

2024

NORTHWEST STRAITS COMMISSION

IMPACT REPORT



Contents

3	Welcome
4	Where we work
5	How we work
6	Collaborative expertise
7	Building community
8	Advisory
13	Conservation & Restoration
20	Education & Outreach
27	Monitoring & Research
34	Partners
36	Photo credits
37	2024 support



“ Our elders have taught us,
through the paddle, to pull together.
We must all work as one to restore
our marine resources.”

Inscription on the paddle plaque pictured at the bottom of page 3. The paddle was presented by the Tulalip Tribes to NW Straits Commission at the Marine Resources Committees' first Annual Conference held on November 5, 1999.

Dear Stewards of the NW Straits,

We want to thank you for the inspiration, strength, and resilience you delivered for our community in 2024. Through your commitment, we've found hope in unexpected places—right here in our own backyards, shorelines, and ocean waters, where local solutions are sparking real, tangible change. As we look back on 2024 and take a moment to catch our breath, we want to share a few reflections with you that highlight some of our collective achievements.

This past year, we've seen hope take shape through:

10.7K hours of volunteer engagement **72** valued partners working with us side by side **44** local and regional projects led by MRCs and the Commission

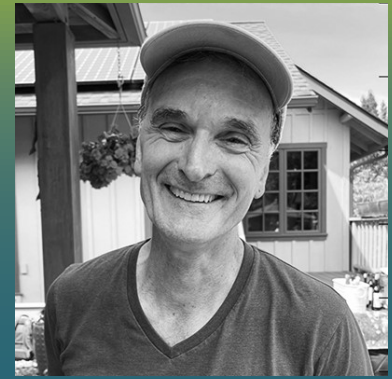
We also made significant progress using a learning cohort model to develop a system for connecting with communities in the NW Straits. Our Science Advisory Committee elevated its emphasis on sharing science with Marine Resources Committees (MRCs), offering workshops and opportunities for “speed dates” with scientists. We hosted site visits that highlighted on-the-ground work like derelict vessel removals, Olympia oyster restoration, and beach seine education projects, and our annual conference inspired collaboration among MRCs, setting the stage for a productive year ahead.

As we enter 2025, we're excited to begin strategic visioning and planning. Our goal is to build on our momentum from the past year and identify areas of opportunity that will deepen the impact of MRCs and NW Straits Commission. We will create a plan that refines and strengthens our community-based approach to conservation and complements the work of our wonderful partners.

We invite you to take a moment to reflect on the highlights of our shared journey, a journey of hope inspired by working together to conserve the places and resources we love. **Thank you. It is your commitment that makes this work possible!**

Together we're building a brighter future for generations to come, one small step at a time.

Tim Ellis (Commission Chair) & Lucas Hart (Director)



Click play to hear an introduction from Commission Chair, Tim Ellis.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In the following pages, we present a summary of NW Straits Commission and MRC work in 2024, encompassing both local and regional collaborative projects aimed at supporting the health of the Salish Sea ecosystem. The projects highlighted in these pages are those that specifically received funding, training, or support through NW Straits Commission. Additional project materials and reports can be found on our website's Resource Library.

The work of MRCs and NW Straits Commission focus on the same goal—to restore and protect our marine waters, species, and habitats. Together, the unique skills across our local network allow for strong collective action.

The sum of our work is greater than its individual parts.

It's important to note that MRCs (Clallam, Jefferson, Island, Skagit, San Juan, Snohomish, Whatcom) are engaged in a variety of projects funded or supported by sources other than those included in this report. For more comprehensive details, we invite you to visit the respective MRC websites. Additionally, each of the seven MRCs produces its own annual report.

Where we work



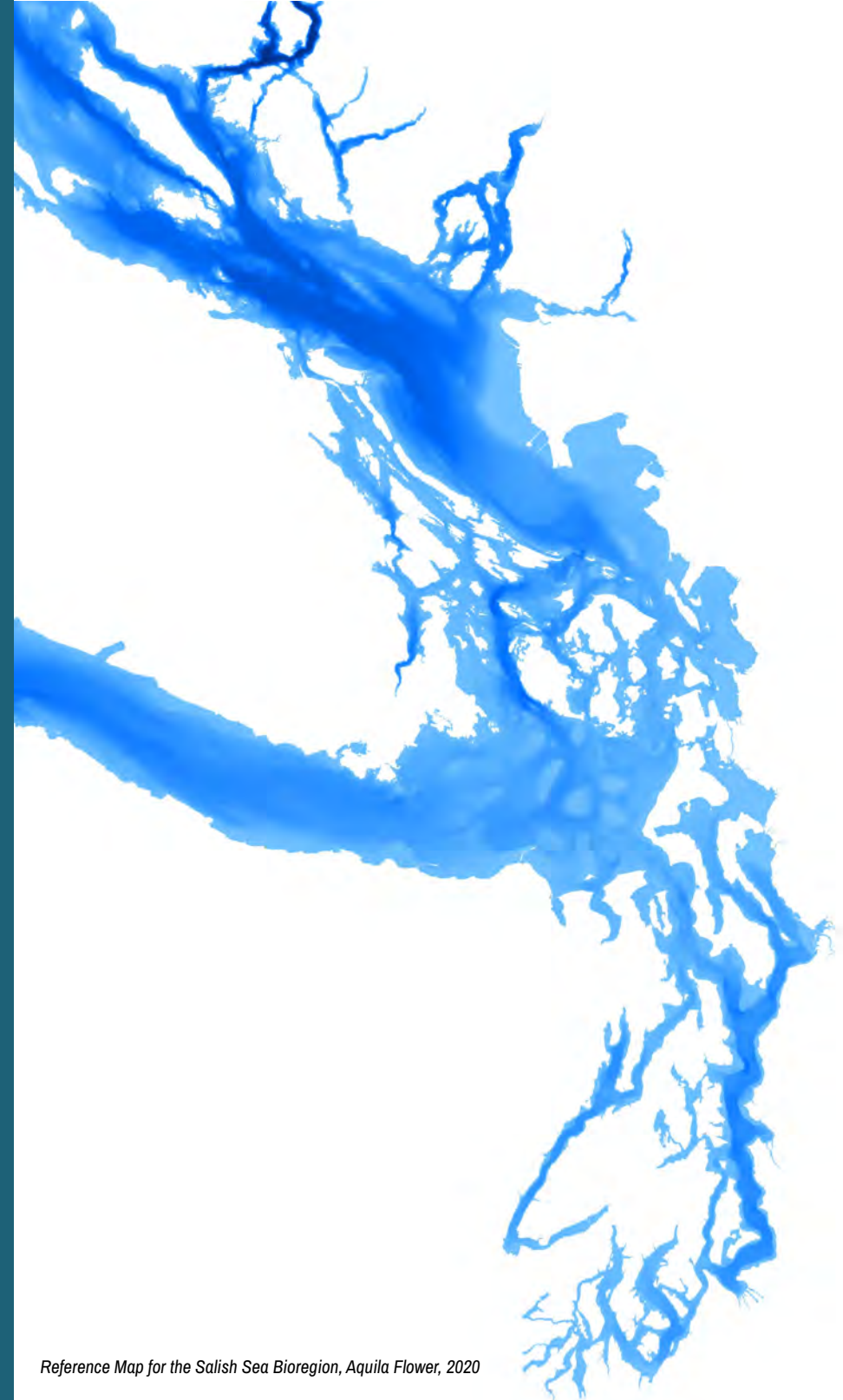
The NW Straits region includes Clallam, Island, Jefferson, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties and their adjoining inland marine waters.

Tribal acknowledgment

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.**

Why we use a Tribal acknowledgment

The Murray Metcalf Report, the founding document of NW Straits Initiative stipulated that the work of NW Straits Commission and MRCs not interfere with tribal Treaty Rights, that work be done with tribal authorities, that scientific recommendations be made in coordination with tribal entities, and that MRCs and NW Straits Commission designate tribal seats. NW Straits Commission pursues these commitments throughout its operations. Our long-standing relationships and partnerships with Tribal communities and nations in the Puget Sound region align with our goal of representing a broad range of interests and serving everyone who inhabits the NW Straits.



Reference Map for the Salish Sea Bioregion, Aquila Flower, 2020

How we work

The seven NW Straits Marine Resources Committees (MRCs), modeled after the original San Juan MRC that was established in 1996, focus on marine issues of local concern and serve as advisory bodies to their local elected government. Their main goals are to address local marine issues, recommend remedial actions, build local awareness of the issues, and garner support for marine conservation.

NW Straits Commission's role is to provide a regional ecosystem-wide perspective, help coordinate county-level efforts and link the Commission and MRC's work with other agencies and regional activities.

The Commission is comprised of one representative from each of the seven MRCs, a Tribal representative appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, and five gubernatorial appointees.

With broad representation from a variety of interests, MRCs collaborate to improve scientific understanding of the marine ecosystem, spreading innovative ideas regionally, and mobilizing community support for marine ecosystem and resource stewardship.

Administered by their respective counties, MRCs receive grant funding through NW Straits Commission. Some also operate with funding support from their county government or carry out projects in partnership with organizations like NW Straits Foundation. MRCs serve as a valuable resource within the county to address local conservation goals. These funds provide capacity and resources to complement regional stewardship, planning and recovery efforts.

MRCs also engage in key processes that have regional implications such as Comprehensive Plans, Shoreline Master Programs, and other local and regional policies and processes.



“ In Jefferson County we look to our MRC as local experts on marine issues. They serve a vital role in shaping local and regional policies, including our Comprehensive Plans and Shoreline Master Programs, and have proven themselves to be creative and thoughtful leaders on behalf of our marine environment.”

- Heidi Eisenhour, Jefferson County Commissioner

Collaborative expertise

As we reflect on the past year, NW Straits Commission and MRCs continued to focus on advancing our **2019-24 Strategic Plan**. Our work remains hopeful and grounded in the collective expertise of our network. The strategic plan, developed through a collaborative and inclusive process, serves as the foundation for our ongoing efforts, with six key themes that guide our work. Each theme is supported by well-defined goals and objectives that steer us toward meaningful results. Looking ahead to 2025, NW Straits Commission is already laying the groundwork for the next phase of our strategic planning process, which will prioritize adaptability and community connections ensuring that we remain responsive to new opportunities and challenges in the years ahead. We look forward to sharing the Commission's vision as it develops in the coming year.

2019-2024 NW Straits Initiative strategic goals

Stewardship

Forge new paths to advance NW Straits recovery and complement the work of regional planning efforts.



Long-term stable funding

Provide organizational stability that allows the Initiative to focus more on advancing its mission.



Engagement & partnerships

Represent a broad range of interests in the NW Straits.



Structural support to MRCs

Strengthen MRC capacity and presence within counties in the NW Straits region and ensures the NW Straits are protected and restored.



Measuring Progress
Engagement & partnerships
Quantify Initiative progress to support communications.



Messaging
Clearly distinguish the Initiative from the work of other organizations.



Reauthorization

There are no other initiatives like NW Straits Initiative in the United States.

NW Straits Initiative is a unique approach to solving important issues that have a direct impact on marine resources, economies, and cultures.

In 2024, efforts to advance the NW Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act made significant progress when the bill passed out of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

The proposed reauthorization would renew NW Straits Initiative's recognition as a federal program within U.S. statute, highlighting the initiative's role as a vital community convener dedicated to marine resource conservation and restoration. Reauthorization would provide greater stability for more comprehensive, long-term planning and an even larger positive impact on the resources our marine economies rely on.

While Congress didn't vote on the bill in 2024, the work done to advance it was important. We will continue to share all the great successes of the Initiative that demonstrate the unique value this incredible network provides.

Building community through collective learning

To help support a broad range of engagement in our work and ensure that it benefits all members of our local communities, we partnered with The Athena Group, LLC to assess the needs of the NW Straits Commission and MRCs. We looked at new approaches and tools to better connect with individuals across our region. The resulting [Needs Assessment Report](#) outlines strategies we can use to engage more effectively with our communities.

One of the strategies we implemented was the creation of a Learning Cohort. This group aimed to help MRC members, MRC staff, and NW Straits Commission staff to adopt new practices that will improve our collective efforts in marine conservation, such as:

- **Recruiting new members:** Building stronger relationships throughout our economic, recreational, and environmental communities, and exploring educational opportunities that can help us build relationships.
- **Connecting with a variety of communities:** Learning how to build stronger relationships with a broader range of stakeholders.
- **Deepening our understanding of our local communities:** Exploring ongoing educational opportunities that build awareness and capacity for practices that better connect our communities in our region to marine resource stewardship.

In 2024, Commission staff collectively attended 80 trainings and events focused on community building and worked on resources to make it easier to access information about local projects and MRC events. We also helped to launch seven MRC websites ensuring they are ADA compliant. Taking these steps allowed us to continue building connections with NW Straits communities.

“ Participating in the Learning Cohort has helped me to think about engagement of diverse audiences. We look forward to collaborating with community members to co-create educational materials that are relevant. It’s about sharing stories that reflect the community. The reward lies in serving a higher purpose. By involving more volunteers from different perspectives, we become more resilient.”

- Jill Lipoti, Island MRC & Learning Cohort Participant



Advisory

Serving as an advisory group
on marine resource issues

In this section:

- Committees
- Shoreline mapping
- San Juan Marine Stewardship Area
- Puget Sound Kelp Conservation & Recovery Plan

Expert advice in science, engagement, & strategy



The Science Advisory Committee provides guidance on scientific matters and project development within the Commission and MRCs. It strengthens the Commission's credibility as a science-based organization. Committee members, experts in various environmental fields, keep the Commission informed about relevant studies and issues that may impact local and regional projects, while also educating the scientific community about the Commission's work. [Learn more about the Science Advisory Committee.](#)

2024 Science Advisory Committee highlights

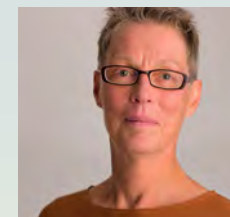
- ★ 2024 Conference session "Knowledge and Resources! Meet the Science Advisory Committee"
- ★ Developed an MRC final project report template with Commission staff streamlining our information collection practices.
- ★ Hosted the first training series "[Understanding & Engaging Communities Using Social Sciences](#)"
- ★ Connected scientists with Commissioners through five [Speed Dating with Scientists](#) sessions

“Being part of the Science Advisory Committee has been an absolute joy. My focus has been on integrating the applied social sciences with NW Straits Commission and MRCs. This includes creating learning opportunities to help those unfamiliar with the social sciences understand their value for MRCs. These collaborative efforts, especially at the local level, are essential for protecting and recovering social-ecological systems.”

- David J. Trimbach, Ph.D. Conservation Social Scientist
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Environmental Leadership

The NW Straits environmental leadership award honors individuals that leave a lasting impact on the Commission and MRCs in a way that helps us advance our goals of community-driven marine conservation.



Julia Parrish, former Chair of the Science Advisory Committee, was awarded the 2024 Environmental Leadership Award for her commitment as a NW Straits Commissioner and Chair of the Science Advisory Committee.

Guiding, informing, educating



The External Relations Committee includes staff from partner organizations and individual volunteers interested in government affairs. The Committee guides the Initiative’s engagement with policymakers and legislation. The Committee helps to track legislative developments, educate elected officials, and promote the Initiative’s mission through effective engagement with all levels of government. Committee members also inform the Initiative about the impacts of legislation on local and regional projects.



We were strongly focused on Congressional Reauthorization of the Initiative in 2024. This reauthorization would secure more stable, long-term federal funding.”

- Tom Cowan, NW Straits Commission’s first Director and a Governor’s appointee

The Executive Committee plays a crucial role in overseeing the operations and strategic direction of NW Straits Commission.

They are responsible for providing oversight and offering recommendations to the Commission on key matters, including budget proposals, internal and external policies, and other operational topics, ensuring the smooth functioning of the Commission’s work.



Our discussions range from logistics to strategic partnerships, all while ensuring the NW Straits Commission remains a consensus-driven, “bottom-up” organization. It’s essential that MRCs and members’ concerns shape the NW Straits Commission’s agenda.”

- Alan Clark, Vice Chair Executive Committee and Clallam MRC member and NW Straits Commission representative for Clallam MRC since 2014



Shoreline mapping



Island County, with over 200 miles of shoreline, faces challenges related to hard armoring. In 2023, Island MRC began a project to survey and analyze shoreline armoring data and provide outreach to homeowners on best strategies for protecting shoreline property and the connections between beach ecosystems and shorelines.

Island MRC hired Herrera Environmental Consultants to conduct boat-based mapping of Whidbey and Camano islands' shorelines to document armoring and assess changes from 2016 to 2023. The study also examined the condition, distribution, and geographic shifts of the armor, noting impacts from storm events. Moving forward, the MRC will continue to educate individuals about effective shoreline protection strategies that also support shoreline stewardship. Island MRC's armoring and permit analysis was presented by the county to the Puget Sound Partnership's Leadership Council, highlighting the advisory role of the MRC in local government. [Read the Armoring Analysis Report.](#)

Key takeaway

- ★ 32.4 miles of the total 108 miles of the documented forage fish spawning habitat in Island County is armored.



State of the San Juan County MSA 2024



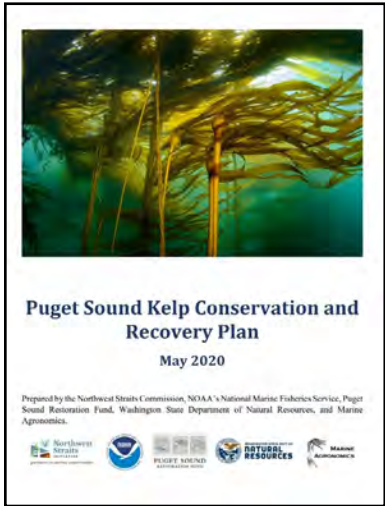
Read the [State of the San Juan County MSA Report](#)

San Juan MRC and San Juan County's Marine Program have completed an assessment of the current status of the Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) and provided recommendations that will allow the MRC, and local, state, federal, and Tribal partners to work together to support a healthy and vibrant marine environment for future generations.

Additionally, this project will contribute to the planning of a Marine Managers' Workshop in 2025 to follow up on the workshop held in spring 2023. These workshops have been hugely successful in prioritizing actions and identifying partnerships to deliver on the goals of the MSA.



Puget Sound Kelp Conservation & Recovery Plan



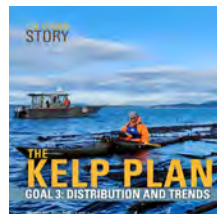
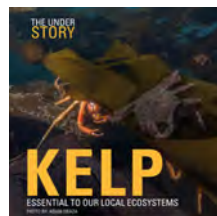
The **Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan (Kelp Plan)**, published in 2020, provides a research and management framework for coordinated action to improve understanding of changes in kelp forest populations, and to implement and strengthen recovery and protective measures for the benefit of recreational and cultural marine species, and the people that depend on them.

As a primary author and signatory, NW Straits Commission coordinates and facilitates implementation of the Kelp Plan. The Commission works with local community groups, Tribes, agencies, non-profits, and

universities as well as some transboundary organizations to promote, link, and implement Kelp Plan actions. [Learn more about the Kelp Plan.](#)

Washington Kelp Project Inventory

Commission staff worked with partners throughout the Salish Sea to develop the Washington Kelp Project Inventory. This inventory is a platform for people to record and observe Washington-based kelp projects and other work that benefits this habitat. The purpose of the inventory is to increase awareness and information sharing for the benefit of the public and partners. The Washington Kelp Project Inventory is an expansion of the 2023 Puget Sound Kelp Project Inventory, which contained 82 kelp projects. Watch for the updated kelp inventory in early 2025. [Learn more about the Puget Sound Kelp Project Inventory.](#)



The Under Story

In 2024, NW Straits Commission launched an initiative to increase Kelp Plan awareness and engagement. A key component of this effort was **“The Under Story,” a social media series about kelp forests and the Kelp Plan.** Created by NW Straits Commission with input from Tribal, transboundary, agency, and nonprofit partners, the series focused on informing state legislators and members of the public about the significance of kelp forests as a marine resource and the efforts to conserve them.

The campaign, which ran bi-monthly from May through December, covered topics from the ecological importance of kelp forests (the most viewed post, with a total of 5,100 reactions on Facebook and Instagram), to actionable ways for both the public and policymakers to contribute to kelp forest preservation.

View [the Under Story.](#)

Conservation & Restoration

Building and maintaining robust marine resources



In this section:

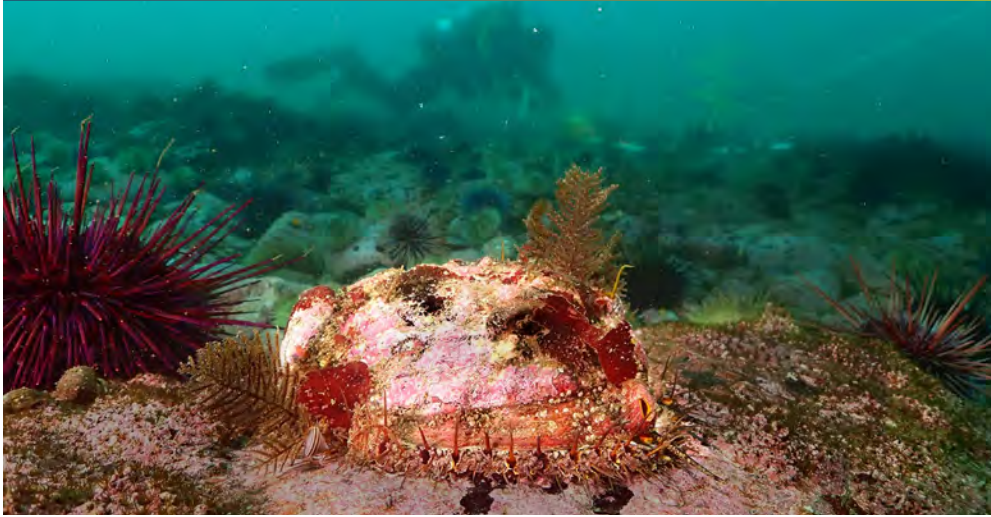
Species focus

- Pinto abalone
- Olympia oysters
- Voluntary no-anchor zones

Restoration work

- Derelict vessel prevention & removals
- Marine riparian vegetation enhancement
- Restoration stewardship
- Nearshore Assessment & Prioritization Tool
- Rain gardens

Rebuilding pinto abalone populations



Clallam and **Skagit MRCs** are partnering with **Puget Sound Restoration Fund** (PSRF) and **WA DFW** as part of a regional effort to rebuild populations of the endangered pinto (northern) abalone. They aim to increase numbers of this previously economically significant recreational fishery species.

In 2024, Clallam MRC took their first steps toward building a local restoration strategy. Potential sites were mapped out as 250-meter² sections based on depth and underwater terrain, followed by dive surveys to locate remnant populations and assess suitability for future outplant sites within those squares. Initial surveys did not find wild aggregations of abalone or any areas suitable for future outplant sites, which helps guide their focus on other areas west of Port Angeles in 2025.

Skagit MRC's pinto abalone efforts in 2024 resulted in 6,344 genetically diverse juvenile abalone outplanted. To date, approximately 26,000 abalone have been outplanted at 11 sites in Skagit County, two newly established in 2023 and another two in 2024. Annual diver surveys show the populations are growing in both size and density. These sites are one component of a recovery network across a significant portion of their geographical range in Washington.

Learn more about pinto abalone restoration in [Clallam](#) and [Skagit](#).

2024 highlight

- ★ 6,344 juvenile abalone outplanted to Skagit sites in 2024, adding to a total of 26k to date.

Olympia oysters



MRCs in four counties play a key role in regional efforts to restore Olympia oysters, the only oyster species native to Puget Sound. Olympia oysters help improve habitat and water quality. Because of habitat loss their populations are a fraction of what they once were prior to the arrival of settlers in the mid-1800s.

Skagit, Jefferson, Clallam, and Whatcom MRCs are focused on restoring native Olympia oyster beds to be self-sustaining and increase in size and density. This long-term effort includes outplanting and monitoring the oysters over time, as well as exploring and testing new sites for future restoration efforts. [Learn more about Olympia oyster restoration.](#)

2024 highlight

- ★ At one site in Clallam County, 2024 population estimates indicated a 104% increase from 2023.



Voluntary no-anchor zones



MRCs and NW Straits Commission are working to build a regional effort to conserve eelgrass and shellfish habitats by encouraging boaters to anchor outside of these areas to prevent physical disturbance to this critical habitat and delineate sub-par anchorage sites. This work is modeled after the highly successful Voluntary No-Anchor Zones established by Jefferson MRC in 2004. Since that time, San Juan MRC has also added voluntary no-anchor zones. **Jefferson** and **San Juan MRC** work to maintain buoys, monitor vessel use, and educate the local community. [Learn more about voluntary no-anchor zones.](#)

NW Straits Commission is supporting regional expansion of this program across the Salish Sea. We partnered with 15 organizations including MRCs to assess eelgrass sites in need of protection from vessel anchoring impacts. This has led to a collaborative social marketing campaign to educate boaters on eelgrass habitat and stewardship-based boating behavior. We continue to lead the Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup to advance this work. The workgroup is a network of partners building a shared approach to eelgrass protection, including coordinating vessel count monitoring and establishing a network of virtual protection zones. [Learn more about Anchor Out of eelgrass.](#)

2024 highlight

- ★ Nearly 100% voluntary compliance by vessels anchoring outside of no-anchor zones at Odlin County Park (San Juan) and Port Townsend (Jefferson) waterfront.



“Being part of the Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup is important because it brings together diverse expertise—scientists, researchers, nonprofits, and state agencies—across borders to collaboratively protect and restore eelgrass, a vital foundation for the health of the Salish Sea and its iconic species like orcas and salmon. It’s place to learn, share, and collaborate for the greater good.”

- Jess Newley, Friends of the San Juans
Community Science and Education Director

Derelict vessel prevention and removal



Derelict and abandoned vessels can create navigational hazards and impact recreational and cultural access. Additionally, derelict vessels can be an impediment to shoreline processes and a source of pollutants and marine debris that harm marine resources.

In 2024, NW Straits Commission worked with all seven MRCs and Tribal partners to remove derelict vessels and pilot vessel turn-in events, which is a strategy to prevent vessels from becoming derelict by giving recreational boaters an inexpensive way to dispose of unwanted boats.

Prevention through vessel turn-in events

Prevention is always cheaper! This year **NW Straits Commission, San Juan and Skagit MRCs, Washington Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR)'s Derelict Vessel Removal Program, WA Department of Ecology Spills Program, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, the Ports of Skagit and Friday Harbor, and La Conner Maritime Service** teamed up to pilot two vessel turn-in recycling events.

The vessel turn-in event model was created with the idea that hosting location-based vessel turn-in opportunities would create cost and logistical efficiencies. These events encourage individuals to voluntarily recycle unwanted vessels at no cost to them, which prevent vessels from becoming derelict.

The two events resulted in 63 vessels being recycled at an average cost of \$4,300-\$5,500 per vessel, substantially lower than removing vessels after they've become derelict or abandoned. Depending on location and condition, removing a similar 20–30-foot vessel from the marine environment can cost \$10,000-\$30,000 or more.

“ This was an excellent opportunity to work with local, state, Tribal and private partners, to bring our collective strengths and skills together for this important program. It’s a proactive way to protect our marine environment and an important service to our local maritime community.”

- Sara Young, Executive Director for the Port of Skagit

2024 Skagit & San Juan turn-in event highlights

- ★ 63 vessels voluntarily turned-in
- ★ 187.15 tons of total debris diverted from landfills and marine environments through recycling or other disposal
- ★ 13 partners participated



Derelict vessel removals

Derelict vessels prioritized by MRCs and Tribal partners targeted the removal of boats on privately and Tribally owned tidelands to benefit the nearshore environment, Treaty rights, and recreational resources.

In 2024, a total of 14 derelict vessels were removed including a 40ft sailboat that ran aground near Neah Bay on the Makah Tribal tidelands and nine sunken vessels in an area critical to the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.

Additional resources

- [WA DNR's vessel turn-in program](#)
- [NW Straits derelict vessel removal webpage](#)
- [Skagit turn-in event press release WA DNR](#)
- [Skagit turn-in event Skagit Valley Herald](#)
- [San Juan turn-in event Salish Current](#)



Marine riparian vegetation enhancement

The southern shores of Ediz Hook were recently restored to a more natural landform by the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. In partnership with the Tribe, Clallam MRC is working to plant native coastal plants at the site.

The MRC hosted two volunteer work parties in the spring, planting 3,000 bare-root plants and five pounds of seed for native plant species at two sites on Ediz Hook, engaging approximately 60 community volunteers. Additionally, two loads of derelict asphalt were removed. The sites were monitored for invasive species and watered as needed throughout the summer. Learn more about [native plant restoration at Ediz Hook](#).



Restoration work

Protecting and restoring marine and nearshore habitat and species

In 2024 **Skagit MRC**, **NW Straits Foundation**, and **Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG)** partnered to conduct beach seining surveys as part of the long-term monitoring for the Bowman Bay Restoration Project. The team completed 16 surveys throughout the year, occurring one to two times a month. The surveys found 2,100 fish that were captured and released, representing 22 unique species including Chinook salmon, chum salmon, pink salmon, Pacific herring, and surf smelt. **A total of 23 volunteers provided 231 hours of service throughout the year. This work is vital for understanding the impact of restoration projects to marine resources so many of us depend on.**

Restoration Stewardship

Following a shoreline restoration project, long-term stewardship of a site is key to its success. Stewarding restored shorelines often involves removing weeds, maintaining native plants so the new habitat can sustain itself, and monitoring fish populations and nearshore environment to see how the restoration is working. Both **Skagit** and **Island MRCs** lead ongoing shoreline restoration stewardship efforts along with a dedicated team of partners.

At Bowman Bay in Skagit County, and Cornet Bay and Hoypus Point in Island County, the **MRCs** worked in collaboration with **NW Straits Foundation**, **WA State Parks**, and various other partners throughout 2024 to carry out post-restoration stewardship activities. This includes planting and maintaining riparian vegetation at the sites, adding mulch and compost as needed, removing weeds and invasive plants, and watering throughout the dry season. Stewardship is instrumental in helping establish important riparian habitat and is carried out by MRC members, project partners, and community volunteers.

2024 Restoration site highlights

- ★ 51 volunteers participated
- ★ 500 pounds of weeds removed
- ★ 98 native plants and trees planted

Additional resources

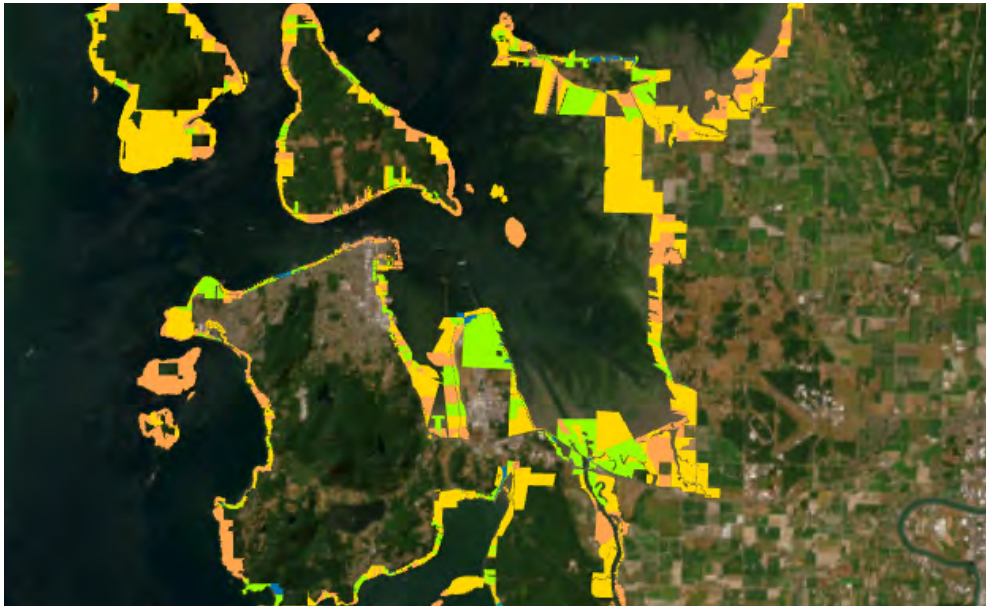
- [Island MRC Cornet Bay](#)
- [Skagit MRC Bowman Bay](#)
- [Island MRC Hoypus Point](#)
- [NW Straits Foundation nearshore restoration](#)



Nearshore Assessment and Prioritization Tool (NEAP)

In 2024, **Skagit MRC** continued to identify opportunities to improve shoreline, estuarine, and nearshore habitats. This was done through development of an interactive web-based tool known as the NEAP Tool. The system uses maps and data to capture elements of ecological function and habitat quality. The NEAP Tool reflects the ecological values and priorities of the MRC for considering future restoration projects.

When complete, the NEAP Tool will make it easier to prioritize projects in a collaborative, transparent, and science-based way. It will also foster stronger community engagement, support streamlining the identification of critical projects, and provide local communities with vital information about the current ecological health and status of Skagit's shorelines. The NEAP Tool also shows shoreline restoration projects completed by the MRC in the last 15 years. Look for a public StoryMap version of the NEAP Tool in early 2025.



“This assessment tool will help the MRC to more quickly respond to and pursue top priority shoreline projects as resources become available (funds, people, timing).” - Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Skagit MRC member

Rain gardens



Rain gardens treat stormwater runoff by filtering contaminants and improving water quality to benefit broad communities. Additionally, they provide a valuable learning opportunity to increase understanding of stormwater issues through volunteer engagement in rain garden installation and maintenance.

In 2024, **Jefferson MRC** and **Skagit MRC** focused on rain garden projects aimed at improving water quality and promoting stewardship. Jefferson MRC maintained 19 previously installed rain gardens, emphasizing neighborhood involvement to enhance water quality in East Jefferson County with maintenance efforts in summer and fall 2024. Skagit MRC has focused their rain gardens on installations at local schools, where they are combined with a curriculum to teach students about rain gardens as a tool for water quality improvement and stormwater management. In 2024, Skagit MRC partnered with La Conner School District, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Skagit Conservation District, Skagit County Public Works, WA Native Plant Society, and Westar Solutions to establish a functional rain garden at La Conner Elementary School.

“There’s always work to be done to maintain these gardens, which play a vital role in our storm drain system leading to the sea.”

– Janette Mestre, MRC Rain Garden Project Lead

2024 Jefferson MRC highlights

- ★ 19 rain gardens maintained
- ★ 4 work parties held
- ★ 2 Master Gardeners adopted a rain garden for ongoing maintenance

2024 Skagit MRC highlights

- ★ 7 project partners contributed
- ★ La Conner’s 4th & 5th grade science class learned how to become rain garden ambassadors
- ★ 25 students contributed to planting native plants

Learn more about [Jefferson MRC](#) rain gardens.

Education & Outreach

Engaging the community to encourage local stewardship and sustainable resource use through outreach and education



In this section:

- Youth programs
- Fidalgo Bay Day
- Salish Sea Stewards
- Wooden Boat Festival
- Marine vegetation outreach
- Plastic Free Salish Sea
- Elwha beach stewardship
- HAZWOPER training
- Project demonstrations
- Regional communications

Youth programs



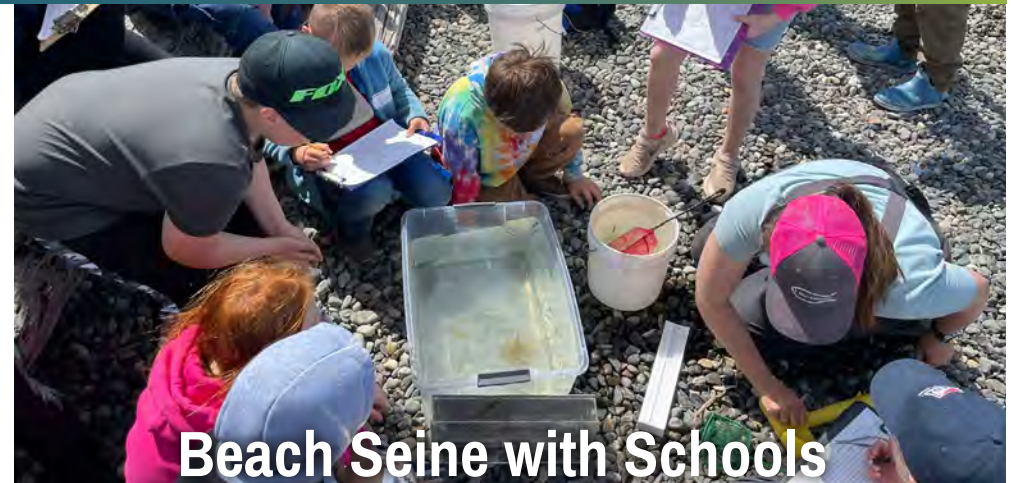
Kids on the Beach

The Kids on the Beach (KOTB) program was launched by the **Skagit MRC** in 2018 and is now managed in partnership with **Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)** with support from Skagit MRC volunteers. The KOTB program is designed to increase literacy in marine science among Skagit County students by providing local experience in marine science and restoration.

The KOTB program is a valuable resource for teachers that aligns with existing educational programs. The program benefits broad communities, including those from Spanish-speaking households. For example, a word reference glossary helped to provide language support for those unfamiliar with academic terms.

“**The Kids on the Beach program can engage students in authentic hands-on sciences, which is something teachers rarely have the opportunity to do.**”

– Annie England, Padilla Bay Marine Educator,



Beach Seining with Schools

“**What makes an impression on kids will stick with them. In our fourth-grade memory books, many listed our Beach Seining field trip as their favorite memory, or one of their highlights.**”

–Teacher comment from the Beach Seining with Kids Program

The Beach Seining with Schools project is a partnership between Whatcom MRC and Lummi Nation Natural Resources. In 2024 the partners conducted three days of demonstration beach seining with 4th grade students. The students heard from Lummi Nation elders and got hands-on experience in scientific research while learning about the local ecosystem and cultural value of salmon. The MRC received additional support for the project from **WA Conservation Corps, NW Straits Foundation, and RE Sources.**

2024 youth program highlights

- ★ 316 students engaged through KOTB and Beach Seining with Schools
- ★ 39 volunteers contributed 226 hours toward these projects

Fidalgo Bay Day



In 2024 **Fidalgo Bay Day** marked the 20th year of **Skagit MRC's** signature annual educational event for families. This free one-day event brings together volunteers, partner organizations and businesses to celebrate the beauty and value of Fidalgo Bay. Generously hosted by the **Samish Indian Nation** in the heart of traditional Samish Indian Nation territory, the event offers educational experiences featuring hands-on activities, marine-themed crafts for children and local seafood samples. The MRC's goal is to increase public awareness of marine life and build a greater sense of understanding and appreciation of the marine ecosystems.

2024 highlights

- ★ 40 organizations and businesses participated
- ★ 450 volunteer hours contributed



Salish Sea Stewards



Salish Sea Stewards (SSS) is a program that trains community science volunteers who study, protect, and restore the natural areas along our marine shorelines. **Skagit MRC** and **SSS Advisory Committee** work in collaboration with **Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)** to implement a 40-hour volunteer training curriculum to establish 25+ new SSS volunteers annually. The curriculum consists of classroom-style lectures by local and regional experts combined with field-based training. Once SSS students complete the training and graduate from the program, they formally become SSS volunteers and agree to give back 40 hours of volunteer services to support Skagit MRC and partner projects. There are now more than 300 community scientists trained, and many have contributed far beyond the minimum number of hours towards projects.

2024 highlights

- ★ 47,476 total hours of service since 2014
- ★ 26 program graduates in 2024

Wooden Boat Festival



In 2024, **Jefferson MRC's** marine education and outreach focus was dedicated to the **Wooden Boat Festival** in Port Townsend, a community event that draws a large regional audience of boaters and boating enthusiasts.

The MRC co-hosted a new outreach initiative at the festival this year, the **Marine Science and Stewardship Stage**. Over three days they had over 1,400 visitors at the speaker series tent, which was hosted in partnership with Washington Sea Grant and the Port Townsend Marine Science Center. 21 speakers presented on topics including derelict crab pots, orcas of Port Townsend, the ecology of a whale fall, and sustainable fishing and boating practices.

MRC volunteers also supported a tabling booth that drew more than 300 visitors to learn about the programs and work of the MRC. Throughout the festival MRC volunteers introduced presenters, provided technical assistance, and led a hands-on plankton microscope activity.

2024 highlights

- ★ 1,700 total visitors to MRC sponsored activities
- ★ 21 speakers in the speaker series

Marine vegetation outreach

In 2024, **Snohomish MRC** focused on addressing the ecological importance and challenges facing kelp and eelgrass beds within Snohomish County by educating and engaging their local community in all things kelp and eelgrass. The MRC worked with a consultant to create a list of known marine vegetation resources and designed outreach materials tailored to local Snohomish County residents. By implementing these approaches, the MRC aimed to improve communication about the importance of kelp and eelgrass and promote stewardship.

Using these resources and outreach materials, Snohomish MRC hosted a Dive into Kelp workshop in October 2024, focused on reaching the Edmonds community. The event was attended by nearly 40 participants. Workshop evaluations indicated that participants learned a lot about what can negatively impact kelp, the benefits of kelp, and actions they can take to protect kelp beds. The MRC is working towards the long-term preservation and restoration of these vital marine resources in Snohomish County, and plan to engage another local community for a workshop in 2025.



Plastic Free Salish Sea

As a part of the Plastic Free Salish Sea campaign, **San Juan MRC and its many partners** successfully led two major community beach cleanup events in 2024: a Spring and Fall Great Islands Cleanup. Through these events, the MRC hopes to gain greater community engagement in maintaining coastal environments. The Plastic Free Salish Sea campaign also includes Adopt-a-Beach and Adopt-a-Road programs. In 2024 the campaign also wrapped up a year-long pilot plastic film recycling program, which was a huge success that diverted tons of plastic from landfills.

2024 highlights

- ★ 5 new Beach and Road Stewards, 73 total stewards
- ★ 5,775 lbs of litter and debris removed from county beaches and roadways during Spring and Fall Great Islands Clean-ups
- ★ 4.72 tons of plastic film diverted from landfills through plastic film recycling



Elwha beach stewardship

The Elwha Beach has become a popular spot for visitors and residents. In addition, educators use this beach and estuary as an outdoor classroom, including hundreds of students visiting the beach through NatureBridge Olympic National Park each year.

Clallam MRC has managed sanitation efforts at the spot since 2016, including providing a doggy bag dispenser, waste bins, and a portable toilet in response to concerns about excessive dog and human waste along the access dike. In 2023-2024, the MRC **distributed 3,400 dog waste bags** and conducted surveys through QR codes and on-foot interviews to gather demographic data and visitor trends. MRC volunteers and staff conducted random and targeted surveys to estimate annual usage patterns. They found that 45% of users were from Clallam County and 20% are from out-of-state. An overwhelming majority of the beach users say the waste facilities are critical and the MRC has recorded substantially less pet waste on the levee. This stewardship effort reduces the amount of waste going into the water and provides a more enjoyable beach experience for visitors.

2024 highlight

★ **Pet waste bags kept an estimated 425 pounds of dog waste off the beach.**

“ This beach allows me to stay healthy mentally and physically. I love it so very much.”

-Elwha beach visitor



HAZWOPER - oiled wildlife training



In 2024, **Clallam MRC** continued its efforts to enhance community preparedness for potential oil spills in the Strait of Juan de Fuca by offering training in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) and oiled wildlife response to local community members. The MRC hosted a 24-hour HAZWOPER course, certifying 28 volunteers who can now assist in the event of an oil spill. The MRC partnered with the **Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe**, who graciously provided the training venue free of charge, and **International Bird Rescue**, who provided trainers for the oiled wildlife response training. Looking ahead, Clallam MRC plans to offer another training session in 2025.



Educating and informing through site visits



In July, NW Straits Commission, MRCs, and representatives from Lummi Nation, Samish Indian Nation, NW Straits Foundation, Padilla Bay NERR, and the Governor's office hosted **U.S. Senator Patty Murray** to share about an array of projects and project partnerships. MRCs highlighted their work on Olympia oyster restoration, creosote piling removal, beach seine with schools, voluntary no-anchor zones for eelgrass protection, and local government advisory efforts. The project stories demonstrated the value of this incredible network and the impact volunteerism can have in our region.

[Read the press release](#) from Sen. Murray's office
[Read NW Strait's August newsletter](#)



In August, NW Straits Commission, Skagit MRC, and Samish Indian Nation hosted **U.S. Representative Rick Larsen** along with partners from Padilla Bay NERR, Port of Anacortes, and City of Anacortes. The event was an opportunity to highlight projects including beach seine with kids, voluntary no-anchor zones at Seafarers' Park, and creosote removal on the Tommy Thompson Trestle. Local students joined to help with on-the-ground project demonstrations that drove home how MRCs and partners are connecting multiple generations to our incredible marine resources.

[Read the press release](#)
 from Rep. Larsen's office
[Read NW Straits's September newsletter](#)





“Hope Through Local Solutions”

Gathering

[The 2024 NW Straits Conference](#), brought together 120 attendees from all seven Northwest Straits counties to collaborate, share updates, and discuss emerging marine conservation issues.

Highlights included keynote speaker, Dr. Elin Kelsey, presenting on “Hope Through Local Solutions,” along with sessions on engaging local government, support from the Science Advisory Committee, science communications, marine restoration, and climate resilience.

Special thanks to Dr. Kelsey, as well as Hayden Jenkins for his remarks on behalf of Senator Murray and Andrew Gobin for his remarks on behalf of Tulalip Tribes, and the many [speakers](#) and the planning committee who contributed to the event’s success.

Sharing

SoundIQ was created to archive and make NW Straits Commission and MRC location-based data accessible and useful for the public. It was designed to help MRCs share project data with local and regional users.

In 2024 the system underwent an update to align with newer technology that will provide MRCs an opportunity to rethink how they use the system, what new data could be added, and how to better reach target audiences.

The updated SoundIQ will:

- Improve accessibility for data managers and users
- Refresh the user base and boost awareness and usage of the system
- Identify new communication strategies for reaching target audiences
- The updates aim to make SoundIQ more efficient and effective for all users.

Learn more about [SoundIQ](#).

Reporting

The **MyCoast** reporting tool allows beachgoers to share observations with resource managers and coastal decision makers that can guide future restoration and preservation efforts. MyCoast started as a project of the Snohomish MRC and it expanded statewide thanks to a partnership with WA DNR and other partners, including USGS, WA Sea Grant, and Snohomish MRC.

2024 highlights

- ★ 20% increase in MyCoast users!
- ★ 1,436 MyCoast reports submitted in the seven-county NW Straits region including creosote reports, green crab molt search, king tides, bluffs, abandoned boats, storm surge, large marine debris, and take a beach photos.
- ★ 3,978 MyCoast users in WA

Download MyCoast at Google Play or the iPhone app store. Browse reports online at [MyCoast](#).

Growing awareness

NW Straits Commission continues to focus on growing awareness as we communicate our work to a variety of audiences through an emailed monthly newsletter, website, social media channels, and news coverage.

2024 social media growth on Facebook/Instagram:

- 117% increase in interactions
- 350% increase in reach
- 79.8% increase in visits

2024 newsletter & website stats

- 42.52% average newsletter open rate (~5-10% above industry average)
- 46,095 website visitors

View our past [newsletters online](#), join our [mailing list](#) and find us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Vimeo](#)) to stay up to date on regional news or to find an event near you.



Monitoring & Research

Collecting environmental data
to inform local government
and resource managers



In this section:

- European green crab
- Pollution & Identification Correction Program
- Storm surge monitoring
- Understanding boater impacts
- Forage fish sampling
- Pigeon guillemot survey
- Floating kelp monitoring
- Harmful Algal Blooms
- Remote sensing imagery for bull kelp



European green crab trapping & removal

In 2024, **NW Straits Commission** continued to coordinate and support trapping and removal efforts of invasive European green crab (EGC) within Whatcom and Skagit counties. Commission staff work to build capacity for additional trapping and outreach efforts in the region through partner engagement.

Commission staff, in collaboration with over 30 dedicated trappers and a range of key partners continued a strategic monitoring and control trapping program aimed at removing European green crabs from Drayton Harbor and Samish Bay. These efforts include close collaboration with **Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew members, WA Department of Fish & Wildlife technicians, WA Department of Natural Resources, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association WA Conservation Corps crew members, Padilla Bay NERR staff, local shellfish growers, and volunteers.** Learn more about [EGC work](#).

2024 highlight

★ 817 invasive EGC trapped and removed in 5,573 trap sets from Drayton Harbor and Samish Bay by crews coordinated by NW Straits Commission



EGC Education & Outreach

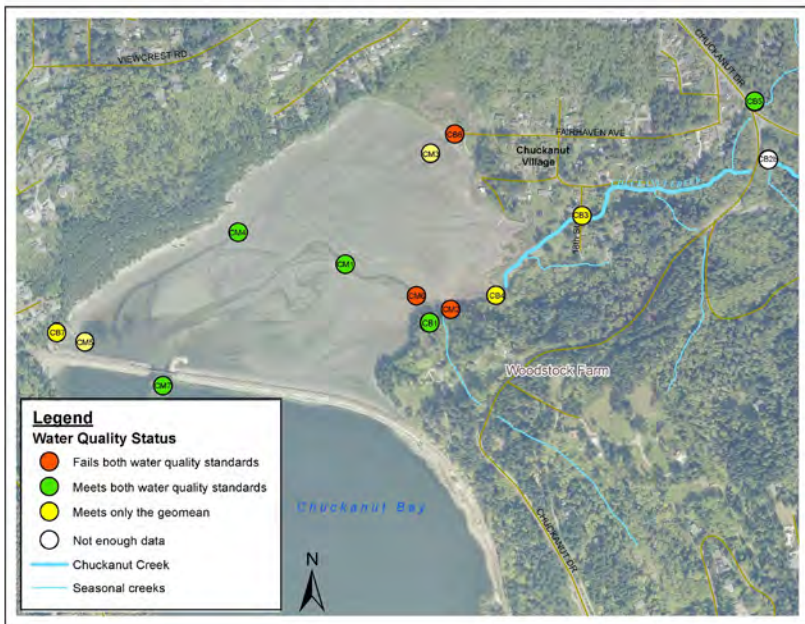
NW Straits Commission partnered with five organizations to host and assist with European green crab molt search training opportunities in Whatcom and Skagit counties. Molt Search is a volunteer-based early detection program, led by WA Sea Grant and WSU Extension, aimed at supporting broader participation in searching for the presence of green crabs across the Salish Sea. Commission staff supported several local molt search training events in Skagit and Whatcom counties both on the beach and through local presentations.

2024 highlight

★ In 2024, 1K+ people were engaged in 1:1 European green crab public interactions, presentations, and outreach

“Environmental science, the protection of our lands and waters, plants and critters, can be anyone’s duty. Citizen science is as valuable to our world as academia is, and frankly it can be great fun.”

- Jesse Harrold, WCC crew member



Pollution Identification & Correction Program

North Chuckanut Bay was closed to recreational shellfish harvest in 1994 and remains closed. In 2014, **Whatcom MRC** included the bay in Whatcom County's Pollution Identification and Correction Program (PIC).

The program is designed to gather data to demonstrate water quality improvements that can lead to lifting harvest restrictions. It also focuses on outreach within the Chuckanut Village community to promote best practices for maintaining high water quality.

The MRC, with the support of **Whatcom County Public Works** and **volunteers**, and other key partners (including **WA State Dept of Health, Whatcom County Health and Community Services, Whatcom County Conservation District**) conducts monthly water quality sampling at 7 locations within the bay and 7 freshwater inputs to the bay. While some sites show improvements, many still do not meet state standards. The MRC is now concentrating on reopening the northwest shoreline, where water quality has improved most consistently. Ongoing sampling and community engagement will continue to support efforts for a healthier bay. **Learn more about [PIC](#).**

From October 2023-September of 2024:

The MRC and partners are working to reopen 65 acres of tidal shoreline for recreational harvest.

Storm surge monitoring

Jefferson MRC's Storm Surge monitoring project, launched in 2016 as part of **WA Sea Grant's King Tide Project**, tracks high water levels influenced by King Tides, storm surge, and wave run-up in Port Townsend. Volunteers photograph King Tides at key locations and collaborate with WA Sea Grant's Coastal Hazards Specialist, Dr. Ian Miller, to measure total water levels. Uniquely, the project uses light detection and ranging (LiDAR) maps at the Salmon Club boat ramp to estimate wave run-up as a component of total water level.



The project aims to increase awareness of storm surge risks by monitoring conditions and providing summary reports, that can be sorted by parameters like total water, atmospheric pressure, or wind speed. To date, the team has created an index for 24 existing reports, adding three new events monitored during the 2024-25 winter season. Moving forward, the team plans to enhance outreach for shoreline property owners improving access to the storm surge reports and evaluating new methods to measure total water levels and wave heights. **Learn more about [Storm Surge monitoring](#).**





“ Eelgrass in the San Juans is struggling more than elsewhere in Puget Sound. We need to identify actions that preserve these critical habitats, but that also support a positive boating experience and provide for unhindered access to usual and accustomed treaty tribal fishing areas.”

— Frances Robertson, San Juan MRC boater impact project lead

Understanding boater impacts

The San Juan islands have long been a world-class boating destination. There is a need to better understand boating activities in the San Juans to inform resource management strategies and promote sustainable boating practices.

San Juan MRC launched a project to identify and assess areas of high boater density, especially in relation to areas with eelgrass and other sensitive marine resource habitats to help balance enjoyable boating experiences with marine resource stewardship.

Aerial surveys were flown across the county over eight days during peak boating season from May through September in 2024, including holiday weekends like Memorial Day, July 4th, and Labor Day weekends. They found on average summer weekends 1,200-1,500 vessels were typically in San Juan County waters with peak numbers over Labor Day weekend of approximately 2,000 boats (not including boats in marinas or private docks). A number of areas of high-density vessel use overlapped with critical marine habitat, like eelgrass beds.



Forage fish sampling

Forage fish have long been a focus of NW Straits Commission and MRCs due to their importance to the marine ecosystem. Salmon and other species rely on forage fish for prey. Sand lance and surf smelt are two forage fish species that lay their eggs on the beach, where volunteers conduct regular sampling to collect important baseline data on spawning trends of these critical fish. This monitoring is done at restoration sites in coordination with **NW Straits Foundation** to evaluate the effectiveness of restoration efforts, as well as at index sites identified by MRCs in coordination with NW Commission staff and **WA DFW** to understand long-term spatial and seasonal spawning trends. These survey results are entered into WA DFW's long-term monitoring database and used on the [Forage Fish Spawning Map](#). [Learn more about forage fish spawning sampling.](#)



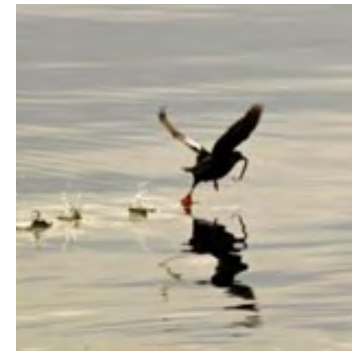
Pigeon guillemot surveys

Since 2016, **Clallam MRC** has been monitoring pigeon guillemots as part of the **Salish Sea Guillemot Network** to track nearshore ecosystem health. The project is co-sponsored by the **Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society** and relies on volunteer teams to collect weekly data from nesting colonies each summer breeding season.

In 2024, volunteers monitored 25 colonies across seven areas, with some prey deliveries (parents giving food to young) extending into September. The project goals are to document breeding colonies using established protocols. Thanks to 31 volunteers and the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, 2024 was a successful year of achieving these goals. A key takeaway was the extended prey delivery season, which highlighted the need to update planning for late-season monitoring. The MRC plans to continue this successful program into 2025, sharing data regionally to support guillemot research and nearshore health studies.

2024 highlight

- ★ 31 citizen science volunteers monitored 25 pigeon guillemot colonies





Floating kelp kayak monitoring

Volunteers with the floating kelp kayak monitoring project monitor over 20 floating kelp beds (i.e., bull kelp and/or giant kelp) annually in the NW Straits region between June and September to better understand the trends and extent of these beds. Coordinated by NW Straits Commission, this regional project is led by Clallam, Jefferson, Island, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom MRCs.

NW Straits Commission also works with other partners, including NW Straits Foundation and WA Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR). Work with WA DNR includes expanding use of the collected data toward kelp conservation in the field and including it in the new WA State Floating Kelp Indicator, a part of Puget Sound Partnership's Vital Signs.

Data collected by MRC volunteers since 2015, suggests that the majority of monitored floating kelp beds have not increased or decreased in size. However, some notable changes include the decrease and eventual loss of the Mukilteo and Meadowdale floating kelp beds in Snohomish County, and the decrease of the Shannon Point East floating kelp bed. These changes also include the expansion of kelp beds at Biz Point and Coffin Rocks in Skagit County. Data also indicates that beds at Ebey's Landing and Possession Point in Island County have grown and merged with adjacent beds. [Learn more about kelp kayak monitoring.](#)

2024 highlights

- ★ 398 acres of floating kelp documented
- ★ 266+ miles collectively paddled
- ★ 53 volunteer kayakers participated

“ My favorite part of the work is how it helps me see my “backyard” through a different lens; it helps me slow down and appreciate the interconnectedness of the human world and the natural world, the challenges of that relationship, and the hope that stems from efforts to foster healthy marine environments.

- Sarah Stanley, Whatcom MRC kelp volunteer

Kayak Training



The Commission offered kayak training for kelp program volunteers through Fidalgo Paddlesports in June 2024 to help ensure kayakers were comfortable and safe on the water. The training, held at Bowman Bay, Fidalgo Island, was attended by 18 kayakers of varying skill levels. Participants passed with flying colors and said they were interested in doing it again next year!



Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB)

Whatcom MRC, in partnership with the **SoundToxins monitoring network** managed by **WA Sea Grant**, added two new HAB monitoring sites in Whatcom County—Birch Bay Village Marina and Drayton Harbor/Semiahmoo Marina—filling data gaps in northern Puget Sound. These sites, monitored by volunteers and staff weekly from March to November and bi-weekly in winter, provide critical data for understanding phytoplankton dynamics and for resource managers to enact shellfish closures when harvest is not safe for consumption. In 2024, both sites showed early signs of HABs, leading to shellfish bed closures for public safety by the WA Department of Health. The project, led by local citizen scientists and supported by community volunteers and student interns, also engages K-12 and higher education students while offering public education on HABs through trainings, community events, and collaboration with local health agencies. **Learn more about [HABs](#).**



2024 highlight

★ 520 + volunteer hours contributed to sampling and analysis



The Whatcom MRC HAB Team has been a wonderful addition to our network. In addition to filling important data gaps, they have increased education and outreach efforts in the community through collaborating with other monitors across the network, engaging with local news outlets, and working with K-12 schools.”

-Michelle Lepori-Bui, SoundToxins Program Manager

Remote sensing imagery for monitoring bull kelp

Jefferson MRC began testing the efficacy of using satellite imagery to detect kelp density changes in Jefferson County in 2024. Satellite systems like Sentinel and Planet Doves offer broader coverage, especially in areas challenging for kayak surveys.

The MRC used satellite and aerial imagery to assess observations of large shifts in floating kelp extent and density from 2017 to 2023. This effort has highlighted stretches of shoreline where the MRC is considering additional ways to understand trends in floating kelp along the Jefferson shoreline and potential causes of those changes.



Tribal partnerships, key to the Initiative's success

In 2024, NW Straits Commission and MRCs continued to work with Tribal partners throughout the region, engaging in a range of collaborative efforts. These partnerships significantly expanded the scope and scale of projects. We are honored to work and learn from Tribal communities through activities such as joint research, conservation and restoration, and event coordination to support environmental stewardship and enhance natural resources in the NW Straits region.

“ The work of conserving, protecting, and restoring marine environments sustains far more than just recreational or commercial interest -- or even the natural resources interests; it preserves a part of who we are as a people. We appreciate so much the work of MRCs and NW Straits Initiative and the work that can be done and the successes we've had over the years. That's what relationships are about. It's the collective work together where we all take part and do some of the heavy lifting.”

- Andrew Gobin, *Tulalip Tribes Treaty Rights Manager and Snohomish MRC member*

Some 2024 partnerships include:



Whatcom MRC partnered with **Lummi Nation Natural Resources** to conduct three days of demonstration beach seining with 4th grade students. The students heard from Lummi Nation elders and got hands-on experience in scientific research while learning about the local ecosystem and cultural value of salmon.



Clallam MRC and **Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe** conducted a population survey of Olympia oysters in the Sequim Bay restoration area and collected broodstock for spawning. This work is part of a long-term partnership between the Tribe and the MRC to restore Olympia oysters at the site.



The Commission coordinated with partners on a vessel turn-in event in Skagit County. This event was co-hosted with **Port of Skagit, La Conner Marina, Skagit County, Skagit MRC, WA Department of Ecology, WA DNR, and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community**. A total of 49 vessels were turned-in and recycled.



The Commission worked with **WA DNR** and **Makah Tribal staff** to respond to the complex removal of a wrecked sailboat on Makah tidelands in early September. Over several days a skilled team used a helicopter to remove the masts and attach floats, allowing the vessel to be safely towed for deconstruction and disposal.

Partnerships, empowering our work

Partners

Bellingham Technical College Fisheries and Aquaculture Program
City of Anacortes
City of Bellingham
Clallam County
Drayton Harbor Oyster Company
Feiro Marine Life Center
Friends of Skagit Beaches
Friends of the San Juans
Hakai Institute, UN Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre
Island County
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe
Jefferson County
La Conner Maritime Services
Lopez Solid Waste Disposal District
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
Lummi Island Heritage Trust
Lummi Nation Natural Resources
Makah Tribe
Marine Ergonomics LLC
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association
NW Straits Foundation

NW Indian Fisheries Commission
Ocean Research College Academy
Orcas Recycling Services & Exchange
Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
Point No Point Treaty Council
Port of Bellingham
Port of Friday Harbor
Port of Port Townsend
Port of Skagit
Port Townsend Marine Science Center
Puget Sound Partnership
Puget Sound Restoration Fund
Quilcene School District
Representative Rick Larsen
Salish Sea Institute
Samish Indian Nation
San Juan Conservation District
San Juan County
San Juan County Solid Waste
Seattle Aquarium
Senator Patty Murray
Skagit Conservation District
Skagit County
Skagit Land Trust
Snohomish County

Solid Waste Alternatives Program
SoundToxins
Sound Water Stewards
South Whidbey School District
Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
Taylor Shellfish Farms
Tulalip Tribes
US Environmental Protection Agency
US Fish & Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey
UW, Friday Harbor Labs
WA Conservation Corps
WA Dept of Ecology
WA Dept of Health
WA Dept of Natural Resources
WA Dept of Fish & Wildlife
WA Sea Grant
WA State Parks
Whatcom County
WSU Extension Island County
WSU Extension Jefferson County
WSU Extension Whatcom County
WSU Master Gardeners
Western Washington University
Youth Conservation Corps

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Caitlyn Blair *Program Coordinator*
Dana Oster *Marine Program Manager*
Jeff Whitty *Kelp Program Manager*
Jessica Owens *Communications Specialist*
Leah Skare *Ecosystem Projects Specialist*
Sasha Horst *Operations Manager*
Suzanne Shull *GIS Analyst Padilla Bay NERR*

2024 Committees

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David Trimbach
Emily Grason
Julia Parrish *Committee Chair*

Kathryn Sobocinski
Kathy Wolf
Ron Thom
Tom Mumford

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Alan Clark *Committee Chair*
Emily Grason
Julia Parrish

Jude Apple
Nan McKay
Tim Ellis

External Relations Committee

Ahren Stroming
Alan Clark
Cecilia Gobin
Christina Koons

Don Hunger
Deb Atwood
Elsa Schwartz
Jamie Stephens

Justin Parker
Nan McKay *Committee Chair*
Tom Cowan

Photo credits

Cover. Kelp crab on bull kelp. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 2. Recreational crabbers rowing through eelgrass. (Gary Ando).

Pg. 3. Tim Ellis and Lucas Hart hold the NW Straits Commission paddle, a gift from Tulalip Tribes in 1999. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 4. NW Straits Region map. (Suzanne Shull); Reference Map for the Salish Sea Bioregion. (Aquila Flower, 2020).

Pg. 5. Jefferson MRC members at the 2024 NWSI Conference. (Caitlyn Blair); Beach. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 6. Kayak volunteers. (Jeff Whitty); Clallam oyster shell spreading. (Neil Harrington); San Juan MRC's Christina Koons with U.S. Sen. Patty Murray. (Jessica Owens); Jefferson MRC's Jeff Taylor and Suzanne Shull. (Jessica Owens); Lucas Hart NW Straits Director and Althea Wilson, Lummi Nation Intergovernmental Affairs. (Jessica Owens); Island MRC's Carter Webb. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 7. Low tide, marine vegetation. (Jessica Owens).

Pg 8. Advisory section cover image: Orcas under Deception Pass Bridge. (Lauren Rasmussen).

Pg 9. 2024 Science Advisory Committee members: Kathy Wolf, Julia Parrish, Anne Beaudreau, Kathryn Sobocinski, Ron Thom, David Trimbach, and Tom Mumford. (Jessica Owens); Julia Parrish Environmental Leadership Award. (University of Washington).

Pg. 10. Nan McKay 2024 External Relations Committee Chair and Tom Cowan former chair External Relations Committee. (Jessica Owens); Alan Clark and his dog Jake. (submitted by Alan Clark)

Pg 11. Shoreline armoring.(Kelly Zupich); Shorebirds and Anemones (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 12. The Under Story cover photo: Bull kelp. (Tim McClure), The Under Story cover photo: Maiden of Deception Pass. (Jeff Whitty); The Under Story cover photo: Kelp crabs. (Adam Obazza); Floating bull kelp. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 13. Conservation & Restoration section

cover photo: A baby pinto abalone seen up close. Photo submitted to WA Department of Fish and Wildlife. (Oriana Poindexter).

Pg. 14. A wild adult pinto abalone is well camouflaged on a boulder while WDFW diver Hank Carson finishes a purple urchin survey in the background. (WA Department of Fish and Wildlife); Jefferson MRC and partners barge oyster shells to Discovery Bay. (Neil Harrington); Olympia oyster survey Discovery Bay. (Katie Kowal).

Pg. 15. Eelgrass illustration (Larry Eifert); San Juan MRC monitors voluntary no-anchor zones. (Frances Robertson).

Pg. 16. San Juan vessel turn-in event. (Katie Johnson); Skagit vessel turn-in event. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 17. All Makah vessel removal photos (Laurel Schoenbohm, WA Department of Natural Resources); Jefferson MRC planting at Ediz Hook. (Tiffany Royal, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission); An example of the 3,000 plants Clallam MRC added to Ediz Hood in March 2024. (Tiffany Royal, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission).

Pg. 18. Island MRC members and volunteers at a restoration site. (Island MRC).

Pg. 19. Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment Map. (Courtesy of Skagit MRC); Jefferson MRC members doing rain garden maintenance. (Janette Mestre).

Pg. 20. Education and Outreach section cover photo: Kids on the Beach with Allen Elementary. (Annie England).

Pg. 21. Kids on the Beach Skagit MRC. (Annie England); Fourth grade students observe and record data about juvenile salmon and other small fish collected in a beach seine along the Boulevard Park shoreline in Bellingham. (Dana Flerchinger);

Pg. 22. Fidalgo Bay Day Skagit MRC, Shannon Point Marine Center touch tank. (Kathy Carroll); Skagit MRC's Salish Sea Stewards educate about forage fish at Bowman Bay. (Jessica Owens); Jefferson MRC's speaker series Wooden Boat Festival. (Besty Carlson); Bottom:

Skagit MRC's Salish Sea Stewards. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 23. Dive into kelp graphic. (Graphic provided by Snohomish MRC); San Juan MRC PFSS participants load up the dumpster with debris. (Katie Fleming); Youth Conservation Corps ready to sort a weeks' worth of plastic film. (Angela Broederick); Planning partners are the Fall Great Island Cleanup. (Amy Neslor).

Pg. 24. Visitor walking his dog at Elwha Beach (John Gussman); Canine visitors at Elwha Beach (Clallam MRC); Participants in the HAZWOPER/Oiled wildlife training. (Rebecca Mahan).

Pg. 25. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, NW Straits Commission, MRCs (Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, Jefferson, Island, Clallam, San Juan County Marine Resources Committee, Clallam Marine Resources Committee, NW Straits Foundation, Padilla Bay NERR, Lummi Nation, Samish Indian Nation, Governor's office. (Office of Patty Murray); Sen. Patty Murray wears a blanket presented by Tribal leaders. (Office of Patty Murray); U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen participates in a beach seine activity. (Jessica Owens); Lucas Hart, NW Straits Director and U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen shows off his waders. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 26. Elected officials panel at the NW Straits Conference. (Jessica Owens); Ginny Broadhurst, with 2024 conference keynote speaker Dr. Elin Kelsey, and Caitlyn Blair. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 27. Monitoring & Research section cover photo: Cassidy Waller (WCC) measuring crab molt. (Allie Simpson).

Pg. 28. Jesse Harrold (left) and Emma Chinchak (right) from WA Conservation Corps check for European green crab; Volunteer Paul Vance checking traps for European green crab; Jesse Harrold (left) Nate Hauer (right) from WA Conservation Corps carries traps for European green crab; Leah Skare (right) instructing volunteers on Molt Search survey protocols; Participants of a Molt and count crabs molts. (All photos pg 28, Allie Simpson).

Pg. 29. Whatcom MRC PIC Map (Austin Rose, Whatcom County Public Works September

2024); Pre-dawn monitoring. Barney Burke capturing storm surge event. December 10, 2022. (Jeff Taylor); Port Townsend waterfront December 2024, (Barney Burke).

Pg. 30. Aerial boater survey of the San Juan Islands; Circle inset: Jamie Hoy (left) who was trained by Frances Robertson (right) as an aerial observer; The survey team and San Juan Airlines pilot at Friday Harbor airport. (All photos submitted by: Frances Robertson).

Pg. 31. Close-up of a forage fish egg, Whatcom MRC final report. (Phillip Dionne WA DFW); Mix of sand and forage fish eggs, Clallam MRC final report. (WA DFW); Catherine Houck, Skagit MRC volunteer holds a forage fish sample. (Jessica Owens); Clallam MRC pigeon guillemot project lead Ed Bowlby seated for monitoring at Port Williams. (Silas Crews); A pigeon guillemot taking off. (Peggy McClure).

Pg. 32. Island County MRC kayak volunteers surveying the Lowell Point kelp bed off Camano Island in August 2024 (Jeff Whitty); MRC volunteer kayakers practicing their wet-exit skills during a safety training class taught by Fidalgo Paddlesports in June 2024 at Bowman Bay. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 33. Whatcom MRC volunteers measuring HABS. (Dana Flerchinger); Imagery from the Pléiades satellite. (Courtesy of Jefferson MRC).

Pg. 34. Whatcom MRC Beach Seine with Kids Harlan James addresses students. (Dana Flerchinger); Clallam MRC Pacific oyster shell spreading. (Rebecca Mahan); Skagit MRC turn-in event partners. (Jessica Owens); Makah vessel response. (Laurel Schoenbohm, WA DNR Derelict Vessel Response Program).

How we were supported in 2024

Equivalent volunteer time

For over 25 years, volunteers have dedicated thousands of hours each year.

The value of these volunteers comes from their broad range of professional expertise, their willingness to get their boots muddy to carry out projects, and their dedication to community-based conservation. In 2024, volunteer time equated to: **\$429,857 (10%)**

County funding

County contributions are a vital piece of the funding package. Several counties provided direct support to their MRC that allowed them to address priority marine resource conservation issues.

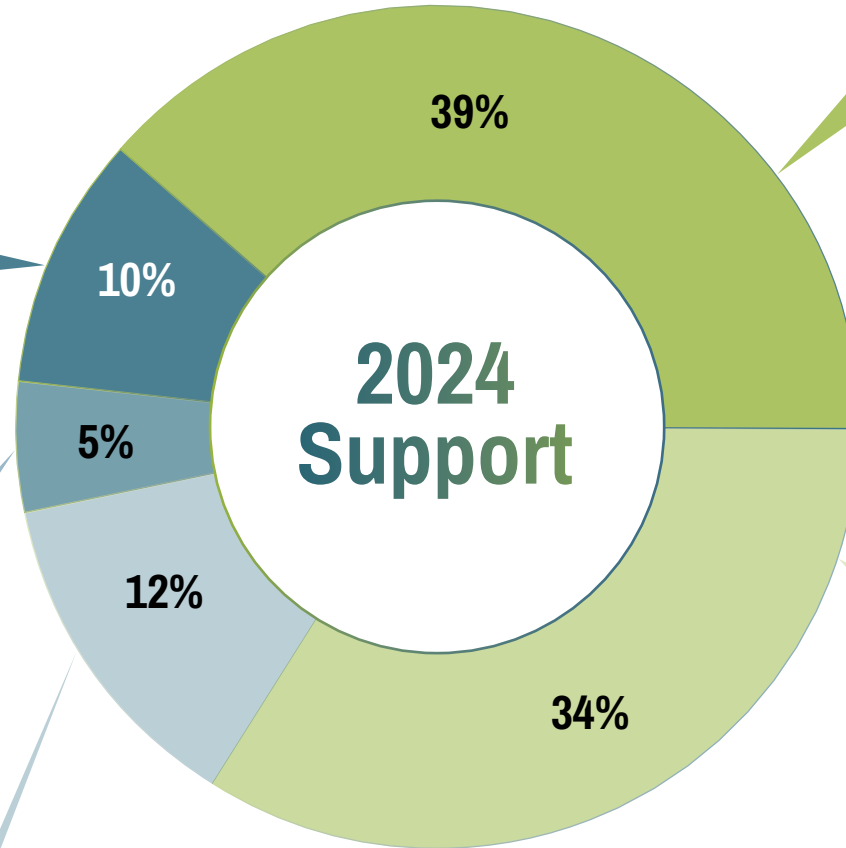
\$242,856 (5%)

State funding

Washington state provided financial support to the NW Straits Commission and MRCs for local projects and regional help conservation work. Additional state funding provided through the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WA DFW) helped to support our work on invasive green crab management.

\$559,343 (12%)

Collectively, these investments ensure marine resource stewardship through our unique local-based approach.



\$1,709,277 One-Time grant funding (39%)

Federal funding

Federal funding provided by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through Puget Sound Partnership supported operations and projects of the Commission and MRCs. This funding also provided an opportunity for additional leveraging of volunteer time, state, and local resources. Additional federal funding from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provided direct project support.

\$1,489,277 program funding (34%)



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Our voluntary no-anchor zone project is supported in part by the Ecological Service's Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Thank you for your support!

