



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Betsy Stevenson, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey's Alternate), Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple, Catey Ritchie, Kevin Anderson
 - *MRC Members Absent: Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Pete Haase*
- **Others in Attendance:** Cynthia Nielsen (Volunteer); Elizabeth Drozda (The Salish Sea School); Dana Oster (NWSC); Jeff Whitty (NWSC); Robby Eckroth (Skagit County Planning); Tara Satushek (Skagit County Planning)

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: March 14, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments: None

Skagit County Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update: Tara Satushek/Robby Eckroth, Skagit County Planning

- The County Planning Department is working on an update to the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan that must be completed by June 30, 2025.
- The Comprehensive Plan is a visioning document to help guide how the County should direct population growth in our community, while still protecting our environment and natural resources.
- Working with a consulting team to add 2 new elements: 1. Housing Affordability and 2. Climate Change. Will also be updating all existing elements.
- In the very early stages of the public engagement process. Nothing to review yet.
- Conducting a survey located on the [County Planning Department website](#) to get public input and perspective on what changes should be made.
- Focused on Diversity Equity and Inclusion and making sure all voices are being heard in the community.
- Looking for ways to engage with a wide range of agencies and groups with various expertise to ensure robust public input in the planning process. Plan to host several workshops and open houses.
- The MRC discussed the idea of reviewing certain elements of the Comprehensive Plan Update, such as climate change and sea level rise, and providing comments as a group. However, it was determined that it would be too complicated to do that as a group. Several MRC members represent other entities that will be providing their own comprehensive review/comments and would not be able to participate in Skagit MRC's formal review/comment process due to the potential conflicts of interest.
 - **Action:** *Betsy will ask Tara and Rob if the MRC could review the Draft documents and provide guidance on certain elements like sea level rise before anything goes out to the public. It would be a more informal process and a good way for the MRC to provide a valuable service without any potential conflicts.*
 - **Action:** *Betsy will keep the MRC updated on any progress and timeline and will share the document when its ready for review.*
 - **Action:** *Representatives from the different entities that will be conducting their own comprehensive review process and providing comments will have an opportunity to share their different perspectives with the MRC at a future MRC meeting.*

Northwest Straits Commission Report: Lynne Wenberg

Last NWSC meeting occurred **March 29**, 10am-noon, held virtually via Zoom. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- Skagit MRC's NWSC Rep: Diane announced her new position and last day as the NWSC rep and introduced Lynne as the new rep. Diane will continue to be an advisor to the Friends of Skagit Beach's stormwater monitoring project.
- Jefferson and Clallam joint MRC Meeting- March: Cecilia Gobin gave a great presentation on tribal treaty rights. Cecilia is willing to give this presentation to other MRCs.
➤ **Action: Tracy will Invite Cecilia to present at a future Skagit MRC meeting.**
- Clallam MRC Olympia Oyster Restoration: 47 tons of Pacific oyster shells spread in Sequim Bay in partnership with Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe.
- Puget Sound Day on the Hill: May 13-16, 2024, in Washington DC.
- Northwest Straits Foundation Community Event: May 5, 2024, at the Edmonds Yacht Club.
- New Science Advisory Committee Member: Anne Beaudreau, Associate Professor at the UW School of Marine and Environmental Affairs.
- NWSI Program Funding: Thanks to Patty Murray the NWSI has been awarded programmatic funding which means we won't have to keep lobbying for funding year after year which is a big deal for sustainability!
- San Juan MRC Boater Impact Project: Will be collecting recreational boating impact data via aerial images and boots on the ground as part of their eelgrass protection initiative. Counting number of boats anchoring near and in eelgrass areas.
- Clayton Beach Restoration: Northwest Straits Foundation received additional funding for the Clayton Beach project (\$500k) and a match will be required.
➤ **Action: Tracy will Invite Lisa to give an update on Clayton Beach at a future Skagit MRC meeting.**
- Next NWSC meeting: **April 26**, 10am-noon, held virtually via Zoom.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Training held Tuesdays from 1-5pm, Feb 6-April 30 at Padilla Bay.
 - 25 trainees slated to graduate and join the ranks of 365 trained Stewards.
 - Graduation will be held April 30th at Padilla Bay at 4pm. All MRC members and SSS alumni are welcome to attend.
 - Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting held April 5th.
 - To date, SSS 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.
 - Upcoming Forage Fish Outreach Activities:
 - April 2- Pete was one of the presenters leading a forage fish survey on April 2nd for the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - 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.
 - April 18- Volunteers will be tabling at Mount Vernon Science night with forage fish eggs and microscopes and educational information.

- 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, plant maintenance and outreach display booths.
- 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 10: **Concrete 10th-11th grade.** Two classes of 10th grade Physical Science students and one class of 11th grade Environmental Science students participated in the Kids on the Beach program at Padilla Bay. Every student was involved in data collection including density and biodiversity of intertidal organisms at three locations along a transect line. They also collected weather, water temps, and substrate composition data. Some of the students participated in the KOTB program when they were in elementary school. There was a great group of volunteers with one adult to four students. The class visited 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 – Tracy Alker:
 - Working with Diane and the NWSF on a maintenance plan for the Mount Erie School Rain Garden which will likely be led by interns with the NWSF and the County Natural Resources Division.
 - Diane and Tracy are planning a site visit to the La Conner School rain garden on April 27th to assess the site and test the soil for infiltration.
 - 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 – Tracy Alker:
 - Date has been set for Saturday, August 24, 2024, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
 - Samish Indian Nation will be supporting Fialgo Bay Day this year with some additional funding.
 - The Samish Canoe Family expressed interest in possibly participating in Fidalgo Bay Day this year. The tides look good.
 - Save the Date notices will be sent out to past participating organizations and volunteers by the end of this month.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) began field work in February.
 - Monitoring abalone outplant sites at 7 locations (3 in Skagit).
 - The two new sites near Deception Pass that were outplanted for the first-time last year were surveyed in February. Survival was low at both sites. One of the sites will not be seeded again. But the other site had enough abalone to justify an overseeding again this season.
 - Recovered oceanographic sensor arrays from 6 outplant sites (2 in Skagit).
 - Surveyed 10 historic index sites (2 in Skagit).
 - Scouted/set up 7 new outplant sites (2 in Skagit).
 - PSRF has been working with and training the Seattle Aquarium dive team for the past several years in outplant site scouting, set up and post-seeding monitoring. The Seattle Aquarium is also one of their satellite nursery partners and have been successful in culture efforts. They will help with outplants and monitoring at several sites in Skagit.

- The Samish Tribe is another new partner with a dive team that will take on one of the original Burrows Island outplant sites along with a new site on Sinclair Island. PSRF will be training their dive team in abalone survey and outplant methods later this month.
- Hatchery production and juvenile culture at both the Manchester Chew Center and the Seattle Aquarium's ACC has gone well since last summer's spawning efforts, and abalone that are larger than 5 mm at these facilities have been sorted into outplant groups.
- During the week of April 15th and during a second outplant week in early June, teams from PSRF, WDFW, the Seattle Aquarium and Samish Tribe anticipate outplanting more than 10,000 juvenile abalone to at least 10 different recovery sites. It is anticipated that 4 of these sites will be in Skagit County.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Sampling for annual 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.
 - Paul presented on the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards class and the Kiwanis Club of Anacortes in March.
- 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 staff and 4 MRC members briefly met with the City of Anacortes staff on March 21 to discuss the project and how the MRC grant funds will be used to make sure we will meet our grant deliverables, timeline, and funding requirements including:
 - Develop Outreach Strategy and Messaging Plan with the help of scientists and communications team to include:
 - Design and fabrication of interpretive signage along the Tommy Thompson trail.
 - Providing outreach materials at the Fidalgo Bay Day event along with a guided walk along the Tommy Thompson Trail and/or a short presentation.
 - Creating website content with science- based messaging to help answer the “why”.
 - Creating short educational video clips with links that will be posted on the website.
 - Collect additional scientific data to support the conceptual design and outreach messaging.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - There are 3 sites surveyed monthly in Skagit County between June and September each year by experienced kayak volunteer leads (Biz Point-John Fritto, Coffin Rocks-Steve Olsen, Shannon Point (2 kelp beds)-Lynn Wenberg-Davidson).
 - The kelp team has been looking for new kelp beds to potentially add to our surveys. They found a huge healthy kelp bed near Lone Tree Point that might be a good option. 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. The kelp bed has been observed at that location even during the colder winter months! Lynne and Steve are working with the Swinomish to access the site by launching from the Thousand Trails Campground. They plan to do a reconnaissance in May to see if it might be feasible. If the new kelp bed is added, it will be a 5-year commitment. They also plan to check out another kelp bed near the Swinomish clam garden and Kiket Island that was recommended by the Swinomish staff. The Swinomish already has a monitoring buoy out there that collects water quality data near the clam garden. It would be interesting to see if there is a correlation between water quality, healthy kelp, and shellfish. Lynne talked to one of the property owners on Similk Bay about using the boat launch next to his property to access the kelp bed near Kiket Island. He seemed very supportive and excited to hear about the kelp monitoring work.
 - Jeff Whitty established a MRC Kelp Kayak Advisory Committee to act as an advisory body to help advance and improve the kayak kelp monitoring program. This committee is composed of 1-2 reps from

each MRC/MRC's kayak group. Steve Olsen, the kayak lead for Bowman Bay kelp surveys, is Skagit MRC's rep. Lynne is Steve's backup. They recently held their first meeting. They talked about the use of drones, water quality monitoring (including ocean acidification), and other data collection that other MRCs are involved in or are interested in. There will be at least 2 or 3 more meetings this year.

- Jeff presented on the NWSC kelp program at the April 16 Salish Sea Stewards class. There are a lot of experienced kayakers in the group.
- Jeff will be hosting the kelp kayak kick-off meeting at Padilla Bay on May 1st. First half will be hybrid and include presentations on the protocol, related safety, and preseason preparation. The remainder of the meeting will be in person only and include hands-on activities to practice skills needed for data collection and management.
- Skagit Kelp Survey Team will schedule a pre-season shake down paddle and a kick-off BBQ at Steve Olsen's home.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance and Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Beach Seining:** Jason Morgan with the NWSF is leading the beach seining effort for Skagit MRC with the help of volunteers from January 2024 through December 2025. Beach seining currently takes place twice a month through June. It will be reduced to once a month starting in July through the end of 2025. We've been seeing Chum salmon, Pink salmon, and Chinook. Last month we saw newly hatched surf smelt, a sharp-nosed sculpin, and a northern lanternfish. Around 7 volunteers help with seining each week, including MRC members (Paul Dinnel and Lynne Wenberg-Davidson) and 10 to 14 hours of volunteerism. Forage fish surveys have been coordinated with beach seining activities.
 - **Plant Maintenance:** Lisa Kaufman with the NWSF is leading the plant maintenance effort for Skagit MRC. It was determined that weekly plant maintenance was too much for volunteers, so we decided to go back to monthly plant maintenance work parties. The events will be held May 30th, June 28th, July 25th, and August 22nd from 9am-11am. Foundation staff will continue to do weekly plant maintenance at the site to make sure the plants get watered on a regular basis during the hot and dry summer months.
 - **Additional Shoreline Restoration:** Recent winter storms have caused a lot of erosion and damage along the shoreline. The boat ramp is broken and unusable now. Lisa found some grant funding for a feasibility study to replace the broken concrete boat launch with a soft beach launch for kayaks, remove additional riprap, and restore the shoreline. The state no longer has funding to replace the damaged fishing pier as originally planned. The interpretive signage that is near the pier is eroding away. We are looking into options for moving it or stabilizing it before it washes away. Can't move it upland without doing another cultural survey.
 - **Bowman Bay Outreach Event- June 28th**- In partnership with NWSF, SFEG, State Parks, and Skagit MRC. Details are still being work out. Will include beach seining demos, plant maintenance, forage fish survey demos, outreach tables, etc.
- 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. They were all excellent proposals. The top 3 candidates were selected to interview. Confluence Environmental was offered the contract. Phil Bloch with Confluence was heavily involved in the Skagit Bays Blueprint project for the Skagit MRC many years ago when he worked for People for Puget Sound.
 - We held a kick-off meeting with Confluence Environmental on April 19.
 - Confluence Environmental 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 and housed in SoundIQ with the help and support of Suzanne Shull.

Vessel Turn-In Event Update: Melissa

- Swinomish in partnership with NWSC, Skagit MRC, Port of Skagit, La Conner Marina, DNR, and Skagit County will be co-hosting a vessel turn-in event towards the end July with NWSC and DNR funding.
- We are still working out details regarding the handling of hazardous materials and the different waste streams.

- We will start promoting the event in May. It will be posted in the Swinomish newsletter so that people can start registering. Registration will close the end of June. The event flyers will be shared on websites and social media and will also be printed and posted at marinas and yacht clubs.
- There are several vessel owners that have already expressed interest to Catey about participating.
- The Turn-In Event could last a few days to a few weeks depending on how many vessels register.
- There will likely be a media day with the partners and press present.

MRC Membership Application: *Elizabeth Drozda*

Skagit MRC voted by consensus to make the recommendation to the Skagit Board of County Commissioners to appoint Elizabeth Drozda to the MRC. Elizabeth is the Program Coordinator for The Salish Sea School and will be an amazing addition to the Skagit MRC!

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: *All*

- MRC Grant Quarterly Progress Reports and Volunteer Hours are Due for all 3 MRC grants by April 15th!

The meeting adjourned at 10:39am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams on May 9, 2024