



Skagit County Marine Resources Committee

MINUTES

The following is a summary of the **January 8, 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
MRC Members Absent: Kevin Anderson, Audrea McBride, Catey Ritchie, Carolyn Moulton
- **Others in Attendance:** Jay Lind (Former MRC member); Phil Bloch (Confluence Environmental); Jenn Johnson (SCPW/NRD); Aaron Esterholt (City of Anacortes, MRC Member Applicant); Ryan Mielke (Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Rerves Citizen Stewardship Volunteer); Leah Skare (NWSC)

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:04 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: December 11, 2025, MRC meeting minutes were approved as written.

Public Comments: Jay Lind shared an article that might be of interest to the MRC "[Unraveling multipredator impacts in salmon-bearing rivers using quantitative DNA metabarcoding](#)"

Action Items:

- **MRC Membership Updates:**
 - Kevin Anderson accepted a new position with the Port of Anacortes and can no longer participate in the MRC. He is in the process of finding a replacement.
 - At the request of the City of Anacortes, MRC members voted by consensus to make the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to appoint

Aaron Esterholt as Carolyn Moulton's replacement representing the City of Anacortes on the MRC.

- Catey will reach out to Toby Schwind to gauge his interest in potentially participating in the MRC. Toby runs a local landscape business and has volunteered to help with maintaining the rain garden at the La Conner Elementary School.
- **MRC Chair/Vice-Chair/NWSC Rep Elections:**
 - Jude will confirm with Lucas if it is considered a conflict of interest with his position at Padilla Bay to serve as the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Representative or NWSC Alternate. Lynne will continue to serve as the NWSC Rep and Pete will serve as the NWSC Alt if Jude is unable to fill either one of those roles and if no other MRC members are interested.
 - Lynne will continue to serve as MRC Chair and Pete will continue to serve as MRC Vice-chair for at least one more year unless there are other MRC members willing to fill those roles.
- **Skagit MRC Kids on the Beach Presentation - Jan 30th:**
 - Committee voted by consensus to present the Kids on the Beach project in combination with a site visit at the January 30th NWSC meeting at Padilla Bay from 10am-3pm. Jude will confirm Annie's availability and coordinate the presentation with Caitlyn.
- **MRC 5-Year Strategic Plan Brainstorming Retreat- March 12:**
 - Committee voted by consensus to schedule the in-person MRC Retreat for Thursday, March 12 in lieu of the monthly MRC meeting. The retreat will be a facilitated brainstorming session as the first step for updating the Skagit MRC's 5-Year Strategic Plan. Details TBD at the February 12th MRC meeting.

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

The last NWSC meeting was held December 12 from 10am-12pm via Teams. Meeting highlights were shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- The [2026 NWSC Meeting and Events Calendar](#) is now available on their website.
- The next **NWSC meeting** is scheduled **Friday, January 30, 2026, at Padilla Bay from 10am-3pm**. Skagit MRC members will be sent a formal invite to attend.
- The annual NWSC retreat with NWS Commissioners, Commission staff, and MRC staff will be held April 2-3. Location and other details TBD.
- Jessica presented phase two of the No-Anchor Zone social marketing campaign: www.anchorout.org.

MRC Operations Report: *Tracy*

- **NOAA Grant- OTGP-2024:** ended December 31st! All the project deliverables have been completed and submitted on time! A huge thanks to Project Leads for getting those done. Currently working on the grant Close-Out Report - Due Jan 31. Hope to wrap it up next week.
- ***New NOAA Grant-OTGP-2026:** routing through county review and signature process. Will have a start date of: January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026.
 - Projects under this grant agreement: Forage Fish Monitoring, Intertidal Monitoring, Derelict Crab Pot Removal, and Crabber Outreach.
 - Two new contracts under this grant will be drafted soon with a start date of January 1st, but won't likely get fully executed until February:
 - **Forage Fish & Intertidal Monitoring projects**-The Salish Sea School

- **Derelict Crab Pot Removal project-** Northwest Straits Foundation
- **EPA/WA Grant- SEANWS-2025- Deliverable Deadlines:**
 - 2026 MRC Annual Work Plan (Tracy): DUE 1/9/26 – **COMPLETE**
 - Volunteer Hours (field work) for county L&I (Tracy): DUE 1/9/26 - **COMPLETE**
 - Quarterly Progress Reports for all projects (Tracy): **DUE 1/15/26**
 - Kids on the Beach Spring Program Schedule Deliverable (Tracy/Pete): **DUE 1/15/26**
 - Pinto Abalone QAPP (Paul/PSRF): **DUE 1/30/26**: QAPP has been drafted and shared with the NWSC to review.
 - Forage Fish QAPP (Pete/NWSC): **DUE 1/31/26**

Project Status & Discussion

- **Salish Sea Stewards – Dale Fournier (update provided after the MRC meeting):**
 - The Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Working Group meeting was held virtually via Teams on January 8th, 2026, at 2:30pm to continue planning the 2025 - 2026 SSS Training Season and curriculum.
 - 2026 Salish Sea Stewards Training will be held Tuesdays, 1-5pm from February 10 through April 14. Classes will mostly be held at Padilla Bay, with at least one field day. Registration is open December 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026. A link to the online registration is available on the Skagit MRC website [here](#). 26 spots available. First come first served basis. For more information, go to the Skagit MRC website: <https://www.skagitmrc.org/projects/salish-sea-stewards/>.
 - As of January 8, we have 13 participants registered!
 - Speakers and topics for the curriculum have been set and confirmed.
 - Assembled a communications team of 6 SSS Advisory Committee members.
 - SSS Advisory Committee members have been working on publicity and promotion since late fall. Flyers have been posted at local libraries and businesses in Anacortes, Mount Vernon, La Conner, Burlington, Bayview-Edison, Sedro-Woolley, Guemes Island, and Bellingham. The Press Release has also been sent to newspapers and local organizations.
 - Our next SSS Working Group meeting will be held February 5, 2026, at 2:30pm. This will be another virtual meeting.
- **Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:**
 - Skagit MRC has partnered with the Salish Sea School for 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: Bowman Bay, Clayton Beach, and Similk Restore.
 - Forage fish surveys will continue at Bowman Bay for at least one more year even though the beach seining is now complete. Will need to determine if we want to keep doing it the way we have been at that location or if there are any changes we need to make.
 - This is the quiet time of year for forage fish spawning but will likely pick up again in late April or May.
 - The January 2026 Forage Fish Survey Schedule is as follows:
 - Jan 9- Bowman Bay at 2:15pm
 - Jan 23- Guemes Channel at 1:30pm
 - Jan 23- Similk Bay at 1pm
 - Jan 23- Fidalgo Bay Resort at 2pm to process samples
- **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 (2026)- Pete Haase:
 - This is a new MRC project that will be starting this year. Project used to be led by Re-Sources, but they are no longer able to continue.
 - Partnering with The Salish Sea School to do this project. Still working out the details.
 - Will use the same protocol and equipment that Re-Sources used. Working on modifying DNR's intertidal monitoring QAPP to meet Ecology's requirements.
 - Two intertidal monitoring events are being planned at two different locations. The first event is anticipated to take place in May 2026 in Fidalgo Bay. The second monitoring event is anticipated to take place in July. Monitoring will likely involve Anacortes High School's Environmental Science program and will depend on tides.
 - Pete attended a meeting with Whatcom MRC and Ecology to discuss if and what intertidal monitoring data might be useful in the event of an oil spill or another disaster. Ecology confirmed that intertidal monitoring data would be useful for understanding pre-spill baseline conditions.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Not much going on this time of year other than routine culturing in the lab, spawning activities, and raising juvenile abalone for outplants in the next few months and planning for the field season.
 - Paul worked with Puget Sound Restoration Fund on drafting the abalone QAPP which has been submitted to Ecology for review.
- 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 April or May. Will probably also work with Puget Sound Restoration Fund again to put out more shell strings again in Fidalgo Bay to monitor recruitment as part of a larger monitoring effort across Puget Sound.
 - 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.
- La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden – Tracy Alker/Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Grant funding for this project just ended December 31st. Funding was used to purchase 25 additional native plants, plant ID tags, supplies for a temporary irrigation kit, and the interpretive sign base and frame.
 - Halee (county intern), Lynne (MRC Project Lead), and Tracy (MRC staff) installed the plants in December.
 - Lynne also installed most of the plant ID tags which look great! We will need to double-check in the spring when the plants start growing again to make sure we got the signs in the right place.
 - The Rain Garden Irrigation Kit has been purchased and assembled into a large tote with wheels and is stored at the Skagit County office. The irrigation system

- will be installed in June after school is out and removed in August / September before school returns in session.
- The Final Report deliverable has been completed.
 - A La Conner School Alumni with a landscaping business and kids about to start school recently reached out about volunteering to help with the school rain garden maintenance. He could be a great candidate for MRC membership. Catey knows him and will reach out to gauge his interest.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
 - No updates. Scheduled a meeting in February to discuss options for possibly scaling back the event so it's less of a time commitment rather than eliminating it completely.
 - Bowman Bay Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC funding for this project ended December 31, 2025.
 - The LAST beach seining event was rescheduled for Friday, January 9 – the December event was cancelled due to severe weather and flooding. NWSF hosted a Thank You luncheon for volunteers of both beach seining and forage fish monitoring at Bowman Bay for the last several years in support of the Shoreline Restoration work completed in 2015. Skagit MRC has provided a “photage” thank you email to same list of volunteers.
 - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC funding for this project ended December 31, 2025. The Final Report has been completed.
 - The Parks Department and Northwest Straits Foundation are planning on some additional restoration work at Bowman Bay including removing the fishing pier, boat launch and riprap and restoring shoreline vegetation. The MRC and Salish Sea Stewards volunteers plan to stay involved and support the restoration work as those projects move forward.
 - 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 now complete. All of the Skagit bull kelp surveys were completed from June – September and uploaded into Kobotoolbox. Recent and upcoming events:
 - Lynne attended the Bull Kelp resilience and loss in the Salish Sea: results of an HSIL funded projects – November 18. Well attended (over 300 people?) and provided results of a wide variety of ongoing research projects – there is a ton of research to determine the factors driving bull kelp abundance and distribution. Interesting research showing a kelp bed around Narrows Bridge that is healthier than those in the Straits of Juan de Fuca for example!
 - HSIL Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy – public comment period Jan 5 – Feb 3
 - The Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy includes strategies for implementing research and monitoring to increase understanding of factors driving changes in abundance and distribution; improving implementation of regulatory and programmatic protections; increasing marine vegetation protected areas; supporting restoration efforts; and improving community connections to marine vegetation through sustainable harvest, responsible outdoor recreation and stewardship.

- DNR’s Historical Kelp in North Puget Sound Project Kick off – January 15 @ 1pm. This project is for leveraging historical imagery to assess floating kelp canopy changes over 30 years in northeastern Puget Sound. The kickoff includes a review of the DNR 2022 kelp canopy classification map.
- Bull Kelp Surveys presentation scheduled at the SSS Training Program on March 10.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Project concluded December 31, 2025.
 - Confluence completed the [High Priority Areas Technical Report](#) presented at January 8 MRC meeting.
 - Plans are in the works to schedule a NEAP tool demonstration with the County GIS and Planning Departments and present to the County Commissioners.
- Derelict Crab Pot Removal (2026) – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Background:** A Derelict Crab Pot Removal project has been funded by Skagit MRC for 2026 to target derelict gear removals in Skagit Bay in collaboration with the Swinomish Tribe, Island MRC and NWSF. NWSF has secured funding from WDFW and The Builders Initiative Fund to support shellfish pot removal, including development of remotely operated vehicles, location-based phone app for reporting lost fishing nets, and a new public access derelict fishing gear database. Skagit MRC has funding for (6) side scan sonar surveys which will be a sole source contract with NWSF to perform the surveys in coordination with removals. Swinomish Tribe has provided a map indicating high priority derelict gear locations. Island MRC will be funding additional side scan sonar surveys and crabber outreach efforts.
 - **Updates:** The Skagit MRC and Northwest Straits Foundation are collaborating on the Statement of Work and a contract agreement for this project. NWSF cannot start any field work until a contract is in place. NWSF is working with WDFW to get those contracts in place as well.
- Derelict Crab Pot Outreach (2026) – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Darla is working on the 2026 crabber outreach plan as part of the Derelict Crab Pot Removal and Prevention project. The original plan was to hold two public Community Workshops in Anacortes in late May/early June and again in mid-August. But after interviewing several crabbers, it was determined that attendance would likely be too low for it to be beneficial. Instead, the outreach effort will likely be scaled back to focus on providing educational materials to crabbers at local sporting good stores, licensing venues, and social media posts. Darla requested additional ideas for crabber outreach from MRC members.

Shoreline Needs Assessment-High Priority Areas Report: Phil Bloch, Confluence

- [High Priority Project Areas Report \(link on the MRC website\)](#)
- **Goal:** identify priority shoreline and nearshore locations that are good candidates for restoration actions
- **Approach:** Compiled existing data and built an interactive web-based geospatial tool with flexible priority rating system to allow for incorporating new information as needed. Two major indices used to score parcels: Restoration Potential and Habitat Ecological Function.
- **5 High Tier Priority Project Areas** (locations and potential actions are only conceptual):
 1. [Crandall Spit and March Point](#)

Potential project opportunities: *invasive species removal, native riparian plantings, strategic shoreline structure and debris removal, interpretive signage- bird & eelgrass protection, undersized culvert replacement, engagement with oil spill planning efforts, and coordination with FBAR and conservation landowners*

2. Samish Island and Outer Samish Bay

Potential project opportunities: *shoreline landowner outreach/education, eelgrass protection (education/moorage alternatives), sea level rise impacts/incentives to address, install public boat access to reduce multiple self-made access areas and moorage, Freestad Lake- estuary restoration*

3. Gibraltar/Campbell Creek Mouth

Potential project opportunities: *culvert replacement, sedimentation/nutrient input reduction, outfall water quality - nutrients monitoring (eelgrass impacts?), shoreline restoration/bulkhead removal/riparian enhancement, piling removal, and Shore Friendly outreach to property owners*

4. Kiket Bay to Snee Oosh Point

Potential project opportunities: *partner with Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, undersized culvert replacement, estuarine wetland restoration, shoreline restoration/artificial structure removal/native riparian plantings, map kelp resources*

5. Cranberry Lake Creek Mouth Vicinity

Potential project opportunities: *La Merced shoreline restoration/enhancement, Cranberry Lake Creek shoreline restoration, remove/reduce fish passage barriers.*

- Aaron- Stabbert Maritime plans to remove the La Merced Historic Vessel and make improvements. There could be a good opportunity for MRC to work with them. Also noted the public is not currently in support of removing the vessel.
- Pete- that location has known surf smelt spawning which should be taken into account for any shoreline work done at that site.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- **Bowman Bay Beach Seining & Volunteer Appreciation Event- Jan 9**: at 11am. This will be the last seining event at Bowman Bay after 10 years of monitoring. A volunteer appreciation celebration lunch hosted by the Northwest Straits Foundation will be held at noon (celebration lunch is by invitation only).
- **Storming the Sound Conference -Jan 23**: at Skagit Valley College 8:30am to 4:30pm. Registration is now open until January 19th. Registration fee is \$20. Register online [here](#).
- **Skagit County to Create Climate Impact Advisory Committee** (CIAC) consisting of 15 voting members, all of which must be full-time Skagit County residents. More information on the CIAC proposal can be found on the Commissioner's [website](#).
- **Puget Sound Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy Public Comment Period**: January 5 through February 3, 2026. See the Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead [blog post](#) for more information and links to the documents. MRCs helped inform the development of the Implementation Strategy which helped to shape the

scope, content, and build out local alignment for each of the following strategies:
research and monitoring; regulatory; protected areas: and community connections

- **2026 Crab Molt Search**: WSU Ext will be hosting a Crab Molt Search Train the Trainer event in April to train others to host their own training event for the public, staff, or volunteers. Contact Cheryl Lovato Niles if interested: cniles@wsu.edu

The meeting adjourned at 11:13am. The next MRC meeting will be held via Teams, February 12, 2026