



Minutes

Northwest Straits Commission Meeting

Port Williams Boat Ramp and Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe Community Center

July 24, 2026, 10:30 AM – 2:45 PM

Attendees

Commission Members: Jamie Stephens (Chair), Lynne Wenberg-Davidson (Vice-Chair, Skagit), Rick Beauregard (Whatcom), Alan Clark (Clallam), Ken Collins (Island), Brenda Johnson (Jefferson), Phil Salditt (Snohomish), Elsa Schwartz (Island)

Commission Staff: Lucas Hart, Sasha Horst, Leah Skare, Jeff Whitty, Katalin Chapman

Others in Attendance: Mark Ozias (Clallam County Commissioner)

Absent: Cecilia Gobin (Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission), Emily Grason, Mike Ramsey (San Juan), Mindy Roberts (Puget Sound Partnership)

Welcome and Tribal Acknowledgement

Jamie Stephens opened the meeting with the Tribal Acknowledgment and introductions.

The June 26, 2026, Northwest Straits Commission meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Clallam Marine Resource Committee (MRC) Site Visit: Pigeon Guillemot Monitoring

Clallam MRC Member Ed Bowlby led a site visit of the Port Williams [Pigeon Guillemot monitoring site](#). Dedicated volunteers follow the [Salish Sea Guillemot Network](#) survey protocol to monitor the species and promote community science contributions to regional research. Ed highlighted that Pigeon Guillemots’ use of coastal bluffs for nesting and subtidal habitat for feeding makes them an excellent indicator of nearshore habitat health.

Remarks from Clallam County Commissioner Mark Ozias

Clallam County Commissioner Mark Ozias welcomed the Commission to Clallam County and expressed his gratitude for the work of MRCs. He specifically called out education and outreach work, kelp bed monitoring, pigeon guillemot monitoring, and Olympia oyster restoration projects. He praised the advisory role of MRCs and emphasized that implementing advice from MRCs gives him confidence in the longevity and merit of policies.



MRC Reports

Clallam MRC – Alan Clark

- The kelp team successfully completed their first survey at Clallam Bay with new volunteers from the Olympic Paddling Club. More than 30 sea otters were spotted!
- The forage fish team collected samples from 4 beaches and found large numbers of surf smelt in Dungeness Bay. New volunteer Rian Robinson is supporting with collection protocols.
- Olympia oyster restoration work was highlighted in the [Northwest Treaty Tribes summer newsletter](#). Check it out on page 10!
- 24-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) trainings are set for October 27 – 28.

Island MRC – Ken Collins

- Monitoring and restoration projects are moving along well.
- The MRC continues to work on their 2027-2030 strategic plan and will use the August meeting to hear from Skagit MRC about the successful creation and implementation of their strategic plan.

Jefferson MRC – Brenda Johnson

- The Olympia oyster restoration team surveyed Discovery Bay and Mystery Bay. 14 volunteers collected 142 samples over 4 hours at Discovery Bay.
- Kelp bed kayak monitoring found the North Beach bed is growing and has many reproductive leaves. Unfortunately, it has been a challenge to attract volunteers.
- The Mystery Bay management plan, created in 2010 to protect the bay from heavy boat traffic and mooring, is currently under review.

San Juan MRC – Provided written report

- The MRC has successfully supported 50 Tier 1 HAZWOPER responders through all their training.
- Remotely operated underwater vehicles (ROVs) are successfully removing derelict crab pots, and drones are identifying derelict vessels and tracking boater behavior.

Skagit MRC – Lynne Wenberg - Davidson

- After disappearing for 2-3 years, the East Shannon Point bull kelp bed is returning with healthy but loosely formed blades! Invasive sargassum may play a role in the disappearance.
- Many kelp monitoring kayakers did not return this season, though the local paddle club has helped fill vacant volunteer slots.



- A total of 397 derelict pots were identified and mapped for targeted removal. The 3 contracted dive teams removed 75 derelict crab pots in Similk Bay in June. ROVs have removed 5 pots so far and will continue focusing on deep water targets.

Snohomish MRC – Phil Salditt

- The MRC approved two letters of support for Tulalip Tribes. One for European green crab invasive species management funding and the other for culvert removal funding.
- Kelp and eelgrass monitoring are in progress, and the county has purchased kayaks and safety gear to support the project.
- Derelict vessel identification and forage fish monitoring are both in progress.
- The Marine Vegetation Outreach Subcommittee developed a 1-pager to share with boating groups and is planning to give more detailed presentations as well.
- Crabber outreach at the Everett boat launch resulted in 191 contacts over the 2 days of opening weekend.

Whatcom MRC – Rick Beauregard

- Low phytoplankton numbers were recorded at the 2 sampled sites, potentially due to high water temperatures. Additionally, no phytotoxins were found in sampled shellfish.
- Olympia oyster monitoring in Drayton Harbor and Chuckanut Bay is ongoing.
- The MRC established an Advisory Subcommittee and has been meeting to discuss their mission and process.
- Humpback and orca whales have recently been sighted in Semiahmoo Bay.

Committee Updates

Executive Committee

Lynne shared that the Committee discussed NW Straits Commission budget planning elements, including the need to better understand baseline funding requirements for the Commission and MRCs, which can help inform future budget decisions. Next steps will include reaching out to MRC staff and chairs to gather MRC budget information.

Other topics included the possibility of having a 1-day conference every other year instead of the 2-day conference every year, reviewing commissioner roles and responsibilities, and Environmental Leadership Award nominees, which the Committee will vote on in the coming weeks.



External Relations

MRC congressional and legislative site visits are in progress. Rick Larsen is visiting Skagit County next week. The visit will include kayaking kelp beds with Skagit MRC and Olympia oyster restoration with Samish Indian Nation and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.

Senator Murray and Representative Randall's staff will visit Jefferson County next week. Jefferson and Clallam representatives will join the tour, which is scheduled to highlight pinto abalone restoration, kelp conservation, and Olympia oyster restoration.

Representative Ramel will visit Whatcom MRC's Olympia oyster restoration field day in August. Skagit, Island, Jefferson, and Clallam MRCs are also discussing site visit options for state legislators in August and September.

No update on reauthorization. It is awaiting passage in the Senate.

Science Advisory Committee (SAC)

The SAC met on July 8 and discussed Collaborative Sessions and the Pre-Conference SAC Workshop.

Two of three Collaborative Sessions between the SAC and MRCs have already happened. The goal of these sessions is to help MRCs work through processes, questions, or challenges on existing projects or the development of new project and advisory ideas. The SAC discussed the success of these sessions and how SAC members can best prepare for them. Please contact Dana Oster (oster@nwstraits.org) by September 18 if your MRC is interested in a Collaborative Session.

The SAC is planning a Pre-MRC Conference Workshop that will be offered on the first day of the Conference, November 6. The workshop will focus on effective ecological monitoring, and participants will leave with a better general understanding of the different types of monitoring programs and how monitoring purpose shapes decisions about design, partners, and endpoints. This workshop will be a mix of learning and applying what we cover to case studies and your own work or ideas. Registration and more information will be included in MRC Conference registration in August.

Business Items

Strategic Plan and Funding Review

Lucas gave a review of the [strategic plan](#) action items and Commission funding.

Commissioners discussed the need for MRCs to be proactive about recruitment. They noted that potential recruits may feel they aren't qualified, don't have the time, or are not familiar enough with MRCs.



Elsa cautioned the Commission not to be overly prescriptive by mandating specific recruitment requirements for MRCs. Instead, recruitment tactics could be framed as suggestions or recommendations designed to help MRCs overcome recruitment challenges.

Lynne recommended providing a briefing to MRC members on the outcomes of the meetings between NW Straits Commission staff, MRC staff, and county leadership.

Commissioners discussed the benefits of the strategic plan and shared their delight that it is being used as an effective tool to implement actions.

Project Updates

Kelp Update

Jeff Whitty gave an overview of MRCs' kayak-based kelp surveys and the [accompanying Story Map](#). Compared to [SoundIQ](#), where anyone can view and download the data, this Story Map provides context for the project and visually highlights the data and work of each MRC. It includes an interactive data map, photos, testimonials, and trends. Please contact Jeff Whitty (whitty@nwstraits.org) with any questions.

Vessel Turn-in Event Planning

Dana Oster updated the Commission on her work with the Makah Tribe and the Department of Natural Resources to run a vessel turn-in recycling event in August. They expect an estimated 28 boats, including those brought in by the Coast Guard from the marina, abandoned on the Makah Reservation, and turned in by Tribal community members. This will add to the 29 vessels removed in 2023-2025 and 92 vessels collected during turn-in events in 2024 and 2025.

Please contact Dana Oster (oster@nwstraits.org) with any questions.

Northwest Straits Commissioner Updates

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

There was no update this month.

Puget Sound Partnership

There was no update this month.



Roundtable

Representative Larsen's staff asked for the Commission's thoughts on the planned Alberta to British Columbia oil pipeline. Commissioners shared:

- Alberta crude is diluted bitumen, which sinks in the water. Technology does not exist to clean it up after a spill.
- San Juan County and the MRC have been focused on spill prevention by seeking an emergency rescue tug to be stationed in Sydney or Roche Harbor. They feel prevention will become more important as traffic increases.
- Risk assessments have been done for crude oil, but not bitumen.
- [Southern Resident Orca Task Force recommendations](#) included reducing the threat of oil spills (recommendation 24) as well as a recommendation to conduct an environmental review to minimize whale strikes and underwater noise (recommendation 49).
- Baseline habitat assessments and monitoring are needed to be effective at oil spill cleanup.
- [Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network](#) (24th Congressional District) has discussed meeting with Canadian counterparts about oil spill risk and planning. Details were not known, but we could ask around if needed.
- Folks expressed concern for the crab fishery and kelp habitat in the vicinity of the tanker traffic.

This input will be provided to Rep. Larsen's staff.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 PM.

The next meeting of the Northwest Straits Commission will be on August 28, 2026, on Zoom. Information can be found on our [events page](#).