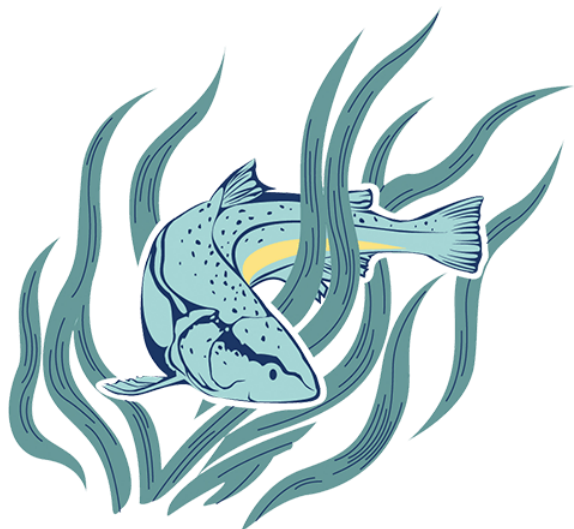




# ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

## **2022 Annual Report**



# About the MRC

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), established in 1999, is an advisory body of volunteers appointed by Island County Commissioners. The members are from the local community, and represent a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and expertise, with the unified goal of protecting and restoring the local marine environment.

The MRC's purpose is to investigate, research, and identify local marine resources, and marine resource and habitat issues; recommend remedial actions to Island County agencies and authorities; carry out such recommendations where so approved; and build local awareness of the issues and broad-based community support for the remedies. The MRC conducts monitoring, restoration, and outreach projects, in addition to its advisory role to the County Commissioners.

The Island County MRC is one of seven Marine Resources Committees supported by the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (NWSI), with the goal to restore and protect our marine waters. In addition to collaborating with the Northwest Straits Commission, Foundation, and other MRCs, Island County MRC also works with many local and regional partners, including: Sound Water Stewards, Whidbey Island Conservation District, Snohomish Conservation District, Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Washington State University Extension – Island County, Washington State Parks, Swinomish Tribe, and others. These partnerships are key to the collaborative effort of protecting and restoring the marine species and habitats that surround our island home.



This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency under Assistance Agreement [CE-01J65401]. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

# Membership

The MRC is comprised of up to thirteen voting members, appointed by the Board of Island County Commissioners, as well as non-voting ex-officio members and technical advisors. The MRC relies on the hard work and dedication of its members and other volunteers to conduct monitoring, restoration, and outreach. In the 2020-2021 year, the MRC recorded 1,498 volunteer hours! Thank you to our members and volunteers for your dedication to protecting and restoring the marine resources of Island County!



| Member                                 | MRC Projects, Sub-Committees, and Group Representation                                 |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Current Members: September 2021</b> |                                                                                        |
| <b>Barbara Bennett - Chair</b>         | Executive Committee, Outreach, Bull kelp, Island Local Integrating Organization (ILIO) |
| <b>Jill Lipoti - Vice-Chair</b>        | Executive Committee, DEI Committee, Stewardship, Outreach                              |
| <b>Scott Chase</b>                     | Sound Water Stewards, Outreach, Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA)               |
| <b>Ken Collins</b>                     | Bull kelp, Forage Fish                                                                 |
| <b>Ed Halloran</b>                     | Port of South Whidbey                                                                  |
| <b>Andi Kopit</b>                      | Outreach                                                                               |
| <b>Alexandra Plumb</b>                 | Island County DNR                                                                      |
| <b>Elsa Schwartz</b>                   | Northwest Straits Commission Representative                                            |
| <b>Kestutis Tautvydas</b>              | Sound Water Steward                                                                    |
| <b>Ex-Officio Members (non-voting)</b> |                                                                                        |
| <b>Jennifer Johnson</b>                | Island County Department of Natural Resources                                          |
| <b>Sarah Bergquist</b>                 | WSU Extension – Island County                                                          |
| <b>Melanie Bacon</b>                   | Board of Island County Commissioners                                                   |
| <b>Technical Advisors (non-voting)</b> |                                                                                        |
| <b>Michael Bianchi</b>                 | Navy                                                                                   |
| <b>Florian Graner</b>                  | Outreach                                                                               |
| <b>Linda Rhodes</b>                    | Science, Bull kelp, Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve                              |
| <b>Mark Stamey</b>                     | Restoration                                                                            |
| <b>Todd Zackey</b>                     | Tribal: Tulalip Tribes                                                                 |



# Operations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MRC meetings continued to be held mostly virtually throughout the year.

The MRC meets on the first Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public, and often feature an educational speaker as well as discussion on business topics and project updates.

MRC Members Gwendolyn Hannam, and Hannah Liss resigned in 2022 to pursue other adventures, and the MRC is thankful for their dedication!

With one fulltime staff member, staff support to the MRC is equivalent to approximately 1 FTE.

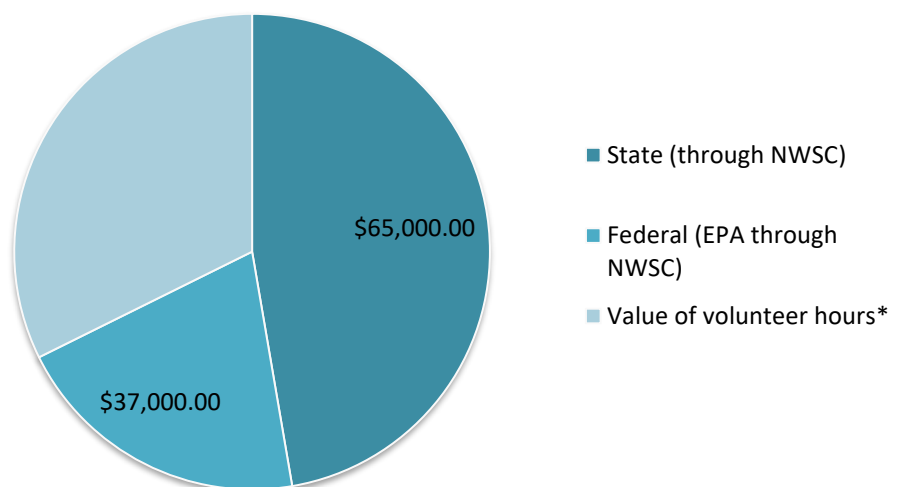
The MRC brings important environmental and economic value to Island County, and engages the local community to preserve and protect our beautiful Island home.

Through grants and volunteer hours, the MRC has brought a total value of **\$146,862.00** to Island County in 2021-2022.

## Accomplishments

- Scheduled, organized, and held 11 MRC meetings.
- Held an MRC Strategic Planning Retreat
- Attended monthly Northwest Straits Commission meetings and seasonal MRC staff meetings.
- Participated in Island Local Integrating Organization Technical Committee meetings and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee meetings.
- Regularly updated the website with meeting agendas and minutes, project updates, and announcements.
- Held a Strategic Planning Retreat.

## Funding Sources



*\*The value of volunteer hours is calculated using the most current [Value of Volunteer Time](#) from the Independent Sector.*

# Advisory

The MRC is uniquely positioned as an advisory body to the Island County Commissioners, comprised of members of the community who understand and represent local issues and perspectives. The MRC also connects with marine issues of regional importance through representation on the Northwest Straits Commission, Island Local Integrating Organization, and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee.

In January, Barbara Bennett presented to the Island County Board of Island County Commissioners to share the final report and findings of the Needs Assessment conducted in 2021. The highlights of the presentation are included below.

- The MRC is seen as a trustworthy, science-based resource for the Board and the community.
- The pressures on the shoreline impact ecosystem functions as well as the economic value of Island County as a site for recreation. This includes the nexus of responsibility for public vs private land.
- Responses highlighted the interconnectedness between upland ecosystems (incl forestry practices, water quality, stream flow, aquifer health, etc.) to shorelines.
- Many people echo the theme of the Sense of Place survey from the ILIO. Our shorelines and public access to them are part of our identity as a county. This especially relates to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion principles.
- The ways that beaches are accessed and used need to be regulated for shoreline health and the wellbeing of the general public.

## Accomplishments

- Presented to Island County Commissioners about the 2021 Needs Assessment.
- Island County Commissioner participated in the MRC all day Strategic Planning Retreat.



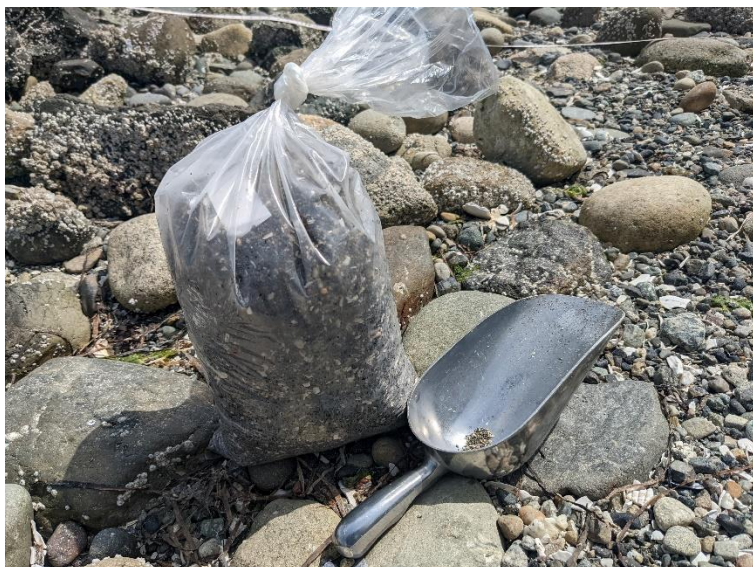
*The MRC Strategic Planning Retreat. Photos by Kelly Zupich*

# Monitoring: Forage Fish

Forage fish are small schooling fish that are a key component in the marine food web, as a vital food source for salmon, seabirds, and marine mammals. Surf smelt and Pacific sand lance, two species of forage fish, lay their eggs on sandy-gravelly beaches around Puget Sound.

The MRC conducts forage fish spawn surveys at selected beaches in conjunction with completed, planned, and proposed shoreline restoration work. The MRC also partners with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to assist in conducting surveys at index sites – locations with public access and a known history of spawning presence. Volunteers collect and condense beach sediment samples, which are then transported to WDFW for analysis.

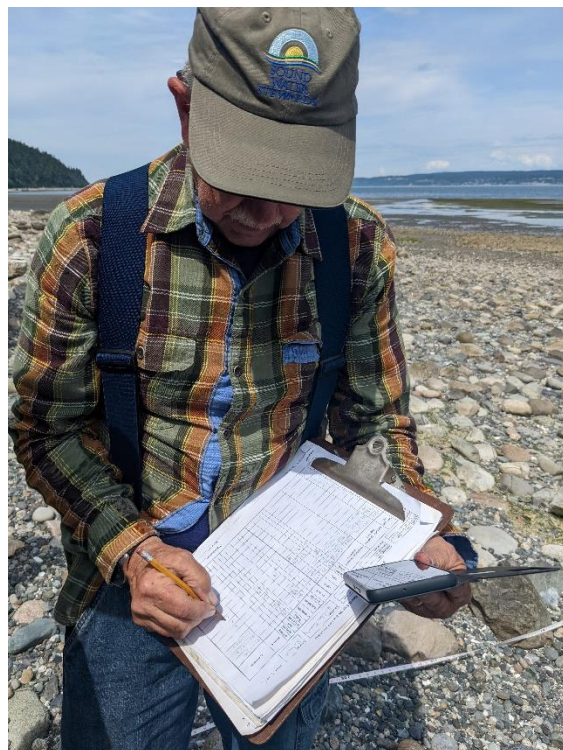
In February and July of 2022, the WDFW hosted Forage Fish Survey training sessions. We had three volunteers who retook the training as a refresher and 8 volunteers who attended for their first time.



*Forage fish spawn surveys. Photos by Kelly Zupich*

## Accomplishments

- Conducted surveys at five restoration sites: Hoypus Point (pre-restoration), Cornet Bay (post-restoration), Hidden Beach (pre-restoration), Seahorse Siesta (post-restoration), and Sunlight Shores (post-restoration).
- Conducted surveys at two index sites: Glendale and Maple Grove.
- Trained 8 new volunteers.
- Volunteers reported 314 hours of service.





# Monitoring: Bull Kelp

Bull kelp forests serve as an important habitat and feeding source to a wide variety of species in the marine environment, providing critical support throughout the marine food web.

Prompted by documented declines of bull kelp in South Puget Sound, the MRC initiated boat-based bull kelp surveys in 2015 in coordination with the Northwest Straits Initiative and other MRCs. Volunteers monitor the size of bull kelp beds using GPS units while paddling a kayak around the perimeter of the bed.

Kelp bed perimeters were tracked during the summer months at five sites around Island County: Hoypus Point, Polnell Point, Ebey's Landing, Possession Point, and Lowell Point.

Volunteers also collected temperature data using temperature loggers at varying depths and collected images of plants and animals observed in the kelp beds.



*Volunteer conducting bull kelp survey at Lowell Point. Photo by Don Engblom.*

## Accomplishments

- Conducted kayak surveys at five key beds around Island County during the summer growing season.
- 15 volunteers reported approximately 407 hours for this project.
- Deployed temperature loggers to measure temperatures across multiple depths.
- Collected images of plants and animals within kelp beds.



*Harbor seal at Possession Point. Photo by Ron Beier.*

# Restoration: Hoypus Point

The MRC has continued its partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) and Washington State Parks (WSP) to conduct a restoration project at Hoypus Point in Deception Pass State Park.

This site contains remnants of an obsolete ferry terminal that served the location in the early 1900s. It is approximately one mile from the Cornet Bay restoration site where the MRC has been involved in restoration and monitoring efforts.

A feasibility study and conceptual design completed in 2020 recommended the removal of approximately 350 feet of shoreline armor, including large rock and concrete debris. The design also included removal of fill, regrading the shoreline to a natural slope, placement of appropriate beach substrate, and installation of native vegetation.

The project will restore a bluff-backed beach and the marine riparian connection. Restoring these ecosystem elements and nearshore processes is expected to improve habitat for salmon as well as spawning habitat for forage fish.

The MRC has worked with the NWSF (project sponsor) and WSP to move the project forward into final design and permitting. The NWSF will lead the project through construction as the MRC continues to partner in the restoration and monitoring process. The project officially has begun, and the hope is to wrap up sometime in November 2022.



*Shoreline armoring at Hoypus Point. Photo by Kelly Zupich*

## Accomplishments

- Project has started as of October 6, 2022.
- Captured pre-restoration drone footage of site. The footage will be used to make an educational video featuring the site pre, during, and post restoration.



# Restoration: Cornet Bay Stewardship

The MRC has been partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation, Washington State Parks, and other partners to restore shoreline habitat at Cornet Bay in Deception Pass State Park.

The first phase of restoration occurred in October 2012, and included removing a creosote-treated bulkhead, re-grading the beach to a natural slope, and planting native vegetation.

The next phase of restoration occurred in November 2015 and included removing fill along the shoreline, re-grading the slope, expanding the salt marsh area, and planting native vegetation.

The native vegetation has been maintained through regular weeding, watering, and installation of additional plantings as needed.

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, this site continues to become more established and provides much-needed habitat for nearshore life.

## Accomplishments

- Volunteers and staff from the MRC and staff from the Northwest Straits Foundation installed over 200 plants.
- Around 80 yds of mulch and compost was layered at two sites at Cornet Bay.
- MRC staff and volunteers watered and weeded as needed throughout the summer months of 2021 in the newest phase of restoration.



*Before and after at site 1 of the Cornet Bay Restoration. photo Kelly Zupich*

# Education and Outreach:

## Meetings, Events, and Presentations

The MRC engaged in several outreach efforts throughout the year. Outreach is an integral part of each MRC project. By helping the community understand what the MRC does and why, the MRC strives to increase public interest in learning about and caring for the local marine environment.



*Marine Debris study. Photo by Kelly Zupich.*



*Family Outdoor Day. Photo by Mary Williford*

### Accomplishments

- Along with partners, honored volunteer Frances Wood as the 2021 Jan Holmes Island County Coastal Volunteer of the Year.
- Made presentations to the Board of Island County Commissioners, Earth Day Town Hall, Swinomish Students, and at the Camano library.
- Distributed crab gauges, rot cord, and educational handouts to recreational crabbers and to local businesses.
- Contributed to the monthly Island County Natural Resources newsletter.
- Participated in Orca Recovery Day, Earth Day, Sound Waters University, Salish Sea Ecosystem Recovery Conference, and the Northwest Straits Collaborative Conservation Workshop.
- Contributed to Whidbey Weekly's "Make a Difference" column by submitting two different articles.
- Taught over 100 children about the marine environment.
- Shared the "Discover our Island Shores" video and curriculum with local schools.
- Hosted a table at the Whidbey Island Fair, Family Outdoor Day, and Camano 101.
- Created educational posts for social media multiple times a month.



*Juvenile salmonid found at Cornet Bay during seining. Photo by Kelly Zupich*

[www.islandcountymrc.org](http://www.islandcountymrc.org)