



Meeting: Northwest Straits Commission
Date: March 29, 2024
Time: 10:00 AM- 12:00 PM
Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting

We acknowledge the lands we're on today are the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous Nations who have stewarded them since time immemorial. We respect their sovereignty, support their Treaty rights, their right to self-determination, and we honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water. These Indigenous Nations include the Jamestown S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Nooksack, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Samish, Stillaguamish, Swinomish, and Tulalip Tribes.

Documents for NW Straits Commission Review:

- February 2024 Minutes Approval
- San Juan MRC boater impact project (see meeting packet for project summary)

10:00 -10:15 AM	Welcome and introductions Tribal acknowledgement February minutes approval	Tim Ellis, Chair
10:15 – 10:35 AM	Business Items <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2024 NW Straits Initiative Conference• San Juan boater impact project approval• NW Straits Initiative Retreat• Senator Murray Thank You	Caitlyn Blair Sasha Horst Lucas Hart Jessica Owens
10:35 – 10:50 PM	Committee Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science Advisory Committee• Executive Committee• External Relations• Green Crab Ad Hoc Committee	Julia Parrish Alan Clark Nan McKay Lucas Hart
10:50 – 11:20 PM	MRC Reports	MRC Representatives



11:20 – 11:30 PM	Northwest Straits Foundation	Don Hunger
11:30 – 11:40 PM	Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission	Cecilia Gobin
11:40 – 11:50 PM	Puget Sound Partnership	Laura Bradstreet
11:50 – 12:00 PM	Public Comment	All
12:00 PM	Adjourn	

Next meeting: Online over Zoom, April 26, 2024, from 10 AM – 12 PM
Join the April meeting for our Speed Date with a Scientist: Use of Science in Ecosystem Recovery
Partnerships in the Puget Sound with Craig Thomas, University of Washington



Minutes

February 23, 2024 10:00 AM-2:30 PM
In-Person Meeting
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam – Vice Chair), Tim Ellis (Snohomish – Chair), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Mike MacKay (Whatcom), Ken Collins (Island), Ginny Broadhurst, Christina Koons (San Juan), Laura Bradstreet (Puget Sound Partnership), Nan McKay, Jeff Taylor (Jefferson)

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

Others in Attendance: Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Kayla Mrozik (NW Straits Foundation), Jerry Masters (NW Straits Foundation), Austin Rose, Dana Flerchinger, Rick Beauregard, Kaylee Galloway (Whatcom County Council), Hayden Jenkins (Senator Murray's Staff)

Absent: Julia Parrish, Cecilia Gobin (NW Indian Fisheries Commission)

Welcome and Introductions:

Tim Ellis welcomed the group with introductions and the tribal acknowledgement.

The January NW Straits Commission minutes were approved by consensus.

Speed Date with a Scientist

Braeden Van Deynze, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife Resource Economist, presented on the emerging research and data of measuring the demand for freshwater recreation in the North Puget Sound region.

Business Items

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

U.S. v WA Boldt Decision event: Lucas gave a debrief on the U.S. v WA Boldt Decision event that six NW Straits Commission staff were able to attend. The event brought together several tribes and communities around the NW Straits and Puget Sound region. Tribal members, policy leaders and youth shared the history and present struggles and accomplishments of the Boldt Decision and upholding tribal treaty rights. NW Straits Commission staff are grateful to the NW Indian Fisheries Commission and the Muckleshoot Tribe for hosting this event and inviting us to attend.



Minutes

Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee: Allie shared that the green crab ad hoc committee will be implemented. The Department of Fish and Wildlife is assessing ways to alter their approach to management of European Green crab to focus more on regional and local coordination. The ad hoc committee will guide the NW Straits Commission's role in European Green crab trapping in the future.

DEI Update: Allie shared that the NW Straits Commission has moved forward with a DEI consultant, Athena Group, to assess diversity, equity, and inclusion within the NW Straits Initiative. The NW Straits Commission reached out to MRC members for interest in attending meetings and providing support on documents. The first meeting to kick off this project is Friday, March 1. If you have questions about DEI at the NW Straits Initiative, please contact Allie Simpson (simpson@nwstraits.org).

Impact Report: The NW Straits Commission 2023 Impact Report will be available digitally as of February 27, 2024. To read the impact report, see our [website](#), or this [link](#). Thank you to everyone who contributed!

2024 NWSI Conference Update: Caitlyn shared that after a long and exhaustive process of research, she has secured the Delta Hotel in Everett, Snohomish County. The Conference will be held on November 15-16, 2024. If you have questions about the 2024 annual conference, please e-mail Caitlyn (blair@nwstraits.org).

Puget Sound Day on the Hill: Lucas shared that Puget Sound Day on the Hill will be May 13 – 17. The NW Straits Commission approved to add our signature to the letters of support by consensus.

Northwest Straits Commission Director Position Update: Lucas shared that the Northwest Straits Commission Director position's supervisor will be changing from the Padilla Bay Director to the Shorelands and Environmental Assistance (SEA) Program Manager. The change is necessary to accommodate the Northwest Straits Commission Director's position as an Exempt Management Services (EMS) employee, as opposed to a Washington Management Services Employee (WMS). The position has been EMS for a number of years. EMS positions in the SEA Program report to the Program Manager. The change in supervisory status will elevate the Commission Director in the Department of Ecology and allow them to work more directly on contracting, staffing, agency related funding and other decisions that directly affect Northwest Straits Commission business.



Minutes

Committee Updates

Science Advisory Committee: Dana shared that the committee had a meeting in January. At the meeting, the committee nominated Tom Mumford to be the Science Advisory Committee representative on the NW Straits Initiative 2024 conference planning committee. Dana shared that the committee is working to create educational trainings for MRCs, and the first training will involve applied social science.

Executive Committee: Alan shared that the committee recommends creating a second tribal seat on the Northwest Straits Commission. The seat would represent a coalition of tribes. Lucas and Cecilia Gobin would work together to seek nominations from the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. The NW Straits Commission motioned to approve this by consensus.

The Committee requested that Todd Hass be approved to serve on the Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee. Todd was nominated by Laura Bradstreet to serve as her delegate on the Ad-Hoc Committee. The NW Straits Commission approved this nomination by consensus.

The committee discussed conservation credits and mitigation funds, which are intended to offset the impacts of development that have negative consequences to the environment. The NW Straits Commission has no policy on use of these funds. The committee brought this topic to the NW Straits Commission to discuss if a policy is needed. Laura recommended that Ahren Stroming present about this topic at a NW Straits Commission meeting. The committee will continue discussing this topic in future meetings.

External Relations: Nan shared that there is excitement and momentum for Puget Sound Day on the Hill from May 13 – 17. There were no further updates at this time.

Remarks from Whatcom County Commissioner Kaylee Galloway, District 1: Kaylee Galloway shared some remarks with the group. In her position, she specifically addresses climate change at a local level. Whatcom County approved a climate action plan in November 2021, and worked with 19 advisory groups on this plan, including Whatcom MRC.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Harmful Algal Bloom Project by Rick Beauregard (Whatcom MRC): Rick Beauregard gave a presentation on the Drayton Harbor Harmful Algal Bloom project. In 2023, they surveyed phytoplankton and harmful algal bloom species (HABS) to determine biotoxin presence in Drayton Harbor, and how these biotoxins contributed to paralytic shellfish toxins. Volunteers spent over



Minutes

2,000 hours collecting data and analyzed over 620 phytoplankton samples. For more information, see the presentation slides [here](#).

MRC Reports

Clallam – Alan Clark

- The MRC continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Elwha Beach surveys of users are randomly occurring monthly.
- The joint Jefferson/Clallam MRC meeting is on March 6th in Sequim.
- The MRC's advisory Sub-Committee is continuing to work on language for Clallam MRC to advise BOCC.
- Ediz Hook planting will occur on March 26th & 28th.
- HAZWOPER/Oiled bird training took place February 13 & 14 at the Jamestown Tribal Center.
- The MRC's new Administrative Assistant is starting February 20th!

Island – Ken Collins

- The MRC presented at the ALE Program Science Panel.
- The Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer Award was awarded to Scott Chase.
- The MRC has launched its Comprehensive Planning process effective January 2024. This work will frame a vision and code elements for the County through 2045. The Island County Marine Resources Committee has formed a sub-committee to address opportunities related to marine resources.

Jefferson – Jeff Taylor

- MRC staff for Clallam and Jefferson, along with Robert Knapp, Clallam MRC Tribal Representative, are working on organizing a joint Clallam-Jefferson MRC meeting set for March 6 to include a guest speaker, Cecilia Gobin, presenting on Tribal Treaty Rights as well as time to network across MRCs.
- The MRC connected Port of Port Townsend staff, NW Straits Foundation Shore Friendly staff, and fourteen members of the public for a site visit at Quilcene Herb Beck Marina on January 20. The site visit provided an opportunity to discuss the feasibility of restoring the natural shoreline as a component of the Port's dredging activities at the marina, using dredge spoils for beach nourishment and other options for enhancing the site for wildlife and public enjoyment.
- The MRC Coordinator will be stepping down from her position as of February 23, and Jefferson County has begun the process of finding her replacement.
- The storm surge projects are now on Sound IQ.

San Juan – Christina Koons

- Outreach efforts are well underway for the Free Vessel Turn-In Event in April. Fliers have been posted, press releases printed in local papers, a flurry of social media posts and



Minutes

shares have reached the interwebs blasting the message out even farther. Eligible vessel owners will need to apply to the program turn through DNR to participate in the turn-in event.

- The MRC represented Plastic Free Salish Sea at the recent 25th Storming the Sound Conference for marine educators at the end of January. It was a great way to spread the message about reducing plastic pollution and finding positive ways to prevent and remove litter from our local waterways.
- The County has been working on updating their marine stewardship plan. The recent draft was sent out for peer review.

Skagit – Diane Hennebert

- **Bowman Bay Seining:** We are conducting bi-monthly beach seining surveys with the NW Straits Foundation to document fish use as part of the comprehensive study on the Bowman Bay Restoration Project. The first seining event took place January 26th with 7 volunteers.
- **Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment:** Posted the Request for Quotes and Qualifications for the Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment project. Deadline for responses is February 29th.
- **Culturally Responsive Elementary Science Teaching (CREST):** CREST is a 3-year research project to study the effect of teachers utilizing the 'Explore the Salish Sea' curriculum which takes elementary school kids (primarily 5th grade) out to the beach and incorporates science and indigenous knowledge and practices into culturally responsive instruction. Skagit MRC is one of several community-based organizations that signed up to participate. Pete Haase is Skagit MRC's representative. Teacher workshops will take place next year in Whatcom County with 30 5th graders.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- The Starlight beach walk was held on February 6th and had a great turn out of over 160 people. Read the article [here](#).
- The MRC is beginning the strategic planning process, and each MRC member is currently being interviewed to capture their perspective. In March, the MRC will participate in an in-person workshop to further delve into the process.
- The MRC wrote a one pager on dredge spoils.

Whatcom – Mike MacKay

- Whatcom County is commencing its 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, and Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff are soliciting recommendations from the Marine Resources Committee on what amendments should be considered in the Marine Resources Lands section of Chapter 8, Resource Lands, and Chapter 10, Environment. The MRC will approve their final list of recommendations during their March 7th meeting.



Minutes

- A few new members joined the MRC including Avery Maverick and Joe Hoats. The MRC also now has representation from Blaine City Council: Mayor Mary Lou Steward, and Bellingham City Council: Jace Cotton.
- The MRC has sent invitations to all schools in the county for the Kids on the Beach program. 17 schools have responded with interest.

Partner Updates

NW Straits Foundation: Sarah Fisker from Jefferson Marine Resources Committee and Doug McCutchen have joined the NW Straits Foundation Board. Phil Salditt, Foundation Board member, joined Snohomish MRC. Kayla Mrozik joined the NW Straits Foundation as the Marketing and Communications Coordinator in January.

Jerry Masters shared upcoming events with the group. On April 10 from 10 AM – 2:00 PM, there will be a spring planting party at Deception Pass State Park. On May 5, there will be a spring party at the Edmonds waterfront, more details will be available soon.

Puget Sound Partnership: Laura Bradstreet shared updates from the Puget Sound Partnership. Puget Sound Day on the Hill is May 13-17, 2024, in Washington D.C. Laura attended a meeting with Senator Maria Cantwell to discuss the “Whale Desk”, which is a pilot program that was signed into law in December 2022. The program is meant to bring together vessel operators, scientists, and the Coast Guard to reduce encounters that disturb whales. Laura also mentioned that the state [legislative tracking page](#) and [Recovery Acceleration Funding Tool](#) are now available.

The Puget Sound Partnership is also hiring positions such as an Ecosystem Recovery Coordinator and a Boards Program Coordinator. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

San Juan MRC project proposal summary

Understanding boater impacts for marine ecosystem protection and recovery in the San Juan Islands.

Project description

Healthy, flourishing eelgrass beds are vital to Puget Sound recovery but are in decline in the San Juan Islands. Disturbance from recreational boats has been identified as one of the current anthropogenic stressors to eelgrass due to physical disturbance and damage they can cause to eelgrass meadows. Physical disturbance can result in meadow fragmentation and accelerate decline in bed health and size. Other important marine habitats can also be impacted by boating activities including kelp beds and shellfish beds. Despite high levels of boating in San Juan County (SJC) waters, boater related impacts on eelgrass and other marine habitats remain unmeasured here and elsewhere in Puget Sound. COVID travel restrictions of 2020 resulted in a concerning spike in boater presence highlighting the urgency surrounding protection of eelgrass habitats and tribal treaty resources. Eelgrass and kelp beds provide nursery, shelter, and food to ecologically, economically, and culturally important species as well as a variety of ecosystem services including improving water quality, sediment stabilization and carbon sequestration that help build coastal resilience to impacts of climate change. The need to protect these habitats has been broadly recognized throughout the region, and globally for both marine ecosystems and wellbeing of coastal communities.

Vision/Goals

This project will allow us to assess vessel presence, activity, and density in relation to sensitive marine habitats, including eelgrass meadows, kelp beds, and shellfish beds. The impacts of boats is a current core data gap in our understanding of what factors are limiting eelgrass growth in the San Juans. Understanding the nexus between vessel presence and eelgrass habitat health is crucial. This will allow San Juan County, the SJC Marine Resources Committee (MRC), and project partners to:

- Identify where the greatest vessel impacts are in relation to core marine habitats and culturally important fishing area.
- Prioritize sites for protection and restoration efforts.
- Evaluate management strategies that will preserve sensitive and critical eelgrass and other marine habitats, support a positive boating experience, and provide for unhindered access to usual and accustomed fishing and harvesting areas.

Budget

FY22 NOAA CDS funds \$206,368



Executive Committee Meeting
March 18, 2024 • 11:00am-12:00pm (Zoom)
Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Committee Members: Alan Clark, Tim Ellis, Nan McKay, Julia Parrish, Jude Apple (ex officio)

NWSC Staff: Caitlyn Blair, Lucas Hart

Absent:

Northwest Straits Commission-Ecology MOU: The Committee discussed a process for writing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northwest Straits Commission and the Department of Ecology that describes the intended relationship between the two entities. The Committee suggested that NW Straits Commission staff write a draft and share with the Executive Committee, Tom, and Ginny for review. Lucas will also talk with Joenne McGerr about scheduling a meeting to talk through the draft MOU.

State Agency Funding and the NW Straits Commission: “Decision packages” are state agency funding requests. The NW Straits Commission has never participated in the decision package process but may have opportunities in the future. For example, Commission staff are talking with Padilla Bay staff about collaborating on a green crab decision package request in 2024 for the 2025-2027 state biennium. This could be a good way to learn about the decision package process. The Committee discussed the decision package opportunity. Some thoughts included:

- Identifying NW Straits Initiative priorities to ensure the Commission has community participation at the center of its projects and programs. There can be a tendency to want to grow toward “centralized” programming, which has the potential of shifting the focus away from the community focus and support the Commission gives to MRCs.
- Making sure that any new approaches to funding, such as decision packages, are additive and do not limit the Commission from receiving funding from other sources.

The Committee would like to continue this conversation in future meetings but did not express immediate concerns about the decision package opportunity as long as the above comments are considered.

NW Straits Initiative Relationships and Retreat: The Commission has identified a facilitator to assist with advancing the conversation about NWS Initiative relationships such as those between the NWS Commission, NWS Foundation, and MRCs. As the Executive Committee has discussed previously, this work will culminate in a NWS Initiative retreat, which the facilitator will also be assisting with. Lucas will be meeting with the facilitator in the next week to discuss next steps and identify a starting point for the process.



Conservation Credit and Mitigation Funding: In February, the NW Straits Commission discussed drafting a policy that addresses when or if the NW Straits Commission would accept money from mitigation accounts. Commissioner Ginny Broadhurst expressed interest in such a policy. The Executive Committee suggested inviting Ginny to the next Executive Committee meeting to talk about this issue and consider if a policy is needed.

Federal Programmatic Funding: Senator Murray successfully secured \$1M in programmatic funding for the NW Straits Commission in the FY2024 federal budget. Lucas shared that this will make future federal funding requests more streamlined in the future. For example, one current source of federal funding is from Congressional Directed Spending, which is not intended to be an annual funding source. Programmatic funding will replace the Congressional Directed Spending. Lucas and Nan will be talking with Senator Murray's office this week to learn more about this change.



Commission staff highlights - [March 2024]

MRC Support

2023 CDS MRC Grants: Following the funding shift for the San Juan MRC's Jackson Beach creosote removal (see budget notes below), the MRC has submitted a proposal to use the original CDS funding to expand one of their existing projects. See separate document for project description and budget.

2023-25 MRC Grants: No new updates on these awards this period.

2023-25 CDS MRC Grants: No new updates on these awards this period.

Regional Projects

Kelp Plan: Staff finalized a first draft of a Kelp Plan action sequence (a primitive roadmap for the action in the Kelp Plan), which will be presented to the Kelp Plan Coordination Advisory Committee for review and lead to developing a strategy to move the plan forward. Staff also began to develop a kelp-based social media campaign.

Kelp Monitoring: Staff have begun to organize the 2024 Kelp Kayak Kickoff to help prepare volunteer kayakers for the upcoming kelp monitoring season, which runs from June through September. Staff also are looking into a new safety training class for interested kayak volunteers, which would be held in June. Staff continue to work to update Sound IQ and the new [StoryMap](#) with the 2023 monitoring data.

Green Crab: The green crab ad-hoc committee met to discuss the background and current involvement of NWSC in green crab management as well as NWSC's long term role with green crab. Staff continue to meet with Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and WA Dept. Of Fish and Wildlife staff regarding our current agreement, planning options for next biennium, and upcoming field season coordination.

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones: Staff held a transboundary eelgrass protection workgroup meeting with partners from WA and BC discussing eelgrass mapping needs for boaters, shared methods for monitoring voluntary vessel compliance in no-anchor zones, and discussing generating a guidance document for communities considering establishing no-anchor zones for eelgrass protection.



Commission staff highlights - [March 2024]

Derelict Vessels: An attempt was made to remove a derelict vessel in Skagit County, however the conditions were not ideal and the contractor is revising the removal strategy. Commission staff continue to work with partners to coordinate vessel turn in events- the upcoming event with San Juan MRC and the Port of Friday Harbor will take place the first two weeks of April and 14 vessels were accepted to be turned in and recycled. A media event is planned for April 4th to highlight the event and partners work.

Operations

Staff: No updates on staffing this month.

Budget: Senator Murray was able to secure \$1 million in programmatic funding in the federal fiscal year 2024 budget, to be received via NOAA. Additional details are pending.

The San Juan MRC's Jackson Beach creosote removal project originally funded with the CDS award in 2023 has now been shifted to be paid for by the Puget Sound Partnership's Nearshore Conservation Credit program funding.

The Dept of Ecology/Commission received guidance via a directive from the Governor's office on ensuring that work done using our 2023-25 kelp proviso funding in the state budget includes funding acknowledgment of the Climate Commitment Act, which is the source of the funding.

Meetings Attended

Allie attended: WDFW Green Crab Agreement meetings 3/1, 3/11; Athena Group Kickoff meeting 3/1; DEI Kickoff meeting check-in 3/5; Green Crab Field Planning with WDFW 3/6; A Path Toward Equity: Modules 2-4 DEI Training 3/6, 3/19, 3/21; NWSC Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee meeting 3/12; Bi-Weekly DEI Meetings 3/13, 3/27; Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup 3/14; Green Crab meeting with Padilla Bay 3/21; Athena Group + NWSC Project Planning Work Session 3/26; Green Crab Molt Training Planning with Skagit MRC & Padilla Bay 3/26; Green Crab Trapping Training with Padilla Bay NERR & Kachemak Bay NERR

Dana attended: A Path Toward Equity: Module 2 3/7; NWSC Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee meeting 3/12; Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup 3/14; Island MRC retreat 3/15; SAC social science 101 training planning 3/26



Commission staff highlights - [March 2024]

Jeff attended: Transboundary Kelp Node Workgroup (03/01, 03/12, 03/08); Padilla Bay All Staff Meeting (03/05); Path Toward Equity: Belonging: Moving from Them to Us (03/13); Island MRC Retreat (03/15); Skagit MRC Meeting (03/14); NWSI Kayak Kickoff Planning Meeting (03/19); Environmental Negotiations Training (03/25-28)

Lucas attended: Resilience planning meeting with Dept of Ecology 2/26; Retreat facilitator interviews 2/27; European green crab meeting with WDFW 3/1, 3/11; DEI contractor kickoff 3/1; Seattle Aquarium kelp conservation Congressional Directed Spending request meeting 3/4; Ecology Program Management Team meetings 3/4, 3/11, 3/18, 3/25; Jefferson/ Clallam MRC joint meeting 3/6; Padilla Bay Leadership Team Meeting 3/7, 3/20; NWS Greed Crab ad-hoc committee 3/12; Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council meeting 3/14; Island MRC retreat 3/15; NWS Executive Committee meeting 3/18; Senator Murray staff meeting 3/19; NWS External Relations 3/20; Green Crab coordination meeting with Padilla Bay 3/21; NFWF forage fish meeting 3/25; NWS DEI Contractor meeting 3/26

Sasha attended: retreat facilitator interviews 02/27; External Relations 03/20

Caitlyn attended: Athena Group Kickoff meeting 03/01; DEI Kickoff meeting check in 03/05; NW Straits Commission Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee meeting 03/12; Bi-Weekly DEI Meeting 03/13; Skagit MRC Meeting 03/14; Executive Committee Meeting 03/18; NWSI Kelp Kickoff Preparation Meeting 03/19; Conference and CTP Assistance Meeting – NWSC and Padilla Bay 03/20; Athena Group + NWSI Project Planning Work Session 03/26; NW Straits 2024 Conference Planning Committee Meeting 03/26; NW Straits Commission Meeting 03/29

Jessica attended: 03/04 SJI Derelict Vessel communications; 03/05 Eelgrass social marketing; 03/06 Joint Clallam/Jefferson MRC meeting; 03/11 kelp communications; 03/13 SJI Derelict Vessel communications; 03/19 Kelp kickoff; 03/20 kelp communications; 03/26 Washington Internal Communicators Roundtable (WICR) meeting; 03/29 NWSC meeting

Leah attended: WDFW Green Crab Agreement meetings 3/1, 3/11; Island MRC Meeting 3/5; Green Crab Field Planning with WDFW 3/6; AGOL questions with Ecology 3/6; Presentation Skills for Scientists 3/7; NWSC Green Crab Ad-Hoc Committee meeting 3/12; Bi-Weekly DEI Meetings 3/13, 3/27; Skagit MRC Meeting 03/14; Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup 3/14; NWSI Kayak Kickoff Planning Meeting 3/19; Green Crab meeting with Padilla Bay 3/21; Forage Fish with NFWF; Green Crab Molt Training Planning with Skagit MRC & Padilla Bay 3/26

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Clallam

Month/Year: March 2024

Submitted by: Rebecca Mahan & Amelia Kalagher

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Special joint meeting was held with Jefferson MRC, including a presentation on tribal treaty rights by Cecelia Gobin.
- 74 tons of clean Pacific oyster shell spread by bargewith Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe for Olympia oyster restoration in Sequim Bay.
- Clallam MRC advisory subcommittee has drafted an advisory process protocol with Lucas Hart’s assistance. The draft is now in review by all MRC members.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

- Ann Stafford resigned from her position representing Marine Related Recreation and Tourism. The MRC is currently recruiting for this and other roles.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events)

- For Olympia oyster restoration, volunteers and staff spread Pacific oyster shell by barge 3/4/24 – 3/6/24 in Sequim Bay, in partnership with the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe.
- A special joint meeting with the Jefferson MRC was held 3/6/24 at the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe’s Red Cedar Hall, including a presentation on tribal treaty rights from Cecelia Gobin (NWIFC).
- March monthly MRC meeting was held 3/18/24.
- A planting event is scheduled for 3/26/24 and 3/28/24, with 100 volunteer participants currently registered.

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): none to report.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified): The Olympia oyster restoration season kicked off with placement of Pacific oyster shells by barge.

- Several Clallam MRC members continued to collect the monthly Forage fish samples at Cline Spit and Ediz Hook and Elwha beaches East and West.
- Clallam MRC continues to steward the beach at the mouth of the Elwha River.
- MRC member Nancy Stephanz attended a regional meeting for the Sound Toxins project.
- The Clallam MRC continues to prepare for its upcoming Pinto Abalone monitoring project, with fieldwork expected to begin late 2024.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

- The MRC has established an advisory subcommittee, which continues to meet with the goal of establishing a defined process for MRC response to advisory topics. The subcommittee presented an initial draft of this process to the MRC at large at the 3/18/24 monthly meeting.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



Olympia Oysters: Barge crew loads the first few of a total of 100 pallets of Pacific oyster shell onto the barge by crane. Photo by Rebecca Mahan.



Olympia Oysters: Barge crew, MRC member Ed Bowlby and MRC admin staff Amelia Kalagher approach the restoration site and wait to spread bags of Pacific oyster shell. Photo by Rebecca Mahan.



Joint Jefferson and Clallam MRC meeting in Red Cedar Hall at Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. Photo credit: Rebecca Mahan.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Island

Month/Year: March / 2024

Submitted by: Kelly Zupich

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- ALE Program Forage Fish Class
- Comprehensive Plan
- MRC Retreat

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff)

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

Previous Meetings/Events:

- March 5: MRC Monthly Meeting
- March 15: MRC Retreat

Upcoming Meetings/Events:

- March 25: SWSD ALE Forage Fish Survey Field Trip
- April 2: MRC Monthly Meeting
- April 10: Stewardship Event at Cornet Bay and Hoypus Point
- April 29: SWSD ALE Low Tide Walk
- May 7: MRC Monthly Meeting

Funding updates (newly awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments):

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Monitoring – Forage Fish: Our work monitoring for Forage fish eggs continues year-round at most sites. Teams continue to monitor monthly at Hoypus Point, Cornet Bay, Sunlight Shores, Maple Grove, Glendale, and Keystone Preserve. Seahorse Siesta is finished for the season and will begin again next winter. The committee has been discussing how to move forward with this project. The team is trying to decide between the importance of index sites and/or working to get protections on as many beaches as possible by moving sites once forage fish eggs are identified at the location. Additionally, the team is looking to find more ways to utilize the volunteers while they are already on the beach and can capture more data.

Bull Kelp Surveys: Planning meetings have begun for the 2024 monitoring season. The team is looking at adding new equipment to measure temperature and salinity and then a device that will measure depth and build contour maps.

Stewardship – Cornet Bay/Hoypus Point: Planning has begun for an April planting event, which will be held at Cornet Bay and Hoypus Point on April 10 at 10 a.m. We will focus on planting Dune grass and

Nootka roses. Additionally, we will be hosting monthly stewardship events throughout the growing season and are getting ready for weekly watering.

Water Quality Testing: The Water Quality team is working on collecting QAPP's from other groups to use for our testing. Additionally, the team continues to compile sources of water quality data in our region.

Shoreline Education and Survey: Herrera Environmental Consultants is working on analyzing permits against our armoring survey data to see how much of the added armoring in Island County since 2016 was permitted vs. unpermitted. Herrera will be presenting the results at our May MRC Meeting.

Derelict Vessels: Our MRC received a call this week about a derelict sailboat on the south end of Whidbey. The vessel is located near a dock and will likely cause damage soon if not removed quickly. Kelly Webb is working with the NWS and state DNR to expedite the process.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

Comprehensive Plan: The IC MRC Comp Plan committee includes Jill Lipoti, Paul Ben McIlwain, Greg Easton and Barbara Bennett. The committee is tracking the County's development of a new comprehensive plan for use through 2045 by attending meetings, reviewing discussions recorded at formal meetings, making public comments, and submitting written comments.

The Comp Plan is broken into elements that address all aspects of County Code. Each element of the Comprehensive Plan is introduced and discussed with the IC Board of County Commissioners and with the IC Planning Commission. The Land Use element is currently in discussion and next will be Natural Resources.

Comments on behalf of the MRC re: Natural Resources have been submitted to the Planning Department. Members of the MRC Comp Plan committee have attended several Planning Commission meetings and have commented on both the Comprehensive Plan and discussion about the County's Shoreline Management Program specifically regarding the hazards of armoring. The Comp Plan committee will continue to monitor and contribute comments in line with the MRC mission and purpose.

MRC Retreat: The Island MRC came together for a five-hour retreat at the Cornet Bay Retreat Center. It was a beautiful day for brainstorming and teamwork to ensure our projects are on track for 2024. We started the day with an icebreaker that allowed folks to see our members' personality types. That exercise was very enlightening and fun. As the day progressed, we reviewed most of our projects to make sure they met our goals. We left feeling energized and with a list of action items to work on.

ALE Program Science Panel: MRC member Kirk Larsen and staff Kelly Zupich joined the South Whidbey School District ALE Class to discuss forage fish. Once we finished our brief review on forage fish and how to identify their eggs, we did a lab where the students got the opportunity to identify eggs and use nature journals to draw and describe what they saw. The students asked great questions and stayed engaged throughout the whole lesson. Next, we will take the students to the Keystone Farm forage fish site to do a mock survey and learn the entire collection process.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



MRC Retreat

Photo by Kelly Zupich

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Jefferson

Month/Year: March 2024

Submitted by: Sarah Fiskén

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Jefferson and Clallam MRC's held a joint meeting on March 6 at Red Cedar Hall in Jamestown. Cecilia Gobin gave a great presentation on Tribal Treaty Rights.
- MRC Hiring Subcommittee Committee will hopefully start the hiring process for Monica's replacement sometime the second week of April. Hopefully someone will be in place by early May
- ROV Project: Due to reduced staffing support the MRC won't be retrieving derelict crab pots this year in Port Townsend Bay. They will be doing some sonar scans to get a better idea of how many pots are still in the water

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

Past Events/Meetings

March 4-Education/Outreach subcommittee meeting

March 5 -MRC monthly meeting

March 6-Joint Jefferson/Clallam county meeting

March 19-Executive meeting

Upcoming Events/Meetings

April 2 – MRC monthly meeting

April 23-Exec meeting

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

1. Monitoring:

- **Forage fish - Fort Townsend:** Nothing to report.
 - **Forage fish - Dabob Bay (Index):** The Project Lead (Sarah) plans to surveyed in March.
 - **Kelp:** Nothing to report
 - Education and Outreach: Nothing to report
- Olympia Oysters: There is funding and permits to place more shell over the next 2 years in Discovery Bay including the lagoon site. There will also be a site visit to Broad Spit in Dabob in June.

•

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: San Juan County

Month/Year: March 2024

Submitted by: Sam Whitridge & Katie Johnson

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- Applications have been flying in for the Free Vessel Turn-In Event in April. The goal is to take care of as many DVs as possible in a safe and responsible way. MRC members have helped with outreach and planning as we look forward to a successful event clearing vessels from waterways and marinas.
- The Spring Great Islands Clean up is scheduled for Saturday, April 20th. We are following this year's theme for Earth Day "Plastics vs. Planet". Activities have been planned on Orcas, Lopez, Shaw, and San Juan Islands. We have had great participation in the past and we are looking forward to another great day of preventing litter and debris from polluting beaches and roadways.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

No changes to report.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- PFSS Subcommittee Meeting – February 27th
- In Person MRC/CAG/LIO Meeting – March 7th
- San Juan County Stewardship Network Meeting – April 3rd
- Next MRC/CAG/LIO Meeting – April 4th
- Free Vessel Turn-In Event – April, exact dates TBD by vessel
- Spring Great Islands Cleanup – April 20th
- Salmon Recovery Site Visits – May 1-2nd (NO MAY MRC MEETING)

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support, or other funding commitments):

No new funding to report for this month.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Marine Stewardship - The State of the Marine Stewardship Area Report is out for peer review until the end of April.

DV - The deadline for applications for the Free Vessel Turn-in Event was extended until March 15 so that even more people could participate in the responsible removal of derelict vessels. We received over 20 inquiries for potential vessels! The program is able to accommodate 14 vessels that fit within the criteria for removal. Our team is thrilled about the opportunity to remove so many boats in one succinct event. This wouldn't be possible without the valuable partnerships with DNR, NWSC, the Port of Friday Harbor to result in a successful event. MRC members and Staff performed a DV patrol on March 7 after the MRC meeting. The crew cruised around the south end of Lopez, weaving into the various bays that have not been surveyed before. We viewed one suspicious boat, but before we could follow up, the owner applied to the Turn-in program. What a great outcome! The team also looked at mooring buoy data accumulated last summer to begin verifying DNR data to on the water buoys.

PFSS - PFSS subcommittee met on February 27 to discuss planning for the year. Discussion included how to expand the initiative beyond San Juan County by developing an adaptable framework with clear mechanisms to implement the work by other MRCs or counties. Several outreach touchpoints have been identified including Plastic Free July and the County Fair later this summer. Planning is underway for the Spring 2024 Great Islands Clean Up, happening on Saturday April 20th across San Juan County. We are hoping for a great turn out and a fun event. Each year, the data has been growing with more volunteers and even more pounds of debris being removed (See the graphic for details).

Eelgrass Protection – At our most recent meeting, we discussed resuming opportunistic vessel counts in the coming months as the boating season will soon be upon us. It would be great to gather some off-season data to compare with the data collected during the summer months.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):

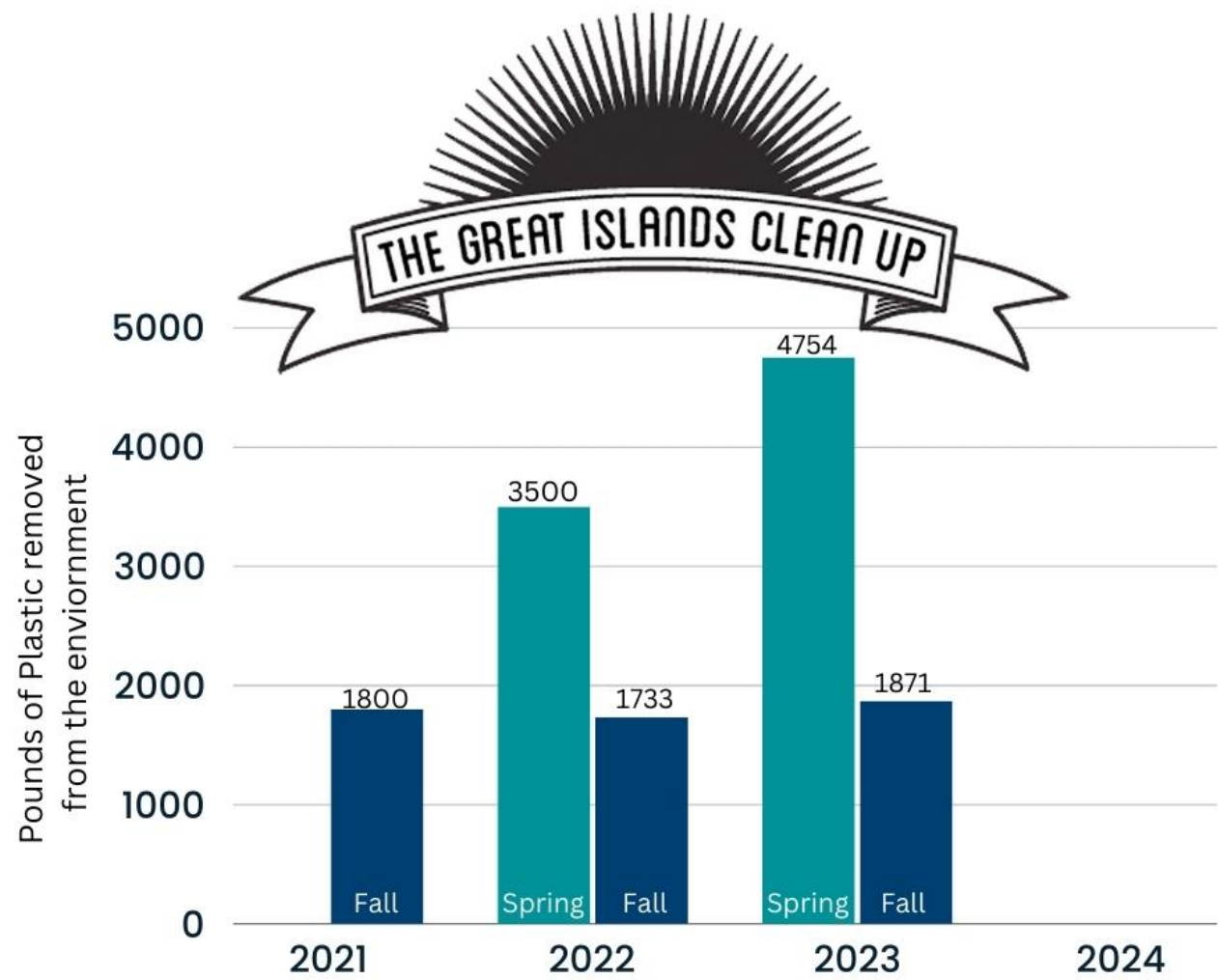
On February 14-15th the County hosted a Tribal Engagement Training for staff facilitated by the Whitener Group. Over two days we dug into Washington Treaties, Tribal Engagement basics and inter-tribal politics. The unique geography of the San Juans makes it such that 14 different tribes have Treaty Rights or Usual and Accustomed fishing rights within the county, which means a lot more communication and coordination is needed to grow these relationships. As we learn to be a better governmental partner, its important to have a background and history to build upon.

The MRC heard two presentations at our March meeting focused on marine aquatic vegetation. The first was from Linda Degan Cobos from Slow Food, Land and Sea who presented a proposed kelp farm pilot project. A private landowner adjacent to Jackson’s Beach has partnered with Linda to provide space for the pilot project which is hoping to launch this year. The second presentation was from Jason Stutes and Ian Wingard about the Bellingham Bay MTCA Clean-up project and eelgrass harvest efforts. Three sites within Bellingham Bay are being mitigated and as such, over 3 acres of eelgrass is available for transplant. Both presentations offered great opportunities for collaboration in the future and positive solutions for kelp and eelgrass, which have been so heavily impacted in the San Juans.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):



Recent DV Patrol and mooring buoy assessment performed by DV Coordinator Kari Koski and Marine Project Manager, Frances Robertson. Photos by Frances Robertson



Great Islands Cleanup Data 2021 – 2023, anxiously waiting for Spring 2024.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: March/2024

Submitted by: Tracy/Diane

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- **Olympia Oyster Restoration:** Olympia oyster restoration work in Fidalgo Bay has been in the news a lot recently and has sparked some interest from the public about getting involved and volunteering. Paul Dinnel was invited to give a presentation on oyster restoration to the Kiwanis Club of Anacortes on March 21 and the Salish Sea Stewards class on March 19.
- **New NWSC Representative:** Diane Hennebert accepted a new position and will be resigning from the MRC at the end of March and will no longer be the NWSC representative. Lynne Wenberg-Davidson has been appointed as the new NWSC Representative for the Skagit MRC.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): MRC member and NWSC representative, Diane Hennebert accepted a new position and will be resigning from the MRC at the end of this month. We greatly appreciate Diane's positive energy and tireless dedication, expertise, and contributions in support of Skagit MRC's mission. She will be missed! Lynne Wenberg-Davidson will take Diane's place as the NWSC representative.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- **March 14-** Monthly MRC meeting. Elizabeth Drozda provided an overview of The Salish Sea School's mission, goals, and programs and discussed possibilities for future collaborations with the Skagit MRC
- **March 15-** Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting
- **March 15-** Aquatic Reserves Intertidal Monitoring Collaboration Meeting with Skagit MRC staff, Whatcom MRC staff, Re-sources, and The Salish Sea School
- **March 18-** Lone Tree Kelp Survey Meeting with kelp survey volunteers and Swinomish staff
- **March 21-** Fidalgo Bay Trestle Project Meeting with MRC members and the City of Anacortes
- **March 22-** Bowman Bay Bimonthly Beach Seining
- **March 22-** Skagit Shorelines Needs Assessment- in-person interviews of the top three firms
- **March 27-** Skagit Vessel Turn-In Event Planning Meeting
- **April 18-** Mount Vernon High School Science Night. MRC Forage Fish Survey volunteers will be hosting a booth with microscopes and surf smelt eggs. The MRC and NWSC will also be co-hosting a European Green Crab outreach table with outreach materials crab molts and the EGC plinko game.
- **April 30-** Salish Sea Stewards Last Class and Graduation

Funding updates (newly - awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): No updates.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Training held Tuesdays from 1-5pm starting Feb 6-April 30 at Padilla Bay. Erin Merklein is now facilitating the training. She is also the Volunteer Coordinator.
 - Full class with 27 very enthusiastic and engaged attendees!

- Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee meeting on March 15.
- One of our SSS Alums (class of 2023), Dean Tillis, was awarded the Dick Knight volunteer of the year award from the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.
- To date, the Stewards & community volunteers have recorded over 50,000 volunteer hours since 2015.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - 4 Index sites (monthly samples): Guemes Channel, E. Similk Bay (Swinomish Reservation), Samish Island, and west of marina towards Skyline.
 - 3 Restoration Sites (monthly samples): Bowman Bay, W. Similk Bay (private property), and Clayton Beach (every other month). Skagit volunteers alternate monthly sampling with Whatcom County at Clayton Beach.
 - Forage fish survey data goes to WDFW in Olympia. WDFW hosts quarterly updates to forage fish survey volunteers.
 - Fidalgo Bay surveys for DNR continue. New lead FF volunteers from Citizen Aquatic Reserve are now coordinating monthly sampling at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve: Tom Flanagan, Catherine Houck.
 - Upcoming Forage Fish Outreach Activities:
 - April 2- Pete will be one of the presenters leading a forage fish survey on April 2nd for the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - April 18- Volunteers will be tabling at Mount Vernon Science night with forage fish eggs and microscopes and educational information.
 - April 16- WADNR will present forage fish data results collected over the last ten years at the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve. The presentation will be held at Padilla Bay in the morning before the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - May- Forage fish volunteers will assist 1st and 2nd graders from Island View Middle School down on the Fidalgo Bay beach in learning about forage fish.
 - June 28- Big outreach event at Bowman Bay will include forage fish surveys & interpretive station, beach seining, and plant maintenance.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
 - 10 classes, 250 students from 3 schools participating in the spring program with classroom and field data collecting and analysis components: mudflats, forage fish, and beach seining. Many students have never been to the beach before:
 - April 15 - April 19: **Concrete 9th-12th grade (3 classes-** underprivileged students). Per teacher's request, students will collect mudflat biodiversity and abundance data- a quantitative mudflat safari at Padilla Bay, instead of forage fish surveys at Fidalgo Bay. The class will visit the Padilla Bay interpretive center afterwards.
 - May 6 - May 10: **Evergreen Elementary in Sedro Woolley** 4th grade, 75 students.
 - May 20 - May 24: **Allen Elementary in Mount Vernon** 4th and 5th grade, 84-100 students (English 2nd language for many of the students).
 - 4th graders will get to participate in the mudflat safari and 5th grade students will get to participate in beach seining at Padilla Bay. The idea is to create a different field experience for students for each grade level.
- School Rain Garden – Diane Hennebert:
 - Working on a maintenance plan and securing one or two lead stewards to maintain the Mt Erie School rain garden.
 - Diane and Tracy are planning a site visit to the La Conner School rain garden to assess the site and test the soil to determine why its not working properly and come up with a game plan to get the site going and maintained.

- There is an intern with the county and interns with the Northwest Straits Foundation who might be able to help with establishing and maintaining the rain gardens.
 - Planting at the La Conner School rain garden is targeted for the fall of 2024.
 - MRC grant funding would be used to purchase plants, mulch, and interpretive signage. Funding expires December 31, 2024.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
 - Date has been set for Saturday, August 24, 2024, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
 - This will be the 20th anniversary of FBD!
 - Need help planning this year's event. Currently only have 3 people on the planning committee and no MRC Lead or Event Chair.
 - Reserved the Shannon Point touch tanks.
 - Beach seining demo will be led by Matt and Jason around 2pm.
 - Planning documents including task lists and timelines are being updated.
 - Will be reaching out to past participating organizations and volunteers with Save the Date cards soon.
 - The Samish Canoe Family expressed interest in possibly participating in Fidalgo Bay Day this year. The tides look good.
 - The event will be posted in the next edition of A Town Magazine.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Field work is ongoing now through April including monitoring outplant sites and outplanting additional juvenile abalone at some outplant sites.
 - Hope to have more information to share next month.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
 - Annual monitoring of Olympia oyster recruitment in Fidalgo Bay will start up again in May to continue monitoring the annual variabilities of oyster densities and post larval settlement and setting out new shell bags for monitoring larval settlement next year. Paul and his son will be doing all the field work. No need for additional volunteers until the next 5-year assessment in 2028.
 - Recent articles about Olympia oyster restoration work sparked a lot of interest from the public. The most recent article was in the [Salish Sea Current](#). Many are inspired and asked how to get involved in volunteer work and others are interested in learning more about the work and some organizations even requested presentations.
 - March 19- Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Salish Sea Stewards class.
 - March 21- Paul will be presenting the Olympia oyster restoration work to the Kiwanis Club of Anacortes.
 - June 13- Padilla Bay NERR staff will present their Olympia oyster restoration work in Padilla Bay at the June 13th MRC meeting.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy Alker:
 - Skagit MRC's Grant Funding from NOAA (\$58k) for this project expires December 31, 2024.
 - The City of Anacortes has a contract with Hanson Professional Services for the Fidalgo Bay trestle project that is expected to get signed in April.
 - MRC staff and 4 MRC members briefly met with the City of Anacortes staff on March 21 to discuss the project and how the MRC grant funds will be used to make sure we will meet our grant deliverables, timeline, and funding requirements including:
 - Develop Outreach Strategy and Messaging Plan.
 - Design and fabrication of interpretive signage along the Tommy Thompson trail.
 - Providing outreach materials at the Fidalgo Bay Day event along with a guided walk along the Tommy Thompson Trail and/or a short presentation.

- Creating website content with science- based messaging to help answer the “why”.
 - Creating short educational video clips with links on the website
 - Collecting additional scientific data to support the conceptual design and outreach messaging.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - There are 4 kelp beds surveyed in Skagit County between June and September each year by experienced kayak volunteer leads.
 - Jeff Whitty is working to establish a MRC Kelp Kayak Advisory Committee to act as an advisory body to help advance and improve the kayak kelp monitoring program. This committee would be composed of 1-2 reps from each MRC/MRC’s kayak group. Steve Olsen, the kayak lead for Bowman Bay kelp surveys, will be Skagit MRC’s rep. Steve also led a kayak tour business for several years in Skagit. Lynne will be Steve’s backup.
 - Steve Olsen has been looking for new kelp beds to potentially add to our surveys. He found one near Lone Tree Point that might be a good option in collaboration with the Swinomish Tribe. The ecological significance of the kelp bed site is that it has freshwater inputs which could be helpful in better understanding how freshwater can affect kelp growth and vitality. Lynne and Steve scheduled a reconnaissance of the site, launching from the Thousand Trails Campground to see if it might be feasible. If the new kelp bed is added, it will be a 5-year commitment.
 - Safety is important and volunteers must be experienced kayakers. The NWSC requires all kayaker participants to go through the safety training videos that they provide at the beginning of each season. Kayaker volunteers must sign liability forms each season. Jeff is also looking for interest from volunteers in scheduling a kayak safety class in the field led by a certified instructor.
 - Lynne and Jeff interviewed for an [article about kelp](#) in the Skagit Valley Herald that just came out earlier this month, March 1st.
 - Jeff will be presenting on kelp at the April 16 Salish Sea Stewards class.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance and Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Skagit MRC funds and supports plant maintenance and beach seining at the Bowman Bay restoration site in partnership with NWSF and Parks. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is also providing some funding to support the beach seining project. They are interested in the data for their feasibility study to open the wetland to Fidalgo Bay.
 - The MOU for plant maintenance and beach seining with NWSF has been finalized and signed.
 - Lynne is working with Lisa Kaufman to come up with a plant maintenance schedule for this spring. Will borrow the Park’s leftover firewater to water plants. Will try to coordinate plant maintenance with forage fish surveys and beach seining if possible.
 - Last month’s storm uncovered some buried debris and additional armor north of the boat launch that we didn’t know was there because it wasn’t part of the restoration site. The boat launch is also very buckled and broken from the storm. Lisa is looking into potential funding options for a feasibility study for removing the boat launch and armoring. The Park would like to pull it out and replace it with a soft ramp for kayaks.
 - Jason Morgan with the NWSF is leading the beach seining effort twice a month at Bowman Bay with the help of volunteers from February through June. They are seeing flounder which is unusual for this time of year. They are also seeing sculpin, pink salmon, Chinook, and pipefish. They also found a northern lantern fish, not typically found on the nearshore.
 - Planning an outreach event on June 28th with beach seining, forage fish surveys, and plant maintenance in collaboration with the NWSF, MRC, SFEG, and The Salish Sea School. Still working out the details.

- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - The Request for Quotes and Qualifications notice was sent to over 235 environmental firms.
 - The Advisory Team reviewed and evaluated proposals from 5 different firms. The top 3 candidates were selected to interview. We hope to have a new contract in place early April.
 - The consultant will be responsible for: designing a new geodatabase, performing literature review, developing a prioritization process, analysis, and identifying geospatial focus areas, and developing a list of proposed shoreline protection and restoration projects. Data will be uploaded to SoundIQ with the help and support of Suzanne Shull.

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.): NA

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):

Northern Lantern Fish- Bowman Bay Beach Seine
Photo: Jason Morgan



MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Snohomish

Month/Year: March 2024

Submitted by: Elisa Dawson and Joycelyn Blue

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

- A beach cleanup in partnership with WSU Beach Watchers is scheduled for March 28 at Howarth Park.
- The MRC is currently hiring for the Marine Ecology Intern position. The selected Intern is expected to start in June of 2024.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

The Marine Ecology Intern position was posted by Snohomish County. The Marine Ecology Intern will support MRC projects including forage fish, kelp monitoring, and the ORCA program. The intern will also focus on creating a shoreline monitoring framework for the MRC and conduct a shoreline audit. The intern is expected to start in June 2024.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

The MRC hosted their January MRC Meeting virtually on February 21.

Joycelyn Blue attended the NW Straits DEI Kick Off meeting on March 1.

Elisa Dawson attended the NW Straits Commission Capstone Group Meeting on March 5.

Elisa Dawson and Joycelyn Blue met with WSU Beach Watchers staff on March 7 to discuss the next two years of partnership.

Elisa Dawson attended the Beneficial Use of Dredge Material meeting on March 13.

The Marine Ecology intern position closed March 20th and intern application reviews were conducted in late March. Intern interviews are scheduled for the week of April 8.

Natasha Coumou, Elisa Dawson, and Joycelyn Blue presented the 2023 MRC Annual Report to Snohomish County Executive's Office on March 25.

Funding updates (newly awarded grants, in-kind support, or other funding commitments)

None.

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

Strategic Planning (MRC grant project for 2024 – 2025): All MRC members have completed interviews. On March 20 in place of the regular MRC meeting, the MRC will participate in the first of two in-person workshops. The subcommittee has crafted a list of contact to receive the survey regarding their perspective on the strategic plan of the MRC.

The strategic plan subcommittee also created a list of 20 people to potentially interview with the Evan's School. They attended an interview training from the Evan's School students on March 5.

Marine Vegetation Outreach (MRC grant project for 2024 – 2025): Our consultant, Peak, is officially on contract. A kickoff meeting will occur this month. The subcommittee is currently pulling together resources related to marine vegetation in the Edmonds area. This list will be added to by the consultant and used by them to create a summary of conservation, policy, and environmental data/conditions for marine vegetation in the Edmonds area.

Derelict Vessels (NWSF funds): Staff are going to determine vessels for potential removal by first getting on the water to note any condition changes or newly arrived vessels. This reconnaissance is scheduled for mid-March.

Below projects are other projects of the MRC funded by SWM fees:

Forage Fish Monitoring: March sampling of Picnic Point and Meadowdale will occur on March 25. A subset of the MRC has volunteered to run weekend sampling of Howarth Park. Staff are currently in the process of gathering all materials for a second forage fish kit for this sampling group.

Nearshore Restoration: None.

Outreach: Beach cleanups in partnership with WSU Beach Watchers continue to be held quarterly. The first clean up is scheduled for March 28 at Howarth Park.

Crabber Outreach/Oil Spill Preparedness and Prevention: None.

Marine Water Quality: The MRC is working with WDFW to return the mussel cage supplies after WDFW's decision to not have volunteers participate in cage retrieval.

Snohomish County staff are currently in the contracting process with ORCA for 2024.

Marine Vegetation Monitoring:

None

Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area: None

Other (anything not covered above, including local issues of interest to the regional group, advisory actions the MRC is taking, questions to the Commission, etc.):
None.

Upcoming Events:

- Strategic Planning Workshop (in place of March MRC meeting) – March 20
- Forage Fish – March 25
- Howarth Park Beach Clean Up – March 28

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info):

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Whatcom

Month/Year: MARCH 2024

Submitted by: Dana Flerchinger and Austin Rose

Key items (two or three) for verbal report-out by MRC rep:

-

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff):

- Due to a recent amendment to Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.03 (Advisory Groups) which requires individuals appointed to a County advisory group to live in Whatcom County, Elma Burnham is no longer eligible to serve on the Whatcom MRC. Elma filled an Economic Interest position and was acting as MRC Vice-Chair. Elma will continue to volunteer with the Beach Seine with Kids project – as she was heavily involved. Rick Beauregard has accepted his nomination to be MRC Vice-Chair and will be formally elected at the April MRC meeting.
- There are currently two vacancies on the MRC: Citizen-at-Large and Economic. Two applications have been received and are currently under review.

Events/Meetings (events/meetings from past month with any noteworthy highlights and information on upcoming events):

- The March MRC meeting was held on March 7. Highlights include:
 - The MRC reviewed their final list of feedback on the Comprehensive Plan and incorporated a few minor edits. Because there was no quorum present, the MRC was not able to formally approve this list during the meeting, but all of the members that were present approved. The rest of the committee approved the list via email. Staff sent the approved final list of recommendations to Whatcom Planning and Development Services on 3/12/24.
 - The primary outcome from the facilitated meeting back in January was to create an Advisory Subcommittee for members to identify and bring issues to the County Council's attention at regular intervals. Members voiced support for potentially creating a rotating subcommittee, so all of the responsibility wouldn't just fall on a few folks. Identifying priority issues is the first goal of determining how the MRC will proceed forward with their advisory role; the different interest groups could create lists of priority issues that they would like to communicate to Council.

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments):

Project Updates (project activities and highlights from the past month, any new projects identified):

- Forage Fish
Dana Flerchinger remains the lead for forage fish sampling. Whatcom MRC continues to sample monthly at Little Squalicum Beach and every other month at Clayton Beach.
- Beach Seine with Kids
The Beach Seine with Kids project team met and selected 4 schools to participate in the 2024 events. Lummi Nation School and Beach Elementary School were selected to participate in the April 19th event, 2 classes from Lowell Elementary school were selected to participate in the May 3rd event, and 3 classes from Eagleridge Elementary were selected to participate on May 15th. There will be a total of 193 students this year, and the MRC will need more assistance at the field events. Don Hunger has a lead on additional funding/ intern possibilities with BP to assist with the field events and pre and post lessons for the events.
- Social Marketing at Wildcat Cove
The social marketing materials generated by Shew Designs, a subcontractor under Peak Sustainability,

have been approved by WA State Parks and the project team. The signs and materials will be implemented at the Wildcat Cove boat launch and via social media. MRC staff will be meeting with the Park Ranger to discuss sign and rack card placement within the park and boat launch area. The [MRC website](#) has also been updated with the outreach materials.

- **Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring:**

Now that it is March, staff and volunteers have switched from biweekly HABs sampling to weekly sampling to determine if any harmful algae are present in the water. As the day length continues to increase and sunlight is becoming more prevalent, phytoplankton numbers are slowly increasing.

Other:

Whatcom County staff, including MRC staff, will be meeting with Elisa Dawson, Snohomish MRC staff, and Kari Koski, Derelict Vessel Coordinator, San Juan County to discuss the derelict vessel response program structure in their counties.

MRC staff attended a WDFW Fish Barrier & Habitat Inventory & Assessment Training (Inventory & Assessment and Habitat & Prioritization. Topics included: Barrier criteria, barrier assessments, non-culvert crossing assessments, and field visits.

Dana Flerchinger joined MRC member and pilot, Mike MacKay, in his plane in attempt to observe herring spawn in the water. Mike and Dana observed a bit of spawning off of Portage Island and were treated to some incredible views on a sunny March day! Photos below by Dana Flerchinger.

Photos:

