



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **January 9, 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, Catey Ritchie, Jude Apple, Kevin Anderson,
  - **MRC Members Absent:** Paul Dinnel, Elizabeth Drozda, Darla Gay Smith, Carolyn Moulton
- **Others in Attendance:** Melissa Ciesielski (Swinomish); Sasha Horst (NWSC); Dana Oster (NWSC); Emma Kortuem (Samish); Caitlyn Blair (NWSC)

**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:** December 12, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**Public Comments:** NA

## Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Report Highlights via Email: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson

Last NWSC meeting occurred **December 6, 2024**, 10am-12pm, held via Zoom. Highlights shared with MRC at last MRC meeting.

- New gubernatorial appointees: Elsa Schwartz and Emily Grason (replacing Nan McKay and Julia Parrish)
- San Juan MRC State of the Marine Stewardship Area Plan – completed and available [here](#).
- Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council Meeting- Dec 11- highlighted a forum on shoreline armoring.
- The Salish Sea Institute: Climate Change in the Salish Sea Bioregion Webinar- December 11, 2024, 4pm-5pm. Recording on the [Salish Sea Institute website](#).
- 2024 NWS Conference: Presentations, tools, and other materials from the conference are posted on the [NWSC website](#).
- 2025 NWS Conference- Nov 7 & 8 at Maple Hall in La Conner.
- Next NWSC meeting: January 31, 10am-3pm. Held in person at the Coupeville Library- 788 Alexander St.

## 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 is January 31. Limited to the first 26 applicants. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 11 applicants are registered.
  - The 2025 SSS Training Flyer and Press Release have been finalized and distributed.
  - The 2025 SSS Training flyer with registration & program information is available on the SMRC website along with an online registration form.
  - The last SSS AC meeting was held virtually December 19. We now have 10 AC members, including 4 new members. The next meeting will be held January 16.
  - The SSS AC looks forward to a successful & full Stewards Training Class & thanks Padilla Bay NERR for their vital role in the process.

- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
  - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue.
  - January 2025 forage fish survey schedule:
    - Jan 17- Bowman Bay at 1pm
    - Jan 20- Fidalgo Bay East at 2:30pm
    - Jan 20- Fidalgo Bay West at 2:30pm
    - Jan 23- Guemes Channel at 1:30pm
    - Jan 23- Similk Bay at 1:30pm
  - Forage Fish Monitoring proposal for allocating OTGP-2024 MRC grant funding to pay for forage fish survey coordination and management in 2025 in partnership with the Salish Sea School has been approved by the NWSC staff. Working on the grant amendment and a QAPP Addendum to include Skagit Sites.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
  - The 2024 Kids on the Beach Final Report has been completed. Three schools and over 200 kids participated in the program. 29 trained volunteers (mostly Salish Sea Stewards) assisted with field activities (around \$5k in-kind contributed).
  - 2025 KOTB program is at full capacity with five schools and 325 students signed up. Spring program: Concrete High School will participate with 45 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders from two classes. Sedro Woolley Evergreen Middle School is also set to participate with 3 classes of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 86 students and Allen Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> graders (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.
  - Bus funding and school bus driver shortages is a challenge. School Buses cost around \$300-\$400/day. Something for the MRC to consider for future project budget planning.
- La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden – Elizabeth Drozda via email update:
  - The La Conner School Rain Garden is looking great!
  - Verbiage for the interpretive signage has been created.
  - Westar, a sign company in La Conner is donating the sign. They plan to design and fabricate the sign in the next couple of months. The sign will likely be installed by the county later this year.
  - Smaller plant identification labels will also be created to identify native plants and culturally significant plants with consultation from the Swinomish.
  - The 2024 Final Report has been completed.
- 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 will distribute Save the Date cards at the Storming the Sound Conference.
  - Meeting next week with Anna Thompson, the Education and Outreach Specialist for the Public Works Natural Resources Division to divide and conquer tasks and determine next steps.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel via email update:
  - Paul gave a brief (virtual) presentation on the history of abalone restoration in Skagit County waters to the Abalone Restoration Partners group on December 17th.
  - Paul is reviewing WDFW's new "Periodic Status Review for Pint Abalone" draft and will provide comments as needed.
  - Hatchery work continues as usual to produce the next batch of juvenile abalone for out planting this winter/spring
- Olympia Oyster Restoration– Paul Dinneel via email update:
  - Paul worked with Lynne on the Olympia Oyster Restoration StoryMap.
  - The next native oyster recruitment bag sampling will take place in May 2025.
  - The next bay-wide population survey is slated for 2028.

Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy

*Cynthia Nielsen, the MRC Project Lead for the Fidalgo Bay Trestle project decided to resign from the MRC now that the project is complete. Committee members expressed gratitude for Cynthia and her strong leadership in taking on the trestle project. She did an excellent job, and we couldn't have gotten it done without her!*

- Phase 1 of this project is now complete and our grant funding and contract with the City of Anacortes ended December 31, 2025.
- Deliverables completed:
  - Draft Education & Outreach Plan
  - Hosted an outreach booth at Fidalgo Bay Day
  - Hosted meetings with the MRC and other stakeholders – including presenting project information to Rep Rick Larsen during visit to learn about collaborative work of the MRC and NWSI
  - Hosted two community meetings at the Anacortes Library
  - Provided updates to the City Council
  - Provided regular updates during monthly Parks and Rec meetings that were open to the public
  - Created a [Project Website](#). A QR code linked to the website was created for outreach materials, social media, and interpretive signage
  - Created a project page on the Skagit MRC website. It includes links to the City's Project Website/StoryMap, video, interpretive signage, and other project partners/stakeholders websites
  - Installed 2 out of 3 interpretive signs along the Tommy Thompson Trail near the trestle. The project's first interpretive sign provides some history of the trestle, a brief overview of the project, and partners involved. The second sign is focused on the environmental impacts of the trestle and why it needs to be replaced. The third sign is currently under production and will include potential trail replacement design.
  - Two short videos: The [first video](#) has been completed and posted online. Second video is underway.
  - The preliminary conceptual design elements have been completed including: Geotech report and an engineered sketch of a portion of the trail replacement design.
    - The City plans to present the conceptual design to the City Council later this month.
  - The Final Report has been completed and submitted.
- 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).*
  - The June – September Kelp Season 2024 has wrapped up.
  - Kelp monitoring will start up again in June.
  - Jeff Whitty, NWSC Staff, will be hosting an MRC Kelp Kayak Monitoring 2024 Data Review Meeting on January 30<sup>th</sup> at 2pm via Zoom.
  - Skagit Kelp Kayak Team Leads (Lynne Wenberg-Davidson and Steve Olson) 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 Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Caught 7 fish: surf smelt, staghorn sculpin, three spine stickleback. 4 volunteers contributed 7 volunteer hours.
  - **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:  
*Confluence Environmental has been contracted to develop a web-based interactive assessment tool for the Skagit MRC to identify high priority shoreline focus areas and future restoration projects. Funding ends 12/31/24.*
  - The Shoreline Needs Assessment project with Confluence Environmental completed on December 31, 2024.
  - Confluence Deliverables completed and provided to MRC:
    - Geospatial Database is complete and developed inside the DOE Portal for displaying Skagit Shoreline-specific shoreline datasets, existing projects and visual prioritization of high value areas to consider for restoration or protection.
    - Skagit Nearshore Inventory, a comprehensive list of existing geospatial datasets from authoritative sources was completed, to include 165 total datasets of which 25 were utilized in the prioritization assessment.
    - Analytical Prioritization Framework is complete and provides the foundation for identifying relative values of ecological function and restoration potential, including target high priority focus areas.
    - Proposed High Priority Shoreline Restoration Projects is complete and includes 5 potential high priority restoration and protection projects for Skagit MRC or others to consider in the future. Summary recommendations are (details in the report):
      - Crandall Spit and March Point: 1) riparian planting around shore side of March Point Road; 2) Engagement with oil spill planning efforts; 3) Support strategic reduction of nearshore structures; 4) Green crab monitoring; 5) Coordination with FBAR and Conservation Landowners to improve conservation.
      - Samish Island and Outer Samish Bay: 1) Coordination and education of shoreline landowners regarding importance of nearshore habitats (shore friendly development); 2) Evaluate Sea level rise scenarios and impacts to habitats and structures; 3) Coordinate with landowners of undeveloped shoreline for conservation; 4) Potential consolidation or removal of multiple private boat ramps
      - Gibraltar/Campbell Creek Mouth: 1) Evaluate fish passage status of Deception Road Culvert; 2) Evaluate non-natal habitat use of Campbell Creek by juvenile salmon; 3) Address potential water quality issues; 4 Coordinate and education shoreline landowners regarding importance of nearshore habitats (shore friendly development).
      - Kiket Bay to Snee Oosh Point: 1) Partnership with Swinomish to identify restoration opportunities (Tombolo beach, clam gardening); 2) Support restoration and protection of Three Tree Point vicinity; 3) Support restoration and protection near Snee Oosh Point
      - Cranberry Lake Creek Mouth Vicinity: 1) Coordinate with COA and WSDOT to evaluate potential culvert or stream channel restoration; 2-3) Map / monitor eelgrass habitat and nearshore fish movement; 4) Engage La Merced Maritime to identify restoration opportunities
    - Interactive, web-based geospatial shoreline assessment tool The NEAP (Nearshore Assessment and Priorities) Tool was developed and completed inside the DOE Portal.
    - Two Story Maps have been completed in the DOE Portal:
      - Native Oyster Restoration
      - Skagit's NEAP Tool
    - Additional Confluence deliverable: Shoreline Needs Assessment Technical Report detailing: objectives, approach, input data, prioritization methods and processes, framework results, proposed high priority projects, and references; also Appendices containing the Prioritization Criteria and Data Dictionary
  - **Next steps:**
    - Coordination and development of the Assessment Tool will go into the DOE Portal to interface with NWSC's SoundIQ by Suzanne. We will have links to apply to our MRC website.

- Tracy and Lynne have DOE SAW Accounts and access to the NEAP Tool and story maps are learning how best to provide appropriate functionality based on user type (ie, MRC, Environmental Groups for project development vs. Public for education and awareness).
- Developing communication plan for public roll-out and use – current plan is to use the NEAP Tool Story Map.
- For 2025: Plan to submit a follow-on proposal for unused funds to Skagit MRC in January for consideration (\$5-10K, depending on availability) to improve the tool. As a beta project, there are several updates that would be invaluable for improved functionality and communication to user communities.
- **Big thank you and acknowledgement to the Advisory Team:**
  - Suzanne Shull, NWSC GIS
  - Paul Dinnel
  - Pete Haase
  - Lisa Kaufman, NWSF
  - Andrea McBride, SWC
  - Rick Haley
  - Denby Lloyd

#### **2024 OTGP Grant Amendment: *Tracy***

- The MRC discussed and approved the following project proposals by consensus for the remaining \$31,500 funds under year 2 (Jan 1 – Dec 31, 2025) of the OTGP-2024 grant agreement amendment:
  - Forage Fish Monitoring (\$9,700): Pete Haase, MRC Project Lead. A Sub-Award Agreement with The Salish Sea School will be needed once the grant amendment gets signed.
  - NEAP Tool Improvements (\$10,000): Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, MRC Project Lead. As a beta project, there are several updates that would be invaluable for improved functionality and communication to user communities. A contract amendment with Confluence will be needed once the grant amendment gets signed.
  - Project Administration and Management (\$11,800): The remaining \$11,800 balance will be allocated to Project Administration and Management to cover staff time for the administration of additional projects, contracts, and deliverables.

#### **2025-2027 Project Wish List: *Tracy /All***

- The NWSC is requesting a draft list of projects that the MRC anticipates proposing for the next two-year cycle - Due by February 13.
- This is just a draft list that doesn't require a detailed description or budget. This list also does not obligate the MRC to submit them as a project proposal once the RFP is issued in March.
- The RFP will include two grant funding sources with different funding timelines:
  - EPA/PSP and Washington State (estimated \$124k/yr): Year 1= October 1, 2025 – September 31, 2026. Year 2= October 1, 2026 – September 31, 2027
  - NOAA (estimated \$67,500/yr): Year 1= January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026. Year 2= January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2027
- The following project list is currently being considered by the MRC. It will be reviewed, modified if needed, and approved by consensus at the February 13 MRC meeting:
  - Ongoing projects to potentially continue with the new funding 2025-2027
    - Fidalgo Bay Day (***Needs Skagit MRC Project Lead***)
    - Kids on the Beach (***Needs Skagit MRC Project Lead***)
    - Pinto Abalone Restoration (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Paul Dinnel*)
    - Salish Sea Stewards (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Darla Gay Smith*)
    - Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
    - Forage Fish Monitoring (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Pete Haase*)
    - School Rain Gardens (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Elizabeth Drozda*)

- Potential new projects for new funding 2025-2027
  - European Green Crab Outreach (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
  - Collaborative Derelict Crab Pot Survey/Removal in Skagit Bay with Island and Jefferson MRCs. (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)
  - Gibraltar/Campbell Lake Creek Mouth -Confluence project recommendation (*Skagit MRC Project Lead, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*)

#### **MRC Operations Report: Tracy**

- MRC Vice-Chair appointment- Pete volunteered to take Lynne's place as the new MRC Vice Chair if nobody else is interested. The Committee decided to postpone the vote until the February MRC meeting when more MRC members can attend.
- MRC Executive Committee- Will consist of MRC Staff, MRC Chair, and MRC Vice-Chair and others as needed. The overall goal is to act as a small "steering team" to improve and organize MRC member activities and aid committee decision-making to reduce MRC operations and member 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
  - Engagement Plan/Strategy with Elected Officials
  - Adopt and Implement Land Acknowledgement - NW Straits Commission's Land Acknowledgement statement was developed and approved in collaboration with multiple tribal partners within the NW Straits region. However, it does not currently list the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe and Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe in Skagit County because they have yet to approve of the NWSC's Land Acknowledgement statement. The Commission plans to try reaching out again.
    - Skagit MRC members agreed it is important not to hold off any longer on adopting a Land Acknowledgement statement. The Committee considered adopting the NWSC's Land Acknowledgement statement and leave off the list of specific tribal partners so that its more generic and doesn't exclude any tribes. However, after a lot of discussion, the Committee decided it would be best to modify the NWSC's Land Acknowledgement to be more specific and authentic to Skagit by only listing Skagit MRC's tribal partners, the Samish Indian Nation and the Swinomish Indian Community. The Land Acknowledgement statement can always be modified again later.
    - Emma Kortuem (Samish Indian Nation tribal member) offered to review Skagit MRC's Land Acknowledgement statement and provide feedback prior to the next MRC meeting.
- 2025 MRC Annual Work Plan- The Work Plan has been drafted but will need to be modified to include project planning info and timeframe. The Plan will be shared with the MRC for review and approval, hopefully in February.

#### **Northwest Straits Initiative Definition and Defining Partnerships: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson**

- NWSI Retreat: One theme that emerged from the retreat was confusion about the NWS Initiative structure. Historical documents, such as the NWSI founding legislation and reauthorization bills, were reviewed to understand what the NWSI structure was intended to be. It distinguishes the NWS Commission and MRCs as the organizational structure of the NWS Initiative.
- Proposed Definition: The Northwest Straits Initiative is a community-led collaboration dedicated to protecting and restoring the marine environment of northwest Washington. It is composed of the NW Straits Commission and seven locally based Marine Resources Committees. Together they identify and address priority NW Straits marine conservation issues.
- Partnerships: Although the NWSI structure/proposed definition does not reference the NWS Foundation, it does not impact the ability of the NWS Foundation and MRCs to continue existing project partnerships.

- Next Steps: The NWS Commission will be discussing and potentially voting on the proposed definition at its January 31 meeting in Coupeville. More conversations are needed to fully understand how communications and branding would need to change to accommodate the definition.

#### Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- No announcements.

*The meeting adjourned at 11:18am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams, **February 13, 2025**.*