



Summary of the July 8, 2021, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Pete Haase, Betsy Stevenson, Paul Dinnel, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Darla Gay Smith, Catey Ritchie, Diane Hennebert, Jay Lind, Jodi Blum (Matt's Alternate), Kari Odden
- **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson, Kevin Anderson, Matt Castle, Jude Apple
- **Others in Attendance:** Kristin Murray, SFEG; Jackie Lindsey, COASST; 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:** June 10, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.
- **Public Comments:** No comments.

Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST): Jackie Lindsey

COASST is a citizen-science program of the University of Washington that was established to collect data on marine bird carcasses and marine debris along the beaches of the Pacific Northwest from California all the way to Alaska. The COASST office consists of a small team of 6 staff members, interns, and AmeriCorps. Survey data and photos are collected monthly at each location to help build a baseline record. Over the long-term marine bird carcasses monitoring data will be used to detect any changes in status and track trends of our marine bird populations and identify any new or rare bird species. This information can also help identify unusual mortality events and potential causes and can also translate into effective marine conservation solutions. The marine debris data collected is used to track patterns, trends, types of debris, origin, sources, sizes, density, and potential environmental impacts. The inner coastal shorelines appear to have larger amounts of marine debris compared to outer coastal shorelines, but the outer coastal beaches appear to have a lot of small plastic debris that could be harmful to marine life. The information could be used to drive targeted marine debris cleanup efforts. To participate in the COASST program, volunteers must attend an in-person training (5-6 hours) for marine birds or marine debris and are then assigned their own beach to survey. Participants can either pick a beach to survey or work with COASST to set up a new one. No previous bird identification experience is necessary. COASST staff includes a data verification expert that checks all data for accuracy. Jackie asked the MRC to consider participating in this kind of program more directly and adopt a particular stretch of beach as a project of Skagit MRC to ensure the data collection is continuous over the long-term. A team of volunteers could take turns monitoring a particular stretch of beach if it's too hard for any one volunteer to commit to monthly surveys. Jackie can set up trainings with anybody who is interested: jackielindsey@gmail.com.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: Pete Haase

The last NWSC meeting was held June 25, via Zoom conference call (10am – 12pm). Meeting highlights were shared with MRC members in the meeting packet email.

- **Ecology Shorelands and Environmental Assistance (SEA) Program:** Presented by Joenne McGerr. Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Northwest Straits Commission are both housed under Ecology's SEA Program.
- **MRC presentations:** Jefferson MRC presented "Voluntary Eelgrass & Shellfish Protection No-Anchor Zones". They shared lots of lessons learned which could be useful to other MRCs who are thinking about doing something similar; Skagit MRC (Dr. Jude Apple, Sara Brostrom, and Annie England) presented "Kids on the Beach and Salish Sea Stewards, Adapting Padilla Bay MRC programs to the virtual world". The presentation was well received; Whatcom MRC presented "Using a Beach Seine to Observe Migrating Juvenile Salmon in an Intertidal Corridor". Whatcom's program will involve schools, similar to the Kids on the Beach program.
- **Annual MRC Conference and NWSC/NWSF Retreat:** The annual MRC conference will be held virtually this fall. Planning for the Conference is currently underway. Planning is also underway for the NWSC/NWSF Retreat in September. There is a possibility the Retreat could be held in person this year.
- **External Relations Committee:** Chair Chriss Castner is putting together information on how the difference MRCs engage with County Commissioners and other local elected officials. He encourages MRCs to look for opportunities to improve those communications.

- Northwest Straits Commission Tribal Acknowledgement: The NWSC adopted the tribal acknowledgement which was developed in consultation with tribes. It will be read at the beginning of each Commission meeting. Pete shared the “Tribal Acknowledgement” with the Skagit MRC at the July 8th monthly meeting for the Committee to consider whether to use this statement at our meetings or possibly a modified version to make it more local. No decisions were made at the meeting. It was tabled for further discussion at a later date.
- Northwest Straits Commission MRC Project Funding Policy: MRCs have been asked to review and discuss the NWS Commission’s MRC Project Funding Policy and bring forward any questions or comments. The Commission will revisit it at the July meeting to consider approval. The general policy is as follows: “Funding secured and distributed by the Commission to MRCs may only be used for *MRC projects* as defined above. Projects that do not meet *MRC project* criteria are considered pass-through funding. If a sub-contract is necessary to carry out the project, the sub-contractor must be working under the direction of the MRC or an identified MRC project lead or subcommittee. In some cases, sub-contractors may be project partners that are also contributing funds to the overall project, but the scope of the sub-contract must be directed by the MRC”. Several examples of what projects would qualify for funding and what projects would not qualify for funding were provided for additional clarification. The consensus of the Skagit MRC was that the Policy did a pretty good job clarifying how the NWSC funding can and cannot be used.
- Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom) July 30, 2021: All MRC members are welcome to attend. Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards- Darla Gay Smith: The SSS Advisory Committee met on June 23 and July 21. We welcomed 2 new members from the graduating SSS Class of 2021, bringing the AC’s membership to 13 (of which 7 are general volunteers doing planning & implementation work & 6 are advisory representatives of involved organizations (PBNERR, Skagit MRC, Coastal Training Program & Friends of Skagit Beaches) overseeing the process. 2021 was a very successful year in both graduate numbers (38 Completed the Program) & trainee satisfaction as indicated by the end of program Survey taken by the SSS graduates. Next year’s training is slated for a hybrid format, in-classroom at Padilla Bay & tentatively several on-line Speaker experts from further reaches. There are currently 304 Trained Salish Sea Stewards on our Master List. Citizen Science volunteer opportunities are opening slowly, but most are limited to an established core of pre-trained, past volunteers. The AC has completed streamlining & updating *Volgistics* (the tool for reporting of volunteer hours). We are working on finalizing a SSS Planning Timeline template for future years (registration, advertising, utilizing social media platforms, gear & working with PBNERR on Speakers). We have started brainstorming the funding search for a part-time paid coordinator and are currently developing a job description.
- Crabber Outreach- Darla Gay Smith: Darla tried to recruit volunteers to help with crabber outreach at the public boat launches on opening weekend through the Salish Sea Stewards electronic news bulletin, The WAVE. Unfortunately, there was not enough interest from volunteers to participate this year. Darla said that it is always a “hard sell” to recruit enough volunteers to help with crabber outreach for several reasons: the volunteers haven’t received proper training on this topic, the timing to conduct outreach is too early in the morning for most volunteers, and there is nothing to entice the crabbers to take the time to engage with the volunteers while they are busy launching their boats and have already geared up for crabbing, so there is very little volunteer satisfaction. Darla suggested the MRC rethink our educational approach. Some of the ideas the MRC discussed included: 1) providing crabber outreach materials in new crab pots sold at local businesses; and 2) Providing demos with properly equipped crab trap display and outreach materials at scheduled times at public beaches, docks, and boat launches, etc. prior to the opening of crabbing season. Dana said the Clallam MRC provides outreach materials in new crab pots sold to recreational crabbers. Darla submitted a crabber outreach article in the Guemes Island Community newsletter including a link to the Northwest Straits Foundation’s online crabber training workshop on June 30th. Darla said it was the best crabber workshop she has ever been to.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: The survey teams are up and running and have scheduled surveys. The kelp beds include Shannon Point, Biz Point, and Coffin Rocks. Surveys were conducted at Shannon Point and Biz Point in June. The volunteers observed a large healthy kelp bed at Shannon Point. The Biz Point kelp beds were just starting to grow in June, but they appeared to be healthy. The Coffin Rocks kelp bed was surveyed in early July. The Coffin Rocks kelp bed appeared to be very healthy with a huge growth at the northeast corner that they’ve never seen before. A reconnaissance survey was conducted at the Hope Island kelp bed in Skagit Bay as a potential new survey site. The volunteers found a lot of narrow growth with small

clumps of bull kelp that really didn't quite line up with our normal survey protocols. We are currently looking at the possibility of applying a different protocol (a single way point method) at that location. Hope Island has some strong currents so it will be important to pay attention to the tides at that location. They will look at that site again in August before making a final decision about adding it as a new survey site.

- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Forage fish surveys continue at our 3 MRC restoration sites and our 3 Forage Fish Index sites as well as the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: We have wrapped up this season, and Annie England, the lead KOTB Educator, gave a great presentation at the recent NWSC meeting as part of our Skagit MRC presentation. All past participating schools and teachers want to continue this program next year and would prefer to do it in person including a field trip. However, No one wanted to make solid plans yet - most of the teachers seem confident next year will be in person and that field trips will be allowed but depending on what COVID protocols will be in place, it could impact the KOTB program. In the fall 2021, Conway and Concrete High Schools will participate in the KOTB program focused on forage fish. Then there will be invasive snail surveys in the spring 2022 with potentially Concrete high school students, and fish seines with Sedro-Woolley elementary students. This might be changed up a bit based on need and ability. We will not be able to finalize things with teachers until the beginning of the school year. We are still working on how Between Two Worlds (Swinomish tribal education program) fits into the KOTB. More to come there.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Paul is working with the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve to try to restore the native oyster population in the southern channels of Padilla Bay. Around 200 bags of shell were purchased from the former Blau Oyster Company with Skagit Restoration Initiative (SRI) funds from the NWSF which were loaded on to the County dump truck by volunteers and hauled to a farm on south Padilla Bay for the oyster restoration project. 50 shell bags were transported to Fidalgo Bay at Little Crandall Spit, to collect seed oysters to outplant in Padilla Bay next spring. Paul collected oyster recruitment data on stacks of ceramic tile at two-week intervals and replaced the tile stacks with new ones. Results indicated the highest oyster settlement ever seen on the tiles in July (we usually don't see high settlement until August), which suggests we will also likely get a nice set of new juvenile oyster settlement on the shell bags this year. Paul also observed a high percentage (approximately 35%) of dead oyster seed on the ceramic tiles, most likely due to the recent 'heat dome'. He plans to conduct another survey to analyze the mortality rates of Olympia oysters at our oyster restoration sites in Fidalgo Bay.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration- Paul Dinnel: Nothing new to report. Hatchery work and data analysis of oceanographic data and abalone survey results continues. The 2021 Annual Pinto Abalone Report will be finalized in September.
- Fidalgo Bay Day- Tracy Alker: Tracy is looking for ideas for the MRC display booth and activities for future events. What do we want the display to look like (e.g. a 3 panel tabletop display, large banner, floor display, etc.? What do we want to highlight? What should the messaging be? Please share your ideas!
- Bowman Bay Restoration – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: A sub-award agreement with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) for plant maintenance at Bowman Bay has been drafted and is waiting signatures. The contract start date is July 1st. A special volunteer event will be held at the Bowman Bay restoration site on July 19 from 11am to 1pm. A notice about the event will be posted in "The WAVE" and on the SFEG and MRC websites. Volunteers will be recruited to help with weeding and watering, forage fish spawning surveys, the forage fish interpretive station, and beach seining.

Miscellaneous Events and Announcements: All

- The Committee discussed the possibility of meeting in person again. The County office is now open to the public. Masks are required when meeting with the public whether vaccinated or not. The Samish Indian Nation and Swinomish Tribal Community employees are not allowed to meet in person at this time. The consensus of the Committee was to meet virtually in August and play it by ear for the September meeting. Tracy will look into the possibility of continuing to keep the virtual meeting option open for the long term for those who are unable to meet in person.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held August 12, 2021