



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the May 13, 2021, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) GoToMeeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Paul Dinnel, Matt Castle, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson, Brian Robson, Kari Odden, Darla Gay Smith, Jay Lind
- **MRC Members Absent:** Catey Ritchie, Diane Hennebert
- **Others in Attendance:** No others in attendance

Call to Order and Introduction: Betsy Stevenson called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

- **Approval of Minutes:** April 8, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus, with minor edits. The budgets were corrected for the Salish Sea Stewards (year two) and the Kids on the Beach (year one).
- **Public Comments:** Brian Robson announced the recent acquisition of Shell Puget Sound Refinery by HollyFrontier. The sale is not final until it goes through the regulatory approval process. If the sale does not go through, Shell will continue to operate the site. If the sale does go through, Shell operations and current employees are expected to transition over to HollyFrontier later this year. Brian said he is uncertain whether or not he will be able to continue to serve on the MRC as a representative of HollyFrontier, but they have expressed interest in continuing the community relationships that Shell has been involved in.

Skagit County Shoreline Master Program Update: *Betsy Stevenson*

Betsy Stevenson is the Project Manager and Senior Planner with the Skagit County Planning Department and the Team Supervisor of the Natural Resources group. Betsy and her team began the comprehensive update of the Shoreline Master Program back in 2010 with some grant money they received from Ecology to do the work. They spent a couple of years working with the Shoreline Advisory Committee, hiring a consultant, and working on all the background documentation and baseline data that they needed to prepare the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) and make some decisions on environment designations in Skagit County. Because of all of the changes in the laws, they ended up having to create a brand new document from scratch. The draft document was presented to the Planning Commission in 2012. The Planning Commission reviewed three different draft versions of the SMP until completing their work in 2016 after lots of public meetings, public outreach, open houses, a public hearing, and a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. The SMP update was later put on hold in order for the County to finish the Environmental Impact Statements in a timely manner for two refineries. The comprehensive update of the SMP, which hasn't been adopted yet, was due in 2020. Ecology agreed to allow the County to combine the SMP Update with the Periodic Review process of the Comprehensive Plan update. Ecology and the Planning Commission have been actively involved in the process and have provided comments and feedback to make sure the County is still meeting all of the guidelines and requirements to help keep things moving. The Planning Commission meeting topics and changes to the 2016 SMP Update included addressing discrepancies in agency standards, changes in laws and regulations, Critical Area Ordinance (CAO) integration, uses and, pre-existing docks and structures standards table changes, shoreline environment designation mapping, environmental designation map changes, and the Channel Migration Zone removal of maps, and the Administrative Variance Process for buffer reductions between 25-50% and mitigation. They opted to address the Channel Migration Zone in a separate stand-alone process. Sections on forest practices and ongoing agriculture are excluded from the CAO and covered under their respective sections in the SMP. The changes in forest practices and agriculture are something that is happening state-wide, not just in Skagit County. Wetland impact minimization measures and mitigation rations have been included instead of cross-referencing Ecology's guidance. Another draft SMP Update document was issued followed by the public comment period: April 22-June 22, 2021. The Public hearing with the planning Commission occurred on May 11. Virtual monthly project updates starting May 13. SMP Online Open House: www.skagitSMPopenhouse.com. County's project website: Mail comments to: Planning and Development Services, 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273. Email questions to: SMPPDS@co.skagit.wa.us. Ecology also has an adoption process that will take a few months.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Pete Haase and Jay Lind*

The last NWSC meeting was held April 30, via Zoom conference call (10am – 12pm). Meeting highlights were shared with MRC members in the meeting packet email.

- NWSC Officer Elections: Elsa Schwartz (Island MRC), was elected Chair and Tom Cowan was elected Vice-Chair.
- Skagit County Board of Commissioners Letter of Support: The County Commissioners submitted a letter of support to Senator Murray for ongoing federal funding to support the NWSI and MRCs. It is anticipated that this could add around \$100,000 to MRC budgets while also funding other emerging NWSI programs.
- Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom)- May 28, 2021: Pete and Paul are both unable to attend the next meeting and are looking for a MRC member to take their place at the meeting. 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*

The April highlights provided by the Foundation were shared with MRC members in the meeting packet email.

- Kelp Kayak Training Video: The Foundation secured a small grant to create training videos for kelp kayak volunteers.
- Passport for Marine Adventure: The Foundation launched the “Passport for Marine Adventure”, a free and fun game to get the public outdoors and educate them on the NW Straits Initiative. The Passport includes 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. Jay was unable to attend the meeting last month.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards- Darla Gay Smith: Just four more weeks of the 2021 Salish Sea Stewards classes to go! For one of the remaining classes, MRC member Pete Haase put together a panel session of unique individuals who have successfully implemented new marine programs to help inspire the new volunteers. We had a really low dropout rate of just one person this year! 39 out of 40 registered participants are expected to complete the program on June 1. The graduation celebration will include a virtual tour of the PBNERR Aquarium. The program graduates will be given a certificate as well as a t-shirt and name tag with funding from private donations received through the Padilla Bay Foundation and Friends of Skagit Beaches. The Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee will recruit new Salish Sea Stewards to join their team and help match volunteers with other partner organization’s volunteer opportunities.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Surveys will likely start up again in June. The kelp beds in Skagit County include: Shannon Point, Biz Point, and Coffin Rock. Six new Salish Sea Stewards have expressed interest in helping with the kelp surveys. For now, the plan is to continue to monitor in small groups following COVID-19 safety precautions. Brad Smith’s volunteer group for monitoring Shannon Point in June is already full! The virtual 2021 Kelp Monitoring Kickoff Meeting was held May 6th from 1-4pm. The agenda topics included kayak safety and liability coverage, the volunteer agreement, the KoboToolbox with smart phone app to upload monitoring data right from the kayak, Island County’s new underwater GoPro technique to document kelp beds (it’s a lot more tricky than it sounds), 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. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) are asking MRCs to note the presence of urchins in the kelp beds to help determine if they might be contributing to kelp declines. Volunteers can use GoPro cameras to look for urchins. Volunteer scuba divers would also be a great resource to take pictures of urchin presence and note their location.
- 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 (Similk Bay, Samish Island, and Ship Harbor). We haven’t seen much spawning at any of our sites yet, but that will likely start picking up again in May. Several new Salish Sea Stewards have expressed interest in helping out with the surveys, but we plan to continue to monitor in small groups for now. Phil Dionne with WDFW recently gave a talk on forage fish as part of the Salish Sea Stewards training. The forage fish survey field trip that was planned for the Salish Sea Stewards was postponed due to COVID-19.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Two schools, Sedro-Woolley 6th grade and Conway 8th grade have completed the spring Kids on the Beach program with over 131 students participating. Concrete 7th/8th grade will be wrapping up the program in the next couple of weeks. La Conner 9th grade is scheduled to start the program on June 1st. The classes were hybrid with some students in the classroom and some students attending virtually. Annie, the Kids on the Beach program coordinator, was able to implement the program in person in the classrooms. The curriculum focused on forage fish. The schools were unable to do any field trips, so the forage fish surveys and beach seining were all done virtually. Students in the classroom got to look at eggs under

microscopes. The students analyzed and compiled all of the data into reports and are working on presentations. Unfortunately, they are unable to do the symposium this year, due to the pandemic.

- Pinto Abalone Recovery – Paul Dinnel: The Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) and WDFW divers have been out doing field work since March. They've outplanted 10,000 juvenile abalone at 10 different restoration sites in the San Juan Archipelago, including 4,000 abalone at sites in Skagit County waters (twice the number of abalone they had planned on outplanting). They now have around 50,000 time-lapse images that they will be analyzing for predation. They will also be looking at the oceanographic data collected from the sensor arrays that were deployed at six abalone restoration sites. The data collected includes temperature, salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, light intensity, and sedimentation.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Paul gave a presentation on the native oyster restoration work for the Salish Sea Stewards class on April 13. Paul will be assisting Whatcom MRC with their oyster restoration efforts in northern Chuckanut Bay in May. Paul and his son will also start up routine field work again the end of May to look at post larval recruitment patterns. Monitoring will be reduced this year in Fidalgo Bay, but will increase again in 2022. Paul will be meeting with Roger Fuller and Sylvia Yang at the Padilla Bay Reserve next week to take a look at the southern channels in Padilla Bay for potential oyster restoration locations. In the past, we've gotten our oyster shell for oyster larvae recruitment from Blau Oyster Company. Unfortunately, they are no longer in business, so we will need to find a new source of oyster shell. One option would be to purchase oyster shell from Taylor Shellfish who would deliver pallets of oyster shell from the south Sound to Samish Bay. One or two pallets of shell will likely be needed which would cost around \$200 each. Volunteers will be recruited to help bag and deploy the oyster shell next year.
- Fidalgo Bay Day- Tracy Alker: The 2021 event date was originally set for Saturday, August 28 (11am-3pm) at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. However, at our last meeting, the MRC decided not to host the Fidalgo Bay Day event this year due to so many unknowns with the pandemic. In addition, the Fidalgo Bay Resort is no longer accepting reservations for large events. As an alternative, the Committee talked about the possibility of doing a very small scale outreach event. Please let Tracy know if there are any other ideas, or if anybody wants to take the lead for another virtual event. Otherwise we will plan on applying the Fidalgo Bay Day grant funding to upgrade the MRC booth for future outreach events.
- Bowman Bay Restoration – Tracy Alker: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson will be taking over as the new MRC Project Lead. Lynne and Tracy will be meeting Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group staff at the site on May 24th at 1pm to do a walk through and figure out a maintenance plan for this year.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: All

- Tommy Thompson Trestle Project Update: Pete reported that the Estuary Salmon Recovery Program (ESRP) funds for the Tommy Thompson Trestle project was approved and it included enough money to fund the study part of the project for replacing the trestle and part of the causeway across Fidalgo Bay. The Washington Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Reserve team, the Samish Indian Nation, and the City of Anacortes are the co-leaders of the project and are beginning to meet to determine how the planning process will unfold. It will be a long process and will involve public input.

The meeting adjourned at 10:38am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held June 10, 2021