



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker (MRC Staff), Betsy Stevenson, Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey Ritchie's Alternate)
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Diane Hennebert, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Cindy Elston, SCPW; Cynthia Nielsen, prospective MRC member; Dana Flerchinger, Salish Sea School; Jason Morgan, NWSF; Jenn Johnson, SCPW

Call to Order and Introductions: Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: June 8th, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

Public Comments: None

MRC – Salish Sea School Intern Update: *Dana Flerchinger*

Since June 2023, intern Dana Flerchinger and four students, grades 7th-12th, have been conducting forage fish spawning surveys at three locations along the Fidalgo Bay RV Resort: shaded, partially shaded, and full-sun sites. They found thousands of eggs at one of the sampling stations. Some were even hatching! They also found some mystery eggs they are currently trying to identify. They will continue collecting samples through September and compile finding into a summary report.

Northwest Straits Foundation Update: *Jason Morgan*

Project updates:

- Derelict crab pot removal – We are in year 2 of the Anacortes derelict crab pot study area. In 2022 we removed 335 pots, the majority of which were commercial pots. This year, surveys showed 230 pots. The majority of crab pot loss is from vessel conflict. We are trying to figure out how to reduce loss. In the lower Samish Bay area, we found 121 derelict crab pots, and are working on removing pots now.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Project – There is a work party every Thursday from 9am to 11am, during which we water the plants using the State Park's water truck. We are trying to get through all of the weeding (there is a lot!) and are struggling to get volunteers, so spread the word!
- Similk Bay Restoration Project – We installed interpretive signage last week at the Similk Bay restoration site on the dual private-property. Pete and Lynne have started doing forage fish surveys and have found eggs.
- Clayton Beach – The restoration project is currently on hold until we get consent from the railroad. Even though none of the workers will be on the railroad property, State Parks does not want them to move forward without the railroad's consent. Pre-restoration monitoring is moving forward. We have been completing snorkel surveys of juvenile salmonids. The site is currently only accessible by boat because a footbridge is under construction, cutting off land access. However, due to windy weather conditions, it has been challenging to kayak and some surveys have been cancelled. Once we have foot access, we would like to schedule forage fish surveys.

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

The last NWSF/ NWSF meeting was held June 23, 2023. NWSF Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the July 13th MRC meeting.

- San Juan MRC hosted a site visit at Odlin County Park and shared information about their voluntary no-anchor zone project to protect eelgrass, and other new and ongoing projects.

- Dana presented on the floating kelp indicator in WA State. To read more about this project, visit [this link](#).
- NW Straits Commission staff finished the draft of the 2020-2023 Kelp Plan Status Report which will undergo public input.
- The Puget Sound Partnership is hiring new staff for their strategic funding team and is working on Progress Indicators in collaboration with local, state, and Tribal partners. To learn more about the Progress Indicators, visit [this link](#)
- Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting – July 28th – in-person at Padilla Bay Reserve. Diane will be presenting about the school rain gardens project. Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>.
- Northwest Straits Conference – November 3-4th – at the Maritime Center in Port Townsend. All MRC members are invited - save the date!

NWSI Conference – MRC Project Sharing Discussion: *Tracy Alker*

The NWSI Conference will be held at the Port Townsend Maritime Center on November 3rd-4th. The Commission is interested in highlighting the MRC's work and wants to know which of the following options the MRC prefers by **August 30th**:

MRC Project Sharing Options:

1. A snapshot presentation (up to 15 minutes) showcasing a project of our MRC
2. A poster or table display that will be displayed in the Gallery Room
3. Contributions towards a combined slideshow

Discussion/Comments:

- Tracy:
 - So far, no MRC members expressed interest in a snapshot presentation showcasing a project.
 - Most are in support of contributions towards a combined slideshow and possibly a table display are posters.
 - Our MRC display is basically a large backdrop with photos of some of our work. We could also create project fact sheets for projects we want to showcase, and possibly bring our new European Green Crab plinko game.
 - Jude: We need to think about what we want our presence to be and how we want to engage with this.
 - Pete: Overarching feedback from previous years suggested more time needed for informal networking and learning about other MRCs. Last year, they had "tables of interest" where people would choose specific interesting topics for others to talk about.
- **Action Items:** No decisions were made at the July MRC meeting. The Committee decided to table it until the August MRC meeting to allow for more time to think about what we want our presence to be and how we want to showcase our work. Please let Tracy know if you have any ideas!

Conference Attendance and Registration: All MRC members are encouraged to attend the Conference! Registration information will be coming soon! MRC members can be reimbursed for travel (ie mileage, ferry, and lodging) within the government per-diem rates. The commission will send a list of lodging options within the per-diem rate. MRC members will need to make their own travel arrangements.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith: Erin has been busy developing a new facebook page called Salish Sea Community Science, along with an Instagram account @SalishSeaStewards, and rolled out the first bi-monthly alumni newsletter called SSS News. The advisory committee is working on establishing internal rules and procedures. We do not meet in July/August/September. The kick-off meeting for the 2024 Stewards planning will be in October. About 1/3 of the stewards training spaces are filled already! Interested people should email now to reserve a spot.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple: Summer hibernation. No new developments.

- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel: Waiting for an update from Puget Sound Restoration Fund. They have finished most of the field work and are working on routine hatchery work and data analysis.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel: On June 20th, four Puget Sound Restoration Staff led 7 volunteers on a successful survey of the eastern side of Fidalgo Bay. The oyster population appears to be doing well. Two more surveys will be held August 2nd and 3rd. Volunteers also surveyed the seed plots planted at Cap Sante 5 years ago, but they did not find a single oyster.
- Clayton beach – Paul Dinnel: Jason provided information during his NWSF update earlier in this meeting.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: June and July Kelp surveys have been completed at all 3 sites: Coffin Rocks, Shannon Point, and Biz Point. The kelp bulbs at Shannon Point were sparsely spread out, but healthy. The Biz Point kelp bed condition was similar to last year’s survey. Kelp bed at Coffin Rocks appears to be very healthy.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: Jason provided information during his NWSF update earlier in this meeting.
- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson: The 2023 EGC Plan is to target outreach to landowners along shorelines off Chuckanut, Edison, Samish and Padilla Bays where there has been an increased detection of EGCs. In collaboration with many co-authors, the EGC Homeowner Outreach letter, along with WDFW EGC identification rack card and wallet card, was finalized and mailed to 505 shoreline property owners. A big thank you to: Skagit MRC, NWSC, WDFW, DNR, Sea Grant, PBNERR, Taylor Shellfish, Samish Indian Nation and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community leaders for their endorsement and signature on the letter.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement – Tracy Alker: The project is on-hold while we are waiting to get the green light to extend the grant agreement to better align with the project timeline. The Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Stewardship Committee is ready to help with the education and outreach component as soon as we get the green light.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase: Dana provided an update on the Salish Sea School program earlier in the meeting. One of the kids came out and completed a modified forage fish survey several years ago from Island View Elementary. Another kid is planning to attend Rice University for their biology program. It is nice to see the impacts of these projects – it makes it worth all the hard work.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase: Surveys continue at the 3 Index sites. Forage Fish surveys at Bowman Bay are scheduled in conjunction with Bowman Bay plant maintenance work parties. We bring the interpretation stand and do the sample processing as well. We have not found any evidence of spawning at Bowman Bay this year. July is the last survey at Kukutali.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert: No update. Work is anticipated to begin this fall.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Cindy Elston, Darla Gay Smith: Fidalgo Bay Day 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. Friends of Skagit Beaches will be running the passport activity and the coloring contest. Around 25 organizations plan to have educational booths. There will also be beach seining, an eco-friendly mermaid, Taylor Shellfish oysters, Samish storytelling, a word scavenger hunt, and crafts with QR codes that translate the animal’s name into Samish language. 2 restaurants will be serving chowder, and there will be a gift card raffle. We’re in the final stretch, getting food permits, finishing up with preparing supplies, and getting passport questions. We are looking for a Fidalgo Bay Day event chair to give a welcome and brief agenda, the NWSI’s tribal land acknowledgement, and hand over to Samish to do their welcome.

MRC Membership Discussion: All

- MRC Applicant, Cynthia Nielsen: Cynthia is a retired civil engineer and architect with 30+ years of experience managing complex projects including environmental restoration as well as a lifelong interest in the environment and conservation. The MRC projects that interest her the most are the Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement and the Clayton Beach Restoration Project.
 - **Action Item**: The Committee voted by consensus to make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint Cynthia as a member of the MRC.
- Questions brought up about MRC Membership:
 - Are we representing everyone who is impacted and connected to our marine communities?

- Who are the voices and communities that are not at the table that should be?
- What are the expertise and insight that we are lacking?
- How do we fill those community diversity and representation gaps?
- What is our strategic plan?
- **Action Item:** The Committee voted by consensus to form a sub-committee to address these questions and take the following actions:
 1. Seek guidance from the NWSC. The Commission is currently working with a diversity/equity consultant.
 2. MRC membership gap analysis.
 3. Look at what other MRCs are doing to recruit new members and improve inclusion, equity, and representation.
 4. Develop a strategic plan for growing the Skagit MRC membership in an intentional and meaningful way.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Padilla Bay is acquiring 70 acres in the Samish Bay area and will likely close on the property in September with big restoration plans related to the purchase. As part of the restoration plan, Padilla Bay is submitting a proposal to NOAA for a comprehensive alternatives analysis to consider sea level rise, coastal inundation, and flooding and will be working with multiple stakeholder groups in that area.

The meeting adjourned at 10:59am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually on August 10th, via Microsoft Teams.