

# **Marine Program & Marine Resources Committee 2019 Annual Report**



**December 3, 2019**

**San Juan County  
Marine Resources Committee  
and  
Citizens Advisory Group for Salmon Recovery**

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## 1. REPORT ON PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### 1.1 The Marine Resources Committee

The San Juan County MRC had another productive and engaging year in 2019. The MRC expanded with two new members bringing the membership back to its full quota of 15. In February, the MRC held a successful annual retreat to develop the project priorities for the year. The Marine Resources Committee contributed almost 1500 hours of voluntary time over the course of 2019. Their efforts included recommendations to support the listing of Pinto abalone in WA State, and supporting the comments made by the Marine Mammal Commission regarding the Navy's Environmental Impact Statement for proposed navy activities in the region. In addition, the MRC hosted six speakers to share their knowledge on areas including marine debris removal, kelp, forage fish, Pinto abalone, and oil spill response. The MRC have been actively engaging with the islands' communities through community workshops, dock talks, beach cleans, the Great Islands Clean-Up events, at the County Fair, and through their online platforms. The MRC have also had communications assistance from an intern funded by the Northwest Straits Foundation. This communications fellow created the MRC in the Spotlight Series featuring short videos of each MRC member highlighting what the MRC does; it's importance to the community and how others can get involved to further stewardship efforts of the County's marine resources. The MRC was also recognized for their efforts and achievements in the recovery of Southern Resident killer whales at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual MRC Conference in November 2019.

The MRC Chair Karin Roemers-Kleven and Vice-Chair Christina Koons continue to lead with enthusiasm for the MRC and wider efforts through the region furthering the County's efforts in marine conservation, restoration, education and outreach.



*MRC members Northwest Straits Initiative staff at the January MRC workshop, Friday Harbor Labs, San Juan Island.*

### **1.1.1 Message from the Chair**

There are many human-caused threats to our marine resources. These threats affect everything from the health of San Juan County's kelp beds, to the presence of eelgrass so vital to forage fish and herring spawning grounds, to our once prolific population of sea stars, to our pinniped population that feeds the transient killer whales and of course our SRKWs that are searching for healthy, adult Chinook. Here in the San Juans we are at ground zero of both the salmon and the orca's decline.

Because the Salish Sea is interconnected, and the fish and marine life truly know no boundaries, the work we do in San Juan County needs to expand and reach other communities beyond our own. Our presence at local, national and even international marine conferences and the creation of our dedicated website for "Plastic Free Salish Sea" (our subcommittee in collaboration with our local solid waste management organizations) allows us to connect with other counties and MRCs. By working collaboratively across the border we hope to create many ripples of change that may combine to a wave that is for the betterment of our marine environment. We have been invited to speak in February 2020 at a regional conference on Whidbey Island called Sound Waters University which attracts 700 people from around the region who are interested in marine protection. We will also be presenting at the renowned Salish Sea Conference in Vancouver BC which attracts 2000 participants where our video has been submitted for their concurrent film festival. We are excited to welcome 2020 and we look forward to continuing to reach out beyond our County to help improve the Salish Sea.

*Karin Roemers-Kleven, December 3, 2019*

### **1.1.2 MRC Activities in 2019**

The MRC's key activities during 2019 included participation in local and state workshops and conferences, including the 21<sup>th</sup> annual MRC Conference. The MRC Conference saw another great participation with 6 members and staff in attendance. MRC members have been active participants in the NW Straits Commission and participated regional efforts for the restoration and recovery of marine resources in the County and the wider Puget Sound region. These efforts included forage fish-spawning survey training workshops, invasive European green crab monitoring, participating in regional kelp monitoring workshops, providing recommendations to the County Council regarding endangered species in County waters, providing recommendations on oil spill prevention, preparedness and response and providing recommendations for comments on the US Navy's proposed activities in the Salish Sea. The NW Straits Initiative recognized the MRC for their accomplishments and efforts towards the recovery of Southern Resident killer whales.

The past year has seen the MRC continue to lead on two key projects –the whale warning flag project and related boater outreach and education, and the Plastic Free Salish Sea initiative. The MRC also published two reports addressing oil spill risk to San Juan County, and has initiated a review and update of the Marine Stewardship Area Plan.





*MRC Vice-Chair receiving the NWSI award at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual MRC Conference.*



*MRC coordinator, Frances Robertson with Debra Giles and Stephanie Solien at the Seattle Boat Show, January 2019.*

### Whale Warning Flag Pilot Project

The Southern Resident killer whale is an icon of the County's environment, cultural and economic identities. The San Juan Islands are the epicenter of the whales' summer core critical habitat, though in recent years have spent more time in the inland waters during the fall than during the summer months. Regardless, the local community has grown increasingly concerned about the health and well-being of the whales and the role that humans play in ensuring their survival.

The MRC have hosted two community workshops since October 2017 that have identified actions community members and the County could take to help address the key threats related to lack of prey (Chinook salmon), contaminant loading, and the impacts of vessel disturbance. In addition, the Governor's Orca Task Force, NOAA, and WDFW also identified the need to do more to provide acoustic and physical sanctuary from vessels, especially when enforcement is not present.



Soundwatch data indicates that incidents of vessels violating vessel regulations and the Be Whale Wise guidelines increases when enforcement is not present. The challenge that federal and state regulators, and those engaged in outreach and education to boaters face is how to change boater behavior around the endangered SRKW. The County's Marine Program and MRC sought to do this through the formation of new social norms for operating vessels in the SRKW core critical habitat by the adoption of a social prompt – the whale warning flag.

The MRC initiated a two-year pilot project in 2018 to introduce a flag to San Juan County waters and the surrounding region. This project has now ended and a final report is due to be published in early 2020. Over the course of the 2-year study the MRC and County staff distributed 1,025 flags. Based on feedback from 2018 an additional size was also made available to boaters. The MRC and County staff promoted the flag and associated best boating behaviors at boat shows, yacht rendezvous, public presentations, at dock talks, and through their online medial throughout the year and particularly over the summer boating months. Their presence at many events was made possible by relationships forged through participation in the Governor's Task Force and the transboundary Be Whale Wise partnership.

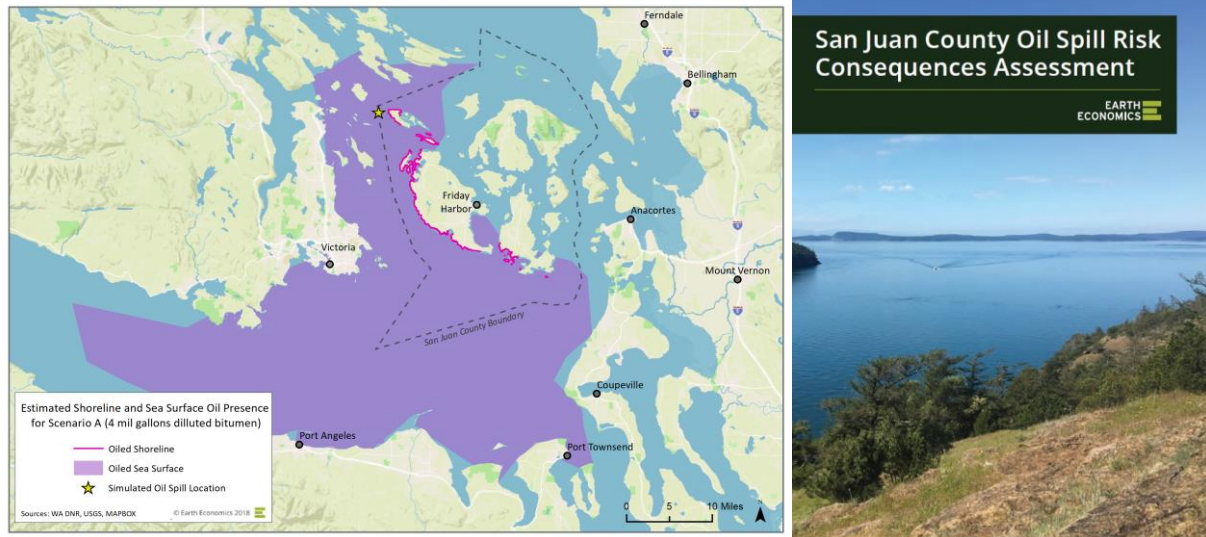


The MRC collaborated with the Soundwatch boater education program to collect data on vessel counts and compliance. The MRC and County staff also conducted a series of social surveys social surveys to determine awareness levels of the boating public on whales, the Be Whale Wise regulations and guidelines, and on the use of the whale warning flag. Preliminary results indicate that boater compliance levels increased as the proportion of flags on scene increased. Vessel count data suggests no difference in the numbers of boats in the vicinity of whales with flags present. The survey data from 402 unique respondents suggests that in general, boaters are familiar with the Be Whale Wise guidelines but surprisingly few indicated that they would be able to implement them by providing correct approach distances. As these data analyses are finalized they will provide further insights into boater behaviors related to whales and also as to how effective the flag may be. This pilot study was enabled by grants through the NW Straits Foundation and the Marine Mammal Commission, volunteer efforts of MRC members, and the resources provided through the NW Straits Commission grant for the MRC programming.



## San Juan County Oil Spill Risk Consequences

The MRC was awarded \$100,000 in locally directed funds through the Puget Sound National Estuary Program in 2018 that enabled two reports addressing oil spill risk and prevention in San Juan County to be produced. These reports included an oil spill risk consequences assessment and cost evaluation analysis for positioning a multi-mission Emergency Response Towing Vessel in the Haro Strait/Boundary Pass area. These reports were published in 2019. These reports are available on the MRC website.



*The projected impact from oil presence of a 4 million gallon spill of diluted bitumen to San Juan County and the surrounding waters.*

## Plastic Free Salish Sea

The Plastic Free Salish Sea project continued to highlight the impacts of single use plastics throughout the community and wider region. MRC PFSS Subcommittee member Carl Davis lent his videographer skills to the production of a series of videos aimed at educating and inspiring the community to reduce their footprints and go plastic free. The short documentary film, 'Plastic Free Salish Sea' was shown at the River and Oceans film festivals at the University of Washington and in Forks, Washington, where it won the runner-up prize for Best-in-Show. These videos are now available to view on the interim PFSS website: [www.plasticfreesalishsea.org](http://www.plasticfreesalishsea.org). The MRC hosted a Talking Trash workshop in Friday Harbor in April 2019 and is planning for the third in the series for Lopez Island in 2020 that will coincide with Earth Day celebrations.



### Marine Stewardship Area Plan Update

The MRC conducted a high-level review of the MSA Plan over the course of the year and established that a larger multi-year effort was required for an adequate review and update. Through this effort, the MRC developed the scope for a modest review and identified the core goals and objectives for this effort. The subcommittee also developed a process outline to guide the efforts through 2020 and set dates for a marine manager's workshop in March 2020. The MRC also successfully applied for funding for a dedicated research fellow who will provide additional support for the effort. The efforts to update the MSA Plan will enable the MRC to begin to create a new, relevant, and practical plan to help move forward with stewardship efforts in San Juan County.



### Salmon Recovery Efforts

This year the MRC's role as the County's Salmon Recovery Lead Entity Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) helped to ensure that four local Salmon Recovery projects were funded to the tune of \$414,702. These projects included two restoration projects (a property requisition for shoreline habitat protection in Griffin Bay, San Juan Island, and the Salmon Point shoreline community beach restoration project on Lopez Island), an eel grass recovery pilot project on San Juan Island, and a feasibility project for the restoration of Crescent Beach on Orcas Island.



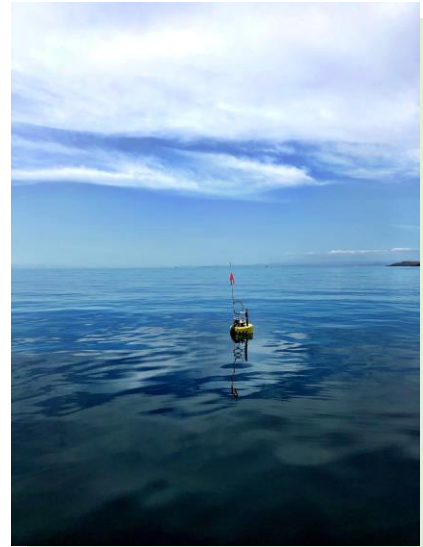
*MRC/CAG members and Lead Entity Technical Advisory Group members visiting the proposed project sites in May 2019.*



## 1.2 Southern Resident killer whale recovery actions

Southern Resident killer whale recovery actions covered three core areas during 2019. These included:

- The continuation of the Whale Warning Flag pilot study in conjunction with the MRC
- Supporting Commissioner Stephens' participation in the Governor's Southern Resident killer whale Task Force
- Participating in the vessel and prey Task Force working groups
- Participating in the transboundary Be Whale Wise boater education program
- Hosting a community workshop aimed at engaging community members in meaningful dialogue about state and local, including *individual*, efforts underway to support SRKW recovery.
- Initiate a marine spatial planning effort to bring science and social values together to identify potential quiet zones for foraging SRKW.



The County's involvement with the State Task Force allowed staff to communicate key local research and management needs to the wider state audience. County staff also successfully forged new connections, one of which earned the Be Whale Wise program (of which the MRC and County are partners) prominent presence at the Seattle and Anacortes Boat Shows in 2019 – these partnerships are continuing into 2020.

Through the County's successful grant applications for SRKW efforts county staff were able to engage local, world-class scientific experts to identify high priority SRKW foraging habitat, and acoustic noise budgets for the Westside region of San Juan Island. County staff also engaged experts in stakeholder engagement to help guide efforts in local community engagement in the effort.

## 1.3 Derelict Vessel Removal

This year saw a further two derelict vessels removed by the Marine Program. This brings the total number of derelict vessels removed by San Juan County Environmental Resources Division to 15 since 2017.

The Marine Resources Program continues to support the DNR's budget proposal for additional funding to support the removal of derelict vessels.

*A derelict sailboat removed from Eastsound in June 2019.*



## **2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES PROPOSED FOR THE COMING YEAR**

Through 2020 the Marine Program and the MRC will continue to build awareness of the MRC through public engagement at monthly meetings, and online through the MRC's website and social media platforms. In addition, the MRC and County staff will continue to expand their working relationships with local entities, neighboring counties, our Coast Salish Partners and our Federal and State partners.

The primary deliverables for the County's Marine Program are outlined in the Strategic Workplan (Appendix 1). The key objectives are to deliver these actions, on time and within available budgets.

## **3. KEY PROJECTS PLANNED FOR THE COMING YEAR**


The coming year the MRC and Marine Program will continue their efforts to support SRKW recovery. These will include continued participation in outreach and education to boaters with the Be Whale Wise program, including hosting a booth at the Seattle and Anacortes Boat Shows. County staff will also be participating in the States Commercial Whale Watch License Program (CWWLP) and supporting the Council's efforts at the legislator to further recovery efforts in San Juan County. As part of both the Marine Stewardship Area Plan update and SRKW response, a marine conservation planning effort will help to collate scientific data on whale foraging hotspots, acoustic noise budgets and local social values, to help identify locally supported alternative management options along the west side of San Juan Island. This information would be made available to the State and Federal entities as they evaluate management strategies to further protect the SRKW in the coming years. These efforts will include additional stakeholder /community workshops in 2020 to share the latest science and approaches to achieving a balanced approach.

Other projects planned for 2020 include continuing to support the Plastic Free Salish Sea (PFSS) initiative and conducting an update of the Marine Stewardship Area plan. The PFSS initiative will include the third community 'Talking Trash' workshop in the spring. The Marine Stewardship Area plan, now over a decade old will be updated to reflect the latest state of knowledge based on monitoring efforts within County waters. The MRC will host a Marine Managers Workshop in 2020 to bring together federal, state, and Tribal partners, as well as local and regional non-profits conducting monitoring efforts in the County. A revised plan will help to guide future monitoring efforts within the County and identify future collaborations for the continued restoration and sustainable use of the County's marine resources.

## **4. PROPOSED GRANTS OR OTHER FUNDING PROGRAM NEEDS**

County staff will continue to work on creating a long-term funding strategy to support the Marine Program so that the County can begin to build a comprehensive program that is able to respond to community needs surrounding our marine resources into the future.

## APPENDIX 1. MARINE PROGRAM STRATEGIC WORKPLAN 2020-2021

<div> <b>San Juan County Marine Program</b></div>				2020-21 Strategic Workplan							
	Status	Lead Staff	Support	2020				2021			
				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Program Management</b>											
Budget and funds management, tracking expenditures, billing		FR, SW, MG	KS	Ongoing							
Monthly MRC meetings & subcommittee meetings, Bimonthly LIO		FR, SW, MG	KS	Ongoing							
Website and social media management and improvements		FR, SW, MG		Ongoing							
Marine Managers Workshop Coordination, Salish Sea Conf.		FR	Intern								
Grant reporting (including progress and quarterly reports)		FR, SW, MG		Ongoing							
External Meetings - Watershed Leads, Salmon TAG, Salmon Coalition		SW		monthly-bi-monthly-quarterly							
Support Council requests, sponsors and volunteers with projects		FR, SW, MG		Ongoing							
Catalyze SJC Near Term Actions for Puget Sound Action Agenda, Fundraising		MG	LOI Members								
<b>Planning, Outreach and Education Projects</b>											
Marine Stewardship Area Plan Update		FR	MG	Generate Plan Alignment							
Salmon Recovery Chapter Update		SW	TAG-CAG								
Ecosystem Protection and Recovery Plan Update		MG									
Salmon Recovery 4 Year Workplan and Planned Project Forecast		SW		Final							
Puget Sound Recovery Continuous Improvement Project		MG									
Southern Resident Killer Whale - Whale Warning Flag Pilot Project		FR									
Southern Resident Killer Whale - Westside Mgmt of Key Foraging Areas		FR	KS	Outreach	Findings		Implement?				
Southern Resident Killer Whale - Be Whale Wise Outreach & Education		FR	MG	Boat Shows	Dock talks		Boat Shows		Dock talks		
Southern Resident Killer Whale - Task Force Rec Implementation Support		FR									
Plastic Free Salish Sea - Education and Outreach		FR	MI								
Oil Spill and ERTV Broader Impacts and Communications		MG	MRC, Sub	Ongoing							
Tracking of nearshore project activities w DCD in GIS		KD	DR	Ongoing							
<b>Capital Improvement Project Delivery</b>											
Lopez - Mackaye Harbor Boat Launch Beach Restoration		BR	KS	Grant to Construct					Construct		
Lopez - Agate Beach & Buff Restoration		BR	DW	Grant to Construct					Construct		
Orcas - Orcas Landing Marine Interpretive Area		KS		Fundraising for added elements							
Orcas - Cresent Beach Culvert Replacement and Lagoon Restoration		BR	Roads						Second grant		
<b>Marine Program Funding Strategies</b>											
Work with Council and Auditor to identify sources of stable funding		KS	FC, MG								
Host 2020-21 Lead Entity funding rounds		SW	TAG,CAG								
Pursue grant opportunities		FR, MG	KS	Ongoing							