



Minutes

May 27, 2022 • 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Zoom – Virtual meeting
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), Julia Parrish, Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Christina Koons (San Juan), Chris Castner, Alan Clark (Clallam)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Dana Oster, Leah Robison, Jeff Whitty, Sasha Horst

Others in Attendance: Troy McKelvey (Jefferson MRC), Jackie Lindsey (COASST), Phil Salditt (NW Straits Foundation)

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

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgment. The Commission approved the minutes from the April 22 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan reported on the May 16 meeting of the committee, noting that the group focused on discussion of the budget for the Congressionally Directed Funds including approaches to address diversity, equity and inclusion, derelict vessels, and tribal projects.

Science Advisory Committee: Julia Parrish reported that the committee has spent time on extending invites to the *Speed Dating with Scientist* presentations for the next series of meetings.

External Relations Committee: Chris Castner noted that he doesn't have an update on the reauthorization bill. He has reached out to Senator Murray's staff to find out the current status of the draft bill. Lucas added that he talked to Padilla Bay Reserve Director Jude Apple, who was in Washington DC this week and noted that Senator Murray's staff mentioned the Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization bill during his meeting with them.

Business items

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

- Staffing updates – Lucas reported that Nathan Woods will be joining us as Program Coordinator on June 6.
- Conference updates – Lucas shared the results of the one-question survey of MRC members about how comfortable they will be attending an in-person event. Following discussion, MRC representatives agreed to raise the discussion at their June meetings and report back to Commission staff. There was general support for an outdoor event in late summer.
- Congressional funding – Lucas informed the group that we are still waiting for NOAA to follow up with the process and guidance for the fiscal year 2022 federal funds and that staff will share more information when we receive it.
- Derelict vessel project opportunities – Commission staff recently held discussions with WA Dept of Natural Resources about derelict vessel removal and potentially a vessel turn in event. Lucas will reach out to MRCs to schedule a meeting on the program.
- Pew - Linking Kelp Science and Policy – Dana updated the group on a project funded by Pew. As part of the project, staff convened a workshop where more than 55 participants tuned in for a panel discussion around the existing rules and regulations that are in place to protect kelp, how they work in practice, and what information/resources are needed to inform decision-making.



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- Voluntary No-Anchor Zones – Dana reported that we are working with the NW Straits Foundation on permit applications and working with MRCs with local sites. The project team is also communicating with Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission for input from tribes.

Presenting Scientist – Jackie Lindsey

Julia Parrish introduced Jackie Lindsey of the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST). Jackie shared information about the beached bird program that has been going on for 22 years, and the marine debris program that has been going on for the last 8 years. The COASST program has already engaged with MRCs in several counties and Jackie shared her contact information and encouraged MRCs to reach out if there is interest in learning more or partnering by adopting a beach for dead bird surveys.

Partner updates:

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin was not in attendance.

Puget Sound Partnership: Jennifer Grimm updated the group on the Leadership Council considering adoption of final Action Agenda on June 8. Science Panel and ECB have recommended approval. Still trying to reschedule Puget Sound Day on the Hill and she will share information as soon as she has it.

Northwest Straits Foundation: Written report was provided in pre-meeting materials.

MRC Updates

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

Clallam – Alan Clark

- Summer interns are being sought. Deadline was extended and they now have applications pending.
- Tumwater Trap was installed 4/28.
- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Clallam MRC participated in Port Angeles' Earth Day Celebration (4/23) on the City Pier. The event was attended and good weather helped, and they may have successfully recruited volunteers to monitor pigeon guillemots.

Island – Elsa Schwartz

- Cornet Bay Stewardship – Weeding for Whales - Our restoration at Cornet Bay received some care on the 11th. We hosted a weeding and composting event. We will host another event on May 24 at 10 am to complete this work.
- Earth Day at the Clyde Theater - Island MRC and Sound Water Stewards partnered to host a showing of four of Florian Graner's amazing educational short films. Additionally, members of the MRC were able to host a Q&A session along with Florian to share about our program and how we have utilized Florian's amazing videos for school age education in Island County. 35 members of the public attended this fun event.
- Low Tide Walk - The Island MRC and Sound Water Stewards partnered to host a Low tide walk at one of Whidbey's beautiful beaches. 10 members of the public joined our team of beach naturalists to see what could be found at low tide. The highlight of the day was finding healthy adult *Pisaster ochraceus* sea stars!

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- Side scan sonar surveys took place May 16 & 17 covering a part of Port Townsend Bay (near the waterfront), as well as the Adelma Beach and Cape George (between the marina and Beckett Point) areas in Discovery Bay.



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- Olympia oyster subcommittee conducted an initial population survey at its new restoration site, south of the powerlines in South Discovery Bay, with the help of 7 volunteers.
- No-Anchor Zones team swapped the PT winter floats with summer spar buoys and did some maintenance work, bringing the number of functioning buoys up to 8 (of 13 permitted).

San Juan – Christina Koons

- Staff and MRC members presented at, and attended the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference
- MRC members reviewed and attended site visits for this year's Salmon Recovery project proposals.
- The MRC welcomed Ciera McQuaid as the summer intern.

Skagit – Diane Hennebert

- Salish Sea Stewards Training ends May 24. 24 trainees are slated to graduate. A 'bring your own lunch' picnic is planned for July 16 at Padilla Bay where the newly graduated volunteers will get a chance to meet some of the veteran volunteers. The event will also include an educational component.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Work Party- May 18: Skagit MRC in partnership with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group planted 10 Sitka spruce, 10 Douglas Fir and 20 Scouler's willow, plus dune grass at Bowman Bay. They also installed 12 watering bags to help the trees stay moist during the dry season. This event coincided with the forage fish surveys. Trained volunteers conducted a survival assessment the following day.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- Snohomish MRC is currently planning for a series of three Stakeholder Meetings for the Port Susan Conservation Action Plan (CAP) Update Project. These meetings will focus directly on topics identified as high priorities by partners, including a meeting to focus on plan implementation and a meeting to discuss the Objectives & Strategic Actions of the CAP, with focus on areas identified by partners in need of updating, such as climate change, invasive species, and human, social, and cultural wellbeing. An introductory meeting will be held on May 25 to present the project to the Snohomish-Stillaguamish LIO, Island LIO, and other interested partners.
- Snohomish County is currently working to finalize a contract for the removal of 4 vessels from the Snohomish Estuary, with the hope to start removing vessels in late May.

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/>

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:

- Action Item: MRC reps please ask your MRCs for insight on the following conference related matters and report general feedback to Sasha and Elsa. Given COVID:
 - How does the MRC feel about attending an in person indoor NW Straits Initiative conference in November?
 - How does the MRC feel about attending an outdoor NW Straits Initiative gathering in late summer/early fall instead of holding an in-person conference in November? The event would be more of an opportunity to connect than a conference.
- Lucas will be reaching out to MRC staff and other interested parties soon to schedule a meeting to discuss derelict vessels. In particular, we will discuss an opportunity to do a direct interagency agreement with DNR to remove vessels



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in MRC counties. Related to this, we will review the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Vessels of Concern list and the possibility of doing a pilot vessel turn-in event with DNR.

- The Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council will vote on approval of the new Action Agenda in June

Public comment

There was no public comment.

*The next Commission meeting will be on Friday June 24, 2022, via Zoom.