



Minutes

June 25, 2021 • 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Zoom – Conference call
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam), Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Pete Haase (Skagit), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Nan McKay, Chris Castner, Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Christina Koons (San Juan)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Allie Simpson, Dana Oster, Sasha Horst, Antonio Jones

Others in Attendance: Mike McKay (Whatcom MRC), Monica Montgomery (Jefferson MRC), Gordon King (Jefferson MRC), Jude Apple (Padilla Bay NERR/Skagit MRC), Austin Rose (Whatcom MRC), Elisa Dawson (Snohomish MRC), Sarah Fiskin (Jefferson MRC), Leslie Perkins, Annie England (Padilla Bay NERR), Sara Brostrom (Padilla Bay NERR), Whitney Stohr

Absent: Julia Parrish, Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Laura Blackmore

Welcome and Introductions

Elsa Schwartz, chair, opened the meeting and facilitated introductions.

Approval of Minutes

The Commission approved the minutes from the May Northwest Straits Commission as amended by consensus.

Ecology SEA Program Introduction

Joenne McGerr, Program Manager for the Washington Department of Ecology's Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program (SEA) introduced herself and described the SEA program. They seek to improve service to all communities by providing technical expertise and regulatory oversight on wetlands, protection of water quality, eliminating or reducing floods and other hazards, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and housing the state Washington Conservation Corps program. A discussion followed with members of the Commission asking about climate resiliency, the most pressing Puget Sound impacts, Shoreline Master Program process and other topics of mutual interest.

MRC Presentations

Three MRCs shared a project that will be included in their proposal to the Northwest Straits Commission. The presentations can be viewed [here](#).

- Jefferson MRC – Monica Montgomery shared an update on the voluntary no-anchor zone project, focusing on an updated buoy design and liability coverage. Jeff Taylor shared information about a pilot effort to test whether ROVs could be used for derelict crab pot removal.



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- Skagit MRC - Jude Apple, Annie England, and Sara Brostrom presented the two programs that Padilla Bay Reserve carries out in partnership with the MRC, Kids on the Beach and the Salish Sea Stewards, focusing on how they adapted to the virtual world, and looking ahead to next year.
- Whatcom MRC – Mike McKay presented a pilot project that the MRC is proposing to use a beach seine with local students to engage students in understanding fish use of the intertidal area.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – Tom Cowan thanked departing member Alan Clark for his participation on the Executive Committee, and welcomed Jeff Taylor and Chris Castner as new members. Chris now serves on the committee as the chair of the External Relations Committee, and Jeff Taylor joined a second MRC representative.

Tom brought forward the tribal acknowledgement and noted that it is now ready for adoption, with the intent of reading it at the beginning of each meeting. He also said that MRCs are welcome to use it. The Commission moved and approved by consensus to adopt the tribal acknowledgement as written.

The committee also brought forward a draft MRC Funding Policy, which staff sent out in the pre-meeting materials and discussed with MRC staff at a previous meeting. MRCs should review and discuss, and bring forward any questions. The expectation is that the Commission will revisit it to consider approval at the July meeting.

Tom also shared that the Committee recommends holding an October meeting, but that an in-person conference is not possible in 2021 for a variety of reasons.

External Relations Committee – Chris Castner reported on the ongoing process for Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization, noting four recent developments:

- Senator Murray has agreed to lead sponsorship of a reauthorization bill in the Senate.
- The 2011 reauthorization bill is being marked up for reintroduction.
- Reps. Kilmer and Larsen are coordinating to determine how to handle reauthorization in the House.
- An earmark for Fiscal Year 22 would provide federal funding, if secured.

Chris encouraged MRCs to consider opportunities to engage with county commissioners/councils and other local officials, and asked MRCs to share with him any examples where that's happening.

Science Advisory Committee – Dana provided an update on behalf of the committee. She noted that the committee is preparing to review a few select MRC projects, and they are looking for ways to better support MRCs and project development.

Business items



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In addition to the written update, staff provided the following business items:

- Staffing update – Lucas informed the group that a new Communications and Outreach Specialist, Leslie Perkins, begins July 1. A second Marine Project Technician and Veterans Conservation Corps member, Antonio Jones, started in June. Another position (Ecosystem Projects Assistant) is posted through Ecology and closes June 25.
- In-person meetings – Lucas shared information about Ecology’s emerging plans for reopening. The group noted that ferry schedules are challenging, especially this summer. Staff will consider ways to accommodate both in-person and virtual attendees where possible.
- Retreat planning – Lucas noted that a planning group is starting conversations about a hybrid in-person and virtual retreat for the fall. More information will be forthcoming.
- Pew kelp project – Dana shared an update on the plans for this project, noting that the recent first advisory group meeting had great engagement. Commission staff also had a meeting with staff from the Governor’s office to provide an update on kelp work.
- Shoreline Master Program (SMP) workgroup – Barbara Bennett from Island MRC initiated a new workgroup of interested MRC representatives to collectively discuss SMP update processes and shared interests.
- Green crab update – Allie updated the group on the recent activities on trapping and removal of invasive green crab, including ongoing efforts in Drayton Harbor and new discovery in Squalicum Harbor in Bellingham Bay.
- Forage fish update – Dana shared the news that WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will not be able to process forage fish samples collected by MRCs after July 16, with only limited sample support for sites where eggs have been found for the first time. WDFW staff is preparing a letter with more information, and Dana will share it with MRCs. Dana can also help coordinate with WDFW on site specific recommendations for how to proceed beyond mid-July.

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) update

No report.

Puget Sound Partnership Update

No report.

MRC Updates

MRCs provided full written reports that are available in the [pre-meeting materials](#). Highlights are included below:

Clallam – Alan Clark

- Internships are all up and going.
- Pigeon Guillemot monitoring was started week of June 7th.
- Rebecca Paradis was hired as new Clallam MRC Coordinator.



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Island – Elsa Schwartz

- **Anna Toledo's Parental Leave:** Anna has gone on maternity leave, and Ann Prusha will be taking on several of her duties while she is away.
- **Cornet Bay Stewardship:** Gwendolyn Hannam and Ann Prusha are going to be watering and weeding bi-weekly throughout the summer months. Anna, Gwendolyn, and Ann visited this site to strategize a watering and maintenance plan for this summer.
- **Bull Kelp:** The monitoring season is starting. Volunteers will be receiving Island County's HR training.
- **Microplastics:** Lyda Harris, Microplastics Fellow at the Seattle Aquarium gave a presentation about their microplastics program and potential ways that Island MRC can be involved. Jill Lipoti has been researching microplastics, and will be presenting at the July MRC meeting.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- The MRC gave its annual update presentation to the Board of County Commissioners on June 14.
- The MRC sent its dive safety manual to the County attorney in late May for review and recommendation for Board of County Commissioner's adoption.
- Northwest Straits Foundation Shore Friendly conducted 12 site visits with shoreline landowners in Jefferson County in May. We have three additional sites/stretches of shoreline anticipating site visits and will continue promoting them throughout the summer.

San Juan – Christina Koons

- The MRC hosted Killer Whale Tales in the Friday Harbor and Orcas Island Elementary Schools to kick off Orca Action month.
- Eelgrass habitat protection zone vessel presence and compliance monitoring began.

Skagit – Pete Haase

- MRC Presentation to the Board of County Commissioners: The MRC Coordinator, Tracy Alker, presented to the Board of County Commissioners on June 8. She gave a brief history of the NWSI, an overview of the MRC, 2020 project highlights, and projects that are in the works. The presentation was well received.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration in Padilla Bay: MRC Project Lead, Paul Dinnel, is working with Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve to restore native oysters in the southern channels of Padilla Bay. Approximately 200 bags of oyster shell were purchased. 50 of those bags will be placed in Fidalgo Bay to collect oyster seed to outplant in Padilla Bay next spring.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- The MRC submitted their NWSC Grant for 2021-2022 on June 8. This work will focus on reviewing the Port Susan MSA Plan and Report Card and is a collaboration with Island County.



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- Meadowdale Park has closed for construction on June 15, 2021. The project will remove shoreline armoring and restore a pocket estuary. The beach will be closed until Summer/Fall 2022.
- The MRC will host another clean up event on September 18, 2021 which is International Coastal Cleanup Day. This event will be in coordination with the WSU Beach Watchers, WSU Waste Warriors, and Zero Waste Washington, and will utilize the Escaped Trash Assessment Protocol developed by the EPA.

Whatcom – Bob Cecile

- The MRC has a vacancy for a Conservation-Environmental seat. This vacancy is advertised on the [MRC homepage](#).

Meeting highlights and action steps for MRCs

The Commission generated a list of key highlights that staff will compile to send to MRC representatives to share with their MRCs. Highlights are compiled on a separate document and sent directly to MRC staff and representatives. Highlights included:

- No-anchor zone project from Jefferson, and especially lessons learned.
- Tribal acknowledgment adopted, and MRCs are welcome to use it.
- The External Relations committee request to engage county officials and share information.
- Shoreline Master Program workgroup activities.
- Forage fish sample processing situation with WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife

Public comment

There was no public comment.

* The next regular Commission meeting will be on Friday, July 30 via Zoom.*