



Minutes

January 28, 2022 • 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Zoom – Conference call
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Jenn Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership alternate), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Phil Green (San Juan-Alternate), Alan Clark (Clallam), Julia Parrish, Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Chris Castner

Commission Staff: Sasha Horst, Allie Simpson, Leah Robison, Jeff Whitty

Others in Attendance: Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Rebecca Mahan (Clallam MRC), Julie Schlenger (Snohomish-Alternate)

Absent: Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Nan McKay, Christina Koons

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgment. The Commission approved the minutes from the December 10 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan updated the Commission on the December 2021 and January 2022 meetings. The Committee discussed the possibility of a retreat, but recommends deferring until it could be held in person. The Committee is planning to draft a policy on providing letters of support in order to clarify the process for future requests. The Committee also considered the potential for an in-person conference in 2022 and staff has tentatively secured a venue. Tom also noted several bills that are currently proposed for the 2022 legislative session that are of interest, although the Commission does not take any position on them.

Science Advisory Committee: Julia Parrish reported on recent activities of the Committee. The Committee has engaged with local scientists and extended invitations to present at Commission meetings, which will begin next month. The Committee has also taken the first steps to developing terms of reference for the Committee, which will be brought to the full Commission at a later date for input.

External Relations Committee: Chris Castner reported on recent activity on the draft Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization bill, noting that there is positive progress on ensuring that the language of the bill is concise and clear. The potential funding for Northwest Straits through Congressionally Directed Spending is still in suspense as the federal FY22 budget is delayed through a Continuing Resolution that goes through mid-February. The Committee's next meeting will be held on February 2.

Business items

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

- Jeff Whitty shared information about his current activities and ideas for an implementation/coordination strategy related to the Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan.
- Allie reminded the group about the fourth climate change symposium on February 17, 2022 at 3:30pm. The event will be more interactive to allow for discussion between MRC members.



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- Allie reported on the eelgrass no-anchor zone project that is now underway with US Fish and Wildlife funding that started as of January 1. Commission staff is working with MRCs and the Foundation on the permitting phase.
- A tentative 2022 in-person conference is scheduled for November 18-19 at Maple Hall in La Conner, Skagit County. MRC members are encouraged to save the date and more information will be shared as planning begins.
- Sasha will share the brief Commission meeting highlights with all members of the Commission, where previously these were sent only to MRC representatives to share with their MRC. Commissioners can respond to that email to opt out of that correspondence at any time.

Partner updates:

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin shared updates on four key areas:

Treaty rights at risk – There is follow up with federal partners on [Treaty Rights at Risk](#), particularly around riparian and nearshore habitat issues related to how the Army Corps of Engineers and NOAA determine impacts from permitted structures. There is a need to do a cumulative effects analysis at the WRIA or Salish Sea scale to ensure that the total impact is considered.

Recreational impacts to treaty rights – They are working with state co-managers (such as WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife) on updating their recreational strategy plans, particularly around marine, freshwater and upper terrestrial areas.

[Lorraine Loomis Act](#) – Tribal leadership is working with the Governor's office on how to proceed with the bill in consideration of comments received in a recent committee hearing. While the bill is named after an important tribal elder, Cecilia noted that the bill is about salmon, which should be important to everyone.

[Pinniped predation on salmonids](#) – Tribes are working with WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife and the WA Academy of Sciences to convene a panel on pinniped predation on salmonids. The panelists are now listed and they hope to begin work in late February to develop guiding questions for the panel. There will be public workshops in the future related to this work.

Puget Sound Partnership: Jenn Grimm reported on four topics from the Puget Sound Partnership:

Upper Skagit watershed – Imperial Metals recently returned mining rights at the upper Skagit headwaters. More information is in a [Seattle Times](#) article, and the Governor has proposed \$4.5 million in the budget for this purpose.

The Army Corps of Engineers released their spend plan for infrastructure assistance, which did not include fish passage at Howard Hanson dam, but does include funding for infrastructure repairs to the Ballard Locks.

Governor Inslee recently issued an [emergency proclamation](#) for support on European green crab in the Lummi sea pond and elsewhere.



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The [2022-26 Puget Sound Action Agenda](#) is now out for board review through early February. The Puget Sound Partnership will have an online Action Agenda Explorer tool to make the information more accessible and user friendly.

Northwest Straits Foundation: In addition to the written reports in the meeting materials, Don Hunger reported out on current activities of the Foundation:

The [Caroline Gibson scholarship](#) application is now online and was sent to Western Washington University, University of Washington and The Evergreen State College. This is the first cycle and the future annual cycle will run in parallel with the academic year.

The Foundation is developing a business plan for an internship program, and expect to reach out to MRCs in about a month to solicit feedback.

Many of the Foundation's current projects are in the permitting or feasibility stage, including Hoypus Point, Polnell Point and Clayton Beach.

The Foundation's Passport to Marine Adventure will be getting a refresh for 2022, incorporating feedback from participants that they would like more interaction at the site. They are hoping to also make it web/app based. The Foundation will be checking back in with MRCs for site recommendations.

MRC Updates

MRCs provided full written reports that are available in the pre-meeting materials. Highlights are included below:

Clallam – Alan Clark

- We added 3 new members one being the Lower Elwha Tribal Representative.
- Several MRC members and Coordinator attended Oiled Wildlife Volunteer Training with Dept. of Ecology.
- Marine Critter Outreach/Education cards are being distributed to local venues.
- Continued forage fish sampling on Cline Spit and Ediz Hook.
- January 27th Mussel cages are being collected and sent to the lab for Biotoxin analysis.

Island – Elsa Schwartz

- Forage Fish: Continued forage fish sampling at Hoypus Point, Cornet Bay, Sunlight Shores, Maple Grove, Hidden Beach, and Glendale. Monitoring resumed at Seahorse Siesta in November.
- Advisory – Pinto Abalone: Jill Lipoti drafted a comment letter on the Pinto Abalone Recovery Plan, which the MRC and the Board of County Commissioners approved. It was submitted at the end of the year
- Staff Change: Island MRC has a new Coordinator – Kelly Zupich!

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- In January, the rain garden subcommittee will be conducting site visits at all MRC co-sponsored rain gardens to assess maintenance needs.
- The MRC adopted a new project focused on storm surge and total water level monitoring.



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- The MRC voted in new officers: Chair – Brenda Johnson (Dist. 2), Vice Chair – Troy McKelvey (Recreation), NWSC Rep – Jeff Taylor (Dist. 2), NWSC Alt – Sarah Fisken (Dist. 3)

San Juan – Phil Green

- The MRC held their annual retreat on December 2nd.
- The MRC and County's Southern Resident killer whale efforts and Plastic Free Salish Sea initiative will be included in the 2022 Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference.
- The MRC continues to make progress on the MSA Plan update

Skagit – Diane Hennebert

- Kayak Kelp Survey Data: Skagit MRC's kelp survey data has been selected as one of the areas to be included in an additional multi-year trend analysis to inform the Puget Sound Kelp Canopy Vital Signs.
- MRC Project Planning Retreat: The MRC is in the process of planning a retreat to evaluate and prioritize the list of projects for federal appropriation funding.
- MRC-Salish Sea School Intern: An intern has been selected for this pilot program to work on a forage fish monitoring project at March's Point. Field work will occur Feb-October. The intern will present results to the MRC in January 2022. This MRC Intern project is part of a pilot program and is just one several other intern projects under the Salish Sea School STARS program (Students Training as Research Scientists), including stormwater monitoring, beach debris, orcas, and marine birds.
- MRC Project Evaluation: MRC member, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, developed a new, easy to follow, three-pronged approach for MRC members to evaluate and prioritize MRC projects. A retreat will be held in April, to finalize the list of projects.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- Snohomish County's contractor has completed the removal of four vessels from the Snohomish Estuary area. The total cost of the removals was nearly \$115,000, which will be reimbursed at 90% by DNR. Additional information about the four vessels removed can be found at www.snocomrc.org/projects/derelict-vessel-removal.
- The MRC conducted interviews for new MRC members on December 13 and 20. The MRC will be looking to fill up to 2 vacancies, in addition to a change in the Stillaguamish Tribal Representative. Franchesca Perez will re-join the MRC in 2022 to serve as the tribal representative upon the departure of Kip Killebrew, who is retiring at the end of 2021.
- The MRC has nominated three new members – Franchesca Perez (Stillaguamish Tribe Representative), Bob Margulis, and Allan Hicks – to Snohomish County Council. We are currently waiting formal appointment by the council.
- The MRC contracted with DNR to complete marine vegetation monitoring from Everett to Edmonds this summer. DNR found eelgrass was present at 21 out of 22 sites sampled, and at 192 of 224 transects sampled. A draft reported is being reviewed by the subcommittee, with a final report due by January 31.
- The MRC finalized the Port Susan Stakeholder List in December. The MRC has also coordinated a draft of the Stakeholder Survey with project consultant ESA, staff from Snohomish County, and the Joint Island-Snohomish Port Susan Team. The next Joint Island-Snohomish Port Susan Team Meeting is scheduled for January 25.

Whatcom – Bob Cecile



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- The MRC has a vacancy for an Economic interest position and a Conservation/Environmental interest position. These vacancies are advertised on the [MRC home page](#).
- Whatcom County was awarded \$100,000 from the Department of Ecology to support the use of CoSMoS (modelling developed by USGS) to inform incorporation of sea level rise (SLR) in the Shoreline Management Program. MRC staff will be joining a workgroup to develop a vulnerability and risk assessment for Whatcom County's marine and riverine shorelines. The MRC will be informed of the process and be able to provide input.

Meeting highlights and action steps for MRCs

The Commission identified the following key highlights, which staff will share as a separate document to MRC staff and the Commission:

- Upcoming climate change symposium series event for MRCs February 17 from 3:30pm-5:00pm.
- 2022 Conference dates – November 18-19, 2022 at Maple Hall in La Conner is the date and location if an in-person event is possible.
- The Northwest Straits Foundation's Caroline Gibson scholarship application period is open in February.
- The Northwest Straits Foundation is hoping to plan some summer social gatherings and will reach out to MRCs if there are opportunities.
- The Clallam MRC's developed some critter cards for community outreach. Contact Rebecca Mahan (rparadis@co.clallam.wa.us) if your MRC is interested in getting copies.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

*The next Commission meeting will be on Friday, February 25, 2022, via Zoom.