



Meeting: Northwest Straits Commission

Date: February 23, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM- 3:00 PM

Location: Whatcom County Civic Building, 322 N Commercial St. Bellingham WA, 98225

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. These Indigenous Nations include the Jamestown S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Nooksack, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Samish, Stillaguamish, Swinomish, and Tulalip Tribes.

Today we are on the ancestral and current homelands of the Lummi and Nooksack Tribes.

10:00 -10:15 AM	Welcome and introductions Tribal acknowledgement January minutes approval	Tim Ellis, Chair
10:15 – 10:45 AM	Measuring Demand for Freshwater Recreation in the North Puget Sound Region: A Revealed Preference Approach	Braeden Van Deynze, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
10:45 – 11:30 AM	Business Items <ul style="list-style-type: none">• U.S. v WA Boldt Decision event• Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee• DEI Update• Impact Report• 2024 Conference Update	Lucas Hart Allie Simpson Allie Simpson Jessica Owens Caitlyn Blair
11:30 – 12:00 PM	Committee Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science Advisory Committee• Executive Committee• External Relations	Dana Oster Alan Clark Nan McKay



12:00 – 12:10 PM	Remarks from Whatcom County Council Member	Kaylee Galloway, District 1
12:10 – 12:15 PM	Public Comment	
12:15 – 1:00 PM	Working Lunch	
1:00 – 1:15 PM	Harmful Algal Bloom Project Presentation	Rick Beauregard
1:15 – 1:45 PM	MRC Reports	MRC Representatives
1:45 – 2:00 PM	Northwest Straits Foundation Presentation	Don Hunger and Lisa Kaufman
2:00 – 2:10 PM	Puget Sound Partnership	Laura Blackmore
2:10 – 2: 20 PM	Meeting highlights and action items	All
2:20 – 2:30 PM	Round table	All
2:30 PM	Adjourn	

Next meeting: Online over Zoom, March 29, 2024, from 10 AM – 12 PM



Minutes

January 26, 2024 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam – Vice Chair), Tim Ellis (Snohomish – Chair), Sarah Fiskien (Jefferson – Alternate), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Mike MacKay (Whatcom), Ken Collins (Island), Ginny Broadhurst, Karin Roemers-Klevin (San Juan), Ahren Stroming (Puget Sound Partnership – Alternate), Cecilia Gobin

Commission Staff: Dana Oster, Jeff Whitty, Caitlyn Blair, Sasha Horst, Lucas Hart, Allie Simpson, Jessica Owens

Others in Attendance: Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation)

Absent: Julia Parrish, Laura Blackmore

Welcome and Introductions:

Tim Ellis welcomed the group with introductions and the tribal acknowledgement.

The December NW Straits Commission minutes were approved by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Alan shared that the Committee recommended moving MRC Report sharing at NW Straits Commission meetings to earlier in the meeting, so MRC's have more opportunity to share updates with attendees. The Executive Committee recommended holding a virtual NW Straits Commission meeting in March due to the retreat that will be scheduled for later in 2024. The NW Straits Commission approved holding a meeting on March 29 by consensus.

Science Advisory Committee: The Committee sent invitations to add new members. Dr. Kathryn Sobocinski has been trained and onboarded. The Committee has their first meeting of 2024 next week, where they will choose the Committee representative for the NW Straits Initiative conference planning committee.

External Relations Committee: Lucas shared that the Committee is working on federal reauthorization and is currently awaiting updates on the federal reauthorization bill.

Business Items

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

NW Straits Initiative Conference Planning Committee: Caitlyn is looking to establish the 2024 planning committee for the NW Straits Initiative conference. If you are interested in being on the conference planning committee, please contact Caitlyn Blair (blair@nwstraits.org).



Minutes

Kelp Kayak Monitoring Update: Jeff hosted a virtual gathering to showcase the 2023 achievements for MRC volunteers and partner presenters, including the monitoring of 22 kelp beds by 54 participants covering 258 miles in the NW Straits region. Jeff also reviewed the data and monitored trends through the years. [Learn more about kelp kayak monitoring.](#)

Green Crab Update: The NW Straits Initiative is reviewing our long-term role in green crab trapping and monitoring. The funding for green crab monitoring from the Department of Fish and Wildlife will end in 2025. The NW Straits Commission recommends establishing an ad hoc committee for interested Commission members to discuss and decide on the Commission's role beyond that time. The NW Straits Commission approved the recommendation, by consensus, to establish an ad hoc committee. If you are a NW Straits Commission representative or alternate and are interested in being part of the ad hoc committee, please contact Lucas (hart@nwstraits.org).

2023 Impact Report update and timeline: Jessica Owens is working on the 2023 Impact Report. There will be a "soft launch" review session during February 12-16. If there are NW Straits Commission members that are interested in reviewing or giving final edits, please contact Jessica (owens@nwstraits.org).

MRC Reports

Clallam – Alan Clark

- Clallam County MRC continued forage fish sampling on three beaches.
- The MRC interviewed for a part time MRC Administrative Assistant.
- The MRC scheduled a joint meeting with Jefferson County MRC in March.
- The MRC established an advisory subcommittee to continue to work on language for Clallam MRC to advise the Board of County Commissioners.

Island – Ken Collins

- Island County MRC was able to present their white paper to County Commissioners, and it was well received. In their letter, they included information and concerns about shoreline armoring.

Jefferson – Sarah Fiskien

- The MRC voted on its 2024 Executive Committee at their December monthly meeting. The MRC is appointing Gordon King as Chair, Betsy Carlson as Vice Chair, Jeff Taylor as the NWSC representative, and Sarah Fiskien as the NWSC alternate.

San Juan – Karin Roemers-Kleven

- The local Sea Scout Troop was able to salvage emergency equipment and personal floatation devices from the Islander, an abandoned party barge the derelict vessel team



Minutes

has been working with to get removed from county waters. It currently is sitting on land in Anacortes and waiting to be demolished.

- The Plastic Free Salish Sea initiative has concluded a reporting contest for beach and road stewards. Heidi Laursen of Orcas Island recorded over 10 hours of removing microplastics and debris from local beaches and has won \$100 gift certificate to Friday Harbor House. We hope this will inspire more stewards to report their efforts and contribute to growing data of plastic pollution in the Salish Sea.

Skagit – Diane Hennebert

- **Olympia Oyster Restoration in Fidalgo Bay Report (Year 21):** The report was prepared by Paul Dinnel with results from the 2023 bay-wide native oyster population monitoring effort. The oyster population in Fidalgo Bay has increased from 3 million to over 5.5 million in just 5 years and has expanded their range beyond the original restoration areas. Recent article in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#).
- **Salish Sea Stewards Training:** There are 24 participants registered. Registration closes January 31st. Classes start Tuesday, February 6, 1-5pm at Padilla Bay. Training curriculum is close to being finalized and will be posted on the Skagit MRC website. Recent article in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#).
- **Kayak-Based Kelp Surveys:** Lynne Wenberg-Davidson (Skagit MRC member), and Jeff Whitty (NWSC) were recently interviewed by the Skagit Valley Herald for an article on kelp.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- In partnership with the WSU Beach Watchers, the Starlight Beach Walk is scheduled for the evening of February 6th from 7pm – 8:30pm at Olympic Beach.
- The strategic planning subcommittee held a kick-off meeting on January 9. The group is currently finalizing interview questions to be used in individual interviews with MRC members to coalesce ideas of where the MRC should be headed.
- The County Commission approved three new members be added to the MRC.

Whatcom – Mike MacKay

- The MRC has received approval from Lummi Natural Resources to conduct 3 days of sampling/seining with 4th grade students. To accommodate as many students as possible at the seine events, the MRC plans an activity at the park with half the students while the others are participating in the seine, then the groups swap. Volunteer help is needed.
- Whatcom County is commencing its 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, and Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff are soliciting recommendations from the Marine Resources Committee on what amendments should be considered in the Marine Resources Lands section of Chapter 8, Resource Lands, and Chapter 10, Environment.



Minutes

Partner Updates

NW Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin shared that she is waiting for the final review of a letter to the Dept of Interior requesting her appointment to the NW Straits Commission as the tribal representative. Cecilia also shared that the NW Indian Fisheries Commission is working on nearshore habitat protections and is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to improve the process for approving shoreline armoring permits.

NW Straits Foundation: Don Hunger shared updates for the NW Straits Foundation. Doug McCutcheon has been appointed as a new board member. If MRC members are interested in participating as a board member on the NW Straits Foundation, please contact Don (don@nwstraitsfoundation.org). The NW Straits Foundation also recently hired a communications staff member, Kayla Mrozik.

Puget Sound Partnership: Ahren Stroming shared that the Puget Sound Partnership's strategic funding team is almost fully staffed. The Partnership has also launched their [Puget Sound Rapid Recovery Acceleration Funding Tool](#).

Ahren also shared that Puget Sound Day on the Hill is scheduled for May 13th through May 17th. NW Straits Commission members are invited to attend. Federal Reauthorization of the NW Straits Initiative is one of three key priorities for the Day on the Hill.

The Partnership also wanted to ensure that the Commission and MRCs are aware of their [Nearshore Conservation Credit Program](#). If MRCs have nearshore conservation projects in need of funding, they are encouraged to submit proposals.

Public Comment

No public comment.



Executive Committee Meeting
February 20, 2024 • 11:00am-12:00pm (Zoom)
Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Committee Members: Alan Clark, Tim Ellis, Jude Apple (ex officio)

NWSC Staff: Caitlyn Blair, Sasha Horst, Lucas Hart

Absent: Nan McKay, Julia Parrish

Second Tribal Seat: In September 2023, the Executive Committee reported to the NWS Commission that they were discussing adding a second tribal seat. In November, the Executive Committee discussed the topic further at their monthly meeting and asked who a second seat would represent. Since the November meeting, Cecilia recommended that the second seat represent a coalition of tribes, like the existing tribal seat. The NW Straits Commission could give a presentation to the NW Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) notifying them that we aim to recruit a second tribal seat. The NW Indian Fisheries Commission could then provide suggestions and input on possible nominees. The Committee recommends that a second tribal seat be approved by the NW Straits Commission.

Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee: In January, the NW Straits Commission approved forming an ad-hoc committee to discuss and decide how the NW Straits Commission should engage in the Green Crab issue post June-2025. Laura Blackmore recently requested that Todd Hass (Special Assistant to the Puget Sound Partnership Director) be appointed to the Green Crab Ad Hoc Committee as an alternate for Laura. Todd is engaged in the green crab issue statewide and would bring a wealth of knowledge. Governor's appointees to the Commission are allowed to request that an alternate represent them, with Commission approval. The Executive Committee recommends that Todd Hass be approved to represent Laura on the Green Crab Ad Hoc Committee.

Conservation credits and mitigation funds: Conservation credits and mitigation funds are meant to offset the impacts of development that has negative consequences to the environment. Recently, San Juan Marine Resources Committee benefitted from the Puget Sound Partnership Nearshore Conservation Credit Program. The funding from this program supported creosote piling removal at Jackson beach. The NW Straits Commission does not have a policy on use of mitigation funds, which can sometimes be viewed negatively for their connection to negative environmental impacts. The Committee did not recommend a policy that would prevent the use of mitigation funding and instead decided to share this as a discussion topic with the NW Straits Commission.

2024 NW Straits Initiative Conference: Caitlyn shared that after an exhaustive search the 2024 NW Straits Initiative conference will be held at the Delta Hotel in Snohomish County.



Commission staff highlights - [February 2024]

MRC Support

2023 CDS MRC Grants: Four MRCs have extended the end date and associated due dates for these awards now that the NOAA FY22 no-cost extension has been executed. Two MRCs have completed their scope of work, and those grants are now closed.

2023-25 MRC Grants: The first quarterly reporting for these awards was completed in January. Year one state funding included in these awards will expire in June.

2023-25 CDS MRC Grants: These awards began in January and work is now underway. These are two-year awards that will end December 31, 2025.

Regional Projects

Kelp Plan: NWSC staff began working on the sequencing of the 65 actions within the Kelp Plan, to provide guidance to partners for the implementation of the Kelp Plan and to aid in the tracking of the Kelp Plan.

Kelp Monitoring: NWSC staff continue to work with WA DNR to incorporate 2022 MRC kayak monitoring data into the Washington State Floating Kelp Indicator. Additionally, staff are working to incorporate 2023 MRC kayak monitoring data into SoundIQ.

Green Crab: NWSC staff met with WDFW and Padilla Bay NERR staff to discuss our current agreement, planning options for next biennium, and upcoming field season coordination. NWSC staff attended WDFW's European Green Crab Manager's Symposium. Staff will also be establishing a Green Crab ad-hoc committee consisting of Commission members to help guide our role within green crab management efforts for the future.

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones: Staff continue to work with the social marketing contractor to review draft reports on the target audience and draft campaign strategies.

Derelict Vessels: Staff held three planning meetings to prepare for vessel turn in events to coordinate logistics with DNR and local partners. Meetings included a recycling event with the Makah Tribe, a turn in event with the Port of Skagit, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and Skagit MRC, and an event in April with Port of Friday Harbor, San Juan County and MRC.

Operations



Commission staff highlights - [February 2024]

Staff: The Kelp Program Manager position has been filled. Jeff Whitty has accepted the position and started in the role as of February 16.

Budget: The NOAA fiscal year 2022 funding has been extended to December 31, 2024. NOAA fiscal year 2023 funding is now active as well. Funding agreements with three of the kelp partners in the state kelp proviso funding are active, two remain to be executed as information is pending from the recipients.

Meetings Attended

Allie attended: U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 2/6-2/7; A Path Toward Equity DEI Training 2/14; Green Crab Work Plan meeting with WDFW & Padilla Bay NERR 2/14; DEI Workplan meeting 2/15; Green Crab Manager's Symposium 2/21-2/22; NWS Commission Meeting 2/23; Salish Sea Stewards Presentation 2/27

Dana attended: Science Advisory Committee (1/29); A Path Toward Equity DEI Training 2/13; Vessel turn in planning meetings with Makah Tribe (2/13), Port of Skagit and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (2/14), and Port of Friday Harbor/San Juan MRC (2/22)

Jeff attended: Whatcom MRC Meeting 02/01; Conflict Happens! Skills to Move Forward Training 02/01; Floating Kelp Indicator Meeting 02/02; WA Seaweed Collaborative Meeting 02/16; U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 02/06-02/07; Ecosystem Coordination Board Meeting 02/08; Transboundary Kelp Node Workgroup Meeting 02/13; A Path Toward Equality DEI Training 02/21; PSEMP Nearshore Meeting Presentation on MRC Kayak Monitoring 02/26

Lucas attended: U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 2/6-2/7; Salish Sea Stewards Presentation 2/13; Green Crab Work Plan meeting with WDFW & Padilla Bay NERR 2/14; DEI Workplan meeting 2/15

Sasha attended: Science Advisory Committee (1/29); Skagit MRC & Salish Sea School (2/1); San Juan MRC (2/8); Executive Committee Meeting 02/20

Caitlyn attended: U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 02/06-02/07; A Path Toward Equity Module 2 DEI Training 02/08; Northwest Straits 2024 conference venue sites 02/14; DEI Workplan meeting 02/15; Executive Committee Meeting 02/20; Northwest Straits Commission Meeting 02/23



Commission staff highlights - [February 2024]

Jessica attended: U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 2/06-2/07; Skagit MRC meeting 2/08; San Juan Vessel turn in check in 2/22 Northwest Straits Commission Meeting 02/23

Leah attended: Whatcom MRC Meeting 2/01; U.S. vs WA 50th Anniversary of the Boldt Decision conference 2/06-2/07; PSEMP Forage Fish and Food Webs 2/9; Historic Estuaries Mapping 2/14; Green Crab Work Plan meeting with WDFW & Padilla Bay NERR 2/14; A Path Toward Equality DEI Training 2/13 & 2/15; Presentation Skills Training 2/21; EGC Manager's Symposium 2/22; Northwest Straits Commission Meeting 02/23; Salish Sea Stewards Presentation 2/27

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Clallam

Month/Year: February 2024

Submitted by: Rebecca Mahan

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Elwha Beach surveys of users are randomly occurring on a monthly basis.
- Joint Jefferson/Clallam MRC meeting is March 6th in Sequim.
- Advisory Sub-Committee continuing to work on language for Clallam MRC to advise BOCC.
- Ediz Hook planting on March 26th & 28th.
- HAZWOPER/Oiled bird training took place February 13 & 14 @ Jamestown Tribal Center.
- New MRC Administrative Assistant is starting February 20th!

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): Clallam MRC is looking for his replacement as Development Community Representative. We received no new applications for this position.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events) Clallam MRC along with Jamestown Tribe hosted 24hr HAZWOPER/Oiled Wildlife training at Red Cedar Hall in Sequim. There are now 29 newly certified people on the Olympic Peninsula. This is a great step at building capacity for oil spill response on the Peninsula. There were 5 Tribes represented as far away as Quinault.

The monthly MRC meeting will be held February 26th at 5:30pm.

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): None

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Several Clallam MRC members continued to collect the monthly Forage fish samples at Cline Spit and Ediz Hook and Elwha beaches East and West.

Clallam MRC continues to supply doggie waste bags on the levee west of the Elwha River mouth and survey beach use by humans, dogs and cars.

Olympia oyster shell spreading in Sequim Bay is scheduled for four days March 4-7.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):
HAZWOPER/Oiled Wildlife training. Photos by Rebecca Mahan.





MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Island

Month/Year: February / 2024

Submitted by: Kelly Zupich

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- ALE Program Science Panel
- Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award
- Comprehensive Plan

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff)

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

Previous Meetings/Events:

- February 6: MRC Monthly Meeting

Upcoming Meetings/Events:

- March 5: MRC Monthly Meeting
- March 15: MRC Retreat

Funding updates (newly awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments):

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Monitoring – Forage Fish: Our work monitoring for Forage fish eggs continues at most of our sites year-round. Teams continue to monitor monthly at Hoypus Point, Cornet Bay, Sunlight Shores, Maple Grove, Glendale, Keystone Preserve, and Seahorse Siesta. We are continuing to look for a new site to replace Sunlight Shores. Additionally, the team is looking to find more ways to utilize the volunteers while they are already on the beach and able to capture more data.

Bull Kelp Surveys: Planning meetings have begun for the 2024 monitoring season. The team is looking at more efficient ways to collect data while out on the water.

Stewardship – Cornet Bay: Stewardship is completed for the season. Planning has begun for an April planting event.

Water Quality Testing: The Water Quality team is working out next steps for 2024 work to be done.

Shoreline Education and Survey: We are working on getting our contractor set up to start analyzing permits against our armoring survey to see how much of the added armoring since 2016, in Island County was permitted vs. unpermitted.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

Comprehensive Plan:

Island County (IC) has launched its Comprehensive Planning (CP) process effective January 2024. This work will frame a vision and code elements for the County through 2045. The Island County Marine Resources Committee has formed a committee to address opportunities related to marine resources.

Committee members are coordinating to participate constructively in a variety of opportunities for engagement in the CP process:

- As members of the general public, committee members have attended Planning Commission meetings, submitted in-person and written comments, and attended CP Open Houses hosted by the Planning Committee.
- The IC MRC has been invited to make comments on the Comprehensive Plan.
- Through an MRC sub-committee: Barbara Bennett, Lead, Jill Lipoti, Greg Easton and Paul Ben McElwain, will coordinate with other members and staff to research, prepare and present written comments, attend Planning Commission meetings, and make in-person comments as it might be helpful.

Through the work of, Greg Easton, the MRC committee is becoming familiar with the 2016 Comprehensive Plan and the drafts being presented to the Planning Committee. Greg has also become familiar with the current Shoreline Management Program (SMP) and its update awaiting adoption and transmission for final approval.

And, in response to an unexpected public hearing asking whether to adopt and transmit the pending SMP vs consideration of a possible amendment to expand armoring justifications in response to marine flooding, MRC committee members have also coordinated with staff regarding attending County Board of Supervisors meetings re: SMP adoption, researched and submitted an informational letter, and will continue this work as needed.

ALE Program Science Panel: Some of our MRC Members were invited back to join the ALE South Whidbey School District class. The purpose of this panel discussion was to talk about effective ways to educate the public about science. The students have been conducting beach monitoring and were tasked with writing about this in the Whidbey Weekly Newspaper which the MRC facilitated. The panel discussion included folks from multiple organizations including the MRC. The 6th-8th grade students had lots of great questions which spurred good comments from the panelists. The students were engaged, and it made for an enjoyable afternoon for the panelists. The article has since been written and will be included in the paper in the next week or so.

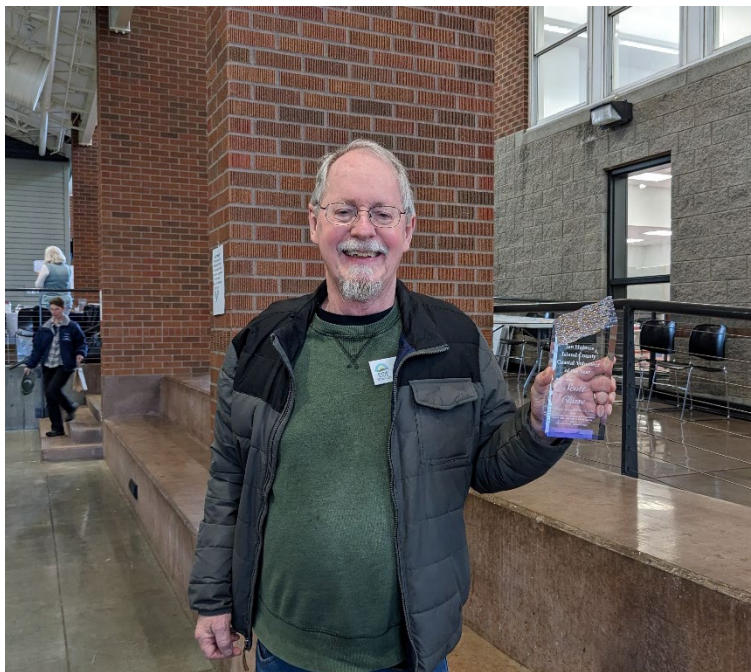
Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award: Our very own Scott Chase won the Jan Holmes award for 2024! He was very proud of this accomplishment as are we. His passion has not been just for the coastal environment around Camano and Whidbey Islands, but also for the education and inspiration of residents to actively protect their precious surroundings. Scott is the ultimate networker who brings people together to take action. He is a thoughtful, enthusiastic participant in all of his volunteer endeavors. Although, a Camano resident he frequently drives to Whidbey Island to participate in volunteer activities. Scott is known for his ability to recall events and work done throughout the region. He brings decades of volunteerism and work experience to the table along with being a holder of historical information. He is a generous spirit who has dedicated much of his time volunteering for various organizations. Scott's education and stewardship activities have had an impact across Island County. Congratulations to Scott and we are thankful for all of his hard work to make the Salish Sea a better place!

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



ALE Panel Discussion

Photo by Kelly Zupich



Scott Chase

Photo by Kelly Zupich



Forage Fish Monitoring
– Keystone Farm

Photo by Kelly Zupich

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Jefferson

Month/Year: February 2024

Submitted by: Monica Montgomery

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- MRC staff for Clallam and Jefferson, along with Robert Knapp, Clallam MRC Tribal Representative, are working on organizing a joint Clallam-Jefferson MRC meeting set for March 6 to include a guest speaker, Cecilia Gobin, presenting on Tribal Treaty Rights as well as time to network across MRCs.
- The MRC connected Port of Port Townsend staff, NW Straits Foundation Shore Friendly staff, and fourteen members of the public for a site visit at Quilcene Herb Beck Marina on January 20. The site visit provided an opportunity to discuss the feasibility of restoring the natural shoreline as a component of the Port's dredging activities at the marina, using dredge spoils for beach nourishment and other options for enhancing the site for wildlife and public enjoyment.
- The MRC Coordinator will be stepping down from her position as of February 23, and Jefferson County has begun the process of finding her replacement.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): The MRC Coordinator will be stepping down from her position as of February 23, and Jefferson County has begun the process of finding her replacement.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

Past Events/Meetings

January 18 – NWSI/MRC Staff Meeting
January 20 – DNR DVRP removed a derelict vessel (JF23-003) near Chimacum Creek
January 23 – MRC Executive Committee meeting
January 23 – Education & Outreach subcommittee meeting
January 26 – NWSC monthly meeting
January 26 – Strait ERN LIO quarterly meeting
January 29 – Quilcene boat ramp site visit with NWSF and Port of PT staff
January 30 – Dabob Bay forage fish survey
February 1 – Joint Clallam-Jefferson MRC meeting
February 3 – No-Anchor Zone maintenance work along Port Townsend waterfront
February 6 – MRC monthly meeting
February 7 – Education & Outreach subcommittee meeting
February 12 – Kelp subcommittee meeting
February 13 – ROV team meeting
February 14 – MRC Executive Committee meeting
February 21 – MRC Executive Committee meeting
February 23 – NWSC monthly meeting

Upcoming Events/Meetings

March 5 – MRC monthly meeting

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): Nothing to report.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

1. Monitoring:

- **Forage fish - Fort Townsend:** Nothing to report.
- **Forage fish - Dabob Bay (Index):** The Project Lead (Sarah) plans to survey in February.
- **Kelp:** The Project Lead (Emily) organized a follow-up subcommittee meeting (Janette, Time, Brad, Jeff, Chris) to further discuss season plans and add-ons, including adding Beckett Point to the MRC's sites, further analysis of aerial and satellite data, determining the need for additional water quality data, and possible use of drones.
- **Storm surge monitoring:** Project lead (Jeff) worked with NWSC staff, Suzanne Schull, to upload all storm surge monitoring data reports dating back to 2016 into Sound IQ for public data access.

2. Rain Gardens:

- The MRC Coordinator and Project Lead, Janette, will be meeting with the Jefferson County Master Gardener Coordinator on February 20 to discuss how their new rain garden training can plug into the MRC's rain garden maintenance efforts.

3. Education & Outreach:

- The subcommittee (Joanie, Betsy, Frank, Brad) and the MRC Coordinator met on January 23 to solidify 2024 outreach plans. This year, we plan to offer Digging for Dinner, Searching for Seaweed (or a pressing event), and hosting a speaker stage at the Wooden Boat Festival to connect boaters and others in the community with local marine science and conservation efforts. The MRC will also table the Hood Canal Fjordfest event in Brinnon again, and will continue to solicit community input on local marine conservation interests and concerns by survey to inform future efforts.
- Shoreline landowner outreach: One MRC member (Sarah) identified a potential restoration project, to restore natural shoreline near the Quilcene Herb Beck Marina as part of the Port of Port Townsend's work to dredge the marina. Sarah connected Port staff with the NW Straits Shore Friendly program and on January 29, NWSF staff (Lisa, Ellen), Port staff (Dave, Eric, Carol, Aubri), MRC members and staff (Sarah, Brenda, Janette, Monica), the WSU Jefferson County Extension Director, and 14 members of the public met for a site visit to discuss overall project feasibility.
- The subcommittee (Joanie, Frank, Sarah, Betsy, Emily, Brad, Judy) and the MRC Coordinator met on February 7 to further discuss plans for the WBF science speaker stage with follow-up task to vote on speakers/topics to feature.

4. Olympia Oysters:

- Nothing to report.

5. Voluntary No-Anchor Zones:

- On February 3, four MRC members (Gordon, Bryan, Troy, Brad) conducted maintenance of the buoy lines and anchors along the Port Townsend waterfront.
- An order for 8 new spar buoys has been placed, 6 of which will be replacing missing or damaged buoys along the Port Townsend waterfront.

6. ROV Lost Crab Pots:

- The team (Chris, Jeff, MRC Coordinator) and Sea Dragons (Gabi, Ella) met on February 13 to further discuss details for the season, including additional community partners, vessels, reducing the number of days on the water (<10 days) and scheduling (May-June).

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

- The second of two derelict vessels (JF23-003) in East Jefferson County flagged by the MRC for removal with the regionally pooled funds was removed on January 20.
- MRC Coordinators for Clallam and Jefferson, along with Robert Knapp, Clallam MRC Tribal Representative, are working on organizing a joint Clallam-Jefferson MRC meeting set for March 6 to feature a guest speaker, Cecilia Gobin, presenting on Tribal Treaty Rights and include time to socialize and network across MRCs.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info): All photos taken by Monica Montgomery unless otherwise noted.

January 29 – Quilcene boat ramp public beach walk with NWSF, Port of PT, and MRC



Dave Nakagawara, Engineer for the Port of Port Townsend, welcomes the group.



A flock of brant geese foraging nearby during the site visit.

February 3 – No-Anchor Zone buoy line and anchor maintenance along the Port Townsend waterfront



Photo by Don Bryant.



From left to right, Bryan DeCaterina, Troy McKelvey, Brad Bebout, and Gordon King (diving/not pictured). Photo by Don Bryant.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: San Juan County

Month/Year: February 2024

Submitted by: Sam Whitridge & Katie Johnson

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Outreach efforts are well underway for the Free Vessel Turn-In Event in April. Fliers have been posted, press releases printed in local papers, a flurry of social media posts and shares have reached the interwebs blasting the message out even farther. Eligible vessel owners will need to apply to the program turn through DNR to participate in the turn-in event.
- The MRC represented Plastic Free Salish Sea at the recent 25th Storming the Sound Conference for marine educators at the end of January. It was a great way to spread the message about reducing plastic pollution and finding positive ways to prevent and remove litter from our local waterways.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

No changes to report.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- Storming the Sound – January 25th
- MRC/CAG/LIO Meeting – February 8th
- PFSS Subcommittee Meeting – February 27th
- Upcoming MRC/CAG/LIO Meeting – March 7th

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support, or other funding commitments):

No new funding to report for this month.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Marine Stewardship - The State of the MSA edits from MRC members is complete and the document will go out for peer review this month. The State of the MSA is an in depth look at the health, vitality, and sustainability of the marine ecosystem in San Juan County.

The MRC has begun to compile a database of marine operators within the county, in order to better facilitate conversations and cooperation around small oil spill prevention and education. Public marinas, private docks, community docks, public anchorages, etc. have been gathered with GPS location and contact info as we begin the process of assembling the database. Gathering as a consortium to discuss successes, challenges, barriers, and gaps has proven effective in planning for terrestrial and marine managers so a similar approach will be taken with marine infrastructure operators. Kari Koski has already utilized this working database to connect with marinas throughout the county about the Free Vessel Turn-in Event.

DV - Outreach efforts are underway for the Free Vessel-turn in event scheduled for April.

Announcements went out the last week of January in the local papers and on social media calling for vessel owners whose dreamboats have become nightmares. This collaborative effort brings together the San Juan MRC, the Port of Friday Harbor, Northwest Straits Commission, and the Department of Natural

Resources to help keep pollution out of our marine environments. The subcommittee has been posting fliers, sharing with friends, and helping to spread the word about this upcoming event. We are already seeing inquiries, hopefully resulting in a successful event.

PFSS - Karin Roemers-Klevin and Katie Johnson attended the 25th Storming the Sound Conference for marine educators on January 25th. Environmental Educators of all kinds, backgrounds, and specialties flocked to La Conner to share, learn, and dive deep into how we tell the story of the Salish Sea. Sharing the mission and goals of the Plastic Free Salish Sea Initiative with conference participants helps to raise awareness about plastic use and ways to reduce or remove it from the environment. The subcommittee will be retreating to set a workplan for the year later this month and to begin planning for the Spring Great Islands Clean-up on Saturday, April 20.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

Councilwoman Cindy Wolf is headed to Washington DC to meet with our state representatives. She has been equipped with talking points created by the MRC about the express need for an ERTV to be stationed in local waters.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



Members of the San Juan Stewardship Network representing their organizations at Storming the Sound conference

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: Feb/2024

Submitted by: Tracy/Diane

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- **Bowman Bay Seining:** We are conducting bi-monthly beach seining surveys with the NW Straits Foundation to document fish use as part of the comprehensive study on the Bowman Bay Restoration Project. The first seining event took place January 26th with 7 volunteers.
- **Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment:** Posted the Request for Quotes and Qualifications for the Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment project. Deadline for responses is February 29th.
- **Culturally Responsive Elementary Science Teaching (CREST):** CREST is a 3-year research project to study the effect of teachers utilizing the 'Explore the Salish Sea' curriculum which takes elementary school kids (primarily 5th grade) out to the beach and incorporates science and indigenous knowledge and practices into culturally responsive instruction. Skagit MRC is one of several community-based organizations that signed up to participate. Pete Haase is Skagit MRC's representative. Teacher workshops will take place next year in Whatcom County with 30 5th grade teachers.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): None

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- **Feb 8-** Skagit MRC meeting via Microsoft Teams. Pete Haase presented an update on the WWU/Pacific Education Institute's 'CREST' project.
- **Feb 9-** Bowman Bay Beach Seining.
- **Feb 12-** Fidalgo Bay Day planning meeting. Currently only have 3 people on the planning committee. We are seeking volunteers to help plan this event!
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- **Feb 16-** Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Meeting- Zoom.
- **Feb 23-** Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Forage Fish Surveys.
- **Feb 26-** Derelict gear removal presentation by Jason Morgan at the Skagit BoCC meeting.
- **March 8-** Bowman Bay Beach Seining
- **March 22-** Bowman Bay Beach Seining

Funding updates (newly - awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): No updates.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Training held Tuesdays from 1-5pm starting Feb 6-April 30 at Padilla Bay with Sara Brostrom facilitating the training. Erin Merklein will start taking over the training facilitation for Sara soon. Erin is also the Volunteer Coordinator.
 - Full class with 27 attendees!
 - An uptick in younger participants and a nice mix of demographics. Most from Anacortes and Bellingham.
 - They are a lively bunch with lots of good questions. One group bonded so well at the table exercise they dubbed themselves the Environmental Data Nerds!
 - First class Jude presented welcoming remarks and an overview of Padilla Bay NERR. Lynne and Pete presented a brief history and overview of the Salish Sea Stewards and MRC. Todd Woodard of Samish Indian Nation presented a thought-provoking talk on

cultural resources and the Cultural Value of the Salish Sea. Second class - Lucas Hart presented an introduction to the Northwest Straits Initiative.

- The SSS Advisory Committee members greeted the class with coffee, treats, and displayed our new Salish Sea Stewards banner.
- The SSS class participates in several ice breaker activities. They were also asked to share one thing about themselves with the rest of the class on a Google spreadsheet. It's a great way to get to know the other cohorts.
- Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting on Feb 16th.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - 4 Index sites (monthly samples): Guemes Channel, E. Similk Bay (Swinomish Reservation), Samish Island, and west of marina towards Skyline.
 - 3 Restoration Sites (monthly samples): Bowman Bay, W. Similk Bay (private property), and Clayton Beach. Skagit volunteers alternate monthly sampling with Whatcom County at Clayton Beach.
 - January sampling at Bowman Bay was canceled due to a big snowstorm event. Bowman Bay gate was shut so no public access to the beach. Scheduling sampling dates in coordination with beach seining activity at Bowman Bay.
 - Fidalgo Bay surveys are for DNR. New lead FF volunteers from Citizen Aquatic Reserve Committed: Tom Flanagan, Catherine Houck.
 - It's a quiet time for surf smelt. Not much happening right now.
 - Outreach: Volunteers will be tabling at Mount Vernon Science night with forage fish eggs and microscopes and educational information on April 18th. Forage fish volunteers will also assist with the Kids on the Beach program in the spring. Pete will be one of the presenters leading a forage fish survey at one of the Salish Sea Stewards classes this spring.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
 - 3 schools participating in the spring program with classroom and field data collecting and analysis components: mudflats, forage fish, and beach seining. Many students have never been to the beach before:
 - April 15 - April 19: **Concrete 9th-12th grade**, 20 high school students.
 - May 6 - May 10: **Evergreen Elementary in Sedro Woolley** 4th grade, 75 students.
 - May 20 - May 24: **Allen Elementary in Mount Vernon** 4th and 5th grade, 84-100 students (English 2nd language for many of the students).
 - 4th graders will get to participate in the mudflat safari and 5th grade students will get to participate in beach seining. The idea is to create a different field experience for students for each grade level.
 - Jude is hoping to improve student language accessibility by inviting Latino college students involved in the Latinos in Science Leadership program at Skagit Valley College to participate in the Kids on the Beach program and work with students and language barriers.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
 - Looking for additional help to keep this project moving forward.
 - Need to find a new point of contact with the La Conner School District.
 - The location has high visibility, is significantly smaller in size compared to other rain gardens and is an existing rain garden so in theory it should be easier to install and maintain. It would also roll in nicely with the Swinomish "Between two Worlds" program curriculum.
 - Planting is targeted for the fall of 2024. The hard part will be to come up with the rain garden design/planting and plant maintenance plan, recruiting volunteers to maintain it, and interpretive signage content and installation.

- Funding would be used to purchase plants, mulch, and interpretive signage. Funding expires December 31, 2024.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Darla Gay Smith/Tracy Alker:
 - Date has been set for Saturday, August 24, 2024, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
 - This will be the 20th anniversary of FBD! Looking for ideas to help celebrate.
 - Need help planning this year's event and leading some of the tasks. Currently only have 3 people on the planning committee.
 - Reserved the Shannon Point touch tanks.
 - Beach seining demo will be led by Matt and Jason around 2pm.
 - Planning documents including task lists and timelines are being updated.
 - Created 2024 Fidalgo Bay Day Flyer and Save the Date cards.
 - Will be reaching out to past participating organizations and volunteers with Save the Date cards in February/March.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - QAPP Addendum has been approved and signed by Ecology.
 - Mostly hatchery work going on right now to raise abalone for outplanting and planning for the upcoming field season.
 - Will start abalone field work soon including monitoring outplant sites and outplanting additional juvenile abalone at some outplant sites.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Annual monitoring of Olympia oyster recruitment in Fidalgo Bay will start up again this spring to continue monitoring the annual variabilities of oyster densities and post larval settlement and setting out new shell bags for monitoring larval settlement next year.
 - Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards class in March.
 - In April, Puget Sound Restoration Fund is going to schedule a field trip to Fidalgo Bay with one of their partners to deliver oysters.
 - Padilla Bay NERR staff will present their Olympia oyster restoration work in Padilla Bay at the June 13th MRC meeting.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy Alker:
 - The City of Anacortes selected Hanson Professional Services for the Fidalgo Bay trestle project. They are currently waiting for contract approval.
 - Skagit MRC's Grant Funding from NOAA (\$58k) for: Alternatives Analysis Report and Conceptual Design and Public Involvement and Outreach.
 - Skagit MRC reps will be involved in reviewing and commenting on the Alternative Analysis Report and Conceptual design and participating in stakeholder meetings and provide input in the development and implementation of the Community Outreach Plan.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - There are 4 kelp bed sites surveyed in Skagit County between June and September each year by experienced kayak volunteer leads.
 - All data from 2023 kelp surveys have been submitted and reviewed by NWSC and will be added to DNR's floating kelp indicator map.
 - The kelp indicator [interactive map](#) data runs about one year behind. 2023 kayak kelp survey data will be added next year.
 - MRC Kelp Kayak Monitoring 2023 Data Review Meeting via Zoom, January 17th. Recording available [here](#) An overview of the Northwest Straits Initiative Floating Kelp Monitoring StoryMap, is [available online](#).
 - Lynne and Jeff Whitty were interviewed last month by Emma with the Skagit Valley Herald for an article on kelp. Article hasn't come out yet.

- Jeff Whitty with NWSC is looking to establish an MRC kelp kayak monitoring advisory committee and has asked for volunteers. Steve Olsen who leads the Bowman Bay kelp team volunteered to represent Skagit on the kelp committee. Lynne will be the backup.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance and Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Skagit MRC funds and supports plant maintenance and beach seining at the Bowman Bay restoration site in partnership with NWSF and Parks. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is also providing some funding to support the beach seining project.
 - Lynne will be working with Lisa Kaufman to come up with a plant maintenance schedule for this spring.
 - We are in the process of getting the MOU for plant maintenance with NWSF finalized and signed.
 - The recent winter storm at Bowman Bay damaged the foot bridge and washed gravel and debris upland burying some of the shoreline plants and caused some erosion to the restoration site. Erosion is also occurring around one of the interpretive signs.
 - Jason Morgan with the NWSF is leading the beach seining effort at Bowman Bay with the help of volunteers including MRC member Paul Dinnel.
 - The first beach seining activity occurred January 26th with 7 volunteers. They found 1 juvenile pink salmon, 11 staghorn sculpin, and 10 starry flounder (a surprise for this time of year). A family with two curious kids stopped by to check out the beach seining.
 - The MOU for beach seining with NWSF has been finalized and signed.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - The Request for Quotes and Qualifications notice has been posted to over 235 environmental firms. Deadline for responses is February 29th. The Advisory Team will be involved in the consultant interviews and selection process.
 - The consultant will be responsible for: designing a new geodatabase, performing literature review, developing a prioritization process, analysis, and identifying geospatial focus areas, and developing a list of proposed shoreline protection and restoration projects.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.): NA

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):

Photos by: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson. Bowman Bay Beach Seining Outreach and Winter Storm Damage.



*New Salish Sea
Stewards Banner*



*Salish Sea Stewards Class Experimenting with
Estuary Models. Photo by: Erin Merklein*



MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Snohomish

Month/Year: February 2024

Submitted by: Elisa Dawson and Joycelyn Blue

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- The Starlight beach walk was held on February 6th and had a great turn out of over 160 people.
- The MRC is beginning the strategic planning process and each MRC member is currently being interviewed to capture their perspective. In March, the MRC will participate in an in-person workshop to further delve into the process.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

Our three new members Phil Salditt, Richard Strickland, and Dawn Presler were officially confirmed by County council on January 24.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

The MRC hosted their January MRC Meeting virtually on January 17th.

Elisa Dawson attended the Northwest Straits Commission Capstone Group Meeting on January 25.

Elisa Dawson attended the Beneficial Use of Dredge Material working group meeting on February 14 to discuss status and future plans of the Snohomish River dredge material.

Elisa Dawson presented information about the Derelict Vessel Removal Program to Snohomish County and Tulalip Tribal leadership on February 15.

Funding updates (newly awarded grants, in-kind support, or other funding commitments)

None.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Strategic Planning (MRC grant project for 2024 – 2025): The MRC is beginning the strategic planning process and each MRC member is currently being interviewed to capture their perspective. The subcommittee met on February 13 to discuss the workshop and check in on progress thus far. On March 20 in place of the regular MRC meeting, the MRC will participate in an in-person workshop to further delve into the process.

Marine Vegetation Outreach (MRC grant project for 2024 – 2025): Contracting with a consultant is still in process and the subcommittee hopes to hold a kickoff meeting in late February or early March.

Derelict Vessels (NWSF funds): Staff are going to determine vessels for potential removal by first getting on the water to note any condition changes or newly arrived vessels. This reconnaissance is scheduled for early March.

Below projects are other projects of the MRC funded by SWM fees:

Forage Fish Monitoring: February sampling of Picnic Point and Meadowdale is scheduled for February 26. The subcommittee met on January 30 to discuss details of forage fish monitoring at Howarth Park. At the February MRC meeting, a final decision of whether a member only led effort if feasible will be determined.

Nearshore Restoration: None.

Outreach: Beach cleanups in partnership with WSU Beach Watchers continue to be held quarterly. Also, in partnership with the Beach Watchers, the Starlight Beach Walk was held in the evening of February 6 at Edmonds Marina Beach. Over 160 people were in attendance and learned about the nearshore creatures and environment.

Crabber Outreach/Oil Spill Preparedness and Prevention:
None

Marine Water Quality: Retrieval of mussel cages was delayed due to the WDFW cessation of water activities. The MRC will retrieve these cages when directed by WDFW.

Snohomish County staff are currently in the contracting process with ORCA for 2024.

Marine Vegetation Monitoring:
None

Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area: Joycelyn Blue, Elisa Dawson, Sara Maxwell, and Kelly Zupich met on February 5 to discuss the work Island County is doing/has done for shoreline surveys and septic issues. The project idea is to implement a similar shoreline survey that Island County did in the Snohomish County side of Port Susan in the summer of 2024.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):
None.

Upcoming Events:

- Forage Fish – Feb 26
- Next MRC Meeting – Feb 21
- Strategic Planning Workshop (in place of March MRC meeting) – March 20

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



Starlight Beach Walk. Photo: Jonathan Robinson



Starlight Beach Walk. Photo: Joycelyn Blue

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: Feb/2024

Submitted by: Tracy/Diane

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 - The consultant will be responsible for: designing a new geodatabase, performing literature review, developing a prioritization process, analysis, and identifying geospatial focus areas, and developing a list of proposed shoreline protection and restoration projects.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.): NA

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):

Photos by: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson. Bowman Bay Beach Seining Outreach and Winter Storm Damage.



Salish Sea Stewards New Banner
Photo: Pete Haase



Salish Sea Stewards Class Experimenting with Estuary Models.
Photo: Erin Merklein



MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Whatcom

Month/Year: FEBRUARY 2024

Submitted by: Dana Flerchinger and Austin Rose

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Whatcom County is commencing its 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, and Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff are soliciting recommendations from the Marine Resources Committee on what amendments should be considered in the Marine Resources Lands section of Chapter 8, Resource Lands, and Chapter 10, Environment. The MRC will approve their final list of recommendations during their March 7th meeting.
- A few new members joined the MRC including Avery Maverick and Joe Hoats. The MRC also now has representation from Blaine City Council: Mayor Mary Lou Steward, and Bellingham City Council: Jace Cotton.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

- New MRC members: Avery Maverick and Thomas “Joe” Hoats
- Current MRC members who renewed their terms: Mike MacKay
- MRC Chair: Heather Spore
- MRC Vice Chair: Elma Burnham
- NWSC Rep: Mike MacKay
- NWSC Rep Alternate: Beth Lorence

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- The February MRC meeting was held on February 1st. Whatcom County Planning and Development (PDS) staff was present to oversee and answer questions about the MRC’s feedback and recommendations regarding Whatcom County’s Comprehensive Plan update. The committee drafted a list of recommendations and suggestions for the PDS consultant to review and incorporate into the Comprehensive Plan. The initial list was approved by the committee, and members continued to make edits to the list over the following week. A subcommittee was formed to review and compile the recommendations into a more formal list. This final list will be approved by the MRC during the March 7th meeting, then sent to PDS staff. A consultant will then use these suggestions in developing text, adding new policies, or editing existing ones. PDS staff will return later in the year (July –October) to discuss what the consultant developed and solicit feedback on their work, including specific edits to goals and policies. Two priorities have been identified for the update 1) GMA Compliance, and 2) Council Priorities – Resolution 2022-036.

Other meeting highlights included introductions to new MRC members (Avery Maverick and Joe Hoats), Blaine City Council Mayor (Mary Lou Steward), and Bellingham City Council Representative (Jace Cotton).

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments):

The NWSF recently secured grants funds that will be used to support the MRC’s Beach Seine with Kids program via paid internships. These interns will assist in the field with the Beach Seine with Kids events and will assist with the pre and post classroom visits.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

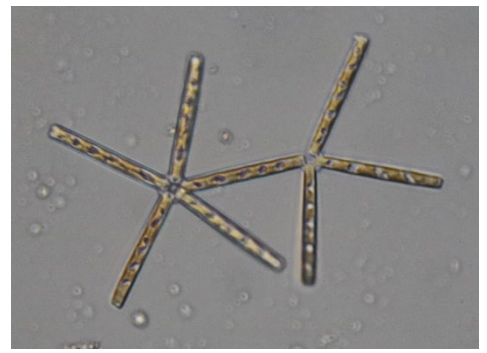
- Chuckanut PIC
MRC staff have been continuing monthly sampling in North Chuckanut Bay. There was a spike in fecal coliform concentrations during the heavy rain events in December in January, but concentrations had significantly reduced by the February sampling event.

- Forage Fish
Dana Flerchinger remains the lead for forage fish sampling. Whatcom MRC conducted their first forage fish survey at Clayton Beach at the end of January, and continues to conduct monthly surveys at Little Squalicum Beach. During the most recent survey at Little Squalicum Beach on January 31st, staff were able to observe forage fish eggs in one of the samples at the site closest to the beach entrance.
- Beach Seine with Kids
MRC members, including Mike MacKay, Glen Alexander, and Elma Burnham, have been busy planning for the upcoming Beach Seine with Kids events that will occur on April 19, May 3, and May 15. Members reached out to contacts with the Bellingham Technical College Aquaculture Program (BTC), who indicated that there may be student interest in helping out at the event or with the pre or post classroom visits. The Northwest Straits Foundation has also secured a few grants that may be able to support interns to assist with the field events. Invitations and applications have been sent out to the entire school district, which included over 100 teachers. Schools have until February 23rd to submit applications, and a MRC subcommittee will review these applications the week after. Schools will be notified on March 1st.
- Social Marketing at Wildcat Cove
The social marketing materials generated by Shew Designs, a subcontractor under Peak Sustainability, are in the final stages of approval. Once completed, the signs and materials will be implemented at the Wildcat Cove boat launch and via social media.
- Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring:
Staff have continued to assist with biweekly sampling of phytoplankton to determine if any harmful algae are present in the water. With the limited sunlight and reduced water temperatures during the winter, the phytoplankton are pretty quiet, but a few photos from the microscopic sample analysis are shown below. Staff will also be attending a training and workshop via Soundtoxins in Seattle later this month.

Other:

MRC staff and other Whatcom County NR and Health staff met with Troy Wood, DNR, Tom Withers, USCG @ Bellingham, Bellingham ECY staff, and Port of Bellingham staff to discuss the derelict boat issue in Drayton Harbor. This has been a growing area of concern for community members involved in marine protection and recovery programs and residents around Drayton Harbor. Troy Wood provided a valuable presentation and discussion about DNR's DVRP program. Drayton Harbor Oyster Company (DHOC) has reported that additional boats have anchored in Drayton Harbor this fall/winter season with 5 boats that have been anchored in the harbor for approximately 3 months. The winter winds caused two of the anchored boats to drag and one close to the DHOC tide flat lease and bottom-culture oyster array. Further coordination is needed in Whatcom to develop an appropriate system to respond to these issues.

Photos:



Zooplankton and phytoplankton under the microscope from harmful algal bloom monitoring.
Photo credit: 1 and 2: Dana Flerchinger, 3: Steve Wilson.



Newly installed bridge to safely cross the railroad tracks at Clayton Beach.
Photo credit: Dana Flerchinger