



NORTHWEST STRAITS
marine conservation initiative

Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative
FIRST ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

April 1, 1999 through March 31, 2000

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Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative First Annual Progress Report April 1, 1999 through March 31, 2000

The purpose of this annual report is to review and evaluate progress in implementing the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative. Preparation of annual progress reports by the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) is required by the 1998 Murray-Metcalf Report to the Convenors and a panel of experts will evaluate it. It is assumed that readers of this Annual Progress Report have a basic understanding of the Initiative or will use the Murray-Metcalf Report as a background reference.

I. Introduction and Background

The Northwest Straits include the U.S. marine waters of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, the San Juan Islands and northern Puget Sound reaching from Everett to the Canadian border (Appendix A.) Seven counties, fifteen tribes, and many cities and other local governments have jurisdiction in the region.

In 1997, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D) and U.S. Congressman Jack Metcalf (R) convened a diverse panel of citizens representing economic interests, the scientific community, conservation interests, universities, and local and tribal governments to assess the ecological health of the Northwest Straits marine ecosystem and to recommend steps to improve the region's sustainability. In August of 1998, the Murray-Metcalf Northwest Straits Citizens Advisory Commission issued, by consensus, the "Report to the Convenors" (Appendix B.)

The Commission concluded that the Northwest Straits marine ecosystem and some of its marine resources are in serious decline and that these problems cross geographical and jurisdictional boundaries. It also recommended a model for protecting and restoring vital marine resources based on a program established in 1996 in San Juan County. A network of local, county-based Marine Resources Committees (MRCs) would be established in each of the seven Northwest Straits counties to protect and restore marine resources. The MRCs would use existing state and local authorities, basing their actions on sound scientific information and the overall needs of the ecosystem. MRCs would coordinate their activities through the Northwest Straits Commission. The Commission would provide technical assistance, integrate scientific information, develop ecosystem-level coordination and guide funding. In addition the

Commission would measure the performance of the Initiative using the eight Benchmarks for Performance found in the Murray-Metcalf Report.

In late 1998, with strong bipartisan leadership from Congressman Metcalf and Senator Murray, Congress authorized the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (HR 3461) which, by reference, incorporated the entire "Report to Convenors." Congress also passed a \$350,000 appropriation to support the Initiative with funds made available through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and administered by Terry Stevens, the Director of the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The effective date for beginning the Initiative is considered to be March 1999, when funds were received and available for spending.

Former members and staff to the Murray-Metcalf Commission together with Lew Moore (Chief of Staff for Congressman Metcalf), Dan Evans (formerly with Senator Murray's staff) and Jill McKinnie (Senator Murray's staff) began meeting during the winter of 1998-99 and became known as the interim or "kitchen" commission. It was important for this group to organize and adopt a Year One Work Plan because the official NWSC could not be established until the local county MRCs become organized since the majority of the NWSC members are appointed by and represent their respective MRC.

In cooperation with the "kitchen" commission, Terry Stevens prepared a first-year work plan and budget (Appendix C) that was submitted to NOAA in early 1999. Funding was received (effective March 1999) and an interim, part-time project coordinator, Tom Cowan, was hired to help begin implementing the four major objectives of the work plan. Operational and infrastructure support was provided by the Padilla Bay Reserve and project guidance continued from the "kitchen" commission.

II. Year One Work Plan

Objective A: Establish and assist up to seven county-based Marine Resources Committees (MRCs)

During the first three months at least **two workshops** were held with the elected county commissioners/council members in each of the seven eligible counties. Packets of information about the Initiative were provided including background information and reports, and a draft resolution establishing a MRC. They were advised that a \$10,000 start-up grant was available to help get organized, set priorities and develop a first-year work plan.

In March 1999, the San Juan County commissioners passed a resolution reauthorizing its MRC and changing some of the provisions to conform to the requirements of the NWSC. In a five-week period in May and June, Skagit, Island, Whatcom, Clallam and Jefferson counties passed **resolutions establishing MRCs** and joining the Initiative. Snohomish passed their ordinance in September. The elected legislators from all seven counties passed their legislation unanimously, demonstrating a keen interest in protecting and restoring the vital marine resources in the Northwest Straits (Appendix D.)

The counties advertised and otherwise solicited volunteers for their MRCs and **appointments** were made by the fall of 1999 (except the Snohomish County Executive and Council made their appointments in January of 2000.) All appointments were made to conform to the Murray-Metcalf Report and included members representing science, economic, recreational, conservation and local government interests. Each recognized tribe with a reservation in the county was offered a seat on the MRC. One or more tribes are represented on each MRC except San Juan and Island, which don't have reservations.

Shortly following their appointments, the MRCs began meeting. Several MRCs meet twice per month and the others meet monthly. An initial MRC meeting with each county included a briefing on the objectives and structure of the program and a slideshow describing the Initiative.

Each of the MRCs took advantage of the \$10,000 **start-up grant** offered by the NWSC. The grants were primarily used for organization, training, data collection and developing a first-year work plan, with some money to contract for minor administrative help. Sharon Riggs of the Padilla Bay Reserve administered the grants.

Regular **MRC meetings** are characterized by lively discussions regarding priorities for protecting and restoring marine resources, often times with guest scientists leading the discussions. Policies and procedures have been adopted for each MRC. Except for the Snohomish MRC, which was later in organizing than the others, each MRC wrote, submitted, and was awarded \$25,000 for a substantive project addressing one or more of the Benchmarks for Performance. The Snohomish MRC has since applied for CZM funding for their project. These projects will be discussed under Objective C below.

The San Juan MRC adopted an annual work plan in March 1999, and reported progress in achieving its objectives in a December 31, 1999 Annual Report (Appendix L.) All of the other MRCs worked on developing a first-year work plan. The Island, Jefferson and San Juan MRCs adopted current year work plans before the end of the Initiative's first year (Appendix F.) Work Plan goals included actions to achieve Performance Benchmarks, fundraising strategies, training needs and strategies to increase tribal and student participation in the MRCs.

The Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team provided scientific reports and other documents that were organized and distributed to each MRC as an initial **MRC and NWSC Library**. The NWSC continues to accumulate technical documents and facilitates library development for the MRCs.

A highly successful two-day **MRC Training Conference** was held in Oak Harbor in November 1999, with most of the MRC members from each county attending. Workshop organization and agenda development was accomplished through a contract with Ocean Policy Associates with coordination by NWSC staff. The primary workshop objectives were to bring all of the MRCs together to learn more about the Initiative, the state of the marine resources in the region, and to begin establishing networks of common interests by sharing information and ideas with each other.

The conference began with a presentation to the NWSC of a ceremonial canoe paddle by the Tulalip Tribes, an inspirational speech by San Juan County Commissioner Rhea Miller, and a slideshow of the region by San Juan MRC member Kelley Balcomb-Bartok. Leading experts presented data and information regarding many of the issues and concerns regarding the health of the marine resources in the NW Straits. Considerable time was devoted to exploring ideas, experiences and tools to address these resources. More than a dozen expert speakers presented their perspectives on how the Initiative can provide needed restoration and protection. Participants left the conference with a better knowledge of the issues, a "tool box" of resources for addressing them, and energy for initiating action at the local level.

The Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team is responsible for coordinating delivery of **technical assistance** to the MRCs by state agencies. Action Team staff regularly attend and participate in MRC meetings and events and respond to requests for assistance. Regular meetings organized and hosted by the Action Team were held with NWSC staff and liaison staff from the natural resource agencies (Ecology, Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife and the Action Team) to facilitate effective and efficient delivery of data and other technical assistance to the MRCs.

The NWSC co-sponsored two successful **nearshore habitat workshops** titled "Puget Sound Nearshore: The Neglected Link." These workshops drew several hundred participants including many members of MRCs. The NWSC also co-sponsored printing and distribution of the popular Shoreline Stewardship Guidebook.

Objective B: Establish the Northwest Straits Commission

The “kitchen” commission met monthly to provide interim direction for the Initiative, including designing an education and outreach program, organizing two rounds of “Early Action” grants, and facilitating a smooth transition to the official NWSC.

The seven MRCs each selected a member to represent them on the **thirteen-member NWSC**. Governor Locke appointed four of his five representatives, reserving his final selection until all the MRC members were selected. Secretary of the Interior Babbitt appointed a tribal representative. Generally, the citizens appointed by the MRCs and the Governor reflect the criteria for interests represented on each MRC. There are science, economic, commercial fishing, conservation, recreational and local government interests represented on the Commission, as well as the required tribal and Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team representatives (Appendix G.)

The official NWSC met on November 19, 1999 for the first time and began organizing and establishing policies. The Commission agreed to meet monthly for the near-term and rotate its meeting location around the NW Straits to facilitate attendance by local MRC members. Regular agenda topics include reports from each MRC and discussion on progress toward achieving the Benchmarks for Performance.

The Commission held a two-day retreat and meeting that also included Commission alternates, resource support people and staff. One objective was to focus the Initiative’s vision and purpose using the Benchmarks for Performance. The Commission also approved an **organizational model** that uses five committees to streamline effectiveness, maintains shared offices/infrastructure at the Padilla Bay Reserve, develops science, economic and outreach partners, and employs a small administrative staff. The five committees are the Administration / Planning Committee, Education and Outreach Committee, Tribal Participation Committee, Technical Committee, and Fundraising Committee.

The Commission approved a **resolution** requesting that federal and state natural resource agencies fully recognize the importance of a healthy marine habitat for restoring wild salmon and support the NWSC and the seven MRCs in achieving the Performance Benchmark of protecting and restoring marine habitat critical to the recovery of listed wild salmon species (Appendix H.) The resolution was sent to the appropriate agency officials.

Tribal participation in the Initiative is a high priority. As a way to reinforce continuing efforts, the NWSC contracted with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) to help with tribal communication and participation. All of the affected tribes in the Northwest Straits were contacted and a series of meetings were held with tribal representatives, Fran Wilshusen of the NWIFC, NWSC members, resource support people and staff. Generally, tribal representatives expressed support for the goals and benchmarks of the Initiative, but some tribes are hesitant to participate because of existing workloads. While pleased that each tribe with a reservation is automatically offered a seat on their respective MRC, criticism was expressed by some tribal representatives that the Murray-Metcalf Report did not consider tribal appointments to MRCs based on “usual and accustomed” fishing rights.

As part of an **outreach strategy**, many presentations about the Initiative have been made to interest groups, potential funding sources, local governments, and state and federal agencies and representatives. The NWSC was invited to join the Puget Sound/ Georgia Basin International Task Force in order to coordinate activities on transboundary issues. Upon request, a NWSC panel testified before a Senate Committee on marine resource recovery and met with numerous state legislators.

A **progress tracking** database was developed to help the NWSC and others track progress in achieving the Benchmarks for Performance over time (Appendix I.) Activities and narrative descriptions are recorded in an Excel file organized by MRC and Benchmarks for Performance. The database is maintained and updated monthly.

The NWSC has begun development of a package of **public information materials** including an introductory brochure, a web site, a descriptive slideshow and a series of MRC fact sheets.

Objective C: Initiate scientific investigations and implement “early action” projects

As a way of initiating research projects before developing and adopting its own procedures, the interim NWSC decided to utilize the Year 2000 Washington Sea Grant solicitation process for considering NWSC funding for research projects. Five projects were submitted and three were advanced to the final recommendation process. However, in the fall of 1999, a recommendation to not fund any of the three **“Year 2000 Research”** proposals under consideration was received from Sea Grant. While there were good concepts and ideas proposed for each of the three projects, there were also “fatal flaws” in each proposal. An appointed research subcommittee concurred in the recommendation and the interim NWSC decided not to fund any of the three proposals. While disappointing, it was agreed that it is important that NWSC only fund research where there is a high expectation for success. The “principle investigators” were given the peer reviewers’ comments and asked to consider revising and resubmitting their proposal in the future.

The interim NWSC decided that it was important to initiate an **“Early Action” grants** program of its own. Two goals were identified. First, it would be an incentive to the participating counties and their MRCs to get organized quickly to take advantage of the grant, and second, newly created MRCs could immediately sponsor a substantive project that would provide an early success and would help solidify the purpose of the MRC model. Procedures and criteria (Appendix E) were adopted by the interim NWSC and it was agreed to have two rounds of grants (July and December). Grants could be submitted for up to \$25,000, they must address the Benchmarks for Performance from the Murray-Metcalf Report and they must serve as a model for future Northwest Straits’ projects. The San Juan County MRC was the only county eligible for the first round and they submitted two proposals.

Experts in the applicable fields reviewed the projects and the results were compiled and considered by the interim NWSC. The **“Forage Fish Habitat Assessment”** proposal was approved with improvements recommended by the project reviewers. The objective of the project is to develop a program of standardized procedures that can be used to map forage fish nearshore spawning habitat and provide this information in a form useable to county personnel involved in land-use decisions. It consists of five primary tasks: developing field protocols, summarizing existing data, classifying beach habitat, verifying protocols and public outreach.

Seven Round Two “Early Action” Grant proposals for up to \$25,000 each were received from the six eligible MRCs in December and forwarded to fourteen volunteer project reviewers for evaluation. Each proposal received five reviews that were forwarded to a NWSC subcommittee for further evaluation. The subcommittee prepared a recommendation to the full NWSC. The Commission conditionally awarded six Round Two Early Action Grants of \$25,000 each to six MRCs. Each MRC was required to make specific improvements to their proposal as identified by the outside evaluators before the grants were processed and issued.

The following is a summary, by county, of each of the six proposals.

1. **Clallam County. “Marine Resources of the Strait of Juan de Fuca: How We Interact.”**
The Clallam County MRC will sponsor seven educational workshops intended to address several Initiative benchmarks for performance including public education, broad county participation in MRCs, and achieving a scientifically based regional system of management (rockfish, shellfish, priority geographic areas, MPAs.) \$25,000.

2. **Island County. “The Island County Eelgrass Survey.”** This proposal is for a comprehensive underwater videographic eelgrass mapping and identification project. As an organizational priority, the Island County MRC has determined to identify and establish scientifically reliable habitat and species baselines. The first component of this proposal represents an initial effort to secure the best available scientific data, together with a public outreach component, to establish eelgrass bed habitat baselines in specified areas of Island County’s shorelines. \$25,000.
3. **Jefferson County. “Community Process for Establishing Marine Protected Areas in Jefferson County.”** The Jefferson County MRC will develop outreach materials and host a series of public meetings to encourage citizen participation in the formation of one or more marine protected areas. Final products include a report to the Jefferson County Commissioners with key findings, including recommendations for establishing local MPAs, a summary report for the general public, and a report to the NWSC presenting the lessons learned from this project as a guide to other MRCs working to establish local MPAs. \$25,000.
4. **San Juan County. “Restore the Bottomfish Populations in San Juan County.”** This proposal will continue the two year old Bottomfish Recovery Program (BFRP) and will include a monitoring component (fish counts, fishing compliance in the reserves, and public attitude survey), outreach and public involvement, research and networking with the WDFW groundfish program and research and teaching at the UW Friday Harbor Labs. \$24,975.
5. **Skagit County. “Preliminary Assessment of Rocky Reef Bottomfish Resources and Habitats in Skagit County, Washington.”** This proposal will initiate the process of identifying and evaluating several potential MPA sites for rocky reef fishes in Skagit County. It includes a public education effort and a public workshop. \$25,000.
6. **Whatcom County. “Shoreline Inventory of Whatcom County.”** The Whatcom County MRC will coordinate a data compilation report, will develop criteria for prioritization of habitat protection/restoration opportunities and recommendations for priority habitat projects, conduct shoreline inventories, and will include a public education and involvement component. The Port of Bellingham will be a full partner in this project. \$24,750.

The NWSC sponsored, organized and conducted a **Missing Science Workshop** in December. The purposes were to identify Northwest Strait's marine resource issues that need additional research and to provide MRCs with additional scientific knowledge to help focus their actions. Under contract, Washington Sea Grant wrote a draft report that was reviewed by over 35 scientists at the workshop. Suggestions for additions and corrections were received and a final draft report will be issued in April 2000 as well as a summary “Science Gaps” report.

Objective D: Project coordination, infrastructure and budget

Congress authorized the Director of the **Padilla Bay NERR**, Terry Stevens, to provide financial administration for the Initiative. The NWSC administrative office is also located at Padilla Bay. Terry wrote the first year grant with NOAA and administered it. Tom Cowan was hired as an interim part-time project coordinator to manage the day-to-day activities of the Initiative. An intern from the University of Washington School of Marine Affairs, Michelle Pico, assisted Tom from approximately June through December of 1999. Subsequently, Cathy Angell was hired in January as a part-time Projects Specialist to assist the Initiative.

The Padilla Bay NERR, part of the Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program within the State Department of Ecology, provides effective and efficient infrastructure assistance by facilitating budget, travel, supplies, payroll, equipment purchases, and sharing other administrative needs such as photocopy and telephone/ computer lines. Two additional staff at the Padilla Bay NERR, Sharon Riggs and Linda Smith, assist with grants/ contracts

administration and receptionist duties respectively. Along with Terry Stevens, a small amount of their time is budgeted to the Initiative.

The first year **budget** for the Initiative was \$350,000 in federal funds specifically authorized by Congress. NOAA provided the funding to the Padilla Bay NERR in the form of an annual grant for tasks adopted by the NWSC.

III. Benchmarks for Performance

The original Murray-Metcalf Commission felt strongly that the Initiative must be guided by, and ultimately judged by, measurable performance standards. These Benchmarks for Performance emphasize substantive action to “keep the pressure on” and produce measurable results. While recognizing that it can take many years before clear conclusions may be made regarding recovery of certain species, it is necessary to demonstrate that substantive protection and restoration actions are being made that will ultimately provide results.

This section describes those activities of the Initiative that begin progress on achieving the eight Benchmarks for Performance. Some of the individual projects are listed multiple times because they address multiple Benchmarks for Performance.

Broad county participation in MRCs

- All seven eligible counties joined the Initiative and appointed citizen-driven MRCs (San Juan reappointed their MRC under the provisions of the Initiative.) In each county the vote by the legislative authority was unanimous.
- Over 100 volunteers are now active members of MRCs and are engaged in tasks to protect and restore the marine resources of the Northwest Straits.
- Each county has a lead staff person responsible for coordinating the activities of their MRC. The county budget covers some or all of this cost.
- Several of the MRCs have sponsored public events, written guest columns for local newspapers and publicized and invited public participation in their activities.

Achieve a scientifically based regional system of marine protected areas (MPAs)

- The San Juan County MRC established its Bottomfish Recovery Program in 1996. It consists of eight voluntary MPAs called bottomfish recovery zones (BRZs) where fishing is discouraged. It has achieved growing success each year and has broad public support, as well as the support of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. It has received financial support from San Juan County, the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team and several private foundations. The NWSC provided a \$24,975 grant to the MRC to continue to improve and expand the Program. The program has strong inventory, monitoring, research and public involvement and education components. It uses citizen volunteers and signage to discourage fishing in the eight areas. A one-half page ad describing the project was purchased and appeared on the back cover of the annual sport-fishing guide published by WDFW. Two concerns are being addressed by the MRC. Because of inadequate financial resources, a non-profit organization was created to help secure private donations. The size and design of the BRZs are being reconsidered in recognition that the initial sites are too small. The MRC issued a progress report in December 1999 (Appendix J.)
- The San Juan County MRC is an active leader in establishing a transboundary MPA. With encouragement from the MRC, The San Juan County Commissioners and the Islands Trust Board, which represents the Canadian Gulf Islands, have signed a Transborder Island Agreement and a Protocol Agreement on Transborder Marine Protection Areas with one goal being to establish a transboundary MPA (Appendix K.) Regular meetings on this topic are held with representatives of the MRC as well as NWSC staff and other involved parties.

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a workshop on the role of MPAs in marine conservation.
- The Jefferson County MRC will encourage citizen participation in forming MPAs to protect bottomfish and other species and will provide a summary report with recommendations to the County Commission.
- The San Juan County MRC will provide scientific information gained during its forage fish assessment to help design future regional MPAs.
- The Skagit County MRC will identify and evaluate several potential MPAs for recovering bottomfish.

Ensure a net gain in highly ecologically-productive nearshore, intertidal and estuarine habitat

- The NWSC co-sponsored two successful nearshore habitat workshops titled “Puget Sound Nearshore: The Neglected Link.” These workshops drew several hundred participants including many members of MRCs. The NWSC also co-sponsored printing and distribution of the Shoreline Stewardship Guidebook, published by the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team.

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a series of workshops bringing the public together with leading experts. One of the topics to be covered will be nearshore marine habitats critical to resources of the Strait, with emphasis on juvenile and adult habitats of federally listed and proposed species of rockfish and salmon and geographic areas of concern. Another topic will be coastal erosion processes with an emphasis on nearshore upland interactions and how shoreline alterations impact shoreline processes and habitat. A third topic will focus on oceanography and how human activities, including oil spills, upland development and water quality declines interact with water movement in the main basin and embayments of the Strait, with a focus on better management.
- The Island County MRC will conduct a comprehensive underwater videographic eelgrass mapping and identification project to establish eelgrass bed habitat baselines in specified areas of Island County’s shorelines.
- The San Juan County MRC will provide local tools to map, assess and protect nearshore habitat and prevent harm from upland activities. It will help to prevent the loss of existing high-value habitat.
- The Whatcom County MRC, with a \$10,000 matching grant from the Port of Bellingham, will survey the shorelines of Whatcom County. Additionally, the MRC will compile existing data on nearshore habitats, develop a prioritization matrix so the MRC can rank the relative importance of nearshore habitats and develop new shoreline survey protocols.

Net reduction in shellfish harvest areas closed due to contamination

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a workshop on shellfish resources and water quality with an emphasis on prevention of water quality declines and shellfish downgrades.

Measurable increases in factors supporting recovery of bottom fish

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a workshop focusing on rockfish species, with emphasis on historic and current stock status, habitat, and directions for future recovery.
- The Jefferson County MRC will encourage citizen participation in forming MPAs to protect bottomfish and other species and will provide a summary report with recommendations to the County Commission.
- The San Juan County MRC will expand and improve the three year old Bottom Fish Recovery Program (BFRP) and will include a monitoring component (fish counts, fishing compliance in the reserves, and public attitude survey), outreach and public involvement, research and networking with the WDFW groundfish program and research and teaching at the UW Friday Harbor Labs. The San Juan County MRC also received a \$30,000 grant of EPA funds from the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team to expand and improve the

Bottomfish Recovery Program and specifically measure the performance and success of a voluntary program for restoring bottom fish.

- The Skagit County MRC will identify and evaluate several potential MPAs for recovering bottomfish.

Increases in key marine indicator species

- The San Juan County MRC facilitated efforts that resulted in the local Tour Boat Operator Association endorsing a voluntary 200 yard limit to avoid harassing whales. They also facilitated discussion regarding a proposed surveillance system at Limekiln Park by the Whale Museum.
- The NWSC approved a resolution requesting that federal and state natural resource agencies fully recognize the importance of a healthy marine habitat for restoring wild salmon and support the NWSC and the seven MRCs in achieving the performance benchmark of protecting and restoring marine habitat critical to the recovery of listed wild salmon species. The resolution was sent to the appropriate agency officials.

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a workshop focusing on key marine indicator species, with emphasis on stock status and habitat requirements of juvenile surf smelt, herring and sand lance.
- The San Juan County MRC will develop a program of standardized procedures that can be used to map forage fish (herring, sand lance and surf smelt) nearshore spawning habitat and provide this information in a form useable to county personnel involved in land use decisions.

Coordination of Scientific data

- The Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team provided scientific reports and other documents that were organized and distributed to each MRC as an initial MRC and NWSC Library. The NWSC continues to accumulate technical documents and facilitates library development for the MRCs.
- The NWSC sponsored, organized and conducted a Missing Science Workshop in December. The purposes were to identify Northwest Strait's marine resource issues that need additional research and to provide MRCs with additional scientific knowledge to help focus their actions. Under contract, Washington Sea Grant wrote a draft report that was reviewed by over 35 scientists at the workshop. Suggestions for additions and corrections were received and a final draft report will be issued in April 2000 as well as a summary "Science Gaps" report.

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Island County MRC will conduct a comprehensive underwater videographic eelgrass mapping and identification project to establish eelgrass bed habitat baselines in specified areas of Island County's shorelines.
- The Jefferson County MRC will conduct a thorough literature review, data search and information compilation. Work will be closely coordinated with WDFW, WDNr, tribes, the University of Washington and other state and federal agencies.
- The San Juan County MRC will develop a program of standardized procedures that can be used to map forage fish (herring, sand lance and surf smelt) nearshore spawning habitat and provide this information in a form useable to county personnel involved in land use decisions.
- The San Juan County MRC will expand and improve the three year old Bottom Fish Recovery Program (BFRP) and will include a monitoring component (fish counts, fishing compliance in the reserves, and public attitude survey), outreach and public involvement, research and networking with the WDFW groundfish program and research and teaching at

the UW Friday Harbor Labs. All data and information will be made available to other MRCs, the NWSC, tribes, and state and federal agencies.

- The Skagit County MRC will identify and evaluate several potential MPAs for recovering bottomfish. A review of all scientific databases and literature on the historical and present status of rocky reef bottomfish in Skagit County will be conducted. Published literature on the ecology of rocky reef bottomfish and values of MPAs for restoring and protecting these species will be gathered and made available to members of the MRCs and others. They will use the scientific data to help assess the need for MPAs in Skagit County and provide habitat and resource abundance data in the County for inclusion in the County GIS database.
- The Whatcom County MRC will compile existing data on nearshore habitats, develop a prioritization matrix so the MRC can rank the relative importance of nearshore habitats and develop new shoreline survey protocols.

Public Education and Outreach

- The San Juan County MRC facilitated a public process that resulted in the local Tour Boat Operator Association endorsing a voluntary 200 yard limit to avoid harassing whales. They also facilitated discussion regarding a proposed surveillance system at Limekiln Park by the Whale Museum.
- A highly successful two-day MRC Training Conference was held in Oak Harbor in November 1999, with most of the MRC members from each county attending. The primary workshop objectives were to bring all of the MRCs together to learn more about the Initiative, the state of marine resources in the region, and to begin establishing networks of common interests by sharing information and ideas with each other.
- As part of its outreach strategy, the NWSC members and staff made many presentations about the Initiative to community groups, natural resource groups, potential funding sources, local governments, and state and federal agencies and representatives. The NWSC has begun development of a package of public information materials including an introductory brochure, a web site, a descriptive slideshow and a series of MRC fact sheets.

As part of their Early Action Grant described on pages five and six:

- The Clallam County MRC will conduct a series of seven workshops bringing the public together with leading experts. One purpose is to engage local citizens in discussions about the threats to their marine resources. The workshops will be advertised and held in several different communities.
- The Island County MRC will actively encourage participation in their eelgrass survey by property owners and shoreline residents via a direct-mail survey/census response. Several mediums will be used to educate Island County's citizens about the importance of healthy eelgrass systems.
- The Jefferson County MRC will develop a brochure, slide show presentation and other tools to educate citizens. A questionnaire will survey citizens about their knowledge or perception of local marine resources and the need to create MPAs. A series of five public meetings will be held around the county on voluntary MPAs.
- The San Juan County MRC will use a variety of forums to educate the public on the importance of forage fish. Shoreline owners will be contacted if their beaches may have suitable spawning habitat. Results of property owner attitudes will be published.
- The San Juan County MRC, as part of the outreach component for their bottomfish recovery program will staff booths at public events, write media articles, and hold meetings with marine related businesses, schools and community organizations. A one-half page ad describing the project was purchased and appeared on the back cover of the annual sport-fishing guide published by WDFW.
- The Skagit County MRC will develop a brochure, slideshow, display and other materials to educate the public at meetings and public events. They will convene workshops at several locations in the county to inform the public and solicit feedback and assistance.
- The Whatcom County MRC will conduct a training program and then will involve citizens and businesses in the rapid inventory and seasonal monitoring. They will also sponsor an

open house toward the end of the project to help educate the public about nearshore habitats.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

Momentum has been building for years to improve the job of protecting and restoring the vital but depleted marine resources in the Northwest Straits. To their credit, U.S. Congressman Jack Metcalf and U.S. Senator Patty Murray recognized the need to make progress and initiated a new citizen-based approach for preserving and enhancing salmon, bottomfish, shellfish, etc., and the habitats upon which they depend.

The Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative was authorized and funded by Congress for Fiscal Year 2000. By the end of the year, all seven of the eligible counties had joined the Initiative and formed their Marine Resources Committees. Over 100 citizen volunteers with representation from the science community, local government, tribes and economic, recreational and conservation interests are actively engaged in prioritizing and taking actions in their community. While demonstrating exceptional enthusiasm for this “bottom-up” approach for enhancing marine resources, it is also apparent that more financial resources are necessary to expect effective progress involving all seven counties.

The Northwest Straits Commission is actively focusing a scientific “spotlight” on the factors for decline and effective remedies, providing technical and financial resources to the MRCs and coordinating activities between MRCs.

Achieving specific Benchmarks for Performance is the key to measuring success and the MRCs and the NWSC will be held accountable to demonstrate progress. While many of the efforts in the first year were devoted to start-up and organization at both the local and regional levels, this report notes many steps that have been initiated to strengthen protection and reverse the dramatic decline in the marine resources of the Northwest Straits.

Year Two will emphasize the further strengthening and empowering of the seven MRCs in carrying out their mission. Additional funding will be aggressively pursued, as will technical assistance and training.

The NWSC will help mobilize science to focus on key priorities, develop and guide additional resources and serve as a forum for coordination on an ecosystem level.

There remains a huge and growing need for action at multiple levels. Committed citizens, local, tribal, state and federal governments, non-governmental organizations, industry, scientists, fishers, economic and recreational users and the general public all play an essential role in protecting and restoring the marine resources of the Northwest Straits.

For its part, The Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative is beginning to demonstrate that once armed with the necessary scientific, technical and financial tools, citizens will become energized and empowered to take the critical actions necessary to achieve success in their own communities.

Appendices

- A. Northwest Straits Area Map
- B. Murray – Metcalf Northwest Straits Citizens Advisory Commission Report to the Convenors
- C. Northwest Straits Initiative's First Year Work Plan and Budget
- D. Seven County Resolutions Joining the Initiative and Establishing MRCs
- E. Procedures and Criteria for Early Action Grants
- F. Adopted Year 2000 Work Plans for Jefferson, Island, and San Juan MRCs
- G. Northwest Straits Commission Members
- H. NWSC Resolution
- I. Progress Tracking Data Base for MRCs and NWSC
- J. San Juan MRC Bottomfish Recovery Report, December, 1999
- K. San Juan County / Island's Trust Memorandum of Understanding
- L. San Juan County MRC's 1999 Annual Report