



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **April 13, 2023**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Darla Gay Smith, Diane Hennebert, Jodi Bluhm, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Betsy Stevenson, Catey Ritchie, Jude Apple, Kari Odden, Kevin Anderson, Matt Castle
- **Others in Attendance:** Cindy Elston, SCPW; Cynthia Nielsen, possible MRC candidate; Dana Oster, NWSC; Jenn Johnson, SCPW; Sasha Horst, NWSC

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

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

Public Comments: There is a City of Anacortes council member who may have access to funds that could be put towards eelgrass restoration & monitoring. If you know of any eelgrass projects or have ideas, contact Diane Hennebert at dianeh@cityofanacortes.org.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Lynne/Dianne*

Lynne attended the Northwest Straits retreat that was held March 30-31 in La Conner. There was no regular NWSC meeting in March.

- Northwest Straits Retreat Summary – There was a facilitated discussion on process improvements, ways to network, and improvements going forward. Notes will be released sometime in the next month.
- Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting – April 28- Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith: 2023 SSS training runs from February 7th through April 25th at Padilla Bay. Two of this year's stewards have applied to the open volunteer MRC positions. The advisory committee met on March 17 and worked on the workflow of the Salish Sea Volunteer Coordinator, Erin Merklein. A private donation was made to the Padilla Bay Foundation for SSS graduation gear this year. The advisory committee is asking for a budget increase in the next round of MRC grant funding to cover expenses including safety vests and supplies. A data-sharing/social event is currently being planned for all Salish Sea Stewards on May 9th. Jason Morgan and Erica Bleke will share data from restoration/monitoring projects, Sue Ehlers will share heron foraging data, and Pete will be heading up forage fish survey data.
- Kids on the Beach – Pete Haase: There are 75 6th-grade students from Sedro-Woolley participating from April 10th-14th at Bayview State Park. For intertidal monitoring, each group of 25 students have chosen a different stretch of beach that corresponds to natural, restored, and rock riprap shoreline. Afterwards, they will be analyzing data and developing graphs in the classroom.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Surveys continue at the 3 Index sites and two restoration sites. April is a slow spawning time for surf smelt in our area, so the volunteers haven't been finding much. We picked up a new restoration site to survey on the west side of Similk Bay on two private properties where bulkheads were removed through the Northwest Straits Foundation's Shore Friendly program. There have been reports of a huge herring spawning event that recently occurred in Similk Bay near the Swinomish shellfish farm. A High School Biology teacher is currently working on a genetic study with shiner perch and wants to do something similar with forage fish. He is interested in getting some live surf smelt eggs from the forage fish survey team

to preserve in alcohol to look for genetic signatures. The forage fish survey team hosted an outreach booth at the Mount Vernon High School Science night. One of the new Salish Sea Stewards class participants expressed interest in joining the MRC and taking the lead on forage fish surveys. Pete will be teaching him the ropes.

- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinne!: It's been a busy month. Crews are doing field work. Eight sites were seeded last year, and all have been surveyed, but none in Skagit County waters; they found a range of survival between <1% to 10%, which is normal. They will likely drop low-percentage sites and focus on sites with higher survival in the future. They have found 2 new potential outplant locations in Skagit County that will be seeded this year. They have also spent time looking for wild aggregations of adult abalone, and collecting some for broodstock and establishing new index stations around those aggregations. This year, they have about 3500 juvenile abalone from the hatchery, and hope to seed 6 sites, 2 of which will be in Skagit County. Joe Gaydos is interested in doing an episode of Salish Sea Wild on the abalone recovery program, which will include a day of filming abalone loading at the hatchery and a day in the field with SeaDoc
- 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 and Shannon Point Marine Center's touch tank has been reserved. The FBD Planning Committee is requesting a budget increase in the next round of MRC grant funding to help cover growing costs of supplies and food permits.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: This is the quiet time of the year. The MRC kelp survey kick-off meeting for the 2023 season is scheduled for April 20th via Zoom, hosted by Jeff Witty of NWSC. The agenda will include the MRC kayak monitoring story map, networking, season planning, safety trainings & protocols, and tool reviews. They have a new kayaker who has signed up from the 2023 Salish Sea Stewards. Later this month, there will be a Skagit all-team kelp kayaker in-person meeting at a kayaker's house, which includes a meet-and-greet and a discussion of selection criteria and prioritization of potential kelp bed project expansions.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: The Salish Sea School is busy working on a wide spectrum of programs and activities. Coming up with a good plan for our Intern program hasn't gone as smoothly as we had hoped. The time commitment and coordination of the interns and students to do the work has been difficult. The current plan is to have an intern do some forage fish survey work with young students this summer. They should be close to having an intern selected.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinne!: Paul plans to collect and re-distribute oyster shell bags at Fidalgo Bay sometime in May to monitor oyster spawning and settlement. Paul worked with Sylvia Yang from Padilla Bay NERR and capstone students from the Shannon Point Marine Center to collect data on the oysters transplanted in Padilla Bay last year. The oysters appear to have done well overall. There was some oyster mortality due to non-native oyster drills and cold winter temperatures during low tide events. We will be conducting a large bay-wide native oyster population survey with NOAA Congressional funding in partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund starting in June 2023. Paul is working on the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) for the bay-wide oyster monitoring project. The QAPP is currently being reviewed by PSRF staff before it is finalized and sent to Ecology for approval and signatures to begin work. Paul presented on the oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards trainees and will be recruiting volunteers to help with monitoring this summer.
- 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. The plants continue to struggle at this site. State Parks has water trucks that they keep full for fire suppression that we can use for watering the plants this summer. The Foundation plans to water heavily and host several volunteer work parties to weed and maintain the plants at the Bowman Bay site this summer.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert: Diane has reached out to the Between Two Worlds program as a potential site. They have drafted a proposal for the tribe and the school board for a native plant food and medicine garden on-campus, with an integrated outdoor learning space and fish pit. They have identified a location on the high school campus. It is likely that the proposal will pass and they will begin the project in a few weeks. There is a focus on native plants and integrating aspects of how plants effect water movement above and below the ground's surface into the education and design.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement – Tracy Alker: The Interlocal Agreement between the County and City of Anacortes has been drafted and is still being negotiated. They are also waiting on some additional grant funding from the Samish to send out a request for qualifications for the engineering work. A meeting to develop the education/outreach plan will be held after the Agreement gets signed.

- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: The [2022 Green Crab Detection Map](#) shows green crabs have been detected along Chuckanut, Edison, Samish, and Padilla Bay. The outreach plan is to send informational letters and outreach materials to educate landowners along shorelines of Padilla and Samish Bays about green crab identification, what to do if you see them, and potentially asking for access along their property to reach the shoreline. The Skagit County GIS Department completed a data pull to get almost 700 names and addresses for landowners along those shorelines. Lynne is working on removing duplicates and government parcels. This outreach effort is in collaboration with NWSC, WDFW, and Sea Grant, and Lynne plans to reach out to other local organizations involved in green crab monitoring and trapping to be cosigners, such as Padilla Bay and Taylor Shellfish.
- Shore Friendly Workshop – Catey Ritchie: The workshop will be held on Saturday, April 29th at Seafarers Park, from 10am-1pm with a beach walk. The workshop will focus on coastal processes, climate change/sea level rise, home relocation, and adaptations.
- Clayton Beach Restoration – Paul Dinnel: The Foundation was awarded a \$700,000 grant from Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead for the Clayton Beach project. The funding would primarily be for feasibility and design of the eelgrass restoration of the dredge hole where sediment was taken out to aid the railroad trestle. DNR will begin monitoring this summer to map the 13-acre dredge hole and survey for eelgrass around the boundary of the hole, sample sediments, and map the bathymetry. The initial work will tie into the monitoring of the eelgrass within the intertidal area. 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.

2023-2025 MRC Project Prioritization: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson & Project Leads

Draft project proposals will be prepared by project leads and uploaded to a shared file online. A link to the shared file will be sent to the committee. Although some projects have been dropped from the list, we are still about \$19,000 over budget. Therefore, the next step is project prioritization. MRC members are asked to rank the projects based on the 6 strategic priorities using the evaluation form that Lynne will provide. The evaluation forms are due two weeks from today. The results will help determine which projects will get top priority for funding under the 2023-2025 MRC grant cycle and if any adjustments need to be made with project budgets, scope, schedules, etc. The final MRC Grant Application is due May 25, 2023.

9 projects are asking for funding that will need to be evaluated and prioritized:

- Clayton Beach Restoration
- Salish Sea Stewards Training and PT Volunteer Coordinator
- School Rain Garden
- Bowman Bay Restoration & Plant Maintenance
- Fidalgo Bay Day
- Kids on the Beach
- Pinto Abalone Recovery
- Skagit Needs Assessment to identify and prioritize potential restoration projects
- Bowman Bay Nearshore Beach Seining

No funding needed but still “go” projects:

- No Anchor Zone/Eelgrass Protection
- Shoreline Landowner Workshops
- European Green Crab Outreach

More information about each of these projects was emailed via the Skagit MRC Projects Go-No Go Spreadsheet and shared during the April 13th MRC meeting.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Skagit Children's Museum Earth Day Event: Skagit Children's Museum is looking for environmental organizations to participate in their Earth Day event in Burlington that could be a good tabling opportunity.
- 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>

The meeting adjourned at 10:56am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually on May 11, via Microsoft Teams.