



Minutes

May 26, 2023 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Virtual Zoom Meeting
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Tim Ellis (Snohomish – Chair), Ginny Broadhurst, Christina Koons (San Juan), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Elsa Schwartz (Island), Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Nan McKay, Tom Cowan, Don Hunger (Foundation), Julia Parrish

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

Others in Attendance: Austin Rose (Whatcom), Dana Flerchinger (Whatcom)

Absent: Cecilia Gobin (NWIFC), Alan Clark (Vice-chair - Clallam), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Bob Cecile (Whatcom)

Welcome and Introductions:

New chair of the Commission Tim Ellis opened the meeting with introductions and the Tribal Acknowledgement.

Committee Reports:

Executive Committee: Lucas stepped in for Alan to share Executive Committee updates. The Executive Committee welcomed Tim as the Chair and Alan as the Vice-Chair of the NW Straits Commission. Jeff, Elsa, and Tom shared about their leadership roles on the Commission and provided insight on ongoing topics for Tim and Alan to be aware of.

The Committee also debriefed on Nan, Jerry, Lucas, and Jeff's trip to Washington D.C. for Puget Sound Day on the Hill.

The Committee also touched on regional work that the Marine Program at the NW Straits Commission has taken on. The Marine Program outline describes three tiers of project support, which are MRC project support, multi-regional project support, and broad scale project support. The Committee plans to bring this forward to the Commission for discussion at a future meeting.

External Relations Committee: Nan outlined the successes of Puget Sound Day on the Hill, sharing that their attendance, meetings, and activities at the event were very well organized by the Puget Sound Partnership and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. One of the main



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priorities in attending was to garner support for federal reauthorization of the NW Straits Initiative. Nan shared that Senator Murray is committed to working on reauthorization. Senator Cantwell's staff said she plans to co-sponsor. Meetings were also held with Representative Larsen, Representative Kilmer, and with staff from Representative Schrier and DelBene's offices. Representative Larsen was asked to sponsor a House companion bill. He is reviewing the Senate reauthorization bill to gain a better understanding of the legislation. Nan mentioned that they are working to get a letter from Governor Jay Inslee supporting reauthorization.

Lucas shared that he attended a meeting with Representative Huffman's staff to discuss supporting kelp conservation efforts. Representative Huffman is a Congressman from California. Lucas added that having NW Straits reauthorization as a priority at Puget Sound Day on the Hill helped foster good conversations with our delegation.

Laura added that a survey is going out to all participants to get feedback from the event, and they are hoping to put out a summary report of the event for the first time.

Lucas thanked MRC Staff for their support in gathering letters from each of the seven county councils/commissions. The letters from counties and tribes were shared with members of Congress.

Science Advisory Committee: Julia deferred to Dana to provide updates about the Science Advisory Committee. Dana welcomed new Science Advisory Committee member [David Trimbach](#). Dana mentioned that there will be a Science Advisory Committee meeting in June for members to provide input and engage with MRC project proposals. Julia added that these meetings are to provide helpful insight, and to assist in making the Science Advisory Committee more relevant to MRCs.

Business Items:

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

Welcome Ginny Broadhurst: Lucas invited the Commission to welcome Ginny Broadhurst as the new Governor's Appointee. Ginny shared about her background with the NW Straits Initiative and her current position as the Director of the Salish Sea Institute at Western Washington University.



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Welcome Tim and Alan: Lucas invited the Commission to welcome Tim Ellis and Alan Clark as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the NW Straits Commission.

MRC Grant proposal submissions: Sasha gave an update on the status of MRC grants from the Commission. The due date for MRC proposals was May 26, and MRCs will receive two grants totaling \$192,000(year 1)/\$192,500(year 2) over the next two-year period. Many thanks to the MRC staff and project leads for their work in developing projects and preparing proposals. Next steps are for review and coordination with MRCs, and the full slate of projects will be brought to the Commission for review at a meeting this summer.

NW Straits communication position update: Jessica Owens has been hired as the Communications Coordinator for the NW Straits Commission, starting June 1

State budget updates: Lucas provided updates on the 2023-2025 state budget, The NW Straits Commission will be receiving funding through a kelp proviso to support kelp conservation and monitoring work. In addition to funding for the Commission, money will also be passed through to partners doing kelp conservation work, such as the Squaxin Island Tribe, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Samish Tribe, and Puget Sound Restoration Fund.

In addition, the MRC funding proviso was included in the state budget, which is \$910,000 for this biennium. This year, the language was also altered to provide more flexibility for MRCs in receiving funds. MRCs can now direct their funding to be used on their projects via the NW Straits Commission.

Green crab funding to the NW Straits Commission will also continue at flat levels through the WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. To bolster funding for The NW Straits Commission's green crab work, a funding request is being submitted to the green crab emergency taskforce workgroup.

NW Straits Commission Meeting – San Juan County: Caitlyn shared that the NW Straits Commission meeting on June 23 will be from 10:45 AM - 2:00 PM on Lopez Island, first at Odlin County Park, where we will hear from the San Juan County MRC about their projects. We will then move the meeting to the Grace Episcopal Church. Please contact Caitlyn with any questions regarding the meeting.

Partner Updates:



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Puget Sound Partnership: Laura shared that Puget Sound Day on the Hill was successful. Laura also mentioned that they held a fruitful Ecosystem Coordination Board meeting in San Juan County. The next leadership council meeting will be June 7-8, where shellfish beds will be a highlight discussion. The Puget Sound Partnership is also looking to collaborate with the Transportation community to work toward salmon recovery efforts.

Foundation Updates: Don shared with the Commission that the NW Straits Foundation will be hosting a 20th anniversary event on June 10 from 2-6 PM at Jerry Masters' house. Don also gave an overview of the successes of the Salish Sea Conservation Corps, where several WWU students were involved with mentorship, trainings, presentations, and hands-on field projects. The NW Straits Foundation is looking for funding for this program for its second year. The crew was proud to announce their findings of 10,544 juvenile chum salmon at Cornet Bay. The NW Straits Foundation has also been working with the journalism program at WWU to provide internships for students at the NW Straits Foundation.

MRC Updates:

Clallam - Alan Clark (not present, written from MRC Report)

- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Three Olympia oyster surveys have occurred.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- The MRC organized a Digging for Dinner event on April 23. The event provided education to 39 participants about Salish Sea clams, where to find them, and how to harvest safely and sustainably.
- In partnership with Puget Sound Restoration Fund and WDFW, the MRC organized community presentations to share about Olympia oyster restoration opportunities in Kilisut Harbor and to solicit input from Marrowstone community members, on May 4 (virtual) and May 7 (in-person with a beach walk). Over 20 tideland owners have expressed interest in beach walks with biologists and further exploration of possible restoration efforts.
- With the help of WSU Extension, Native Salvage Plant Foundation, groundskeeping staff and three volunteers, the MRC installed a new rain garden at the Old Alcohol Plant Inn in Port Hadlock



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Island County – Elsa Schwartz

- The MRC hosted a Forage Fish class for the South Whidbey School District.
- The MRC had a table at the Penn Cove Water Festival.

San Juan County – Christina Koons

- The spring Great Islands Cleanup event was held on April 22nd. This year a total of 301 people collected 4,574 pounds of litter on Shaw, Orcas, San Juan, Stuart, Decatur, Sucia, and Lopez Islands
- There was no May MRC meeting and instead MRC members attended the boat-based Salmon Recovery site visits on May 4th. This year they visited shoreline armor sites on Lopez and Orcas.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- The MRC hosted an Earth Day event on April 22 in partnership with WSU Beach Watchers and Tulalip Tribes. This cleanup utilized the Escaped Trash Assessment Protocol and was held at Mission Beach. Around 30 volunteers were in attendance and a total of 145 lbs of trash was removed from the beach.
- The crabber subcommittee and members of the Oil Spill subcommittee decided again to do crabber outreach. for the first two weekends of crabbing at the Everett Marina. In addition to handing out crabber information and supplies the committee will add oil spill kits donated by Washington Sea Grant and Snohomish County oil spill phone number magnets. The subcommittee is also developing a short survey of yes/no questions to get a bit more information from the public on crab pot loss/prevention of loss.
- A college intern has been hired by Snohomish County to assist the Marine Program this summer. The intern will start in June.

Skagit – Diane Hennebert (not present, written from MRC Report)

- Salish Sea Stewards Social and Data Sharing Event held May 9th at Padilla Bay. It was a great turnout with around 35-40 in attendance. Five speakers presented some of the data that volunteers have been collecting on forage fish, bull kelp, March Point Heronry, beach seining, intertidal monitoring, etc. Presentations were followed by a potluck social.
- Shoreline Landowner Workshop held April 29th at Seafarer's Memorial Park in Anacortes. Excellent presentations by Herrera and Nickel Brothers! Although it was a low turnout with only around 15 shoreline property owners in attendance, they were all engaged and



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asked a lot of great questions. Several were from the same neighborhood and were interested in getting a technical site visit.

Whatcom – Austin Rose

- Staff are working to organize a MRC retreat in late September early October. Triangle Associates (formally Veda Environmental) is available and interested in facilitating.
- The MRC will work with David Wallin, Western Washington University, to conduct eelgrass surveys by drone several times throughout the summer to quantify/ photo document the eelgrass coverage and potential damage that may occur as a result of boat use in Wildcat Cove, Larrabee State Park. In addition, DNR will be conducting a survey in late August, and will attempt to complete 3m transects in the focus zone around the Wildcat Cove boat launch, and 10m transects in the rest of the cove out to where vegetation is not detected (deep water zone).
- The annual Olympia oyster survey in N. Chuckanut Bay occurred on May 8 and May 10 with the help of two different groups of students enrolled in the Bellingham Technical College Fisheries and Aquaculture Program. Very few LIVE Olympia oysters were found within the test plots. The MRC is considering abandoning the pilot restoration project in N. Chuckanut Bay and transitioning their efforts to Drayton Harbor. The success of Oly oyster restoration efforts in Drayton led by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) is visible. Brian Allan, PSRF, will be joining the June MRC meeting to discuss their work in Drayton and ways the MRC could consider adding to the project.

Meeting Highlights and Action Items:

The Commission identified the following key highlights:

- The next Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council meeting is June 7-8 at the LOTT Clean Water Alliance in Olympia. One topic on the Leadership Council agenda is the trend in declining shellfish bed in Puget Sound. This topic will be from 9:20-10:00 on June 7. The Alliance for a Healthy South Sound will follow that up with a local forum from 10:15-12:15 that will cover shellfish beds and nutrient management. The meeting will be streamed on TVW. Click [here](#) for the link to watch the meeting.
- The NW Straits Foundation is hosting a 20th year anniversary event at Jerry Masters' house on June 10 from 2-6 p.m. Contact Brooke Friesen friesen@nwstraitsfoundation.org for information.
- Due to boat launch design, boaters launching at Larrabee State Park in Whatcom County drive over critical eelgrass habitat at lower tides. The Whatcom MRC is working with WWU professor David Wallin to assess damage caused by boat launch use in the area.



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- The Canadian federal government approved the Roberts Bank container terminal expansion. This project is expected to have direct impacts on Salish Sea species, as the port is in a critical habitat for Southern Resident Orca Whales and Chinook salmon.
- Four representatives from the NW Straits Initiative attended Puget Sound Day on the Hill in Washington DC. Northwest Straits Commission reauthorization was one of three priorities at this year's event. Reauthorization includes federal appropriations. Senator Murray is committed to working on reauthorization. Senator Cantwell plans to co-sponsor. Attendees also held meetings with Representative Larsen, Representative Kilmer, and with staff from Representative Schrier and DelBene's offices. Representative Larsen was asked to sponsor a House companion reauthorization bill. He is reviewing the Senate reauthorization bill to gain a better understanding of the legislation. Governor Jay Inslee's staff has offered to write a letter of support for reauthorization.

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Public Comment:

Julia shared that the UW College of the Environment was successful in recruiting Dr. Corey Garza as the Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He is a marine ecologist and is developing programs to further diversify programs at UW and Friday Harbor Labs.

Lucas commented on the Roberts Bank terminal project. He suggested that individuals take a look at the project as it is occurring a large Salish Sea estuary.

Don is recruiting board members for the NW Straits Foundation and is looking to fill three-year terms that start October 1, 2023.

Jeff shared that Jefferson County MRC has created a subgroup to get student representation on the MRC.

*The next meeting will be the Northwest Straits Commission meeting June 23, 2023, on Lopez Island at Odlin County Park the Grace Episcopal Church.