



Meeting: Northwest Straits Commission
Date: February 27, 2026
Time: 10:00 AM- 12:00 PM
Location: [Virtual Zoom Link](#) Meeting ID: 834 9189 5935 Passcode: 612322

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

Documents for NW Straits Commission Review:

- **January NWSC Meeting Minutes**
- **Skagit MRC Project**

10:00 – 10:10 AM	Welcome and introductions Tribal acknowledgement January Meeting Minutes approval	Alan Clark, Chair
10:10 – 10:25 AM	Committee Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Retreat Agenda ○ Communications Guidelines • External Relations Committee • Science Advisory Committee 	Jamie Stephens Elsa Schwartz Emily Grason
10:25 – 10:50 AM	Business Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline Awareness Survey • Skagit MRC project approval • NW Straits Commission 101 	Jessica Owens Sasha Horst Sasha Horst
10:50 – 11:00 AM	Project Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Green Crab Update 	Leah Skare



agenda

11:00 – 11:30 AM	MRC Reports	MRC Representatives
11:30 – 11:40 AM	Commissioner Updates (NW Indian Fisheries Commission, Puget Sound Partnership)	
11:50 – 12:00 PM	Public Comment and Partner Updates	
12:00 PM	Adjourn	

The NW Straits Commission retreat will be held on April 2-3, 2026. For more information about the retreat, please contact info@nwstraits.org.

The next regularly scheduled NW Straits Commission meeting will be Friday, April 24 2026, virtually. Please see the [NWSC Events page](#) for more information about our meetings.



Minutes

January 30, 2026, 10:15 AM- 2:45 PM
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam – Chair), Jamie Stephens (Vice Chair), Rick Beauregard (Whatcom), Elsa Schwartz, Lynne Wenberg (Skagit), Brenda Johnson (Jefferson), Emily Grason, Phil Salditt (Snohomish), Kirk Larsen (Island – Alternate), Larry Epstein (Puget Sound Partnership), Christina Koons (San Juan)

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

Others in Attendance: Jude Apple, Annie England, Pete Haase, Todd Woodard

Absent: Cecilia Gobin (NW Indian Fisheries Commission)

Welcome and Tribal Acknowledgement

Alan Clark opened the meeting with introductions, the Tribal Acknowledgement, and a welcome to new MRC representatives Brenda Johnson (Jefferson MRC) and Phil Salditt (Snohomish MRC).

The December 2025 meeting minutes were approved as written by consensus.

Skagit MRC Presentation and Site Visit: Kids on the Beach with Annie England

Annie England, Environmental Educator at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), gave a presentation and overview of the Kids on the Beach program, and the schools served by the program. Annie shared that the program was initiated by Skagit MRC member Pete Haase and designed in collaboration with Mira Lutz and Padilla Bay NERR to increase student literacy in marine science in Skagit County schools. Students learn about marine science through hands-on experience in the field and in the classroom. For more information about the Kids on the Beach program, please visit the [Skagit MRC website](#). If you are interested in getting involved with Kids on the Beach, or want more information, you can reach out to Annie England (aengland@padillabay.gov).

An Overview of Samish DNR - sharing perspectives and partnerships with Todd Woodard,

Todd Woodard, Infrastructure and Resource Executive Director with Samish Indian Nation, gave a presentation on the Samish Department of Natural Resources. Todd presented on some of the Samish traditions, cultural ties to the Salish Sea and its abundant resources, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Science. Additionally, Todd gave an overview of the work involved at the Samish Department of Natural Resources, such as stream restoration, beach restoration, kelp monitoring and recovery, prairie bald restoration, marine debris and creosote removal, and climate change mitigation planning and vulnerability assessment. For more



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information about the Samish Department of Natural Resources, please visit their [website](#). Please reach out to Caitlyn (info@nwstraits.org) if you are interested in a copy of Todd's presentation.

MRC Reports

Clallam MRC – Alan Clark

- 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.

Island MRC – Kirk Larsen

- 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. The MRC has been working diligently to attend public meetings, work sessions, and to submit their final public comment prior to the early February deadline.

Jefferson MRC – Brenda Johnson

- 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.

San Juan MRC – Christina Koons

- 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.

Skagit MRC – Lynne Wenberg

- **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



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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 -22

A call to volunteers will be sent out to help with field days.

Snohomish MRC – Phil Salditt

- 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!

Whatcom MRC – Rick Beauregard

- 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.

Committee Updates

External Relations: Elsa Schwartz shared that fiscal year 2026 NOAA funding in the amount of \$1 million was included in the budget passed by Congress. She will be going to Olympia next week to discuss NW Straits Commission and the work of MRCs with state legislators. Additionally, Jude and Lucas met with Senator Cantwell’s staff to share about the work of NW Straits and reauthorization.

Executive Committee: Jamie Stephens shared an update about the NW Straits Commission budget. The Committee recommended advancing the funding proposal of redistributing \$140,000 (\$20,000/MRC) in carryover funding from the fiscal year 2023 NOAA award to MRCs, and to utilize additional carryover funding of \$200,000 toward NW Straits Commission staff time that supports MRC grant administration, as well as other regional programs such as kelp and eelgrass. These allocations match the grant categories of the 2023 award.



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The NW Straits Commission approved this budget recommendation by consensus.

Also, during the Executive Committee meeting, Jessica Owens shared an outline of the communications planning process to clarify our communications and increase confidence when talking about the Commission. The Committee also discussed how the NW Straits Commission and MRC work aligns with various state statutes. The Committee is taking a pause on research on statute alignment for the time being.

Science Advisory Committee: Emily Grason shared the Committee met the week prior to solidify their 2026 work plan. The Committee is also inviting Speed Date with A Scientist speakers for 2026 NW Straits Commission meetings. Emily shared that the Committee will be offering additional consultation/collaboration opportunities with MRCs on their projects. The Committee is also planning a workshop during the 2026 MRC Conference.

Business Items

2026 Retreat: Caitlyn reminded members that the NW Straits Commission retreat is April 2-3 at Elsa's house. NW Straits Commission representatives, governor's appointees, Commission staff and MRC staff are invited to attend. More details about the retreat will be available in the coming months.

Strategic Plan Update: Lucas shared an update on some of the progress we've made on strategic plan key objectives, goals, and actions. If you are interested in reviewing the strategic plan, please visit our [website](#).

NW Straits Commission Meeting Logistics: Caitlyn reminded Commission members to reach out to her if representatives have any travel needs for Commission meetings. Additionally, if you are not able to attend, please arrange with your alternate to attend and reach out to Caitlyn. If individuals not on the Commission are interested in being on the Commission distribution list, which includes meeting information, please reach out to Caitlyn (info@nwstraits.org).

Project Updates

Website Update: In December 2025, NW Straits Commission moved to a new website platform called Drupal. The new NW Straits website continues to review for ADA compliance, and Jessica is working with MRC website leads on ADA compliance for their websites. Please reach out to her (owens@nwstraits.org) with any questions.

Kelp Monitoring: Jeff Whitty shared an update about the results and successes of the kayak kelp monitoring project in 2025. For more information about the project and the 2025 accomplishments, please visit the [Kelp Monitoring page](#) on our website.

Legislative update on Derelict Vessels, Mooring Buoys, and Funding: Dana Oster shared information about [HB 2199](#), relating to reducing impacts from derelict vessels, and [HB 2395](#),



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relating to authorizing additional use of certain private recreational docks and mooring buoys. Dana also noted the Governor's Budget proposed a \$5 million reduction in the Derelict Vessel Removal Program's capital budget.

NW Straits Commissioner Updates

Larry Epstein, Deputy Director with the Puget Sound Partnership, shared that there are two vacancies on the Partnership's Leadership Council. Please visit the [website portal](#) to apply. He noted that Washington state agencies are still operating under a spending freeze with some exceptions and several state agencies are experiencing a deficit that includes programmatic cuts, layoffs, and furloughs. The recent budget that passed Congress included an increase in EPA funding for the Puget Sound Geographic Program. Puget Sound Day on the Hill is scheduled for the week of April 13. Register to attend or learn more at www.psdonth.org.

The Puget Sound Partnership 2026-2030 Action Agenda is available for public comment, for more information please visit the [website](#).

DRAFT

Project	Description	Budget Y1	Budget Y2	Notes/Comments/Questions
Skagit				
Intertidal monitoring	<p>Skagit MRC will conduct summer surveys of the intertidal beach areas in and around Fidalgo Bay to detect trends and to maintain a baseline inventory of marine life. Skagit MRC will coordinate volunteers and contract for an experienced naturalist to conduct surveys for one season in summer of 2026 to avoid any gaps in data collection.</p> <p>With added funding the project staff can do a more thorough job of packaging the various equipment and materials for future use or use by others.</p> <p>With added funding the project staff can coordinate with local school to participate in a survey as able.</p>	\$ 4,000	\$ -	Budget increased by \$1,000 from \$3,000 to \$4,000



Commission staff highlights - [February 2026]

MRC Support

MRC Grants: NOAA-funded grants have been signed, with the exception of San Juan (OTGP-2026). Staff has been fielding questions from MRCs about projects and potential uses for the additional NOAA funding available in 2026. Proposals are due by March 17 for the additional funds.

MRC Staff meeting: Commission staff hosted a meeting for MRC staff on February 25 at Padilla Bay Reserve, covering topics related to the MRC Full Potential session from the conference, communications, and various topics brought forward as priorities from MRC staff.

MRC Meetings:

- Clallam MRC Meeting (2/23) – Sasha
- Island MRC Meeting (2/3) – Sasha
- San Juan MRC Meeting (2/5) – Dana, Jeff, Sasha
- Snohomish MRC Meeting (02/18) – Jeff
- Skagit MRC Meeting (02/12) – Jeff, Dana, Jessica

Regional Projects

Kelp Plan: The Kelp Plan Coordination Advisory Committee met and discussed kelp funding opportunities, development of an understory kelp indicator, and transboundary collaborations. Staff attended the Kelp and Eelgrass Conservation and Health Plan Workgroup on 2/18 and the Kelp Plan Advisory Committee meeting on 2/23.

Kelp Monitoring: Staff have been preparing for the upcoming Kayak Kickoffs and kayak safety trainings to help prepare kayakers for the upcoming kelp monitoring season. Details and registration will be sent to volunteers and staff in the coming weeks.

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 attended the North Puget Sound Coordination Group meeting and Green Crab Manager's Symposium both hosted by WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife on 2/5. Staff also attended the European Green Crab Manager's Symposium on 2/19. Staff are continuing to plan logistics for the upcoming trapping season starting in April.

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones: Rack cards were distributed by partners at the Seattle Boat show for the Anchor Out of Eelgrass campaign. Staff are also working on final reporting to wrap up a US Fish and Wildlife grant.



Commission staff highlights - [February 2026]

Derelict Vessels: Staff are coordinating with WA DNR and the Makah Tribe to co-host a vessel turn-in event in Neah Bay. A draft intergovernmental agreement has been sent to the tribe for tribal council and legal review.

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

Operations

Staff: Allie is working part-time and on a flexible schedule. Dana is also working part-time on a Wednesday through Friday schedule.

Budget: NW Straits Commission has been appropriated \$1 million in the FY26 federal budget. Staff will work with NOAA to coordinate on adding the funds to our existing agreement.

Communications: Please fill out the short baseline awareness survey that was emailed to members (Commission, MRCs, SAC) mid-February. The survey will close March 4. We'll use the information for discussions at the retreat.

Contracts and grants: The interagency agreement with WA Department of Natural Resources was signed in early February. The agreement will support derelict vessel removal/vessel turn-in events in 2025-26. The interagency agreement with WA Tech is now in maintenance mode after the site upgrade in December.

Broad Community Engagement: NW Straits Commission staff continue to discuss community engagement and the Community Connectivity Analysis tool. Staff met with Athena Group for a check in on 2/3.

Other Meetings Attended

Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program Management Team meeting (2/2, 2/23) - Lucas

Olympia legislative meetings (2/4) – Lucas

Salmon PSEMP meeting (2/5) – Jeff

Transboundary Kelp Node workgroups (2/10, 2/24) – Jeff

WWU/Salish Sea Institute Environmental Speaker Series (2/12) – Jeff presented

WA Sea Collaborative Workgroup (2/13) – Jeff

DNR kelp and eelgrass congressional directed spending check-in (2/19) - Lucas, Dana

Puget Sound Partnership legislative check in call (2/20) – Lucas



Commission staff highlights - [February 2026]

MRC Lead Staff meeting (2/25) - All staff

Puget Sound Partnership Ecosystem Coordination Board (2/26) - Lucas

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Clallam

Month/Year: February 2026

Submitted by: Amelia Kalagher

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

- Guest speaker Dr. Chris Bassett presented at the MRC's January meeting, discussing his work on the interactions between animals and a small tidal turbine.
- The MRC established an education & outreach subcommittee with three members, with the main goal of developing interactive new displays.

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):

- MRC chair, vice-chair, staff and some project leads held a meeting on February 12th to discuss potential ideas for new available funding. The MRC as a whole will discuss these ideas at the February 23rd monthly meeting.
- The MRC will hold its regular monthly meeting on Monday, February 23rd. Guest speaker Justine Chorley will present on Clallam County Emergency Management, and speaker Cynthia Harbison will present on DNR's kelp and eelgrass health plan.

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.):

- The MRC developed a formal interview process for new member applicants, and conducted three such interviews.

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: Island

Month/Year: February / 2026

Submitted by: Elise Adams

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

- The MRC has welcomed three new members: Brad Thompson, Marena Salerno Collins, and Fran Horvath!
- The Island County MRC attended the annual Sound Waters University on February 7. In coordination with Sound Waters Stewards and WSU – Island Count Extension, the IC MRC presented the Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award to long-time volunteer, Mary Jo Adams.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): New members: Brad Thompson, Marena Salerno Collins, and Fran Horvath

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

Previous Meetings/Events:

- Feb 3: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Feb 7: Sound Waters University
- Feb 19: February SRTCC Meeting
- Feb 19: February ILIO Technical Meeting

Upcoming Meetings/Events:

- Mar 3: MRC Monthly Meeting
- Mar 12: 2026 Island County MRC Annual Retreat
- March 19: March SRTCC Meeting
- April 7: MRC Monthly Meeting
- April 16: April ILIO Technical Meeting
- April 16: April SRTCC Meeting
- April 27: 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 MRC’s policy subcommittee coordinated, drafted and edited, and submitted their Island County Comprehensive Plan public comments. The Island County Comprehensive Plan drafting process is coming to an end as the 60-day public comment period ended on February 9th. IC MRC and the policy subcommittee will continue to report on the on-going progress of the Comprehensive Plan’s completion in future reports!

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 continued 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. The forage fish workshop will be held at the Cornet Bay Retreat Center on April 27th.

Sound Waters University:

- Many IC MRC members were present at Sound Waters University, a day long “University for All”, presented and held by Sound Water Stewards. In addition to hosting an IC MRC table with educational materials and information on the MRC’s ongoing projects, attendees enjoyed a variety of speakers and presenters ranging in topics from ocean acidification to bluff geology, and river otter conservation to killer whale dynamics. A highlight of the event was the award presentation for the Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award, which highlights the marine conservation inspired accomplishments of Island County volunteers. In coordination with Sound Water Stewards and Washington State University – Island County Extension, the IC MRC presented this year’s award to Mary Jo Adams – a close friend and colleague of Jan Holmes – who has helped to shape marine education and shoreline identification throughout Island County.

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



The Island County MRC educational table at Sound Waters University.
Photo by Elise Adams



Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award Winner, Mary Jo Adams, with Sarah Bergquist, Sarah Schmidt, and Don Meehan.
Photo by Elise Adams

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Jefferson

Month/Year: February 2026

Submitted by: Katie Kowal

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

- In March, two new members will start – Odhran Waggoner (Local Youth) and Bella Ferland (Local Youth Alternate).
- Two Janette Mestre resigned in February 2026. This has put the Forage fish – Fort Worden project on pause, and the MRC will reevaluate project goals for the Rain Garden project.

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

In February, Janette Mestre resigned from the MRC.

In March, two new members will start – Odhran Waggoner (Local Youth) and Bella Ferland (Local Youth Alternate).

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

Past Events/Meetings

January 15 – Forage Fish sampling (Quilcene + Dabob)

January 23 – Kelp Project Lead Knowledge Transfer meeting

January 23 – Olympia Oyster subcommittee meeting

January 26 – MRC Kelp Kayak review meeting

February 3 - MRC Monthly Meeting

February 12 – Coordinator met with Master Gardener Coordinator at WSU Ext re: Rain Gardens

February 18 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

February 19 – E+O Subcommittee meeting

February 19+20 – MRC members and Coordinator sorted and moved MRC supplies

February 25 – MRC Staff Lead meeting

Upcoming Events/Meetings

February TBD - Forage Fish sampling (Quilcene + Dabob)

March 3 - MRC Monthly Meeting

March 17 – MRC Executive Committee Meeting

March 19 – Strait ERN Meeting

March 24 - E+O Subcommittee meeting

April 2-3 – NWSC Retreat

Funding updates (newly-awarded grants, in-kind support or other funding commitments): OTGP-2026 agreement has been signed.

April 6 – MRC annual presentation to the Jefferson BOCC, date tentative

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 February 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Quilcene Marina:** Sarah Fisken will sample in late February 2026.
 - **Forage fish – Fort Worden:** Project is on pause as of Feb 2026 (loss of project lead and unclear timeline from State Parks)
 - **Shoreline Landowner:** Nothing to report.
 - **Kelp kayak monitoring:** Summer monitoring dates will be chosen in April. Project lead is interested in incorporating a public outreach component to monitoring events. Working with E+O subcommittee to discuss options.

- Rain Gardens:
 - The project lead resigned in February.
 - Coordinator met with WSU Extension Master Gardener (MG) Coordinator on 2/12 to plan 3 rain garden assessment opportunities for MG volunteers in March/April, and discuss 2026 MG capacity to care for RG's (minimal capacity to help, volunteers may be available for MRC planned work parties).
 - Signage is planned to be replaced at several rain gardens.
 - As of 2026, RG Stewards can no longer care for gardens at Garfield&Adams, Taylor&Clay, and Lincoln&Van Buren. Stewards of Chetzemoka Park may resign, they feel this garden is not functioning properly during heavy rains.
 - Future MRC involvement/project goals will be discussed at the March MRC meeting. Current capacity is likely to hire a gardener to provide regular maintenance. MRC will discuss sunseting project.

- Education & Outreach:
 - Subcommittee met 2/19 to discuss plans for 2026.
 - 2026-27 E+O Outreach Plan in progress.

- Olympia Oysters:
 - 2026 Oly QAPP is in review with the project lead – waiting on final map updates from contractor, and then will be ready to send to NWSC.
 - Project lead and Coordinator will focus on permit renewal needs in March.

- Voluntary No-Anchor Zones:
 - Subcommittee is considering purchasing a shipping container or renting a storage unit for NAZ storage.

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.):

Jefferson BOCC approved the MRC's Letter of Recommendation in support of the Dabob Bay Natural Area - Trust Land Transfer, and it has been sent to DNR.

The WSU Extension office is losing the Classroom meeting and storage space due to county budget cuts. MRC has spent significant time moving and reorganizing since December 2025.

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: February 2026

Submitted by: Sam Whitridge & Katie Johnson

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

- The results of benthic habitat mapping were shared out with the MRC, helping fill in data gaps in Lopez Sound. Better understanding of the seafloor can give into habitat features like eelgrass meadows and anthropogenic impacts like anchor scarring, cable crossing and derelict fishing gear. We now have a more complete picture of what is happening in specific locations.
- MRC Youth Rep Lola Walker helped out at the Seattle Boat show, sharing the message of Be Whale Wise and passing out whale warning flags to boaters.

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

Our longtime NWSC representative, Christina Koons will complete her second term on the MRC in June. The committee has begun discussions about who could step into this role and represent San Juan MRC on the commission. Recruitment is planned for later this spring to fill upcoming membership gaps.

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

- January 31- February 7 – Seattle Boat Show
- February 5- MRC Meeting
- February 12 – Cattle Point Site Visit
- February 12 – Oil Spill/ERTV Subcommittee Meeting
- February 25 – MRC Staff Meeting
- March 3 – PFSS Subcommittee Meeting
- March 5 – Next MRC Meeting

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

The OTGP funding through NOAA for the 26-27 grant year is being held up at the County Prosecuting Attorney's office due to language around Executive Order 14173. This funding was dedicated to developing a community engagement and communications plan for the Marine Stewardship Area. The MRC is still dedicated to sharing this message but without the funding to fully develop a comprehensive plan, our outreach efforts will continue with current opportunities.

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

Winter is a great season to get out on the water and take account of derelict or abandoned vessels. However, the county boat has been out of commission since late December which has hindered efforts to get on the water. While this is a core time for patrols, shore-based patrols are underway. This allows us to effectively monitor marinas and popular moorages but impacts the ability to survey more remote locations. When comparing the number of vessel responses in early 2025 to 2026, this year has seen vessels in distress or needing immediate response. We believe this is in part due to better communication and outreach to the boating community and increased referrals to DNR's Vessel Turn-in Program. This helps make the case that increased prevention efforts leads to a decrease in derelict vessels. The DVP subcommittee will be meeting at the end of February to discuss planning for the upcoming year.

Lola Walker attended the Seattle Boat Show and helped at the Be Whale Wise booth to pass out whale warning flags and spread the message of giving whales space. The Marine Stewardship Area of San Juan County is vital habitat for the endangered Southern Resident Killer whales. Providing education and outreach to the broad boating community regarding species and special habitats remains a goal of the MSA. We are so lucky to have Lola

take the time to spread this message and support ongoing efforts to educate the public and provide resources that protect important species.

The MRC has long been interested in sharing the story and uniqueness of Cattle Point. Owned by DNR, there is a historic naval radio building surrounded by trails. The surrounding waterways are special for the kelp beds and unique geologic features, aquatic life and vibrance. On a clear day you can see Mount Rainier to the South, and the Cascade Range through Mount Baker to the Northeast. The MRC was awarded funding through the Washington Maritime National Heritage Area to work with DNR for interpretive signs at the location, helping to orient and educate about this special place. Beth Tate and Katie Johnson went for a site visit to assess the current conditions and content of signs, scout locations and feasibility for new interpretive materials and get a feel for the location.

At the February meeting Gary Greene and Emily Roland presented results and findings from the benthic habitat surveys of Lopez Sound, funded through the 2024 OTGP. It was fascinating to learn about their methodology in mapping the shallow seabed and discovering what lies beneath. Using multibeam sonar they were able to detect cable crossings, derelict fishing gear, and other signs of human activity. The maps also show the range of eelgrass meadows, tidal scour marks, and can detect changes in seafloor substrate. This data provides important insight into missing details on the map, allowing for better understanding of habitats and potential human impact, which can influence management recommendations. MRC members, staff, and fellow attendees were all impressed by the data and excited about ways to utilize this data.

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, in its role as the Citizens Advisory Group for Salmon Recovery was notified that restoration plans at Jackson Beach have halted. On January 20 the County Council decided to move forward with plans to preserve and re-arm the barge landing in lieu of restoration efforts. MRC members were disappointed by the lack of advisory consultation for this project they have been supportive of since early 2023.

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



MRC Youth Representative, Lola Walker helped pass out whale warning flags at the Be Whale Wise booth at the Seattle Boat Show. Photo by Alex Borowincz.



L - Be Whale Wise booth at the Seattle Boat Show. Photo by Alex Borowincz.

R - MRC Member, Beth Tate on a site visit at the Cattle Point Interpretive Center, San Juan Island. Photo by Katie Johnson.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Skagit

Month/Year: Feb/2026

Submitted by: Tracy/Lynne

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

- We are pleased to welcome our newest MRC member, Aaron Esterholt, City of Anacortes Stormwater Manager! Aaron brings a wealth of knowledge and is eager to put his skills to use in support of Skagit MRC's mission.
- Skagit Nearshore Assessment Prioritization Tool and Sound IQ demonstration for county and city staff on February 11th followed by a discussion about the 5 High Priority Project Areas. Around 18 people in attendance with lots of great questions and conversations.
- 2026 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program is now underway! Classes are held every Tuesday from 1-5pm at Padilla Bay, February 10 – April 14. There are still spots available! Please help spread the word! The training schedule and online registration form are available on the Skagit MRC website.

Membership/Leadership changes (new/departing members, changes to chair/vice-chair, NWSC representative/alternate, staff): No changes

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

- **Feb 11- Monthly MRC Meeting-** 9am-11am, via Teams. Jason Quigley- Skagit County Stormwater Coordinator presented the Bay View Ridge Stormwater Management Plan Phase 3 project.
- **Feb 5- Salish Sea Stewards Training Working Group Meeting** - 2:30pm via Teams.
- **Feb 25- MRC/NWSC Staff Meeting** at Padilla Bay
- **March 5-** Salish Sea Stewards Training Working Group virtual meeting at 2:30pm
- **March 12- Skagit MRC Brainstorming Retreat** to initiate the process of updating the MRC's 5-Year Strategic Plan in lieu of the monthly MRC meeting. The retreat will be held in-person at the Skagit PUD facility in Mount Vernon from 9am-11am and facilitated by Dana Oster

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:
 - The 2026 Salish Sea Stewards training program has begun! Classes are held every Tuesday at Padilla Bay from 1pm-5pm from February 10th through April 14th.
 - [2026 SSS Training Schedule](#) is now available on the MRC website. The topics are always interesting, and MRC members are invited to attend.
 - 21 students had registered, but only a small group of 15 students attended the first session. 4 people who registered confirmed they are no longer able to participate. The Salish Sea Stewards Working Group plans to repost flyers and social media posts to let everyone know there are still spots available.
- All 15 students that attended the first class seemed very interested and eager to participate - if a bit quiet. They have varied backgrounds and some are new to the Skagit Valley area.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - Skagit MRC contracted with the Salish Sea School's 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: Clayton Beach, and Similk Restore.

- Now that the restoration project monitoring at Bowman Bay has ended, the forage fish surveys at Bowman Bay will be changed to fixed long-term index type sites rather than random sites, starting in February.
- This is the quiet time of year for forage fish spawning but will likely pick up again in late April or May.
- The February 2026 Forage Fish Survey Schedule is as follows:
 - Feb 20- Lovrics- noon
 - Feb 20- Guemes Channel -1pm
 - Feb 20- Similk Bay- 1pm
 - Feb 20 (or before)- Clayton Beach, Similk Restore (TBD)
 - Feb 20- Fidalgo Bay Resort- process samples – 1:30pm
 - Feb 23- Fidalgo Bay Resort- preview new survey methods and sites- 1pm
 - Feb 25- Bowman Bay at 2:30pm

- 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 to help with field days will be posted 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. A contract has been drafted.
- Will use the same protocol and equipment that Re-Sources used.
- Completed the draft QAAP update for intertidal monitoring. It is now under review with the Department of Ecology.
- The first intertidal monitoring event is anticipated to take place May 18, 2026, at Fidalgo Bay RV Park. Monitoring will be led by Elizabeth Drozda and involve Anacortes High School's Environmental Science program.
- Working with Whatcom MRC and Ecology to determine the kind of intertidal monitoring baseline data that would be the most useful to have in the event of a disaster.

- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinnel:

- Eileen Bates is the new pinto abalone project co-lead with Josh Bouma – Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF).
- PSRF just kicked off the winter/spring field season.
- Surveyed the Switchback site and found 80 abalone! Compared with 23 found on the pre-outplant survey last year.
- Completed a collaborative survey of the Vitality site with Samish using 2 dive boats! Only 55 abalone were found there, but after only finding 1 in the 2025 survey, this was a huge improvement! Last year the Vitality site was expanded to twice its original size to follow the abalone that seemed to be moving shallow. There were also two rounds of outplants at that site in 2025.
- The Shannon Point Marine Center abalone rearing nursery is humming along and should be ready for juveniles this spring, and Derek has a new grad student who will be taking up the cryopreservation work starting in the summer. All good news!
- Eileen will give a presentation on the pinto abalone project at the May 14th MRC monthly meeting.

- 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 May.
 - 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 through mid-May.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - 2026 season will kick off soon – Skagit bull kelp surveys are from June – September.
 - Spring MRC Kelp Monitoring Workgroup meeting is in works for March. Topics include: Shoreline segments, kayak kickoff ideas, final review of new datasheet.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - Project concluded December 31, 2025.
 - Lynne and Suzanne Shull provided a demonstration on how to use the NEAP tool and Sound IQ and discussed the 5 High Priority Project Areas to county and city staff from Planning GIS, and the Natural Resources Division on February 11. 18 people were in attendance! Lots of great questions and conversations followed the presentation. Lynne followed up with a 'Thank You' email to the attendees and asked for some feedback on how they might use the tool.
 - Lynne plans to solicit feedback from MRC members on the 5 High Priority Project Areas.
- Skagit Bay Derelict Crab Pot Removal (2026) – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - The MRC's contract agreement with the NWSF to perform 6 side scan sonar surveys and derelict crab pot removal in Skagit Bay is going through the county review and signature process. Island MRC will be funding additional side scan sonar surveys and crabber outreach efforts in Skagit Bay. NWSF is also working with WDFW to finalize additional funding for derelict crab pot removal.
 - NWSF purchased a Remote Operating Vehicle (ROV) to survey and remove derelict pots in certain areas where derelict crab pot removal with divers might be more difficult. The Swinomish Tribe has agreed to provide watercraft support to the NWSF for this effort.
 - Side-scan sonars are expected to be accomplished between March and July 2026, with derelict crab pot removals after scans are complete and through the summer of 2027.
- Derelict Crab Pot Outreach (2026) – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Darla is working with the Northwest Straits Foundation and the Derelict Crab Pot Advisory Team to develop and implement the 2026 crabber outreach strategy for Skagit County. Darla requested ideas and feedback from MRC members on crabber outreach strategies for Skagit County.

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)

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Snohomish

Month/Year: Feb 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 had over 150 participants.
- The MRC will elect to use the additional funds from NWSC towards the NWSC derelict vessel turn-in program.

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

The paperwork for Anya Voloshin is still being processed so that she can replace Franchesca Perez as the Stillaguamish rep.

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

Over 150 people attended the Starlight Beach Walk, including Cali, Joycelyn, Dawn, Becky, and Richard.

Julie attended an event on Feb 28 at Picnic Point, where Snohomish County and the Edmonds Fly Fishing Organization planted native beach vegetation

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

The MRC will elect to use the new funds from NWSC towards the NWSC derelict vessel turn-in program.

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

MRC Admin: The MRC website has been updated to be more ADA accessible, and all dead links have been updated.

Derelict Vessel (MRC Grant 2025 – 2027): The subcommittee met on Feb. 2nd and has begun to reach out to other organizations to continue to gather information for their framework.

Marine Vegetation Outreach (MRC OTGP grant project for 2024 – 2025): The consultant MFA is officially on contract and held a kick off meeting on February 12th with the subcommittee to make a list of groups they plan to meet with for their outreach.

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

Forage Fish Monitoring: Picnic Point and Meadowdale were sampled on February 19th. Howarth Park was sampled on February 21st. Collected samples have been given to WDFW for analysis.

Marine Vegetation Monitoring: None

Shoreline Armoring: The subcommittee met on February 12th and decided they will take a step back and play more of an observer role until Puget Sound Partnership is closer to being finished with the armoring study. They plan on meeting Ad Hoc until they need to begin making outreach materials again and will touch base in August.

Outreach: Dates have been identified for clean-up events with the Beach Watchers: March 7th from 1-2:30 pm at Howarth Park, June 3rd from 12:30-2 pm at Picnic Point, September 26 from 10 am-1 pm location TBD (ETAP), and November 7th from 10 am-11:30 am at Howarth Park. Articles for other organization newsletters have been drafted and are being presented to the MRC for review. The sub team decided not to table at the Mukilteo Lighthouse Festival, as the requirements of all three days having a staffed table would be too difficult to meet; they are still planning on tabling at the Watershed Fun Fair on May 2nd from 11 am-3 pm.

Crabber Outreach/Oil Spill Preparedness and Prevention: The Department of Ecology had a kick-off meeting that Julie and David listened to about new regulations for the Oil Spill contingency plan. The subcommittee plans to meet next week to discuss what it can do to support these regulations.

Marine Water Quality: None

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

Upcoming Events:

- Next MRC Meeting – Mar 18th
- Beach Cleanup March 7th at Howarth Park
- Howarth Park Forage Fish – March 21st

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



Photos from the Starlight Beachwalk of attendees and sea anemone. Photo credit Cali Weber.

MRC Monthly Report to the Northwest Straits Commission

County: Whatcom

Month/Year: February 2026

Submitted by: Dana Daniels and Austin Rose

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

- The MRC's vice chair, Kathy Ketteridge, resigned from the MRC (conservation/environmental seat). Two new members have joined the MRC: Paul Cline, Lummi Nation Rep and Abby Neal, recreational interest.
- The MRC sent out applications for the 2026 Beach Seine with Schools events that will take place at Boulevard Park from 11-1:30pm on April 14th, May 12th, and May 22nd.
- MRC staff submitted a proposal for the Terry Husseman Coastal Protection Fund grant opportunity to support additional Olympia oyster restoration efforts in North Chuckanut Bay in partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

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

- Departing member: Kathy Ketteridge, conservation/environmental interest (The MRC will need to identify a new vice chair at their next meeting).
- New members: Paul Cline, Lummi Nation Representative and Abby Neal, recreational interest

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

- The February MRC meeting was held on the 5th. Highlights included:
 - A presentation from David Stalheim, a former Whatcom County Planner, about his concerns regarding a plethora of environmental impacts at Cherry Point (vessel noise, habitat degradation, water quality issues, contaminants), specifically focusing on potential impacts of the AltaGas expansion.
 - A presentation from Lauren Ode-Giles, a GIS analyst with Herrera Environmental, on the Bluff Recession and GIS Analysis for Retreat/Restoration project that has been conducted in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. This project aims to support nearshore stewardship efforts by identifying impaired shorelines that may be suitable for restoration activities, locating intact shorelines that should be protected from future shoreline armoring, and recognizing adaptive management pathways for impacted properties.
 - Discussion and approval of a letter of support for the Terry Husseman Coastal Protection grant opportunity that MRC staff are applying for to support additional Olympia oyster restoration efforts in North Chuckanut Bay.
 - Discussion of project ideas for an additional funding opportunity being offered by the Northwest Straits Commission (up to \$20,000 per MRC).
 - There are two vacancies on the MRC, one representing a conservation/environmental interest and one an economic interest.

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

- Beach Seine with Schools
Applications to participate in the beach seine with schools program were sent to fourth grade teachers throughout Whatcom County at the end of January. Applications close on February 20th, and the project subcommittee will be reviewing and selecting schools on February 23rd. The field events for 2026 are scheduled from 11-1:35pm at Boulevard Park on 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 collected on February 3rd and 17th. Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor remain open for recreational shellfish harvest and no harmful phytoplankton have been observed in the water.
- Forage Fish Surveys
The MRC conducted a forage fish survey at Little Squalicum Beach on February 19th.
- Bull Kelp Monitoring
Dana Daniels and kelp monitoring volunteer, Eleanor Hines, gave 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. The project team is starting to identify potential dates for the surveys in 2026.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration
The project team will be meeting with staff from the Puget Sound Restoration Fund and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on Tuesday, February 24th to discuss the logistics for the upcoming field season. Activities planned for this year in Drayton Harbor include establishing up to 12 bioassay plots throughout two more broadly identified locations and distributing Olympia oyster spat within these bioassays. Activities for North Chuckanut Bay in 2026 will include spreading additional Olympia oyster spat (that has been donated by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund) in 3 of the sites that the MRC piloted restoration at from 2018-2025.

Other

- Education and Outreach Subcommittee: The new education and outreach subcommittee held their first meeting on February 18th. The group discussed techniques for improving the MRC's education and outreach efforts including being more strategic about the events the MRC participates in.
- Terry Husseman Coastal Protection Grant Opportunity: MRC staff submitted a grant proposal to support additional Olympia oyster restoration efforts in North Chuckanut Bay in partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. If secured, the funding will be used to support additional Olympia oyster spat to enhance restoration plots in 2028 as well as PSRF and MRC staff time.
- NWSF March Shore Friendly Workshop: MRC staff are working with the Northwest Straits Foundation to plan a Shore Friendly workshop in Whatcom County for the end of March.

Photos



Left: A beautiful (but chilly) day for a forage survey at Little Squaticum Beach. Right: While monitoring for HABS at Semiahmoo on February 3rd, the team noticed DNR removing 4 derelict vessels that have been anchored in Drayton Harbor for years! Such a huge win! Photo credits: Dana Daniels, MRC staff.