



minutes

March 27, 2020 • 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

WebEx – Conference call

Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam-Chair), Elsa Schwartz (Island-Vice Chair), Pete Haase (Skagit), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Tom Cowan, Ron Thom, Chris Castner, Jennifer Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership-alternate), Nan McKay, Christina Koons (San Juan), Tom Doerge (Snohomish-alternate)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Katie Harris, Sasha Horst, Dana Oster

Others in Attendance: Caroline Gibson (Northwest Straits Foundation). Sarah Fisker (Jefferson - alternate)

Absent: Cecilia Gobin (Tribal)

Welcome and Introductions

Alan opened the meeting and facilitated introductions.

The minutes from the February Northwest Straits (NWS) Commission meeting were approved as written by consensus.

Director's Report

Commission operations in the face of COVID-19: COVID-19 is changing the way that the Northwest Straits Commission works, but the staff are busy as ever. Staff are adapting to new work from home policies, adapting to event cancellations and postponements, and examining virtual event options in order to reach our objectives.

Retreat Update: Lucas is working with Don Hunger from the NW Straits Foundation to plan a webinar around NWS Initiative operations plan updates, a topic originally planned for the retreat. Climate change is a second retreat topic staff are considering for a webinar.

Ecosystem Coordinator Hiring: Lucas extended an offer to Alexandra (Allie) Simpson, she will start on April 1. Allie's temporary position is anticipated to last through August 2021. Allie will be working on a variety of projects, including the Green Crab response in Drayton Harbor.

NWS Commission - committee reports

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee recommended Alan Clark be nominated as Commission Chair and Elsa Schwartz be nominated as Vice Chair. The Commission elections will be held at the April 24.

External Relations Committee



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The External Relations Committee gave an update on work Chris Castner and Lucas are doing to explore collaborative opportunities with NOAA. WA Dept. of Ecology has a new Director and Deputy Director, and Lucas is setting up a meeting with them to introduce the Northwest Straits Initiative.

Science Advisory Committee

The Science Advisory Committee met via WebEx, instead of their previously planned in-person meeting. Dr. Kathleen Wolf, a social scientist at University of Washington, is a new committee member. She has expertise with the links between human well-being with environmental health. The committee focused on developing a path forward on the Actions to Impacts project. The committee is strategizing on steps to take by developing proof-of-concept examples using select MRC project examples.

Ad hoc Communications Committee

The Communications Committee reviewed proposals from firms who responded to the Request for Qualifications and Quotations for the communications audit and plan development project. Sasha is working on completing the process for contractor onboarding. Staff anticipates work will begin in May.

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC)/Tribal update

No update.

Business items

MRC Grants: Sasha has been working with MRC staff to prepare Year 2 grant agreements. Proposals/Amendments are due April 10. MRCs need to spend Year 1 state funds by the end of June.

NWSI Conference: Commission and Foundation staff have changed the Conference date by one week, to November 13-14 and the location to the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend, WA.

NWS Commission Meetings: Commission staff have switched the locations of May and August meetings. Pending the COVID-19 situation, the May Commission meeting will be in Snohomish County and the August meeting will be in San Juan. Exact location pending.

Northwest Straits (NWS) Foundation update

Caroline Gibson provided an update:

- The Foundation offices closed 2 weeks ago, all staff are working remotely. They also implemented a hiring freeze in light of the COVID-19 situation, and canceled all other public events until further notice.
- Foundation staff issued a call for applications for the Opportunity Fund at the beginning of March. The deadline is May 8. Interested MRCs should demonstrate the need for funding a project or activity that's ready to roll. Contact Caroline Gibson for questions related to the Opportunity Fund.



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- The Foundation released the first episode of the [Salish SeaFresh](#) series, a video series bringing awareness to the connection between sustainable seafood and marine ecosystem health.
- Lisa is exploring options for web-based Shore Friendly workshops.
- Foundation staff are continuing to plan for Orca forums in Island, Whatcom, and Skagit counties. Contact Caroline with suggestions for speakers, content or venues. Caroline is planning these for June-July.

Puget Sound Partnership (Partnership) update

Jennifer Grimm provided the following Partnership update:

- The Partnership has postponed Puget Sound Day on the Hill. They will consider rescheduling the event.
- The Partnership has [finalized the sign-on letter to Congress](#) and are seeking signatures from leading organizations. To be included as an official signatory to the letter, please provide the requested information at [this link](#) by April 14, 2020.

Kelp Plan Update

Dana Oster from Northwest Straits Commission presented on the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan. NW Straits Commission will release the plan during the week of March 30, 2020.

The six strategic goals of the plan are:

- Understand and reduce kelp stressors;
- Improve understanding of the value of kelp to Puget Sound ecosystems and integrate into management;
- Describe kelp distribution and trends;
- Designate kelp protected areas;
- Restore kelp forests;
- Promote awareness, engagement, and action from user groups, Tribes, the public, and decision-makers.

Successes of the plan thus far:

- DNR has committed to leading a kelp research and monitoring forum and a policy and management forum for the next two years.
- In the Puget Sound Partnerships vital sign revision effort, MRC kelp surveys along with DNR and Samish Indian Nation kelp data are being proposed as a kelp canopy indicator to support a marine vegetation vital sign (depending on final vital sign count and approval from the Leadership Council).
- Fostered collaboration between agencies, organizations, and citizens that have a stake in kelp conservation and recovery.

Challenges moving forward:

- No funding for any agency to dedicate a staff member to coordinate implementation and to monitor progress of the plan.



- Maintain the momentum of the report and partners who have collaborated on it, and ensure implementation of the plan.

MRC reports

Monthly reports for each MRC are available by visiting this link: <http://www.nwstraits.org/archive/>

Clallam

Alan said that the MRC reviewed projects for their 2020-21 grant at their March meeting. Members of the MRC have interviewed candidates for their MRC intern programs. Members of the Climate Change subcommittee are reaching out to county commissioners to set up meetings, but that effort is on hold in the wake of COVID-19.

Island

Elsa said that Island County Commissioners have suspended all advisory committees under the Dept. of Natural Resources, which includes the MRC. All MRC activities, including April MRC meetings, have been suspended.

Jefferson

Jeff said that MRC activities have been curtailed significantly by COVID-19.

San Juan

Christina said the MRC is continuing Southern Resident Killer Whale outreach (including Be Whale Wise and Whale Tales curriculum). The MRC is considering how to modify outreach for this spring and summer. The MRC is developing a website for Plastic Free Salish Sea. The MRC hosted the Marine Managers' Workshop on March 10-11 at Friday Harbor Labs.

Skagit

Pete said the MRC hosted the first session of the Salish Sea Stewards before they had to cancel in-person meetings. The MRC is working to set up digital meetings so that the Salish Sea Stewards program can continue digitally.

Snohomish

Tom said the MRC has transitioned to remote meetings. Elisa Dawson has been hired for the full time position as lead MRC staff member. Snohomish County has not yet rehired the half time position that Elisa vacated. The MRC is continuing the pilings prioritization project.

Whatcom

Bob said students from Western Washington University presented at their March meeting on their analysis of MRC projects. Dr. Brooke Love leads the collaboration between the students and the MRC. The Climate Impact Committee will speak during the MRC's Speaker Series in April.



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Round table

- Dana said that there is interest from the MRCs about revamping the Symposium in some way because MRCs want to hear about other projects. Dana will work on a solution to address the interest from the MRCs.
- Lucas gave thanks to the commission staff for excellent work under ever-changing conditions.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

* The next regular Commission meeting will be on April 24 by WebEx.*