



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **September 14th, 2023**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Betsy Stevenson, Cynthia Nielsen, Darla Gay Smith, Diane Hennebert, Jude Apple, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Catey Ritchie, Kevin Anderson, Tracy Alker (MRC Staff)
- **Others in Attendance:** Craig Thomas, UW Professor/Researcher; Melissa Ciesielski (Catey Ritchie's Alternate); Cindy Elston, SCPW; Jenn Johnson, SCPW; Caitlyn Blair, NW Straits; Dana Oster, NW Straits; Leah Robison, NW Straits; Lisa Kaufman, NW Straits; Sasha Horst, NW Straits

Call to Order and Introductions: Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: August 10th, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus as written.

Public Comments: None

Collaborative Partnerships in the Puget Sound Region Study: *Craig Thomas*

Craig Thomas is a professor at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy & Governance. He joined the meeting to give background information and legitimize a multi-year study that he is working on with Tom Koontz, another professor at the University of Washington.

Faculty members at the University of Washington received a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to figure out challenges that partnerships face in accessing and using science to develop plans and projects. Undergrads made a catalog of organizations working in the Puget Sound basin, which will be listed on a UW website for all to see. They interviewed select individuals from these organizations, asking open-ended questions about the kinds of science used, challenges faced, and applications to decision-making. These questions helped form a survey design that will be sent to all members of all partnerships, including the Skagit MRC.

It's important that you fill out the survey if you receive it; for data legitimacy, they need everyone to complete the survey. If you receive the survey twice due to membership in multiple partnerships, only fill it out once. The survey will be sent out in October and open for a few weeks. They will analyze and share results after the new year. The goal is to turn these results into usable information for partnerships, not just in the Puget Sound region but also nationally.

NW Straits Derelict Vessel Removal/Takeback Update: *Dana Oster & Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*

The MRCs pooled original funds to form an overall derelict vessel removal plan for 2023, with an interagency agreement with DNR. They formed a workgroup with representatives from tribal partners and all MRCs to devise a process separate from the state to prioritize removals that benefit cultural resources, recreation, and the environment (as opposed to the state's process that prioritizes state-owned aquatic lands with a focus on health & safety). A first round of vessel submissions has been removed, and they are opening up a second round.

Budget:

- Initial costs estimated for agreement with DNR is \$1.28 million
- Spending to-date for 10 removed and soon-to-be-removed vessels is ~\$540,000
- Setting aside ~\$200,000 for Makah vessel turn-in event for Spring 2024
- Around \$500,000 remaining for a second round of vessels

Removed vessels:

- 3 boats in Island County, +1 remaining at Camano that was delayed due to forage fish spawning
- 1 boat in Snohomish County
- 1 boat in Whatcom County
- 1 boat in San Juan County
- 1 boat in Jefferson County
- 2 boats in Skagit County / Swinomish – Check out this cool video! [Windjammer Derelict Vessel Removal 2023](#)

Turn-in events are currently in the planning stage with:

- Makah Tribe
- Snohomish MRC and Port of Everett
- San Juan MRC, County, and Port of Friday Harbor
- Swinomish?

They have a connection with DTG Recycling to have people willingly turn in vessels, have them deconstructed and put in recycling bins to recycle as much of the vehicles as possible.

The second round of vessel submissions for tribal partners and MRCs was due last Friday.

Lynne spoke about the **derelict vessel near Blanchard**:

- Fishing boat reported in MyCoast on 8/30/23 by Allie Simpson
 - Located near Colony Creek and tressel tracks
 - Registration # WN2363T (someone ran through DOL database and did not find a record)
 - WA Lic sticker dated 1993
- GPS Coordinates taken on 9/12/23: N 48.59821; W 122.42606
- Vessel straddles potentially 3 parcel owners:
 - Roger Wechsler (landside)
 - PSE (easement)
 - Alfred Perthou III (tidelands)
- Skagit iMap Aerial overlay onto parcels – appears to be in the middle of the PSE owned easement parcel

Skagit MRC voted unanimously to submit this derelect vessel to Northwest Straits. There were no objections as there are funding and opportunity remaining to continue removing vessels.

There may be opportunities for the Skagit MRC to get involved in turn-in events. DNR has interest in continuing this work, so if not right now, they can partner in the future for a turn-in event. We can wait and see how some of these turn-in events go and get a better sense for what it requires.

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: [Diane Hennebert & NWSC Staff](#)

The last NWSC/ NWSF meeting was held August 25th, 2023. NWSC Meeting Highlights were emailed to the MRC and shared at the September 14th MRC meeting.

- The NW Straits Commission will present a new annual award in honor of Senator Patty Murray. An ad-hoc committee will be formed to develop criteria and a nomination process for future recipient selection. The first recipient will be Senator Patty Murray.
- NW Straits Commission staff are working on hiring a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant to assess DEI needs within the Commission and NW Straits Initiative. The first phase will be to create a needs assessment to identify next steps in DEI at the Initiative.
- NW Straits Commission staff are looking for speed date topics for “Speed Date with a Scientist” presentations at our monthly Commission meetings. If you have topics that you are interested in learning more about, please reach out to Dana (oster@nwstraits.org).
- The NW Straits Commission approved the 2023-2025 MRC grant proposals for the Washington state general fund and EPA-funded award, with a start date of October 1, 2023.
- Representative Debra Lekanoff joined the meeting and gave a great talk. She is working on creating a salmon commission that includes people of many different backgrounds to discuss all aspects of saving salmon, from habitat restoration to water laws.
- **Next NWSC/NWSF Monthly Meeting – September 29** - 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. Northwest Straits Conference registration is opening at the end of August! Travel and lodging costs for MRC members and staff can be covered through their MRC grants. If you have questions about lodging, travel, or general conference inquiries, please contact Caitlyn (blair@nwstraits.org). For displays, MRCs should get back to Caitlyn by October 2nd with information about what materials needed, space for a table, etc.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee Meeting: *Jude Apple*

The MRC agreed unanimously to create a subcommittee to reflect on what voices are represented on MRC, and review goals for recruitment and membership. On this committee, Melissa, Lynne, Tracy, Betsy, and Jude met initially and talked about key things to work on:

1. Review current guidelines for membership. Begin doing assessment as to whether scope of membership is representative of all the voices impacted by coastal resources who would want to weigh in on decisions about their management.
2. Get together and talk about next steps. Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 5th sometime between 2-5pm.

They are looking for feedback from the MRC for additional agenda items or topics for the first subcommittee meeting, and will also check in with NWSC about other things to consider. Folks mentioned:

- A lot of organizations are expanding EDI to DEIJA, which includes Justice and Accessibility. This is important to consider even if NWSC doesn't include it.
- Skagit MRC may need more technical expertise on the committee or as support in the future – this may be an area to chat about the larger picture.
- We are welcome to branch off of NWSC. The MRC can do things internally, but rely on NWSC for larger strategies across MRCs, and to provide tools / resources / consultant reports. NWSC can aggregate and provide tools and templates that can be deployed at different MRCs.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - “The Wave”, the Stewards online listing of volunteer opportunities, has been full of great listings & workshops all Summer long. Volunteers have been busy. As of August 18, 2023, a total of 47,476 service hours have been recorded in Volgistics by Volunteers.
 - The Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee does not meet in July, August & September. We resume in October, 2023 to plan for the 2024 Salish Sea Stewards Training commencing in early February of 2024 and running through late April of 2024 at Padilla Bay NERR.
 - If you know an interested Stewards candidate, they may wish to contact the Stewards (on the SMRC website) to reserve a spot in the class of 25 trainees; the waiting list from last year puts the class at approximately one third full. The Salish Sea Stewards training is an excellent program giving an overview of many (15-18) areas of research in our area of the Salish Sea, at no cost to attendees.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Continuing the event's tradition since 2004, the 19th Fidalgo Bay Day was held on Saturday, August 26, 2023 at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. A large crowd of over 300 attended, despite the poor air quality from wildfires. We had extra ice water at many stations.
 - Fidalgo Bay Resort donated their beautiful Lodge and Beach; of special note: Samish Indian Nation Chairman, Tom Wooten, delivered an opening song to drumming & Rosie Cayou James gave a tribute to killer whale Tokatie. The Samish Beach Seining Team had a good set & much to display. The Samish Librarian held a story circle. Friends of Skagit Beaches ran the Passport Activity & youth coloring contest. Shannon Point Marine Center was present with their Touch Tank. Deception Pass Rangers were there with their whale skull. The SMRC hosted 38 groups with educational booths both in & outdoors. Salish Sea focused crafts (15 offerings) were highly popular. Taylor Shellfish Farm donated oysters & blue mussels which were grilled on the patio. Eco-friendly Selkie Corra educated youth & actually swam in the Salish Sea. Bob's Chowder Bar & Secret Cove served samples of their clam chowder. Door Prizes for

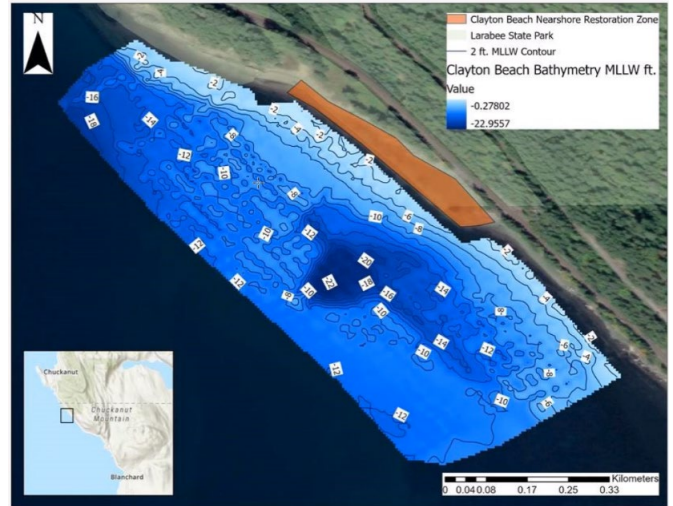
restaurant certificates were drawn (Anthonys, Bob's Chowder & Secret Cove). Rosie Cayou James & her family prepared their Salmon BBQ and fry bread. This was a Zero Waste event with the assistance of Skagit Soils. GoSkagit had a good newspaper article the following day highlighting the value of the event to our Community & to the Salish Sea.

- The event pulls together donations from many businesses & organizations in the Community & involves the SMRC Planning Committee, the Salish Sea Stewards & Friends of Skagit Beaches. The Day's success is credited to over 42 organizations and businesses, plus seasoned volunteers that offer their gifts of expertise, time & donation of materials.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
 - They are wrapping up summer and getting things ramped up for the fall. Two programs have committed: Conway's 7-8th grades on October 2-6th, and Concrete's 9-12th grades sometime in late October to mid-November. The program will focus on forage fish at Fidalgo Bay, and will include a combination of field site visits and classwork.
 - In the spring, they hope to involve Sedro-Woolley. The school needs funding for buses, but the Padilla Bay Foundation often helps cover transportation for school groups, so they can probably support it. They would like to get one other school involved in the spring. Anacortes schools are interested but have an "all-or-none" approach, and Padilla Bay can't handle large volumes of kids and chaperones.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - September is last month of the season for surveys.
 - **Shannon Point survey completed – September 1st** – Team led by Hal. They have found that late in the season, the currents are nothing close to what the current station says. With higher currents, they can't hold position long enough to take readings, and can't see the kelp well. After lots of discussion, they decided to use the Green Point current station in addition to their usual station, and it worked perfectly. They found two new kelp beds – one forming on the west bed, and another forming on the northwest corner of the east bed. Beds were healthy, and sargassum near the shoreline had thinned out.
 - **Biz Point survey was completed – August 13th** – Team led by John. They also had similar problems at Biz Point where currents are off, but they are not sure how to remedy this. Someone from a different MRC has been modelling currents for their surveys, so it's a common issue. Beds were healthy and expanding, with no epiphytes. They found a new bed, but it was so close to the original that they included it with the original bed. Saw lots of wildlife, including harbor seals, sea lions, harbor porpoises, and tons of fish and birds. Last survey is scheduled for September 27th.
 - **Coffin Rocks survey was completed – August 15th** – Team led by Steve. Kelp beds were very dense, with blades fully intact. There were many single bulbs around the larger bed. They saw various wildlife including harbor seals. Last survey is scheduled for September 26th.
- Green Crab Outreach – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Letters were sent in July to 505 landowners, focusing on areas where green crab was present in the 2022 green crab detection map. This year, there has been a slow uptick in green crab in Padilla Bay and large uptick in Samish Bay: Allie has found 125, and Taylor Shellfish has found 80.
 - Nobody has reached out to Allie, but Washington Conservation Corps has run into people who said they had received the letter, and people on the beach seem to be more aware of green crab.
- Bowman Bay Restoration Plant Maintenance – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - NW Straits Foundation is managing the project for the MRC this year. They are out there almost every Thursday morning watering and weeding with the help of a few volunteers (a total of 10 volunteers culminating 38 volunteer hours so far). Increasing the frequency of watering appears to be working! The conifers are coming back and looking healthy.
 - They are preparing for a NW Straits Foundation recognition event from 11-2pm on September 22nd. It will include an hour of volunteer work, lunch, discussions, and mulching. All volunteers, friends, and community members are welcome!
 - A planting party is tentatively scheduled for October 12th, which will be combined with or in lieu of Skagit MRC's monthly meeting. This is also the final watering day.
- MRC Intern project at the Salish Sea School – Pete Haase:

- Dana Flerchinger and four students are wrapping up their summer sampling activities soon along the 3 locations at Fidalgo Bay. After sampling, they will create some way to report their findings; as soon as we get details on when and how, hopefully there will be an invitation to an online program from them. More to report next month.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Forage fish surveys continue. They plan on sampling at Bowman Bay on September 22nd at the NW Straits Foundation recognition event. At Bowman Bay previously, they would collect 4-5 samples along the beach and go to restroom facility for water, but it's far away from the beach and where the crowd is. The last couple of months, they set up processing by the boat launch and used buckets of water instead of the hose. Michelle and Mike have been there with their outreach interpretation stand. Lots of people typically come watch and learn about the project.
 - Last month, there were very few eggs in all samples, including the index site. It was not clear whether eggs spawned on the beach or had floated in from somewhere else.
 - More forage fish news related to Clayton Beach is located in the Clayton Beach Discussion below.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
 - Diane has been focused on the Mount Erie rain garden. The rain garden work party was just Diane, but she recruited a coworker to help get it ready for the first day of school. The garden is low-maintenance during the winter, so she will send out a listing for Salish Sea Stewards in March to get more volunteers.
 - More attention will shift to the La Conner rain garden in the fall.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Josh Bouma is working on an annual report, which should be submitted at the end of the month.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Brian Allen and Hilary Hayford led the effort to get a new population estimate, and are working on data analysis and summaries. Paul will get that information from Brian and put it into a report due at end of the year.
- Clayton beach – Paul Dinnel & Lisa Kaufman:
 - Snorkel surveys are over for the season due to tides. The last survey they completed in August, they saw a bunch of juvenile chinook along the shoreline. This is unusual, as groups typically see salmon earlier in the spring and summer. They didn't see a ton of fish, but they are just getting feet wet on how to do things. Haley is working on data. Surveys will pick up again in late winter or early spring.
 - Other monitoring will be volunteer-dependent in the next season. They are hoping to host a gathering in the spring to get everything on-track and ready to go.
 - BNSF provided permission to allow the NWS Foundation to move forward with the project, but it's vague and may not provide the approvals we need to go ahead.
 - They gave a tour with Congressman Rick Larsen on August 18th and other aids to help keep it in their sites so when large sums of funding come around, they see it as an opportunity.
 - They made it past the pre-proposal for NFWF and are working on a proposal due in October.
 - Pete has reached out to Jason about starting forage fish surveys in the fall. The largest challenge is getting materials up the beach along a long trail. They will poke at Jason to have him speak next week with Pete about doing a scouting expedition with folks who want to participate. There's also opportunity for collaboration with Whatcom MRC.
 - DNR did initial surveys of eelgrass beds a few weeks ago. Dana showed photos of preliminary results that they provided:



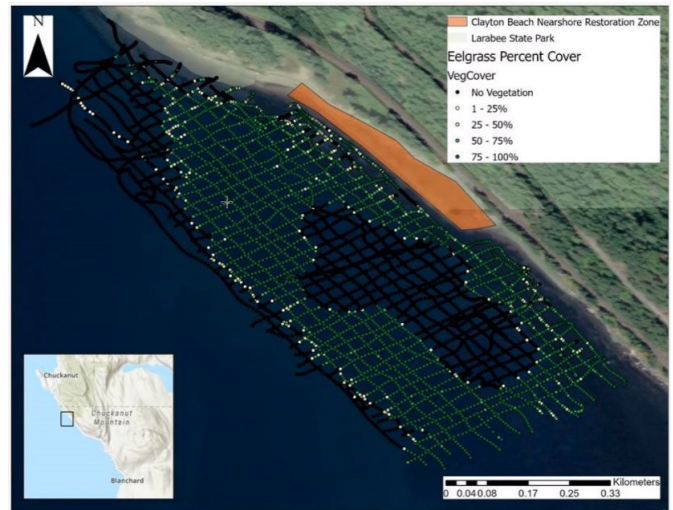
Boundaries of survey and eelgrass



Bathymetry



Eelgrass blade length



Percent cover

In the meantime, Herrera produced alternatives:

1. Full debris removal and adding beach nourishment.
2. Debris removal with 3 groins to produce pocket beaches.
3. Debris removal and 2 pocket beaches.

Clayton Beach Project – MRC’s Role Discussion: All

The MRC discussed the Clayton Beach project and what the MRC’s role would need to be in order for the project to fit the NW Straits Funding criteria. If we cannot come up with a clear role or a piece of the project the MRC can take ownership of, it won’t likely get funded and we will need to drop this project.

- When competing internal prioritization, the MRC was interested but there were questions internally about it being a little out of scope. However, this is a very special area and it would be amazing for the MRC to have a meaningful role, and could be a good opportunity for collaboration with MRCs. NWSC gave feedback that echoed that. We need to make it the MRC’s own, while still fitting into the Northwest Straits project. Lisa will do everything she can to increase MRC involvement and have defined roles, but currently the work is in the hands of the consultants.
- Whatcom is doing eelgrass surveys, and are interested in getting involved in forage fish and other monitoring as well. There is opportunity for collaboration.
- Cynthia Nielsen is interested in getting involved and has expertise that may help with this project. She will speak with Lisa & Paul in the beginning of October.

- As the project is currently in feasibility study phase, the consultants are doing most of the work. As we get further, there will be more opportunities for Skagit and Whatcom MRCs to get involved. This can involve beach walks, interpretive trail planning, attending project meetings, and forage fish surveys.
- Can start on interpretive trail planning now by starting conversations and flushing out ideas. This would involve talking to Amber and the interpretive staff about ideas. Nothing concrete has happened about interpretive signage yet. Ideas included starting from the uplands and talk about geology or historic use, and farther down the trail they can interpret other things such as vegetation. Betsy is willing to help Cynthia with this.
- Beach walks could not happen last summer due to the trail closure, but the MRC can lead beach walks next spring and summer.
- All-team meetings will start up again as we get further into the process, but they can begin quarterly meetings now.
- We have Clayton Beach tentatively funded starting in January 2024. 2024 funding would be used to move design to a point where it is ready for permitting. 2025 funding would help to finalize designs and permits, and apply to grants to fund the actual project construction. Also, supporting outreach roles for community involvement.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- **NWSI GoSkagit Article:** Betsy was quoted in a GoSkagit article about the [Northwest Straits Initiative may be up for federal reauthorization](#).
- **Shore-Friendly Updates:** Shore-friendly funds are close to releasing the next video about trees and views. It's a short video, about 6 minutes long, talking about how landowners can maintain their views while encouraging people to not top trees or cut them down. The next videos, including topics such as drainage and invasives, will be released in random order depending on when they get the footage. Also, Haley, Brook, and Evan are penciling together a curriculum for a contractors workshop.
- **Northwest Straits Conference:** The conference will focus on interactions between MRC members, with two main issues to facilitate interactions: kelp, and climate change & resiliency. There won't be many lectures, but there will be some facilitated sessions by a professional facilitator. Skagit MRC will need to be prepared to have **an issue from our MRC that can be used in those facilitation sessions**. Next meeting we can decide what issue to take to the conference and set forward for the facilitation.
- **Fidalgo Bay Day Success:** There were more young people there than previous years. Perhaps it was due to crafts, or just word-of-mouth and demographics. It drew families from Mount Vernon and the surrounding area with the goal of education.

The meeting adjourned at 11:02am. The next MRC meeting will be held at Bowman Bay for a Planting Work Party on October 12th, 2023. Bring gloves and anything else you might need.