



SKAGIT COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Summary of the **June 13, 2024**, Skagit County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Facility.

Attendees:

- **MRC Members:** Tracy Alker, Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, Melissa Ciesielski (Catey's Alternate), Darla Gay Smith, Jude Apple, Matt Castle, Paul Dinnel, Elizabeth Drozda, Betsy Stevenson
 - **MRC Members Absent:** Pete Haase, Kevin Anderson, Catey Ritchie
- **Others in Attendance:** Jeff Whitty (NWSC); Sylvia Yang (PBNERR); Holli Watne (Skagit Watershed Council); Gabe (PBNERR); Kat Hayes (SCPW); Sasha Horst (NWSC); Caitlyn Blair (NWSC); Annie England (PBNERR); Chandler Colahan (PBNERR)

Call to Order and Introductions: Lynne called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and opened the meeting with introductions.

Approval of Minutes: May 9, 2024, MRC meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Public Comments: None

Native Oyster Restoration at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve: Sylvia Yang and Gabe (WCC)

- Padilla Bay is one of 19 sites around the Puget Sound region prioritized for native oyster restoration.
- Stressors and other factors can impact success rate of Olympia oyster restoration efforts which could include pathogens, predators, population size, larval supply, water temps, salinity, sedimentation, hypoxia, presence of food, substrate, etc.
- Paul Dinnel and Sylvia Yang were instrumental in getting the native oyster restoration project started at Padilla Bay. Skagit MRC's Skagit Restoration Initiative (SRI) funding from the NW Foundation was used to purchase bags of cultch that were placed in Fidalgo Bay to collect juvenile native oysters. The oysters were later transferred to test plots in Padilla Bay. Mount Vernon High School students helped wash the bags of oysters and inspect them for invasive species prior to deploying them in Padilla Bay.
- Several additional experimental research projects grew from this initial oyster restoration pilot project. A few bags of cultch provided by the MRC went a long way!
- Interesting findings:
 - Oysters grown in bags do not grow as flat as oysters that grow on the ground.
 - Keeping the oysters in bags wasn't a good idea because native species like Dungeness crabs got trapped in the bags. In addition, the oysters kept in bags at certain locations were killed by sedimentation.
 - The winter freeze also killed most of the oysters at one location, but it didn't seem to impact them at other sites. It might have been due to the extremely low tides at that location during the freeze.
 - There were some signs of potential oyster larval recruitment at one of the sites.
 - There were also some signs of some oysters surviving despite predation of oyster drills.
 - Oyster drills appeared to be attracted to barnacles.
 - There is some literature that oysters can induce a defense mechanism in response to predation by making a thicker shell.
 - Evidence that shell cultch in the right places can attract European Green Crabs. They recently caught four EGCs in locations where oyster shell bags were in Padilla Bay.
- PBNERR is looking for feedback from MRC on possible expansion of oyster restoration in Padilla Bay and opportunities for collaboration.

- Paul suggested using longlining oysters - oyster shells placed on lines so they are elevated to keep them out of sediments as well as possibly protecting them from some oyster drill predation.
- Grow oyster spat in the presence of oyster drills to research impact on shell growth and on next generation of oysters.

Northwest Straits Commission Report: *Lynne Wenberg*

Last NWSC meeting occurred **May 31**, 10am-3pm, held at the Camano Island Library. Highlights shared with the MRC in the meeting packet.

- DEI Focus Groups: Athena Group is hosting virtual focus groups for NWSI members to discuss DEI. The next focus group open to all is June 13, 5-6:30pm. A presentation is scheduled June 25th. All MRC members are welcome and encouraged to attend.
- New NWSC Chair/Vice Chair: Tim Ellis – Chair; Alan Clark -Vice Chair.
- NWSI Fall Leadership Retreat: ECO Resource Group performed a series of interviews with reps from the MRCs, NWSC, and NWSF in preparation for the upcoming retreat tentatively set for Thursday, Aug 22 at Padilla Bay and Thursday, Sept 19 (location TBD).
- Speed Date with a Scientist Presentation: Jay Krienitz, Department of Ecology, presented on the new Coastal Resilience Initiative. Jill Lipoti, Island MRC, gave a presentation on Building a Sense of Place. Lynne will share the presentation with those interested.
- Northwest Straits Initiative Reauthorization: At the Puget Sound Day on the Hill, meetings were held with the Washington State delegation to share the work of MRCs and our regional partners as part of the reauthorization discussion. Reauthorization would help assure more predictable federal funding appropriations for longer term planning.
- Why Evidence-Based Hope is Crucial to Salish Sea Recovery and Beyond: Article for the Salish Sea Institute's Emerging Issues in the Salish Sea Series co-written by Ginny Broadhurst and Dr. Elin Kelsey. Read it [here](#).
- NWSI Conference- Nov 15-16- at The Delta Hotel in Everett. The planning team is working on the agenda which will include a Collaborative Networking Activity. MRCs have been asked to select one project to feature at a station. Conference participants will rotate throughout the stations so that everyone has a chance to learn about work happening in other areas and find areas of common interest. There is no requirement to participate, though it is strongly encouraged. Looking for idea for Skagit MRC projects to highlight.
- Next NWSC meeting: June 28, 10am-12pm, held virtually via Zoom. Darla Gay Smith will be attending as Lynne's alternate as the Skagit MRC rep.

Project Status & Discussion

- Salish Sea Stewards – Darla Gay Smith:
 - Final class and graduation held April 30 at Padilla Bay with 26 new graduates joining the ranks of 365 trained Stewards. Many have already started volunteering!
 - 2 new SSS graduates, Barabara Clark and Jenn Dumas, recently joined the AC.
 - Volunteer opportunities are posted every 2 weeks in *The Wave*, an electronic bulletin maintained by PBNERR.
 - The Advisory Committee is in the process of reviewing the 2024 SSS Class Surveys and planning the Summer Alumni social with Padilla Bay.
 - To date, SSS have recorded over 50,000 volunteer hours since 2015.
- Forage Fish Surveys – Pete Haase:
 - May forage fish surveys for restoration and index sites were cancelled due to schedule conflicts.
 - The "annual" Anacortes Island View Elementary kids program on May 21 was held at RV Park for a great time by all. Huge thanks to a big group of volunteers who made it work in Pete's absence!
 - June forage fish survey schedule is now out.
 - Pete will be at the Bowman Bay Discovery Day event on June 28 and will be leading some small group forage fish sessions and sample survey work.

- Kids on the Beach – Annie England:
 - April 8-12: **Concrete 10th-11th grade.** Weeklong program. 1 field day, 4 classroom days. 45 students collected species abundance and biodiversity of intertidal organisms at Bay View State Park with the help of volunteers on April 10. Students collected data from natural beach habitats and compared them to habitats that have been armored and beach habitats that have been partially restored as an indicator of ecosystem health. Students created graphs, analyzed data, and gave presentations.
 - May 22: **Allen Elementary in Mount Vernon-** 40 fifth grade students participated in the mudflat safari at Bay View State Park. This was their first year participating! A lot of these kids have never been to the beach before. The teachers were impressed by how engaged their students were! There was a good student to volunteer ratio. Recent article in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#).
- School Rain Gardens – Tracy Alker and Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:
 - **Mt. Erie School Rain Garden:** Diane Hennebert hosted a Rain Garden Maintenance Orientation at the Mt. Erie School in May and again in June with MRC and NWSF staff, one County Intern, and two NWSF interns. Pulled lots of weeds. There are still a lot of weeds left to pull, but the rain garden is looking healthy overall. Starting to fill in with new growth. Might need some additional planting and mulch in the fall or next year to help it fill in. The interns will maintain the rain garden this summer into the fall with NWSF staff oversight. The NWSF is working on a maintenance schedule and will be purchasing some tools, a hose, and key for water access.
 - **La Conner School Rain Garden:** Tracy and Lynne facilitated a site visit on May 20th with the Skagit County Road Shop Staff, Skagit Conservation District Staff, and Swinomish staff (ie Catey Ritchie) to get their technical expertise on the proposed improvements. The School Principal and Facilities Staff attended as well and were able to track down a copy of the original rain garden design. Proposed improvements include:
 - Improving stormwater flow to the rain garden (top priority).
 - County can help with construction. Recommended creating additional notches in the curb around the rain garden and shaving the asphalt area to help direct stormwater flow into the rain garden. Cost estimates are around \$6,000.
 - School Principal's daughter is a civil/environmental engineer who specializes in designing water flow systems for property development. She offered her engineering services (if needed) free of charge!
 - Spruce up the bare areas with additional native plants and mulch and incorporate indigenous plantings for food and/or a medicine garden to support the Swinomish's Between Two Worlds program.
 - 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.
 - Save the Date notices have been sent out to past participating organizations and volunteers.
 - Volunteer recruitment noticed posted in the Salish Sea Stewards electronic news bulletin The WAVE and the SSS alumni newsletter.
 - Event Agenda and Volunteer Needs:
 - Beach Seining: Matt Castle will lead the beach seining activity.
 - Samish Canoe Family: Expressed interest but haven't confirmed.
 - Shannon Point Touch Tanks: Confirmed.
 - Kids Craft Tables: 2 volunteers signed up to help with face painting, but we haven't had much luck recruiting volunteers to help with the craft tables so far. The Skagit Childrens Museum is too busy with back-to-school events in late August. We also reached out to the Anacortes High School Green Club and the Mount Vernon High School Key Club but haven't heard back.
 - Chowders: Cynthia Nielsen is coordinating the chowders. Two restaurants confirmed participation this year: Bob's Chowder and Adrift. Anthony's and Secret Cove donated gift cards since they are unable to participate at the event this year.

- Shellfish: Paul is coordinating the Shellfish BBQ and has several volunteers signed up. Taylor confirmed they will be donating shellfish for the event. Has a volunteer lined up to pick up the BBQ equipment rental.
 - No-Host Salmon BBQ: Rosie confirmed participation.
 - Discovery Passports: Friends of Skagit Beaches confirmed participation.
 - Outreach Booths: 27 organizations confirmed participation.
- Several Volunteer Vacancies: Parking, zero waste, popcorn, kids craft tables, Event MC/announcer, photographers, roving volunteer break relief, and setup/cleanup.
- Pinto Abalone Restoration – Paul Dinneil:
 - Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) currently doing field work- outplanting with Teams from PSRF, WDFW, the Seattle Aquarium and Samish Tribe. So far this year they've 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.
 - PSRF finished monitoring all the outplant sites for the season.
 - Collected 20 new broodstock for spawning in the hatchery.
- Olympia Oyster Restoration – Paul Dinneil:
 - Paul retrieved shell strings for the Puget Sound Restoration Fund to monitor oyster settlement throughout Puget Sound.
 - Sampled oyster shell patch at the muddy southern channels of Fidalgo Bay. 82% of oysters were dead in the southern channels, possibly due to freezing winter temps during low tide. On the plus side, there were a lot of juvenile oyster settlement on the shell. The oyster shells will continue to provide substrate for future oyster settlement where there is very little substrate in the muddy bay.
- 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.
 - Our Interlocal Agreement with the City of Anacortes is being presented to the City Council this week. The City will be responsible for the following deliverables:
 - Interpretive Signage: City will create the layout design, fabricate, and install up to 3 interpretive signs. Skagit MRC Science team will help create messaging content.
 - Website: City will host the project page on their website and create the QR Code. Skagit MRC Science team will help create content.
 - Video: City will create a series of 3 short video clips (30 or 60 seconds) for social media and websites with input from Skagit MRC Science team.
 - Community Engagement: City will host 3 stakeholder meetings at the Anacortes Senior Center and several community meetings. City staff will also host an informational booth at Fidalgo Bay Day.
 - Preliminary Conceptual Design: Hanson will provide a very preliminary conceptual design by the end of December. The conceptual design process will include geotech and hazardous materials sampling, and testing. The conceptual design will not be finalized until after our grant expires but will still be shared and presented to the MRC.
 - Need a team of MRC members to help develop messaging and content for public outreach (interp signage, website, videos, etc.) based on scientific data extracted from existing Fidalgo Bay studies, complete the Communications Plan and Outreach Strategy, and attend stakeholder meetings with the City.
- Kayak Kelp Surveys – Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:

Background: Skagit surveys include the following sites: Coffin Rocks (Steven Olsen - Lead), Biz Point (John Freeto - Lead), Shannon Point east/west (Lynne Wenberg - Lead) and proposed new "Lone Tree Point" (Steven Olsen – Lead).

Updates: Kelp Season is here!

- May 11, Steven Olsen and Lynne Wenberg-Davidson, with help from the Swinomish - obtained access to Thousand Trails boat launch and did a recon of Lone Tree Point and Skagit Island kelp beds. Found a healthy young kelp bed starting around the reef off Lone Tree. Steven, as lead, determined access and managing currents / tides were feasible (although something to watch). The MRC approved the addition of the new Lone Tree Point site to the kelp surveys. First survey for Lone Tree occurred June 21.
 - Skagit kayakers and NWSC reps (Jeff and Suzanne) met June 7 for a team BBQ and pre-season coordination at Steven's house. Topics covered: coordinating shake-down cruise for June 14 (Steven leading), debrief from NWSC kelp meetings and discuss what other MRC's are doing, new equipment needed, etc. (NWSC has what we need). Team leads shared their survey schedules and discussed resources needed to add the new bed. Although we have lost 4 kayakers (and added 1) this year, the team agreed to rally to share kayakers to ensure all teams have the kayakers they need (an online schedule and contact list was established).
- **Bowman Bay Beach Seining– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:**
Background: Bowman Bay Restoration Project Monitoring Plan calls for post-restoration monitoring to occur in years 1 – 5 (2016 - 2019 & 2021), and 9 – 10 (2024 – 2025) after restoration has occurred. A new Beach Seining project was funded by the SMRC for 2024-2025 with Jason Morgan as the NWSF Lead Scientist. SFEG has an adjacent restoration project in the works and will be providing 50% of the necessary beach seining funds -Yuki Reiss, SFEG Restoration Ecologist will lead this effort for SFEG. An MOU with NWSF and SMRC has been signed and formalized.
Updates:
 - Beach seining currently takes place twice a month through June with the help of volunteers including MRC members (Paul Dinnel and Lynne Wenberg-Davidson. It will be reduced to once a month starting in July through the end of 2025.
 - BB has been experiencing high levels of ulva and at least one seining session had to be called off. In May they caught a few juvenile Chinook and chum salmon and a large number of juvenile pink salmon, surf smelt, Sculpin, and English sole.
 - A team of 8 volunteers contributed a total of 41 hours.
- **Bowman Bay Plant Maintenance– Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:**
Background: 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 to make sure the plants get watered on a regular basis during the hot and dry summer months.
Updates:
 - Stewardship event on May 30th with 13 volunteers and 3 NWSF staff in attendance, focusing on plant maintenance, such as weeding throughout the entire restoration site.
 - Monthly volunteer events have been scheduled for June 28, July 25, August 22. June 28th will be a larger event including project partners (NWSF, MRC, SFEG, TSSS and MG Native Plants) and nearshore monitoring activities and demonstrations.
 - Coordinating the season's plant maintenance schedule of stewardship events with weeding, watering, and spreading compost and mulch.
 - No watering to date due to rainy spring. Next event is June 28.
- **Skagit Shoreline Needs Assessment- Lynne Wenberg-Davidson:**
Background: This project will produce a Skagit Geodatabase with interactive web-based tools compatible with SoundIQ; Skagit Nearshore Inventory Resource List; List of Prioritized Skagit Focus Areas and a Top Priority List of Skagit MRC Projects and recommended action plans. Confluence Environmental is the firm that has been contracted to do this project.
Updates:
 - Meeting with Confluence every 2 weeks. June 20 was a one-hour progress meeting (1st deliverable) to review status of all the tasks in detail and solicit input from the Skagit advisory team members.
 - Phil reviewed latest conceptual model for determining marine processes, structure and function stressors, degradation and linkage analysis.

- The preliminary literature review is almost complete and will be shared with the MRC for review. It will initially take the form of a table of all possible data approaches in summary form. The list of data will be broad but not necessarily used in the analysis. All datasets will become part of the final Skagit Resource Inventory for future use. Literature Review will be iteratively updated as new information is needed over time.
- Phil noted some data sources from agencies (like WDFW) will require a public disclosure request before data will be made available. For digital access to Skagit Bay Blueprint data, Phil and Suzanne talked about other possible sources who might have this data archived somewhere – they haven't given up yet!
- Phil recommends we use Google Earth initially to more easily map existing MRC projects (completed, partially completed or incomplete).
- The geodatabase analytical unit will likely be shoreline (line segment) rather than parcel (polygon). Suzanne recommended looking at how other agencies define their data.
- Nearshore connections were noted of most importance to MRC: kelp/eelgrass, forage fish, native Olympia oysters and crab, consistent with current adjacent MRC projects. We may elect to add areas up the watershed in the future.
- The following preliminary categories were proposed for prioritization:
 - Landscape Context
 - Ecosystem Process
 - Habitat Function
 - Overall
- Phil provided a Nearshore Context diagram to verify what areas of the nearshore we want covered and asked if we also want to add areas higher up in the watershed for water quality.
- Vessel Turn-In Event- Melissa Ciesielski:
 - Swinomish in partnership with NWSC, Skagit MRC, Port of Skagit, La Conner Marina, DNR, and Skagit County will be co-hosting a vessel turn-in event towards the end July with NWSC and DNR funding.
 - Applications are being accepted through June 24th.
 - Potentially over 30 vessels interested.
 - There will likely be a media day with the partners and press present. Communications team (NWSC, Swinomish, Port of Skagit, DNR, and ECY reps) coordinating on media day logistics and plan.
 - Next meeting mid-July to finalize plans.

Miscellaneous Discussions and Announcements: All

- **Skagit Green Crab Molt Search Training:** Saturday, June 15 from 10:30am to 12:30pm at Padilla Bay. Must register! <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/skagit-molt-search-training-tickets-884423523567?aff=oddtcreator>. This training will be co-hosted by the Skagit MRC, Padilla Bay, and the Northwest Straits Commission.
- **Friday, June 21: 2025 Skagit comprehensive Plan Update Stakeholder Interview with MRC.** – 2pm-3pm via Microsoft Teams. Interview questions have been provided. All MRC members are encouraged to attend.
- **Skagit Watershed Council Updates:** Salmon Recovery Board currently has 18 projects for this round of grant funding. Two marine restoration projects are ready for construction. One is for over 260 acres in the Skagit Delta through Department of Fish and Wildlife land. The other project is Similk Bay at the Swinomish golf course where they will be adding a new bridge.

The meeting adjourned at 11:11am followed by a tour of the PBNERR upland coastal meadow restoration project and touch pool tour with PBNERR staff. The next MRC meeting will be virtually July 11, 2024, via Microsoft Teams.