



Minutes

June 24, 2022 10:00 AM-12:00PM
Zoom - Virtual meeting
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Chris Castner, Phil Green (San Juan-alternate)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Dana Oster, Leah Robison, Jeff Whitty, Nathan Woods, Sasha Horst, Allie Simpson, Antonio Jones

Others in Attendance: Troy McKelvey (Jefferson MRC), Phil Salditt (NW Straits Foundation), Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Jay Lind, Bob Margulis, Austin Rose (Whatcom), Frances Robertson (San Juan), Rebecca Mahan (Clallam)

Absent: Christina Koons (San Juan), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Julia Parrish, Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal) Nan McKay, Alan Clark (Clallam)

Welcome and Introductions

Due to technical issues, Chair Elsa Schwartz joined the meeting late, so Vice Chair Tom Cowan opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgment. The Commission approved the minutes from the May 27 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan reported on the June 13 Executive Committee meeting, noting that the group focused on discussion of the budget for the Congressionally Directed Funds including Marine Resource Committee's project proposals, approaches to address diversity, equity and inclusion, derelict vessels, and tribal projects. The Commission approved the budget for the Congressionally Directed Funds from NOAA by consensus.

Science Advisory Committee: Dana Oster shared an update from the Science Advisory Committees June meeting where the Committee reviewed an overview of the Voluntary No-Anchor Zone project and discussed possible eelgrass monitoring strategies to assess efficacy of this approach to eelgrass conservation. Dana also reported that the Science Advisory Committee is discussing how the current draft Articles of Association outline the role of the Science Advisory Committee and its support of the Northwest Straits Initiative.

External Relations Committee: Lucas reported that the Northwest Straits Commission is awaiting an update from Senator Murray's staff regarding the draft NW Straits Initiative reauthorization bill.

Business items



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- Welcome Nathan – Lucas introduced Nathan Woods to the Northwest Straits Commission. Nathan is excited to join the team as Program Coordinator.
- Kelp Plan Project/Program Inventory Survey – Jeff reported on the progress of the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan Project/Program Inventory Survey that was sent out to kelp stakeholders throughout Puget Sound to gather information about what groups are involved in kelp conservation and restoration in the area, and to better understand what actions of the Kelp Plan are being undertaken. The survey is still active, and Jeff has asked for people to share the [kelp survey](#) link to anyone involved with kelp in Puget Sound. People have been asked to submit their responses by July 15, 2022.
- Conference update – Lucas reported on the feedback from MRCs on holding an in-person event in November. Based on that feedback, the recommendation is to hold an outdoor Collaborative Conservation Workshop on September 16 at Padilla Bay Reserve. Planning committee members met and discussed agenda items and created a tentative timeline for the event. The Commission approved the proposed Northwest Straits Collaborative Conservation Workshop by consensus.
- No-anchor zone funding update – Dana reported that the Commission was awarded \$66,874 in funding for the voluntary no-anchor zones project from US Fish and Wildlife Service. The funds will be used to support the program in 2023-2024. Around half of the award will be contracted to the Northwest Straits Foundation to carry out components of the project. Current work on the project includes a site selection process, finding independent contractors for diving operations, and completing permit applications.
- Pew kelp project update – Dana reported the first of two kelp workshops and focus groups occurred during May of this year, and the second is scheduled for August. The goal of this project is to bridge science, policy, and management practices to more effectively conserve kelp forests in Puget Sound.
- Veterans Conservation Corps – Allie welcomed back Antonio Jones to the Northwest Straits Commission as a full-time intern for his second summer season working on the European green crab trapping and removal program. In response to a question about how volunteers can engage in green crab efforts, Allie said MRCs should check with Washington Sea Grant about green crab monitoring by contacting [Emily Grayson](#) or visiting the [Washington Crab Team](#) or the [Washington Green Crab Map](#) website.
- Forage Fish training schedule update – Nathan reported on behalf of Leah that forage fish training is scheduled for July 13 in Port Townsend, with the virtual presentation on the July 12. Everyone who is signed up for the training event received an email from Leah with details, and interested parties can reach out to [Leah](#) with questions or concerns.

Congressional Funding Update

- Lucas reminded the group that preparations for this funding began six months ago and thanked MRCs for their help in the preliminary planning process. A final proposal will be submitted to



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NOAA by July 5 and is already routing at the Dept. of Ecology for review. After NOAA approval of the budget and workplan, the next steps will be to work with MRCs beginning in August to create grant agreements for the award to start in January of 2023.

- Lucas discussed the budget breakdown, including funding allocated to MRCs and funding for the WA Department of Natural Resources to conduct derelict vessel removal operations as prioritized by MRCs and tribal partners.
- The Northwest Straits Commission will work collaboratively with the Northwest Straits Foundation on several projects, including the voluntary no-anchor zones project and Clayton Beach restoration.
- Lucas also addressed the Northwest Straits Commission and MRCs desire to move forward with DEI assessment, and a new communications position that is planned to help support the work of MRCs and the Commission.

Partner updates

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

Puget Sound Partnership: Jennifer Grimm was not in attendance.

Northwest Straits Foundation: Don Hunger stated that a written report of the Northwest Straits Foundations current projects was provided in pre-meeting materials. Don noted that the Northwest Straits Foundation is recruiting two new board members for 2023. Don reported that the Northwest Straits Foundation's [Passport to Marine Adventure app](#) is live and available for download. The app connects the public to restoration work by providing incentives to the public, in the form of credits, for visiting restoration sites. The credits can be applied at participating businesses for discounts on purchases. Don Hunger encouraged MRCs to raise awareness of the app among their members and the public and contact him with any restoration sites that MRCs would like included in the app. Don also reported that three Caroline Gibson's Scholars scholarships have recently been granted to students.

MRC Updates

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

Clallam – Rebecca Mahan

- Summer intern interviews 6/13.
- Tumwater Trap is fishing.
- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Pigeon guillemot surveys have started.



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Island – Elsa Schwartz

- Cornet Bay Stewardship – Weeding for Whales. The MRC's restoration at Cornet Bay received some additional care on May 24th and June 10th. There are a lot of weeds to remove. The MRC will be holding another event on July 8th to start spreading 40 yards of hog fuel to help smother the weeds and provide a moisture barrier for the plants and trees.
- Marine Debris/ Plastics Classes with the Swinomish. In collaboration with the Sound Water Stewards, the MRC was honored to assist in teaching a couple of classes for Swinomish youth called "Between Two Worlds." This program helps students learn about science from a western and indigenous perspective.
- Oak Harbor AP BIO Class – Marine Debris Survey. The final weeks of the school year, the MRC were worked with the 12th grade AP Biology students from Oak Harbor to set up an initial marine debris survey site at Fort Casey State Park. The site will then be monitored by students in the future. This is in collaboration with WA State Parks, Sound Water Stewards and NOAA.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- The MRC tabled its first in-person community event since the pandemic started, at Shrimpfest in Brinnon on May 28 and 29. We made 266 direct contacts over the weekend and had lots of positive interactions and public members (local and visiting) particularly interested in the green crab invasion (the first one in Hood Canal was detected just the week prior).
- The first ROV survey to locate and remove derelict crab pots from the Cape George and Adelma Beach areas of Discovery Bay was conducted on June 14. The team faced a number of challenges (strong currents, low visibility, fishing line and seaweed plugging up the ROV propellers, etc.) and was unable to locate pots. With some lessons learned and ideas for improving the ROV setup, the team will continue to pilot this effort.
- The MRC had an Olympia oyster workday on June 17, with 5 MRC members and 5 community volunteers helping to spread shell (16 half barrels) at the Lagoon Site.

San Juan – Phil Green

- Vessel monitoring efforts at eelgrass protection sites around the county began for the season. MRC staff and an MRC member began visitor assessments at False Bay, they are trying to recruit more members to help with this effort.
- County staffing of the MRC is undergoing restructuring to make better use of staff time and skill sets.

Skagit – Jay Lind attended on behalf of Skagit MRC.

- Olympia oyster cultch bags recently collected by volunteers indicated that 2021 had the second highest rate of oyster settlement recorded in Fidalgo Bay!



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- Surf smelt spawning activity is really starting to ramp up now after a quiet winter.
- Kelp monitoring is now underway. The first surveys of the season took place at our 3 survey sites on June 3, June 12, and June 25. Five new kayaker volunteers are helping with the surveys this year.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- Snohomish MRC hosted an introductory stakeholder meeting on May 25 for the Port Susan Conservation Action Plan (CAP) Update Project to present the project to the Snohomish-Stillaguamish Local Integrating Organization (LIO), Island LIO, and other interested partners. The MRC is currently planning for two additional stakeholder meetings, which 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 as in need of updating, such as climate change, invasive species, and human, social, and cultural wellbeing.
- Snohomish County's contractor is planning to begin removing the first of four derelict vessels from the Snohomish Estuary the week of June 27, starting with the vessel on Jetty Island.
- The Crabber Education subcommittee is planning to coordinate in-person outreach at the 10th Street Boat Launch in Everett on July 1, 2, 8, and 9, pending final details about opening day from WDFW. Depending on volunteer interest, in-person outreach may expand to additional sites.

Whatcom – Bob Cecile

- The MRC has a vacancy for an Economic interest position interest position. This vacancy is advertised on the MRC homepage <https://www.whatcomcountymrc.org/>
- The MRCs Beach Seine with Schools program was highlighted in the [Cascadia Daily News](#).

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:

- **Save the date:** In lieu of the November conference, Northwest Straits will hold an outdoor in-person Collaborative Conservation Workshop on Friday September 16 from 11am-4pm at Padilla Bay Reserve. All MRC members and staff, NW Straits Commission staff and Commissioners, NW Straits Foundation Board and staff are invited and encouraged to attend. A schedule and timeline of events is in development. Additional information and registration details will be sent directly to all MRC members.
- **Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS):** NW Straits Commission staff submitted the budget and project outlines for the 2022 Congressional funds. The planned timeline for the funds is January 1, 2023-December 31, 2023. The timeline and workplan are awaiting approval from NOAA.



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- **Passport to Marine Adventure:** The NW Straits Foundation's [Passport to Marine Adventure app](#) is live and available for download. The app connects the public to restoration work by providing incentives to the public, in the form of credits, for visiting restoration sites. The credits can be applied at participating businesses for discounts on purchases. Don Hunger encouraged MRCs to raise awareness of the app among their members and the public and contact him with any restoration sites that MRCs would like included in the app.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

July 29, 2022 - The next Northwest Straits Commission meeting: 10am-12pm via Zoom. More information can be found [on our website](#).