



# Minutes

**July 28, 2023 10:00 AM-3:00 PM**  
**10441 Bayview Edison Road, Mount Vernon, Padilla Bay Reserve**  
**Northwest Straits Commission meeting**

**Attendees:**

**Commission Members:** Tim Ellis (Snohomish – Chair), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Ginny Broadhurst, Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Tom Cowan, Elsa Schwartz (Island), Nan McKay, Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Laura Blackmore, Julia Parrish

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

**Others in Attendance:** Don Hunger, Ron Wesen (County Commissioner), Jen Johnson (Skagit), Jodie Toft (Puget Sound Restoration Fund), Hilary Hayford (Puget Sound Restoration Fund), Pete Haase, Craig Smith (San Juan)

**Absent:** Alan Clark (Clallam), Cecilia Gobin, Christina Koons (San Juan)

**Welcome and Introductions:** Tim welcomed the group with introductions and the tribal acknowledgement.

The Commission approved the June Commission meeting minutes by consensus.

Pete Haase, Skagit MRC and Padilla Bay Foundation board member welcomed Commissioners and attendees to the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

**Remarks from County Commissioner Ron Wesen:** Commissioner Ron Wesen shared his thanks to the Commission for inviting him to attend this meeting. He shared that he has been a Commissioner in Skagit County for 15 years, and he is proud to support the NW Straits Commission, Skagit MRC, and the partnerships that have been fostered during his time as a County Commissioner.

**Skagit MRC Presentation:** Diane Hennebert with the Skagit MRC presented on the MRC's Mt. Erie Elementary School Rain Garden. This project connected many partners such as the NW Straits Foundation, Boeing, the Anacortes School District, and others to implement a rain garden at Mt. Erie elementary school. Diane shared the process of what the implementation looked like, from excavation with the City of Anacortes, to the planting party with Azusa Garden Centre and the NW Straits Foundation. Diane also worked with the Skagit Watershed Council to coordinate education and outreach for the students at Mt. Erie elementary school. Diane mentioned that some of the lessons learned from this project included improving communication with the school district maintenance staff and to set up a regular volunteer schedule to keep up with the long-



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term care of the rain garden. Overall, Diane shared that the work was worth seeing the community of students that came together to participate in a project that allowed them to be outside the classroom.

For more information about the Mt. Erie elementary school rain garden, contact Diane Hennebert ([diane@cityofanacortes.org](mailto:diane@cityofanacortes.org)) and see the link to the presentation here: ([Mt. Erie Rain Garden Presentation](#))

### **Business Items:**

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

**Introducing Antonio as our new Veterans Conservation Corps/Marine Nearshore Tech:** We welcome Antonio back as the VCC/Marine Nearshore Tech and we are looking forward to his return on staff at the NW Straits Commission.

**Green crab outreach and trapping efforts:** Allie updated the group on the ongoing European green crab outreach and trapping efforts. Allie participated in a local radio interview with Skagit Talks where she highlighted the impacts the WCC Crew has had on trapping efforts and the experiences they gained through being part of invasive species trapping and removal. Link to Allie's interview here: ([Skagit Valley College Community Radio Archive \(ksvr.org\)](#)). The episode is from Thursday July 6, 2023.

Allie and Leah shared the work that the NW Straits Commission has been participating in for green crab trapping efforts with the multi-agency coordination group. This was the first time they presented to this group.

Recently, the NW Straits Commission worked with the Skagit MRC on creating an outreach letter that targets landowners. The letter was sent to 500 landowners in Skagit County who own shoreline in Fidalgo Bay, Samish Bay, and on the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community's reservation. Nine people from the Skagit MRC, Taylor Shellfish, Samish Indian Nation, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Washington Sea Grant, WA Department of Natural Resources, and the NW Straits Commission collectively signed the letter, which came with outreach cards. A special thanks to Lynne Wenberg Davidson with the Skagit MRC and her great work assisting with the outreach to landowners.

Allie also shared that WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has created green crab outreach materials in Spanish that are available upon request. Please contact Allie Simpson ([simpson@nwstraits.org](mailto:simpson@nwstraits.org)) if you would like these materials.



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Leah updated the NW Straits Commission on the number of green crabs caught. The NW Straits Commission has caught 11 in Chuckanut Bay, 15 in Birch Bay, 103 in Drayton Harbor, and 107 in Samish Bay. All green crab caught are frozen and sent to WA Sea Grant for research purposes.

**MRC Grant Update:** Sasha shared that the grant timeline is on schedule. Since the last NW Straits Commission meeting in June, we have submitted comments to the MRCs regarding their grant proposals for the next two-year cycle. MRCs are in the process of meeting with Sasha and Dana to discuss the remaining logistics and follow up questions, and Sasha will be compiling agreements for the \$192,000 that each MRC will receive per year for the next two years. This includes funding from EPA via the Puget Sound Partnership, and state funding from the 2023-25 biennium. For the NW Straits Commission meeting in August, all project proposals will be shared for review and approval by the Commission. Another set of grant agreements will follow to award NOAA funding to MRCs from the second round of Congressionally Directed Spending.

**Derelict Vessel Update:** Dana shared with the group that Congressionally Directed Spending funds are being used in 2023 to do derelict vessel removal. Derelict vessel removal at the NW Straits Commission was made possible through an interagency agreement with WA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a workgroup developed with tribal partners and all seven MRCs. To date, DNR has removed 9 out of 11 vessels prioritized by the workgroup. The remaining two on the list are scheduled for removal in August. One of the removed vessels, the Windjammer, was blocking the intertidal zone where the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community would like to install another clam garden. Jessica Owens created a video to showcase the importance of the removal of the Windjammer vessel. See the link here to the video: ([Windjammer Vessel Removal July 2023](#)).

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**Forage Fish Survey Training:** Leah shared that Kate Olson and Phill Dionne from WDFW are hosting a Forage Fish Training on August 30 at Padilla Bay Reserve in the Stevens Center. The training will teach new volunteers about the program and protocols, and current volunteers are encouraged to attend as well. To sign up for this training, please use the following link: [Forage Fish Survey Training sign-up](#). Contact Leah Robison ([robison@nwstraits.org](mailto:robison@nwstraits.org)) for more information.

### Committee Reports:

**Executive Committee:** Lucas shared that the Executive Committee recommended adoption of the Marine Program Description. The Committee also discussed strategic planning and recommended formation of an ad hoc strategic planning committee. Lucas noted that a joint staff meeting for the NW Straits Commission, NW Straits Foundation, and MRCs will be held on September 6 at the Padilla Bay Stevens Center.



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The NW Straits Commission discussed adoption of the proposed Marine Program Description. Tom Cowan noted the importance of the description for the future of collaboration within the NW Straits Initiative. The NW Straits Commission approved the Marine Program Description by consensus with the request that language be added to acknowledge coordination with partners such as the NW Straits Foundation.

**External Relations Committee:** Nan shared that the Committee continues to prioritize efforts to move forward with reauthorization and appropriations. The Committee is hoping Senator Cantwell will co-sponsor the reauthorization bill with Senator Murray.

The Committee is working on planning for Senator Patty Murray's visit the first week of August. Senator Murray is planning to do a site visit to Lone Tree at Swinomish on August 7. She is interested in hearing about the collaborative efforts between Swinomish Tribal Community and Skagit MRC.

**Science Advisory Committee:** Julia reported that the Committee met on June 29 at the University of WA in Seattle for an initial meeting to provide feedback on MRC project proposals. Julia shared that she is looking forward to the ways the Committee can assist MRC and NW Straits Commission staff with restructuring project reports to establish a simpler process for reporting on the projects. The Committee reviewed 15 proposals out of the total 46 that were submitted.

### **Speed Date with a Scientist – Eyes on Kelp: Puget Sound Restoration Fund**

Jodie Toft and Hilary Hayford from the Puget Sound Restoration Fund presented on an initiative titled "Eyes on Kelp", which establishes bull kelp enhancement tools to continue monitoring and growing bull kelp in WA State. Bull kelp enhancement has been a vital tool for resource managers to consider the next steps in kelp conservation. This project began with a concern about bull kelp, as it is the only canopy forming kelp located inland in WA State.

In partnership with NOAA, MRCs, tribal nations, universities, the NW Straits Initiative, and other state agencies, the Puget Sound Restoration Fund initiated this project to connect existing work around kelp conservation and to expand the reach of current canopy kelp-focused projects. Index sites have been set up throughout the southern Salish Sea, establishing buoys with monitoring equipment, as well as annual scuba surveys of the index sites. The PSRF is hoping for this project to expand across transboundary waters into the northern Salish Sea in British Columbia. For more information on the "Eyes on Kelp" Initiative, please contact Jodie Toft



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([jodie@restorationfund.org](mailto:jodie@restorationfund.org)) or Hilary Hayford ([hilary@restorationfund.org](mailto:hilary@restorationfund.org)) and see the link to the slides for their presentation: ([Link to PSRF Presentation here](#)).

## **Partner Updates:**

**Puget Sound Partnership:** Laura shared that the House bill for appropriations has allocated \$54 million for the Puget Sound Geographic Program. She also mentioned that the Senate bill has \$57 million for Puget Sound Geographic Program. Laura shared that the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund has appropriations at \$65 million.

**NW Straits Foundation:** Don shared that the Foundation has pulled a total of 550 derelict crab pots. Don, Brooke, Sasha, and Jessica met about communications and how to enhance the NW Straits Foundation's reach to the public. Don shared that the Clayton Beach project is in the scoping phase, and they are getting support from the Samish Indian Nation. This will be one of the largest shoreline projects in Puget Sound with around 1,200 feet of shoreline restoration projected. As the project moves to the construction phase, there will be room for partners to get involved with the project.

## **MRC Updates:**

### **Clallam – from MRC Report**

- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Elwha Beach surveys are randomly occurring. These surveys are documenting people/dog use as well as counting dog waste not in CMRC's provided waste can.
- Shellfish biotoxin surveys happen bi-monthly.
- Sound Toxin training was attended by 2 MRC members. The sampling training was held at Feiro Marine Life Center.
- New outreach coasters were designed and ordered.

### **Island County – Elsa Schwartz**

- Working on a white paper on sea level rise and resiliency
- Shore Friendly Outreach continues

### **Jefferson – Jeff Taylor**

- The MRC contracted Hood Canal Oyster Company to deliver 1,200 bags of clean Pacific oyster shell to the Powerlines Site in South Discovery Bay. With just one workday, about half of the bags are now emptied. We anticipate just one or two more workdays to finalize spreading shell here and look forward to next year's population survey.



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- The MRC conducted its first kelp linear extent survey, spanning from Beckett Point in Discovery Bay to Point Hudson, along the north and east shores of Marrowstone Island, and through the Port Townsend Ship Canal, documenting bull kelp beds that are not recorded in the WA DNR Marine Vegetation Atlas.
- The ROV derelict crab pot removal team resumed removal operations on July 11, 12, and 19, recovering a total of 16 pots to date and training new robotics students on operating the ROV in marine waters.

### **San Juan County – Craig Smith**

- The MRC has recommended Dave Checkley to join the Committee. Dave's background as a biological and fisheries oceanographer and professor at the Scripps Institute makes him a desirable candidate to join the MRC.
- Plastic Free July is underway with the launch of Adopt-a-Road, sister program, to Adopt-a-Beach, unleashing a public plastic film recycling bin at the local market, and a social media campaign to highlight the importance of reducing plastic consumption.

### **Snohomish – Tim Ellis**

- The story map for the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area is complete. Next the Snohomish MRC webpages will be updated, and the story map added.
- Crabber and oil spill outreach occurred on July 1-2 and 8-9 at the Everett Marina. Volunteers reached 554 people and handed out both crabber gear and oil spill kits.

### **Skagit – Diane Hennebert**

- European Green Crab outreach letters and rack cards have been mailed to 505 Samish and Padilla Bays shoreline property owners in collaboration with 8 organizations and tribes.
- MRC-Salish Sea School Intern, Dana Flerchinger and four students grades 7th-12th, are collecting forage fish survey data at 3 locations at the Fidalgo Bay Resort through Sept. They are finding lots of eggs so far including some mystery eggs they hope to identify.

### **Whatcom – Bob Cecile**

- Peak Sustainability has been hired as the social marketing campaign consultant for eelgrass preservation in Wildcat Cove in Larrabee State Park. MRC staff and Peak Sustainability had their kick-off meeting on July 13th and will be working together closely on the project.
- Western Washington University began drone surveys in Wildcat Cove on July 14th and will continue monthly flights through September to assess potential changes to eelgrass meadows throughout the summer.



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**Round Table:** Time was allotted for the Commission round table.

**Public Comment:** No public comment

\*The next meeting will be held virtually on August 25, 2023.