



minutes

August 28, 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, Sarah Brown (Snohomish), Christina Koons (San Juan), Nan McKay, Ron Thom, Jenn Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership- Alternate), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Chris Castner

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

Others in Attendance: Kate Elliott (Maul Foster and Alongi), Sidney Counts (Maul Foster and Alongi), Nicole Naar (NOAA), Emily Buckner, Monica Montgomery (Jefferson MRC), Kristin Hayman (Puget Sound Partnership), Alexandra Doty (Puget Sound Partnership), Austin Rose (Whatcom MRC)

Absent: Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership)

Welcome and Introductions

Alan opened the meeting and facilitated introductions.

Approval of Minutes

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

NW Straits Commission Committee Reports

Executive Committee

Elsa presented the Draft Match Policy for Commission approval. This policy addresses the steps MRCs should take when considering the use of Commission funds for match on third-party grants. The Commission approved the policy by consensus.

External Relations Committee

Tom Cowan reported that the committee did not meet in August. Commission staff continue to identify opportunities to partner with NOAA.

Science Advisory Committee

Ron Thom reported that the Committee is focused on developing a framework for Actions to Impacts that can be scalable to the MRC level. Ron reported that the committee discussed possible association with the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification, and how the MRCs work ties into the Alliance's work. The Committee prepared a memo that they will send to the Executive Committee in September. Ron is also working with the Washington State Academy of Sciences panel regarding noise and killer whales.

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) update



minutes

Cecilia Gobin reported that she and Lucas are working on getting speakers from NWIFC about hatcheries and pinnipeds. Cecilia reported that the updated [State of Our Watersheds Report](#) is scheduled to be released in November or December. Cecilia is responding to a proposed rule that would add a new definition of “habitat” to the Endangered Species Act. Comment period closes September 4, 2020.

Business Updates

MRC Symposium feedback

Dana Oster explained that there were 150 people who attended and participated in the Symposium series and gave very positive overall feedback from the sessions. Dana is leading upcoming staff discussions on collaboration between the MRCs as we continue to work from home.

County budgets discussion

Clallam: Alan reported that the lodging tax revenue is down 90%. They are looking at a “major hole” in terms of county budgets. Businesses are struggling in Clallam County.

Island: Elsa shared that Island County does not know what their budget situation will be next year.

San Juan: Christina reported that the funding for the county marine program is fine for the next year, but they don’t know for the following year.

Skagit: Pete explained that most of the county support they receive is from the clean water tax. It is small per parcel and usually renewed without much push back.

Snohomish: Sarah said that the surface water county budget is not impacted. However, there is a hiring freeze, which has affected the staff support to the MRC.

Jefferson: Jeff said that there are no current threats to the funding, but they will continue to look into it.

Whatcom: Bob reported that MRC staffing budget is stable through 2021.

Puget Sound Partnership Update

Jenn Grimm reported that the Action Agenda update is in progress, and she encouraged people to participate in the Partnership’s virtual workshops related to the update.

Kristin Hayman and Alexandra Doty presented about the Partnership’s approach to social approaches. The Partnership is trying to determine how they can help their partners, including MRCs, in social approaches (including how to change people’s behaviors and attitudes). They are looking for the barriers and challenges that partners are facing as they implement projects or campaigns designed to change attitudes and behaviors. Kristin will send a questionnaire intended for the MRCs, through the Commission, on September 10.

Environmental Benefits and Risks of Kelp Aquaculture

Nicole Naar and Emily Buckner from NOAA presented NOAA’s recent research about kelp aquaculture.



minutes

Communications Audit + Plan

Kate Elliott from Maul, Foster and Alongi (MFA) shared the elevator pitch:

Key Messages

Kate walked the Commissioners through the concept of key messages, which should answer the question "If there is one thing I want my audience to know, what would that be?" There should be no more than three or four key messages and they should be clear and concise.

Messages should be relevant to all arms of the organization and all MRCs. Commissioners broke into small groups to discuss: What concepts do we want to get across in our key messages? What are your top priorities?

Example concepts:

- Bottom up approach
- Regional environmental health
- Impact within the conservation effort
- Uniquely positioned within county governments to help inform decision-making

Tools

How are you going to learn these messages, and be able to communicate them effectively? What has worked for you in the past to learn about the Initiative? Examples include:

- Onboarding
- Communications matrix
- Communications plan fact sheet
- MRC Symposium sessions
- NW Straits Initiative Conference
- Monthly Commission meetings
- MRC Lead Staff Meeting
- Newsletter

MRC Reports

Clallam –

Alan Clark reported that the MRC had an online intern celebration on August 17. Alan said the MRC is doing educational outreach to Boys & Girls Club in Port Angeles. MRC members met with Commissioner Randy Johnson on August 14.

Island –



minutes

Elsa reported that the MRC announced the winners of the Design Your Own Salish Sea Creature art contest, in partnership with Sound Water Stewards. The winning entries are posted on the MRC website. MRC volunteers documented Pacific sand lance feeding in a kelp bed. This video and many more are available on the MRC's kelp webpage. The MRC is planning an outreach needs assessment to understand how the MRC can help address the needs of the community in regards to outreach about marine resources.

Jefferson –

Jeff Taylor reported that five MRC members did Olympia oyster monitoring at Discovery Bay and five members did reconnaissance at Dabob Bay. The MRC concluded that the Dabob site visited has plenty of oysters and won't need any restoration efforts. Four MRC volunteers did a third kelp survey in August. They're finding the kelp bed taking a different shape this year. A masters student focusing his project on doing drone surveys for kelp monitoring has been tagging along and taking videos and photos and can georeference the perimeter to compare with the volunteers' data. The MRC is finalizing edits on Olympia oyster and eelgrass videos with the local videographer.

San Juan-

Christina reported that the MRC continued efforts to spread the Be Whale Wise messaging through signage installation. The MRC has started community value data collection regarding human use and management of Southern Resident Killer Whale foraging habitat. Christina reported that progress continues for the Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) biodiversity conservation targets. Abigail Ames is leading the MSA Plan update efforts. Abigail will be presenting her work at the September MRC meeting. County staff have been working to address progress of the strategies identified in the original plan.

Skagit-

Pete Haase reported that forage fish surveys started up again in August. MRC members are conducting more extensive surveys at Bowman Bay. Pete said that Skagit Valley College is working on a forage fish survey video with the help of the forage fish survey crew. Pete reported that Fidalgo Bay Day has gone virtual as a scavenger hunt! Event organizers will launch the Scavenger Hunt on September 1.

Snohomish-

Sarah Brown reported the MRC received feedback from partners and made edits to the draft Snohomish Prioritization of Pillings for Removal report. The final report will be made available in September and a press release is planned for the project in September. The MRC will focus on high-priority areas and additional conversations with stakeholders in Phase 2 of the project. The MRC has partnered with DNR to do marine vegetation mapping of the Snohomish Estuary. The MRC collected data in late July, and will complete a report later this fall. The MRC continues to support derelict vessel work around the county and assist other agencies who have derelict vessels on their property. Snohomish County is working on a contract to remove four vessels from the estuary this fall.

Whatcom-



minutes

Bob Cecile reported that the MRC hosted a [virtual European green crab forum](#) on August 12. The webinar was targeted to Drayton Harbor residents but suitable for anyone in the region to learn about green crabs. The goal of the forum was to inform the public on why green crabs are an issue, how to identify and report them, and how green crabs are being managed in Drayton Harbor. The MRC is planning to hold a virtual retreat in early 2021. The goals of the retreat are project planning (considering COVID-19), addressing member engagement and capacity, and alignment of MRC activities with goals and mission.

Round table

There were no items for round table.

Public comment

There was an inquiry about how Commission meetings are publicized. Commission staff reported that agendas and materials are published to the website in advance.

* The next regular Commission meeting will be on Thursday, September 24.*