



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **February 13, 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, Jude Apple, Paul Dinnel, Elizabeth Drozda, Darla Gay Smith, Carolyn Moulton, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey's Alternate)
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Caitlyn Blair (NWSC), Dana Oster (NWSC), Don Hunger (NWSF), Jenn Johnson (SCPW)

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: January 9, 2025, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments: NA

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

Last NWSC meeting occurred **January 31, 2025**, 10am-3pm, held in person at the Coupeville Library. Highlights shared with MRC via email.

- Nan McKay - received special recognition for her contributions as a gubernatorial appointee to the NWS Commission for 11 years.
- Science Advisory Committee Workshop Series - is being planned for October 2025.
- Norms for Courageous Conversations - solutions for tackling difficult conversations adopted for Commission meetings and will be shared with the MRCs.
- NWS Initiative Definition - proposed at the September 2024 retreat was discussed. Additional information from the NWS Foundation needed for further the discussion before decision can be made.
- Salish Sea Institute Speaker Series- "Commercial Shipping: Impacts and Risks in the Salish Sea". The event recording is [available online](#).
- 2025 NWS Conference- Nov 7 & 8 at Maple Hall in La Conner. **Seeking Skagit MRC representative to join the planning committee to help craft the agenda and build out sessions.** There will be 4 or 5 virtual meetings (1-1.5 hours) March/April through Sept/October. Contact Caitlyn for more information.
- Next NWSC meeting- **February 28**, 10am-12pm. Held virtually via Zoom.

Skagit MRC Vice-Chair Election: All

The Committee voted by unanimously by consensus to appoint Pete Haase as the new Skagit MRC Vice-Chair.

MRC Executive Committee Proposal: Lynne

- The recommendation to establish an MRC Executive Committee was brought forward by Lynne and Tracy.
- The Executive Committee would consist of MRC Staff, MRC Chair, and MRC Vice-Chair and others if interested or as needed.
- The overall goal of the Executive Committee is to act as a small "steering team" to organize and improve MRC administration/operations and project planning processes to help reduce MRC member and staff workloads. Some of the priority tasks could include:
 - MRC Project Planning Support including reviewing and updating the project review, prioritization and approval process and reviewing Draft RFPs before submitting to MRC and NWSC for approval.

- MRC Membership Recruitment and Onboarding Strategy.
- MRC 5-Year Strategic Plan Update.
- Education/Outreach.
- Engagement Plan/Strategy with Elected Officials.
- Draft a Land Acknowledgement statement.
- Questions raised about what authority the Executive Committee would have. Need more clarification. Will develop a more formalized statement before adopting the Executive Committee's Role and Responsibilities which would need to be approved by the whole MRC

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith via Email update:
 - The 2025 Training Program will commence February 18 – April 29, 2025. Classes will be held Tuesdays 1-5pm at the Padilla Bay Reserve.
 - Registration & program information is posted on the SMRC website.
 - Registration deadline was January 31 but has been extended until the class is filled. As of February 12, 24 applicants are registered. The class limit is 26 applicants.
 - The Stewards Advisory Committee met on January 17, 2025. We were pleased to welcome back to the Advisory Committee past Chairman & longtime member & Rachel Best. The Committee welcomes her historical insights & input.
 - Discussed volunteer hour reporting in Volgistics and potential methods for its use to increase SSS volunteer hours and a strategy for engaging non-active SSS.
 - Padilla Bay staff also worked on some of the SSS key deliverables including the Mentoring Plan, Volunteer Recognition Plan, and Social Media Plan.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue.
 - Surveys take around 1.5 -2 hours to complete.
 - February 2025 forage fish survey schedule:
 - Feb 14- Bowman Bay at 10am
 - Feb 14- Clayton Beach?
 - Feb 15- Fidalgo Bay East at noon
 - Feb 15- Fidalgo Bay West at noon
 - Feb 26- Guemes Channel at 10am
 - Feb 26- Similk Bay at 10am
 - Lots of good participation from volunteers helping forage fish surveys.
 - Sometimes receive calls from someone from consulting firms needing FF monitoring hours to keep their certification active or someone interested in seeing what its like to do a FF survey.
 - Will be moving to the WDFW online i-form system to input field data on an i-pad tablet while in the field. NWSC has barcode tags for this. Change can be hard for some of the volunteers that are used to doing it a certain way.
 - Sub-Award Agreement with The Salish Sea School for professional forage fish monitoring coordination and administration has been drafted and will be fully executed in the next couple of months.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
 - 2025 KOTB program is at full capacity with five schools and 325 students signed up. Will need volunteers to help with field days:
 - **April 23:** Padilla Bay Field Day with 45 students from Concrete High School -10th and 11th grades from two classes.
 - **May 6-8:** Field Days with 86 students from Sedro Woolley Evergreen Middle School - 3 classes of 6th graders.
 - **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).

- Fall program is currently being developed: Concrete and Mount Vernon High Schools signed up to participate.
- La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden – Elizabeth Drozda via email update:
 - The La Conner School Rain Garden is looking great!
 - Westar, a sign company in La Conner is donating the sign but cannot create a custom illustration or install the sign. Elizabeth shared the draft design with the MRC for feedback.
 - MRC comments on the sign design:
 - Does Westar want to include their logo?
 - Could the text for all of the sign match the blue of the top text?
 - Could the images chosen be "sharper" or use "punchier" colors (to show up in gray rainy weather better)?
 - Could there be a QR code (perhaps on a different sign)? Need to determine target audience and landing site for this idea.
 - Could the images include more native plants and wildlife?
 - Smaller plant identification labels will also be created to identify native plants and culturally significant plants with consultation from the Swinomish.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
 - 2025 Fidalgo Bay Day has been set for Saturday, September 13, 2025, 11am-3pm at the Fidalgo Bay Resort!
 - Pete distributed 30 Save the Date cards at the Storming the Sound Conference. North Cascades Institute reached out about participating
 - Anna Thompson, the Education and Outreach Specialist for the Public Works Natural Resources Division created online registration forms for volunteers and for organizations to sign up to participate. Hoping it will help reduce some of the work. Will be contacting volunteers and organizations soon.
 - The County will be interviewing interns next week. The new intern will help support FBD. We will schedule a planning meeting as soon as the new intern is on board.
 - Depending on the number of volunteers that sign up, we might need to scale back the event (e.g. no chowders, popcorn, multiple craft activities, etc. It's been difficult to get volunteers to sign up to help with those activities.
 - Suggestions from MRC members:
 - Darla plans to provide information to recruit volunteers from new 2025 SSS class during training.
 - Recommend doing a hard recruit for volunteers towards the end of the Salish Sea Stewards training.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel update:
 - Paul reviewed WDFW's Draft 5-year status report for Pinto Abalone.
 - Recommendation is to keep Pinto abalone on the Endangered Species list.
 - Total number of abalone at index sites increased from 12 abalone in 2017 to 13 abalone in 2024. For the first time in decades, abalone numbers have increased instead of decreased!
 - Encouraging signs of some reproduction/juvenile recruitment occurring in the wild!
 - Hatchery work continues as usual to produce the next batch of juvenile abalone for out planting this winter/spring
 - Dive season began this week, with loads of enthusiasm and collaboration. Three boats and at least 13 divers on the water doing abalone surveys.
 - Eileen and Josh with PSRF on board with the Samish team picking up where we left off last year in getting their divers trained in finding existing outplant sites, setting them up for survey and conducting the monitoring.
 - Surveyed sites at Burrows, Sinclair and Orcas with excellent, moderate and poor survival respectively. We also scouted with Samish and set up a new site on Burrows which they will seed for the first time later this spring.

- Josh reported excellent collaboration with the Samish as they seem energized by the abalone restoration work, and they have a good dive team and boat crew to get the work done effectively. MRC member Matt Castle went out with the crew to help get the work done.
- They hope to find another spot on Burrows and an additional spot on Allan for new outplant sites. This could mean that Samish has as many as 5 outplant sites of their own in Skagit that PSRF will help seed and monitor moving forward.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration– Paul Dinnel update:
 - The next native oyster recruitment bag sampling will take place in May 2025.
 - The next bay-wide population survey is slated for 2028.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson via email update:
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). Kelp monitoring will start up again in June.
 - The MRC Kelp Kayak-Based Monitoring Data Review - meeting held January 30. A recording of the session is [available online](#).
 - The Spring 2025 Kelp Kayaking Monitoring Workgroup is currently being organized by NWSC – Skagit will send representatives.
 - Skagit Kelp Kayak Team Leads (Lynne Wenberg-Davidson and Steve Olson and Brad) are scheduled to present to the upcoming 2025 Salish Sea Stewards Training on April 1 to recruit new experienced kayakers as possible.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson via email update:
 - **Bowman Bay Beach Seining Updates:**
 - Monthly beach seining will continue at Bowman Bay through December 2025.
 - Jason Morgan has provided the upcoming seining schedule for January – June so far.
 - The last beach seining was held January 15. Caught 9 fish: stary flounder, staghorn sculpin, English sole, bay pipefish, sharpnose sculpin. 9 volunteers contributed 15.25 volunteer hours.
 - No more seining planned for 2026. Not needed for another 5 years.
 - **Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Updates:**
 - Nothing happening right now.
 - Funding is in place for NWSF to continue in the 2025 growing season (approx. May – October)
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson via email update:
Background: A Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment was funded for Jan 2024-Dec 2024 to leverage previous shoreline restoration and protection studies, projects and research and update with new and emerging research to produce: Skagit Geodatabase with interactive web-based tools compatible with SoundIQ (a new SoundIQ is in the works); Skagit Nearshore Inventory Resource List; List of Prioritized Skagit Focus Areas and a Top Priority List of Skagit MRC Projects and recommended action plans.

Updates: Skagit Co has extended the contract with Confluence Environmental 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. There is a lot of data. Lynne would like to demonstrate the tool at a future MRC meeting to get feedback on what info would be good for public use and how to make it more user-friendly
- 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.

- Once Confluence modifications are complete, Lynne will work with Suzanne Shull to pull the NEAP Tool with interactive functionality into SoundIQ for public education and awareness.

Working with Northwest Straits Foundation: Don Hunger

Don presented the Northwest Straits Foundation's new **Project Funding Request** document and how to use it, and opportunities for working with the Foundation.

The Foundation serves two roles:

- Nonprofit fundraising partner that MRCs contact with a project funding request to help raise funds for project. It will take 6-12 months to secure funding for most projects. Some have taken 203 years to find funders.
- Nonprofit participating organization that MRCs contact with a collaboration opportunity to participate in an event, project, or activity.
- Core NWSF Programs:
 - Nearshore Restoration and Stewardship
 - Derelict Gear Removal
 - Shore Friendly Landowner Outreach
 - Citizen Science Monitoring
 - Scholarships

To discuss general project ideas or funding requests, contact Don Hunger: don@nwstraitsfoundation.org, 360-739-9909

2025-2027 Project Wish List: Tracy /All

- The MRC's draft list of projects proposed for the next two-year funding cycle is now due!
- March 14th- Request for Proposals issued for three funding sources with different timelines. MRC Project Leads responsible for preparing proposals and cost estimates:
 - EPA/PSP and WA (\$124k/yr) – funding not secured
 - Year 1= October 1, 2025 – September 31, 2026.
 - Year 2= October 1, 2026 – September 31, 2027
 - NOAA (\$67,500/yr)- funding secured
 - Year 1= January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026.
 - Year 2= January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2027
- February 13th- The MRC voted by consensus to approve the following list of proposed projects:
 - Ongoing projects:
 - Fidalgo Bay Day (**Project Lead TBD**)
 - Kids on the Beach (**Project Lead TBD**)
 - Pinto Abalone Restoration (*Paul Dinnel*)
 - Salish Sea Stewards (*Darla Gay Smith*)
 - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance (*Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
 - Forage Fish Monitoring (*Pete Haase*)
 - School Rain Gardens (*Elizabeth Drozda*)
 - Potential new projects:
 - European Green Crab Outreach (*Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
 - Collaborative Derelict Crab Pot Survey/Removal in Skagit Bay with Island and Jefferson MRCs. (*Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
 - Gibraltar/Campbell Lake Creek Mouth -Confluence project recommendation (*Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
 - Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Intertidal Monitoring (*Pete Haase*)
 - Clayton Beach Interpretive Signage (**Project Lead TBD**)
 - Bowman Bay Interpretive Signage Relocation (**Project Lead TBD**)
 - March Point Beach Nourishment (*Pete Haase*)
- March 6- MRC Project Leads will provide cost estimates to Tracy before the next MRC meeting.
- March-April- Project Proposal Consultations with NWSC

- May 29- Grant Applications Due
- Oct 1- EPA/PSP/WA Funding starts

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy for Puget Sound: Whatcom, San Juan, Snohomish, and Island LIOs and their respective MRCs have scheduled a lunch hour meeting to work on developing the Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy for Puget Sound. The leads are interested in building on existing kelp and eelgrass plans and what data or information the different geographies may be able to provide as they develop the implementation strategy for Puget Sound. Since Skagit doesn't have an LIO, they've invited Skagit MRC and others in Skagit to participate in this meeting. The meeting will be virtual and will be held April 2, 11:30-1:00pm.
- Shore Friendly Contractor Workshop: March 21, 2025, at the WECU Education Center in Bellingham, hosted by the Northwest Straits Foundation in partnership with Skagit and Whatcom MRCs. This workshop is designed specifically for contractors that work on marine shorelines; arborists, landscape professionals, excavation services etc. John Bornsworth of Peninsula Environmental Group as our lead presenter.
- A Showcase of Graduate Research: Salish Sea Conservation & Stewardship: March 29, 1:00-3:30pm, Padilla Bay Research Center. The Northwest Straits Foundation invites you to an exciting showcase of graduate research supporting Salish Sea conservation and stewardship. **More Information** Event is free and open to the public; **Register Here**.
- Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Stakeholder Meeting: January 29th at the Fidalgo Bay Resort (1-3pm). Birdie Davenport, DNR is retiring. Meeting well attended. Provided an update on the management of the Aquatic Reserve. Shared aquatic reserve monitoring results and upcoming projects including European Green Crab monitoring. Jonn Lunsford gave a presentation on the Tommy Thompson Trestle Removal and Replacement project. Final Report will be presented to the City Council soon.

*The meeting adjourned at 11:15am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams, **March 13, 2025.***