



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **January 11, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Betsy Stevenson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase, Catey Ritchie, Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple
  - MRC Members Absent: Kevin Anderson, Diane Hennebert
- **Others in Attendance:** Jonn Lunsford (City of Anacortes), Erin Merklein (SSS Volunteer Coordinator/Padilla Bay NERR); Caitlyne Blair (NWSC); Cynthia Nielson (volunteer); Jenn E. 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:** December 14, 2023, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**Public Comments:** None

## Fidalgo Bay Trestle Project Update- Jonn Lunsford

- City of Anacortes partners: DNR and Samish Indian Nation.
- RFQ- 5 firms submitted bids. Hanson Inc. selected. Currently negotiating scope. Contract not signed yet.
- Phase I Scope Task List to determine current site conditions to get to 15% completion drawings for removing the causeway and replacing the trestle):
  - Site Investigation and Baseline Assessment
    - Topographic & Bathymetric surveys- 30ft off trail and causeway
    - Structural inspections(flammable/creosote) - (Probably off the table for now)
    - Geotechnical inspections (causeway borings & sediment sampling)
    - Hazardous material sampling (will the removal & transport of sediment cause problems in the bay? If contaminated soil, will it cause problems to the surrounding area?). Costs could be more expensive if additional samples need to be taken. Could be subject to a lengthy study.
  - Data Analysis and Design
    - Geotech design analysis
    - Hydrodynamic modeling and Sediment Transport Evaluation
    - Wave modeling (not quite there yet)
    - Structural analysis & conceptual design
  - Alternatives Analysis Report and Conceptual Design Renderings
    - Will be looking at potential impacts to recreation component and overall health of the bay if we do this project.
  - Public Involvement and Outreach
    - Partner and Public meetings
    - Community Engagement Plan
- Army corps wants to be a partner on project team which would be a huge win.

## Project Status & Discussion Continued...

- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - There are 4 kelp bed sites surveyed in Skagit County between June and September each year by experienced kayak volunteer leads.
  - All data from 2023 kelp surveys have been submitted and reviewed by NWSC and will be added to DNR's floating kelp indicator map.

- The kelp indicator [interactive map](#) data runs about one year behind. 2023 kayak kelp survey data will be added next year.
- MRC Kelp Kayak Monitoring 2023 Data Review Meeting via Zoom, January 17<sup>th</sup>.
- Lynne and Jeff Whitty will be interviewed this morning by Emma with the Skagit Valley Herald for an article on kelp.
- Bowman Bay Restoration– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - Skagit MRC funds and supports plant maintenance at the Bowman Bay restoration site in partnership with NWSF and Parks.
  - Ellen from NWSF provided the 2023 Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance annual report.
  - The restoration plantings have struggled to survive at the site in past years with hot dry summers. This year Lisa Kaufman led efforts to use the Parks excess fire hydrant water truck (250 gallons) for weekly watering during the spring and summer months. Lots of weeds and grass but plants doing well.
  - Difficult to get enough volunteers to consistently help with plant maintenance on a weekly basis. Need to do a better job of communicating and recruiting volunteers to help.
  - The NWSF will perform beach seining out there in 2024 and 2025 with support and funding from Skagit MRC and SFEG. SFEG is interested in the beach seining data for a potential restoration project out there.
- Shoreline Needs Assessment – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - This project leverages all the studies since 2005 such as Skagit Bay’s blueprint document that surveyed shoreline for restoration and conservation opportunities.
  - Several projects have been completed since then. Lynne assembled a technical advisory team to identify what’s been done, consolidate the information, and update the list as part of phase I. Advisory team members include: Lynne, Tracy, Paul, Pete, Cynthia, Lisa Kaufman, Rick Haley, and Audrea McBride.
  - Lynne drafted an RFP that is being reviewed by the Advisory Team. The Advisory Team will be involved in the consultant interviews and selection process.
  - The consultant will utilize the updated list and apply new data (kelp, forage fish, sea levels, etc.) to create a new project ready list that the MRC could focus on with available funding.
- Salish Sea Stewards – Erin Merklein and Pete Haase:
  - Training will be held Tuesdays from 1-5pm starting Feb 6-April 30 at Padilla Bay. Max of 25 people, 24 spots filled. Registration is open through January 31st.
  - MRC members are invited to attend the training.
  - Training is being widely promoted. Recent article in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#)
  - Sara Brostrom is developing and coordinating the training curriculum. Training schedule close to being finalized. Just waiting on two speakers. Erin Merklein will facilitate the classes this year.
  - Sara is coordinating the SSS training schedule with the Deception Pass State Park Naturalists training program and other similar programs to make sure the classes don’t conflict so that volunteers can attend both training programs interested.
  - Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meets monthly with the Volunteer Coordinator and Padilla Bay NERR education staff to plan the upcoming training. Next meeting will be held January 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
  - Date has been set for Saturday, August 24, 2024 at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
  - This will be the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FBD! Looking for ideas to help celebrate.
  - Need help planning this year’s event and leading some of the tasks. Currently only have 3 people on the planning committee. Next meeting will be held in February.
  - Looking for a volunteer to coordinate chowder samples.
  - Reserved the Shannon Point touch tanks.
  - Beach seining demo will be led by Matt and Jason around 2pm.
  - Will be reaching out to organizations with education booths in February.
  - No current lead, only a committee of 3 sharing the responsibility. Need more help with event planning.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
  - Will start ramping up planning in March.
  - 3 schools participating in the spring program:
    - April 15- April 19: Concrete 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade with 20 students participating.
    - April 29- May 2: Evergreen Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> grade with, 100 students participating.

- April 29- May 2: Allen Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> grade with 100 students participating.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase & Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - 4 Index sites (monthly samples): Guemes Channel, E. Similk Bay (Swinomish Reservation), Samish Island, and west of marina towards Skyline.
  - 3 Restoration Sites (monthly samples): Bowman Bay, W. Similk Bay (private property), and Clayton Beach.
  - Surveys in Fidalgo Bay are on behalf of DNR as a State Aquatic Reserve. Pete stepping down as lead for this site. New lead FF volunteers from Citizen Aquatic Reserve Committed: Tom Flanagan, Catherine Houck. Annual FF report produced by DNR will be shared with MRC.
  - There is a quarterly Zoom meeting for all those involved in forage fish surveying work on January 16.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
  - No update.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - QAPP Addendum has been updated and under review by Ecology.
  - Mostly hatchery work going on right now to raise abalone for outplanting and planning for the upcoming field season.
  - Looking to start abalone field work in February when algae has died back and there is better visibility to count abalone.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - The Olympia Oyster Restoration in Fidalgo Bay Day Report (Year 21) with 2023 bay-wide population data has been finalized and was shared with the MRC as well as volunteers and partners involved in the project.
  - Annual monitoring of Olympia oyster recruitment in Fidalgo Bay will start up again this spring to continue monitoring the annual variabilities of oyster densities and post larval settlement.
  - Pete- Mike Sato’s newsletter “Haikai” had an article on Olympia oysters making a comeback on the west coast from CA to WA “[How to Love an Oyster](#)”.

#### Northwest Straits Commission Report: *No Report*

- Last NWSC meeting occurred December 8<sup>th</sup> via Zoom, from 10am-12pm. Highlights were already shared with the MRC at the December 14<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting. No new updates.
- MRC/NWSC staff meeting will be held January 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Next NWSC meeting will occur virtually on Zoom, January 26<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm. All are welcome to join.

#### MRC Operations & 2024 Work Plan: *Tracy Alker*

- EPA/PSP Grant Deliverables Due: including the 2024 Annual Work Plan, Quarterly Progress Reports, and volunteer hours.
- MRC’s 2024 Annual Work Plan: intended to be a useful tool to help make sure we stay on track with our key tasks, timelines, and deliverables, and reaching in our goals.
  - The Annual Work Plan includes MRC Operations and all our projects that are currently funded under 3 different grants with different timelines. It also includes projects that aren’t currently funded such as: Forage Fish Surveys, Kelp Surveys, Crabber Outreach, Derelict Vessel Work Group, and Voluntary No Anchor Zone/Eelgrass Protection.
  - The Annual Work Plan will be sent to project leads for input. The final will be shared with the entire Committee. It is a working document that will need to be updated.
- One Time Grant Program- OTGP-2023 NOAA: grant deadline has been extended through December 31, 2024, for the School Rain Garden project and Trestle Project that got delayed.
- One Time Grant Program -OTG-2024 NOAA: grant just got signed. Funding is available January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2025, for the following projects:
  - Skagit Shorelines Needs Assessment (2024)
  - Bowman Bay Beach Seining (2024-2025)
  - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance (2024-2025)

- School Rain Garden (2025)
- Under this grant, we will have some funding available in 2025 for another project (\$31,500).
- Drafted Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs)- for grant funding directed to Northwest Straits Foundation:
  - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance
  - Bowman Bay Beach Seining
  - Skagit Shorelines Needs Assessment Tech Support.
  - Will also draft MOUs for MRC grant funding directed to Padilla Bay NERR for Salish Sea Stewards and Kids on the Beach.
- Presentation to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC): Jason Morgan will be giving a presentation on the Derelict Gear Removal Project to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) on February 26 at 2pm.
  - What other MRC or NWSI projects would be good to present to BoCC?
- In-Person MRC Meetings: The Committee liked the idea of hold in-person meetings on a quarterly basis. Catey- it might be a little more difficult to attend in-person meetings. Melissa will try to attend when Catey can't. Darla requested in-person meetings have a start time of 9:30am rather than 9:00am to better align with ferry schedules. Jude- in-person meetings are valuable and should be purpose driven. What are we going to when we meet in-person that we can't do when meeting virtually? There should be more of a strategic plan when we schedule in-person meetings.
  - Tracy, Betsy, and Lynne will try to come up with a strategic plan for our in-person meeting schedule. Should align with presentations and field trips, etc.
  - MRC members were asked to share guest speaker or field trip ideas for future MRC meetings.

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

- Mount Vernon High School Science Night - Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup> 5-8pm. Forage Fish Survey volunteers will host a booth for the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Stewardship Committee. Good opportunity for MRC to host a booth for education and outreach. Betsy said she would put it on her calendar.
- Storming the Sound- Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup> in La Conner. Annual conference for environmental educators in the north Puget Sound Region. Susan Wood has been heavily involved in planning the annual Storming the Sound each year for the last 25 years. Susan recently retired in December after 35 years of service as the Education Program Coordinator for Padilla Bay, but still plans on attending the event this year. Be sure to stop by and say "hi".
- Salish Sea School Partnership Opportunities- Pete, Tracy, and Sasha will be meeting with the Salish Sea School in early February to discuss potential partnership opportunities that would benefit the meet our funding criteria that could benefit the MRC.
- Samish Area Conservation Project - Padilla Bay NERR's project in partnership with Skagit Land Trust. Submitted a Letter of Intent to apply for a very large-scale restoration assessment project. Invited to submit a full proposal this week. It's a \$500k project to complete an alternatives analysis and modeling to look at all kinds of different scenarios and how to maintain county infrastructure, dikes, and access to the island, and restoring the areas to accommodate Sea Level Rise.
- Padilla Bay NERR's Upland Prairie Restoration Project- PBNERR submitted a proposal for an upland prairie restoration project and will be partnering with the Swinomish and Samish on restoration of native plants and improving access to culturally valuable plants..

The meeting adjourned at 10:23am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams on February 8th.