



agenda

Meeting: Northwest Straits Commission Meeting

Date: January 30, 2026

Time: 10:15 AM – 2:45 PM

Location: Stevens Center, Padilla Bay, 10441 Bayview Edison Road, Mount Vernon, WA, 98273

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.

Today we are on the ancestral and current homelands of the Samish and Swinomish Tribes.

Documents for NW Straits Commission Review:

- December Meeting Minutes

10:15 – 10:30 AM	Welcome and Introductions Tribal acknowledgement December Meeting Minutes approval Welcome new NW Straits Commission Representatives	Alan Clark, Chair
10:30 – 11:05 AM	Skagit MRC Presentation and Site Visit: Kids on the Beach <i>Annie England will give a short presentation in the Stevens Center, then we will walk to the Padilla Bay overlook for a demonstration.</i>	Annie England, Environmental Educator at Padilla Bay NERR
11:05 – 11:35 AM	An overview of Samish DNR-sharing perspectives and partnerships	Todd Woodard, Infrastructure and Resource Executive Director - Samish Indian Nation
11:35 – 12:05 PM	MRC Reports	



agenda

12:05 – 1:00 PM **Working Lunch**

1:00 – 1:25 PM **Committee Updates**

- External Relations
- Executive Committee
- Science Advisory Committee

Elsa Schwartz
Jamie Stephens
Emily Grason

1:25 – 1:50 PM **Business Items**

2026 Retreat
Strategic Plan Update
NWSC Meeting Logistics

Caitlyn Blair
Lucas Hart
Caitlyn Blair

1:50 – 2:15 PM **Project Updates**

Website Update
Kelp Monitoring

Jessica Owens
Jeff Whitty

2:15 – 2:30 PM **NW Straits Commissioner Updates**

(Puget Sound Partnership)

2:30 – 2:45 PM **Public Comment**

2:45 PM **Adjourn**

*The next regular monthly NW Straits Commission meeting will be on February 27, 2026 over Zoom.
Please visit the [website](#) for more information.*



Minutes

December 12, 2025, 10:00 AM- 12:00 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees

Commission Members: Christina Koons (San Juan), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Alan Clark (Clallam – chair), Lynne Wenberg (Skagit), Rick Beauregard (Whatcom), Elsa Schwartz, Jamie Stephens, Jason Lim (Puget Sound Partnership – alternate), Emily Grason, Ken Collins (Island), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Leah Skare, Sasha Horst, Jessica Owens, Jeff Whitty

Absent: Cecilia Gobin, Jeff Taylor

Others attending: Amelia Kalagher (Clallam), Erik Young

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Alan Clark, opened the meeting with the Tribal acknowledgement and introductions.

The Commission approved the September meeting minutes as written by consensus.

Committee Updates

Executive Committee: Jamie updated the group about the November Committee meeting where the group had a debrief on the conference, budget planning, and a letter of support to be discussed later in the agenda.

External Relations Committee: Elsa Schwartz reported on attending Puget Sound Day on the Sound and noted that the reauthorization bill is still pending in the current session of Congress in the hope that there may be a bill to attach to that will pass.

Science Advisory Committee (SAC): Emily Grason shared a summary of the Committee meeting earlier in the week, which included debriefing 2025 committee activities. The committee completed MRC proposal review and feedback as well as individual project consultations. They are looking forward to future opportunities for connecting with MRCs by piloting consultations outside of the proposal process. They are interested in feedback from MRCs to gauge interest. They also debriefed on the MRC conference and dug into planning for a 2026 SAC-hosted workshop. They are planning to bring back Speed Dates with a Scientist in 2026 as well, so anyone with ideas for timely or emerging themes please reach out to Emily.

Business Items

Staff gave updates on the following business items:



Minutes

Conference Debrief: Staff reported that 101 attendees joined us for the 2025 MRC Conference in La Conner at Maple Hall. Thanks to everyone who attended and made this conference possible. Staff shared a few reflections from the post-conference survey. A summary from the Reaching your MRC's Full Potential session will be compiled and shared with MRCs soon. Suggestions, ideas, and recommendations from the post-event survey have been collected and will be considered in the planning process for the 2026 conference and other purposes.

2026 NW Straits Commission meeting dates: The first meeting of 2026 will be January 30 at Padilla Bay Reserve. MRCs representatives in counties where there will be an in-person meeting this year are encouraged to get it on their calendar to consider whether they would like to present anything. Caitlyn will be in contact in advance to coordinate agenda plans and logistics. She will also send calendar invitations before the end of the year.

Retreat Planning: The retreat will be Thursday and Friday April 2-3, 2026, at Elsa's house on Camano Island. Caitlyn will send the calendar invitation soon and will be in contact with Commission members and MRC staff in the new year to begin on logistical plans and retreat content input.

Budget Update: Sasha shared an update on the status of the NOAA FY23 Congressionally Directed Spending award, which has funding remaining to be spent in 2026 before it expires. Commission staff will work with the Executive Committee to bring forward a proposal to the full Commission in early 2026 on how to redistribute funds to MRCs with identified needs.

Approve NWSC Rules of Procedure: Lucas introduced the topic and summarized the changes. A draft with tracked changes was provided in the meeting materials for review.

During discussion it was noted that there is an increased number to meet quorum requirements and that the even number may result in a tie. This scenario was discussed by the Executive Committee, but it was determined that in such a situation the Commission would table the decision for more discussion. Another question was related to the funding policy, and staff confirmed that the language in that was previously approved by the Commission and included in the Request for Proposals for MRCs and is now being incorporated in the rules of procedure through this version.

The Commission moved and approved the revised rules of procedure by consensus.

Marine, Economic, and Research Institute for Sustainability (MERIS) Letter of Support: The Commission moved and approved the proposed letter of support by consensus.



Minutes

Project Updates

No-Anchor Zone Report Out: Jessica presented information on the phase two activities from the social marketing campaign.

Campaign goals: raising boater awareness about eelgrass and eelgrass zones, driving traffic to the www.anchorout.org informational website, and engaging partners to amplify reach.

Actions: protection measures, messaging/branding, and goals/actions. The campaign had targeted communication and visual tools to keep anchors out of eelgrass.

Campaign reach: Analytics from trackable messaging tools (social media posts, digital ads, website traffic), as well as reflections about the work of the past year, and next steps for 2026.

Evaluate the behavior change: partners are tracking that. We may not have good metrics on pre-but we can do post-. We are monitoring compliance. Can check later when there is a lull in the campaign and then a re-start.

MRC Reports

Full written reports from the MRCs are available in the meeting materials on our website.

Clallam MRC – Alan Clark

- Five members and two staff attended the Northwest Straits Commission's annual MRC conference on November 7-8.
- At the regular monthly meeting November 17, Clallam County Director of Community Development Bruce Emery presented on the County Comprehensive Plan update.

Island MRC – Ken Collins

- Many Island MRC members attended the MRC Conference where they were able to educate and inform other MRCs on their Shoreline Armoring Analysis and Report!
- Thanks to Scott Chase and Barbara Bennett as long-term members who are completing their time on the MRC.

Jefferson MRC – Jeff Taylor

- An ad hoc subcommittee is drafting an advisory letter to the Board of County Commissioners in support of WA Department of Natural Resources' Dabob Bay Natural Area Land Trust transfer.
- Akeykla Behrenfeld resigned as the Youth Local representative.

San Juan MRC – Christina Koons

- Two youth members have begun working with the MRC. Lola Walker and Flora Vaught have joined the MRC as youth representatives, and we are thrilled to hear their voices.



Minutes

- MRC members and staff attended the MRC Conference in November in La Conner. It is always a wonderful event to connect with MRC members across the region and hear inspiring stories, ideas and collaborations.
- Derelict Vessel prevention efforts are underway through recently produced video about winterizing your vessel as well as a poster campaign for end-of-life planning for your boat.

Skagit MRC – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson

- **2026 Salish Sea Stewards Training** - dates have been set. Classes will be held Tuesdays, 1-5pm from February 10 through April 14. Classes will mostly be held at Padilla Bay, with some field days. Registration is open December 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026. A link to the online registration will be made available soon on the [Skagit MRC website](#).
- **La Conner School Rain Garden** - The interpretive sign has been installed. Skagit County Intern got approval from the school to purchase and plant an additional 25 native plants which will hopefully get done before the end of the month.
- **Olympia Oyster Restoration** - Paul Dinnel wrote a piece on Fidalgo Bay oyster restoration project for an upcoming shellfish exhibit at the Skagit County Historical Museum in La Conner, which will also include oyster restoration in other bays in the county.

Snohomish MRC – Tim Ellis

- The MRC 2026 workplan is finalized and will be available on the website soon.
- A few members and staff attended the Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead Bull Kelp webinar on November 18.

Whatcom MRC – Rick Beauregard

- MRC members (7) and staff attended the 2025 NWS MRC Conference in November
- Laura Hanna joined the committee representing recreational interest.

Commissioner Updates

Jason Lim reported from the Puget Sound Partnership. The Governor's team is working on hiring for the Executive Director position expects an announcement in January. A Leadership Council meeting next will be held on Wednesday, December 17 in Federal Way, and will also be available to watch on TVW.

Public Comment and Partner Updates

There was no public comment.

The next meeting of the Northwest Straits Commission will be on January 30, 2026, at Padilla Bay Reserve in Skagit County.



Commission staff highlights - [January 2026]

MRC Support

MRC Grants: NOAA-funded grants are still in the process of routing for signatures at the counties (OTGP-2026), and the first quarterly reporting is due for the state and EPA/Puget Sound Partnership funded agreements (SEANWS-2025). Staff prepared a memo to share with MRCs to provide additional funding in 2026.

MRC Meetings:

- Jefferson MRC (01/6) – Leah and Jeff

Regional Projects

Kelp Plan: Staff continued to work with Puget Sound Partnership on a kelp funding landscape to increase awareness of kelp funding opportunities. Staff presented the [WA Kelp Project Inventory](#), a who is doing what with kelp, at the annual Eastern Pacific Kelp Alliance on Jan. 20th. Jeff attended WDNR's Kelp and Eelgrass Health and Conservation Plan meeting on Jan. 27. Jeff and Suzanne attended WDNR's Historical Kelp in North Puget Sound project informational on Jan. 15.

Kelp Monitoring: Staff finalized analysis of MRC kelp monitoring data and presented it at the 2025 MRC Kelp Monitoring Review on Jan. 26. Staff are working to include 2025 data on Sound IQ and the MRC Kelp Monitoring StoryMap.

Forage Fish: The MRC Forage Fish project beach sampling MOU letter with WDFW was signed and sent to project leads. A Sample Alteration Form is in progress for signatures to make minor updates to the QAPP.

European Green Crab: Staff collaborated with Padilla Bay NERR staff to submit the annual report for the NOAA ESA permit required for trapping in salmonid habitat. In coordination with Padilla Bay NERR, staff sent European green crab samples from Drayton Harbor, Samish Bay, and Padilla Bay to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution for genetics processing.

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones: Staff added the first round of new Voluntary No Anchor Zone sites (chosen and managed by partners in the Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup) to Garmin's Active Captain virtual platform. The VNAZ additions included eleven virtual sites in Washington, six sites shared from partners in BC and two sites in the San Juan Islands that have physical buoys.

Derelict Vessels: There is no activity as we wait for the new interagency agreement with WA Department of Natural Resources to be executed.

SoundIQ: Updated kelp data was uploaded in the main SIQ map and established it as source for Kelp Story Map data. Display adjustments were made to Forage Fish Map page and



Commission staff highlights - [January 2026]

historic survey MRC Forage Fish egg sampling data are now brought into the SIQ display directly from WDFW online data service.

Operations

Staff: Allie has returned in January part time and in a flexible schedule. Dana has returned part time as of January, working a Wednesday through Friday schedule.

Budget: The US Fish and Wildlife Service grant and the 2023-25 grant from Puget Sound Partnership (EPA funds) ended as of 12/31/2025 and final reporting and billing is in process.

Communications: Commission staff are working on finalizing the 2025 Impact Report with the goal of release mid-end of January. Staff have begun 2026 Commission communications planning with a small communications committee.

Contracts and grants: The new interagency agreement with WA Department of Natural Resources is still pending in the Ecology contracts office.

Broad Community Engagement: NW Straits Commission staff continue to discuss community engagement and the Community Connectivity Analysis tool, with plans to introduce the tool to Clallam MRC. Lucas, Allie, and Caitlyn attended a recruitment meeting with Clallam MRC staff and members on Jan. 29.

Other Meetings Attended

Jan 14 - Washington Internal Communications Roundtable (Jessica)

Jan 8 – PSEMP Salmon (Jeff)

Jan 9 – Bowman Bay Seining with NWS Foundation (Lucas)

Jan 12, 26 – Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program Management Team (Lucas)

Jan 16 – PSEMP Nearshore (Jeff, Dana, Leah)

Jan 28 – Ecology supervisor support presentation delivery (Lucas)

Jan 28 - Ocean Biodiversity Listening Session: Puget Sound (Dana, Jeff)

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Clallam

Month/Year: December 2025

Submitted by: Amelia Kalagher

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

- The Clallam MRC submitted a comment letter to County officials on the draft County comprehensive plan changes.
- Two members joined the MRC: Tim Cochnauer (returning member representing the community at large) and Rob Casey (representing marine related recreation & tourism).

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

- Two members joined the MRC: Tim Cochnauer (returning member representing the community at large) and Rob Casey (representing marine related recreation & tourism).
- Member Mike Doherty (representing Commissioner's District III) resigned from the MRC.
- Alternate Ray Kirk (representing the community at large) is concluding his term December 31st and has chosen not to be reappointed to another MRC term.

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

- The MRC held its regular monthly meeting on Monday, December 15th.

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

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

- *Olympia oysters*: Olympia oyster populations at the Sequim Bay restoration site were surveyed in May 2025. The next annual population monitoring will likely be scheduled for late spring 2026.
- *Forage fish*: Forage fish sampling continues at Elwha Beach, Cline Spit and Ediz Hook. Returning member Tim Cochnauer will be the site lead for Cline Spit.
- *Pinto abalone*: Final pinto abalone survey dives for 2025 took place in late September and October in the Port Angeles subregion. Multiple abalone were found.
- *Kelp monitoring*: Kelp monitoring for summer 2025 concluded in September. Planning for the 2026 kelp monitoring season will commence in winter/spring.
- *Pigeon guillemots*: Pigeon guillemot monitoring for summer 2025 concluded in September. Planning for the 2026 pigeon guillemot monitoring season will commence in winter/spring.
- *Education – outreach cards*: MRC members continued supplying local eateries and community establishments with educational outreach cards featuring information on local marine life.
- *Education – displays*: MRC members continued developing new displays for outreach at local festivals.
- *Education – oil spill response*: The HAZWOPER refresher and oiled wildlife training was offered in April 2025. The next round of training will likely be planned for spring 2026.
- *Elwha Beach*: Clallam MRC continued to steward the beach at the mouth of the Elwha River, with sponsorship of a Sanikan and dog waste bin through a North Olympic Development Council grant and MRC alternate Dann May replenishing the dog waste bags.

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

- The Clallam MRC submitted a comment letter to County officials on the draft changes to the County Comprehensive Plan.
- A derelict sailboat at Elwha Beach (Place Rd) came to the MRC's attention in November through member Allyce Miller, and the vessel is now being removed (expected December 31) by DNR through a contractor. The MRC was not involved in a formal capacity; MRC staff and members both helped facilitate the connections that got this vessel prioritized for removal.

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

None this month.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Clallam

Month/Year: January 2026

Submitted by: Amelia Kalagher

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

- The MRC gave a presentation to Peninsula College students and community members in the College's "Studium Generale" lecture series on January 22nd, describing the Clallam MRC and its work. MRC member Nancy Stephanz was the speaker, followed by Q&A with additional members.
- A derelict sailboat at Elwha Beach (Place Rd) came to the MRC's attention in November through member Allyce Miller, and the vessel was removed on December 31st through DNR's derelict vessel program. The MRC was not involved in a formal capacity; MRC staff and members both helped facilitate the connections that got this vessel prioritized for removal.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): none to report.

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

- The MRC will hold its regular monthly meeting on Monday, January 26th. Guest speaker Dr. Chris Bassett will present his work on interactions between animals and a small tidal turbine.

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

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

- *Olympia oysters*: The next annual population survey of Olympia oysters will likely be scheduled for late spring 2026.
- *Forage fish*: Forage fish sampling continues at Elwha Beach, Cline Spit and Ediz Hook.
- *Pinto abalone*: The MRC is in early planning stages for pinto abalone survey dives to be conducted in 2026.
- *Kelp monitoring*: Planning for the 2026 kelp monitoring season will commence in winter/spring 2026.
- *Pigeon guillemots*: Planning for the 2026 pigeon guillemot monitoring season will commence in winter/spring 2026.
- *Education – outreach cards*: MRC members continued supplying local eateries and community establishments with educational outreach cards featuring information on local marine life.
- *Education – displays*: MRC members continued developing new displays for outreach at local festivals.
- *Education – oil spill response*: A HAZWOPER / oiled wildlife response training is being planned for 2026, likely in spring.
- *Elwha Beach*: Clallam MRC continued to steward the beach at the mouth of the Elwha River, with sponsorship of a Sanikan and dog waste bin through a North Olympic Development Council grant and MRC alternate Dann May replenishing the dog waste bags.

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

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

At the derelict boat removal, member Rob Casey took videos rather than still photos.

[DNR removing a derelict boat from the mouth of the Elwha River, Port Angeles, Wa. 12/31/2025 - YouTube](#)

Project: Not an MRC project – the MRC was indirectly involved in the removal of this derelict vessel at Elwha Beach.

Photo credit: [Rob Casey](#)

Additional info: This video was taken by MRC member Rob Casey, a professional photographer, and shared to his business YouTube channel.

[Derelict boat being towed after being removed at the Elwha River mouth, Port Angeles, Wa -12/31/2025](#)

Project: Not an MRC project – the MRC was indirectly involved in the removal of this derelict vessel at Elwha Beach.

Photo credit: [Rob Casey](#)

Additional info: This video was taken by MRC member Rob Casey, a professional photographer, and shared to his business YouTube channel.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Island

Month/Year: December / 2025

Submitted by: Elise Adams

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

- Long-time environmental steward, Commissioner Janet St. Clair, had rejoined the Island County MRC as the Board of County Commissioners representative beginning January 1!
- The IC MRC December meeting invited Hakai Institute researcher, Dr. Melanie Prentice, to present on her recent research regarding sea star wasting disease. These findings have been reported on throughout the world and Dr. Prentice highlighted that sea stars from our very own Northwest Straits area were used in this research!

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): Long-time members, Scott Chase and Barbara Bennett, are departing Island County in December. We will miss them and the role they play in Island County marine stewardship but have no doubt that they will still be apart of what makes our volunteers so great!

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

Previous Meetings/Events:

- Dec 2: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Dec 8: Education and Outreach – Plankton Day at South Whidbey Schools ALE Program

Upcoming Meetings/Events:

- Jan 6: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Jan 14: WA Kelp Research & Monitoring Work Group – Winter 2026
- Jan 15: Historical Kelp in North Puget Sound Meeting
- Feb 3: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Feb 7: Sound Waters University
- Mar 12: 2026 Island County MRC Annual Retreat

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

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

Island County and DEI:

- The Island County Board of County Commissioners is working with the Island County Human Resources department to streamline the board and committee new member application process. Island County MRC staff will begin to accept new member applications and wait for further Island County guidance.

Island County Comprehensive Plan:

- The Island County Planning Department posted their final round of Comprehensive Plan draft elements for a 6-day public comment period on December 10th. The Island County MRC policy-subcommittee will work to streamline the MRC's response, working the MRC members to

understand the current draft and respond to the most crucial marine elements prior to the deadline. IC MRC will be happy to report back any major themes or comments for other county MRC and NWSC awareness.

Monitoring – Forage Fish:

- We have continued our year-round monitoring for forage fish eggs with teams conducting monthly monitoring at our Whidbey Island and Camano Island sites.

Education and outreach:

- MRC Staff joined the education and outreach lead at the South Whidbey ALE (South Whidbey Alternative Programs) to host the Fall plankton day. Students looked through their microscopes of Puget Sound samples retrieved at Admiralty Bay and in Langley to see what types of plankton they could identify. Students were tasked with identifying the different types of plankton, hypothesizing how seasonality may affect plankton density, and learning more about how plankton effect the greater Puget Sound food web and health. Students who participated in the 12/8 lab will join the MRC staff and education volunteers in Spring to see if their hypothesis about plankton was true and see how plankton density shifts throughout the year.

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



Island County MRC Chair, Jill Lipoti, celebrates long-time member Barbara Bennett's accomplishments during her three terms and many policy successes while on the MRC!

Photo by Elise Adams

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Island

Month/Year: January / 2025

Submitted by: Elise Adams

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

- Kelly Webb has begun her new term as Island County MRC Chair – Congrats, Kelly!
- The Island County planning department has released the Island County Comprehensive Plan draft elements, which include a section on both natural resources and climate, for public comment. IC MRC has been working diligently to attend public meetings, work sessions, and to submit their final public comment prior to the early February deadline.

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

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

Previous Meetings/Events:

- Jan 6: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Jan 14: WA Kelp Research & Monitoring Work Group – Winter 2026
- Jan 15: Historical Kelp in North Puget Sound Meeting
- Jan 15: January SRTCC Meeting

Upcoming Meetings/Events:

- Feb 3: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Feb 7: Sound Waters University
- Feb 19: February SRTCC Meeting
- Mar 3: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Mar 12: 2026 Island County MRC Annual Retreat
- April 7: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Early April: Island County MRC Forage Fish Community-Based Research Meeting

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

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

Island County Comprehensive Plan:

- The Island County Planning Department has posted their final round of Comprehensive Plan draft elements for a 60-day public comment period that began on December 10th. The Island County MRC policy-subcommittee has worked to streamline the MRC's response, working the MRC members to understand the current draft and respond to the most crucial marine elements prior to the deadline. On Wednesday, January 14th, the Island County Board of County Commissioners met during their weekly work session to discuss the natural resource and climate themed elements of the Comprehensive Plan draft. MRC members were in attendance as the IC BOCC and the IC Planning Department presented, discussed and questioned the most recent elements of the draft. Following the work session, IC MRC will continue to work towards

submitting a robust public comment for continued IC consideration. IC MRC will be happy to report back any major themes or comments for other county MRC and NWSC awareness.

Monitoring – Forage Fish & Forage Fish community-based research:

- We have continued our year-round monitoring for forage fish eggs with teams conducting monthly monitoring at our Whidbey Island and Camano Island sites.
- IC MRC forage fish lead, Kirk Larsen, has begun planning, coordinating, and preparing for Spring's forage fish community-based research workshop. Kirk is working with fellow MRC members and community partners to coordinate the upcoming workshop and determine the agenda, invite list, and goals for its completion.

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

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Jefferson

Month/Year: December 2025

Submitted by: Katie Kowal

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

- At our December meeting, the MRC voted in a new Chair – Emily Buckner, Vice Chair – Neil Harrington, and NWSC Rep Alt – Sarah Fisken. Voting for the NWSC Rep will take place at the January MRC meeting.
- For the bull kelp monitoring project, the Coordinator received confirmation from Jefferson County that MRC volunteers (MRC members and general public volunteers) are covered by the county's liability insurance.

- **Membership/Leadership changes** (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): At our December meeting, the MRC voted in a new Chair – Emily Buckner, Vice Chair – Neil Harrington, and NWSC Rep Alt – Sarah Fisken. Two members, Jeff Taylor and Brenda Johnson, were nominated for the NWSC Rep position, and voting resulted in a tie. Voting for the NWSC Rep position will take place again at the January MRC meeting.

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

Past Events/Meetings

December 2 - MRC Monthly Meeting

December 8 – E+O subcommittee Name badge meeting

December 8 – NWSF Shoreline Friendly Workshop

December 16 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

Upcoming Events/Meetings

January 6 - MRC Monthly Meeting

January 20 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

January TBD – Olympia Oyster subcommittee meeting

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): OTGP-2026 agreement finalized and in process for county approval.

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

- Monitoring:
 - **Forage fish - Dabob Bay (Index):** Sarah Fisken will not sample Dabob Bay in December at the suggestion of WDFW due to significant winds/storm activity, and will sample again in January 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Quilcene Marina:** Sarah Fisken will not sample Quilcene Marina in December at the suggestion of WDFW due to significant winds/storm activity, and will sample again in January 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Fort Worden:** Coordinator is in communication with NWSC staff and proposed project lead Janette Mestre to discuss potential for adding this sampling site in 2026. Details of WDFW availability and project scope are in process.
 - **Shoreline Landowner:** Nothing to report.
 - **Kelp kayak monitoring:** Coordinator received confirmation from Jefferson County that MRC volunteers (MRC members and general public volunteers) are covered by the county's liability insurance.
- Rain Gardens:
 - Project lead has contracted a gardener to provide maintenance to several rain gardens through the end of the year, focused on thistle and grass removal, and mulching. Coordinator met with WSU Extension Master Gardener Coordinator to identify ways to streamline the volunteer coordination process and perform rain garden assessments in spring 2026.
 - Additional signage was ordered to replace missing/broken signage at several rain gardens.
- Education & Outreach:
 - Group met to discuss ordering name badges.
- Olympia Oysters:
 - 2026 Oly QAPP and USACE Permit Compliance report are in review with the project lead.
- Voluntary No-Anchor Zones:
 - NAZ team is working to find a good low tide during daylight to swap summer and winter buoys at the Port Townsend Waterfront.

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

The MRC was asked by DNR to write a Letter of Recommendation in support of the Dabob Bay Natural Area - Trust Land Transfer. An ad-hoc subcommittee formed at the November monthly meeting and will draft a letter for review by the MRC at the January meeting.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info): All photos taken by Katie Kowal unless otherwise noted.

No photos were taken this reporting period.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Jefferson

Month/Year: January 2026

Submitted by: Katie Kowal

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

- At our January meeting, the MRC voted in a new NWSC Rep— Brenda Johnson.
- Two applicants were interviewed for the two open Local Youth member positions. It's expected both applicants will be offered positions, and if they accept, will begin at the February and March monthly meetings.

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

At our January meeting, the MRC voted in a new NWSC Rep – Brenda Johnson. Two applicants were interviewed for the two open Local Youth positions by Emily Buckner and Katie Kowal. Applicants will be reviewed with the Executive Committee on January 20. It's expected both applicants will be offered positions, and if they accept, will begin at the February and March monthly meetings.

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

Past Events/Meetings

January 6 - MRC Monthly Meeting

January 13 – Two MRC Local Youth member interviews

January 20 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

January 23 – Kelp Project Lead Knowledge Transfer meeting

January 23 – Olympia Oyster subcommittee meeting

January 26 – MRC Kelp Kayak review meeting

January TBD – Forage Fish sampling (Quilcene + Dabob)

Upcoming Events/Meetings

February 3 - MRC Monthly Meeting

February 17 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

February 25 – MRC Staff Lead meeting

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): OTGP-2026 agreement finalized and in process for county approval.

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

- Monitoring:
 - **Forage fish - Dabob Bay (Index):** Sarah Fisken will sample in late January 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Quilcene Marina:** Sarah Fisken will sample in late January 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Fort Worden:** Coordinator is in communication with NWSC staff and proposed project lead Janette Mestre to discuss potential for adding this sampling site in 2026. Details of WDFW availability and project scope are in process. (Same update as December 2025)
 - **Shoreline Landowner:** Nothing to report.
 - **Kelp kayak monitoring:** Coordinator, past Project Lead Emily Buckner, and new Project Lead Jon Waggoner will meet on January 23 to discuss project needs and timeline for 2026.
- Rain Gardens:
 - Coordinator and Project lead will meet with WSU Extension Master Gardener Coordinator to schedule rain garden assessments in March.
 - Signage is planned to be replaced at several rain gardens.
- Education & Outreach:
 - Subcommittee meeting will be scheduled to complete 2026-27 E+O Outreach Plan by end of February.
- Olympia Oysters:
 - 2026 Oly QAPP is in review with the project lead.
 - Subcommittee will meet on January 23 to discuss 2026 workplan and permit renewals.
- Voluntary No-Anchor Zones:
 - Nothing to report.

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

The MRC was asked by DNR to write a Letter of Recommendation in support of the Dabob Bay Natural Area - Trust Land Transfer. An ad-hoc subcommittee formed at the November monthly meeting and a letter was approved by the MRC at the January meeting. BOCC Representative Heidi Eisenhour will submit the letter for BOCC approval at an upcoming BOCC meeting.

Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photo credit and additional info): All photos taken by Katie Kowal unless otherwise noted.

No photos were taken this reporting period.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: San Juan County

Month/Year: December 2025

Submitted by: Sam Whitridge & Katie Johnson

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

- Derelict Vessel prevention efforts continue with shore-based patrols, response after storms and an upcoming end of life planning for your vessel poster campaign.
- The MRC retreated in December to celebrate accomplishments and plan for the upcoming year. A day of discussion and camaraderie was productive and enjoyable to learn and collaborate as a committee.
- The benthic habitat study has wrapped up providing incredible data about the seafloor of Lopez channel. The results of this study will help influence future vessel management throughout the islands, keeping critical habitats safe and encourage positive boating behaviors.

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

None to report

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

- November 25th – PFSS Subcommittee Meeting
- December 4th – MRC Retreat
- January 6th – Upcoming MRC Meeting

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

None to report.

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

Derelict vessel patrols have continued. With intense wind, rain and storms our DV coordinator has been busy responding to incidents. Work has continued to follow-up with vessel of concern owners, as well as help get boats into DNR's VTiP. Unfortunately, the county boat is broken so more shore-based surveys will be conducted. The MRC is soon launching an end-of-vessel-life campaign to help ease the transition of boat loss. Several flyers have been created, and a social media campaign will be coming out soon. This theme has been a fun and interesting way to honor people's boats and the deep connection they have; while realizing it might be time to let them go.

The MRC met at the Friday Harbor Labs in early December for an annual retreat. It was a great opportunity to connect with new and seasoned members to celebrate the accomplishments of the past year and review plans for 2026. Highlights from the MRC retreat sub-committee presentations on accomplishments from the previous year, as well as discussed ideas for 2026, an in-depth discussion about fundraising and supporting marine work moving into the future, and introductions from the new youth representatives. The afternoon included presentations from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory on the environmental effects of marine renewable energy and from SMRU consulting about tidal energy impacts on marine mammals. These presentations are greater background and knowledge for the MRC in evaluating the potential tidal energy project from OPALCO. Also, MRC members enjoyed a brief tour of the sea star lab during lunch.

Planning is underway for Plastic Free Salish Sea engagement in 2026 with youth through MRC youth representatives. The Spring Great Islands Cleanup will happen the weekend of April 18th just before Earth Day. We are looking forward to working with the SJI Yacht club to reach outer islands which are much more difficult to get to than the four ferry served islands, yet often see issues of debris after winter storm season.

The benthic habitat mapping study is now complete and we have been able to collect an extremely rich dataset on the benthic habitats of Lopez Sound. Highlights include detailed mapping of significant eelgrass beds, clear

anthropogenic features like cables crossing the sound and abundant buried fishing gear, dynamic bedforms in high-current areas, and diverse habitats in the shallow waters of Lopez Sound. We are working with our contractors to complete the final report by the end of December. This project has also provided a wonderful educational opportunity for two senior Marine and Coastal Sciences students, and two entire classes of Seafloor Mapping and Marine Geology students at WWU. The information gathered throughout this project will help inform future vessel management in the Islands, with the ultimate goals of preserving sensitive and critical habitats and supporting a positive boating experience. The MRC plans to host a presentation on this project at our February MRC meeting.

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

In early December Jane Fuller and other County Councilors met once again with the Islands Trust of BC, Canada to discuss transboundary issues including ferries, emergency response towing vessel (ERTV) and oil spill response, and potential impacts from the upcoming FIFA world cup in summer 2026. The meeting was mutually beneficial and a great touch point for island communities in the Salish Sea. Together, the councils will establish a political working group to address regional oil spill response.

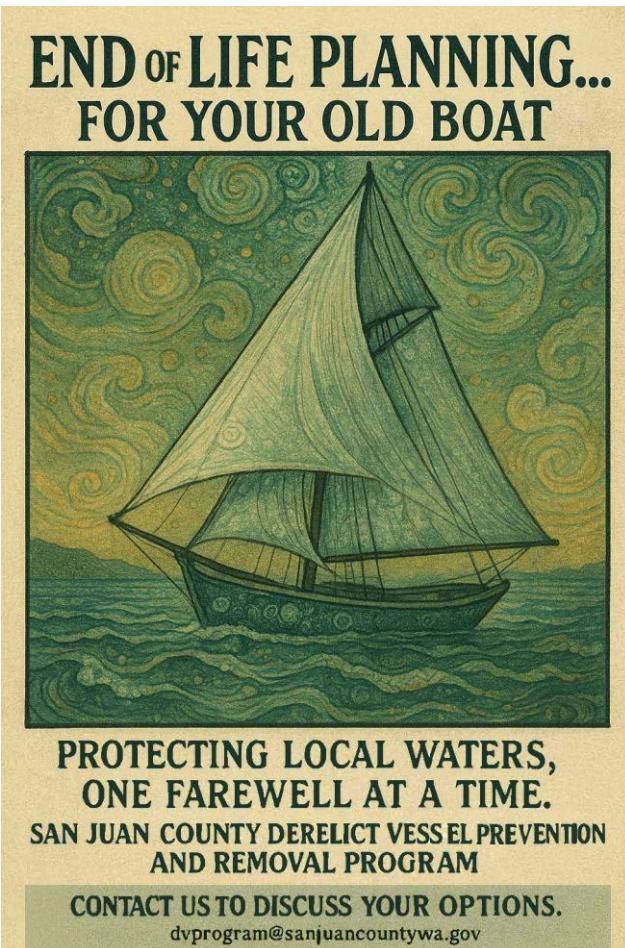
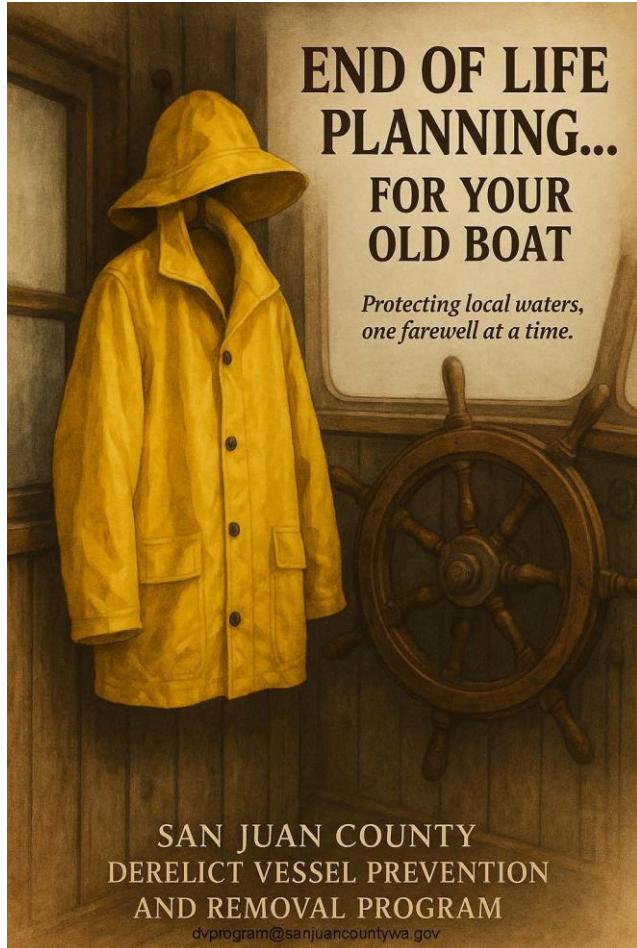
Photos (photos of recent projects or members—include project, photos and additional info):



MRC Members and staff at the annual retreat. Photo by Pema Kitaff



Sea Star lab tour during MRC retreat. Photos by Katie Johnson



End-of-life planning for your vessel fliers. Be on the lookout for the upcoming campaign! By Kari Koski

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: San Juan County

Month/Year: January 2026

Submitted by: Sam Whitridge & Katie Johnson

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

- Jane Fuller will no longer serve as the County Council liaison to the MRC as the County Council rotates advisory committees annually. We appreciate the service of Council Member Fuller and look forward to working with Kari McVeigh in the upcoming year.
- The MRC workplan and subcommittees were confirmed at the January meeting, resulting in two new areas of focus: sustainable funding and vessel impacts & infrastructure.

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

In January of each year, the San Juan County Council rotates advisory committee roles so that each council member can participate and engage with different advisory groups. As such, Jane Fuller will no longer serve as the County Council liaison to the MRC. Council member Kari McVeigh will be joining the committee for the year of 2026. We are grateful for Council Member Fuller's leadership and support throughout 2025 and look forward to working with Council Member McVeigh as the new liaison. Having multiple council members familiar with the work and priorities of the MRC will be a greater asset to progressing MRC projects.

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

- January 6th – MRC Meeting
- January 26 – OTGP kick off meeting
- January 30 – NWSC Meeting
- January 31- February 7 – Seattle Boat Show
- February 5th – Next MRC Meeting

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

None to report.

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

Winter is typically a slow time for our MRC as many of our projects and outreach events occur in the summer months around the boating season. During January the MRC approved its workplan and subcommittees for 2026. Two new ad-hoc groups were formed at the MRC retreat in December. Recognizing that federal funding levels can fluctuate over time, the MRC is taking proactive steps to explore sustainable funding approaches that support marine program continuity and resilience. The second new subcommittee will focus on vessel impacts and infrastructure needs. Rising concerns about impacts to marine habitats and resources include cruise ships, mooring buoys, and potential increases in vessel traffic due to the FIFA World Cup in 2026.

Due to costs doubling for use of the county vessel this year, on the water derelict vessel surveys have been delayed. Currently the DV coordinator and MRC member volunteers are conducting shore-based surveys at marinas and responding to any reports. Winter is typically a good time for patrols as there are more residential vessels instead of visitors and it is easier to discern whether a vessel is abandoned without the influx of travelers. We are currently looking into other options for rent for on the water patrols.

In late January, the MRC plans to support the Be Whale Wise booth at the Seattle Boat Show. Connecting with the public about whale safety and vessel regulations remains a priority for marine stewardship. This show is typically well attended, and many folks stop by the booth to receive whale flags.

Plastic Free Salish Sea subcommittee is currently working out a meeting schedule for the year with the hopes of a planning session early in February. The Great Islands Cleanup is scheduled for April 18th. Discussions with the San

Juan Island Yacht Club for increased participation and further reach have started. This is an exciting partnership we hope to continue and expand to other marine and boater related issues.

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

At the January meeting, OPALCO shared an update to their tidal energy generation project. The MRC has been following the project proposal through presentations, community meetings, and document review over the past year. The MRC exemplified their advisory role in providing the County Council with thoughtful questions about potential impacts to the marine environment, delicate resources and the native species that live therein. Russel Guerry of OPALCO stated that the project is currently paused pending grant funding from FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission). If funding is awarded to OPALCO their board will decide if the pilot project will continue, and it will be a multi-year process to complete the proper permitting.

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

None to share at this time.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: December/2025

Submitted by: Tracy/Lynne

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

- **La Conner School Rain Garden-** We planted an additional 25 native plants during an atmospheric river event on December 10th. Plant ID signs and temporary seasonal irrigation kit supplies have been purchased. The rain garden irrigation kit will be stored at the county office and will be available for the MRC to use for other projects.
- **Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment-** The final Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment - High Priority Area Technical Report was completed December 5th and has been uploaded to EAGL and the Skagit MRC website. Phil Bloch will present the report at the January 8th MRC meeting.
- **Bowman Bay Beach Seining-** November 19 seining results: 3,530 total fish caught. 3 staghorn sculpin, 5 English sole, 1 penpoint gunnel, 1 threespine stickleback and a whopping 3,520 Pacific herring!! 9 volunteers contributed a total of 16.5 volunteer hours.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): None

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

- **Dec 10- La Conner School Rain Garden-** Planting party.
- **Dec 11- Monthly MRC Meeting-** 9am-11am, via Teams. The in-person meeting was cancelled due to the ongoing flooding situation. Birdie Davenport presented the Friends of the Salish Sea's Biodiversity project.
- **Jan 8- Monthly MRC Meeting-** 9am-11am, via Teams. Phil Bloch, Confluence- will present the Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment High Priority Areas Technical Report.
- **Jan 8- Salish Sea Stewards Training Working Group Meeting-** 2:30pm via Teams.
- **Jan 9- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Volunteer Appreciation Lunch.** Final beach seining event at Bowman Bay starts at 11am. Lunch starts at noon. The event was originally scheduled for December 12 but had to be rescheduled due to ongoing flooding.

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

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

- Salish Sea Stewards – Dale Fournier:
 - December 4th- Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Working Group meeting held virtually via Teams to continue planning the 2025 - 2026 SSS Training Season and curriculum.
 - The training classes will be held Tuesdays at Padilla Bay from 1pm-5pm starting February 10th through April 14th (unless an 11th session is needed).
 - Most of the speakers and topics for the curriculum have been set. Erin is working on confirming presenters. Pete is also reaching out to additional salmon speakers.
 - On April 14th, Graduation Day, there will be a panel of MRC members to help the participants understand the role of the MRC.
 - Registration for the 2026 SSS Training Class opened on December 1st and runs through January 31st. Registration forms are available on the MRC website [here](#). 26 spots available. First come first served basis. For more information, go to the Skagit MRC

website. Please help spread the word!. <https://www.skagitmrc.org/projects/salish-sea-stewards/>. As of December 9th, we have 8 participants registered!

- Flyers have been distributed to local libraries and businesses. It is also being promoted on websites and social media.
- Our next meeting is January 8th, 2026, at 2:30. This will be another virtual meeting.

- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:

- Skagit MRC has a subaward agreement with the Salish Sea School for Catherine Houck to coordinate the monthly forage fish monitoring at 7 Skagit MRC restoration and index sites. WDFW Index Sites: Guemes Channel Index, Lovrics Assessment, Samish Index, Similk Bay Index. Restoration Sites: Bowman Bay, Clayton Beach, and Similk Restore.
- December forage fish surveys had to be rescheduled for later in the month due to flooding and safety concerns.
- The 2025 Forage Fish Monitoring Report is now complete.
- The January 2026 Forage Fish Survey Schedule is as follows:

Date	Time	Location	Notes
Jan. 9	2:15PM	BOWMAN BAY	Meet at the main parking area, near the little restroom/kayak rental. Discover Pass Required. NOTE: Follows NW Straits Foundation final Bowman Bay seining and celebration
Jan. 23	1:30 PM	GUEMES CHANNEL	Meet at the end of Edwards Way at the Ship Harbor Preserve. Bring samples to Fidalgo Bay Resort (Samish RV Park) to process.
Jan. 23	1:00 PM	SIMILK BAY	Meet at small pullout on the east side of Reservation Rd, about 1 mile south of Hwy 20-Reservation Rd intersection. Bring samples to Fidalgo Bay Resort (Samish RV Park) to process.
Jan. 23	2:00 PM	Fidalgo Bay Resort	Process samples from Skagit MRC sites (Samish Index, Similk Restore, Lovrics)

- Kids on the Beach- Pete Haase:

- Allen Elementary is now formally a bilingual school so there have been shifts with some of the teachers who aren't bilingual including one of the teachers who has participated in the KOTB in the past. She is now with Edison Elementary School. Because of this recent shift, Allen Elementary School will not be participating in the 2026 KOTB spring program. Annie hopes they will participate in the future, but it will depend on the interest of teachers in participating in the program.
- Emma Chuang (PBNERR AmeriCorps) will help with the spring program. There will be calls out to volunteers to help with field activities.
- Spring 2026 KOTB program is as follows-
 - Edison Elementary: 3 classes 5th graders 65 students, April 27-May 1
 - Evergreen Elementary, Sedro-Wolley: 92 6th graders, April 13-17
 - Concrete High School: 90 students, May 18 -22

- Intertidal Monitoring (2026)- Pete Haase:

- Early in the planning process.
- Funding for the project doesn't start until January 1, 2026.
- Working on modifying DNR's intertidal monitoring QAPP to meet Ecology's requirements with help from Sasha.
- Intertidal monitoring is anticipated to take place in the summer of 2026 in Fidalgo Bay. It will be dependent on permits, protocols, availability of experts, etc.
- Pete is in communication with Whatcom and Jefferson MRCs who are also investigating the possibility of intertidal monitoring.

- La Conner School Rain Garden – Tracy Alker/Lynne Wenberg-Davidson

- The interpretive sign donated by Westar Solutions has been installed in by the School Facilities Dept.
- Lynne developed and implemented an upgraded rain garden plan that was approved by the school.

- Lynne, Tracy, and the county intern Halee installed 25 additional native plants in December.
 - Purchased plant identification signs that will be installed in the spring.
 - Purchased supplies for an irrigation kit that will be installed after school is closed for summer break and will be removed when school starts back in the fall.
 - The Final Report deliverable has been completed.
- Fidalgo Bay Day –Tracy Alker:
 - Received feedback from 14 participating outreach booths in an online survey. 100% of the respondents thought that Fidalgo Bay Day was worthwhile and was successful in increasing public awareness of the marine environment, fostering stewardship, and nurturing partnerships. Unfortunately, there was no interest in planning or coordinating Fidalgo Bay Day in 2026.
 - A Fidalgo Bay Day debrief meeting with Jenn Dumas, the 2025 FBD Event Coordinator and Anna Thompson, county outreach staff, was originally scheduled for December 17 but cancelled due to the ongoing flooding event. The meeting will be rescheduled in February to review lessons learned, outreach booth survey results, and discuss options for a potential 2026 FBD event.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Paul met with staff from Shannon Point Marine Center (SPMC) and PSRF at Shannon Point to discuss the possibility of establishing an abalone grow-out facility at Shannon Point to increase the propagation of juvenile abalone for future outplants. It looks like SPMC is actively seeking funding to accomplish this.
 - Paul attended the 2025 Abalone Partner's Meeting on December 2nd at Fisherman's Terminal in Seattle. Gave a short presentation on the history and status of Skagit MRC's abalone restoration project. Others giving presentations represented the following: WDFW, PSRF, Seattle Aquarium, Samish Indian Nation, Clallam MRC, Makah Tribe, SPMC, Lummi Nation, WWU and UW. Breakout sessions looked at many of the factors affecting abalone restoration in the Salish Sea and what the future may hold.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Paul provided a summary for the Skagit County Historical Museum (in La Conner) on Skagit MRC's native oyster restoration efforts and outcomes in Fidalgo Bay. This information will be part of an oyster exhibit being planned for the Museum in the near future. Other groups are also providing information related to their oyster restoration projects and areas of interest.
 - Paul connected with Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) to forward oyster settlement shell strings collected from two sites in Fidalgo Bay in 2025 to monitor recruitment.
 - Jude reported that PBNERR has been doing some outplanting at test plots in Big Indian Slough and Padilla Bay. This is the first year they've seen natural recruitment! They now have an estimated 65,000 Olympia oysters in a 110 square meter area thanks to an initial contribution of shell from Skagit MRC several years ago. PBNERR is part of the Native Olympia Oyster Collaborative for the west coast. The Native Olympia Oyster Collaborative recently published the [Olympia Oyster Restoration Story Map](#).
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Skagit surveys generally take place from June-September each year and include the following sites: Coffin Rocks (Steven Olsen - Lead), Biz Point (John Freeto - Lead), Shannon Point east/west (Lynne Wenberg - Lead) and new "Lone Tree Point" (Steven Olsen – Lead).

 - 2025 Season is now complete. All of the Skagit bull kelp survey data has been uploaded into Kobo toolbox.
 - NWSC Skagit MRC Kelp Monitoring Data Review – November 17 (team leads)
 - Bull Kelp resilience and loss in the Salish Sea: results of an HSIL funded project – November 18.

- Performed a boat-based survey to observe and take photos of Skagit Bay kelp beds in support of possible Puget Sound Restoration Fund research on winter kelp beds.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining—Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Beach seining at Bowman Bay is funded by the SMRC for 2024-2025 with Jason Morgan as the NWSF Lead Scientist.
 - Beach seining occurs monthly at Bowman Bay with NWSF through December 2025.
 - The very LAST beach seining event at Bowman Bay was supposed to take place this Friday, December 12 followed by a Thank You luncheon for Bowman Bay restoration monitoring volunteers (beach seining and forage fish monitoring) hosted by the NWSF. However, the event was cancelled due to ongoing flooding concerns. The was rescheduled for January 9th.
 - Skagit MRC has provided a “photage” thank you email to same list of volunteers.
 - The Bowman Bay Beach Seining Final Report will be completed in March, 2026 after the data has been entered and analyzed.
 - November 19 seining results: 3,530 total fish caught. 3 staghorn sculpin, 5 English sole, 1 penpoint gunnel, 1 threespine stickleback and a whopping 3,520 Pacific herring!! 9 volunteers contributed a total of 16.5 volunteer hours.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance—Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC funding for this project ended December 31, 2025, and will not continue in 2026.
 - The final planting party and stewardship event was held October 15 at 10 am as part of Orca Recovery Week hosted by the NWSF.
 - The Northwest Straits Foundation staff completed the Final Report.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Project closed December 31, 2025.
 - The NEAP Tool, Story Map, Data Dictionary, Prioritization Criteria and How-to Video are complete and available on the Skagit MRC website and SoundIQ2: <https://www.skagitmrc.org/projects/skagit-shoreline-needs-assessment/>
 - The final Skagit Co Shoreline Needs Assessment - High Priority Area Technical Report was completed December 5th and has been uploaded to EAGL and the Skagit MRC website. It has also been submitted to the Skagit MRC members and our partners for information and future project consideration. Phil Bloch has agreed to attend the January 8th MRC Monthly meeting to provide a summary and Q&A of Confluence’s proposed high potential restoration projects in Skagit.
 - Confluence supported the NWSC Annual Conference and Collaborative Networking Activity in La Conner on November 8 to showcase Skagit’s NEAP Tool functionality and capabilities.
- Derelict Crab Pot Removal (2026) – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Background:** A Derelict Crab Pot Removal project has been funded by Skagit MRC for 2026 to target derelict gear removals in Skagit Bay in collaboration with the Swinomish Tribe, Island MRC and NWSF. NWSF has secured funding from WDFW and The Builders Initiative Fund to support shellfish pot removal, including development of remotely operated vehicles, location-based phone app for reporting lost fishing nets, and a new public access derelict fishing gear database. Skagit MRC has funding for (6) side scan sonar surveys which will be a sole source contract with NWSF to perform the surveys in coordination with removals. Swinomish Tribe has provided a map indicating high priority derelict gear locations. Island MRC will be funding additional side scan sonar surveys and crabber outreach efforts.
 - **Updates:** We met with Jason Morgan and Ken Collins and Jeff Wheeler (Island MRC) several times in preparation for developing the 2026 statement of work, including establishing an Advisory Committee to support collaborative decision making. Grant

documentation is in process; once funds are received in January a sole source contract will be established with NWSF for Skagit MRC's portion of the project.

- **Derelict Crab Pot Outreach (2026) – Darla Gay Smith:**
 - Darla is working on the 2026 crabber outreach plan as part of the Derelict Crab Pot Removal and Prevention project. More information to come.

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

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

La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden, Interpretive Sign (Left) & Planting Event- Dec 10 (Right)
Photo: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson



Bowman Bay Beach Seining, Nov 19th– 3,520 Pacific Herring!
Photo: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson



MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: Jan/2026

Submitted by: Tracy/Lynne

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

- **Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Volunteer Appreciation - Jan 9th.** After 10 years of monitoring at this restoration site, the very last seining event was held at Bowman Bay on January 9. The seining event was followed by a volunteer appreciation luncheon hosted by the Northwest Straits Foundation for all volunteers involved in beach seining and forage fish monitoring at Bowman Bay. Skagit MRC provided a “photage” thank you email to same group of volunteers. The Foundation is in the process of analyzing the data and compiling it into a final report that will be shared with the MRC and volunteers. The report is anticipated to be completed in March.
- **Kids on the Beach- 2026 Spring Program Schedule** is as follows:
 - Edison Elementary: 3 classes 5th graders 65 students, April 27-May 1
 - Evergreen Elementary, Sedro-Wolley: 92 6th graders, April 13-17
 - Concrete High School: 90 students, May 18 -22A call to volunteers will be sent out to help with field days.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): Aaron Esterholt, City of Anacortes Stormwater Manager replaced Carolyn Moulton to represent the City of Anacortes on the MRC. Keven Anderson is stepping down as the Port of Anacortes representative on the MRC and is looking for someone else to fill that seat.

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

- **Jan 8- Monthly MRC Meeting-** 9am-11am, via Teams. Phil Bloch, Confluence- presented the Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment High Priority Areas Technical Report.
- **Jan 8- Salish Sea Stewards Training Working Group Meeting-** 2:30pm via Teams.
- **Jan 9- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Volunteer Appreciation Lunch.** Final beach seining event held at Bowman Bay followed by a volunteer appreciation lunch hosted by the Northwest Straits Foundation.
- **Jan 15- Historical Kelp Imagery in NE Puget Sound-** 1pm Zoom
- **Jan 19- Clayton Beach Stewardship Day-** hosted by Northwest Straits Foundation
- **Jan 26- 2025 MRC Kelp Monitoring Data Review- 1-3pm Zoom**
- **Jan 31- Deadline to register for the 2026 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program!**
- **Feb 5- Salish Sea Stewards Training Working Group Meeting -** 2:30pm via Teams.
- **Feb 10- 2026 Salish Sea Stewards Training starts!** 1-5pm at Padilla Bay
- **Feb 25- MRC/NWSC Staff Meeting** at Padilla Bay

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

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

- Salish Sea Stewards – Dale Fournier:
 - Jan 8th- Salish Sea Stewards Advisory Committee Working Group meeting held virtually via Teams to continue planning the 2026 SSS Training Season.
 - The training classes will be held Tuesdays at Padilla Bay from 1pm-5pm starting February 10th through April 14th.

- Registration for the 2026 SSS Training Class opened on December 1st and runs through January 31st. Registration forms are available on the MRC website [here](#). 26 spots available. First come first served basis. For more information, go to the Skagit MRC website. Please help spread the word! <https://www.skagitmrc.org/projects/salish-sea-stewards/>. As of January 8th, we have 13 participants registered.
- Speakers and topics for the curriculum have been set and confirmed.
- Flyers have been distributed to local libraries and businesses. It is also being promoted on websites and social media.
- Our next meeting will be held February 5, 2026, at 2:30pm. This will be another virtual meeting.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Skagit MRC has partnered with the Salish Sea School for Catherine Houck to coordinate the monthly forage fish monitoring at 7 Skagit MRC restoration and index sites. WDFW Index Sites: Guemes Channel Index, Lovrics Assessment, Samish Index, Similk Bay Index. Restoration Sites: Bowman Bay, Clayton Beach, and Similk Restore.
 - Forage fish surveys will continue at Bowman Bay for at least one more year even though the beach seining is now complete. Will need to determine if we want to keep doing it the way we have been at that location or if there are any changes we need to make.
 - This is the quiet time of year for forage fish spawning but will likely pick up again in late April or May.
 - The January 2026 Forage Fish Survey Schedule is as follows:
 - Jan 9- Bowman Bay at 2:15pm
 - Jan 23- Guemes Channel at 1:30pm
 - Jan 23- Similk Bay at 1pm
 - Jan 23- Fidalgo Bay Resort at 2pm to process samples
- Kids on the Beach- Pete Haase:
 - Spring 2026 KOTB program is as follows:
 - Edison Elementary: 3 classes 5th graders 65 students, April 27-May 1
 - Evergreen Elementary, Sedro-Wolley: 92 6th graders, April 13-17
 - Concrete High School: 90 students, May 18-22
- A call for volunteers will go out for help with field days as we get closer to the spring event.
- Intertidal Monitoring (2026)- Pete Haase:
 - This is a new MRC project that will be starting this year. Project used to be led by Re-Sources, but they are no longer able to continue.
 - Partnering with The Salish Sea School to do this project. Still working out the details.
 - Will use the same protocol and equipment that Re-Sources used. Working on modifying DNR's intertidal monitoring QAPP to meet Ecology's requirements.
 - Two intertidal monitoring events are being planned at two different locations. The first event is anticipated to take place in May 2026 in Fidalgo Bay. The second monitoring event is anticipated to take place in July. Monitoring will likely involve Anacortes High School's Environmental Science program and will depend on tides.
 - Pete attended a meeting with Whatcom MRC and Ecology to discuss if and what intertidal monitoring data might be useful in the event of an oil spill or another disaster. Ecology confirmed that intertidal monitoring data would be useful for understanding pre-spill baseline conditions.
- La Conner School Rain Garden – Tracy Alker/Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Grant funding for this project just ended December 31st. Funding was used to purchase 25 additional native plants, plant ID tags, supplies for a temporary irrigation kit, and the interpretive sign base and frame.
 - Halee (county intern), Lynne (MRC Project Lead), and Tracy (MRC staff) installed the plants in December.

- Lynne also installed most of the plant ID tags which look great! We will need to double-check in the spring when the plants start growing again to make sure we got the signs in the right place.
- The Rain Garden Irrigation Kit has been purchased and assembled into a large tote with wheels and is stored at the Skagit County office. The irrigation system will be installed in June after school is out and removed in August / September before school returns in session.
- The Final Report deliverable has been completed.
- A La Conner School Alumni with a landscaping business and kids about to start school recently reached out about volunteering to help with the school rain garden maintenance.
- Fidalgo Bay Day –Tracy Alker:
 - No updates. Scheduled a meeting in February to discuss options for possibly scaling back the event so it's less of a time commitment rather than eliminating it completely.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Not much going on this time of year other than routine culturing in the lab, spawning activities, and raising juvenile abalone for outplants in the next few months and planning for the field season.
 - Paul worked with Puget Sound Restoration Fund on drafting the abalone QAPP which has been submitted to Ecology for review.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel:
 - Not much is happening with native oysters right now. Field work to monitor annual recruitment levels using oyster shell bags will start up again in April or May. Will probably also work with Puget Sound Restoration Fund again to put out more shell strings again in Fidalgo Bay to monitor recruitment as part of a larger monitoring effort across Puget Sound.
 - Paul provided a summary for the Skagit County Historical Museum (in La Conner) on Skagit MRC's native oyster restoration efforts and outcomes in Fidalgo Bay. This information is now part of a new oyster exhibit at the museum for the next several months.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Skagit surveys generally take place from June-September each year and include the following sites: Coffin Rocks (Steven Olsen - Lead), Biz Point (John Freeto - Lead), Shannon Point east/west (Lynne Wenberg - Lead) and new "Lone Tree Point" (Steven Olsen – Lead).

 - 2025 Season is now complete. All of the Skagit bull kelp surveys were completed from June – September and uploaded into Kobotoolbox. Recent and upcoming events:
 - Lynne attended the Bull Kelp resilience and loss in the Salish Sea: results of an HSIL funded projects – November 18. Well attended (over 300 people?) and provided results of a wide variety of ongoing research projects – there is a ton of research going into trying to determine the factors driving bull kelp abundance and distribution. Interesting research showing a kelp bed around Narrows Bridge that is healthier than those in the Straits of Juan de Fuca for example!
 - HSIL Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy – public comment period Jan 5 – Feb 3
 - The Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy includes strategies for implementing research and monitoring to increase understanding of factors driving changes in abundance and distribution; improving implementation of regulatory and programmatic protections; increasing marine vegetation protected areas; supporting restoration efforts; and improving community connections to marine vegetation through sustainable harvest, responsible outdoor recreation and stewardship.
 - DNR's Historical Kelp in North Puget Sound Project Kick off – January 15 @ 1pm. This project is for leveraging historical imagery to assess floating kelp canopy changes over

30 years in northeastern Puget Sound. The kick off includes a review of the DNR 2022 kelp canopy classification map.

- Bull Kelp Surveys presentation scheduled at the SSS Training Program on March 10.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC funding for this project ended December 31, 2025.
 - The LAST beach seining event was rescheduled for Friday, January 9 – the December event was cancelled due to severe weather and flooding. NWSF hosted a Thank You luncheon for volunteers of both beach seining and forage fish monitoring at Bowman Bay for the last several years in support of the Shoreline Restoration work completed in 2015. Skagit MRC has provided a “photage” thank you email to same list of volunteers.
- Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - MRC funding for this project ended December 31, 2025. The Final Report has been completed.
 - The Parks Department and Northwest Straits Foundation are planning on some additional restoration work at Bowman Bay including removing the fishing pier, boat launch and riprap and restoring shoreline vegetation. The MRC and Salish Sea Stewards volunteers plan to stay involved and support the restoration work as those projects move forward.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Project concluded December 31, 2025.
 - Phil Bloch, Confluence Environmental presented details and fielded Q&A of the 5 High Priority shoreline restoration projects recommended from the assessment at the January 8 MRC meeting.
 - Plans are in the works to schedule a NEAP tool demonstration with the County GIS and Planning Departments and present to the County Commissioners.
- Derelict Crab Pot Removal (2026) – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Background:** A Derelict Crab Pot Removal project has been funded by Skagit MRC for 2026 to target derelict gear removals in Skagit Bay in collaboration with the Swinomish Tribe, Island MRC and NWSF. NWSF has secured funding from WDFW and The Builders Initiative Fund to support shellfish pot removal, including development of remotely operated vehicles, location-based phone app for reporting lost fishing nets, and a new public access derelict fishing gear database. Skagit MRC has funding for (6) side scan sonar surveys which will be a sole source contract with NWSF to perform the surveys in coordination with removals. Swinomish Tribe has provided a map indicating high priority derelict gear locations. Island MRC will be funding additional side scan sonar surveys and crabber outreach efforts.
 - **Updates:** The Skagit MRC and Northwest Straits Foundation are collaborating on the Statement of Work and a contract agreement for this project. NWSF cannot start any field work until a contract is in place. NWSF is working with WDFW to get those contracts in place as well.
- Derelict Crab Pot Outreach (2026) – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Darla is working on the 2026 crabber outreach plan as part of the Derelict Crab Pot Removal and Prevention project. The original plan was to hold two public Community Workshops in Anacortes in late May/early June and again in mid-August. But after interviewing several crabbers, it was determined that attendance would likely be too low for it to be beneficial. Instead, the outreach effort will likely be scaled back to focus on providing educational materials to crabbers at local sporting good stores, licensing venues, and social media posts.

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

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

Final Beach Seining Event at Bowman Bay- Jan 9, 2026!

Photos- Tracy Alker



Bowman Bay Beach Seining & Forage Fish Survey
Volunteers & Northwest Straits Foundation Staff

Bowman Bay Beach Seining Volunteers & Northwest Straits Foundation Staff



La Conner School Rain Garden Irrigation Kit
Photo: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson



La Conner School Rain Garden Native Plant Identification Signs
Photo: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson



MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Snohomish

Month/Year: Dec 2025

Submitted by: Cali Weber and Joycelyn Blue

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

- The Possession Sound marine water quality report cards are finished and posted on the MRC website.
- The 2026 Starlight Beach Walk in collaboration with the WSU Beach Watchers will be on January 28th.

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

The County is in the process of hiring for the Senior Planner staff position. Elisa is officially on maternity leave. Heidi Stewart will be replacing Natasha Coumou as the Tulalip Tribes representative. Becky Passarella is joining the MRC for District 2 as a Conservation/Environmental representative. Tim Ellis is stepping down from the MRC. Julie Schlenger and Sara Maxwell are starting their third term. Francesca Perez is stepping down, and Anya Voloshin will be the new Stillaguamish tribal representative.

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

A few members attended the WDOE Shoreline Management Act Virtual Open House on Dec. 16th.

A few members attended a talk in Edmonds about sunflower sea stars at the Waterfront Center on Nov. 20th.

Funding updates (newly awarded grants, in-kind support, or other funding commitments) None

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

MRC Admin: A new SharePoint has been made for the MRC members to ease collaboration. A contract has been extended for additional admin help from Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc. to assist in the development of the 2025 Annual Report and the 2027 Annual Work Plan.

Derelict Vessel (MRC Grant 2025 – 2027): The subcommittee is meeting again on Feb. 2nd and is currently gathering known data for their framework.

Marine Vegetation Outreach (MRC OTGP grant project for 2024 – 2025): The subcommittee finalized the outreach plan deliverable.

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

Forage Fish Monitoring: Picnic Point and Meadowdale were sampled on Dec. 9. Howarth Park was sampled on Dec. 13.

Marine Vegetation Monitoring: None

Nearshore Restoration: None

Outreach: Currently in the process of contracting with WSU Beach Watchers for 2026.

Crabber Outreach/Oil Spill Preparedness and Prevention: None

Marine Water Quality: The final draft of the Possession Sound marine report card was posted on the MRC website. Members are brainstorming any other locations for them to be posted.

Derelict Vessel Removal: A vessel was identified south of Picnic Point and DNR was contacted about the vessel. DNR is currently taking the lead on contacting the owner and removal of the vessel.

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

Upcoming Events:

- Next MRC Meeting – Jan 21
- Starlight Beach Walk – Jan 28

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



The turnout for the Nov. 2 Beach Watchers beach cleanup.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Snohomish

Month/Year: Jan 2026

Submitted by: Cali Weber and Joycelyn Blue

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

- The 2026 Starlight Beach Walk in collaboration with the WSU Beach Watchers was on January 28th.
- Joycelyn has moved up to the Senior Planner Staff Position!

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

Joycelyn has been hired by the county for the Senior Planner Staff position. Becky Passarella and Heidi Stewart have been approved by the Snohomish County Council to join the MRC.

Chair: Julie Schlenger

Vice-Chair/Co Vice-Chairs: Brie Townsend and Sara Maxwell

LIO Representative: Phil Salditt

LIO Alternate: Heidi Stewart

NWSC Representative: Phil Salditt (Subject to review by the Commission and Foundation Board)

NWSC Alternate: None

MRC Ex-Officio Members: David Bain

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

Members and staff attended the 2026 Starlight Beach Walk in collaboration with the WSU Beach Watchers on January 28th.

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

The OTGP grant has officially been signed.

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

MRC Admin: The SharePoint has been shared with MRC members to ease collaboration. A new member training packet has been created to help onboard new MRC members. A subcommittee meeting notes template has been created to encourage subcommittees to take running meeting notes.

Derelict Vessel (MRC Grant 2025 – 2027): The subcommittee is meeting again on Feb. 2nd and is currently gathering known data for their framework.

Marine Vegetation Outreach (MRC OTGP grant project for 2024 – 2025): Working to find a time to meet next to work on the grant.

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

Forage Fish Monitoring: Picnic Point and Meadowdale were sampled on January 26th. Howarth Park was sampled on January 24th.

Marine Vegetation Monitoring: None

Shoreline Armoring: The LIO voted to conduct a study similar to the SOW that the MRC created in 2025. Puget Sound Partnership will be leading the study, and the analysis for this project is set to be done this year. The subcommittee plans to step in when the report is out, using the analysis to help create outreach materials. The subcommittee plans to revise the workplan for this year and start brainstorming the steps to present outreach next year. The next subcommittee meeting is 2/12.

Outreach: Met to discuss possible festivals the MRC would be interested in tabling at, including the Edmonds Watershed Fun Fair, the Mukilteo Lighthouse Festival, and Orca Recovery Day. Additionally, they discussed creating three articles to send out to boating organizations and decided on Plastic-free, Derelict vessels, and Eelgrass/25+ feet as the topics. The MRC is in coordination with Beach Watchers to create 4 dates for beach cleanups.

Crabber Outreach/Oil Spill Preparedness and Prevention: None

Marine Water Quality: None

Derelict Vessel Removal: DVRP contracted the removal of the vessel, and the contractor has been seen on site, so the vessel has been removed already or is very close to being removed.

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

Upcoming Events:

- Next MRC Meeting – Feb 18th
- Next LIO Meeting – Feb 25th

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

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Whatcom

Month/Year: December 2025

Submitted by: Dana Daniels and Austin Rose

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

- At the December MRC meeting, there was a discussion about the key takeaways from the 2025 NWS Conference including ideas that folks wanted to bring back to our MRC. One of the items the MRC identified was utilizing subcommittees for certain topic areas including policy/government relations, education and outreach, and member recruitment.
- The MRC chair, Mark Fairhart, and MRC staff have been meeting individually with MRC members to discuss their motivation for participation and to gather ideas to strengthen engagement and retention.
- There are two vacancies on the MRC, one representing a recreational interest and one an economic interest.

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

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

- The December MRC meeting was held on the 4th. Highlights included:
 - A presentation from David Wilson with Jacobs Engineers regarding the City of Blaine's conceptual design for the outfall at the Lighthouse Point Water Reclamation Facility.
 - An update from Lauren Clemens, the Climate Action Manager at Whatcom County, about the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Climate Chapter and timeline.
 - A discussion about the key takeaways from the 2025 NWS Conference and ideas folks want to bring back to our MRC. One of the items the MRC identified was utilizing subcommittees for certain topics including policy/government relations, education and outreach, and member recruitment.
 - There are two vacancies on the MRC, one representing a recreational interest and one an economic interest.

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

- Beach Seine with Kids

The MRC wrapped up efforts for the 2025 Beach Seine with Kids events in June. The MRC will kick off initial planning meetings for 2026 starting in January.

- HABs

The HABs team has been sampling every other week at Semiahmoo Marina and Birch Bay Village Marina. Samples were collected on December 2nd and 16th. As temperatures cool and sunlight diminishes, phytoplankton counts are becoming sparser. Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor remain open for recreational shellfish harvest.

- Forage Fish Surveys

The MRC conducted the forage fish survey at Little Squalicum Beach on December 29th. The original sampling date of December 12th was cancelled due to major flooding. Tons of large woody debris was observed littering the beach at the December 29th survey.

- Bull Kelp Monitoring

The MRC wrapped up all bull kelp monitoring surveys in August.

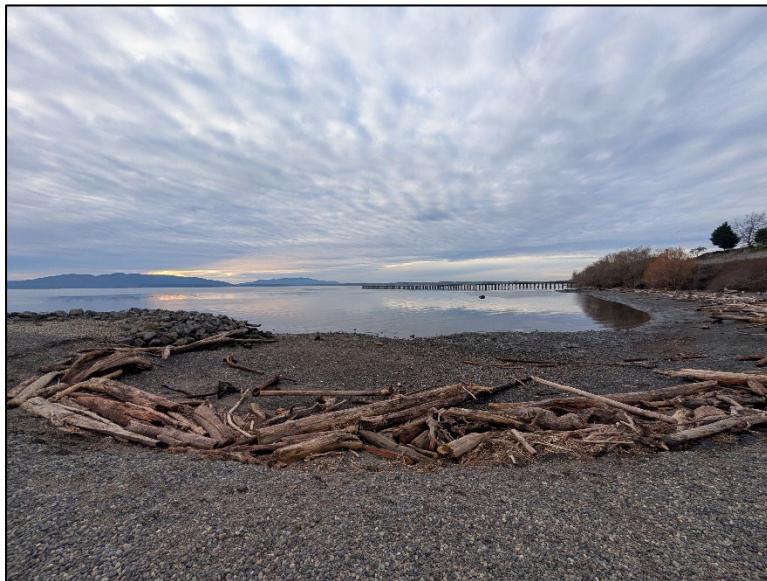
- Olympia Oyster Restoration

MRC staff submitted permits for Olympia oyster restoration activities planned for Drayton Harbor and North Chuckanut Bay in 2026. MRC staff also completed the final year end reports for activities completed in both North Chuckanut Bay and Drayton Harbor in 2024 and 2025.

Other:

The MRC chair, Mark Fairhart, and MRC staff have been meeting individually with MRC members to discuss their motivation for participation and to gather ideas to strengthen engagement and retention. Staff will compile feedback and identify common themes to develop action items for the MRC in the coming year.

Photos



Left: Tons of large woody debris washed up at Little Squalicum Beach following major floods in December. Right: Volunteers conduct a forage fish survey at Little Squalicum Beach. Photo credits: Dana Daniels, MRC staff.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Whatcom

Month/Year: January 2026

Submitted by: Dana Daniels and Austin Rose

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

- The MRC kicked off the Beach Seine with Schools project for 2026 and will be sending applications out to 4th grade teachers throughout Whatcom County at the end of the month. The event dates have been set for April 14th, May 12th, and May 22nd.
- The MRC established 3 new subcommittees including education and outreach, advisory/policy, and member engagement and recruitment.
- There are two vacancies on the MRC, one representing a recreational interest and one an economic interest.

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

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

- The January MRC meeting was held on the 8th. Highlights included:
 - A continued discussion about oil spill response capacity in Whatcom County with Darcy Bird from the Department of Ecology's Oil Spill Preparedness, Prevention, and Response Program.
 - A presentation from Andrea MacLennan with Herrera Consulting about the Clayton Beach Restoration project.
 - Approval of a comment letter recommending that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for the proposed "Woods at Viewcrest" development project.
 - The establishment of 3 new subcommittees including education and outreach, member recruitment and engagement, and advisory/policy.
 - There are two vacancies on the MRC, one representing a recreational interest and one an economic interest.

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

- **Beach Seine with Schools**

The MRC began planning activities for the beach seine with schools program in 2026. Activities included a kickoff meeting held on January 21st, drafting up a flyer and application materials for the program in 2026, and confirming support and availability from partner organizations including Lummi Natural Resources and the Salish Sea School. The field events for 2026 are scheduled for April 14th, May 12th, and May 22nd.

- **HABs**

The HABs team has been sampling every other week at Semiahmoo Marina and Birch Bay Village Marina. Samples were only collected on January 20th this month as poor weather resulted in a cancellation on January 6th. Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor remain open for recreational shellfish harvest.

- Forage Fish Surveys

The MRC conducted a forage fish survey at Clayton Beach on January 8th and at Little Squalicum Beach on January 9th. Due to the winter storms, a derelict vessel at Little Squalicum Beach ended up in the middle of one of the sampling sites. DNR's derelict vessel program and the Port of Bellingham were notified.

- Bull Kelp Monitoring

Bull kelp survey planning will begin in February of 2026. Dana Daniels and kelp monitoring volunteer, Eleanor Hines, will be giving a presentation about MRC bull kelp monitoring efforts to the Whatcom Association of Kayak Enthusiasts (WAKE) organization at the Community Boating Center on Tuesday, February 17th at 5pm.

- Olympia Oyster Restoration

MRC staff submitted permits for Olympia oyster restoration activities planned for Drayton Harbor and North Chuckanut Bay in 2026.

Other:

The MRC chair, Mark Fairhart, and MRC staff have been meeting individually with MRC members to discuss their motivation for participation and to gather ideas to strengthen engagement and retention. Staff will compile feedback and identify common themes to develop action items for the MRC.

Photos



Left: A derelict vessel washed up at sampling site at Little Squalicum Beach following major storms. Right: Kingfisher observed at the Semiahmoo Marina during HABS sampling. Photo credits: Dana Daniels, MRC staff.