



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **January 12, 2023**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Betsy Stevenson, Catey Ritchie, Diane Hennebert, Kari Odden, Kevin Anderson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Brian Robson, Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple
- **Others in Attendance:** Aundrea McBride, Skagit Watershed Council; Cindy Elston, SCPW; Dana Oster, NW Straits; John Lunsford, City of Anacortes; Myrriah Crowley, SFEG; Sasha Horst, NW Straits

Call to Order and Introductions: Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: December 8, 2022, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

Public Comments: No comments

Fidalgo Bay Trestle Update: *Jonn Lunsford, City of Anacortes*

There are two main parts:

- **Rebuilding after the fire:** The City secured permits from the Corps to remove some of the derelict pilings in the burn zone. They hope to start rebuilding the trestle towards the end of January.
- **Long-term planning:** The Samish secured federal funds, which may be delayed up to 12 months, and are also working on securing additional money through Skagit County. The City has \$50,000 in-kind with a match from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grant, in addition to money from the Samish Tribe, which could bring it to full allotment. However, it is likely the City will need to request a grant extension from RCO office because the grant expires this biennium. Skagit MRC also recently received \$58,000 of NOAA congressional funding for the trestle project that will go towards education and outreach as well as the preliminary conceptual design components of the trestle project. Tracy is currently working on an Interlocal Agreement with the City of Anacortes. Skagit MRC's funding would be used for the match to help with the project research that would be used to develop the Community Education and Outreach Plan for communicating the project to the public.
 - **Cultural Resources Survey:** The Samish Indian Nation is currently working on the cultural resources survey. This must be completed before we can do anything else.
 - **Surveys and Geotechnical Work:** The City plans on doing a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) to satisfy federal guidelines for the geotechnical work.
 - **Community Education and Outreach:** The focus will be to educate the public on impacts of creosote, the marine ecosystem, and the flushing and removal of riprap and what it can do to enhance the bay and return it to its natural state.

Ship Harbor:

- A portion of the beach and boardwalk was lost due to the recent king tides, and the area is slowly moving towards being a tidally influenced wetland. People are excited to see the changes and improvements as the habitat returns to its natural state. The community's enthusiasm for the transformation of habitats returning to its natural state could potentially carry over to the trestle project in Fidalgo Bay as the habitat returns to its natural state with the removal of the riprap causeway.

2023 Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Funding Update: *Sasha Horst*

The NWSC staff hosted a series of drop-in sessions with MRCs to share information about NWSC/MRC funding projections for the next couple of years. It is anticipated that the NWSC and MRCs will continue to get around the same level EPA/State funding starting October 2023 through December 2025, as well as a second round of NOAA Congressionally-directed spending starting January 2024 – December 2025. A single Request for Proposals will be sent to the MRCs that will be split into 2 rewards for the different funding sources and timelines. For now, MRC's are being asked to provide a simple list of ongoing, planned, and new MRC projects by **March 1st**. The list should also include MRC projects that would be managed under the Northwest Straits Foundation and Padilla Bay. Skagit MRC members agreed to brainstorm a list of project ideas prior to the February Skagit MRC meeting. At the February meeting, we will discuss the project list and decide if we need to have a Project Planning and Prioritization retreat in March or April. The final project proposals and grant application will be due in May.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: Diane Hennebert

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held December 9, 2022, via Zoom conference call. NWSC Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the January 12 MRC meeting.

- The NWSC Science Advisory Committee (SAC) is seeking new members. MRC members are encouraged to suggest names for potential members. The SAC primarily supports MRC project development and proposal process and contributes to the Annual Conference planning.
- NWSC Retreat: March 30-31st in La Conner. Diane will be unable to attend and is looking for someone to take her place as the representative of Skagit MRC.
- The Commission approved a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) vision and goals statement. The next step is to establish a process for creating action items for each of the DEI goals. Stay tuned for more information.
- The NW Straits Foundation is starting a [Salish Sea Conservation Corps program](#) for 10 interns. The Foundation is looking for mentors for the interns as well as projects.
- [Tessa Francis](#) from the Puget Sound Institute gave an interesting presentation on nearshore habitats, bulkheads, and restoration impacts on nearshore fish populations. Tracy will invite Tessa to present at a future Skagit MRC meeting.
- [Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting via Zoom- January 27 \(10:00am-12:00pm\)](#) - meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>. Starting in 2023, the meetings will be held in-person every other meeting. The February 24th NWSC meeting will be held in-person in Snohomish County!

Project Status & Discussion

- [Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith](#): The date for the 2023 Fidalgo Bay Day event has been set for **Saturday, August 26, 2023**, from 11am to 3pm. The Fidalgo Bay Resort facility has been reserved. The Shannon Point Marine Center confirmed their participation with the portable Touch Tank. Darla is seeking an MRC member to take over as Project Lead. The Committee is interested in recruiting a new MRC member with experience in Education and Outreach to be the lead for Fidalgo Bay Day and other education and outreach events. Jude is reaching out to Shannon Point Marine Center to try to recruit someone to fill that role. Cindy Elston, Skagit County Public Works intern, has offered to lead the Fidalgo Bay Day Planning team through July 31st, but someone else will need to take over as lead starting in August.
- [Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith](#): 2023 SSS training will start February 7th through April 25th. Classes will be held Tuesdays from 1pm to 5pm at Padilla Bay. The earlier start date is to accommodate spring volunteer opportunities. MRC members are welcome to attend. The class is now FULL, with 26 registrants! It only took 39 days to fill the class. There is now a waiting list. The speaker schedule has been drafted and posted on the [MRC website](#).
- [Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase](#): Forage fish surveys continue. The forage fish surveys at our March's Point restoration site has ended because we have reached beyond the 5-year post-construction monitoring requirement. Forage Fish surveys will also likely end in July at the Kukatali nearshore restoration site after collecting 5 years' worth of data. However, forage fish surveys will likely continue at the Bowman Bay nearshore restoration site. The forage fish Index Site surveys at Ship Harbor, Samish Island, and Similk Bay will continue to occur monthly. The forage fish survey team is considering petitioning the NWSC and WDFW to add one or two new Index Sites and possibly decommission one or two of the sites that haven't been very good sampling sites.

They are also reducing the surveys at Fidalgo Bay on behalf of the WDNR Aquatic Reserve, which is currently in-the-works.

- MRC Forage Fish Project Check-in with WDFW: January 24th 10am-11am, via Zoom
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: The intern and STaRS student finished collecting forage fish data at March's Point in November. The STaRS students presented their projects virtually via Zoom on January 7th. The presentations are available on YouTube at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhppJ8nHiKQ>. The Year 1 Final Report is available on the [Skagit MRC Website](#). Due to scheduling conflicts with public schools, field activities, and the MRC grant timeline, the MRC Intern Program Plan will be taking a slightly different approach in 2023. The 2023 MRC intern forage fish project will be integrated into classrooms and the classrooms will be brought to beaches to learn how, when, where, and why forage fish lay their eggs, with one or two paid interns as teaching assistants. There are ongoing conversations with Fiddlehead Montessori, Acton Academy, and Island View Elementary to create a lesson plan for local classrooms.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Planning is underway for the spring program.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Not much happening right now except for hatchery maintenance. Puget Sound Restoration Fund will start field work in February or March 2023. The Environmental Reporter from the Skagit Valley Herald is interested in writing an article about the pinto abalone work in Skagit waters and reached out to Paul, Tracy, and Josh Bouma for more information about the work that is being done.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Not much happening right now. We will be conducting a large bay-wide native oyster population survey in partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund starting in April or May 2023, with NOAA Congressional funding. Bay-wide surveys will only occur at 5-year intervals as funding allows. The last bay-wide survey was completed in 2018.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Kayak volunteers are gearing up for the 2023 kelp survey season. Lynne attended WDNR's Puget Sound Floating Kelp Vital Sign Indicator Workshop on January 10th. They are collecting data from 172 locations from multiple sources, including the MRCs, to create an [interactive map](#) to help tell the story. There is currently insufficient data in the north Puget Sound subbasin (just 8%) to establish any trends including Skagit County. Skagit MRC currently has 14 experienced kayakers involved in surveying 4 kelp beds (Biz Point, Coffin Rocks, Shannon Point East, and Shannon Point West) since 2017. So far Skagit MRC kelp bed survey sites appear to be remaining stable with some seasonal variations.
 - The MRC Kelp Data Review Workshop will be held January 19th, 3pm-5pm via zoom. All MRC members are welcome to attend: <https://waecy-wa.gov.zoom.us/j/89783947787?pwd=ajFLb0VPaE5sNGtsVWh3ejNNaWJyUT09>
 - The [Kelp and Eelgrass Engagement Plan](#) Workshop will be hosted by DNR on January 31st
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Skagit MRC's NOAA Congressional funds will be used to continue plant maintenance activities at Bowman Bay in 2023 in partnership with NWSF. Some erosion occurred at the site due to king tides and high winds that we will continue to monitor. This includes erosion near the interpretive sign and along the shoreline.
- Sharpes Corner Round-About Stormwater Sampling – Diane Hennebert: There was not enough time to complete the full QAPP required by the Department of Ecology, so the Committee decided to put the project on hold until the next round of MRC grant funds that will start October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2025.

NOAA Grant Update & 2023 Workplan: Tracy Alker

- 2023 NOAA Grant: The grant is expected to get signed next week or the following week. Funding became available starting January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023.
- MRC Grant Amendment: Our current MRC Grant must be amended because there were some changes to the projects, deliverables, and budget. The amendment will be routed soon for signatures.
- MRC Grant Deliverables Due- January 13th: The MRC grant deliverables, including the 2023 MRC Workplan, quarterly progress reports, and volunteer hours are due next Friday, January 13th.
- DRAFT 2023 MRC Workplan: The 2023 workplan includes projects for year 2 of our base MRC funding through the Puget Sound Partnership/EPA and Ecology. The second half of the Workplan is for the new NOAA grant funded projects. The workplan also includes some of our ongoing projects that are not currently grant funded such as forage fish surveys, kayak-based bull kelp surveys, recreational crabber outreach, and the voluntary no anchor zone at Seafarer's Memorial Park. Dana said the buoy permits were recently retracted due to tribal

concerns about restricting fishing access, so the Voluntary No Anchor Zone project has temporarily been put on hold. More information to come.

- MRC Project Presentations to the NWSC: Each year the MRC's are asked to present one or two projects at one of the NWSC meetings. The Skagit MRC will likely be asked to present at the NWSC meeting that will be held in-person at Padilla Bay. The exact date TBD.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- New MRC Executive Planning Sub-Committee: The MRC discussed forming an Executive Planning Sub-Committee to help identify and develop new MRC project ideas and prioritization, recruit new MRC members to become Project Leads, and provide guidance for overall MRC operations. Lynne volunteered to participate on the committee and encouraged others to join. Please contact Tracy or Lynne if you are interested.
- New MRC Membership Recruitment: The county has a new process for recruiting Advisory Committee board members where the Board of County Commissioners will issue a public notification including a description of the committee and specific skills we are looking for, like education and outreach.
- Mount Vernon High School Science Night: Will be held in person this year on Thursday, April 20, 2023, 5-8pm! Skagit MRC has been invited to host a booth. Tracy is seeking ideas for fun educational activities for the MRC booth and volunteers to host the booth. Recreational crabber outreach and/or European green crab outreach were two ideas that were discussed. Betsy volunteered to host the MRC booth unless someone else is interested.
- European Green Crab Co-Managers and Partners Meeting and ESA Permit Discussion- February 1. In person at the Lacey Community Center, with an option of attending virtually, 9am-3pm.
- Storming the Sound- Thursday, January 19 at Maple Hall in La Conner. Registration fee is \$15. Register online at Eventbrite. The Agenda is available on the [Storming the Sound website](#). Storming the Sound is a conference for environmental educators in the north Puget Sound region.
- Salish Sea Magazine Call for Content: The Salish Sea Magazine is currently seeking articles, poetry, art, music, photos, and videos for their Spring 2023 issue of the Salish Magazine. The theme of the issue is: Movement. How are different types of movement involved in the stories of how our ecosystems work? For example: Currents/tides, erosion/sediment transport, and obstructions such as bulkheads. Brief proposals are due **January 15th**.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually February 9, via Microsoft Teams.