



Skagit County Marine Resources Committee

MINUTES

The following is a summary of the **February 12, 2026**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting held virtually, via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Pete Haase, Tracy Alker, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Dale Fournier, Paul Dinnel, Jude Apple, Darla Gay Smith, Matt Castle, Aaron Esterholt (MRC Members Absent: Catey Ritchie)
- **Others in Attendance:** Dana Oster (NWSC); Jason Quigley (Stormwater, SCPW); Jessica Owens (NWSC); Jeff Whitty (NWSC)

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions and Tribal Land Acknowledgment.

Tribal Land Acknowledgment: *We acknowledge the lands we're on today are the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous Nations who have stewarded them since time immemorial. We respect their sovereignty, support their Treaty rights, their right to self-determination, and we honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water. The Samish Indian Nation, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and other Coast Salish Tribes are invaluable partners in the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems. We follow through on this support by ensuring there is staff representing the interests of the Samish Indian Nation and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community as members on the Skagit Marine Resources Committee.*

Approval of Minutes: January 8, 2026, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.

Public Comments: Jude shared the good news that Matt Castle recently got promoted as the new Director of the Samish Natural Resources Department! Congratulations Matt!

Action Items:

- **2026 MRC Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals:**
 - After the February 12th MRC meeting, MRC members voted by email in favor of approving Pete's proposals to allocate \$1,000 to the Intertidal Monitoring project and \$1,000 to the Forage Fish Monitoring project to help cover increased costs of materials and salaries for both projects as well as outreach for Forage Fish Monitoring.
- **Bayview Ridge Water Quality Improvement Projects:**
 - Skagit County Stormwater Management Coordinator looking for project ideas, big or small, to improve water quality in the Bayview Ridge watershed. Will schedule a meeting with Padilla Bay NERR staff.

Bayview Ridge Stormwater Management - Jason Quigley, Stormwater Coordinator

- Bayview Ridge Stormwater Management Plan Phases 1 & 2 (completed) – Phases 1 & 2 were written before the county was issued its first NPDES permit. Focused on water quantity (not water quality) and addressing drainage issues, flooding mitigation and channel capacity.
- County NPDES Phase2 Permit- requires county to protect waters of the state and report, track, and address stormwater and water quality issues.
- Bayview Ridge Stormwater Management Plan - Phase 3 – County received a grant for updating the Stormwater Management Plan (Phase 3) - focusing on water quality to address known water quality impairments due to fecal coliform, temperature, pH, and DO impacting the salmon and shellfish populations, to be in compliance with Washington State TMDL standards in the Bayview Ridge watershed (around 11,277 acres) drains into Padilla Bay along the eastern shoreline from the 4 major sloughs and outfalls: No Name Slough, Big Indian Slough, Little Indian Slough, and Joe Leary Slough and outfalls that go directly to the shoreline). Poor soils/infiltration in the area, increasing runoff. Consultant compiling and analyzing existing data and looking for gaps. The Draft Plan will be completed this year and finalized in 2027. Looking for Capital Improvement Project Ideas- for updating county owned infrastructure that will improve water quality. Will be seeking additional funding to carry out the projects.
 - Jude- PBNERR interested in meeting with county to discuss and brainstorm project ideas.
 - Lynne- Friends of the Salish Sea volunteers are available to help with sampling if needed!

Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report: *Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*

The last NWSC meeting was January 30, 2026, from 10am-3pm at Padilla Bay. Meeting highlights were shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- Presentations: Annie England presented on the Kids on the Beach program and Todd Woodard presented on the Samish DNRs projects.
 - Lynne- Other MRCs interested in doing something similar to Kids on the Beach
- Puget Sound Partnership: [2026-2030 Action Agenda](#) open for public comment. Puget Sound Day on the Hill- April 13.
- House Bills: [HB 2199](#)- reducing impacts from derelict vessels. [HB 2395](#)- private recreational docks and mooring buoys.
- April 27- Island MRC is hosting a Forage Fish research workshop at Cornet Bay Retreat Center
- Science Advisory Committee will be available to do two project consultations for each MRC in 2026.
- The next **NWSC meeting** is scheduled **Friday, February 27, 2026**, virtually on Zoom from **10am-3pm**. For more information about upcoming meetings and events: [2026 NWSC Meeting and Events Calendar](#)

2026 MRC Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals: *Tracy Alker*

- Approximately \$20k of leftover NOAA grant funding is available for each MRC in 2026. These funds expire December 31, 2026.
- MRCs encouraged to consider enhancing existing projects funded under NOAA grant funding rather than developing a new project, unless there is a new project that is "shovel ready."

- Existing MRC projects funded under NOAA grant funding include: Intertidal Monitoring, Forage Fish Monitoring, and Derelict Crab Pots. MRCs may also defer the funding to be used for derelict vessel removal/vessel turn-in opportunities.
- Applications for additional funding for existing projects could potentially be reviewed and approved as soon as the February 27th NWSC meeting if received before February 20th and as long as the original project scope is not changed.
 - Pete Haase proposed allocating \$1,000 to the Intertidal Monitoring project and \$1,000 to the Forage Fish Monitoring project to help cover increased costs of materials and salaries for both projects and outreach for Forage Fish Monitoring. Pete will provide a written summary of his proposals for the MRC to review and approve via email. MRC members were asked to vote by consensus via email by Tuesday February, 17 so that we can get it on the February 27th NWSC meeting agenda for funding approval.
 - All MRC proposals must be submitted to Tracy by Thursday, February 26, 2026 to give the MRC enough time to review and approve before the NWSC's March 17th application deadline.
- All MRC Applications Due to the NWSC: March 17, 2026!
- **2026 RFP Timeline:**

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TASK</u>
January 30, 2026	Northwest Straits Commission approves budget
March 17, 2026	Application deadline
March 18-20, 2026	Review and feedback to MRCs
March 27, 2026	Northwest Straits Commission approves projects
April-May 2026	Staff prepares grant agreements or amendments
December 31, 2026	Projects complete

MRC Strategic Plan Update Strategy: *Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*

- Briefly discussed the 2014 -2019 MRC Strategic Plan and recognized the accomplishments achieved.
- The structure of the MRC's new strategic plan will depend on how we intend to use it and the desired outcomes.
 - For example – it could be used as a tool to help guide the work and prioritize projects, resources/funding allocation, and people capacity (staff and volunteer time) of the MRC. This type of structure would be more focused on themes/areas to achieve mission and maintain function of MRC, and not on specific actions/tasks.
- Proposed Approach for Updating the MRC's 5-Year Strategic Plan shared with the MRC members in the meeting packet.
- The brainstorming retreat will be held in person Thursday, March 12th, 9am-11am at the Skagit PUD facility and will be facilitated by Dana Oster, NWSC. MRC member participation is important!
- MRC members are asked to do some reading homework prior to the March 12 Retreat. Links to the reading materials will be provided in the meeting packet that will be sent out next week.

Next steps after the retreat:

- Strategic Plan drafted by small subcommittee based on results from brainstorming retreat. Anyone welcome to join

- Draft Strategic Plan update shared with MRC for discussion and feedback
- Strategic Plan updated and refined by subcommittee based on MRC feedback
- MRC final review and approval of Strategic Plan
- MRC feedback on proposed approach

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Dale Fournier:
 - The 2026 Salish Sea Stewards training program has begun! Classes are held every Tuesday at Padilla Bay from 1pm-5pm from February 10th through April 14th.
 - [2026 SSS Training Schedule](#) is now available on the MRC website. The topics are always interesting, and MRC members are invited to attend.
 - 21 students had registered, but only a small group of 15 students attended the first session. 4 people who registered confirmed they are no longer able to participate. The Salish Sea Stewards Working Group plans to repost flyers and social media posts to let everyone know there are still spots available.
 - All 15 students that attended the first class seemed very interested and eager to participate - if a bit quiet. They have varied backgrounds and some are new to the Skagit Valley area.
 - The speakers - Erin Merklein, Jude Apple, Sylvia Yang and Todd Woodward were enthusiastic and set a great tone for the start of the program. Dale presented a brief history and overview of the Salish Sea Stewards program and the MRC. The day went smoothly. The timing for all of the speakers seemed just right. Students had breaks. There were enough supplies and refreshments for everyone. We all felt that it was a good day.
 - On February 5th, 2026, the Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Working Group met virtually via Teams. Training schedule finalized. AC members will attend first class for support and introductions. Started planning for the first Social Event for the Salish Sea Steward alums. We talked about having the first event in late Spring. Pete Haase is going to check into having the event at Taylor Shellfish. The Communications Team headed by Lynne Wenberg-Davidson updated the whole group on alumni communications.
 - The next meeting of the Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Working Group is March 5th, 2026 at 2:30. This will be another virtual meeting.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Skagit MRC contracted with the Salish Sea School's Catherine Houck to coordinate the monthly forage fish monitoring at 7 Skagit MRC restoration and index sites. WDFW Index Sites: Guemes Channel Index, Lovrics Assessment, Samish Index, Similk Bay Index. Restoration Sites: Clayton Beach, and Similk Restore.
 - Now that the restoration project monitoring at Bowman Bay has ended, the forage fish surveys at Bowman Bay will be changed to fixed long-term index type sites rather than random sites, starting in February.
 - This is the quiet time of year for forage fish spawning but will likely pick up again in late April or May.
 - The February 2026 Forage Fish Survey Schedule is as follows:
 - Feb 20- Lovrics- noon
 - Feb 20- Guemes Channel -1pm
 - Feb 20- Similk Bay- 1pm

- Feb 20 (or before)- Clayton Beach, Similk Restore (TBD)
- Feb 20- Fidalgo Bay Resort- process samples – 1:30pm
- Feb 23- Fidalgo Bay Resort- preview new survey methods and sites- 1pm
- Feb 25- Bowman Bay at 2:30pm
- Kids on the Beach – Pete Haase:
 - Spring 2026 KOTB program is as follows:
 - (April 27-May 1) **Edison Elementary**: 3 classes 5th graders 65 students
 - (April 13-17) **Evergreen Elementary**: Sedro-Wolley: 92 6th grade students
 - (May 18 -22) **Concrete High School**: 90 students
 - A call for volunteers will go out for help with field days as we get closer to the spring event.
- Intertidal Monitoring - Pete Haase:
 - This is a new MRC project that will be starting this year. Project used to be led by Re-Resources, but they are no longer able to continue.
 - Partnering with The Salish Sea School to do this project. A contract has been drafted.
 - Will use the same protocol and equipment that Re-Resources used.
 - Completed the draft QAAP update for intertidal monitoring. It is now under review with the Department of Ecology.
 - The first intertidal monitoring event is anticipated to take place May 18, 2026, at Fidalgo Bay RV Park. Monitoring will be led by Elizabeth Drozda and involve Anacortes High School's Environmental Science program.
 - Working with Whatcom MRC and Ecology to determine the kind of intertidal monitoring baseline data that would be the most useful to have in the event of a disaster.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Eileen Bates is the new pinto abalone project co-lead with Josh Bouma – Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF).
 - PSRF just kicked off the winter/spring field season.
 - Surveyed the Switchback site and found 80 abalone! Compared with 23 found on the pre-outplant survey last year.
 - Completed a collaborative survey of the Vitality site with Samish using 2 dive boats! Only 55 abalone were found there, but after only finding 1 in the 2025 survey, this was a huge improvement! Last year the Vitality site was expanded to twice its original size to follow the abalone that seemed to be moving shallow. There were also two rounds of outplants at that site in 2025.
 - The Shannon Point Marine Center abalone rearing nursery is humming along and should be ready for juveniles this spring, and Derek has a new grad student who will be taking up the cryopreservation work starting in the summer. All good news!
 - Eileen will give a presentation on the pinto abalone project at the May 14th MRC monthly meeting.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration– Paul Dinnel:
 - Not much is happening with native oysters right now. Field work to monitor annual recruitment levels using oyster shell bags will start up again in May.
 - Paul provided a summary for the Skagit County Historical Museum (in La Conner) on Skagit MRC's native oyster restoration efforts and outcomes in Fidalgo Bay. This information is now part of a new oyster exhibit at the museum for the next several months.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Project concluded December 31, 2025.

- Lynne and Suzanne Shull provided a demonstration on how to use the NEAP tool and Sound IQ and discussed the 5 High Priority Project Areas to county and city staff from Planning GIS, and the Natural Resources Division on February 11. 18 people were in attendance! Lots of great questions and conversations followed the presentation. Lynne followed up with a 'Thank You' email to the attendees and asked for some feedback on how they might use the tool.
 - Lynne plans to solicit feedback from MRC members on the 5 High Priority Project Areas.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - 2026 season will kick off soon – Skagit bull kelp surveys are from June – September.
 - Spring MRC Kelp Monitoring Workgroup meeting is in works for March. Topics include: Shoreline segments, kayak kickoff ideas, final review of new datasheet.
- Bowman Bay Restoration – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC's plant maintenance and beach seining projects concluded December 31, 2025.
 - Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group met with State Parks to discuss the wetland project. They decided not to pursue the restoration project to restore it to an estuary after finding many native amphibians thriving in the freshwater wetland habitat. Instead, they plan to do more data collection with some of the remaining funds from the feasibility study.
- Derelict Crab Pot Removal – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - The MRC's contract agreement with the NWSF to perform 6 side scan sonar surveys and derelict crab pot removal in Skagit Bay is going through the county review and signature process. Island MRC will be funding additional side scan sonar surveys and crabber outreach efforts in Skagit Bay. NWSF is also working with WDFW to finalize additional funding for derelict crab pot removal.
 - NWSF purchased a Remote Operating Vehicle (ROV) to survey and remove derelict pots in certain areas where derelict crab pot removal with divers might be more difficult. The Swinomish Tribe has agreed to provide watercraft support to the NWSF for this effort.
 - Side-scan sonars are expected to be accomplished between March and July 2026, with derelict crab pot removals after scans are complete and through the summer of 2027.
- Derelict Crab Pot Outreach – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Darla is working with the Northwest Straits Foundation and the Derelict Crab Pot Advisory Team to develop and implement the 2026 crabber outreach plan for Skagit County. The outreach effort will likely focus on providing educational materials to crabbers at local sporting good stores, licensing venues, and social media posts. Requested feedback from MRC members on crabber outreach strategies for Skagit County.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy:
 - Fidalgo Bay Day task was not included in the MRC grant this year because we do not have an MRC Project Lead.
 - Without a Project Lead or grant funding, we cannot contract with someone to plan and coordinate the event. No grant funding also means no food or permits, grill rental, event street banner, or advertisement.
 - Tracy met with county staff to brainstorm some ideas on alternatives that wouldn't require an MRC lead or MRC funding or a ton of staff time. No good solution so

- far. Not sure how to continue to move forward on this without someone jumping in and taking the lead.
- Aaron and Darla both offered to help if assigned specific tasks but cannot commit to taking the lead.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: *All*

- [UW Climate Impacts Group webinar series](#): Extreme Heat in the Pacific Northwest: Strategies for Next Summer and Beyond. February 12, 2026, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm
- **Puget Sound Kelp Forest Conservation and Recovery webinar**- Jeff Whitty, NWSC- Thursday, February 12, 4:30pm-5:30pm. [Register here](#). For more information: [Puget Sound Kelp Forest Conservation and Recovery | The Foundation for WWU & Alumni | Western Washington University](#)
- **Shellfish Exhibit: History of Shell-fishing in Skagit County** – opens January 15, 2026 – May 17, 2026 at the Skagit County Historical Museum ([Skagit Valley Herald](#))
- **2026 Crab Team New Monitor Trainings**: Volunteers are needed to help with early detection and monitoring of invasive European green crab. Washington Sea Grant is offering 2 virtual training sessions (on Zoom) and 1 in-person session, at several locations across the region. Volunteers needed at 3 sites in Skagit County. [Volunteer Interest Form](#)
- [North Sound Riparian Conference 2026](#) – presentation recordings available on YouTube Channel
- Skagit County Commissioners Appoint Members to **Climate Impact Advisory Committee** [Feb 2, 2026 Press Release](#)
- Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission’s [“2025 State of Our Watersheds” report](#).
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Communities clam gardening publication: [“Reviving the past to protect the future: developing a social-ecological clam garden site selection model](#)

*The meeting adjourned at 10:50am. Next Scheduled Skagit MRC Meeting – April 9, 2026, Microsoft Teams (*Note: the Skagit MRC Strategic Plan Brainstorming Retreat will be held March 12, 2026 at the Skagit PUD Facility in lieu of the monthly MRC meeting)*