



Minutes

February 24, 2023- 10:00AM-2:00PM
In-Person Meeting-Swinomish Natural Resources Center
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Christina Koons (San Juan), Alan Clark (Clallam), Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Nan McKay, Cecilia Gobin (NWIFC), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson)

Commission Staff: Sasha Horst, Caitlyn Blair, Dana Oster, Lucas Hart, Jeff Whitty, Leah Robison, Allie Simpson

Others in Attendance: Elisa Dawson (Snohomish), Franchesca Perez (Snohomish MRC, Stillaguamish Tribe staff)

Absent: Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Julia Parrish

Welcome and Introductions:

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgement. The Commission approved the minutes from the January 27 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan updated the Commission and attendees on the February 22 Executive Committee meeting. Tom Cowan reported that the committee has made the decision to write a letter of support for [Senate Bill 5371](#) (Protecting southern resident orcas from vessels).

The Executive Committee discussed the Commission's marine programs, the progress of these programs, and the possibilities of expanding the programs based on MRC needs and goals, and goals of the Northwest Straits Initiative. This topic is to be discussed at further meetings and is part of the core topics for discussion at the retreat.

Science Advisory Committee: Dana Oster shared with the Commission and attendees that the most prominent activity for the Committee right now is Committee membership. The Committee is in the process of slowly expanding and has extended a few invitations and notified others of nominations to gauge interest in the future. Committee member Tom Mumford is serving on the conference planning committee as a way to integrate the Science Advisory Committee into conference planning.

External Relations Committee: Nan McKay shared with the Commission and attendees about the bill that Senator Murray is sponsoring to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Initiative. Nan outlined that the bill was sent to senate committee in the last session of Congress. Nan also mentioned that Puget Sound



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Day on the Hill will be held May 9-11. The event is a way to educate members of Congress about the work being done in Puget Sound.

Business Items:

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

Derelict vessel removal: Dana Oster presented on the derelict vessel removal project, which will be done in collaboration with WA Dept of Natural Resources (DNR), MRCs, and tribal partners. The funding comes from the fiscal year 2022 Congressionally Directed Spending. Dana outlined the core partnerships with MRCs and tribes that are part of the project workgroup. There are nine vessels identified for removal, and two vessel turn-in events that have been prioritized by the workgroup. The vessel list created from input by MRCs and tribal partners was organized into three tiers to prioritize removal operations. Commission staff and DNR are coordinating with the Makah Tribe to host a vessel turn-in event where vessels can be brought to be crushed and recycled. Other counties have also expressed interest in hosting a vessel-turn in event. Dana will keep everyone up-to-date and encourages MRCs to identify if there is a continued interest in the derelict vessel removal program.

Voluntary no-anchor zones: Dana presented updates on the voluntary no-anchor zone project. Since 2020, MRC partners have identified a selection of sites where there is moderate to high anchoring activity along important eelgrass beds. Dana reported that this project has worked well in Jefferson County, and San Juan County has established a few no-anchor zones as well. Dana shared that there has been concerns from tribes about the no-anchor zone marker buoys limiting traditional fishing access. A tiered approach is being developed to better tackle barriers of buoy maintenance and fishing access.

Retreat: Caitlyn Blair updated the Commission and attendees about the retreat at the La Conner Country Inn March 30-31. Caitlyn shared the outcomes from the Retreat Planning Committee meeting on February 14. The Committee began to outline some of the goals for the retreat as follows:

- 1) Celebrate the accomplishments of the last year
- 2) Reenergize and revisit the relationships and collaborations among the Commission, Foundation, and MRCs
- 3) Increase the understanding and scope of the Northwest Straits Initiative's impact.

MRC Presentation – Snohomish / Island: Elisa Dawson presented on behalf of Snohomish MRC and on behalf of Scott Chase from Island MRC about the work being done on the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area, and the progress in the past ten years. The Conservation Action Plan was finalized in 2012 and addresses target species and habitats and looks to encompass a wide range of issues and strategies to address the issues. Elisa pointed out that they are still seeing many of the same issues at Port Susan that existed ten years ago. The MRCs are working on evaluating and executing the best ways



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for stakeholders to get involved, and are in the process of implementing communication and outreach strategies.

Public Comment: There was no public comment

Partner Updates:

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin shared with the Commission and attendees that they are tracking legislative bills, including the bill relating to protection and restoration of riparian areas. Cecilia mentioned that tribes have been working on issues surrounding recreational impacts on treaty rights and have formed a working group to discuss the concerns on recreation affects on treaty resources and off-reservation treaty areas to hunt and fish. Cecilia has been coordinating with the NWIFC director for the agenda and priorities for Puget Sound Day on the Hill.

Cecilia added that last year, there was a round table process with several stakeholders to tackle issues surrounding riparian zones. These round tables went well, however the bill that was requested eventually died. There was a commitment to putting forth a budget for the conservation commission to do a riparian grant program and salmon recovery and noted that tribes would like to see more of a state-wide standard on the ground for riparian zone restoration.

Puget Sound Partnership Update: Laura Blackmore shared the finalized dates of Puget Sound Day on the Hill, which are May 9-11; all are invited. Laura reminded everyone to contact her if they are interested in signing up to be present. Registration is online at <https://www.psdonth.org/>.

MRC Updates:

Island County – Elsa Schwartz

- The MRC is continuing Forage Fish monitoring.
- There is a working meeting in place for derelict vessels and shoreline armoring.
- The upcoming MRC meeting is Tuesday March 7, 2023.

Clallam – Alan Clark

- Continued forage fish sampling on three beaches.
- Shore Friendly will be hosting a workshop *Living with Sea Level Rise* on March 11, 2023.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor



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- The Fort Townsend forage fish monitoring team surveyed a second time in January to collect samples from all five sample sites, as tides were higher than predicted the first attempt and blocked off beach access.
- The no-anchor zones team is planning to head out to Mystery Bay this weekend, on February 11, the first time since the pandemic began, to do some much-needed maintenance.
- The storm surge monitoring team went out to the Salmon Club and Chetzemoka Park sites with Ian Miller on January 23 to assess survey elevation control points and to discuss methods for measuring water elevation.

San Juan County – Christina Koons

- Two new members have been appointed to the MRC.
- The Marine Managers' Workshop is scheduled for April 4-5, held at the UW Friday Harbor Labs. The intention is to review the updated Marine Stewardship Area Plan.
- The Great Islands Clean Up for Plastic Free Salish Sea will be held on Earth Day (April 22, 2023).

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- The MRC and Snohomish County have drafted an Intergovernmental Services Agreement with ORCA (Ocean Research College Academy). ORCA is an early college program for high school juniors and seniors. The contract is for the calendar year of 2023 to collaborate on collecting water quality data in Possession Sound. Snohomish County is reviewing the scope of work and contract, which we hope will be signed in March 2023.
- DNR recently removed 290 creosote pilings from the Snohomish Estuary utilizing the MRC's pilings removal inventory from the 2019-2021 MRC Grant.
- DNR presented their findings from the comprehensive eelgrass survey of the Snohomish County shoreline at the MRC February 15 meeting. At that meeting, the MRC also reviewed the online map being created by Snohomish County which compares the most recent data to a historic 1999-2007 survey of eelgrass that was done in Snohomish County. The MRC is in the early stages of brainstorming a scope of work for the 2023- 2025 grant that will focus on marine vegetation.

Skagit - written report

- Planning is underway for the spring Kids on the Beach Program. 75 6th graders from Sedro Woolley will be participating, with 3 field days at Bayview State Park and an in-class visit.
- The Shore Friendly Workshop in partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation and Swinomish Tribe has tentatively been set for Saturday April 29, 2023.
- There was a great article on pinto abalone in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#). Field work is now underway.



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Whatcom – Bob Cecile

- The job announcement for the MRC's additional staff person closed on February 15, 2023. A decision was made the week of February 20, and there is a new Whatcom MRC staff appointed.
- The MRC agreed to take on a new project for the 2023-2025 grant round – Harmful Algae Bloom Monitoring in Drayton Harbor and Birch Bay.
- Hannah Pittman is the new MRC Forage Fish Intern, hired to take the lead on monthly surveys and volunteer coordination.

Meeting Highlights and Action Items:

The Commission identified the following key highlights:

- The Puget Sound Partnership and Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission are co-hosting Puget Sound Day on the Hill from May 9-11. All are invited to participate (at their own expense), more information and registration are [online](#). Reauthorization of the Northwest Straits Initiative may be included as a priority for 2023.
- The derelict vessel project in collaboration with WA Dept of Natural Resources is underway and representatives from several MRCs and tribal partners are involved in the workgroup. Details for a vessel turn-in event are being worked out, with a goal of hosting an event with the Makah Tribe.
- Elisa Dawson shared about the collaborative efforts from San Juan and Snohomish MRCs on the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area. More information is available on their [website](#).
- The Northwest Straits Commission is now returning to in-person Commission meetings. In-person meetings will generally be held in alternating months, with some adjustments. Information about the monthly meeting dates and locations is on our [website events page](#).
- The 2023 Northwest Straits Conference planning is underway and will take place November 3-4, 2023, at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend. All members of the MRCs are invited, as well as members of the Commission and Foundation. Please look out for a conference survey coming soon.
- The Northwest Straits Initiative retreat will be held on March 30-31 at the La Conner Country Inn for members of the Commission and Foundation Board.

Round Table



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- The next meeting is the retreat – March 30-31. Jeff mentioned it would be great to have MRC staff invited to future retreats. If members have not indicated accommodation needs or attendance for the March retreat, please e-mail Caitlyn Blair.
- Dana shared that MRC symposiums have gone well, and we are currently mixing up how we feature MRCs with different formats.
- Elsa mentioned that now that we are meeting in person, we can reach out to neighboring MRCs and partners to do joint in-person MRC meetings, presentations, discussions, and project sharing.
- The conference planning is underway, the first planning meeting is Monday February 27, 2023.

*The next meeting will be the Northwest Straits Initiative retreat on March 30-31 at the La Conner Country Inn; open to members of the Commission and Foundation Board.