



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **February 10, 2022**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Diane Hennebert, Jay Lind, Paul Dinnel, Jodi Bluhm (Matt Castle's Alternate), Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Pete Haase, Jude Apple, Kari Odden, Betsy Stevenson, Darla Gay Smith, Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson, Matt Castle
- **Others in Attendance:** Allie Simpson, NWSC; Jeff Whitty, NWSC; Kristin Murray, SFEG; Lisa Kaufman, NWSF; Leah Robison, NWSC

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

- **Approval of Minutes:** January 13, 2022, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.
- **Public Comments:** No comments.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Diane Hennebert*

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held January 28 via Zoom conference call.

- **NWSI/MRC Conference- Nov 18-19, 2022:** A tentative in-person conference is scheduled for Nov 18-19, 2022, at Maple Hall in La Conner.
- **Clallam MRC Marine Critter Outreach Cards:** Clallam MRC's critter outreach cards have been distributed to several community locations in Clallam County. The cards have a QR code link back to the MRC website. The cards are available for other MRCs if interested.
- **NWSF's Caroline Gibson Scholarship in Marine Studies:** The Foundation issued its first call for applications for the scholarship. Applications are due February 19.
- **NWSF Passport to Marine Adventure:** The Foundation is reviewing their Passport to Marine Adventure program and plans to expand its reach and scope. They are looking at multiple ways to do this. One way is to add new sites to each county. They've requested feedback from the MRCs on additional sites and any other aspect of the program.
- **NWSC Symposium via Zoom- February 17, 2022 (3:30pm):** In lieu of the annual MRC conference, the NWSC is hosting a series of virtual symposiums. The Symposium theme is Climate Change Action at the Local Level.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting via Zoom- February 25 (10:00am-12:00pm):** This meeting will include a presentation from Christy Pattengill-Semmens of REEF. 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/>.

European Green Crab Update: *Allie Simpson*

European green crabs are considered one of the world's worst invasive species that can decimate eelgrass beds and outcompete native shellfish populations. European green crabs first arrived on the east coast of the United States in the mid-1800s but weren't found in the Northwest Straits region of the Salish Sea until 2016. To date, green crabs have been detected in Padilla Bay, Drayton Harbor, Lummi Bay, Sequim Bay, Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, Westcott Bay, and Samish Bay. Just this past season over 86,000 green crabs were caught in Lummi Sea Pond! Drayton Harbor had 146, the second largest number of green crabs caught, and Samish Bay had 118, the third largest number of green crabs.

The NWSC is working in collaboration with the WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and WA Sea Grant "The Green Crab Team" and other partners in a coordinated effort to monitor, trap, and remove green crabs using three types of methods including: early detection monitoring and trapping to collect baseline data, opportunistic trapping to look for hot spots, and dedicated

trapping and removal in known hot spot areas where there are large numbers of green crabs. The NWSC is leading the dedicated trapping and removal effort in Whatcom and Skagit Counties including Drayton Harbor and Samish Bay. The NWSC recently hired Jeff Whitty to lead the work in Samish Bay along with the Washington Conservation Crew. This year the NWSC will also be assisting with the opportunistic trapping effort in Padilla Bay since it is such a large area to cover. Although only 4 green crabs were caught in Padilla Bay last year, they continue to be consistently caught, but they are not in one localized spot. The NWSC plans to initiate a green crab volunteer pilot program with MRC members starting in May. MRC volunteers can help with monitoring, trapping and removal of green crab, as well as outreach and education. MRC members can also help by being the eyes and ears while on the beach. Green crabs can be identified by the 5 spines on each side of its eyes. If you think you've spotted a green crab, take a photo, and mark the location/date, and email it to Allie or The Green Crab Team. But be sure to leave the crab in place because it is illegal to possess a green crab without a proper permit.

Lisa asked if we should consider including green crab monitoring at Clayton Beach in our monitoring plans. There is some concern that Clayton Beach eelgrass beds could be ideal habitat for green crab, particularly if a clam garden is installed. Allie thought it would be a good idea to include green crab monitoring and opportunistic trapping at Clayton Beach to see if there are any green crab out there. Jay asked if there are any efforts in Canada to eradicate the green crab populations across the border. Allie said Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans sets lots of traps to remove as many green crabs as possible in the Sooke Basin. There are also some local volunteer groups that trap and remove green crabs in Boundary Bay. Lynne asked how Governor Jay Inslee's emergency proclamation on green crabs will impact the NWSC's work. Allie said most of the funding would likely be directed to WDFW to support the green crab trapping and removal effort in the Lummi Sea Pond. But it could also potentially mean additional funds for purchasing traps and bait for other areas such as NWSC's dedicated trapping and removal efforts in Skagit and Whatcom Counties.

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards - Darla Gay Smith:** The 2022 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program will start March 1 – May 24, 2022. Classes will be held Tuesdays from 1pm to 5pm at Padilla Bay. Registration deadline is February 22, 2022. 13 people have registered so far to take the training. 26 is the maximum number of participants allowed for the in-person training. The training program continues to be widely promoted. Governor Inslee's mandate for vaccinations extends to volunteers. SSS training participants will be required to wear masks and show proof of vaccination. The [2022 Training Schedule](#) is now available on the Skagit MRC website. The SSS Advisory Committee meeting will be held February 15.
- **Fidalgo Bay Day- Darla Gay Smith:** The Fidalgo Bay Resort is not currently accepting facility reservations for 2022 events. Planning has been put on hold. Darla thanked Jay for sharing the planning documents from past events. We are thinking about sending out a survey to past participating organizations to gauge their interest and comfort level in participating in-person. We will also be looking at different dates and alternative locations to host the event just in case we are unable to have it at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
- **Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:** The NWSC hosted the annual MRC Kelp Kayak Survey workshop on January 26th. The workshop was well attended including four presentations. Over 50 volunteers participated in 2021 kelp surveys across 7 counties including Skagit County. Volunteers monitored 21 different kelp beds, documented 404 acres of kelp forest, and collectively paddled 326 miles! MRC kelp monitoring data will be used for the Department of Natural Resources new floating kelp canopy vital sign indicator and to create an interactive StoryMap. In addition to kayak kelp surveys, the Department of Natural Resources collected kelp canopy data using drones, fix-winged aircraft, and high-resolution cameras and compared it to the data collected by the kelp kayakers. They found that the kelp kayak surveys are currently the best method for collecting the most reliable kelp forest data compared to other methods. Puget Sound Restoration Fund presented an overview of the kelp expedition that took place last July with 184 participants collecting kelp data over 8 days from Neah Bay to south Puget Sound. The purpose of the expedition was to catalyze a broader effort to protect and restore our kelp forests. Kayak Kelp Survey training will take place this spring. Surveys won't start again until June 2022.
- **Bowman Bay Restoration – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:** Parts of the beach area are currently closed to protect a new northern elephant seal pup and its mother, until the pup is fully weaned. Lynne and Tracy had a meeting with Lisa Kaufman (NWS Foundation), Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) staff, and State Parks staff at the Bowman Bay Restoration site on January 13 to look at the storm damage and talk about the next steps with additional planting and plant maintenance at the site and discuss two potential projects that are being proposed. This year the MRC in partnership with the SFEG will plant trees and shrubs along the fence line to help protect the rest of the

vegetation and provide some shade. We will try to integrate additional dune grass up to the fence line and in between the logs that washed up along the shoreline. The new trees will likely have to be mounded. We are also considering the use of slow drip watering bags to increase the survivability of the newly planted trees during times of drought and extreme heat. The planting and plant maintenance work will be done with the help of volunteers through a Sub-Award Agreement with SFEG. State Parks received funding to remove the dilapidated pier and creosote pilings and will replace it with more environmentally friendly materials. They hope to reduce the amount of hard shore armoring required to support the new pier. The shoreline next to the pier where one of the interpretive signs is located is highly eroding. As part of the pier removal/replacement, the Parks dept will be looking into different options for moving the interpretive sign to a better location. SFEG is seeking funding for a feasibility study/design to restore the pocket estuary and replace the Pass Lake culvert to improve flushing and have requested a Letter of Acknowledgment for their grant proposal from the Skagit MRC. The final Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP) grant application is due May 11, 2022. They are also applying for another grant as match that is due March 1, 2022. Tracy will forward the Letter of Acknowledgement and project information in the grant application to the Committee for consideration. The MRC will need to decide by consensus whether to provide the letter of support for SFEG's grant proposal. As part of the feasibility study, SFEG will also be applying for a collection permit to collect baseline seining data at the site with the help of volunteers.

- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Monthly forage fish surveys continue. However, surveys at Bowman Bay have temporarily been put on hold until the northern elephant seal pup that was born at the park in January is fully weaned. Surf smelt spawning is pretty much over for the year in the northern part of Similk Bay out toward Turner Bay and Kukatali and won't likely start again until late May. However, they continue to spawn in Fidalgo Bay and Marchs Point.
- MRC Salish Sea School Intern- Pete Haase: The intern that has been selected is a college graduate that will be working on several projects including one for the MRC that involves mentoring a 7th grader from Shoreline to collect and analyze forage fish data at several locations along Marchs Point. Field work will occur Feb-October. Data analysis and report prep Nov-Dec. The intern will present results to the MRC in January 2022. This MRC Intern project is part of a pilot program and is just one of 5 other intern projects under the Salish Sea School STaRS program (Students Training as Research Scientists), including stormwater monitoring, beach debris, orcas, marine birds, and marine mammals.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Three schools will be participating in the spring KOTB program. Sedro-Wooley 6th grade students will be participating in a mudflat safari and beach seining activity over a three-day period in late March (March 29-31st) at Padilla Bay with the help of volunteers. Conway and Concrete middle schools will be collecting fish seine data and forage fish eggs at the Fidalgo Bay RV Park on April 13th and 27th with the help of volunteers. Annie is still working out the details for the Anacortes School District to participate in the spring program. Annie is also working in collaboration with the La Conner School to integrate the KOTB with the Swinomish Tribal Community's Between Two Worlds program.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration- Paul Dinneil: Hatchery work continues with 15,000 abalone in cultivation. Field work including monitoring and outplanting started this month. The goal is to outplant 10,000 juvenile abalone to the abalone restoration sites in Skagit County by April this year.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneil: Field work will start up again in April 2022 with abbreviated monitoring again this year. More intensive monitoring is planned in 2023 depending on funding. In March, Padilla Bay staff plan to collect a sub-sample of oyster seed from the bags of cultch that were placed in Fidalgo Bay last summer. The shells will be transported to south Padilla Bay channels later this summer. Paul will present on the native oyster restoration project as part of the 2022 Salish Sea Stewards training program in late March.
- Sharpes Corner Stormwater Sampling- Diane Hennebert: It is anticipated that the QAPP will be completed in late March. Sampling will take place after the first flush in the fall of 2022 (late September-October).

MRC Project Wish List Update and Retreat Discussion: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson

It is anticipated that each MRC will receive an additional \$200k in federal appropriations funding by March or April 2022, depending on Congress. The funding is just a one-time deal for MRC projects that are shovel ready and can be completed by the end of 2023. Lynne developed a new, easy to follow, three-pronged approach for MRC members to evaluate and prioritize MRC projects.

STEP 1: STEP 1 is now complete! Project Leads were contacted by the Planning Team to provide initial project info for the 20 projects on the MRC's wish list. After completing the initial screening process following a set of criteria, it was determined that 6 of those projects are a "No Go" at this time and 10 projects are a "Go" and will move on to STEP 2. There are also 4 projects that need an MRC Project Lead/s before they can be considered a "Go". If nobody volunteers to be the Project Lead, the projects will automatically get moved to the "No Go" status at this time:

- Clayton Beach Restoration
- Pre-Season Crabber Outreach
- Derelict Crab Pot Removal in Fidalgo Bay – *Jay Lind and Matt Castle expressed interest in this project and are considering becoming the MRC Project Co-Leads*
- Educational Videos

STEP 2: MRC Project Leads will be asked to complete the Project Info forms from the NWSC's Request for Proposals for each of their projects prior to the next MRC meeting on March 10. The Project Info Packet and Evaluation Forms will then be emailed to MRC members to rank projects prior to the April 13 MRC Retreat at Padilla Bay.

STEP 3: A Project Planning Retreat will be held in-person at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center on Wednesday, April 13, 9:00am-11:00am. The retreat will be facilitated by NWSC staff. The purpose of the retreat is to review the project evaluation/ranking results and different funding scenarios (totaling \$200k), discuss the risks and benefits of each scenario, provide clarifying information as required, vote on preferred scenario, and authorize the final list of MRC projects/budget to proceed.

MRC Chair/Vice-Chair Elections: *All*

MRC Chair and Vice-Chair elections were originally supposed to be held in January but were postponed until February due to the lack of any new nominees. The Committee voted unanimously by consensus to re-elect Betsy Stevenson to continue to serve as MRC Chair. Jay Lind nominated Lynne Wenberg-Davidson as Vice-Chair. Lynne graciously accepted the nomination. The Committee voted unanimously by consensus to appoint Lynne to serve as MRC Vice-chair. The term for Chair and Vice-Chair will be for a one (1) year term.

Miscellaneous Announcements: *All*

No announcements

The meeting adjourned at 11:30am. The next virtual MRC meeting to be held March 10, 2022.