



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **May 11, 2023**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Betsy Stevenson, Catey Ritchie, Jodi Bluhm, Kevin Anderson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase
  - **MRC Members Absent:** Darla Gay Smith, Diane Hennebert, Jude Apple, Matt Castle
- **Others in Attendance:** Cindy Elston, SCPW; Jenn Johnson, SCPW; Melissa Ciesielski, Swinomish Outreach Specialist; Russel Barsh, Kwiáht

**Call to Order and Introductions:** Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

**Approval of Minutes:** April 13, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

**Public Comments:** None

## Kwiáht Center for the Historical ecology of the Salish Sea, Lopez Island: *Russel Barsh*

*Russel Barsh is the director of the Kwiáht Center for the Historical Ecology of the Salish Sea and was a previous member of Skagit MRC 20 years ago.*

Marine Research Program:

- Food Web Research that supports chinook salmon
  - How is chinook diet changing?
  - How might toxicants and climate change impact food webs that support salmon, and therefore large predators in the Salish Sea?

Preliminary Results:

  - Chinook diet primarily consists of sand lance and herring, and some crustaceans and terrestrials
  - Same-sized chinook are eating smaller-sized herring and sand lance. Blackmouth salmon are also eating smaller herring
  - Sharp drop in consumption of forage fish in terms of biomass
- Indian Island Stewardship Program on Orcas Island
  - Researching urban impacts and climate change impacts on a large eelgrass meadow and rocky reef
    - Gets about 4,000 – 5,000 visitors per year
    - East Sound stormwater goes directly into the eelgrass meadow that surrounds Indian Island

Preliminary Results:

  - Declines in shallow eelgrass, fish diversity, sea star diversity and abundance
  - Changes likely an effect of higher temperatures and human activity
- Marine Bioacoustics
  - Researching fish sound production and the extent of which we can use fish acoustics to measure the health of rocky reef and kelp canopy ecosystems
  - Working with Padilla Bay Reserve to record fishes and build an inventory of fish sound production
    - Only 1 fish is well-documented in terms of sound production in this region
    - Biologists estimate around 1/5 or 1/4 of all fish produce sound at some point in their life history, particularly associated with territorial or nest defense
- Community Education, Conservation, & Community Resilience Work
  - Community Clam digging
  - Building shellfish beds as coastal defenses to reduce shoreline currents and reduce erosion

## 2023-2025 MRC Project Prioritization Results: *Lynne / Tracy*

Scores and results are located on the SMRC 23-25 Project Prioritization Form. Each project was ranked by MRC members on local/regional priority, MRC role & visibility, community engagement, measurable benefits, long term success/sustainability, and funding requirements. A summary of average scores are in the table below.

| Project Name   | Score |
|--|-------|
| Pinto Abalone Recovery                               | 2.71  |
| Salish Sea Stewards Training & Volunteer Coordinator | 2.69  |
| Fidalgo Bay Day                                      | 2.61  |
| Bowman Bay   | 2.57  |
| Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance                         | 2.56  |
| Kids on the Beach                                    | 2.52  |
| School Rain Gardens                                  | 2.43  |
| Clayton Beach Restoration                            | 2.39  |
| Skagit Needs Assessment for Restoration Projects     | 2.11  |

- **DECISION MADE BY CONSENSUS- All:** Funding sources and amounts were adjusted appropriately, reviewed, and approved by consensus:
  - \$1,000 from Salish Sea Stewards moved to Fidalgo Bay Day.
  - Funding for the Skagit Needs Assessment Phase II project was reduced to fit within the overall grant budget.
  - A potential new project to recruit and train volunteers to monitor beached seabirds with Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST), was approved to be added if it fits within budget.
    - **ACTION ITEM- Lynne:** Lynne will take the lead if there is enough funding. It would cost an estimated \$5,000 per MRC.

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

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held April 28, 2023. NWSC Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the May 11<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting.

- The Commission has elected Tim Ellis, Snohomish MRC representative, as the new Chair, as well as Alan Clark of the Clallam MRC as the new Vice Chair.
- Ginny Broadhurst has been appointed to the Commission by Governor Inslee.
- Chanda Littles presented on beneficial use of dredge materials in the Lower Columbia river.
- **Northwest Straits Conference – November 3-4** – in-person at the Maritime Center in Port Townsend. Updates will be sent via e-mail, including registration. Additional information will be added to the Conference Website. MRC Operations funding is available to reimburse MRC members for travel and lodging for the conference.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting – May 26<sup>th</sup>** – online via Zoom. 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:** On April 25<sup>th</sup>, we welcomed 24 new Salish Sea Steward graduates who finished the 11-week program. They will be committing to 40 hours of volunteering over the next year. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, Padilla Bay and the advisory committee hosted a data sharing and social event, with around 30 stewards and 5 speakers in attendance. The advisory committee has been turning over some responsibilities to Erin Merklein, the new Volunteer Coordinator, who is now leading their social media campaigns.
- **Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:** No updates.
- **Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:** Crews are finishing field work. Paul will have an update next meeting.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:** Paul Dinnel attended the Pacific Estuarine Research Society Conference in Bellingham, where they had a presentation about the transfer of oyster seed from Fidalgo Bay into Padilla Bay that he co-authored. Padilla Bay Reserve is transferring another batch of native oyster seed into 3 different locations in Padilla Bay to assess the best locations. Paul also collected half-a-dozen oyster recruitment bags from last year. It was a successful spawning year with about 2 oysters per shell and is the top 3rd highest recruitment we've seen in Fidalgo Bay. Recruitment appears to be increasing on the west side of the

bay. In late June, we will be working with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund crews to collect samples for a bay-wide population estimate completed every 5 years.

- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Survey season starts in June. There are 4 sites, and 3 teams consisting of 12 surveyors. Coffin Rocks in Bowman Bay, led by Bob Weathers; Biz Point, led by John Freeto; and Shannon Point East and West, led by Lynne Wenberg-Davidson. A shakedown cruise is scheduled for May 17<sup>th</sup> at Seafarers Park. The all-MRC kelp kick-off meeting was held on April 20<sup>th</sup>, where they rolled out a new kelp monitoring story map, introduced new kelp protocols, and provided safety trainings. On April 28<sup>th</sup>, they had a Skagit all-team kelp kayaker meeting, where 11 of the 12 kayakers were in attendance. The team discussed criteria and selected the top 2 sites to do reconnaissance and potentially add sites in the future.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Plant maintenance will be starting up soon under the management of the Northwest Straits Foundation. The plants continue to struggle at this site. State Parks has water trucks that are kept full for fire suppression that NWSF staff has been trained to use for watering the plants this summer. The Foundation plans to water heavily and host several plant maintenance work parties this summer.
- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: The outreach plan is to send informational letters to shoreline landowners where green crab was detected in 2022 (along Chuckanut, Edison, Samish, and Padilla Bay) to increase awareness of the issue and what they can do to help. Lynne has narrowed the address list provided by the Skagit County GIS Department to 500 addresses. They have a letter drafted which will be approved and signed by NWSC, WDFW, UW SeaGrant, and potentially Padilla Bay and Taylor Shellfish. The letter provides information about green crab identification and what to do if you see them, which they hope to send in June.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: There is meeting scheduled for May 22<sup>nd</sup> to finalize plans and schedules for students doing the forage fish surveys this summer and early fall.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Several folks from the Salish Sea Stewards are helping, and some are becoming regulars.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Cindy Elston, Darla Gay Smith: The date for the 2023 Fidalgo Bay Day event is Saturday, August 26, 2023, from 11am to 3pm. The Fidalgo Bay Resort facility and Shannon Point Marine Center's touch tank has been reserved. We've sent out initial "save the date" emails to booth organizations and got around 20 responses from those who said they are interested. New this year is an educational mermaid to teach kids about the wonders of the Salish Sea and what they can do to protect it! The next planning meeting is scheduled for May 15. Paul added that he has contacted Taylor Shellfish, and Dennis Parent will be taking the lead for shellfish cooking in Paul's absence.
- Clayton Beach Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Design work has begun as the Northwest Straits Foundation waits on an agreement with BNSF. The Foundation completed a snorkel survey where they saw some chum salmon.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement – Tracy Alker: The Interlocal Agreement between the County and City of Anacortes has temporarily been put on hold as the NWSC tries to get the NOAA grant extended to better fit the timeline of projects.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert: Diane has been talking to the Between Two Worlds program and the principal of La Conner Elementary School, which has a good potential site.
- Shore Friendly Workshop – Betsy Stevenson: The workshop was held on Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup> at Seafarers Park. The workshop focused on coastal processes, climate change/sea level rise, home relocation, and adaptations. About 15 people were in attendance. Presentations were well-received. Many attendees experienced flooding during the January high tides and heavy rains and were interested in potential options.

#### **Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All**

None.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:40am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually on June 8<sup>th</sup>, via Microsoft Teams.**