



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the April 8, 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, Brian Robson, Darla Gay Smith
- **MRC Members Absent:** Todd Mitchell, Kari Odden, Diane Hennebert
- **Others in Attendance:** Catey Ritchie, Swinomish (MRC Membership Applicant); Alex Gradwohl; Andrea McBride, Don Hunger, NWSF; Kimberly Cauvel, SVH

**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:** March 11, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.
- **Public Comments:** No comments

## Maritime National Heritage Area: Alex Gradwohl

National Heritage Areas (NHA) are cultural landscapes of national importance designated by Congress and supported by the National Park Service. NHAs are not government owned and are non-regulatory. There are currently 55 NHAs across the country, mostly concentrated on the east coast and mid-west. The Maritime Washington National Heritage Area (MW-NHA) was officially designated by Congress in 2019 and is managed by the nonprofit Washington Trust for Historic Preservation. It is the first NHA in the country focused entirely on maritime heritage. It encompasses 3,000 miles of Washington State's saltwater shoreline from Grays Harbor County to the Canadian border and includes 18 federally recognized tribes and 13 counties. The MW-NHA will build partnerships and increase collaboration to be responsive to the locally identified needs and provide a platform to preserve, maintain, celebrate, and share stories of the diverse cultural maritime heritage landscape and identity along our coast. There are six primary goals of the MW-NHA including: 1. Share cultural stories; 2. Support tribes and local organizations in sharing and maintaining their maritime heritage; 3. Connect coastal communities and cross-sector groups working in this field to maximize impact; 4. Celebrate working waterfronts; 5. Help draw connections to maritime heritage and healthy shorelines and marine waters; and 6. Amplify diverse and underrepresented stories of western Washington's maritime heritage and culture. The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation is currently working on developing a MW-NHA Management Plan. It takes three years to complete and they are currently in their second year. The Plan will be completed in 2022 and submitted to the National Park Service for approval. Pete asked if there would be any opportunities for volunteers after the Plan is implemented. Alex said the final plan will include goals and strategies for developing partnership networks which could potentially involve volunteer opportunities. This year the main focus will be on conducting outreach, hosting work groups, seeking input, advice, and expertise from tribes and the MW-NHA Steering Committee, and seeking public comments which will be compiled into a MW-NHA Management Plan. There are several opportunities for MRC members to get involved including: take and share the online survey at [www.preservewa.org/mwnha-survey](http://www.preservewa.org/mwnha-survey), participate in virtual regional workshops, identify important maritime sites using the online mapping tool, and reviewing and providing comment on the draft management plan. MRC members can sign up for email updates at: [preservewa.org/mw-nha](http://preservewa.org/mw-nha). MRC members were invited to attend the Maritime Focus group and Workshop on Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 5pm. Pre-registration is required. The purpose of the invitation-only focus group is to bring together a range of private and public perspectives from Whatcom and Skagit Counties for a conversation about the current state of cross-sector collaboration around maritime projects, identify the biggest threats, and where there is room for growth.

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

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

- **NWSC Staff Update:** Pete gave special recognition to Sasha Horst for taking on additional duties until they are able to fill Katie Harris's position. The NWSC is hiring two new positions from the Veteran's Conservation Corps for a period of six months each. The first one will be starting in April and the second one will start in June.
- **NWSC Tribal Acknowledgement:** Members of the Commission drafted a Tribal Acknowledgement that will be presented at all NWSC meetings and special events. MRCs are invited to modify the Acknowledgement with guidance from local tribes.
- **Northwest Straits 101:** Will be held on April 15. It is recommended for new MRC members.

- NWSCI Virtual Conference – October 29, 2021: Stay tuned for more information.
- Eelgrass Protection Zone Grant: The NWSC is applying for the Community Project Fund grant to support the social marketing component of eelgrass protection zone expansion. The total request is \$72,500. The NWSC requested a letter of support for this grant opportunity from Skagit MRC. Unfortunately, the request was short-notice and the MRC was unable to reach a consensus before the deadline.
- Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- April 30, 2021: Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>

### **Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) Report: *Jay Lind and Don Hunger***

- Mt. Erie Elementary School Rain Garden: NWSF was recently awarded a grant from Shell Puget Sound Refinery, for a rain garden/stormwater retrofit project in partnership with Mt. Erie Elementary School, City of Anacortes, and Skagit MRC. There will be planting and outreach opportunities for MRC volunteers and Shell employees. The project will likely take about one year to complete.
- Fellowship/Intern Needs Assessment Survey: The Foundation is considering sponsoring a program to fund and recruit interns or fellows to support MRC projects. The MRCs would be able to request an individual with specific skills and abilities for a period of time between three months to twelve months. MRCs would have to provide the project, mentoring, office space, etc. Don will be sending out a survey to MRC Members about this opportunity to see if there is enough interest or need.
- Nearshore Monitoring: The Foundation will be able to begin working with volunteers again as the state enters phase three of the recovery plan.
- Shore Friendly Workshops: Two virtual workshops were held in February and March. A combined total of over 315 people attended the workshops! The Foundation will provide further assistance through site visits.
- Passport for Marine Adventure: The Foundation is creating a “Passport for Marine Adventure”, a free and fun game to get the public outdoors and educate them on the NW Straits Initiative. The Passport will include a game board with three sites per each MRC for a total of 21 sites. Once you visit three sites and send photos of each, you will get a gift from the Foundation and once you get to 7 you get an accommodating gift from the Foundation.
- NWSF Board Meetings: Will occur every other month.

### **Project Status & Discussion**

- Salish Sea Stewards- *Darla Gay Smith*: 2021 was the first year that the SSS Training Program was advertised to the public as an all-virtual, on line program, which resulted in a significantly larger class. 41 students registered and 39 are on track complete the training, this is an additional 15 trainees compared to 2020 (62.5% increase over past average). The AC attributed the low drop-out rate to host Sara Brostrom’s hosting skills and Padilla Bay’s polished administration of the program. The 9 member SSS Advisory Committee typically meets once a month with Padilla Bay NERR staff to talk about how the program is going, any issues that arise, and how we can make improvements. At the last meeting, the AC discussed all of the benefits of a virtual program and whether or not the larger class size and expanding base of volunteers would impact PBNERR’s ability to administer the program effectively, which it was decided would not. They also acknowledged all of the benefits of in-person classes. For the 2022 SSS training, the AC and PBNERR are now considering a combination of: virtual, in-person classroom, and hands on field training.
- Fidalgo Bay Day- *Tracy Alker*: The 2021 event date is tentatively set for Saturday, August 28 (11am-3pm) at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. The MRC decided not to host the traditional large-scale Fidalgo Bay Day event this year due to so many unknowns with the pandemic. Especially since several past participating organizations have already indicated they will not be participating in any in-person outreach event this year. As an alternative, the Committee talked about the possibility of doing a very small informal outdoor public outreach activity/s, if it is determined safe to do so. The activity could be something we combine with the Foundation’s Passport Marine Adventure or it could be something completely separate and spontaneous. The Committee agreed that whatever we decide to do, it should not be promoted as Fidalgo Bay Day in order to avoid any confusion or ruin any expectations of those who are familiar with the traditional event. Another possible alternative that was discussed, is to apply the Fidalgo Bay Day grant funding to upgrade the MRC booth for future outreach events.
- Bowman Bay Restoration – *Tracy Alker*: 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. Pete commented that while conducting forage fish surveys at the site, he noticed some erosion happening around the fence posts located closest to the beach that we might want to keep an eye on. He is concerned that some of the posts might soon be gone with the next big storm

and suggested taking pictures to help document changes to the shoreline. Paul said he has a series of photos that he has taken over the years of the Bowman Bay restoration site that he could share.

- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: 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. Five new Salish Sea Stewards have expressed interest in helping with the kelp surveys. The virtual 2021 Kelp Monitoring Kickoff Meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 6<sup>th</sup> from 1-4pm. The agenda topics will include kayak safety training, the online data reporting tool, Island County's new underwater GoPro technique to document kelp beds, an update from kelp partners and volunteers, and an overview of the Puget Sound Restoration Fund's Kelp 7 day Expedition to map the Kelp Highway in Puget Sound. Interested MRC members and volunteers are welcome to attend.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Forage fish surveys continue at our MRC restoration sites (Marchs Point- 2/month, Bowman Bay- 1/month, and Kukatali Reserve -2/month) and at our Forage Fish Index sites for the NWSI and WDFW (Similk Bay, Samish Island, and Ship Harbor). Lots of surf smelt eggs have been found at the Marchs Point restoration site. The Bowman Bay restoration site is a high energy site which has made it difficult to find any surf smelt eggs because the fine sands tend to get washed away. Surf smelt have also been found at the Similk Bay and Ship Harbor sites, but very few have been found at the Samish Island site. The forage fish surveys are all coordinated and conducted by a team of trained volunteers. Volunteers are also conducting forage fish surveys along the beaches of the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve for the Washington Department of Natural Resources. The surf smelt are found at this location in huge abundance during the summer months! There are potentially two new sites that are currently being considered as additional forage fish index survey sites including: the beach at Skyline in partnership with Amy Eberling's Salish Sea School students. The second potential location of interest is at the proposed MJB Development site in Anacortes along the Fidalgo Bay shoreline. The area is currently heavily armored.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: The Kids on the Beach program is still on track for virtual classroom and field trip experiences this spring, starting April 26<sup>th</sup> through June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Over 200 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be 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. Students will also get to look at eggs under microscopes. The students will analyze and compile the data into reports to present at a virtual symposium.
- Pinto Abalone Recovery – Paul Dinnel: Field work started up again in March with Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) and WDFW divers. Field work consists of monitoring and outplanting juvenile abalone at 10 different restoration sites in the San Juans including 4 sites in Skagit County waters, scouting for potential new restoration sites, collecting wild adult abalone for broodstock in the hatchery, and deploying underwater cameras to study predation. Since 2009, around 14,000 abalone have been outplanted at 6 different sites in Skagit County waters. PSRF had a bumper crop of around 10,000 abalone produced at the hatchery this year. They are planning to outplant 1,000/each at four different restoration sites in Skagit County. This is about twice as many as they had proposed to outplant this year. During a recent survey, they discovered lots of pinto abalone at two sites in Skagit County waters that were previously thought to have low survival rates and had been removed from the list to receive any additional outplanting. The two sites are now back in the fold to receive future outplants! PSRF will be working with a UW Graduate Student to deploy oceanographic arrays at six sites around the San Juans to track temperature, pH, Dissolved Oxygen, salinity, sedimentation, and currents, for a number of months during the summer, pre- and post-outplanting of pinto abalone. They will also deploy cameras to take a look at predation.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Routine field work will start up again in May with a reduced amount of monitoring at different sites in Fidalgo Bay to look at post larval 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 will be meeting with Roger Fuller, Jude Apple, and Sylvia Yang at the Padilla Bay Reserve soon to take a look at the southern channels in Padilla Bay for potential oyster restoration. Darla posted a YouTube video of Paul's oyster restoration work in Fidalgo Bay on the Salish Sea Stewards Facebook page.

- MRC Project Presentation (May 28 or June 25): Each MRC will need to present one project at the May 28 or June 25 NWSC meeting. The project can either be a new project proposal or a current project to discuss Actions to Impacts and lessons learned.
- 2021 – 2023 MRC Grant Projects: MRC Project Leads shared details about their projects and budget request. The following list of projects and budget was approved by consensus and will move forward with the application process.
  1. **MRC Operations** (Project Lead- Tracy Alker): Year 1 Budget= \$32,500; Year 2 Budget= \$32,500. The budget would primarily be used for staff support, MRC meetings and communications, supplies and refreshments for MRC meetings, MRC member travel costs for MRC Conference and other approved workshops/training, and NWSC meetings.
  2. **Fidalgo Bay Day** (Project Lead- TBD): Year 1 Budget= \$2,500; Year 2 Budget= \$2,500  
The budget would primarily be used for supplies and event promotion. *\*Note: The Committee recommended moving forward with the Fidalgo Bay Day proposal without an official MRC Project Lead until the position can be filled. Darla Gay Smith said she would be willing to fill in as the lead for now until we can find someone to take her place. If we are unable to recruit a new lead by February, we will need to amend the grant and reallocate the funds.*
  3. **Salish Sea Stewards** (Project Lead- Darla Gay Smith): Year 1 Budget= \$21,000; Year 2 Budget= \$21,000 The budget would primarily be used to pay for Padilla Bay NERR staff time for the administration of the Salish Sea Stewards program through a Sub-Award Agreement. The program model would be similar to previous years in the development and implementation of a 40-hour volunteer training curriculum. *\*Note: Jude Apple recused himself from any decisions regarding the budget and funding for this project.*
  4. **Kids on the Beach** (Project Lead- Jude Apple): Year 1 Budget= \$13,000; Year 2 Budget= \$13,000. The budget would primarily be used to pay for Padilla Bay NERR staff time for the administration of the Kids on the Beach program through a Sub-Award Agreement. The program model would be similar to previous years in the development and implementation of KOTB to engage school kids (primarily middle-school) in a variety of hands-on marine science activities in the field and in the classroom. *\*Note: Jude Apple recused himself from any decisions regarding the budget and funding for this project, but said the Kids on the Beach program could use some additional funding if there is any available to help build on and expand the program. The consensus of the Committee was to increase the Kids on the Beach budget by \$3,000 (originally \$10,000) by re-allocating the funding originally budgeted for the Samish Flower Farm Signage project which the MRC decided to drop from this grant proposal.*
  5. **Pinto Abalone** (Project Lead- Paul Dinnel): Year 1 Budget= \$21,000; Year 2 Budget= \$21,000. The budget would primarily be used to pay for Puget Sound Restoration Fund staff time to administer the program through a Sub-Award Agreement. Skagit MRC will continue working in collaboration with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund to build upon existing outplant efforts of juvenile pinto abalone to establish a sustainable population at the restoration sites in Skagit County. Divers will conduct surveys of the outplant areas to monitor survival, growth and movement of abalone.
  6. **MRC Intern** (Project Lead- Pete Haase): Year 1 Budget= \$2,000; Year 2 Budget= \$2,000. The budget would primarily be used to pay for Salish Sea School staff time through a Sub-Award Agreement to carry out a specific project for the MRC (e.g. forage fish surveys at Skyline, boat-based kelp surveys, marine bird surveys, etc.). At the end of the program the intern will present the project to the MRC.
  7. **Stormwater Sampling** (Project Lead- Diane Hennebert): Year 1 Budget= \$2,000; Year 2 Budget= \$2,000. The budget would be used to pay for the lab analyses. Skagit MRC would partner with Friends of Skagit Beaches, the Samish Indian Nation, and the City of Anacortes to build on their sampling efforts at the Sharpes Corner outfalls to test for hydrocarbons and metals in the stormwater runoff from the new roundabout. Jude offered to help out with review and/or input on the stormwater proposal to make sure this work yields something interesting, that is also useable and defensible – and that we are confident in the findings and what it tells us. For example, if we find elevated hydrocarbons, it would be good to know that those levels are elevated relative to background, or what was there before.

**\*\*Flower Farm Nearshore Signage in Partnership with the Skagit Land Trust:** Skagit MRC decided to drop the Samish Island Flower Farm Nearshore Signage project for several reasons including: A budget shortfall (only \$3,000 was budgeted, but the project will cost around \$5-\$6k to implement), no MRC Project Lead, and there were concerns over the eligibility of the project to get funded due to the perceived pass through funding to another organization. The consensus of the Committee was to re-allocate the \$3,000 to the Kids on the Beach project which was in need of additional funding.

### **MRC Membership Applicant**

Skagit MRC voted unanimously by consensus to make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint Catey Ritchie to the MRC. Catey will replace Todd Mitchell as the representative for Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Catey was recently hired as an Environmental Specialist for the Swinomish Tribe and is overseeing the new Swinomish Shore Friendly Program and is involved in several restoration and improvement projects.

### **Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: All**

- **Shoreline Master Program Update:** Betsy said the Skagit Shoreline Master Program Update will be available for public comment soon. The Committee discussed whether or not the MRC should try to comment as a group or as individuals. It was determined that it would be much easier to just leave it up to individuals to comment on their own rather than trying to formulate something as a Committee via consensus. Betsy offered to provide an overview of the Shoreline Master Program Update at the next MRC meeting.
- **MJB Shoreline Development Proposal in Anacortes:** Pete suggested inviting Diane or someone from the City of Anacortes to one of our future MRC meetings to talk about the proposal so that we could get a better understanding of the project. Pete asked the MRC to consider what the Committee's role might be in reviewing and providing comments on potential impacts to the shoreline and marine waters. Particularly the potential impact on nearby shoreline restoration work. The Committee decided there could be potential conflicts with the MRC providing comments and recommended the comments come from individuals rather than the MRC as a group.
- **Tommy Thompson Trestle Project Update:** Pete reported that the Estuary Salmon Recovery Program (ESRP) funds for the planning part of the project was approved in the State's Capital Budget by the Senate, but Congress voted for a much smaller budget which didn't cover the Trestle project (House Bill 1080). Pete suggested MRC members contact the legislators to let them know the importance of the project and the need for funding.
- **Port of Anacortes Beach Cleanup for Earth Day- April 22 (1pm-3pm):** To celebrate Earth Day, the Port of Anacortes is hosting small beach cleanups at three locations (no more than 15 people per site): Railroad Avenue Beach, N Avenue Beach, and Ship Harbor Beach on April 22. Please register on Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/port-of-anacortes-earth-day-beach-cleanup-tickets-147888140409>.
- **Samish Island Conservation Area:** Skagit Land Trust purchased an additional 50 acres at the entrance to Samish Island for a total of 100 acres for protection, including over a half a mile of marine shoreline! Public access will be allowed along Padilla Bay for low-impact recreation.

**The meeting adjourned at 11:15am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held May 13, 2021**