



# SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **August 08, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) via Microsoft Teams

## Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Betsy Stevenson, Jude Apple, Cynthia Nielsen, Darla Gay Smith, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel
  - **MRC Members Absent:** Pete Haase, Elizabeth Drozda, Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Lisa Kaufman (NWSF), Shannon Boldt (PIGU)

**Call to Order and Introductions:** Betsy called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

**Approval of Minutes:** July 11, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**Public Comments:** None

## Salish Sea Pigeon Guillemot (PIGU) Network's Breeding Survey: Shannon Boldt

- PIGU live in Puget sound year around and are considered a Marine Bird indicator species. They are adaptable to change and appear to be doing well.
- PIGU Network's Breeding Survey started on Whidbey Island in 2004. It is a collaborative effort between eight independently coordinated and sponsored survey regions across the Salish Sea, from Olympia all the way to the San Juans.
- 255 volunteers. 64 colonies surveyed. 2000 birds monitored last year.
- PIGU surveyed during the breeding season, from June through September. This entails survey teams sitting and observing PIGU breeding activity at their colonies for one hour, once a week. Record population numbers, frequency and types of prey delivered, and disturbances.
- Surveys take just 1 hour, done by 9am. Some areas require 2 surveyors others need more.
- Tides effect activity. More activity with high tides.
- Data Informs WDFW and UW. Value in long-term data sets.
- PIGU nest in bluffs, rock cavities and structures along the water. Not always easily observed from the shore. Easier with a boat. Have survey protocol for collecting population data for when burrows not visible.
- They like to eat crustaceans and gunnells are their favorite fish. Sculpin 2<sup>nd</sup> favorite.
- Currently don't have any surveys occurring in Skagit County and would love to explore the possibility of expanding surveys to Skagit if there are any volunteers willing to get involved in coordinating the effort.
  - Skagit MRC was involved in PIGU surveys in 2007 and has some maps that show where the breeding sites were located.
  - If interested in sponsoring surveys in Skagit, they ask for a \$500/year donation to be part of the PIGU Breeding Survey Network.
  - Would need to scout and look for site to set up a survey. Organize and determine number volunteers needed and get signed up.
  - Elizabeth- The Salish Sea School has a boat and is very interested and has already been in contact with Shannon.
  - Matt Castle expressed interest as well. The Samish DNR sees a lot of PIGU during their field work.
  - Lynne offered to reach out to members of the Skagit Audubon to see if there is interest in this opportunity.
- For more information: <http://www.pigeonguillemot.org/>. Survey toolbox on website with lots of resources.

### **Clayton Beach Project Update:** *Lisa Kaufman*

- Feasibility study completed by Herrera. The project has expanded. It now includes nearshore restoration, filling in the dredge hole, and eelgrass restoration.
- Existing Conditions: BNSF railroad runs adjacent to the site. 1200-1300 linear feet of rock armor that sits low in the intertidal area. 189 piling stumps of varying heights in the upper intertidal. Mostly dredged fill material along upper shoreline. Not much natural sediment. Additional beach nourishment will likely be needed.
- Herrera did extensive wave model to determine where the waves are breaking along the shoreline. Determined the dredge hole is causing the waves to break closer to shore which is having a big impact on the erosion hot spot along the shoreline. The erosion hot spot has been increasing in width. Bathymetry maps show eelgrass all along the nearshore, almost continuous except for dredge hole- no eelgrass. Filling dredge hole and re-seeding and replanting of eelgrass is recommended. There should be an opportunity for a lot of natural recolonizations of eelgrass here.
- Need to finalize the QAPP. Trying to get permission to take the rock and potentially some of the fill from the shoreline to help fill the dredge hole. Other dredged material would be used to fill in the rest of the hole. It will require sediment testing which will require permission from landowners.
- Evaluated three alternatives and the preferred alternative for nearshore restoration work:
  - Alternative 1: Remove the rock and pilings (leave some rock to protect railroad). Remove the fill. Add beach nourishment-flatten beach profile. Eventually, the beach will likely narrow due to limited sediment source and nothing to hold the sediment as it moves up drift from south to north.
  - Alternative 2: Install two groins using existing rock, partially buried to help hold some sediment in place and protect the railroad. Remove rock armor. Remove pilings. Remove fill. Add beach nourishment-flatten beach profile.
  - Alternative 3: Install one groin using existing rock, partially buried. Excavate upland to remove more fill material and reclaim backshore area. Concern- don't know what's in there. Could potentially destabilize bank more.
  - Preferred Alternative: Combination of alternatives. Install one groin to create 2 pocket beaches. No excavating backshore area. Armor removal. Remove pilings. Fill removal. Beach nourishment and revegetation.
    - Need to get approval from State Parks on preferred alternative.
    - Waiting on tribal discussion and feedback from other stakeholders.
    - Have enough funding to get through conceptual design phase.
- Would like to plan a community beach walk sometime in late September to introduce the project to the community. Could use MRC assistance.
- Clayton beach is a sand lance spawning beach. Might want to consider using different monitoring protocol for this beach.

### **Northwest Straits Commission Report:** *Lynne Wenberg-Davidson*

Last NWSC meeting occurred **July 26**, 10am-3pm, held at the Port Townsend Yacht Club. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- Expanding Techniques for Monitoring Floating Kelp: Jefferson County MRC is using a variety of aerial imagery/pixels to assist with tracking trends and changes in kelp beds of specific sites.
- Speed Date with a Scientist: Liz Tobin, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, presented on how they rely on data and collaboration to inform sustainable shellfisheries co-management such as the Dungeness crab larval monitoring and population genetics research coordinated by the Pacific Northwest Crab Research Group.
- Science Advisory Committee Roles – articles of association outlined [here](#).
- Puget Sound Partnership Climate Commitment Act- Fact sheet [here](#)
- NWSI Retreat- Sept 19, 2024: for NWS Commissioners and staff, NWS Foundation Board members and staff, and MRC staff. A retreat planning committee with representatives from each of these groups is currently working on an agenda. Lynne is on the sub-committee determining what MRC's role is. Meeting Aug 12.

- NWSI Conference- Nov 15-16: at the Delta Hotel in Everett.
- NWSI Reauthorization: On July 31, 2024, U.S. Senator Patty Murray announced The NW Straits Initiative reauthorization bill passed out of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee! This is a major milestone that now gives the bill a chance of being voted on by the full Senate.
  - **Rep Rick Larsen visit:** Aug 27 at Fidalgo Bay Resort with the NWSC staff and Skagit MRC to talk about the NWSI reauthorization and MRC projects in collaboration with the Samish. Have a draft agenda. Still working out the details.
- Next NWSC meeting: **August 23**, 10am-noon, held virtually via Zoom.

## Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
  - The SSS Advisory Committee is on their summer break. The AC will resume monthly meetings starting in October to review the 2024 Steward Class surveys and start to plan for the 2025 SSS Training Program at Padilla Bay.
  - Darla and Pete are working to recruit new AC members. The AC provides guidance and oversight of the SSS Program, helps Padilla Bay develop & organize the yearly SSS training, and assists in steering topics & speakers for the class and are responsible for publicity, and graduation gear, reviews new volunteer opportunities, and brainstorm alumni events.
  - Darla reminded the MRC that SSS graduates are a reliable source of new MRC members. Four of our MRC members were SSS graduates: Pete, Lynne, Darla, and Cynthia.
  - Darla encouraged MRC members to help recruit or volunteer time to support the SSS Advisory Committee.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
  - Monthly forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites continue.
- Kids on the Beach – Jude Apple:
  - Not much happening right now. Planning and coordinating will start up again soon for the upcoming school year.
- 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.
- Fidalgo Bay Day – Tracy Alker:
  - The event will be held Saturday, August 24, 2024, at the Fidalgo Bay Resort.
  - Event setup will take place Friday, August 23 from noon-4pm.
  - Saturday event set up will be 9am-10:30am.
  - Jude Apple is the MC and will help kick off the event at 11am. Need a microphone.
  - Samish welcome will hopefully be provided by Chairman Tom Wooten or another member. Waiting on confirmation.
  - Matt will be unable to participate so Jason Morgan will lead the beach seining at 2:00pm. Already has volunteers lined up.
  - 28 Discovery Passport Outreach Stations. Collected questions for kids and adults. Will print 250 passport booklets.
  - Promoted event online. Handed out flyers in Mt. Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, La Conner, and Anacortes. Contacted Skagit Kid Insider to place an ad. Hope to send out the press release Friday.
  - Pete and several forage fish volunteers will posted the FBD event banner on R Avenue today.
  - Ordered supplies for food and kids crafts. Still need to order a few more things.

- Cynthia completed the Umbrella Food permit application. It's been submitted to the Health Dept.
- BBQ rental equipment reserved. Paul will purchase the top- secret ingredients for the shellfish.
- Still working on getting a popcorn machine for the event. Might have to do without this year.
- Started cutting out crab and orca hat templates. The kelp forest craft activity is coming along nicely.
- Not as many volunteers helping this year as in the past but grateful for the support we have.
- Have a new appreciation for those volunteers who have coordinated this event in the past like Darla and Pete. Many kudos to you!!
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinne!
  - Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) with the help of WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Samish Indian Nation, Seattle Aquarium, and Port Townsend Marine Science Center completed the second round of outplanting in June where they seeded 8 additional sites around north Puget Sound.
  - 4 sites in Skagit County were outplanted this year, including 2 new sites with help from Shannon Point Marine Center.
  - Successful hatchery spawning. 1000 larvae were seeded into culture tanks to provide juveniles for next year's outplants.
  - PSRF is currently working on data analyses and the annual report due in September.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinne!
  - Field work has been completed for this year. Shell bags were distributed around Fidalgo Bay to catch this year's seed oysters to assess next spring.
  - Paul gave a brief presentation on oysters during Senator Patty Murray visit to Padilla Bay as part of the NWSI reauthorization discussion. Other MRCs, NWSC staff and NWSF staff presented as well.
  - Betsy pointed out that Paul deserves special recognition for his dedication, hard work, and many hours contributed to the success of the oyster restoration project. Thank you, Paul!
- Fidalgo Bay Trestle – Cynthia Nielsen:
  - Cynthia Nielsen is the new MRC Project Lead for the Fidalgo Bay Trestle project. Thank you, Cynthia!!
  - Our Interlocal Agreement with the City of Anacortes has been fully executed with the following deliverables: Interpretive signage, project website, short video clips for social media, community meetings, and preliminary conceptual design- due December 31, 2024.
  - The City of Anacortes hosted the first community meeting with stakeholders including Skagit MRC and Samish DNR, on August 1 at the Anacortes Library. Not a lot of people showed up, but it is still very early in the process. The City provided an overview of the project and the stakeholders shared perspectives.
  - Cynthia is coordinating and facilitating the communications plan and interpretive signage content development in collaboration with the City and other stakeholders. The Teams kickoff meeting will be held August 15, 2:30-3:30pm via Teams.
  - This project from start to finish could potentially take up to 15 years to complete!
- 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).

  - **Coffin Rocks:** A team of 3 volunteers surveyed July 19. Observations: Kelp density and health very good. Overall kelp bed appears larger than June survey with fingers of kelp extending beyond circular perimeter. Next survey is Aug 20.
  - **Shannon Point:** A team of 4 volunteers - surveyed July 17.
    - West Kelp Bed Observations: Overall kelp was very healthy, still a lot of bulbs underwater but only tracked those above.
    - East Bed Observations: Very little kelp bulbs observed (4 total) same as last month. Significant amount of sargassum observed close to shore and farther out where bull kelp is normally found (50-100 feet). Next survey is scheduled for Aug 16.

- **Biz Point:** A team of 3 volunteers surveyed August 6. Overall kelp was very healthy with long blades and dense in places. Tracks provided for “new” south and north beds, along with the primary bed. Next survey is Aug 19.
- **Lone Tree:** A team of 3 volunteers surveyed July 22 for the inaugural paddle. Kelp very dense and very healthy in appearance. Kelp appeared clean-nothing on blades. Very fresh looking. Eelgrass in hallow area by reef in 1-2 foot depth at minus 1 to minus 2 tide. Next survey is Aug 20.
- **WA DNR’s Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead (HSIL):** team will be visiting Bowman Bay or a nearby area on August 29<sup>th</sup> (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 W 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:**
  - **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 took place July 16. Caught a total of 376 fish: Chinook, lots of shiner perch, snake prickleneck, English sole, and sculpin
  - **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 completed watering of the restoration site July 3, July 11, July 16, July 25, and July 31. We have not gotten substantial rain, so we are watering once a week. However, the native vegetation seems to be increasing in survivability and growth, in large part to weekly watering, mulching, and weeding.
    - A stewardship event was held July 25<sup>th</sup> with 3 NWSF staff, 2 Skagit MRC members and staff, 6 Foundation Board Members, and 5 volunteers with a catered lunch. We successfully spread the remainder of the mulch throughout zones 3 and 4, and substantially cut back the blackberry from the landward side of zone 6 in hopes to minimize it’s spread into the restoration site.
    - Moving forward we will continue to water as needed, and our next stewardship event will take place on August 22nd. In the next month we will schedule a planting event, possibly in lieu of Orca Recovery Day, as well as another fall stewardship day for cutting back more blackberry.
- **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.
    - Feedback for Confluence includes: ensuring parcel vs. polygon GIS objects are integrated; ensure rising seas information with elevation based on estuary models – recently completed; Need to clarify how far upstream (with rising sea models) this assessment will cover. Suzanne will try to attend next session to clarify her questions.
  - 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)
    - 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
- Task 4 – Develop High Priority Restoration or Protection Projects
  - tbd
- Task 5 – Final Geodatabase
  - tbd

#### **Collaborative Networking Activity- Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment:** *Lynne*

- The annual NWSI Conference November 15-16 in Everett will include a collaborative networking activity in a tabling format where attendees will rotate through the stations to discuss highlighted work of each MRC, the NWSC and NWSF. The goal of this activity is to provide opportunities for MRC and NWSI members to learn what work is happening in other counties and identify potential collaboration opportunities. The NWSC provided an application to fill out by September 20 which will be used to create a one-pager in preparation for the event.
- Lynne completed the application for the Shoreline Needs Assessment project for the collaborative networking activity for the Skagit MRC. No other MRC project ideas were brought forward for this activity.
  - Action: Tracy will submit the Shoreline Needs Assessment application for the collaborative networking activity to the NWSC by the end of August.

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

- Tracy- Will be out of the country in September. Looking for someone to take minutes at the September 12 MRC meeting. Betsy knows someone in her office that might be able to help.
- Tracy- MRC website is getting an upgrade! Will be migrating information and photos from old site this month to go live by the end of August. The new format is set up to include photos and short bios of our MRC members. Please send Tracy your bio and a photo that we can post on our website as soon as you get a chance.
- Tracy/Lynne - The Vessel Turn-In Event took place July 22 - Aug 16. Media day took place August 1 with project partners and several elected officials and media outlets in attendance. The La Conner Maritime team was very efficient in deconstructing over 43 vessels! A special Thanks goes to Dana, Catey and Melissa for planning and coordinating and successfully getting 50 boats signed up! Recent article in the NWSI newsletter and in the Skagit Valley Herald.
- Tracy- Northwest Straits Foundation is seeking new board members to serve a three-year term starting January 1, 2025. Would like to have someone from Skagit county. It doesn't have to be someone on the MRC, although that would be a plus. Will post in The WAVE.

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