



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **August 10, 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, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase, Diane Hennebert, Cynthia Nielsen, Catey Ritchie
  - **MRC Members Absent:** Lynne Wenberg-Davidson; Matt Castle
- **Others in Attendance:** Yuki Reiss, SFEG; Melissa Ciesielski (Catey Ritchie's Alternate)

**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:** July 13, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

**Public Comments:** None

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

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held July 28th, 2023. NWSC Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the August 10<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting.

- Presentations at the NWC meeting:
  - **Eyes On Kelp-** Puget Sound Restoration Fund presented on the decline of bull kelp and the efforts to protect and restore it ([Link to presentation](#)).
  - **Mt. Erie Elementary School Rain Garden-** presented by Diane Hennebert
  - **Derelict crab Pot Removal Story Map-** presented by Jefferson MRC and Sea Dragons ([Link to Story Map](#))
- **Derelict Vessel Removal:** The "Windjammer", a derelict vessel was recently removed from Similk Bay as part of a collaborative effort with the NWSC, DNR, and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Committee. ([Link to Press Release](#)) ([Link to Video](#))
- **Senator Patty Murray's visit- August 7:** The NWSC in partnership with the Skagit MRC and Swinomish Indian Tribal Committee hosted a site visit at Lone Tree Point with Senator Murray on August 7<sup>th</sup>. Everything went smoothly and it was a successful visit! The presenters did an excellent job showcasing our projects and collaborations. A huge thanks to NWSC staff, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Catey Ritchie, and Pete Haase!! Links to the press release and photos and the handout were shared with the MRC.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting – Aug 25** - Meeting information is posted on the NWSC Events Page on the NWSC website: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/events/>.
- **Northwest Straits Conference – November 3-4<sup>th</sup>** – at the Maritime Center in Port Townsend. All MRC members are invited and encouraged to attend- save the date!

## NWSC Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Planning: Allie Simpson

- Last month Skagit MRC formed a subcommittee to develop a strategic plan for expanding our MRC membership and filling diversity and representation gaps and invited Allie to share information about what the Commission is doing to address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).
  - **DEI Goals:** Based off the Northwest Straits Initiative's Strategic Plan which specifically states that the Initiative serves everyone who inhabits the Northwest Straits.
  - **DEI Vision:** A broad diverse and inclusive group of individuals engaged in the health of their local ecosystems to ensure a thriving, resilient, and healthy Salish Sea. Pursuing an equitable approach to marine conservation will engage, empower, and benefit all who inhabit the Northwest straits.

- What Can We Do Better: What can we do better within our entire organization both internally and externally such as: Recruiting MRC members, hiring practices for staff and consultants, ensuring those projects that we're working on are benefiting a diverse group of community members, etc.
  - Next Steps: Currently working on the Request for Proposals through a lengthy non-competitive bid process to hire a consultant to complete an assessment that will help us better understand the current state of DEI within the NWSI, both internally and externally. They are narrowing down the long list of potential consultants.
  - Anticipated Outcome: This will be a multiple phased process that will result in documents with action items to help provide guidance in meeting our DEI goals.

➤ **Skagit MRC DEI Subcommittee Action Item:**

Schedule a meeting in October to discuss what our growth plan might be in terms of voices that sit on the MRC. Who is at the table and should be at the table? Where are the gaps? How do we connect with the voices that are missing? What actions can we take while waiting on the results from the consultant?

## Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
  - We now have over 360 trained Salish Sea Steward volunteers.
  - Over 800 hours recorded in July.
  - The Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee does not meet July-Sept. We will resume in October to plan for the 2024 SSS Training Program commencing in early February.
  - Erin Merklein, our part time SSS Volunteer Coordinator, continues to work on outreach. She is organizing a field trip to Washington Park in late August to explore tide pools and to socialize. The outing is open to all Salish Sea Stewards.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
  - Planning for the fall program will start soon.
  - There are several new teachers this year that might not be able to fit the KOTB into their curriculum. It will likely take a little more outreach to get the new teachers on board.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - The WDFW PSRF dive teams successfully outplanted 4900 juvenile abalone (1- and 2-year-old cohorts) to 6 sites in late April. 4 sites were in San Juan County and 2 new sites in Skagit County waters.
  - Collected new broodstock for spawning in the hatchery.
  - Field work is now complete, and data is currently being analyzed.
  - Inducing spawning has been difficult this year. Results produced fewer juvenile abalone than they've had in the past. They will continue working on hatchery production for future outplants.
  - The report will be finalized in September.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - The five-year bay-wide Olympia oyster population survey in Fidalgo Bay is now complete.
  - The surveys took place on June 20, Aug 2, and Aug 3 and were led by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund with the help of MRC member Paul Dinnel and several volunteers.
  - Preliminary data indicates the oyster population is doing very well.
  - After the data analysis is complete, Paul will work on the final report.
  - There was a recent article in the Skagit Valley Herald about the Olympia Oyster Restoration project.
- Clayton beach – Paul Dinnel:
  - BNSF finally signed the letter of consent allowing the NWS Foundation to move forward with the project.
  - The Northwest Straits Foundation is hosting a tour with Congressman Rick Larsen MRC on Friday, August 18<sup>th</sup>. Skagit and MRC representatives are invited to attend. Paul said that he will be unable to attend, so we are looking for another MRC member to take his place. The purpose is to explain the project and garner Congressman Larsen's support. There's no press and it's not a large tour because the project is in scoping and permitting.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

- **Shannon Point survey completed - August 4** – Team: Hal (Lead), Joan, Catherine, Elizabeth, Jeff Whitty (NWSC): East and west Kelp beds appear to be in great shape. Sargassum was present in both areas.
  - **Biz Point survey was completed - July 13** – Team: John (Lead), Phil, Denby: In June the kelp bed was only a narrow band along the cliff. However, the July survey has shown significant growth. There have always been sparse kelp bulbs that were scattered parallel along the beach south of this kelp bed. Over the last several years, the kelp along the beach at Telegraph Bite has increased density and growth into the south end of the Biz Point kelp bed. Observed 8 healthy Purple Sea Stars along the cliffs.
  - **Coffin Rocks survey was completed - July 19** – Team: Steve (Lead), Bob, Hal: Density of kelp bed has increased since the June survey. Many younger bulbs were apparent below the surface. Kelp appeared to be healthy.
  - **September surveys for all sites will be determined soon** – there are few 0.0 tides in the month of September making surveys difficult.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - NW Straits Foundation is managing the project for the MRC this year. They are out there every Thursday watering and weeding with the help of a few volunteers (a total of 8 volunteers culminating 18 volunteer hours so far).
  - Increasing the frequency of watering appears to be working!
  - Last Thursday the Foundation hosted a compost and mulching event with MRC Staff (Tracy Alker) and 4 volunteers helping to haul buckets of the eight yards of compost and mulch into two of the six zones where the weeds and invasive plants have been successfully removed.
  - A planting party is tentatively scheduled for October 12<sup>th</sup>, which will be combined with or in lieu of Skagit MRC's monthly meeting.
- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - Letters and rack cards were mailed to 505 Padilla Bay and Samish Bay 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.
  - The MRC, NWSC, WDFW, and SeaGrant will be co-hosting a European Green Crab outreach booth at Fidalgo Bay Day this year with fun games and activities.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle Replacement – Tracy Alker:
  - We requested a grant extension with NOAA to better align with the project timeline, but they said it was too early to make the request. We will take another run at the request in September.
  - The City of Anacortes now has an Interlocal Agreement in place with the Samish Indian Nation and is beginning the Request for Qualifications process for the geotechnical analysis and project engineering design.
  - The City hopes to have the engineering contract in place by the end of October which will give us a more realistic timeline for the MRC's education and outreach component.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase:
  - The Intern, Dana Flerchinger, and four students (7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade) have been surveying forage fish once a month at 3 locations along the Fidalgo Bay RV Resort since June: shaded, partially-shaded, and full-sun sites.
  - They will continue sampling through September and compile the findings into a summary report.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
  - Surveys continue at the 3 Index sites (Ship Harbor, Samish Island, and Similk Bay), Bowman Bay restoration site, and Fidalgo Bay.
  - There haven't been any mass spawning events in Fidalgo Bay like we typically observe this time of year.
  - July was the last survey at Kukutali after completing 5 years of surveying. The surf smelt population appears to be doing well at Kukutali.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
  - Diane has been in touch with the Principal at the La Conner School as well as the Swinomish and has gone out to look at the site and the different options for the rain garden.
  - Construction will take place this fall.

- Continued maintenance, especially during the first two years, is important for the success of the rain garden. Recruiting one or two volunteers to steward the rain garden sites during the summer months when school is out would be ideal. Other ideas: Adopt a Rain Garden program by a club, group, or organization to maintain the rain garden, or schedule MRC work parties, etc.
- Diane will be meeting with Jefferson County MRC and the NWSF to discuss different options and resources for maintenance.
- Fidalgo Bay Day –Darla Gay Smith: Fidalgo Bay Day is Saturday, **August 26, 2023**, from 11am to 3pm at the Fidalgo Bay Resort in Anacortes. Just a small group of five are currently involved in planning and coordinating this year’s event. Volunteers are all lined up and ready to go. Just a few tasks left to do before the event. Pete’s forage fish survey crew will be putting up the sign after their survey. Some of this year’s planned activities include:
  - Shannon Point Marine Center’s touch tank
  - Friends of Skagit Beaches passport activity and the coloring contest
  - 25 organizations with educational booths
  - Samish Indian Nation’s beach seining demonstration, Samish storytelling & crafts with QR codes that translate the marine animal into the Salish language (w/pronunciation)
  - Corra, the eco-friendly mermaid
  - Complimentary chowder served by 2 restaurants and Taylor Shellfish Farm’s oysters & mussels
  - Rosie Cayou James & her family will return with their Salmon BBQ, and
  - Zero Waste with the assistance of volunteers and Skagit Soils.
  - A free gift card raffle to three local restaurants

**MRC Operations Report:** *Tracy Alker*

- MRC 2023-2025 Grant- Next Steps (including EPA/ECY and NOAA funding sources): Received comments and questions back from the NWSC staff and Science Advisory Committee. The MRC Project Leads and NWSF have been asked to help provide a response. Tracy hopes to have it all wrapped up by the end of August so that we can get the grant agreement in place by October 1, 2023, when the EPA/ECY funds become available. Below are just a few of the comments and questions received for the Committee to consider:

**MRC Operations**

- Is there adequate support for project leads for some of the larger projects like SSS and Fidalgo Bay Day?
- Recommended increasing the budget for MRC operations to cover the conference and increase MRC staffing capacity.

**Fidalgo Bay Day**

- 2024 Will mark 20 years! Anything special in mind to celebrate two decades?
- To get the desired outcome to become good environmental stewards, consider asking each partner that has a booth to provide 1 action an individual can do to be a good steward and compile all actions into a cheat sheet for individuals to take home. Or ask individuals to sign a pledge with one or two actions they would take to be better stewards.

**Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Clayton Beach Restoration with the Northwest Straits Foundation:**

- As written, these projects don’t currently meet the NWSI funding criteria.
  - MRC’s role needs to be clarified.
  - Outline timeline for the Foundation to provide project updates and presenting results back to the MRC and setting routine intervals of meetings to support a more collaborative partnership.
  - A Memorandum of Understanding between the MRC and NWSF would be a good idea.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining: Suggested logging interactions with the public.
  - **Action Item:** Tracy will revise the proposal to include information about Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group partnership on this project including providing half the funding as well as a Communications Plan that will include interactions with the public during beach seining events.

- Clayton Beach Restoration: Are there ways to build in opportunities for the MRC to be more engaged throughout the project with input, rather than just receive info? For example, is there an outreach component that the MRC could take ownership of?
- NWSI Conference MRC Project Sharing - decision by August 30th:  
The Committee considered the following options for showcasing Skagit MRC's work at the conference:
  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
  - **Action Item**: By consensus, the Committee selected **Options 2 and 3**. Please send Tracy photos and/or project information to highlight.
- Upcoming MRC meetings:
  - **Sept 14<sup>th</sup> MRC Meeting**: County intern Cindy Elston will be filling in for Tracy at the September 14<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting.
    - **Action Item**: Please let Tracy know if there any guest speakers or discussion topics you would like to include on the September MRC meeting agenda before the end of August.
  - **October 12<sup>th</sup> MRC Meeting**: Our October 12<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting will be held at Bowman Bay as part of the Planting/ mulching event. Pete will try to coordinate a forage fish survey at the same time.
  - **Nov 9<sup>th</sup> MRC Meeting**: With the NWSI Conference happening Nov 3-4, one week before our regularly scheduled MRC meeting on Nov 9<sup>th</sup>. The Committee discussed the possibility of canceling the Nov 9<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting but decided to keep the meeting on the books.
  - **Dec 14<sup>th</sup> MRC Meeting**: Our Dec 14<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held in-person.
    - **Action Item- All**: Please let Tracy know where you would like to hold the in-person meeting in December and if you have any ideas for a guest speaker or field trip.
  - **Future in-person meetings**: The MRC discussed the possibility of scheduling a few more in-person meetings in the future in combination with project site field trips and work parties.

#### Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- **European Green Crab Molt Search Training- August 23**: WSU Extension will be hosting a virtual training on August 23 to teach volunteers how to conduct a 20-minute survey for crab molts and how to report their findings using a mobile app. For more information about the upcoming training workshops go to <https://wsg.washington.edu/event/molt-search-volunteer-training-zoom/> or email [cniles@wsu.edu](mailto:cniles@wsu.edu), or [jonathan.w.robinson@wsu.edu](mailto:jonathan.w.robinson@wsu.edu)
- **Forage Fish Spawning Survey Training- August 30**: WDFW will be hosting a MRC forage fish training for interested volunteers at Padilla Bay on August 30<sup>th</sup>. Please reach out to either Leah Robison if you would like to attend the training but haven't already signed up. **Bowman Bay/Cornet Bay, and Hoypus Point Marine**
- **Stewardship Celebration- September 22<sup>nd</sup>**: The Northwest Straits Foundation is hosting a marine stewardship celebration and service day at Bowman Bay, in **Deception Pass State Park, 11 am - 3 pm, Friday, September 22. All MRC members are invited.**

The meeting adjourned at **10:36am**. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually on September 14th, via Microsoft Teams.