



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **October 13, 2022**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Betsy Stevenson, Diane Hennebert, Jay Lind, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Darla Gay Smith, Kevin Anderson, Kari Odden, Pete Haase, Catey Ritchie, Matt Castle, Jude Apple, Paul Dinnel
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson
- **Others in Attendance:** Leah Robison, NWSC; Jeff Whitty, NWSC; Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Mira Lutz

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

- **Approval of Minutes:** September 8, 2022, MRC meeting were approved by consensus as written.
- **Public Comments:** Mira Lutz shared information about the National Science Foundation proposal for a 3-year research project to study the effect of teachers utilizing the Explore the Salish Sea curriculum which takes kids out to the beach and provides culturally responsive instruction. They will know if it gets funded in January. Mira thanked the MRC for providing a Letter of Collaboration. Some MRC members have committed to supporting the students in doing field science which would most likely take place in the spring of 2024. The project will involve working with La Conner and Sedro Woolley schools.

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

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held September 30, 2022, via Zoom conference call. NWSC Meeting Highlights and NWSF Monthly Updates were emailed to the MRC.

- **Seabird and Marine Mammal Monitoring:** Scott Pearson from WDFW gave an excellent presentation on how they monitor seabirds and marine mammals. The presentation and interactive map was shared with the MRC. To explore data collected, go to <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/wp/MarineSeabird/index.html>
- **Northwest Straits initiative Reauthorization:** The NWSI reauthorization bill was introduced to the Senate.
- **Derelict Vessels:** A workgroup is being formed with MRC and tribal representatives to help guide derelict vessel removal prioritization and a pilot Vessel Turn In Event in 2023. MRCs have until the end of October to identify and prioritize derelict vessels to be removed. So far Skagit MRC has not identified any.
- **Eurasian Green Crab Update:** There was a late season spike in the number of green crabs trapped. They were also finding green crabs in the lower reaches of tidally influenced creeks.
- **March in-person NWSC retreat:** An in-person retreat is being planned for March. Diane will be unable to attend and is looking for another Skagit MRC member to go in her place.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meetings via Zoom- **October 28** (10:00am-12:00pm):** 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/>.

Northwest Straits Initiative (NWSI) Collaborative Workshop:

- Skagit MRC members Pete Haase, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Paul Dinnel, Diane Hennebert, and Matt Castle attended the NWSI Collaborative Workshop on September 16th at Padilla Bay. They all enjoyed seeing everyone in person and felt inspired after listening to elected officials Liz Lovelett and Ann Larson (Patty Murray's representative) speak very passionately about the work that we do. Rosie Cayo James also provided an inspirational welcome and delicious salmon BBQ. MRC's exchanged project ideas and discussed collaborative opportunities. It was exciting to see what the other MRCs are doing and how it could translate here. It was surprising to learn how few MRCs have a volunteer program like the Salish Sea Stewards. Over 50 people attended the event.

Project Status & Discussion

- Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith: Fidalgo Bay Day was held Saturday, August 20th at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Thanks to Darla’s leadership and the 36 organizations and 155 volunteers who helped make this year’s in-person event a huge success! An estimated 300 people attended. The opening ceremony was led by MRC member Jay Lind and Samish tribal member Rosie Cayou James. The event offered a wide variety of indoor and outdoor educational booths and activities including a beach seining demonstration, a touch tank, a whale skull, microscopes, games, kids crafts, and face painting. 175 attendees participated in the Discovery Passport activity and 35 kids competed in the coloring contest to win a spot on the cover of next year’s Discovery Passport. Food included popcorn, a chowder competition from 3 local restaurants, complimentary samples of grilled shellfish, and a no-host traditional Samish salmon BBQ lunch. Bob’s Chowder Bar won the chowder competition this year. There were two newspaper articles about the event. Planning for the 2023 FBD event will likely start in November. Darla announced she can no longer be the lead for Fidalgo Bay Day and is looking for someone else to fill that role.
- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith: The Advisory Committee is currently focused on the implementation of a part-time paid stewardship coordinator position with congressional funding. This role will help provide support and coordinate volunteer opportunities with stewards and maintain a strong volunteer base. Currently, the consensus of the AC is that a professional in the communication/ecology field (working less hours) would be more beneficial than a new college intern each year. The AC held a meeting on October 20th to start planning the 2023 SSS training which will start in February to get volunteers trained and ready to help with projects by early spring. Classes will likely be held Tuesdays again at Padilla Bay.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Forage fish surveys continue. We have reached the 5-year post-construction monitoring requirement at our restoration sites so we will either stop sampling or reduce sampling at these sites in 2023. Sampling at the DNR Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve sites will likely be reduced as well. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife maintains the database for the forage fish survey data collected, including 6 sites in Skagit County, and shares results with forage fish volunteers and partners on a regular basis. They also host quarterly meetings to touch base with the volunteers and partners. Jason Morgan with NWSF oversees and analyzes the data collected at our restoration sites and will compile it into a final report. DNR maintains and analyzes the data collected at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve site. The data is shared in reports to the Citizen Stewardship Committee and posted on the DNR’s Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve website. Fidalgo Bay has the most forage fish spawning activity compared to any of the other sites in Skagit County.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: The monitoring will continue through November. The interns will then put together data analysis, a final report, and presentation. Virtual presentations will be held January 7th and Skagit MRC members are invited. It will also be a good opportunity to learn what other participants in the program have been working on.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Typically, the Kids on the Beach program involves grade school and middle school students. But starting this fall we will have a modified version involving high school students. The first program this fall occurred October 5th with Concrete High School Students who collected mudflat exploration data at Bay View State Park. The next field program is with Conway Middle School on October 19th at the Fidalgo RV Park where they will be collecting beach seining data and forage fish surveys with the help of volunteers from 8:30am to 1pm.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel: The [2022 Pinto Abalone Final Report](#) is now complete and available on the Skagit MRC website. The final report is now complete and available on the MRC website. Puget Sound Restoration Fund and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife were able to spawn and raise about 1.3 million abalone larvae to settlement stage. They surveyed four of the eight Skagit abalone restoration sites and found 275 abalone. About 20% of those had emigrated offsite. There were densities of 0.23 to a little over 1 abalone per square meter. Densities of only 0.15 per square meter is required for successful spawning to occur. The abalone have grown a little over 2 inches. No outplanting occurred at the Skagit restoration sites this year. Over 7,283 juvenile abalone were outplanted in San Juan County.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneel: Overall, this year has been a very good year for oyster larval recruitment. It was the highest larval recruitment that we’ve ever seen. Several bags of oyster seed were transported to Padilla Bay as well as Kukatali and Skagit Bay. One set of the shell string at Weaverling spit didn’t survive the winter. Most likely because they were in an area that was really exposed to boat traffic and storm action. The three shell strings at the trestle were collected and are currently being analyzed by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund.
- Sharpes Corner Stormwater Sampling – Diane Hennebert: No Update.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: September was the last month for kelp surveys this season. Several new Salish Sea Stewards helped with the kelp surveys this year. The kelp appears to be healthy at all sites and expanded in growth compared to the last survey. Three purple sea stars were observed at the Biz Point kelp bed

site. The survey track at Coffin Rocks looks different than previous years due to smokey haze, currents, and the growth extension of the kelp bed. The winds and waves really picked up during the Shannon Point kelp survey. The survey team had to retreat and head back to shore. Unfortunately, they were unable to reschedule the September survey for Shannon Point.

- **Bowman Bay Restoration – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:** Skagit MRC had a sub-Award Agreement with Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to manage the plant maintenance work at Bowman Bay that recently ended on September 30th. On September 9th Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group Ameri-corps and staff removed the water bags that were placed next to the conifers and spread mulch. They rented a water truck and watered the plants at the site on September 22. The final walk through with the MRC Project Lead and SFEG staff occurred September 30th. Some of the new plantings did not do very well this year because they were planted a little later in the season due to the birth of the elephant seal followed by a dry hot summer. The Final Report is now complete. Costs were lower than expected, so there was some money left on the contract with Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group which was used to purchase additional plants for the site. The contract with SFEG expired September 20th. To get the 150 new plants in the ground this fall, Skagit MRC is partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation to co-host a volunteer planting party at Bowman Bay on November 3rd from 9am to 12pm. Volunteers will be asked to provide their own garden tools and gloves.

NOAA Grant Application Update: *Tracy*

- The NOAA Grant application for our MRC project proposals was due September 30, 2022. Approximately \$200k will be available in January for MRC projects. The projects must be completed within the 12-month timeframe, by December 31, 2023. Tracy thanked Cindy and the MRC Project Leads for their hard work preparing the proposals and addressing the comments from the NWSC staff.
 1. **Trestle Replacement- Fidalgo Bay (\$58,000)**- There are still questions whether NOAA funds can be used for a match. Sasha is waiting for some clarification from NOAA. The funds will likely need to be directed to the City through an interlocal agreement for the conceptual design, project management, and for developing and implementing an education/outreach plan.
 2. **Olympia Oyster Fidalgo Bay-Wide Monitoring (\$7,500)**- Funds would be used to contract with Puget Sound Restoration Fund to conduct a bay-wide survey of Olympia oysters in Fidalgo Bay. There were only a few minor comments that Paul was able to address and its now moving forward to EAGL.
 3. **Salish Sea Stewards Part-Time Volunteer Coordinator (\$10,000)**- Funds would go directly to Ecology for Padilla Bay NERR or the Padilla Bay Foundation to hire an Intern or a PT professional. There were questions whether this would be enough funding for the long list of tasks. The Salish Sea Advisory Committee recommends increasing the budget to \$15k - \$20k. Tracy will need to confirm with Sasha if we can request funding beyond the allotted \$200k.
 4. **School Rain Gardens (\$10,000)**- There were questions about whether the funding would be enough to cover the interpretive sign, rain garden design, and installation. Diane said she would check to see what their final cost was for Mt. Erie, but there are so many factors that can play a part in the cost of a rain garden. The City of Anacortes provided excavation for the Mt. Erie rain garden because its within City limits. However, if its outside of City limits (Fidalgo Elementary or any La Conner schools) then we will have to either hire a contractor or hope we can find someone who will donate their time, excavator, and dump truck. Plants and design are another big piece. The rain garden curriculum was created by one of Diane's interns. It is designed to be three lessons over the school year: one in fall, one in winter, one in spring. Each lesson has a hands-on activity and a trip through the garden. The Green Club at the high school is interested in coming to the elementary school to teach the curriculum to the kids. There were also questions regarding maintenance. The bulk of the site maintenance has to be done when school is not in session, otherwise the students could get involved. We could try to recruit one or two Salish Sea Stewards to maintain the site on a consistent basis.
 5. **Voluntary No Anchor Zone/Eelgrass Protection (\$5,000)**- Funding was originally to be used for outreach, mailing, and supplies. However, after meeting with the NWSC staff, we've decided to postpone the No-Anchor Zone outreach work until the next MRC grant funding cycle due to the permitting timeline concerns which means we will no longer need the \$5,000 from the NOAA grant. Kevin plans to continue monitoring anchored vessels at Seafarers Memorial Park.
 6. **European Green Crab Community Outreach/Education (\$5,000)** - Lynne and Tracy will be meeting with NWSC staff this Friday to address some of the comments and to get some clarification regarding what

the project needs are and what Skagit MRC's role should be. The budget for this project could probably be reduced.

7. **Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance (\$5,760)**- The MRC is considering partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation to take the lead on plant maintenance instead of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. It seems like a perfect fit since the Foundation is not only part of the NWSI, but they were also the Project Manager of the larger Bowman Bay restoration project. It would also be easier to partner with the Northwest Straits Foundation from an administrative standpoint since the funds would go directly to the Foundation rather than through the County. The MRC has been partnering with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to take the lead on plant maintenance for the last several years, but nearshore restoration work isn't really in their wheelhouse. Their primary focus is riparian restoration along freshwater creeks and streams.

The following proposals were submitted by the NWSF and are moving forward. Funding will go directly through the NWSC to the Foundation instead of through the County. MRC members expressed concern about making sure we are on the same page as the Foundation regarding the project goals, objectives, and implementation and what the MRC's role will be. Tracy suggested we develop a Partnership Project Plan with the Northwest Straits Foundation for each of the projects we will be partnering on that clearly outlines the project, and the roles and responsibilities of the Foundation and MRC.

8. **Derelict Crab Pot Removal in Samish Bay (\$41,100)**
9. **Shore Friendly Shoreline Landowner Workshops (\$5,000)**
10. **Clayton Beach Restoration (\$50,000)**

Miscellaneous Announcements: *All*

- MRC Grant: Our MRC grant (Year 1) expired September 30th. All year-1 grant invoices, deliverables, volunteer hours, in-kind services, and invoices are due. Tracy will post the final reports on the MRC website and send links. Year-2 of the MRC grant started Oct 1, 2022 and will end September 30, 2023.
- Next MRC Grant Funding Cycle: The MRC will need to come up with a list of projects for the next two-year MRC grant by March 2023. Grant applications will be due in May. The new two-year grant will start October 1, 2023.
- In-person annual meeting: The monthly meetings will continue to be held virtually. The consensus of the Committee was to hold the December 8th MRC meeting in-person since it's the last meeting of the year. The meeting will include a field trip to the Mount Erie Rain Garden.

The meeting adjourned at 11:25am. The next MRC meeting will be held November 10 via Microsoft Teams.