



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Paul Dinnel, Matt Castle, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Jay Lind, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson, Diane Hennebert
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Brian Robson, Darla Gay Smith, Kari Odden
- **Others in Attendance:** Bob Weathers, Kelp Survey Lead; Sasha Horst, NWSC; Dana Oster, NWSC

Call to Order and Introduction: Betsy Stevenson called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

- **Approval of Minutes:** February 11, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.
- **Public Comments:** Bob Weathers, shared concerns from a local resident over possible illegal harvesting of bull kelp at Yokeko Point. The concerned citizen would like to see the area closed to harvesting. Pete said the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is tasked with enforcing daily bag limits on seaweeds and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) is the managing entity. Betsy suggested contacting the WDFW to report any suspected illegal harvest. Kevin shared the link to WDNR's website and brochure on [seaweed harvesting](#). Bob expressed interest in possibly adding the Yokeko Point kelp bed to the bull kelp surveys to see if the harvesting is having an impact on the kelp bed. MRC members expressed support of adding Yokeko Point to our kelp survey locations if there is enough interest from the volunteers to take on a new site and if the Northwest Straits Commission staff has enough capacity to process the data. The Committee discussed the possibility of designating the Yokeko Point area as a Marine Protected Area for kelp to restrict harvesting. Paul pointed out that designating a Marine Protected Area for kelp could be very complicated and could impact local treaty rights and could also receive pushback from the public. Dana recommended taking the education and outreach approach first before imposing new restrictions. Pete suggested adding kelp signage at the Deception Pass State Park boat launch using WDNR's graphics. Lynne volunteered to talk to the Park Manager at Deception Pass State Park about adding WDNR's kelp signage. Lynne also offered to talk to her neighbors at Yokeko Point about setting up a "community watch" program to educate and watch for kelp harvest violators.

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

The last NWSC meeting was held February 26, via Zoom conference call (10am – 12pm).

- **New Science Advisory Chair:** Julia Parrish was recently appointed as the new Chair of the NWSC Science advisory Committee. Julia is a professor at the University of Washington and also runs the citizen science-based Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COAST).
- **NWSC Staff Update:** Katie Harris, NWSC Communications and Outreach Specialist, has accepted another position. Her last day with the Commission is February 19. Sasha will be taking over Katie's duties until her position is filled. Unfortunately, there is currently a hiring freeze at Ecology.
- **Maritime National Heritage Area:** Alexandra Gradwohl of the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation presented on the Maritime Washington National Heritage Area (MNHA). Pete said it was a very interesting presentation that raised some very interesting questions about what the roles of an MRC and other various other organizations might be. The MNHA presentation slides were shared with MRC members. Alexandra will present to the MRCs on the MWNHA if interested.
- **Voluntary No Anchor Zone:** The NWSC is looking for funding opportunities to expand the Jefferson MRC's Voluntary No Anchor Zone project to other counties, including Skagit County at Cap Sante. The grant that they recently applied for did not get approved so they will continue to look for other opportunities.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- March, 2021**

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

- The February NWSF Board Meeting was cancelled. Jay said there was nothing new to report. Updates will be shared at the next MRC meeting in April.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards: The 2021 Salish Sea Stewards Training commenced on Feb 23, 2021. We have 41 registered trainees (normally classes average 25 trainees), representing a 64% increase. This is likely due to offering an all-online program & doubling our advertising. Additionally, we are averaging 9 previously trained Salish Sea Stewards attending the lectures for a total of 50 people a week benefiting from the lectures. The next Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee will be held on March 19th at 10am via Zoom. Jude pointed out that the state is starting to loosen restrictions on the number of people that can do field work which will likely influence volunteer opportunities.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: The 2021 event date is tentatively set for Saturday, August 28 (11am-3pm) at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Tracy recommended not offering free samples of seafood at the event this year due to the impacts COVID-19 has had on the restaurant industry and seafood business, in addition to the health concerns and permit requirements. A survey will be sent to past participants and volunteers sometime in May to see if there is any interest to host activities in person this year.
- 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. A training session will likely be scheduled before the surveys start up again.
- 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. Two additional hoses were purchased to help with this effort. Pete thanked Matt and the Samish Indian Nation for allowing the volunteers access to the nice warm water inside their Fidalgo Bay Resort facility this winter when it was so cold. Pete said the logs have really piled up along the shoreline and it's been interesting to watch how the beach changes after the winter storms roll in.
- Kids on the Beach: The Kids on the Beach program will be virtual this spring (April-May) with over 200 6th - 8th graders participating from four different schools including Sedro-Woolley, Conway, Concrete and La Conner. 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. Annie has a meeting with the teachers at the end of this month to plan logistics and discuss if there are any other options for the Kids on the Beach program this spring other than just virtual learning.
- Pinto Abalone Recovery: Hatchery work continues to raise juvenile abalone for outplanting. Field work started up again this month. More information will be provided at the April MRC meeting. Field work consists of monitoring and outplanting of 2,000 juvenile abalone, 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: Routine field work will start up again in May with a reduced amount of monitoring at three different sites in Fidalgo Bay to look at recruitment patterns. Paul Dinnel will be giving a presentation on the native oyster restoration work for the Salish Sea Stewards class on April 13. Paul met with Roger Fuller and Sylvia Yang at the Padilla Bay Reserve about going out this summer to take a look at the south channels in Padilla Bay for potential oyster restoration with seed oysters. Seed oysters could be collected from Fidalgo Bay with the help of volunteers to reduce costs. Brian Allen with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund surveyed the shell beds that were put out by barge at Weaverling Spit last winter. Results indicated a very good oyster settlement last year. Paul said this is a good indication that the oysters will continue to spawn and settle increasing the oyster population on the west side of the Bay. Paul and Brian discussed goals for monitoring in the future. For the last two years we've been on an abbreviated sampling schedule, which was recommended to do every three to five years. They agreed that next year would be a good time to do a full scale sampling effort. Paul said that he will need additional assistance either from a new MRC Project Lead or from the Puget Sound Restoration Fund which might require additional funding of around \$4,000. The Northwest Straits Foundation had originally allocated Skagit Restoration Initiative Funds for oyster restoration in Fidalgo and Padilla Bay. Tracy will contact Lisa to see if those funds are still available for oyster restoration.

MRC Project Planning Process: *Tracy Alker*

- Project Ideas: Each MRC selects their projects a little differently, including projects or actions that don't necessarily require any funding. Some MRCs host an Annual Retreat to develop project ideas based on priority issues. Others form subcommittees to select projects. For Skagit MRC, project ideas are typically brought forward by an individual MRC member or partner organization. We don't currently have a formal process, but if there is

any interest in planning an annual retreat, forming additional subcommittees, or doing things a little differently, please let Tracy know. Pete suggested revisiting this topic later this year after this grant process has been finalized to determine if we want to take a different approach in planning our projects in the future.

- **Project Ranking:** Project priorities are ranked based on the following criteria:
 - There must be a benefit to the marine or nearshore environment.
 - The MRC must have a clear role, if it is part of a larger project. There must be a part of the project the MRC can take ownership of or credit for.
 - Each MRC project must have a Project Lead/s. The degree of the Project Lead's involvement varies depending on the project. Project Leads typically help develop project proposals, provide monthly updates at our MRC meetings, and make sure deliverables are met. Sometimes the Project Leads are asked to give presentations or help write reports. Project Leads can also form subcommittees if they need the extra help.
 - Some form of community engagement is also desirable.
 - Final decisions about MRC project priorities are made by consensus.
- **Project Timeline:** The timeline of the project, whether it's a one-time effort or ongoing, when it needs to be implemented, and the duration and commitment requirements will help determine the best available resources to tap into to implement the project. It's always good to have a wish list of projects that are ready to go, because you never know when funding might become available.
- **Resources:** Determining which resources to use will also depend on the estimated costs and if any other partners will be involved to help leverage funding. Some of the project ideas that are brought to the table don't necessarily require any funding, but do require a Project Lead to see it through. There are several resources that are readily available to the MRC:
 - **NWSC:** The NWSC secures the core funding for the MRCs including federal funding from the EPA through the PSP, as well as funding from the State in the form of a 2 year grant that starts October 1 through September. They can also seek for funding for regional projects and provide technical expertise and communications for our projects. There are certain restrictions tied to the NWSC's state and federal funds. The NWSC Budget Tips information sheet was shared with MRC members.
 - **NWSF:** The Foundation is a great resource for our larger restoration projects. They can provide project management expertise and help with contracting and permitting which is sometimes easier and faster than going through the County. They can also help apply for grants and seek private donations for projects, facilitate training and workshops, provide technical expertise and provide liability insurance to volunteers. If the MRC is interested in collaborating with the Foundation on a project, we will need to refer to the Partnership Project Plan and fill out their new agreement form.
 - **Skagit County:** The Skagit County Public Works Department's Natural Resources Division's Clean Water Program provides funding to support MRC Operations and administration including part-time staff. It can sometimes be used to provide refreshments at our special events, volunteer recognition, and projects that improve or protect water quality and shellfish, but must be budgeted and approved ahead of time.
 - **Partner Organizations:** Our projects often involve support from partner organizations whether it's in-kind support, or other sources of funding. For example: Friends of Skagit Beaches sponsors the passport activity and prizes for Fidalgo Bay Day and has paid for t-shirts and speaker gift bags for Salish Sea Stewards. Padilla Bay has provided their facility free of charge as well as some of their staff time and office space for our SSS and KOTB programs. The Samish hosts Fidalgo Bay Day and several MRC meetings and other events at their resort. And the Puget Sound Restoration Fund supplements the larger Pinto Abalone Recovery project with various other sources of funding.
- **(2021-2023) MRC Grant:** A Request for Proposals will be issued March 15. 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. The MRC Grant Application is divided into 3 project categories: Monitoring/Research, Restoration/Protection, and Education Outreach. There is a different form to fill out for each category. Some projects might fall under more than one category. For Example, Pinto Abalone Recovery falls under the Monitoring/Research as well as the Restoration/Protection category so it will require both forms to be filled out. The MRC Project Leads will be responsible for filling out the application forms for their projects. Tracy will post the information provided by the Project Lead in the online application in EAGL.

- 2021-2023 Skagit MRC Grant Projects: Projects currently being proposed include: Fidalgo Bay Day, Salish Sea Stewards, Kids on the Beach, Pinto Abalone, MRC Intern, Stormwater Monitoring, and Samish Flower Farm Interpretive Signage. MRC Project Leads will help prepare the proposals for the MRC Grant Application. The project proposal list will be finalized by consensus at the April 8 MRC meeting. A MRC Project Lead is still needed for Fidalgo Bay Day, otherwise it will be removed from the list.
- 2019 -2020 MRC Projects for all 7 MRCs: Tracy shared a spreadsheet of the recent projects for all 7 MRCs.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: *All*

- Navy Aircraft Noise: Implications for Salish Sea and Olympic Region- March 16 (4pm-6pm): Virtual webinar hosted by the San Juan MRC and Salish Sea Institute.
- Skagit MRC Presentation to the Board of Skagit County Commissioners- April 20 (8:30am) Tracy will provide a brief overview of the NWSI and highlight Skagit MRCs recent accomplishments in the 2020 Annual Report. MRC members were invited to present on specific projects if interested.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held April 8, 2021