



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **May 8, 2025**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Pete Haase, Matt Castle, Tracy Alker, Chandler Colahan (Jude's Alternate), Paul Dinnel, Darla Gay Smith, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey's Alternate), Dale Fournier
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Carolyn Moulton, Elizabeth Drozda, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Jeff Whitey (NWSC); Audrea McBride (Skagit Watershed Council); Jay Lind (former MRC member); Yuki Reiss (SFEG)

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: April 10, 2025, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments:

- No comments

Skagit Watershed Council Membership: Aundrea McBride

- Background:
 - The Skagit Watershed Council is a non-profit community partnership for salmon recovery since 1997.
 - Currently 46 members. Only organizations involved in salmon restoration work can join. Individual citizens cannot join, but they are welcome to attend the meetings.
 - 4 council member meetings held per year. Usually have science talks. Meetings are hybrid held at WSU Ext. Next meeting is June 4th- will be voting on revised By-Laws. Annual lunch meeting at Hillcrest-present annual report.
 - Funded 230 projects in the watershed since established. Includes nearshore and delta projects. 3 nearshore projects funded in 2024. All have salmon focus.
 - 9 projects proposed for funding this year.
 - Six subcommittees under the SWC (Technical Work Group, Protection Subcommittee, Monitoring & Adaptive Management Subcommittee, Technical Review Committee, Lead Entity Citizen Committee, and Community Engagement Committee)
 - The Lead Entity Citizens Committee prioritizes salmon recovery projects and makes recommendations to the state for state funding. This process occurs every year starting in February through August. The last two days includes site visits to the final list of proposed project sites.
 - Technical Committee established to test viability of projects.
 - Community Engagement Committee- Pete Haase frequently attends the Community Engagement Committee meetings facilitated by Holli Watne.
- Skagit MRC invited to become a member of the Skagit Watershed Council to build a stronger ecological recovery community and build some synergy around that work.
 - SWC Membership requirements- must have one designated MRC representative and an alternate for voting. Must attend at least one meeting per year to maintain membership. Representative can be changed at any time prior to the vote.
 - **Question:** How can Skagit MRC rep vote on behalf of the entire MRC when MRC members represent tribes and other organizations that are also members of the Skagit Watershed Council? **Answer:** Representatives for each of those organizations will cast their own vote.

Skagit MRC rep would ask MRC how to vote, if no consensus Skagit MRC rep could recuse themselves from voting. It would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Another option would be to apply to become a non-voting member.

- **Question:** Are members required to report on anything at the meetings: **Answer:** No, not unless there is something they would like to share.
- **Question:** Any homework required of members? **Answer:** No homework except for occasional documents to review prior to voting.

➤ **Action Item:** Skagit MRC members voted unanimously by consensus to apply for membership with the Skagit Watershed Council with Darla Gay Smith as the Skagit MRC Rep and Pete Haase as the alternate MRC rep.

Tribal Land Acknowledgement: Lynne

Proposed Tribal Land Acknowledgment including additional language recommended by Jude Apple to help reaffirm a realistic and achievable commitment. The tribes do not have a formal process for reviewing and vetting this type of thing on behalf of the entire tribe, so the additional language was reviewed and modified internally by the Swinomish staff representatives on the Skagit MRC and tribal members they work with. The proposed revised Tribal Land Acknowledgement is as follows:

"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 MRC."

➤ **Action Item:** Skagit MRC members voted unanimously by consensus to adopt the proposed Tribal Land Acknowledgement statement

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

April 25 NWSC meeting highlights shared with MRC in pre-meeting packet.

- New NWSC Chair (Alan Clark) and Vice-Chair (Jamie Stephens) appointments.
- The NWS [reauthorization bill passed out of the Senate Commerce Committee](#). There is still a long way to go for the bill to reach a vote in Congress, but this is a positive step forward.
- [2024 Annual Reports](#) from the NWSC and Snohomish MRC is available on the NWSC website.
- **Next NWSC meeting (May 30):** 10am-3pm. Held in-person Clallam County.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - The 2025 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program, which commenced on February 18, 2025 & ran for 10 weeks, was completed on April 29, 2025.
 - Twenty-four (24) new Stewards for 2025 had a festive graduation at PBNERR. The SSS Advisory Committee gave a hearty welcome to the new volunteers joining the larger group of 365 SSS Alumni.
 - This trainee class has been an exceptionally talented one and we look forward to their future involvement in over 60 different environmental organizations.
 - *Of note:* Victor Garcia, a member of the graduating 2025 SSS Class, has been appointed by Governor Ferguson to fill a Western Washington seat on the WA State Fish & Wildlife Commission.

- The Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee finalized their membership recruitment procedures, and a New AC Member Packet is in the works. The AC attempts to add two members from each graduating class to the Advisory Committee with fresh eyes on the Program.
- Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting held May 15th via Teams. In June we will have an in-person meeting to review Training Schedule Topics & Speakers for the 2026 Stewards Program.
- SSS Social Event planned for June 18th at Padilla Bay with a presentation from Wolf Hollow.
- Darla is stepping down as the MRC Project Lead at the end of June 2025. Dale Fournier, a newly appointed MRC member, will become the new SSS Project Lead starting July 1, 2025.
- The SMRC again thanks *Padilla Bay NERR for their vital role in the successful SSS Training.*
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Skagit MRC contracted with the Salish Sea School's Catherine Houck to coordinate the forage fish surveys in Skagit.
 - Catherine will be invited to the July MRC meeting to introduce herself and give a report.
 - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue. Spawning activity is starting to pick up.
 - Surveys take around 1.5 -2 hours to complete.
 - Started using the i-Form automated system to collect data and photos on smart phones and send to WDFW. There are a few glitches with the automated systems and a few survey sites where volunteers are unable to get phone coverage to use the system so they are still using the paper form.
 - May 2025 forage fish survey schedule:
 - May 7- Bowman Bay at noon
 - May 12- Guemes Channel at 9am
 - May 12- Similk Bay at 9am
- Kids on the Beach – Chandler Colohan:
 - **April-** 90 Concrete High School students participated.
 - **May 6-8:** Padilla Bay Field Days with 86 students from Sedro Woolley Evergreen Middle School - 3 classes of 6th graders. Collected biodiversity data along transects on the mudflat.
 - **May 21:** Padilla Bay Field Day with 42 students from Allen Elementary 4th & 5th grades (English is a second language for majority of students- engaged interpreters). Recent article in the Skagit Valley Herald.
 - Over 200 students participated in the spring 2025 KOTB program from three schools- 10 classes.
 - Volunteers assisted with field days, including some of the new SSS volunteers from the 2025 class. This year was a little more difficult getting help from volunteers compared to previous years. More PBNERR staff had to help this year.
 - 1 school, 3 classes scheduled for the fall 2025 KOTB program.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Paul went out in the field with the PSRF abalone crew this month and visited three different sites (one in Skagit).
 - Collected one female spawner from Lopez Island that they took back to the lab for hatchery broodstock to produce abalone for outplants. Several aggregates of abalone were also observed- in close proximity to one another, and as such, were left alone. Per protocols only singleton abalone can be collected.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration– Paul Dinneel:
 - Paul collected native oyster recruitment bags that were set out last year in Fidalgo Bay to monitor the annual 2024 recruitment status. The number of oyster larvae tallied indicated a very good spawn last year. The bags collected around the trestle had around 50% more recruitment than what we've seen in the past. The other sites around the Bay didn't follow that trend, but they still had very strong recruitment.
 - Paul put new oyster recruitment bags out for monitoring this year's spawning and recruitment.

- Paul set out shell strings (shells on a stick) at two different locations at Weaverling Spit and at the trestle in Fidalgo Bay, for the Puget Sound Restoration Fund to monitor oyster recruitment throughout Puget Sound.
- PBNERR crew will be collecting native oyster recruitment bags from Crandall Spit that they put out last year and transferred over to Padilla Bay for oyster restoration. Swinomish Tribal Community also has oyster recruitment bags there that they collect for oyster restoration in Skagit Bay.
- La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden – Elizabeth Drozda:
 - The rain garden sign design has been finalized and will hopefully be printed soon.
 - Elizabeth will be teaching the 5-6 grade students a class on rain gardens with hands on learning activities on May 13.
- Fidalgo Bay Day –Tracy Alker:
 - 2025 Fidalgo Bay Day has been set for Saturday, September 13, 2025, 11am-3pm at the Fidalgo Bay Resort!
 - Save the Date cards and links to the online registration form has been shared with past participating organizations and volunteers.
 - 20 organizations have registered to participate. We have space for 35.
 - 6 volunteers have signed up so far.
 - Beach seining, shellfish samples, and no-host salmon BBQ have been confirmed.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Bowman Bay Beach Seining Updates:**
 - Beach seining is now occurring twice a month at Bowman Bay - funding is in place for NWSF to continue January – December 2025.
 - Beach seining statistics for **April 7:** 913 fish total: staghorn sculpin (15), English sole (32), starry flounder (4), juvenile sculpin (31) and Chum salmon (831). 8 volunteers contributed 14.5 volunteer hours.
 - Beach seining statistics for **April 21:** 122 fish total: starry flounder (1), staghorn sculpin (8), shiner perch (1), three spine stickleback (2), Chum salmon (102). English sole (5), juvenile flatfish (1), and juvenile sculpin (2). 6 volunteers contributed 15.5 volunteer hours.
 - The story of the month is Chum! 933 just for April 2025! This breaks all the records for chum found to date at Bowman Bay. Checkout the NWSF Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AY64Yk4vq/>.
 - **Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Updates:**
 - June 4 is currently in the works for the kickoff of plant maintenance activities with volunteers. NWSF, SFEG, and MRC are working to have beach seining and forage fish teams there as well. More details to come. Looking for volunteer help that day!
 - **Bowman Bay Pocket Beach Restoration Feasibility Study- SFEG project:**
 - Yuki Reiss (SFEG) reported that an abundance of native amphibians was recently discovered at the Bowman Bay wetland site where they were studying the feasibility of opening it up to tidal flow, re-creating a pocket estuary to support salmon rearing. This new finding indicates this project might not be feasible. Could redirect focus to enhancing existing habitat: e.g. remove riprap berm and do some planting along the wetland.
 - **Question:** Are there any historical photos of the site before everything was changed when they put the hatchery in? **Answer:** Have not seen any historical photos of the actual wetland area, just the historical maps or T-sheets.
 - **Question:** Could opening the wetland be a futile effort if the high energy storms that tend to come into Bowman Bay end up causing it to close back up again? **Answer:** The feasibility study and modeling would help answer those questions and determine if this project is feasible. But there will be no need for all of that extra analyses if we end up changing direction of the project.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Skagit surveys generally take place from June-September each year and include the following sites: Coffin Rocks (Steven Olsen - Lead), Biz Point (John Freeto - Lead), Shannon Point east/west (Lynne Wenberg - Lead) and new "Lone Tree Point" (Steven Olsen – Lead).

- 2025 season is swinging into gear. The three Kayak Team leads have published their survey schedules for the 4 Skagit Survey Sites for June – September and the schedule has been posted for volunteer sign-ups.
- A notice will be placed in the next WAVE Newsletter soliciting new kayaker volunteers. Caitlyn, NWSC fame and an experienced kayaker, has agreed to join the Skagit kelp surveys as her schedule allows – yay!

Upcoming events:

- May 2 – NWSC Kelp Kickoff workshop at Padilla Bay
- May 30 – Skagit Kayak Team BBQ and revisit kelp plans
- June 6 – Skagit Kayak Team Shakedown Cruise
- June survey dates: June 8 (Biz Point), June 9 (Coffin Rocks), June 10 (Lone Tree), June 17 (Shannon Point)

- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson via email update:

The contract with Confluence Environmental has been extended through December 31, 2025, for an additional follow-on statement of work (\$10K) to:

- Make improvements for simplified user functionality to the Nearshore Assessment and Prioritization tool while protecting sensitive landowner data.
- Improve MRC useability and access to parcel-level data within the tool.
- Build out details of high potential restoration projects proposed for the MRC.
- Conduct training and tutorials for improved user experience in using the tool.
- Provide editorial edits to text, photos and links to the two previously completed Story Maps as directed by MRC.
- The Olympia Oyster Story Map was updated by Confluence and is now LIVE on the Skagit MRC website as of April 3, 2025 [click here](#)
- The NEAP Tool is in the process of being updated for improved public access and simplified user interface – ECD June 2025.
- The NEAP Tool Story Map is in process of finalization and a “how-to video” will be made as a tutorial for NEAP functionality.
- The NEAP Tool, Story Map, How-to Video as well as back up materials will be posted onto SoundIQ – ECD June 2025.

Derelict Crab Pot Project Consultation with SAC: Lynne

- No updates. Consultation won't take place until June. Results will be shared at June MRC meeting.

2025-2027 Project Proposal Prioritization: Tracy

- No budget updates. The NWSC plans to schedule a budget meeting with MRC staff in June.
- Project Proposal Evaluation and Prioritization Results:
 - MRC members with a real or potential conflict of interest regarding a project (e.g. Project Lead, serve on project committee, benefit financially, etc.) were recused from ranking those specific projects.
 - Only 5 out of 11 MRC members completed the evaluation forms. We cannot accurately rank and prioritize projects until a majority of MRC members complete the forms.
 - The Fidalgo Bay Day project proposal will be dropped from the grant application because without a Project Lead it does not meet the NWSC funding criteria. The funding request for this project will get allocated to the general MRC Operations budget that can be used for special events.
 - Pete Haase volunteered to be the Project Lead for the Kids on the Beach project until he can find a replacement.
- Final Grant Proposals/Application **Due- May 29**

MRC Membership Recruitment Strategy: Pete

Proposed two-prong approach for recruiting new MRC members:

1. Address immediate need for project leads for signature MRC projects- FBD and KOTB. Focus on recruiting new MRC members willing to take the lead on projects.
 2. Develop an ongoing recruitment plan that addresses gaps in stakeholder representation as well diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, right now we don't have any MRC members representing industry or businesses.
 - **Comment:** Darla recommended meeting with volunteers or other community members face to face to get them excited about joining the MRC. Face time is more effective than placing an ad or sending an email.
 - **Comment:** Melissa suggested social media posts to raise awareness of the MRC and to get involved in local efforts to spark interest and recruit new members.
- **Action Item:** MRC members asked to help recruit new members and bring forward ideas of who we could contact that could bring expertise, experience, and knowledge and potentially bring new projects and/or support the work and mission of the MRC.

MRC Member Functions & Responsibilities Updates: Lynne

- The MRC Member Functions & Responsibilities document originally adopted January 8, 2024.
 - Originally proposed updates in April to clarify the role and responsibilities of a Project Lead and to better align with the new NWSC project proposal criteria.
 - Additional changes have been made to the Project Lead description based on feedback received at the April MRC meeting. The proposed updates were provided to the MRC members to review prior to the May 8th MRC meeting including:
 - Simplified and reformatted Project Lead bulleted list of responsibilities into the following categories: Proposal Planning, Project Management, and Other Considerations.
 - A Project Lead checklist was also created as an additional tool for understanding the responsibilities.
 - Note: MRC Staff provides guidance and administrative support to the Project Leads to help ensure success.
- **Action Item:** The MRC voted by consensus to adopt the updates as proposed.

MRC Membership Application: Aundrea McBride

Aundrea McBride applied for Skagit MRC membership and gave a brief introduction with some background information about herself and the Skagit Watershed Council at the beginning of the meeting. If appointed, Aundrea would be the Skagit Watershed Council representative on the Skagit MRC and Holli Watne would be the Aundrea's Alternate. They would both serve on the Fidalgo Bay Day event planning subcommittee.

- **Action Item:** The MRC voted unanimously by consensus to approve Aundrea's MRC membership and make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint Aundrea to the MRC.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- NWSF Annual Spring Celebration at Larrabee State Park- May 17- 11:00am-3:00pm. Includes a service project on the trail to Clayton Beach, a picnic, and information booths. Skagit and Whatcom MRC's invited to table at the event. Nobody from Skagit MRC will be available to attend.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Event- June 4th- hosted by the NWSF 10am-noon. Will be combined with beach seining starting at noon and forage fish surveys.
- Boldt at 50 Years: Tribal Sovereignty, Resources Management, & the Boldt Decision's Continuing Influence- free lecture presented by NWSC member Cecilia Gobin, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Conservation Policy Analyst - May 10, 2pm at Padilla Bay Stevens Center. Seating is limited, register at

www.padillabayfoundation.org. This lecture is co-sponsored by the Lance Christopher Smith and the Benjamin Fisher Aguero Memorial Fund and the Padilla Bay Foundation

- Tides to Trees Tour May 24th- Skagit MRC members have been invited to attend the **Tides to Trees Tour** event hosted by Hampton Lumber and Skagit Genuine Valley. The event will take place **Saturday, May 24th** 9am-3pm. The topic is around water quality within the three industries: forestry, farming, and aquaculture including visits to Swinomish Shellfish Farm, Hedlin's Family Farm, and Hampton Tree Farm. **RSVP by May 9**. No MRC members were able to attend.

*The meeting adjourned at 11:03am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams, **June 12, 2025**.*