



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **March 9, 2023**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Catey Ritchie, Darla Gay Smith, Jodi Bluhm, Jude Apple, Kari Odden, Kevin Anderson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Betsy Stevenson, Diane Hennebert, Matt Castle
- **Others in Attendance:** Caitlyn Blair, NWSC; Cindy Elston, SCPW; Dana Oster, NWSC; Holli Watne, Skagit Watershed Council; Leah Robison, NWSC; Sasha Horst, NWSC; Tessa Francis, Puget Sound Institute

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: February 9, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

Public Comments: No comments

Shoreline Restoration for Nearshore Fishes: Tessa Francis, Puget Sound Institute

Researchers completed a project evaluating the effectiveness of shoreline restoration for nearshore fishes.

Project information:

- Selected sites where there were natural, restored, and armored habitats present to understand how local-scale restoration fits in with broader landscape patterns.
- Gathered nearshore fish surveys from other projects
- Sampled at 6 sites across Puget Sound for 4 fish species: Chinook, chum, herring, and surf smelt
- Sampled fish at 3 different distances away from the shore
- Evaluated patterns between nearshore fish and environmental characteristics
- Compared to a model that used shoreline structure, eelgrass presence, season, and site location as predictors

Conclusions:

- Positive benefits for removing shoreline armoring include:
 - Increased connectivity between terrestrial and marine ecosystems
 - Increased invertebrate diversity
 - Increased habitat for beach spawning forage fish
 - More gradual beach slope and finer sediment composition
- Actions for protection and restoration depend on what species of fish it is:
 - Herring are more abundant where there are natural shorelines (as opposed to restored and armored sites)
 - Chinook are more abundant at shorelines near their spawning rivers
 - Chum are most abundant in eelgrass habitats
 - Surf smelt had no major patterns, but the data for smelt was patchy and unclear. Their abundance may depend more on substrate

Looking forward:

- Historically, shoreline restoration has mostly been opportunistic, but we may need a more strategic approach to restore shorelines.
- Distribution of armoring and habitat connectivity may impact nearshore fishes: is low connectivity or high connectivity better to support nearshore habitat of fishes?
- New project looks at where to focus restoration efforts along shorelines:

- Goal is to develop a predictive sound-wide model that shows high- or low-end quality areas for different species
- Site selection is ongoing. They are focused on Port Susan and Saratoga Passage to link with other ongoing projects and are open to suggestions
- Beach seining data will be collected
- What MRC members can do: contribute fish survey data and/or beach survey data

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Sasha Horst*

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held February 24, 2023, in-person. NWSC Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the March 9th MRC meeting.

- Puget Sound Day on the Hill - May 8-11 – in-person in Washington, D.C. More information is available on the website: <https://www.psdonth.org/>
- Skagit MRC will be asked to do a presentation on one of our MRC projects when there is an in-person NWSC meeting in Skagit County
- Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting - April 28 – online via Zoom. Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>.
- Northwest Straits Retreat – March 30-31 - in-person at La Conner Country Inn for members of the Commission and Foundation board. Lynne will be representing Skagit MRC at the retreat.

NWSC Conference Planning: *Pete Haase*

Pete has joined the NWSC Conference Planning Team. He participated in one planning meeting already.

- NWSC Conference - November 3-4 – in Port Townsend at the Northwest Maritime Center.
- MRC members were encouraged to fill out the survey to rank potential conference topics. They are compiling the results.
- They are looking for ideas for the keynote speaker

Project Status & Discussion

- Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith, Cindy Elston: 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 and Shannon Point Marine Center’s touch tank has been reserved. MRC member Darla Gay Smith and the Skagit County intern, Cindy Elston, will co-lead the event this year. The first planning meeting was February 23. One of last year’s volunteers and Salish Sea Stewards grad, Bev Mowrer, has agreed to do much of the organizing and hard work this year. Skagit County recently hired a new Education/Outreach person who will help develop new promotional materials for FBD.
- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith: 2023 SSS training runs from February 7th through April 25th. Salish Sea Stewards each receive a t-shirt and a button name tag. The SSS Advisory Committee is still working on locating funds for the gear for this year. In previous years, they were able to secure funding from a private donor. The advisory committee met on February 17. A former MRC member, Morty Cohen, joined them in a February meeting, and had some ideas to engage existing stewards. They are working to incorporate his ideas for educational activities, special presentations, and updates on projects. They are also working on coordinating the full-time volunteer coordinator, Erin Merklein who was hired in late February and will work 3 days per week for Padilla Bay and 2 days per week for Skagit MRC.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Forage fish surveys continue at the index and restoration sites. They will be picking up a restoration site at Similk Bay off Reservation Rd on the east side near Turner Bay, which has prolific spawning results in the summer. They are also doing surveys in Fidalgo Bay for DNR, which is a productive site all-year round and has particularly good survival rates in the winter.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: Planning is underway for this year’s program.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Conway & Concrete participated in the program in the fall. There was a new concrete middle school teacher who was still getting settled, so high-school students participated in the program instead. For the spring program, there will be 75 6th-grade students from Sedro-Woolley participating

from April 10th-14th at Bayview State Park. There will be front-end and back-end activities in the classroom and 3 field days, which includes a tour of aquarium, collecting fish data through seining and taking fish counts, developing graphs, and thinking about results and presentations.

- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel: The crew is out doing field work while the kelp and algae levels are at a minimum, so the abalone are easier to see. There should be more to report next month.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: They are gearing up for summer bay-wide sampling. Paul is working on preparing the QAPP Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) for sampling this summer in conjunction with Puget Sound Restoration Fund.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Because kelp has become a floating indicator in the Puget Sound Partnership Action Agenda process, there has been an increased effort in state-level kelp teams (DNR, Samish, NWSC, etc) and a series of kelp workshops. A kelp plan action workshop was most recently held at the beginning of March, where they reviewed a robust kelp plan. Although Lynne was unable to attend, Jeff Whitty shared lots of great information from the workshop. The [interactive kelp indicator map](#), shows that Skagit MRC's Shannon Point kelp bed monitoring sites are in one of DNR's Puget Sound sub-basins that is listed as having insufficient data. The Skagit kelp monitoring team met with DNR to discuss what the 'insufficient data' means and if there is anything we can do to change that status. The insufficient data is based on historic geographic data of where kelp beds used to be, but there isn't much data available for Skagit County waters. The Skagit kelp team will help with research on historical kelp bed locations and extent. Skagit does not need to add more sites, but we can if we want to. As a long-term goal, SMRC's kelp kayak team are talking about recruiting more leads for more projects in the future. A kelp surveyor volunteer, Steve Olson, is very familiar with the kelp beds in the region so he put together a list of potential sites. DNR is doing aerial surveys in some of those locations, but due to issues with aerial photography, like the wing of the airplane blocking visibility, they can't always see the kelp. To confirm the presence or absence of kelp, kayak volunteers will check out those sites, evaluate feasibility for surveying, and prioritize which new sites to add to the kayak surveys.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Plant maintenance will likely start back up in May under the management of the Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF). Don and Lisa with NWSF had a very productive meeting with the Park Manager, Jason Armstrong to discuss watering and vegetation maintenance. Parks has water trucks of varying sizes that they keep full for fire suppression but need to empty periodically that we could use for watering the plants once we establish a plant maintenance schedule this summer. Access to the water trucks will help stretch the grant funds further for more mulch, trees, etc. There has been a lot of beach erosion at the restoration site. Jason Armstrong seems open to pulling the restoration area back a bit to increase the survivability of plants and trees. There will be more discussions about what this could look like in the future.
- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Lynne met with Allie Simpson and Leah from NWSC to develop an outreach plan. The primary focus of the green crab outreach effort in Skagit County is Padilla Bay and Samish Bay shoreline landowners. The program is modeled after Whatcom County's program. The goal is to help make them aware of the green crab issue and how to identify them and encourage them to allow us access for monitoring and trapping if green crabs are present. We will also provide green crab outreach materials at community events like Skagit Water Weeks and Fidalgo Bay Day.
- School Rain Garden – Dianne Hennebert: No updates.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement – Tracy Alker, Jude Apple, Pete Haase: The Interlocal Agreement between the County and City of Anacortes has been drafted and is still being negotiated. A meeting to develop the education/outreach plan will be held after the Agreement gets signed.
- Shore Friendly Workshop – Catey Ritchie, Betsy Stevenson: Catey has delegated the shore friendly workshop project to a shoreline specialist with the Swinomish Tribe, Jason Thompson. The date has been tentatively set for Saturday, April 29th at Seafarers Park, from 10am-2pm with a beach walk. The workshop will focus on coastal processes, climate change/sea level rise and adaptations. We are still considering where to do a beach walk and would like input for locations. Some ideas that have been discussed include: the Samish RV Park, Rosario beach, and Snee-oosh Beach as possible options, but ideally would like to keep the drive short from Seafares to the beach walk. The Foundation received additional Shore Friendly funding to continue with more videos and workshops for influencers such as contractors, land managers, and planners (in addition to those being funded with CDS funds). The registration has gone live, and postcards will be sent 5 weeks before the event. The event is limited to 40 people.

- Clayton Beach Restoration – Paul Dinneel: For the feasibility study, NWSF met with BNSF. They have no concerns with the project at this time and have agreed that there are benefits to their infrastructure because it reduces the need to continually reinforce the area of the slope that continue to slough. The Foundation is waiting on a letter of agreement from BNSF before they can continue the approval process with State Parks. DNR will begin monitoring this summer to map the eelgrass, sample sediments, and map the bathymetry. The Foundation was recently awarded the HSIL grant for feasibility and design of the eelgrass restoration of the dredge hole. The initial work will tie into the monitoring of the eelgrass within the intertidal area. DNR will map the dredge hole and survey for eelgrass around the boundary of the hole. Sediment samples will help determine composition and chemistry required to plant eelgrass once the hole is filled. A feasibility study will be developed to identify sediment sources to fill the hole from other dredge projects. WWU/Shannon Point will propagate eelgrass at their labs for eventual transplanting.

NWSC 2023-2025 Request for Proposals: *Tracy Alker, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*

The NWSC issued the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the next round of MRC grant funding. The RFP is different this year as it combines two grants that are funded from three different sources and different funding timelines. MRC Project Leads were asked to provide a brief project description, timeline, and cost estimates for the initial “Go No-Go” screening process. The Executive Project Planning Committee will determine which projects meet all the requirements to make it to the “Go” phase. For the projects that make it to the “Go” phase, the Project Leads will be asked to develop full project proposals using the template in the RFP and present project information at the April 13th MRC meeting. If we are within budget, we can move on with the grant application process, but if not, we would need to complete a prioritization process. Project consultations with the NWSC will be held in April. Project proposals must be finalized before the May 11th MRC meeting where the Committee will vote on the final grant packet. Grant applications must be completed and uploaded to EAGL by May 25th.

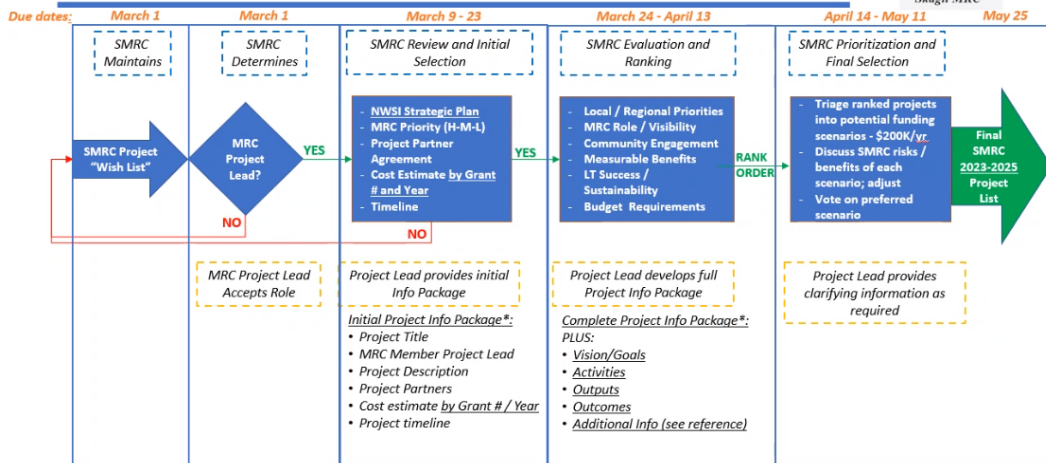
Projects for the “Go No-Go” Initial Screening Process:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fidalgo Bay Day • Kids on the Beach • MRC Salish Sea School Intern • Salish Sea Stewards Training Program • Salish Sea Stewards PT Volunteer Coordinator • Pinto Abalone Recovery • School Rain Garden • Bowman Bay Restoration & Plant Maintenance • Bowman Bay Nearshore Seining • Shore Friendly-Shoreline Landowner Workshops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clayton Beach Restoration • European Green Crab Outreach • Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement • Olympia Oyster Restoration/Monitoring • Derelict Crab Pot Removal • Voluntary No Anchor Zone/Eelgrass Protection • Derelict Vessel Removal • Skagit Needs Assessment to identify and prioritize potential restoration projects • Project Coordinator |
|--|---|

Skagit MRC

PROJECT EVALUATION AND PRIORITIZATION PROCESS (2023-2025)

March 9-16 Project Leads
March 16-23 Exec Committee



Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- **Skagit Water Weeks:** A month-long event in May. Skagit Conservation Education Alliance will be reaching out to organizations with more information soon.
- **Mount Vernon Parks & Enrichment Group:** They are creating an environmental education curriculum, volunteer naturalist programs, and summer programs. They are also hosting an Earth Day event that could be a good tabling opportunity for the MRC if interested.
- **Skagit Land Trust Appoints New Rep to MRC:** Lynne was recently appointed as a Skagit Land Trust board member and was asked to be the new representative of Skagit Land Trust on the Skagit MRC. Congratulations, Lynne! Kari will serve as the Alternate Rep on the MRC.
- **Skagit Land Trust Events:** Skagit Land Trust has some upcoming walks and work parties at their Samish Island conservation area. More information is located here: <https://www.skagitlandtrust.org/events.aspx>
- **Samish Island Community Meeting:** There have been dike breaches along Alice Bay. There was a town meeting at Samish Island, where many organizations are involved in working with the community to look at short and long-term solutions. There is a collective effort to come up with a solution. A newspaper article in the Skagit Valley Herald about the meeting will soon be published.

The meeting adjourned at 10:58am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually April 13, via Microsoft Teams.