



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **July 11, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) via Microsoft Teams

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Elizabeth Drozda, Betsy Stevenson, Pete Haase, Kevin Anderson, Raquel Crosier (Jude Apple's Alternate)
  - **MRC Members Absent:** Darla Gay Smith, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Jude Apple, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Leah Skare (NWSC); Sasha Horst (NWSC); Craig Thomas (UW); Cynthia Nielsen (SSS Volunteer); Ryan Mielke (FBAR Volunteer); Tom Koontz (UW); Chang, Katherine (UW)

**Call to Order and Introductions:** Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

**Approval of Minutes:** June 13, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**Public Comments:** None

## How Collaborative Partnerships Apply Science: Craig Thomas and Research Team (U.W.)

- Last fall, Skagit MRC helped the U.W. research team field a survey on how collaborative partnerships with diverse interests find and apply science in their decision-making processes to develop policies, plans, proposals, projects, etc. The report was shared with MRC members.
- **Research questions:** When do collaborative participants in the Puget Sound basin seek scientific information, and how do they find it and evaluate it? What makes a piece of scientific information useful? How do they apply it to their local context? In relative to science? (could be any type of science: social science, natural science, physical science, etc.)
- **Research project included 3 phases:** (1) building a catalog of collaborative environmental organizations in the Puget Sound region working on ecosystem restoration planning and projects; (2) interviewing members of several of these organizations to help set up survey questions (interviewees were randomly selected using a software system); and (3) conducting a web-based survey of participants across all these collaborative organizations.
  - Skagit MRC members were not interviewed, but several committee members completed the online survey.
  - 54 ecosystem recovery partnerships invited to participate in the web-based survey in 2023.
  - 292 viable responses received out of 940 eligible members and across 51 partnerships (no responses from 3 partnerships). Mostly from government led partnerships (e.g. Lead Entities, RFEGs, MRCs, LIOs, etc.).
- **Expertise of respondents:** Most indicated natural science expertise. Many other types of expertise are also represented. Its possible that more scientists took the survey than non-scientists. Social science ranked low. Respondents ranked social science as less important than natural science.
- **Most common barriers to applying science:** logistical constraints, such as cost and decision deadlines.
- **What makes scientific information useful:** relevance and credibility ranked highest.
- **When do respondents seek scientific information?** To understand problems and develop solutions and recommend a specific course of action.
- **Most common obstacles to finding science information:** insufficient time or labor to find it, too much data to sift through, and missing data.

- MRCs indicated capacity was one of the biggest hurdles. Capacity was less of an obstacle for respondents from other organizations.
- **Where do most respondents get their scientific information?** Request help from others within or outside their partnership, particularly scientific information produced by government bodies.
- **Where do MRCs get scientific information?** Meetings and conferences and inviting expertise/speakers to share information and networking with other partnership members.
- Asked which of these findings resonate with MRC members and how might these results be useful for MRCs and NWSC? Weren't sure if any non-science people filled out the survey.
  - Several MRC members that are not scientists took the survey. Although they don't consider themselves to be scientists most have taken some form of science classes or training.
  - MRC members feel that communicating science with others in a way that resonates with them is important and it's something we should incorporate into planning and implementing projects.
  - This information could help inform our thoughts about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and bringing more people with different expertise into these types of projects. How do MRCs recruit new members with more diverse expertise and backgrounds or invite those experts to present at MRC meetings?
    - Puget Sound Partnership Social Science Advisory Committee meets monthly and is a good place to get more information and certain expertise to present at MRC meetings.

#### **Northwest Straits Commission Report:** *Darla Gay Smith*

Last NWSC meeting occurred **June 28**, 10am-12pm, held virtually via Zoom. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- **NWSI Reauthorization:** On June 18, 2024, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), and U.S. Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA-02) reintroduced legislation to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Initiative. Reauthorization will recognize the Initiative as a federal program and acknowledge the importance of locally driven marine conservation.
  - **Senator Patty Murray visit:** Tuesday, July 16 at Padilla Bay with the Northwest Straits Commission and reps from all MRCs to talk about the NWSI reauthorization and MRC projects from each county. Paul Dinnel and Todd Woodard will talk about MRC and Samish projects in Skagit County.
  - **Rep Rick Larsen visit:** Aug 22 or 27 at Fidalgo Bay Resort with the NWSC and Skagit MRC to talk about the NWSI reauthorization and MRC projects in collaboration with the Samish and NWSC regional projects.
- **New Gubernatorial Appointee:** The NW Straits Commission welcomed Jamie Stephens as the new gubernatorial appointee to the Commission. He is a former San Juan County Council member and Lopez Island resident.
- **Diversity Equity Inclusion Assessment Presentation:** Tevin Medley & the Athena Group shared a brief update of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion assessment survey, focus groups, and a project summary presentation.
- **Ohop Creek Stormwater Management Pilot Project Presentation:** Keith Estes from *Long Live the Kings* presented on the *Ohop Creek stormwater management pilot project*. The project tested the efficacy of using an above ground compost-based biofiltration system to collect and clean stormwater from roadway runoff.
- **Next NWSC meeting:** **July 26**, 10am-3pm, held at the Port Townsend Yacht Club

#### **Project Status & Discussion**

- **Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:**
  - The SSS Advisory Committee started their summer break. The AC will resume with an in-person meeting in October to review the 2024 Steward Class surveys and start to plan for the 2025 SSS Training Program at Padilla Bay.
- **Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:**
  - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue.

- Spawning is good in Fidalgo Bay and is picking up in Similk Bay.
- Volunteers helped with forage fish sampling demos at the Bowman Bay Discovery Day on June 28. Several students from The Salish Sea School that participated spoke very little English. An interpreter was there to help communicate the information that was being shared. An important reminder to be mindful of these communication barriers and to do our best to make sure the information we provide is accessible to everyone.
- Pete announced he will no longer be the forage fish lead after the end of this year. He is working with other volunteers to figure out how to restructure and reorganize and transition things over to someone new.
- Bob Weathers, a longtime volunteer for forage fish surveys and bull kelp kayak surveys recently moved to California. The good news is that two longtime volunteers, Dale Fournier and Brad Smith, are moving back to Shelter Bay after moving to the east coast two years ago and are eager to get involved in volunteering again!
- Kids on the Beach – Raquel Crosier:
  - Kids on the Beach programs took place in April with Concrete High School students and in May with Allen Elementary Mount Vernon fifth grade students (first year participating). Lots of help from volunteers during field days. It was a very successful spring program. Planning will start up again soon for the next school year.
- School Rain Gardens – Tracy Alker:
  - **Mt. Erie School Rain Garden:** The NWSF is leading the maintenance effort at this site with their two interns and the County intern. They purchased some tools, a hose, and key for water access. Weeding and watering took place on July 15.
  - **La Conner School Rain Garden:**
    - Elizabeth Drozda will be taking over as the new MRC project Lead of the school rain garden project.
    - The top priority is to improve stormwater flow to the rain garden because it isn't currently functioning properly as a rain garden. The County Road Crew will create additional notches in the curb around the rain garden and re-grade the asphalt area to help direct stormwater flow into the rain garden. Construction will hopefully take place in August, before school starts back up again (once we get permission from the school).
    - This fall we plan to spruce up the bare areas with additional native plants and mulch with the planting plan provided by the Skagit Conservation District. We also hope to incorporate culturally significant plantings for food and/or a medicine garden.
    - There won't likely be enough funding left to install interpretive signage this year, but we hope to get it done next year.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
  - Date has been set for Saturday, August 24, 2024, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
  - Event Agenda: Samish led beach seining, Shannon Point Marine Center Touch Tank (waiting on confirmation), outreach tables, chowders, shellfish, no-host salmon BBQ, popcorn, face painting, kids craft tables, Corra the Mermaid-Selkie, discovery passport activity, Samish canoe experience (waiting on confirmation).
  - 27 outreach booths confirmed.
  - Collecting and coordinating Discovery Passport Station Questions for outreach booths. The deadline for Passport questions is August 3.
  - Only 21 volunteers signed up so far. Still have lots of volunteer vacancies to fill: Parking, zero waste, popcorn, kids craft tables, Event announcer, photographers, roving volunteer break relief, and setup/cleanup.
  - Event promo starting to ramp up. Posted event to online event calendars and resources.
  - Skagit Soils will take our compost free of charge for this event with our pre-approved compostable plates, bowls, cups, and utensils we have in stock.

- Planning kids craft activities. Skagit MRC and The Salish Sea School will be hosting the kids craft tables this year along our outreach booths/Discovery Passport Station activity.
- Chowder Samples provided by Bob's Chowder Bar and Adrift (Thanks to Cynthia Nielsen for coordinating!) Anthony's and Secret Cove donated gift cards since they are unable to participate at the event this year. The gift cards will be given to FBD volunteers in a free drawing.
- Shellfish provided by Taylor Shellfish and BBQ'd by volunteers (Thanks to Paul for coordinating!). Kat will reserve the BBQ rental equipment soon.
- Traditional Coast Salish No-Host Salmon BBQ provided by Rosie and family.
- Popcorn- Kat contacted the Anacortes Boys and Girls Club to reserve the popcorn machine. Still waiting to hear back. Elizabeth said The Salish Sea School also has a popcorn machine we could borrow for this event if needed.
- Looking for an MRC member to kickoff the Fidalgo Bay Day event with a welcome, brief event agenda/overview, and tribal lands acknowledgement (we can provide a short script).
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
  - Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) with the help of WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Samish Indian Nation, and Seattle Aquarium completed field work for the winter/spring season (Feb- June).
  - Field work included monitoring of previously established outplant sites, adding new seed abalone, collecting new spawners for the laboratory, and commencing spawning activities in the lab to produce seed abalone for 2025.
    - Outplanted around 12,000 juvenile abalone in the San Juan Island area at 17 outplant sites. 5,600 of those abalone went to Skagit sites.
    - Collected 20 new broodstock for spawning in the hatchery.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneel:
  - Paul Coordinated with Puget Sound Restoration Fund to get new shell strings for deployment in Fidalgo Bay and later deployed strings at the trestle & Weaverling Spit. Also collected and processed the shell strings that had been set out in 2023. Collected and processed the 2023 shell recruitment bags from four Fidalgo Bay location. Settlement proved to very high in 2023. Set out new recruitment bags for collection in 2025.
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Tracy Alker:
  - Skagit MRC's Grant Funding from NOAA (\$58k) for this project expires December 31, 2024.
  - The City of Anacortes has a contract with Hanson Professional Services for the Fidalgo Bay trestle project including site investigation and baseline assessment (Geotech and hazardous materials), structural assessment (hydrodynamic modeling and sediment transport), alternatives analysis, and conceptual design.
  - Our Interlocal Agreement with the City of Anacortes was recently signed by the City. It is anticipated to get signed by the County next week. It includes the following deliverables: Interpretive signage, project website, short video clips for social media, community meetings, informational booth at Fidalgo Bay Day, and preliminary conceptual design.
  - The City would like the MRC and other stakeholders to help develop messaging and content for public outreach (interp signage, website, videos, etc.) and to participate at community meetings.
  - The Board of County Commissioners is interested in a presentation to learn more about this project. Would like MRC members to share perspectives why this project is important. Other speakers invited to present include the City of Anacortes, the Samish and WADNR Aquatic Reserve. Speakers will have the option of presenting in person or online. Trying to find a date that will work.
- Bull Kelp Kayak Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Skagit surveys 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).

- **Coffin Rocks:** A team of 3 volunteers surveyed June 20. Observations: Kelp density and health looked very good with young kelp still below surface. Next survey is July 19.
- **Shannon Point:** A team of 3 volunteers surveyed June 18.
  - West Kelp Bed Observations: Kelp appeared to be sparse but very healthy. Many individual bulbs were noted to the south of the track bed, as well as many detached small bulbs found washed up at shoreline.
  - East Bed Observations: Very little bull kelp – only 11 random single small bulbs (searching multiple times), several bulbs found surrounded in Sargassum. Not enough bulbs to track a bed. The shoreline is overrun with thick, invasive Sargassum.
  - Next SP survey is scheduled for July 17.
- **Biz Point:** survey was not conducted in June due to a scheduling conflict. The next BP survey is scheduled for July 9.
- **Lone Tree:** No survey was conducted in June due to access issues. Next LT survey is planned for July 22.
- Bowman Bay Beach Seining and Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
  - **Beach Seining Updates:** Beach seining is a project funded by Skagit MRC and Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and is led by Jason Morgan as the lead scientist with the help of volunteers including MRC members (Paul Dinnel and Lynne Wenberg-Davidson). Beach seining in June took place June 17 (150 fish) and June 28 (311 fish). They caught lots of shiner perch English sole, gunnel's and staghorn sculpin. They also caught Chinook, pricklyback, and greenling. 7-8 volunteers contributed a combined total of 21 volunteer hours each day.
  - **Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance Updates:** Lisa Kaufman with the NWSF is leading the plant maintenance effort for the Skagit MRC. Foundation staff continues to do weekly plant maintenance at the site every Thursday.
    - Using the Parks water truck, NWSF staff watered the restoration site on June 13<sup>th</sup>, June 20<sup>th</sup>, and July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The weeks that were skipped were due to sufficient rain for early season and no watering was necessary.
    - The next stewardship event is on July 25<sup>th</sup> with the NWSF staff, Foundation Board Members, and volunteers.
  - **Bowman Bay Discovery Day- Celebrating Habitat Restoration- June 28:** We kicked off the event with an overview of the history and ongoing habitat restoration of Bowman Bay presented by Lisa Kaufman. Outreach booths were hosted by the Skagit MRC, NWSF, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, The Salish Sea School, and the Salal Chapter of the Washington National Plant Society. Activities included spreading two yards of mulch within the restoration site, beach seining demonstrations, forage fish sampling demonstrations, forage fish eggs under microscopes, build a beach activity, and native plant ID. 14 first - third graders and 20 fifth – sixth graders from The Salish Sea School participated.
- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

The Shoreline Needs Assessment project with Confluence Environmental is underway.

  - Meeting with Confluence every 2 weeks.
  - Task 1 – Initial new Geodatabase
    - Task 1 deliverable was provided by Confluence for MRC review containing the proposed initial database structure, including snapshots of the current parcel and drift cell datasets. It is expected the database design will be updated iteratively as we make more decisions going forward.
  - Task 2 – Literature Review
    - Task 2 deliverable was provided by Confluence for MRC review containing a spreadsheet of 168 possible source publications and dataset descriptions.
    - Not all data will necessarily be used in the analysis. All datasets will become part of the final Skagit Resource Inventory for future use.

- Nearshore connections were noted of most importance to MRC: kelp/eelgrass, forage fish, native Olympia oysters and crab, consistent with current adjacent MRC projects.
- 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
    - ❖ Overall
  - Additional descriptions and attributes were reviewed and will continue to be developed for purposes of prioritization and analysis.
  - We confirmed that priority should be nearshore to maintain scope, but we may elect to add areas up the watershed in the future.
- Task 4 – Develop High Priority Restoration or Protection Projects
  - tbd
- Task 5 – Final Geodatabase
  - tbd

#### **SSS Volunteer Coordinator Project Recommendation: Betsy**

- State Funding for Year 1 of the Salish Sea Stewards Volunteer Coordinator project ended 6/30/24. This project was experimental, and it has proven to be challenging as a stand-alone project and unable to meet all the grant deliverable requirements. In addition, Lynne is stepping down as project lead, and in the absence of an MRC member project lead it is no longer eligible for Commission funding. Lynne, Darla, and Pete are making the recommendation to the MRC to close the Volunteer Coordinator Project and reallocate Year 2 funding (\$20k) to the Salish Sea Stewards Training project to help supplement the training program and some volunteer coordination. The recommendation was brought to a vote by the MRC.
  - Action: MRC voted by consensus to approve the recommendation to close the Volunteer Coordinator project and reallocate \$20k to the Salish Sea Stewards Training project for year 2 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025).

#### **Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All**

- MRC Quarterly Grant Progress Reports Due: July 15
  - Action: MRC members were asked to submit hours and project reports to Tracy as soon as possible.
- Pigeon Guillemot Breeding Survey: The Program Coordinator for the Salish Sea Guillemot Network's Pigeon Guillemot (PIGU) Breeding Survey would like to explore the possibility of expanding surveys to Skagit County if there are any volunteers willing to get involved in coordinating the effort.
  - Action: The Committee requested the Program Coordinator be invited to a future MRC meeting to share more information about this project.
- Passport to Marine Adventure: The NW Straits Foundation is refreshing their Passport to Marine Adventure Application where participants collect points when they visit sites and redeem points for discounts at local businesses. They would like the MRC to select 3 new sites to add along with a brief description and something engaging for the user to do along with a photo of the for each site. Potential new sites: Bowman Bay Deception Pass State Park, Sunset Beach Washington Park, and South Padilla Bay Shore Trail. Looking for MRC volunteers to take the lead on this!
  - Action: Raquel volunteered to write something up for the South Padilla Bay Shore Trail. Betsy volunteered to take on the Sunset Beach Washington Park location.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50am. The next MRC meeting will be held virtually August 8, 2024, via Microsoft Teams.