



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **March 14, 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:** Catherine Houck (volunteer); Caitlyn Blair (NWSC); Elizabeth Drozda (The Salish Sea School); Leah Skare (NWSC); Jeff Whitty (NWSC)

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: February 8, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments: None

MRC Membership and Northwest Straits Commission Representative Update: *Diane Hennebert*

- MRC member and NWSC representative, Diane Hennebert accepted a new position and will be resigning from the MRC at the end of this month. We greatly appreciate Diane's positive energy and tireless dedication, expertise, and contributions in support of Skagit MRC's mission. She made a huge impact and will be missed!
- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson was appointed to take Diane's place as the NWSC representative.
- A new NWSC alternate will also need to be appointed to fill in for Lynne when she is unable to attend the meetings. Meetings alternate between in-person and virtual. Darla volunteered to be the NWSC Alternate but will be out of town for the next six months.
- Also looking for either the NWSC representative or NWSC alternate from Skagit MRC to serve on the NWSC European Green Crab Ad Hoc Committee. Only NWSC representatives can participate on the EGC Ad hoc Committee because of its designation as a decision-making authority. However, NWSC reps aren't required to join the EGC Ad Hoc Committee.
 - Jude- can't step into the role of NWSC rep or alternate due to a conflict of interest with his position as Director at PBNERR but is involved in a lot of EGC work and would be happy to engage on behalf of the MRC if there are any opportunities. Will check with Lucas.

The Salish Sea School Update: *Elizabeth Drozda*

Elizabeth is the Program Coordinator for The Salish Sea School and Amy Eberling is the founder and Director. The Salish Sea School is actively growing and interested in branching out in the community and being more involved with the Skagit MRC to help support Skagit MRC's mission. The Salish Sea School currently leads several stewardship and educational programs for students and adults. Right now, their focus is trying to connect students with stewardship-based action activities and get them involved in collecting scientific data such as: marine bird surveys, forage fish surveys, intertidal surveys, and stormwater monitoring. They also have a boat and take both teens and adults to do surveys in areas that are less accessible and have two cold water divers on their team.

- MRC members encouraged Elizabeth to apply for MRC membership.
- Jude- there could be some cross pollination opportunities with the Salish Sea Stewards training program and volunteer opportunities that students could participate in. There could also be some opportunities at Padilla Bay.
- Darla- suggest an afternoon cruise for patrons interested in supporting The Salish Sea School.

- Pete- Re-Resources will no longer be able to continue leading the Intertidal monitoring at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve. The Salish Sea School expressed interest in managing and coordinating intertidal surveys in the future but will likely need some funding. Pete suggested Skagit MRC consider allocating funding to keep the intertidal surveys going in Fidalgo Bay because it would be beneficial to continue collecting important baseline data to track any changes.
 - Catherine Houck, Citizen Stewardship Committee member of the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve- before allocating funding to another entity to lead the intertidal monitoring effort at Fidalgo Bay, please consider what question we want to answer with the monitoring data and think about the big picture to help determine the best path forward. What is it we are doing with the monitoring data and why? What have we learned from the data already collected from the past ten years? How can we improve it? Where is the best place to house it?
- Lynne- the Skagit MRC is working on an improved Diversity, Equity, Inclusion approach to our membership and our work. One of the areas that we would like to improve is engaging more with youth, especially in underserved communities. The Salish Sea School could really help the Skagit MRC in this area.
 - Elizabeth- Connecting with youth in underserved communities and across different cultures is really at the heart of The Salish Sea School’s mission. Securing funding for transportation is always a huge challenge with these programs.

Northwest Straits Commission Report: *Diane Hennebert*

Last NWSC meeting occurred **February 23**, 10am-3pm at the Whatcom Civic Building. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- 2024 NW Straits Initiative Conference: **November 15-16** at the Delta Hotel in Snohomish County. The pre-conference survey is out! Now is your chance to provide input on topics for the 2024 conference.
- NWSC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Assessment: Working with Athena Group to assess DEI goals.
- 2023 NWSC Impact Report: Now available on the NWSC website at [this link](#).
- Puget Sound Day on the Hill: May 13-17, 2024, in Washington DC.
- Northwest Straits Foundation Community Event: May 5, 2024, at the Edmonds Yacht Club.
- Boldt Decision 50-Year Celebration: Several NWSC members attended and talked about how impactful it was. Recommended the book ‘Treaty Justice’.
- Whatcom County Climate Action Plan: Shared by a Whatcom County Council member. All Cities and Counties are required to update their Comprehensive Plans in 2025. Diane recommended Skagit MRC be a voice in that process for Skagit County and the City of Anacortes. Community meetings will be held to help guide the priorities.
- San Juan Derelict Vessel Turn-In Event: April 2024. For more information click [here](#).
- Next NWSC meeting: **March 29**, 10am-noon, held virtually via Zoom. This will be Diane’s last NWSC meeting.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Training held Tuesdays from 1-5pm starting Feb 6-April 30 at Padilla Bay. Erin Merklein is now facilitating the training. She is also the Volunteer Coordinator.
 - Full class with 27 very enthusiastic and engaged attendees!
 - Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting on March 15.
 - One of our SSS Alums (class of 2023), Dean Tillis, was awarded the Dick Knight volunteer of the year award from the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.
 - To date, the Stewards & community volunteers have recorded over 50,000 volunteer hours since 2015.
- 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 (every other month). Skagit volunteers alternate monthly sampling with Whatcom County at Clayton Beach.
- Forage fish survey data goes to WDFW in Olympia. WDFW hosts quarterly updates to forage fish survey volunteers.
- Fidalgo Bay surveys for DNR continue. New lead FF volunteers from Citizen Aquatic Reserve are now coordinating monthly sampling at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve: Tom Flanagan, Catherine Houck.
- Upcoming Forage Fish Outreach Activities:
 - April 2- Pete will be one of the presenters leading a forage fish survey on April 2nd for the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - April 18- Volunteers will be tabling at Mount Vernon Science night with forage fish eggs and microscopes and educational information.
 - April 16- WADNR will present forage fish data results collected over the last ten years at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve. The presentation will be held at Padilla Bay in the morning before the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - May- Forage fish volunteers will assist 1st and 2nd graders from Island View Middle School down on the Fidalgo Bay beach in learning about forage fish.
- June 28- Big outreach event at Bowman Bay will include forage fish surveys & interpretive station, beach seining, and plant maintenance.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
 - 10 classes, 250 students from 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 the beach before:
 - April 15 - April 19: **Concrete 9th-12th grade** (3 classes- underserved students). Per teacher's request, students will collect quantitative mudflat biodiversity and abundance data at Padilla Bay, rather than forage fish surveys at Fidalgo Bay. The class will visit the Padilla Bay interpretive center afterwards.
 - May 6 - May 10: **Evergreen Elementary in Sedro Woolley 4th grade**, 75 students.
 - May 20 - May 24: **Allen Elementary in Mount Vernon 4th and 5th grade**, 84-100 students (English 2nd language for many of the students).
 - 4th graders will get to participate in the mudflat safari and 5th grade students will get to participate in beach seining at Padilla Bay. The idea is to create a different field experience for students for each grade level.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
 - Working on a maintenance plan and securing one or two lead stewards to maintain the Mt Erie School rain garden.
 - Diane and Tracy are planning a site visit to the La Conner School rain garden to assess the site and test the soil to determine why it's not working properly and come up with a game plan to get the site going and maintained.
 - Interns with the county and the Northwest Straits Foundation might be able to help with rain garden maintenance.
 - Planting at the La Conner School rain garden is targeted for the fall of 2024.
 - MRC grant funding would be used to purchase plants, mulch, and interpretive signage. Funding expires December 31, 2024.
- 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 20th anniversary of FBD!
 - Need help planning this year's event. Currently only have 3 people on the planning committee and no MRC Lead or Event Chair.
 - 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.
- Will be reaching out to past participating organizations and volunteers with Save the Date cards soon.
- The Samish Canoe Family expressed interest in possibly participating in Fidalgo Bay Day this year. The tides look good.
- The event will be posted in the next edition of A Town Magazine.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Field work is ongoing now through April including monitoring outplant sites and outplanting additional juvenile abalone at some outplant sites.
 - Hope to have more information to share next month.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Annual monitoring of Olympia oyster recruitment in Fidalgo Bay will start up again in May 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 and his son will be doing all the field work. No need for additional volunteers until the next 5-year assessment in 2028.
 - Recent articles about Olympia oyster restoration work sparked a lot of interest from the public in getting involved in volunteering. The most recent article was in the [Salish Sea Current](#).
 - March 19- Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - March 21- Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Kiwanis Club of Anacortes.
 - June 13- Padilla Bay NERR staff will be presenting Olympia oyster restoration work in Padilla Bay at the June 13th MRC meeting.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy Alker:
 - Skagit MRC’s Grant Funding from NOAA (\$58k) for this project expires December 31, 2024.
 - The City of Anacortes has a contract with Hanson Professional Services for the Fidalgo Bay trestle project that is expected to get signed in April.
 - MRC members expressed concern about being able to spend the funds before they expire and meeting the funding criteria and deliverables. The deliverables include:
 - Education and Outreach Strategy/Plan
 - Conceptual Design
 - The Committee discussed possible MRC outreach opportunities including:
 - Design and fabrication of interpretive signage along the Tommy Thompson trail.
 - Distributing outreach materials at the Fidalgo Bay Day event along with a guided walk along the Tommy Thompson Trail and/or a short presentation.
 - Tracy plans to meet with Jonn Lunsford with the City of Anacortes staff soon to discuss the project and Skagit MRC’s grant funding requirements. Jude, Paul, Lynne, and Cynthia expressed interest in attending the meeting.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - There are 4 kelp beds surveyed in Skagit County between June and September each year by experienced kayak volunteer leads.
 - Jeff Whitty is working to establish a MRC Kelp Kayak Advisory Committee to act as an advisory body to help advance and improve the kayak kelp monitoring program. This committee would be composed of 1-2 reps from each MRC/MRC’s kayak group. Steve Olsen, the kayak lead for Bowman Bay kelp surveys, will be Skagit MRC’s rep. Steve also led a kayak tour business for several years in Skagit. Lynne will be Steve’s backup.
 - Steve Olsen has been looking for new kelp beds to potentially add to our surveys. He found one near Lone Tree Point that might be a good option in collaboration with the Swinomish Tribe. The ecological significance of the kelp bed site is that it has freshwater inputs which could be helpful in better understanding how freshwater can affect kelp growth and vitality. Lynne and Steve scheduled a site visit at the Thousand Trails Campground boat launch to see if it might be feasible. If the new kelp bed is added, it will be a 5-year commitment.
 - Only experienced kayakers are allowed to participate in kelp surveys. Kayaker volunteers must sign liability forms each season and review the safety training videos that NWSC provides.

- Jeff is looking for interest from volunteers in scheduling a kayak safety class in the field led by a certified instructor.
- Lynne and Jeff interviewed for an [article about kelp](#) in the Skagit Valley Herald that just came out earlier this month, March 1st.
- Jeff will be presenting on kelp at the April 16 Salish Sea Stewards class.
- 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. They are interested in the data for their feasibility study to open the wetland to Fidalgo Bay.
 - The MOU for plant maintenance and beach seining with NWSF has been finalized and signed.
 - Lynne is working with Lisa Kaufman to come up with a plant maintenance schedule for this spring. Will borrow the Park’s leftover firewater to water plants. Will try to coordinate plant maintenance with forage fish surveys and beach seining if possible.
 - Last month’s storm uncovered some buried debris and additional armor north of the boat launch that we didn’t know was there because it wasn’t part of the restoration site. The boat launch is also very buckled and broken from the storm. Lisa is looking into potential funding options for a feasibility study for removing the boat launch and armoring. The Park would like to replace it with a soft ramp for kayaks.
 - Jason Morgan with the NWSF is leading the beach seining effort twice a month at Bowman Bay with the help of volunteers from February through June. They are seeing flounder which is unusual for this time of year. They are also seeing sculpin, pink salmon, Chinook, and pipefish. They also found a northern lantern fish, not typically found on the nearshore.
 - Planning an outreach event on June 28th with beach seining, forage fish surveys, and plant maintenance in collaboration with the NWSF, MRC, SFEG, and The Salish Sea School. Still working out the details.
- Skagit Shorelines Needs Assessment– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - The Request for Quotes and Qualifications notice was sent to over 235 environmental firms.
 - The Advisory Team reviewed and evaluated proposals from 5 different firms. The top 3 candidates were selected to interview. We hope to have a new contract in place early April.
 - The consultant will be responsible for: designing a new geodatabase, performing literature review, developing a prioritization process, analysis, and identifying geospatial focus areas, and developing a list of proposed shoreline protection and restoration projects. Data will be uploaded to SoundIQ with the help and support of Suzanne Shull.

MRC Derelict Vessel Workgroup Update: Lynne, Tracy, and Melissa

- The Blanchard derelict vessel was originally scheduled for removal Tuesday but has been delayed because the plates for the machinery sunk in the mud. Swinomish fish dock is also planned for removal.
- Swinomish in partnership with NWSC, Skagit MRC, Port of Skagit, and DNR had a meeting Feb 14th to continue discussing the possibility of co-hosting a turn-in event this year with NWSC funding. Next meeting planned for March 27 at 2pm.
- The vessel turn-in event will likely be held this summer, sometime after July 4th - the slowest time at the La Conner marina and boatyard for hosting an event.
- Will know more at the April MRC meeting.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Mount Vernon High School Science Night - Thursday, April 18th 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.
- Friends of Skagit Beaches Lecture Series- Looking for volunteers to help plan and carry out a new lecture series in November 2024 at the Northwest Educational Center in Anacortes.

- EGC Molt Search Training Workshop- Planning a Molt Search workshop at Padilla Bay in partnership with the NW Straits Commission, Padilla Bay, and Skagit MRC.
- Acidification Nearshore Monitoring Network (ANeMoNe)- WADNR, Aquatic Reserve (Fidalgo Bay) starting in May with a sensor swap. interested in new ideas for collaboration and are super happy to meet to discuss opportunities for folks interested in getting involved in nearshore climate research.
- Intertidal Monitoring- Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve- Re-Sources will no longer be able to continue leading the Intertidal monitoring at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve or the Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve. The AmeriCorps person with Re-Sources will lead two surveys at each Aquatic Reserve this summer but won't likely be able to continue doing that. They will be hosting a Zoom meeting this Friday, March 15th at 9am to explore partnership opportunities to help keep the monitoring program going in future years.
- Northwest Youth Corps Conservation Crews for Hire: Would like to discuss potential future collaborations. Will be presenting more information at future MRC meeting.
- Skagit County Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update: The County Planning Department is currently in the process of compiling a list of community events to disseminate information about the Periodic Comprehensive Plan to the public. They are dedicated to engaging with a wide range of agencies and groups to ensure robust public input in our planning process. Will be presenting more information at a future MRC meeting.
- City of Anacortes Stormwater Master Plan Update: City just signed contract. Scope of Work includes stream walk and stream assessment focused on fish barriers but will also include capital projects for stream restoration.
- Skagit Conservation District Collaboration: Tracy will be meeting with Cindy Elston this Friday to chat about the roles and capacity the CD could participate and collaborate with the MRC.

The meeting adjourned at 10:59am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams on April 11, 2024