



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the August 12, 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, Kevin Anderson, Jude Apple, Matt Castle, Kari Odden
- **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson, Diane Hennebert, Jay Lind
- **Others in Attendance:** Dana Oster, NWSC; Allie Simpson, NWSC; Jessica Espy, WSU Ext.; Lisa Kaufman, NWSF; Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council

**Call to Order and Introduction:** Betsy Stevenson called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

- **Approval of Minutes:** July 8, 2021, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.
- **Public Comments:** No comments.

## **Shore Stewards Program Introduction:** *Jessica Espy, WSU Ext.*

Jessica Espy is the new Program Coordinator for the Shore Stewards Program through WSU Skagit Extension. Jessica is in the process of building this program and connecting with local community members and organizations to look for ways to collaborate, share information, and increase public involvement in protecting our shorelines. The Shore Stewards Program currently highlights 10 guidelines for watershed preservation and offers quarterly newsletters, educational videos, and easy access to additional resources. The program is small but has the potential to do a lot of good in the community. After learning about the Northwest Straits Foundation's Shore Friendly program and all the wonderful shoreline landowner outreach that is already happening in the nearshore community, Jessica decided to focus her efforts on lakefront shorelines. Jessica is interested in implementing a volunteer water quality monitoring program in Lakes Erie and Campbell in partnership with Skagit Valley College, Samish Indian Nation, and lakefront property owners. She also hopes to host a few educational workshops and events for lakefront property owners.

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

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

- **State of the Salish Sea Report:** The Salish Sea Institute recently published the State of the Sea Report. Ginny Broadhurst presented the report at the NWSC meeting. The report can be downloaded for free here: <https://wp.wvu.edu/salishsea/>. The Commission will provide each MRC with one hard copy if interested. Hard copies are also available for purchase.
- **NWSC Funding Policy:** The NWSF Funding Policy has been approved as written.
- **Clallam MRC's Tumwater Creek Internship Project Report:** The Tumwater Creek Internship Project was presented by Clallam MRC member Tim Cochnauer. Clallam MRC's internship programs are typically for three months (40-80 hours) in the summer. The interns are assigned to work on specific projects under the supervision of an assigned mentor. The interns present their projects to the MRC at the end of their term.
- **Federal Reauthorization of NWSI:** The NWSC Executive Committee has been working on the reauthorization of the Northwest Straits Initiative to get included in the federal programs that automatically receive funding to help make it more sustainable.
- **2021-2023 MRC Grant:** The 2021-2023 MRC Grant Proposals have been approved for funding! Commission staff will work with MRCs to finalize project budgets in the next month.
- **Caroline Gibson Scholarship Fund:** In honor of Caroline Gibson and her amazing legacy to the Salish Sea, the Northwest Straits Foundation established the Caroline Gibson Scholarship Fund to grant scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students in Marine Studies. Planning is underway for Caroline's memorial.

- Next NWSC/NWSF Meeting (via Zoom) August 27, 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/>.

### **Voluntary No Anchor Zone Discussion:** *Allie Simpson and Dana Oster, NWSC*

Allie and Dana presented an overview of Jefferson MRC's Voluntary No Anchor Zone project and discussed the next steps Skagit MRC would need to take to potentially establish something similar in Skagit County. The goal of this project is to protect eelgrass beds by placing buoys seaward of the beds to let boaters know where they should anchor to avoid physical damage to the eelgrass. It is completely voluntary and so far in Jefferson County, they've had 98-99% compliance rates each year. The NWSC secured some funding in 2022 in partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation to expand this project to other MRCs and start permitting some potential sites. Lisa Kaufman will help with the permitting across multiple counties. Partner organizations in B.C. are also interested in establishing No Anchor Zones in their area, so the NWSC will be working with them to develop and share consistent branding and messaging with the boating community. At a previous Skagit MRC meeting the MRC discussed the possibility of establishing a Voluntary No Anchor Zone at Seafarer's Memorial Park in Anacortes. Allie asked MRC members to help create a list of local stakeholders to contact about the Seafarer's Memorial Park location as a potential candidate for the Voluntary No Anchor Zone. The MRC identified the following local stakeholders to contact: Jimmy Blais, MJB Properties; Kevin Anderson, Port of Anacortes; Libby Grage, City of Anacortes; Anacortes Waterfront Alliance; Cap Sante Marina Advisory Committee; Brad Johnson, Cap Sante Marina Harbor Master; Samish Indian Nation; Swinomish Tribal Community; Anacortes Rowing Society; and Anacortes Yacht Club. Allie also asked MRC members to identify one or two photo point locations for counting the number of boats in the bay at a given time, particularly in the area where the eel grass beds are located. This information will help determine whether a Voluntary No Anchor Zone would be beneficial at the Seafarers Memorial Park location. Kevin said the Port of Anacortes has a camera that record boats entering the bay that can be used to help count boats with screen capture. The camera can be controlled and can zoom into a specific location and can rotate 360 degrees to capture lots of different angles. Kevin pointed out that the Harbor Master also does weekly counts of vessels that he has access to. Paul volunteered to take photos and count vessels at the end of the Cape Sante Pier if an additional on-the-ground perspective is needed. Dana said the NWSC has data sheets for the volunteers to record data. Paul said it would also be a good idea to know the location of the eelgrass beds to determine if the buoys could potentially become a navigational hazard if placed out seaward of the beds. Kevin said the Port of Anacortes has some good data on nearby eelgrass beds that can be shared.

### **Project Status & Discussion**

- Salish Sea Stewards - Darla Gay Smith: A picnic is currently scheduled for **Saturday August 28, 2021** at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (1 - 3pm potluck) to welcome in the 38 new Salish Sea Stewards graduates who completed the Program in June of this year. But plans could change, depending on COVID restrictions. Skagit MRC members are invited to attend. The SSS Advisory Committee is in the process of developing a timeline template to help with program planning (registration, advertising, social media platforms, securing gear and scheduling speakers). The Committee is also working on a Communications Plan and developing a job description for a part-time Volunteer Coordinator. Next year's training is slated to be a hybrid format with some in-person and some virtual classes.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys - Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: There are three kelp bed locations that are currently being surveyed by MRC volunteers including: Shannon Point (2 kelp beds east and west), Biz Point, and Coffin Rocks. On July 20<sup>th</sup> volunteers surveyed Shannon Point east and west kelp beds. The rust on the kelp that they had observed previously appeared to be going away. The next survey will take place August 20<sup>th</sup>. Kimberly Cauvel, Environmental Reporter with the Skagit Valley Herald, participated in a survey with volunteers at Coffin Rocks on August 5. She plans to write an article about the kelp surveys in the next week or two. The Biz Point survey crew went out on July 11<sup>th</sup>, but the waves were just too big and unsafe to complete the survey. The next survey is scheduled August 26<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup>. All kelp beds surveyed appear to be dense and healthy.
- Bowman Bay Restoration - Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: A special volunteer event was held at the Bowman Bay restoration site on July 19 from 11am to 1pm. 11 volunteers helped with weeding and watering. Volunteers hauled buckets of water (500 gallons) to water plants throughout the site with water from the County's water

trailer. The volunteers removed thistles, poison hemlock, and blackberries before they went to seed. Four volunteers helped with forage fish spawning surveys and two volunteers helped with the forage fish interpretive station. The interpretive station was a huge hit with the public. Seven volunteers helped with the beach seining. They found lots of juvenile Chinook and had lots of great interaction with the public. The next plant maintenance event is scheduled for August 17<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm to coincide with the nearshore monitoring. The County water truck will be used again. This time we have permission from the Park Manager to drive on the grass next to the pathway to water the plants. Lisa Kaufman recommended planting additional trees and shrubs this fall and increasing the watering to twice a month next year during the hot summer months. Lisa said there is a grant available for purchasing plants, but it will require a match. Tracy said there also might be some additional MRC Grant funding available for Bowman Bay if approved by the NWSC.

- 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. The sampling schedule in August has been reduced to work around vacations and other obligations. In July they found a few eggs in all their samples at Bowman Bay. They plan to complete a more intensive survey at Bowman Bay in August. Pete is working with Sara Brostrom to schedule a field trip in September to Fidalgo Bay with the Salish Sea Stewards class of 2021 to run through the forage fish sampling protocols. Forage fish survey volunteers hosted an educational forage fish station at the Fidalgo Bay Resort for several small groups of Latinx kids from the Washington Gear Up Program in Burlington and Edison High School in Mount Vernon. It was part of a larger program that took place over the course of a three-week period with 7 or 8 different education stations that focused on the marine environment. In addition to forage fish, some of the different topics include tide pool exploration, marine mammals, boat-based research, kayaking, stormwater, data analysis, report writing, presentations, etc. Many of the kids have never even been to a beach before. The kids were very enthusiastic and eager to learn and had a great experience. Pete said he felt inspired just being a part of it. On Tuesday, August 24<sup>th</sup> from 10am-11am via Zoom, the Washington Conservation Corps forage fish team will present an overview of their experience in the last year collecting and processing forage fish samples from across the Sound and supporting other work to monitor forage fish in the state.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Nothing new to report. The 2021 Kids on the Beach Annual Report will be finalized in September. Padilla Bay staff are working on the 2021 fall line-up for the Kids on the Beach program.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneel: Paul observed lots of oyster settlement on the ceramic tiles, more than he has seen in the last five years. There are lots of bags of oyster shell in Fidalgo Bay that are currently collecting oyster spat to transfer elsewhere (e.g. Skagit Bay and Padilla Bay). It is anticipated that the shell bags will also have lots of oyster settlement. Paul surveyed the impacts of the recent heat dome. It did not appear to impact the mussels, barnacles, or Pacific oysters. There was some mortality of Olympia oysters due to the heat wave of around 13.2% to 14.6%. Luckily the temperatures in Fidalgo Bay didn't get quite as high as it did in other parts of the state. It could have been a lot worse. Pete noted that they conducted intertidal monitoring at the Custom Plywood site one or two weeks after the heat dome event. Luckily, it didn't appear to have an impact on the clam population at the Custom Plywood site.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration- Paul Dinneel: 2021 was a very good year for pinto abalone restoration. Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) was able to outplant twice as many abalone than originally anticipated. Several abalone were found at two restoration sites that previously had really low numbers. PSRF is currently working on data analysis and the annual report. The 2021 Annual Pinto Abalone Report will be finalized in September.
- Fidalgo Bay Day- Tracy Alker: The MRC Grant funds that were set aside for Fidalgo Bay Day will be used to update our MRC display booth since we had to cancel Fidalgo Bay Day this year. The funds must be spent by September 30, 2021. We currently have a three-panel tabletop display, but it is old and falling apart. A new tabletop display would cost around \$355. Tracy researched other options to get a fresh new look for the MRC display. The Northwest Straits Commission and the Northwest Straits Foundation both have free standing floor banners which are very professional looking with custom printed graphics and are easy to store and transport. However, they are kind of flimsy and tend to snap back into the roll. The Skagit County Clean Water Program just purchased a new 8' pop-up curved exhibit booth for the Poop Smart campaign that staff took to the Skagit County Fair. The large display seemed to really draw a lot of attention. It looks very professional, is sturdy but

light weight, easy to set up and comes with a carrying case with wheels and a podium with storage, so no table required, and it leaves more room for games and activities. The backdrop is one large graphic printed on fabric that can be custom designed to make it look more professional. We would just have to provide the design elements such as our logo, text, pictures, and anything else we would like included. The total cost for the backdrop, podium, and custom design is \$1,125. The backdrop can also be replaced for around \$350. Even though we won't be able to change the custom backdrop, we can still highlight specific projects by creating posters in-house and display them on an easel or sandwich board. We can also print project fact sheets. Committee members expressed their support for purchasing the 8' pop-curved exhibit booth. Tracy will start working on a concept design and asked for help with refining the messaging and selecting a few good photos for the backdrop. Tracy also asked for ideas for new activities for the display booth.

#### **Clayton Beach (Larrabee State Park) Restoration:** *Lisa Kaufman, NWSF*

Lisa shared information about a potential restoration project at Clayton Beach in Larrabee State Park that offers a wonderful opportunity for both Whatcom and Skagit MRCs to work together on a project. Technically the beach is in Skagit County, but the project is on the WRIA 1 project list, so it spans the geographies of both MRCs. There are remnant materials from the old railroad spur including about 1,300 linear feet of rock armor, old pilings, as well as more recent rock debris on the shoreline. Lisa said the folks that she talked to at State Parks are super excited about the prospect of a project out there and they are interested in getting involved. They talked about the possibility of creating a demonstration clam garden at that location to include cultural aspects. They currently have plans to reroute the trail to the beach including an overpass over the railroad which is supposed to get underway this fall. Lisa applied for funding from Marathon to get started on the feasibility study (around \$25,000). She will know in a couple of weeks if she was able to secure the funding. Assuming restoration is feasible, there will be lots of opportunities to get volunteers out on the beach for monitoring. Jason Morgan has funds available through the Foundation's restoration monitoring grant for this project. Monitoring would likely include intertidal surveys, beach seining, forage fish surveys, elevation surveys, beach wrack, large woody debris (LWD), and anything else Jason can come up with that makes sense. There will also be lots of opportunities for public outreach and engagement. Lisa will try to schedule a site visit soon and will send an invite to MRC members.

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

- **Port of Anacortes- Seabin Pilot Project:** Kevin reported that the Port of Anacortes recently installed a Seabin at A Dock earlier this winter as a pilot project. It has been running continuously since the end of March. The Seabin gets emptied daily. Most of what the Seabin has collected so far includes eelgrass, seaweed, gunnels, and polystyrene beads. They also get the occasional chip bag and soda bottle. The Port has absorbent pads that they can throw into the Seabin if there is a spill in the marina basin. They are eager to see how it does throughout the winter to decide how beneficial it is and whether it's worth installing additional Seabins at multiple locations. If so, there might be a good opportunity for volunteers to get involved in monitoring and maintaining the Seabins.
- **MJB Development Activity Along the Fidalgo Bay Waterfront:** Pete reported that several Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Citizen Stewardship Committee members are committed to stay informed on what is happening with the huge development project along the Fidalgo Bay Waterfront and to see if there might be a role for citizens or the MRCs to play. They recently learned that Coastal Geologic Services is doing the studies for this project. But the actual construction phase is still a long way out.
- **Similk Bay Bulkhead Removal:** The Northwest Straits Foundation is currently under contract to remove the bulkhead on two private properties in Similk Bay in September.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:55am. The next virtual MRC meeting will be held Sept 9, 2021**