



Minutes

February 25, 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), Jenn Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership alternate), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Christina Koons (San Juan), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Julia Parrish, Chris Castner, Nan McKay

Commission Staff: Dana Oster, Allie Simpson, Leah Robison, Jeff Whitty

Others in Attendance: Austin Rose (Whatcom), Troy McKelvey (Jefferson), Christy Pattengill-Semmens (REEF), Janna Nichols (REEF), Adam Lorio (NW Straits Foundation), Phil Salditt (NW Straits Foundation), Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation)

Absent: Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Alan Clark (Clallam), Tim Ellis (Snohomish)

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgment. The Commission approved the minutes from the January 28 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan updated the Commission on the February 2022 meeting. The Committee discussed the tentative in-person conference in La Conner November 18 and 19 at Maple Hall. The Committee discussed the NW Straits Commission funding policy change, as further detailed in the report included in the meeting packet. The policy will be brought to the Commission for adoption at a later date.

Science Advisory Committee: Julia Parrish reported on the recent activities of the Committee. The Committee has continued to work on the Articles of Association. The Committee has developed and scheduled the first few months of the new program engaging local scientists. This program will give NW Straits Commission members a deeper insight into relevant local science and opportunities for involvement. The first presentation of this series was by Christy Pattengill-Semmens with REEF. The four-part Climate Change Symposium series finished with the last session on February 17. The Committee would like participants to complete the [follow-up evaluation](#) to provide input on the symposium series.

External Relations Committee: Chris Castner reported on the recent activity on the draft NW Straits Initiative reauthorization bill. He reported that there is no change in the status of the bill, and the next step will be for Senator Murray's staff to send the draft bill to NOAA. The Committee also discussed opportunities for conversations with legislators during Puget Sound Day on the Hill to thank them for past support and discuss reauthorization. There are no changes in the status for the potential funding for Northwest Straits through Congressionally Directed Spending as the FY22 budget is delayed through a Continuing Resolution through March 11.

Director's Report: Elsa conveyed Lucas's updates.

- Staff Updates: Dana has returned and will be working four days per week starting March 1. Progress on filling the open administrative position continues. The reclassification phase is almost complete. Recruiting will follow reclassification.



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- Maritime WA National Heritage Area recognizes our state's unique and diverse maritime culture. This new designation supports our coastal communities in celebrating, maintaining, and sharing their water-based stories. A draft management plan for this area has been released. Comments can be provided in several ways, including through a survey that focuses on the key components of the plan:
<https://preservewa.org/programs/maritime-national-heritage-area/mw-nha-get-involved/>
- Legislative Update: The session ends March 10. Here are some bills that are being tracked
 - SB5619: Provides funding to WA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to identify priority kelp and eelgrass habitat. The bill has passed in the Senate and will go to the House.
 - HB1700: Provides funding to the DNR derelict vessel removal program. The bill has passed house and will go to the Senate.
 - SB5885: Mandates that replacement of existing shoreline structures must meet most up to date standards. The bill has passed Senate and will go to the house.
 - HB1117: This bill impacts state comprehensive planning by setting Net Ecological Gain standards. The bill is getting mixed testimony.
 - HB1099: Addresses climate change through state's comprehensive planning framework. Passed from Senate housing and local gov't committee. Will be taken up by full Senate.
 - SB5747: Would require consultation with tribes on oil and hazardous substance spill prevention and contingency plans. Passed from House Environment and Energy committee. Will be taken up by full House.
 - HB1172: Recognizes judicially affirmed and treaty-reserved fishing rights. Bill is in hearing in Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Parks.
 - SB5590: Extends expiration of the Marine Resources Advisory Council (ocean acidification advisory group) from 2022 to 2032. Passed Senate, Bill is now in the House Environment Committee.

Business items

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

- Green crab update: Jeff and Leah gave an update on green crab field preparation and presentations. Staff has been busy preparing for the upcoming field season in Whatcom and Skagit counties by coordinating efforts with WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife, WA Sea Grant, Padilla Bay Reserve, local landowners, and local shellfish farmers. The team has also made several presentations on green crabs (e.g. crab ID and what to do if you see a green crab). Staff is also happy to announce that they will be able to work with a WA Conservation Corps and Veterans Conservation Corps crews during the 2022 trapping season. To help with the intensive removal efforts in Whatcom and Skagit counties, staff is starting a pilot volunteer program. MRCs members in these counties received a recruitment announcement for participating in the boots-in-the-mud work later this spring. In addition to trapping, there will also be education and outreach opportunities that would benefit from volunteer support.

Presenting Scientist

Christy Pattengill-Semmens from Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) presented on Linking Citizen Science to Ocean Conservation. Citizen scientists are pushing the field and filling in the data gaps. Opportunities like the REEF Volunteer Fish Surveys provide authentic learning opportunities to connect people to the natural world.



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The extensive data collected in this global project has contributed to many research projects and supported management decisions. In Washington, data REEF collected was useful in assessing the sunflower sea star, which led to the species being listed as critically endangered. REEF data was also used in a case study of rockfishes in Puget Sound. MRC members can make this program more visible to their community members by participating and sharing the Volunteer Fish Survey Project: www.REEF.org.

Partner updates:

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

[Treaty rights at risk](#)- Tribes reconvened regional meeting with federal tribal leaders. The issue of European green crab was elevated to federal agencies (Bureau of Indian Affairs and NOAA) to support with funding this work.

The Lorraine Loomis act in the legislature was pulled. A lot of the conversation is around putting money toward existing salmon protections in preparation for when a bill is in place. They discussed redirecting energy to seeking funding for salmon recovery work in the different Water Resource Inventory Areas.

They are working with member tribes to figure out the next steps on addressing the Coho mortality due to the tire chemical pollution (6 PPD Quinon). They would like to engage the EPA and their Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. With EPA regulatory engagement, industry could be brought to the table to discuss safer alternatives and development of a national phase-out approach as part of the long term planning. There was tribal engagement and support on the research phase, now that there are solid findings; it is time to move towards the 'next steps'. Jenn Grimm shared an article with the Commission on this topic: <https://www.washington.edu/news/2020/12/03/tire-related-chemical-largely-responsible-for-adult-coho-salmon-deaths-in-urban-streams/>

Puget Sound Partnership: Jenn Grimm reported on updates from the Puget Sound Partnership and provided the link to the interactive tool for viewing legislative updates: ([Puget Sound Partnership - Legislative Updates \(wa.gov\)](#)). She gave a reminder about the Action Agenda which is open for public input and review from March 15 through April 15 (<https://www.psp.wa.gov/draft-action-agenda-development-review.php>). After this, it will make rounds to the boards and then go into effect. Puget Sound Day on the Hill will be hybrid and extended and more details will be provided next month.

Northwest Straits Foundation: Don Hunger reported out on current activities of the Foundation.

- Jason and Haley are continuing beach seining surveys.
- The Mount Erie rain garden project is underway and there will be upcoming volunteer opportunities.
- They are relaunching the marine passport to adventure and will produce a rack card with QR codes to share. The project is a fun engagement opportunity for community members to visit sites and become stewards and supporters.
- The first round of the Caroline Gibson scholarship fund was open for a short period and received five applicants. Two scholarships will be given in March. The next application cycle will align with the next academic year.
- The Foundation has been working with Clallam MRC on the outreach coasters project.



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- They are planning on engaging with Boeing on more projects in the future and will provide more details at a future meeting.
- They received a business planning grant that funds a position to initiate the new AmeriCorps program.

MRC Updates

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

Clallam – Alan Clark (not present)

- Met with the NW Straits Foundation about their Marine Critter Outreach/Education cards.
- Clallam MRC gave an update presentation to Clallam Board of County Commissioners.
- January 27th Mussel cages were collected and sent to the lab for Biotoxin analysis.

Island – Elsa Schwartz

- Strategic Planning: The Committee is working to hire a consultant to help facilitate the in-person retreat on March 19.
- Staff in Training: Kelly Zupich has started her new position and is being onboarded.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- The rain garden subcommittee conducted site visits at all MRC co-sponsored rain gardens in Port Townsend to assess maintenance needs and created a list of rain gardens overgrown with weeds/grass. The subcommittee is planning a work party on Mar 18 to add mulch to the Franklin and Adams St. rain garden and to weed some of the other rain gardens around Port Townsend.
- No anchor zones subcommittee members (Troy, Pam, Gordon, Bryan) serviced the buoys along the Port Townsend waterfront on Jan 22 – the MRC's first time back to diving since 2019. They swapped out the remaining 4 summer spar buoys with winter floats and checked the integrity of the ropes and hardware, relocating 6 of the anchors.
- Expansion of the Olympia oyster restoration site in South Discovery Bay received permit approvals from WDFW and Jefferson County (DNR, USACE and Ecology pending).
- Student ROV project is coming up for crab pot removal and will also be including a side scan sonar to get a survey of the bay. The experiments with the side scan fish finders is supported by folks from the University of Delaware.

San Juan – Christina Koons

- The MRC welcomed two new members.
- The MRC continues to make progress on the Marine Stewardship Area Plan update.
- A Joint letter to Islands Trust was provided with a request for the Canadian government to reposition an emergency towing tug to Victoria BC.
- MRC members are planning to volunteer with island oil spill association (IOSA)
- Plan to install the Seabin.
- Grade 5 classrooms hear killer whale tales.
- Working on eelgrass protection, and determining where protection buoys should be placed

Skagit – Diane Hennebert



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- Forage fish surveys at the Bowman Bay restoration site have temporarily been put on hold to help protect the northern elephant seal and her new pup until the pup is fully weaned.
- 19 participants have registered so far for the in-person Salish Sea Stewards training program that starts March 1st. Masks and vaccinations are required. Speakers have the option to present virtually. Salish Sea Stewards alumni are invited to attend virtually. The [2022 Training Schedule](#) is now available on the Skagit MRC website.
- Excited to hear that Boeing reached out. The Skagit MRC received some funding from them for stormwater improvement and the deliverable was the Anacortes rain garden that is underway.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis (not present)

- The Stakeholder Survey for the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area Conservation Action Plan Update project was launched on February 9. The survey will remain open until March 2, and respondents will have the opportunity to respond either in writing or with a follow up phone interview.
- 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. DNR submitted their final report on February 11 and presented on this work at the February 16 MRC Meeting.
- The MRC retrieved cages for the Mussel Watch program on January 31. One mussel cage (Kayak Point) was lost during heavy storms shortly after deployment in November, while the remaining 6 cages were successfully retrieved and returned to WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife.

Whatcom – Bob Cecile

- The MRC has a vacancy for an Economic interest position and a Conservation/Environmental interest position. These vacancies are advertised on the MRC homepage <https://www.whatcomcountymrc.org/>.
- The MRC will be hosting education and outreach lessons with grade school kids. The program will demonstrate beach seining and will teach about salmon migration.
- The community boating center (CBC) would like to get involved with the MRC Kelp surveying. Allie presented on survey results at their last MRC meeting.
- There was a recent beach access issue with a landowner concerned about public access on the county road. The MRC will continue to monitor what is happening as this county road is used for marine access for various MRC programs.

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:

- A reminder for the *tentative* in-person Northwest Straits conference November 18-19, 2022 at Maple Hall in La Conner. The Northwest Straits Commission plans to announce whether a conference will be held within the next month. A decision is pending public health recommendations.
- The REEF Volunteer Fish Survey Project is a citizen science opportunity for those who dive or snorkel. Learn more about how to get involved here: <https://www.reef.org/what-reef>.
- For invasive European green crab early detection and monitoring information, follow along with the work of Washington Sea Grant's Crab Team: [Get Involved With Crab Team – Washington Sea Grant](#).



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- In Whatcom and Skagit Counties, NWSC staff will be leading intensive green crab removal efforts. Contact Leah Robison (robison@nwstraits.org) for more information about MRC volunteer opportunities in these counties.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

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