



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **September 12, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Betsy Stevenson, Cynthia Nielsen, Darla Gay Smith, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Elizabeth Drozda, Melissa Ciesielski
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Pete Haase, Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie, Jude Apple, Paul Dinnel, Tracy Alker
- **Others in Attendance:** Caitlyn Blair (NWS), Jeff Whitty (NWS), Carolyn Moulton (Anacortes City Council), Caitie Sheban (Skagit County Planning and Development Services), Jenn Johnson (Skagit County Public Works)

Call to Order and Introductions: Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: August 8, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments: None

Northwest Straits Commission Report: Lynne Wenberg-Davidson

Last NWSC meeting occurred **August 23**, 10am-12pm, held via Zoom. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- The Science Advisory Committee – is hosting a Social Science Seminar: Understanding and Engaging Communities Using Social Sciences on October 2nd from 4:00pm to 5:30pm. All MRCs and staff, and NW Straits members are invited. *See MRC Sep 12 meeting packet for more information about an invitation and the Zoom link.*
- NWSI Annual Conference- Nov 15-16: at the Delta Hotel in Everett. Registration is now open. *See MRC Sep 12 meeting packet for more information about reimbursement protocol.* Event website: [2024 Northwest Straits Conference \(nwstraits.org\)](https://2024.nwstraits.org)
- NWSC approved a proposed budget for \$1M in NOAA programmatic funding appropriated for fiscal year 2024. The funds will be spent over three years, allowing for MRC grant funding through 2027. Commission staff are preparing the application to submit to NOAA for approval in September.
- Skagit MRC Vessel Turn-In Recycling Event began July 22, 2024, Applications for 50 vessels to be deconstructed during the event were received. 47 vessels were completed during the initial timeframe. La Conner Maritime Service extended and upgraded the contract to finish all the approved vessels by 9/27. A media event was held with all the project partners, special guests, elected officials and media to witness the deconstruction and recycle process. The media day event was an opportunity to showcase the amazing collaborative work by all the project partners. Jessica Owens made a video.
- NW Straits Insider Roundup will have first iteration in September– looking for feedback. Goal to share resources distinct from external communication channels, foster connections, stay informed and share information.
- Next NWSC meeting: **September 27**, 10am-noon, held virtually via Zoom.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - The SSS Advisory Committee will begin planning for the 2025 training program with an in-person meeting at Padilla Bay Reserve on October 18, 2024.

- On September 10, 2024 Darla Gay Smith, as the MRC Stewards Lead, participated in NOAA's 5-year review of the PBNERR at the Reserve. She reported to the NOAA review panel the invaluable collaborative role the Reserve plays in the Steward program by:
 - Using the PBNERR in Program advertising
 - Using the classroom at the Reserve to hold training over 10 weeks
 - Using Reserve staff to recruit speakers on current scientific topics for Program training sessions and facilitating the training classes
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase via Betsy from written report:
 - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue.
 - Negotiating with WDFW to include an additional index survey site near the old Lovrick Marina on the Guemes Channel. Waiting for landowner permission to access the site.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple via Betsy from email:
 - Reserve staff unavailable for MRC meeting and report because of NOAA evaluation.
- La Conner Elementary School Rain Garden – Elizabeth Drozda:
 - On July 31, the County Road Crew regraded the asphalt and created additional notches in the curb around the rain garden to help direct stormwater flow into the rain garden. They suggested creating a swale in the asphalt to the rain garden.
 - Coordinating with the school's facilities staff to clean up the raingarden and remove some plants to make room for culturally significant native plants.
 - Will reach out to Washington Native Plant Society to see if they have the plants on our list available for planting this fall.
 - May be enough money so signage is an option, too.
 - Working with Elizabeth Fakkema, Principal, on the possibility of having 4th and 5th grade science ambassadors be involved in talking about the value of rain gardens.
 - Mount Erie School rain garden needs maintenance. Elizabeth would like to replace nonnative species with native and culturally significant plant species.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker via Betsy from report:
 - Despite the cold rainy weather, an estimated 300 people showed up (less than last year, but still a pretty good turnout) We received lots of positive feedback.
 - We had 35 participating organizations, 31 Discovery Passport Outreach Stations (a new record), 155 Passport Booklets handed out, over 30 volunteers (much fewer than usual), and 5 local businesses supporting the event this year.
 - A few planned activities were canceled including the Samish Canoe family canoe rides and Corra the Selkie.
 - Jude Apple was the MC and kicked off the event (thank you Jude!) followed by a Samish welcome from Rosie Cayou.
 - Jason Morgan with the help of volunteers led the very popular beach seining demonstration in the afternoon. Shannon Point Marine Center's touch tanks were also a crowd favorite.
 - Food included complimentary popcorn and chowder and shellfish samples and a traditional No-Host Coast Salish BBQ Salmon and Indian Tacos.
 - Crab hats, orca hats, fish prints, and face painting (thank you Elizabeth) were a huge hit.
 - Skagit MRC's kelp forest coloring activity "fort hideout" was also a huge hit. Some parents couldn't get their kids to come out of the kelp forest (see photos on page 6).
 - There was a raffle drawing just for the volunteers. 13 names were drawn for gift certificates to local seafood restaurants.
 - The Anacortes American published a recent article about the event.
 - Thank You cards and emails were sent out to participants.
 - Need a new lead for next year's Fidalgo Bay Day event.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel via Betsy from email:

- No new updates of significance for abalone.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinnel via Betsy from email:
 - No new updates of significance for oysters.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Cynthia Nielsen:
 - Cynthia Nielsen reported there was a kickoff meeting on August 15, 2024.
 - Cynthia is coordinating and facilitating the communications plan and interpretive signage content development in collaboration with the City of Anacortes and other stakeholders. They have signage and a videographer. Birdie Davenport from DNR is doing the text for signage and webpage for Anacortes and should all be completed by December.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Skagit surveys occur monthly June-Sept and include the following sites: Coffin Rocks (Steven Olsen - Lead), Biz Point (John Freeto - Lead), Shannon Point east/west (Lynne Wenberg - Lead) and new "Lone Tree Point" (Steven Olsen – Lead). Kelp Season is wrapping up! September are the last surveys of the year – weather starts to break down and tides/currents can be challenging this time of year so hopefully we can all squeeze in our surveys safely.

 - **Coffin Rocks:** August 18, Steven lead the team of Hal Lee and Joan Magee. Observations: Kelp bed surrounds Coffin Rocks completely; very healthy in appearance. Thick clusters close to rocks, and numerous outliers on edges (2-4 single kelp). Rock top exposed with a flock of seagulls perched on top. One juvenile pigeon guillemot observed. Two-three porpoises surfaced north of rock with a harbor seal surfacing after the porpoises left.
 - Next CR survey is September 16.
 - **Shannon Point:** August 15, Lynne lead the team of Hal Lee, Dorothy Bradshaw and Elizabeth Drozda-Freeman.
 - West Kelp Bed Observations: Nanoose was more accurate reflection of currents (again). The current and winds were calm with little boat wakes. The "new" southern kelp bed grew into a full larger bed connecting with typical north kelp bed. Additional sparse kelp was found along the shoreline outside of track. Some sargassum observed nearer to shore. "New" bed formed south of traditional west bed with narrow but connecting row of bulbs to make a single track. Kelp very healthy with long blades. Sparse sargassum observed close to shore. Two harbor porpoise and one bald eagle in a tree observed.
 - East Bed Observations: Current and winds were calm, few boat wakes. Some single kelp bulbs were observed outside of track both near shore and far offshore. Kelp was healthy and very sparse, but enough bulbs and spacing to get a small track. The sargassum has died way back to shore from last two months. There were other single kelp bulbs outside track. Two herons, belted kingfisher and a purple sea star observed.

Next survey is scheduled for September 14.
 - **Biz Point:** Lynne led the team with Joan Magee and Catherine. Calm winds, light fog / mist. Current was slack. Sparse kelp observed outside of main bed and outside of the "new" south and north beds. Kelp was very healthy, long blades and dense in places. Tracks provided for "new" south and north beds - more kelp was observed outside of all the tracked beds. Two harbor porpoises, many harbor seals, pigeon guillemots, fried egg jellyfish, belted kingfisher and large schools of small silver fish among the kelp beds.

Next BP survey is scheduled for September 16.

 - **Lone Tree:** August 20, Steven led the team with Catherine Houck and Joan Magee. Localized winds picked up to 15-25 knots, so paddle was cut short. Several crab trap buoys trapped in kelp beds on north side of reef. Possibly still anchored to crab traps below surface. Kelp appears very healthy and very dense/thick on NW side of reef. Kelp bed extends westward of survey area toward Hope Island. Conditions too rough with white caps to survey further. About one hour after slack water flood current submerged kelp north of reef.

Next LT survey is scheduled for September 17.

Kelp bed name update: Per Lindy Hunter, The Swinomish Cultural Committee had a meeting on Thursday and I was able to present your kelp bed naming request. They are leaning towards using the Lushootseed place names for the bed off Skagit Island and Lone Tree Point but have requested time to brainstorm and discuss. They don't meet very often so it might be a while before I can get the names to you. I will check in with them at their next meeting and have requested that the names are decided on before your next year of surveying begins. I'll be in touch when they've decided.

- **WA DNR's Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead (HSIL):** team will be visiting Bowman Bay or a nearby area on August 29th (sometime between 12:30 and 3:00). The HSIL team supports Puget Sound habitat recovery and conservation issues through HSIL funding and also runs various implementation strategies, including a Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy that will be developed over the next year. Bree Turner, who is organizing this trip, asked if Jeff Whitty can present on the Kelp Plan and Steven Olsen will present on Skagit's kayak kelp surveys.

- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Plant Maintenance—Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

BOWMAN BAY BEACH SEINING (2024 – 2025):

Updates:

Date	Species	Count
8/14/2024	english sole	4
8/14/2024	staghorn sculpin	22
8/14/2024	starry flounder	2
8/14/2024	snake prickleback	1
8/14/2024	penpoint gunnel	1
8/14/2024	saddleback gunnel	1
8/14/2024	shiner perch	362
8/14/2024	threespine stickleback	1
8/14/2024	Bay pipefish	1
8/14/2024	Sand sole	1
8/14/2024	Greenling	1

Date	# Volunteers	Total Volunteer Hours
8/14/2024	5	11

8/14/2024 Total Fish: 397

▪ Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Updates:

- Using the Parks water truck, we completed watering of the restoration site August 8th, August 15, and August 22. We received substantial rain to allow for no watering on the week of August 22nd but anticipate watering a few more times throughout September as the warm weather continues. The native vegetation appears to be continuing to increase in survivability and growth, in large part to weekly watering, mulching, and weeding by staff and volunteers.
- On August 22nd we hosted our final scheduled stewardship event for the summer season. We were joined by 3 NWSF staff, 2 Skagit County MRC staff, and 3 volunteers. We continued to tackle some of the blackberry at the South end of Bowman Bay. We also weeded the majority of the zones in preparation for the coming fall.
- Moving forward we will continue to water as needed. We are in the planning phases for planting party at Bowman Bay during Orca Recovery week (October 19), we have ordered some native vegetation to supplement bare areas within the restoration site. More information and registration page will be distributed soon.

- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

The Shoreline Needs Assessment project with Confluence Environmental is underway.

- Meeting with Confluence every 2 weeks. A Skagit Co GIS representative has requested to participate and will attend meetings as possible.
- A one-hour update and review held with Skagit Advisory Team (this time Lisa Kaufmann, Rick Haley, Suzanne Shull, Tracy and me for feedback.
- Task 1 – Initial new Geodatabase
 - Task 1 deliverable (memo with proposed initial database structure, primary datasets to be used and prioritization datasets) was reviewed with Skagit Advisory Team.
- Task 2 – Literature Review
 - Task 2 deliverable provided contains a spreadsheet of 167 possible source publications and dataset descriptions.
 - Good feedback from Skagit Advisory Team will be shared with Confluence – appropriate scale is biggest concern (multiple large scale, older data sources)
- Task 3 – Develop Prioritization Process, Perform Analysis, Identify MRC Focus Areas
 - The following preliminary categories were proposed for prioritization:
 - ❖ Landscape Context
 - ❖ Ecosystem Process
 - ❖ Habitat Function
- Task 4 – Develop High Priority Restoration or Protection Projects
 - tbd
- Task 5 – Final Geodatabase
 - tbd

Collaborative Networking Activity- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment: Lynne

- On another note, Suzanne Shull and Confluence both plan to provide demonstrations during the Collaborative Networking Activity (an MRC report out) of 1) the new SoundIQ (Suzanne) and 2) Skagit Needs Assessment Web Map (Confluence) at the upcoming NWS Commission Annual Conference on November 15-16. These demonstrations will show how the Shoreline Needs Assessment products will interface with the new SoundIQ capability that Suzanne has been working on. It should be pretty cool!

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- Elizabeth followed up with Shannon about the Pigeon Guillemot Network survey proposal possibly sponsored by Skagit MRC. They are developing “burrows not visible protocol” to be able to take surveys by land so it won’t require boats being available. It’s possible 2025 could be a scouting year for potential survey sites and surveys could begin in 2026 using the modified protocol. She conferred with Tim Manns and discovered it was a challenging proposition to find areas to access by land.
- Lynne mentioned that Bill Dewey from Taylor Shellfish approached her about the MRC hosting a booth for the Skagit Festival of Family Farms October 5 and 6. She asked for volunteers to help. Betsy agreed to help.
- Registration open for the NW Straits annual conference November 15-16. Instructions for reimbursement were contained in Tracy’s email with MRC September meeting materials. Register by October 15. Caitlyn Blair offered insight into the program and agenda.
See website for more details <https://www.nwstraits.org/2024-northwest-straits-conference>
- Betsy summarized the visit with Representative Rick Larsen at the Fidalgo Bay RV Resort on August 27, 2024. Boots in the Bay organized by NW Straits Commission staff to showcase the work being done by Skagit MRC, Samish Indian Nation, Padilla Bay Reserve, Port of Anacortes, City of Anacortes, and the Northwest Straits Commission. These project demonstrations and presentations were a great opportunity to highlight the type of work the NW Straits reauthorization bill supports.

The meeting adjourned at 11:10am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually September 12, 2024, via Microsoft Teams.

FIDALGO BAY DAY MRC DISPLAY

