



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **February 8, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Microsoft Teams Meeting

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Betsy Stevenson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey's Alternate), Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple, Diane Hennebert
  - MRC Members Absent: Catey Ritchie, Kevin Anderson
- **Others in Attendance:** Holli Watne (Skagit Watershed Council); Cynthia Nielson (volunteer); Jenn E. Johnson (SCPW); Jessica Owens (NWSC); Caitlyn Blair (NWSC)

**Call to Order and Introductions:** Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

**Approval of Minutes:** January 11, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**Public Comments:** None

## Northwest Straits Commission Report: Diane Hennebert

Last NWSC meeting occurred January 26<sup>th</sup> via Zoom, from 10am-12pm. Highlights were shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- **2024 NW Straits Initiative Conference- November 15-16.**
  - Location TBD. Hoped to have it in La Conner at Maple Hall, but it didn't pan out. Looking at venues near Everett. Jude recommended the Bellingham cruise Terminal.
  - **Seeking MRC members to participate on the 2024 NW Straits Initiative Conference Planning Committee.** Attend 5-7 meetings, each around 1-1.5hrs. Last meeting in August. Committee reviews Agenda topics, speaker recommendations and invitations, etc. Contact Caitlyn Blair to sign up or for more information (blair@nwstraits.org).
- [Puget Sound Recovery Acceleration Funding Tool](#) now available. This tool makes it easier to find and apply for funding and helps to align funding opportunities with funding needs.
- [Puget Sound Partnership Nearshore Conservation Credit Program](#) – MRC's in need of funding for nearshore conservation projects are encouraged to submit proposals.
- **NWSI Retreat:** originally planned for March, but will hold regular meeting via Zoom instead. New retreat date TBD.
- **MRC Kelp Data Sharing Meeting Stats:** Kelp monitoring -over 343 acres of kelp forests monitored and over 250 miles paddled in 2023.
- **European Green Crab Committee:** Seeking reps from each MRC to participate.
- **NWSC Alternate Representative:** Diane is seeking an alternate Skagit MRC representative to attend NWSC meetings when she is unable to.
- **Next NWSC meeting: February 23**, 10am-3pm at the Whatcom Civic Building. Presentation by Braeden Van Denze, Natural Resource Economist at WDFW.

## CREST Project Update: Pete Haase

- "Culturally Responsive Elementary Science Teaching - CREST" is the WWU/Pacific Education Institute project grant recently awarded by the National Science Foundation.

- A 3-year research project to study the effect of teachers utilizing the ‘Explore the Salish Sea’ curriculum which takes elementary school kids (primarily 5<sup>th</sup> grade) out to the beach and incorporates indigenous knowledge and thinking and culturally responsive instruction.
- Skagit MRC signed a letter of collaboration. Pete agreed to be Skagit MRC’s representative and provide support as needed.
- The first Introductory Zoom meeting was held January 22 with several representatives from supporting organizations.
- Will host summer workshops next year to introduce the ‘Explore the Salish Sea’ teaching curriculum to 30 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, mostly from the Bellingham School District.
- Representatives from the collaborative community-based organizations, including Skagit MRC, will participate in the teacher workshops to share information about our organization and opportunities for teachers to bring classes to participate in some kind of field activity or research project outside of the classroom. There is funding available to bring the classrooms on field trips as well as stipends for teachers.
- A final report will be produced.
  - Jude- This collaboration provides an opportunity to further incorporate indigenous practices and knowledge and science into our own educational programs like Kids on the Beach.
  - Holli- this is the first-time hearing about this project. It would be really cool if Pete could share this with the Skagit Watershed Council.

### **The Salish Sea School/Skagit MRC Collaboration Meeting Update: *Pete Haase***

Pete and Tracy (Skagit MRC) along with Sasha Horst (NWSC) met with Amy Eberling and Elizabeth Drozda (The Salish Sea School) to brainstorm ideas for a collaborative project with school kids that would meet the funding criteria of the NWSC. It cannot be a project that The Salish Sea School is already doing because that would be considered pass through funding to another organization and not a Skagit MRC project. It would have to be a new project that the Skagit MRC came up with in collaboration with The Salish Sea School. Although we didn’t walk away with any new project ideas that we could help fund, there are some possible ways The Salish Sea School could participate in some of the work the Skagit MRC is already doing such as:

- Stormwater monitoring
- Fidalgo Bay Day craft table
- Recreational crabber outreach
- Bowman Bay plant maintenance (*The Salish Sea School will be meeting with NWSF about their summer camp visits to Bowman Bay and how they might involve students while they are there*)
- Rain Garden plant maintenance

Right now, The Salish Sea School is focusing on developing school partnerships (especially with schools from Sedro, MV, Burlington). This involves going into schools to teach about the impacts of stormwater and/or local marine life and then bringing students to the beaches, islands, and/or waterways- ultimately connecting where they live with the sea, while discussing how they can help aid in its conservation/preservation. If/when Skagit MRC is interested in funding and collaborating on a school field trip, community partnership trip (Children of the Valley/Kulshan Creek/Glacier Peak Institute) or a community event (wildflower plantings, luminaria event, orca recovery day, etc.) The Salish Sea School would be happy to come in and talk about the project to the MRC. In the meantime, we will continue discussing potential new project ideas that we could collaborate on and fund in the future.

- Darla- how are they currently getting funding for their programs. Pete- mainly through a variety of grants and private donations.

### **Project Status & Discussion**

- Salish Sea Stewards – *Darla Gay Smith*:
  - Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting on January 14<sup>th</sup> to finalize planning for the 2024 Salish Sea Stewards (SSS) training.
  - Full class with 27 attendees!
  - Classes started Tuesday, Feb 6 from 1-5pm at Padilla Bay with Sara Brostrom facilitating the training. Erin Merklein will be taking over the training facilitation for Sara soon. Erin is also the Volunteer Coordinator. Classes run through April 30<sup>th</sup>.

- There was an uptick in younger participants and a nice mix of demographics. Most were from Anacortes and Bellingham.
- They were a lively bunch with lots of good questions. One group bonded so well at the table exercise they dubbed themselves the Environmental Data Nerds!
- The class participated in several ice breaker activities. They were also asked to share one thing about themselves with the rest of the class on a Google spreadsheet. It's a great way to get to know the cohorts.
- Jude presented welcoming remarks and an overview of Padilla Bay NERR programs and Ecosystem services. Lynne and Pete presented a brief history and overview of the Salish Sea Stewards and MRC. Todd Woodard of Samish Indian Nation presented a thought-provoking talk on cultural resources and the Cultural Value of the Salish Sea.
- The SSS Advisory Committee members greeted the class with coffee, treats, and displayed our new Salish Sea Stewards banner.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
  - 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. Skagit volunteers alternate monthly sampling at Clayton Beach with Whatcom County. This is Skagit's month to sample Clayton Beach.
  - January sampling at Bowman Bay was canceled due to a big snowstorm event. Bowman Bay gate was shut so no public access to the beach. Plan to sample at Bowman Bay along in coordination with the Northwest Straits Foundation beach seining activity in February.
  - Fidalgo Bay surveys are for DNR. New lead FF volunteers from Citizen Aquatic Reserve Committed: Tom Flanagan, Catherine Houck.
  - It's a quiet time for surf smelt. Not much happening right now.
  - Outreach: Volunteers will be tabling at Mount Vernon Science night with forage fish eggs and microscopes and educational information. Forage fish volunteers will also assist with Kids on the Beach program in the spring. Pete will be one of the presenters at one of the Salish Sea Stewards classes this spring on conducting forage fish survey in the field.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
  - 3 schools participating in the spring program with classroom and field data collecting and analysis components: mudflats, forage fish, and beach seining. Many students have never been to beach before:
    - April 15 - April 19: **Concrete 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade**, 20 high school students.
    - May 6 - May 10: **Evergreen Elementary in Sedro Woolley** 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 75 students.
    - May 20 - May 24: **Allen Elementary in Mount Vernon** 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 84-100 students (English 2<sup>nd</sup> language for many of the students).
      - 4<sup>th</sup> graders will get field experience participating in the mudflat safari and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students will get field experience in beach seining. The idea is to create a different field experience for each grade level.
      - Jude hopes to improve student language accessibility by inviting Latino college students involved in the Latinos in Science Leadership program at Skagit Valley College to participate in the Kids on the Beach program and work with students and language barriers.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
  - Looking for additional help to keep this project moving forward.
  - Need to find a new point of contact with the La Conner School District.
  - Melissa and Catey- know some potential some contacts in La Conner that could help.
  - The location has high visibility, is significantly smaller in size compared to other rain gardens and is an existing rain garden so in theory it should be easier to install and maintain. It would also roll in nicely with the Swinomish "Between two Worlds" program curriculum.
  - Planting is targeted for the fall of 2024 since that is the best time for planting rain gardens. The hard part will be to come up with the rain garden design/planting and plant maintenance plan, recruiting volunteers to maintain it, and interpretive signage content and installation.

- Funding would be used to purchase plants, mulch, and interpretive signage. Funding expires December 31, 2024.
- Need to recruit volunteers to help get the plants in the ground and with ongoing maintenance.
  - Lynne- Rain Gardens are currently on the Salish Sea Stewards project list in Volgistics. We can post something in TheWave to recruit volunteers.
  - Diane- will be at one of the Salish Sea Stewards training sessions to talk about the Mt. Erie Rain Garden which might be a great opportunity to recruit volunteers to help with the La Conner Rain Garden as well.
  - Tracy- The new County Intern has experience in habitat restoration planting and can help and take on a lead role as well.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith/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 February 12 at 2:30pm.
  - Reserved the Shannon Point touch tanks.
  - Beach seining demo will be led by Matt and Jason around 2pm.
  - Planning documents including task lists and timelines are being updated.
  - Created 2024 Fidalgo Bay Day Flyer and Save the Date cards.
  - Will be reaching out to past participating organizations and volunteers with Save the Date cards in February/March.
  - Holli- looking for a new home for a collapsible interactive photobooth. It could be a great activity for Fidalgo Bay Day.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - QAPP Addendum has been approved and signed by Ecology.
  - Mostly hatchery work going on right now to raise abalone for outplanting and planning for the upcoming field season.
  - Will start abalone field work soon including monitoring outplant sites and outplanting additional juvenile abalone at some outplant sites.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
  - 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 and setting out new shell bags for monitoring larval settlement next year.
  - Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards class in March.
  - In April, Puget Sound Restoration Fund is going to schedule a field trip to Fidalgo Bay with one of their partners to deliver oysters.
  - Jude- Padilla Bay NERR staff can present their Olympia oyster restoration work in Padilla Bay at a future MRC meeting if the Committee is interested. They will likely be putting a presentation together for the upcoming Pacific Estuarine Research Society meeting in B.C. in April. Jude will reach out to Syliva to see if the May or June MRC meeting would work.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy Alker:
  - The City of Anacortes selected Hanson Professional Services for the Fidalgo Bay trestle project. They are currently waiting for contract approval.
  - Skagit MRC’s Grant Funding from NOAA (\$58k) for: Alternatives Analysis Report and Conceptual Design and Public Involvement and Outreach.
  - Skagit MRC reps will be involved in reviewing and commenting on the Alternative Analysis Report and Conceptual design and participating in stakeholder meetings and provide input in the development and implementation of the Community Outreach Plan.
  - Looking for MRC members interested in getting involved in this project. Lynne, Cynthia, Betsy, Jude, and Pete expressed interest in getting involved in some capacity.
- 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>. Recording available [here](#). An overview of the Northwest Straits Initiative Floating Kelp Monitoring StoryMap, is [available online](#).
  - Lynne and Jeff Whitty were interviewed last month by Emma with the Skagit Valley Herald for an article on kelp. Article hasn't come out yet.
  - Jeff Whitty with NWSC is looking to establish an MRC kelp kayak monitoring advisory committee and has asked for volunteers. Steve Olsen who leads the Bowman Bay kelp team volunteered to represent Skagit on the kelp committee. Lynne will be the backup.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance and Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
    - Skagit MRC funds and supports plant maintenance and beach seining at the Bowman Bay restoration site in partnership with NWSF and Parks. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is also providing some funding to support the beach seining project.
    - Lynne will be working with Lisa Kaufman to come up with a plant maintenance schedule for this spring.
    - We are in the process of getting the MOU for plant maintenance with NWSF finalized.
    - The recent winter storm at Bowman Bay damaged the foot bridge and washed gravel and debris upland burying some of the shoreline plants and caused some erosion to the restoration site. Erosion is also occurring around one of the interpretive signs. The Parks Manager said we could attach the interpretive sign to the new pier when it gets built. The State Park is not planning to replace the damaged foot bridge. Visitors will have to walk down to the beach to get to the trail. Although the debris and gravel washed up from the storm looks bad, this is a natural process that will help to nourish the beach. Without the shoreline plants, the damage to the shoreline would've been worse.
    - Jason Morgan with the NWSF is leading the beach seining effort at Bowman Bay with the help of volunteers including MRC member Paul Dinnel.
    - The first beach seining activity occurred January 26<sup>th</sup> with 7 volunteers plus Jason. They found 1 juvenile pink salmon, 11 staghorn sculpin, and 10 starry flounder (a surprise for this time of year).
    - Great outreach opportunity when a family with two curious kids stopped by to check out the beach seining.
    - The MOU for beach seining with NWSF has been finalized to outline the work agreement.

#### Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment: Lynne Wenberg Davidson

- Lynne with the help of the Advisory Team (including MRC members Paul, Pete, Tracy, and Cynthia, and Lisa Kaufman, Rick Haley, and Aundrea McBride) updated and consolidated the project list status from past MRC funded studies (Phase I of this project).
- Lynne drafted the Request for Quotes and Qualifications with input from the Advisory Team. The Advisory Team will also be involved in the consultant interviews and selection process.
  - Aundrea McBride recommended the MRC determine specific project priorities.
  - Lynne proposed (and MRC members supported) using the Northwest Straits Initiative's **Marine Habitat** Benchmark to define our goals and priorities for this project with the following language: Accelerate the rate of shoreline and nearshore habitat protection and restoration with the goal of a net gain of functional habitat, including projects that increase shoreline connectivity and complexity and help mitigate the effects of sea level rise and changing ocean conditions.
- The consultant would be responsible for: designing a new geodatabase (excel spreadsheet), performing literature review, developing a prioritization process, analysis, and identifying geospatial focus areas, and developing a list of proposed shoreline protection and restoration projects.
- Lynne scheduled a meeting with Suzanne Shull about incorporating the data from this project into SoundIQ.

- MRC Administration: Tracy transitioning into a full-time position as Skagit MRC Coordinator.
- County Natural Resources Intern – Kat Hayes: Kat will be working part-time through June and full-time in the summer. She will assist with some Skagit MRC tasks including Fidalgo Bay Day, Forage Fish Surveys, Plant Maintenance, MRC website event calendar posts, etc.
- MRC's 2024 Annual Work Plan:
  - The 2024 Annual Work Plan has been finalized and shared with the entire Committee.
  - A big Thank You to MRC Project Leads for reviewing and provided feedback!
  - It is a working document that will need to be regularly 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. The amendment will get signed February 20<sup>th</sup>.
- MRC/NWSC Staff Meeting Highlights: Jan 18<sup>th</sup>

Most of these topics were tabled for a later discussion with Skagit MRC.

- Is Skagit MRC interested in taking on more of an Advisory Role?
- How can we improve communications/engagement with our elected officials?
- How can we increase engagement especially with larger projects with consultants?
- MRCs provide content for the NWSI Newsletter through monthly reports. New MRC members are not automatically signed up to receive the newsletter. The option to sign up should be part of the onboarding process for new MRC members.
- Is Skagit MRC interested in creating marine critter coasters or cards with QR code- linked to MRC website info for special events, similar to Clallam MRC's coasters?
- Skagit MRC website slated for an upgrade. Checkout other MRC websites and the NWSC website for design and content ideas. Do we want to include MRC membership photos/bios/contact info?
- NWSC plans to reach out to tribes not currently engaged with MRCs- like Upper Skagit and Sauk Suiattle and are looking for contacts.
- Drafted Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs):
  - Bowman Bay Beach Seining- Signed by NWSF.
  - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance- Waiting for NWSF review and signature.
  - Skagit Shorelines Needs Assessment Tech Support- Waiting for NWSF review and signature.
  - Salish Sea Stewards – Waiting for Padilla Bay review and signature.
  - Kids on the Beach- Waiting for Padilla Bay review and signature.
- In-Person MRC Meeting Discussion:

Discussed the following possible meeting options and topics. No decisions were made. Tracy will send 2 or 3 in-person meeting dates and topics for MRC approval:

  - Update MRC's 5-Year Strategic Plan (2014-2019)
  - MRC year-end check-in. How are we doing? Are we meeting our goals? How can we do better? What do we want to accomplish? Should we be doing things differently? /
  - MRC project planning/prioritization for 2025-2027.
  - Earth Day Celebration beach cleanup in collaboration with other partner organizations
  - Swinomish Clam Garden- logistics would be difficult. Would need to schedule with tides.
  - School Rain Garden Maintenance work party
  - Bowman Bay Planting/Maintenance work party
  - Padilla Bay NERR- Presentation by Padilla Bay staff on current research/projects. Field trip to upland restoration or to the beach.
  - Fidalgo Bay Resort- Samish DNR presentation or a seabird presentation and guided bird walk
  - Rosario Beach or Washington Park- picnic and tidepool exploration with beach naturalists or students from Salish Sea School.
  - Skagit County- Pollution Identification and Correction /Stormwater Program- presentation-
  - Clayton Beach- Joint MRC meeting with Whatcom and NWSF presentation/field trip.

- Skagit Land Trust- presentation and field trip to one of their conservation sites.
- Port of Anacortes- presentation and field trip to project site.
- Invite other MRCs to present projects they are working on.

#### Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Mount Vernon High School Science Night - Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup> 5-8pm. Skagit MRC will be co-hosting a European Green Crab Outreach table with the NWSC. The Forage Fish survey volunteers will be hosting a forage fish outreach table with microscopes and surf smelt eggs.
- MRC Derelict Vessel Workgoup Update- In 2023 this group prioritized and removed 13 vessels! You can review and share the highlights in this [2023 Derelict Vessel Accomplishments Report](#). Upcoming in 2024:
  - We are in various phases of planning a few vessel turn in events. The first will be in the San Juans in April. Swinomish in partnership with NWSC, Skagit MRC, Port of Skagit, and DNR are meeting Feb 14<sup>th</sup> to continue discussing the possibility of co-hosting a turn-in event this spring with NWSC funding.
  - A vessel in Jefferson County was removed earlier this month.
  - Additional vessels in Skagit County in Blanchard and at the Swinomish fish dock are being planned for removals.
  - Our funding has been extended until December 2024. We have a few removals and events being planned and need to carry them out to assess our budget before we can determine if there are additional available funds.
- Skagit and Whatcom County Dog Poop Survey: Take the survey at [this link](#) and be entered to win a 25 visa gift card!

The meeting adjourned at 11:17am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams on March 14, 2024