



minutes

June 26, 2020 • 10:00 AM-1:00 PM

Zoom – 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, Chris Castner, Sarah Brown (Snohomish), Nan McKay, Ron Thom, Jennifer Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership – Alternate), Christina Koons (San Juan)

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

Others in Attendance: Anna Toledo (Island), Austin Rose (Whatcom), Barbara Bennett (Island), Frances Robertson (San Juan), Ed Halloran (Island), Don Hunger (Northwest Straits Foundation), Caroline Gibson (Northwest Straits Foundation), Neil Harrington (Jefferson), Monica Montgomery (Jefferson), Kate Elliott (Maul Foster and Alongi), Sidney Counts (Maul Foster and Alongi)

Absent: Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal)

Welcome and Introductions

Alan opened the meeting and facilitated introductions.

Approval of Minutes

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

NWS Commission - committee reports

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee postponed the joint executive committee meeting until August. The committee recommended that all virtual Commission meetings previously planned to be in-person be extended to three hours to assure there is enough time to cover all topics.

External Relations Committee

Tom Cowan reported that the Committee discussed an overall budget defense strategy due to the economic downturn. This includes working on collaborative opportunities with federal partners. Separate from budget discussions, the committee talked about building partnerships with tribes, such as through re-establishment of the tribal committee and focusing on projects that involve tribes. In addition, the Committee considered how to create connections with business interests, including maritime industries (Blue Marine), and understand the need for strengthening relationships with county councils/commissions throughout the NW Straits. MRCs: please let the External Relations Committee know if you would like support in strengthening key relationships.

Science Advisory Committee

Ron Thom reported that the Committee is focused on measuring our social impacts as well as ecological impacts through the actions to impacts project. This is an expanded vision beyond just net ecosystem improvement (the original focus). The expanded scope recognizes and includes the broad direct and indirect cumulative benefits of the projects MRCs carry out, as well as the unique bottom up Initiative



model that supports the MRCs. The Committee's next step is to outline a framework and anticipated outputs from the model developed. The Committee's next meeting is July 1.

Budget review and year two MRC projects

Last June the Commission approved a two-year budget. Lucas outlined some revisions to the budget since that time, including an increase in \$50K for green crab work in year two, a \$2,000 increase per MRC from the year one grant amount, an increase in Commission staff FTE which covers Allie's time on green crab, and additional coordination support with funds that were originally planned for database creation.

The Commission approved the revised budget by consensus, allowing for flexibility for minor adjustments based on the pending federal approval of Ecology's indirect rate.

The Commission also approved the year two MRC projects by consensus.

Director's Report

Commission Staff are being furloughed one day per week in July, and one day per month through November. Furloughs apply regardless of the source of funding for staff positions, which are federal funds.

NWS Commission Meetings in person: August is tentatively planned for San Juan, but the Executive Committee will discuss that meeting and future plans for in-person meetings. Lucas described some key considerations before meeting in person:

- NWS Commission staff would need to be cleared for travel by Ecology.
- All counties should be in Phase 4 of the Washington Safe Start plan (able to protect high risk populations).
- Members of the Commission need to be comfortable with meeting in person.

The Commission can also consider intermediate steps toward in person meetings, such as hybrid in-person/virtual meetings when the time is right.

MRC Representative Reports to the Commission: With shortened virtual meeting times, there is less time available for Commission business. To maximize efficiency, the Executive Committee recommended MRC representatives to verbally share two or three highlights from their monthly reports. An updated MRC report template will include a section for those highlights. All Commissioners are encouraged to read the full written report of each MRC. This is an experiment that we'd like to try starting in July, and MRC representatives are encouraged to share feedback so that we can continue to fine tune the virtual meetings and ensure MRCs are able to share their work effectively.



minutes

Zoom meetings: We will now use Zoom for Commission meetings, which offers better functionality and the ability to do breakout groups. Some meetings may continue to be hosted with our WebEx account.

Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan: We released the Kelp Plan in early June. Some notable outcomes so far have been:

- Over 500 page views of the kelp plan webpage
- EPA section 10 requested a presentation for staff on the NWS Commission and Kelp Plan work
- Pew Charitable Trust signed onto the vision statement, and are scheduling a meeting with Lucas and Dana to talk about kelp focused work and strategy.
- The Commission received positive responses and thanks from Governor Inslee's office, as well as Reps. Jayapal and Schrier's staff.

A key gap that was identified was lack of status and trends. Our kelp monitoring helps to fill that gap. That will be the Commission's primary focus. NW Straits Commission also acts as a "traffic director" for information requests in regards to kelp research.

The Commission has a strong relationship with the Foundation on kelp monitoring. The Commission needs additional funds to move some of the recommendations in the plan forward.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is committed to the next two years coordination of policy/planning and research (two different departments).

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC)/Tribal update

Cecilia Gobin shared the June 2020 Marine Conditions Bulletin from NWIFC in advance of the meeting.

Puget Sound Partnership update

Jenn Grimm reported that the PUGET SOS is in the Senate Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and the House infrastructure package, which would authorize up to \$50M/year for five years for Puget Sound recovery efforts, would create a Puget Sound office within EPA, make the Federal Task Force permanent. The Senate version of the WRDA bill also contains provisions from PUGET SOS, including the \$50M/year authorization.

The Puget Sound Days on the Hill are virtual events. The next sessions will be June 26 (with Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell's staff, and Rep Smith's senior staff) and July 10 (conversation with Representatives McMorris, Rodgers, Larsen, and DelBene). More information here:

<https://psp.wa.gov/psdoth2020.php>

The Puget Sound Leadership Council adopted an updated set of Vital Signs and indicators for the biophysical parts of the ecosystem, and the proposed approach to developing the 2022-2026 Action Agenda, at their meeting on June 10.



Northwest Straits Foundation update

Don Hunger reported that the Foundation is at the end of their fiscal year. He praised the Foundation board and staff for their adaptability. Don reported that more than 200 people attended the crabber outreach workshop, which was held virtually. Foundation staff are developing a number of videos. The Foundation has created a visioning strategy that Don will share with the Commission.

MRC Project Presentations

Jefferson – Olympia oyster restoration

Neil Harrington presented on the MRC's project to restore Olympia oysters. Neil described the enhancement efforts the MRC leads at Discovery Bay, which includes spreading oyster shell for Olympia oyster to "land" on, and monitoring the oyster population. The MRC is examining additional sites at Mystery Bay and Dabob Bay for possible additional plots.

Island – MRC Communications and needs assessment

Barbara Bennett presented on the MRC's communications and needs assessment. The MRC completed a needs assessment in 2016 – 2017, which identified the need for a communications plan for the MRC. Some of their outcomes were that outreach is a dialogue, and needs to be strategic and tailored. The MRC's communication plan is here: <https://www.islandcountymrc.org/media/19408/2020-mrc-communications-plan.pdf>

San Juan- Community based efforts for Southern Resident killer whale (SRKW) conservation

Frances Robertson explained that the County hosted a workshop in 2017 that provided key input into the Governor's Killer Whale Task Force and other local and regional efforts. Frances also explained the introduction of the Whale Warning flag, and the partnership with the Soundwatch boater education program. Frances explained how the MRC determined compliance rates. Frances reported that the MRC is identifying high priority SRKW foraging habitat for a dedicated marine spatial planning effort. The MRC released the [Whale Warning flag report](#) in April 2020.

Communications Audit + Plan

Kate Elliott from Maul, Foster and Alongi (MFA) explained the overall scope and timeline of the project. Kate reviewed the findings from the communications audit and interviews. She identified key challenges, including confusion regarding roles and responsibilities within the Initiative, and lack of internal shared baseline knowledge about Northwest Straits, as well as inconsistent voice and formatting across communications platforms.

The Commissioners discussed what resonated with and/or surprised them about the findings.

- Some people were not surprised, saw clearly communicating about our identity as a fundamental challenge.
- People have different levels of experience of knowledge and there was still a lot of confusion regarding roles and responsibilities.



minutes

- There are commonalities across the organization. Some felt that explaining why there are differences would be helpful.
- Helping onboarding for new members and explaining what resources are available to them.

Kate outlined one key challenge: lack of internal shared baseline knowledge about Northwest Straits and confusion between the arms of the organization:

- Similar names
- Some overlapping work (projects)
- Different work focus areas

The attendees broke out into small groups and discussed the roles of the Foundation and the Commission using the following prompts:

- Was it easy or difficult to describe the roles and responsibilities of the Foundation and the Commission?
- Was it easy or difficult to understand the roles and responsibilities of the Foundation and the Commission?
- If you found it difficult to describe or understand, why do you think that was the case?
- Other thoughts from your discussion groups.
- What actions would you recommend for improving understanding about roles and responsibilities?

Responses to these prompts, and recommendations from the Commission will be integrated into the final audit report and communications plan.

Round table

There were no round table items.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

* The next regular Commission meeting will be on July 31.*