recruits and safely teaching them the kelp monitoring protocols. Samish Indian Nation is currently surveying two kelp beds at Cypress Island using the same kayak-based survey protocols. They are also using aerial surveys and satellite imagery to assess the kelp beds as well as traditional tribal knowledge of historical kelp beds. Dana presented the MRC kelp data at the virtual Salish Sea Ecosystem to an audience of 800 people in 2020! The Kelp Recovery Plan was also released in 2020. To help make sure the Kelp Recovery Plan is being put to good use, the NWSC is working with the Pew Charitable Trust to host workshops to learn from State and local municipalities in terms of how they currently use best available science to help implement policies for habitat protection. Betsy said that as a local government employee involved in shoreline management she is very interested in participating in this effort. Dana said that WDNR would like to host workshops to train local jurisdictions on how to incorporate kelp protection into Shoreline Master Programs (SMPs). Most SMPs only have eelgrass protections, but kelp is equally important. Skagit County is still in the early stages of updating their SMP. The NWSC is seeking state funding in the 2021-2023 biennium to increase staff capacity to help make sure the Kelp Recovery Plan is implemented and for data analysis of the MRC regional kelp monitoring.

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards:** The SSS Advisory Committee met on January 20th to continue planning for the 2021 Salish Sea Stewards Training which will commence on Feb 23 – June 1, 2021. Classes will be held virtually via ZOOM on Tuesdays from 1pm to 3:30pm with two speakers and 2 optional field sessions from 1pm -5pm. The registration deadline is February 16, 2021. The 2021 curriculum, including 20 speakers and 10 training sessions, has been finalized and shared with MRC members. To date there are 26 registrants. Geographically, half of the registrants hail from Anacortes, with the balance from Sedro Woolley, La Conner, Mt Vernon, Burlington, & 5 from Snohomish, Seattle & Bainbridge Island. Lynne updated the Master SSS Member List which was no easy task! There are currently 272 trained SSS graduates. Sara Brostom & Lynne integrated the list with Mail Chimp so we have a way to communicate with all the trained SSS. This week, the new SSS Member Master list was successfully used to invite all past SSS to the upcoming 2021 training sessions. MRC members were also invited to watch the presentations. The SSS Advisory Committee continues to communicate volunteer opportunities through the electronic news bulletin, "The Wave". The SSS Facebook pages have also been revamped. The Advisory Committee looks forward to using new communication tools to keep all the Stewards informed, engaged & connected. Since 2014 the SSS have contributed over 35,000 hours of volunteer service to Salish Sea projects. Jude said he is very pleased with Sara's enthusiasm, positive energy, and adaptability in taking on the leadership role to develop and facilitate the SSS training program this year. Jude thanked the MRC for the progress being made in keeping this program going. The Committee shared Jude's sentiments and are very pleased with how the program is progressing in partnership with Padilla Bay.

- **Fidalgo Bay Day:** The 2021 event date is tentatively set for Saturday, August 28 (11am-3pm). The Fidalgo Bay Resort facility has been reserved. A FBD Planning Committee meeting will likely be scheduled sometime in the next couple of months to discuss the different possible scenarios, options, and alternatives depending on COVID-19 safety restrictions for public events. A decision will need to be made soon so that we can start planning and promoting the event. Please let Tracy know if you are interested in helping with the planning process.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration:** Lynne Wenberg-Davidson and Tracy Alker will be maintaining the plants at the site this year starting later in May or early June, under the guidance of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's Restoration Technician.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys:** Surveys will likely start up again at the three different kelp beds in June or July 2021. The kelp beds include: Shannon Point, Biz Point, and Coffin Rock.
- **Forage Fish Surveys:** All forage fish survey sites continue to be surveyed once or twice a month with small groups and all COVID-19 safety precautions. Spawning season is pretty much done until spring except in Fidalgo Bay where it is common for light spawning to continue into February. Pete shared an infographic of the 2020 forage fish data collected for WDNR's Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve that was put together by Rondi Nordal, AmeriCorps with RE-Sources. A forage fish survey is planned at Fidalgo Bay this Saturday, weather permitting.
- **Kids on the Beach:** The Kids on the Beach program will be virtual this spring with over 200 6th - 8th graders participating from four different schools. The curriculum will focus on forage fish. The virtual field trips will consist of beach seining and forage fish spawning surveys and eggs under microscopes. The students will analyze and compile the data into reports to present at a virtual symposium. On a side note, Jude said that he will need to recuse himself from any discussions or decisions related to funding for MRC programs hosted by Padilla Bay (i.e. Kids on the Beach and Salish Sea Stewards) in order to avoid any potential conflicts that might be perceived. However, he said that he would be happy to continue to provide program updates.
- **Pinto Abalone Recovery:** Hatchery work continues to raise juvenile abalone for outplanting. Field work, including monitoring and outplanting of 2,000 juvenile abalone, will begin later this month or early March, when there is minimal algae cover at the site. Field work will also include scouting for potential new restoration sites, collecting wild adult abalone for broodstock in the hatchery, and deploying underwater cameras to study predation.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration:** Not much happening right now. Routine field work will start up again in May with a reduced amount of monitoring this year at three different sites in Fidalgo Bay. Paul Dinnel will be giving a presentation on the native oyster restoration work for the Salish Sea Stewards class on April 13.

Earth Day Celebration: *Kevin Anderson*

The Port of Anacortes is in the very early stages of planning a community-based event to celebrate Earth Day this year. They are thinking about hosting a beach cleanup at two Port-owned beaches in Anacortes including: Railroad Avenue Beach at the Port Office and Ship Harbor Beach, which is co-managed by the City of Anacortes. The idea is to have beach cleanups at multiple locations to help maintain social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures. In addition, the Port plans to convert to 100% renewable energy and is looking for other creative ways to celebrate Earth Day and possibly collaborate with other organizations. Matt said the Samish Indian Nation might be interested in participating. Tracy suggested posing the question at the upcoming Skagit ECO-Net meeting on February 16. Several different organizations belong to Skagit ECO-Net which focuses on environmental education and outreach opportunities and promoting special events. Please let Tracy or Kevin know if you have any ideas on how the MRC and the Port could collaborate on an activity for Earth Day.

MRC Officer Elections

- **NWSC Representative and NWSC Alternate:** Diane said she is interested in the NWSC Representative position but is unable to commit until 2022. No other MRC members expressed interest in the position. Pete agreed to continue to serve as the NWSC Representative. Paul and Diane will fill in as the NWSC Alternate as needed. Pete encouraged MRC members to sit in on the NWSC virtual meetings to learn what it's all about. NWSC meetings are open to the public so anybody can attend. Tracy or Katie can forward meeting materials to those who are interested in attending.
- **MRC Chair and MRC Vice-Chair:** Betsy was appointed to serve another term as MRC Chair. Jay will continue to serve as MRC Vice-Chair until the position is filled, but strongly recommended appointing someone new. MRC members were asked to consider filling this role and to let Betsy, Jay, or Tracy know if interested.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- **MRC Membership Resignation Announcement:** Kathy Thornburgh announced she is stepping down from her seat on the MRC after taking on new work for the Skagit Land Trust. Kari Odden will take over as Kathy's Alternate on

the MRC until she can find a replacement. Betsy thanked Kathy for all of her hard work and the time she committed to the MRC. We are all extremely grateful.

- Skagit ECONet Virtual Meeting/Presentation- February 16 (11am – 12:30pm): A special presentation by Betty Carteret, representing Citizens' Climate Education called "Climate Change Progress and Solutions – There's Still Room for Optimism". MRC members are welcome to attend.
- NOAA Marine Debris Program's Webinar Series, Salvaging Solutions to Abandoned and Derelict Vessels: Starting February 24, 2021 at 12pm "Salvaging Solutions: Knowing the Ropes" <https://noaaorr.adobeconnect.com/adv/>. Webinars will be recorded and posted on NOAA's [website](#).
- Kelp Webinar, February 24th (7-8pm): The Clallam MRC will be hosting a virtual kelp webinar on February 24th from 7-8pm featuring Tom Mumford. The webinar is open to the public.

The meeting adjourned at 10:18am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held March 11, 2021