



Minutes

February 27, 2026, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees

Commission Members: Alan Clark (Clallam – Chair), Jamie Stephens (Vice Chair), Rick Beauregard (Whatcom), Elsa Schwartz, Lynne Wenberg (Skagit), Sarah Fisken (Jefferson - Alternate), Emily Grason, Phil Salditt (Snohomish), Ken Collins (Island), Jason Lim (Puget Sound Partnership)

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

Others in Attendance:

Absent: Christina Koons (San Juan), Cecilia Gobin (NW Indian Fisheries Commission)

Welcome and Tribal Acknowledgement

Alan Clark opened the meeting with introductions and the Tribal Acknowledgement.

The January 2026 meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Committee Updates

Executive Committee: Jessica Owens shared the communications planning process and updates. Caitlyn Blair shared the overview of the spring retreat agenda and logistics.

The Executive Committee considered guidance that directs MRCs and partners on how to acknowledge the NWSC in communications. This includes use of the NWSC logo in acknowledgements, while pausing the use of the NWSI logo. The Committee recommended this approach to the Commission. The Commission approved by consensus.

External Relations: Lucas, Jamie, Alan, Elsa met with legislators in Olympia to share about NWSC and MRC projects and results.

Science Advisory Committee: Emily shared that Jason Toft is the newest member of the Science Advisory Committee. To read more about Jason and his work, please visit this webpage: [Jason Toft | Freshwater Initiative](#) or [About – Wetland Ecosystem Team](#). The Committee is also working on a workshop for the MRC Conference on November 6 before the conference. There will be questions regarding the workshop on the pre-conference survey scheduled to go out in early March. The Committee is excited to offer the next iteration of MRC/SAC project consultations. They have been rebranded and each MRC can request up to two Collaborative Sessions with members of the SAC. These offerings are meant to be available to support your MRC in a wider phase of project life cycles. Further details and timelines were included in a memo sent out this



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month to MRC staff, Chairs, Vice Chairs, and MRC Commission Reps to discuss with your MRCs. If you have questions, please contact Dana Oster (oster@nwstraits.org).

Business Items

Baseline Awareness Survey: Jessica reminded everyone to take the survey that was sent out to all MRC members, MRC staff, and members of the Commission.

Skagit MRC project approval: Sasha reminded the Commission that each MRC was offered an opportunity to receive an additional \$20,000 from the fiscal year 2023 NOAA funding. Skagit MRC proposed a project to use \$1,000 for an existing intertidal monitoring project. The Commission approved this project by consensus. Lynne abstained.

More MRC project proposals will be brought to the Commission for consensus at a later date related to the additional funding.

NW Straits Commission 101: Commission staff has scheduled two separate webinar presentations of Northwest Straits Commission 101 to orient new MRC members to the Commission, remind current MRC members of the Commission structure and function and share information with other interested individuals. The meetings are scheduled for March 19 and April 8. Anyone interested can attend; no registration is required.

- March 19, 2:00-3:30pm: [Zoom Link](#), Meeting ID: 848 4786 4722, Passcode: 248150
- April 8. 11:00am-12:30pm: [Zoom Link](#), Meeting ID: 844 5765 9244, Passcode: 542246

Announcement from Caitlyn Blair: After three years as the Program Coordinator at the NW Straits Commission, Caitlyn Blair is departing from her position to pursue a new career opportunity. She has greatly appreciated all the support and learning during her time with all the MRC staff, volunteers, NW Straits Commission staff and members, and partners. It's been a joyful and exciting time, and she will miss everyone!

Project Updates

Commission staff shared an update on the European green crab regional project and results from the 2025 trapping season in Drayton Harbor and Samish Bay. Ongoing monitoring and removal of green crabs in these hotspots is a collaborative effort that will continue in 2026. Statewide results from various other trapping partners can be viewed on [WDFW's EGC Hub](#), [2025 blog](#), or WA Sea Grant's [2025 Salish Sea Green Crab Summary](#).



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MRC Reports

Clallam MRC – Alan Clark

- 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.

Island MRC – Ken Collins

- 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.

Jefferson MRC – Sarah Fiskén

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

San Juan MRC – Read from written report

- 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.

Skagit MRC – Lynne Wenberg

- 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 were 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!



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Please help spread the word! The training schedule and online registration form are available on the Skagit MRC website.

Snohomish MRC – Phil Salditt

- 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.

Whatcom MRC – Rick Beauregard

- 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 representative 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.

NW Straits Commissioner Updates

Puget Sound Partnership

Jason Lim shared information on the proposed state budget reductions for FY27. The Legislature is still in session, but funding cuts remain for natural resource work that will have significant impacts on Puget sound and salmon restoration. The Partnership hosts a weekly update on legislative activities. Information and recordings are available online: [Puget Sound Legislative Update Call - January 9, 2026](#)

The Vital Sign indicator for [swimming beaches](#) was updated with the Department of Ecology. 2025 is the first year 95% safe swimming standards were reached. The bivalve harvest for personal use indicator has been updated, which is part of the [local food](#) indicator. The Governor's team has announced the Partnership will have an executive director; they hope to have a press release soon.