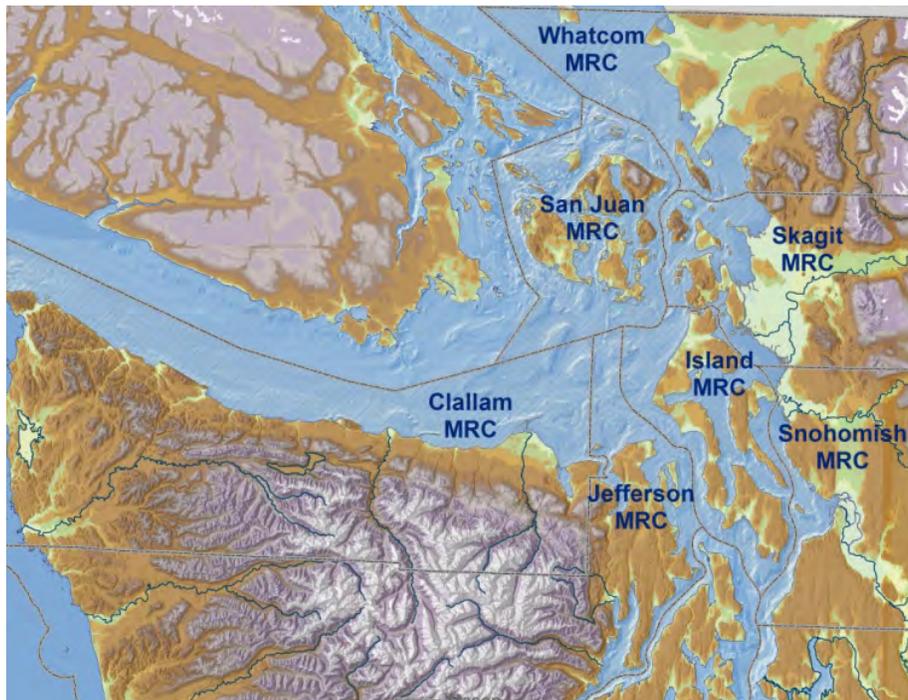




Northwest Straits Initiative 2014-2018 Strategic Plan

Vision of the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative:

The vision of the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (Initiative) is to be an effective citizen-based organization working in partnership with many organizations to protect and restore the waters and resources of the Northwest Straits region. The Northwest Straits Commission (NWS Commission), Northwest Straits Foundation (NWS Foundation) and seven Marine Resources Committees (MRCs) will accomplish meaningful education, restoration, and conservation projects and will achieve measurable results that protect and restore the marine environment.



The Initiative's mission is to protect and restore the marine waters, habitats and species of the Northwest Straits region to achieve ecosystem health and sustainable resource use.

This mission is achieved by:

- Empowering local citizens through MRCs and the Commission structure to identify and resolve marine environmental concerns
- Designing and initiating projects that are driven by science, reflect local priorities, promote community-based decisions and provide the ability to measure results
- Building awareness and stewardship and making recommendations to improve the health of Northwest Straits marine resources
- Maintaining and expanding diverse membership and partner organizations
- Expanding partnerships with tribal governments and continuing to foster respect for tribal cultures and treaties
- Recognizing the importance of economic and social benefits that are dependent on healthy marine environments and the sustainable use of marine resources

How We Work

The Initiative was authorized by Congress in 1998 as an experimental alternative to a National Marine Sanctuary in Puget Sound. The Initiative’s primary focus is to identify and carry out local and regional high priority projects that will restore and protect marine resources. The Initiative includes seven county-based MRCs comprised of volunteers appointed by their local elected officials. Tribes have a seat on every MRC and most MRCs have ex-officio seats for their local city, port and resource agency representatives. The NWS Commission is the board of directors responsible for setting policy, making budget decisions, and ensuring a regional focus of all MRCs. The Commission has an executive director and small staff who administer funds and contract agreements with MRCs and provide a variety of support services and coordination for the seven MRCs. In 2002, the NWS Foundation was established as a non-profit partner to aid in raising funds and project management, and has a similar management structure and includes staff with complementary skill sets.



What We Do

The NWS Commission provides funding, training and support to MRCs. It facilitates regional coordination among the MRCs and connects the MRC work to regional planning processes such as the Action Agenda and Puget Sound Nearshore Estuary Restoration Program. The NWS Commission also takes on and manages regional projects that are of interest to all MRCs such as training volunteers to identify forage fish spawning sites.

The MRCs are locally-based advisory groups comprised of volunteers with an interest in protecting their local marine waters. MRCs receive base funding through grant agreements with the NWS Commission to accomplish priority restoration and protection work in their local areas.

The NWS Foundation is a nonprofit organization established to leverage additional financial resources to accomplish the work of the Initiative. The NWS Foundation raises private and public funds and also manages large regional projects such as the removal of derelict fishing gear and restoration of many shoreline sites.

The work of the NWS Commission, the MRCs and the NWS Foundation all focus on the same goal-- to restore and protect our marine waters. Each component of the Initiative has unique skills and organizational characteristics that allow for strong collective action. The sum of our work is greater than its individual parts. It is through this Strategic Plan that we are articulating our desired path of collective accomplishments for the next three years.

This strategic plan was developed through a variety of actions in 2014, including an annual retreat, multiple strategic planning advisory committee meetings, discussions at NWS Commission meetings, consultations with the NWS Foundation staff and board, and correspondence with all seven MRCs. The following strengths and challenges were identified by attendees at a March 2014 retreat that included NWS Commission members and staff, as well as NWS Foundation board members and staff.

CURRENT STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative has a number of strengths:

- A structure that empowers local stewardship, decision-making, and results
- With direct access to government entities through the NWS Commission and the fundraising capacity in the non-profit sector with the NWS Foundation, the Initiative has capacity to leverage funding from a variety of sources and build strong partnerships
- Access to MRC volunteers with a strong stewardship ethic, commitment to the Initiative's purpose and local insight
- Delivery of meaningful, science-based and cost-effective work
- A talented and dedicated staff
- Positive recognition and continued support from state leaders and politicians

Many of the Initiative's current challenges are large in scope and seem beyond our control, but need to be acknowledged. These include the effects of a weak economy on investments in environmental protection and restoration actions, congressional gridlock and global environmental issues such as ocean acidification and sea level rise that affect local marine waters. It can be difficult to measure long-term impacts of MRC projects, often because projects are small and geographically scattered. The Initiative's small size and regional focus, which does not include highly urbanized areas of Puget Sound, make "visibility" a perpetual challenge. Being a unique organization that does not have a "budgetary home" also challenges our financial security and long-term viability. Although the NWS Commission is embedded within Washington Department of Ecology, it is neither a program of Ecology nor any other agency.

CHANGING OCEAN AND CLIMATE CONDITIONS

In addition to the existing stressors that affect the marine resources of the Salish Sea, we recognize the serious, long-term effects of changing ocean and climate conditions that include ocean acidification, rising sea levels and increasing seawater temperatures. These emerging stressors have the potential to affect our restoration outcomes and disrupt the sustainable use of marine resources. As a result, we will pursue strategies for preservation and restoration of habitat that have the greatest potential to maintain and improve the resilience and health of our ecosystem in the coming decades. Going forward, we will continue to educate ourselves about the impacts of and science relating to changing ocean and climate conditions, share what we're learning with our communities and decision-makers, and apply what we're learning to the selection and support of our projects.

A strategic plan for the next three years

This document includes strategic environmental and operational goals that provide a vision for the next three years. The entire Initiative will work towards achieving the environmental goals listed below through the identified projects and actions. Some of the projects have funding already available and others are proposed projects for which funding must be obtained.

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

To be successful, we understand that we must harness our collective energy and resources to make a difference with our work, and be focused and strategic in our thinking. This means making some hard choices about what to take on and what not to do. The four environmental goals discussed below reflect the key activities we believe best support our stated vision and mission, and provide the largest impact to ensure the marine resources of the Salish Sea are protected and restored for future generations. In creating the goals, we defined measures of progress—with an emphasis on outcomes—that would allow us to effectively monitor our progress. As this strategic plan is implemented, and as other projects are added, we will evaluate our progress quantitatively and qualitatively to ensure the work we do truly makes a difference.

Goal 1: Accelerate the rate of shoreline and nearshore habitat protection and restoration with the goal of a net gain of functional habitat. Work in harmony with regional planning efforts that have identified projects that increase shoreline connectivity and complexity. Design restoration projects, where feasible, to help mitigate the effects of sea level rise and changing ocean conditions.

The following projects and actions will be carried out by MRCs, NWS Commission and NWS Foundation to make progress towards this goal:

| Project or Action | Who Does It |
|---|---|
| Riprap removal/nearshore restoration at Bowman Bay, Shannon Point and Fort Townsend State Park | Skagit MRC with NWS Foundation Jefferson MRC with NWS Foundation |
| Shoreline restoration at Howarth Park | Snohomish MRC |
| Shoreline restoration at Cornet Bay | Island MRC with NWS Foundation |
| Inform landowners about shoreline geology, good stewardship practices, restoration opportunities, and alternatives to hard armoring | All MRCs with NWS Foundation |
| Bring managers together to identify risks of increasing vessel traffic in San Juan waters. | San Juan MRC |
| Support strong shoreline management policies that protect shoreline habitats-- particularly critical habitats such as feeder bluffs, kelp and eelgrass beds | All MRCs |
| Provide decision-makers with a better understanding of Island County kelp beds, eelgrass and forage fish habitat | Island MRC |
| Identify new sites for potential restoration actions | All MRCs |
| Provide information to boaters about the importance of eelgrass and how to protect it. Expand the acreage of existing eelgrass protection areas. | Jefferson MRC |
| Monitor restoration projects at Cornet Bay, Ft Townsend, Howarth Park and Boulevard Park to ensure success and to measure restoration outcomes | Island, Jefferson, Snohomish and Whatcom MRCs |

Measures of Progress: Individual project outcomes will be tracked through their own reporting mechanisms. Below are some of the cumulative results desired during the next three years for this goal:

- 25 acres of nearshore habitat restored
- One mile of shoreline restored
- More than 300 landowners become more aware of the natural shoreline processes that affect their property; 50 shoreline property owners receive professional advice about how to address erosion concerns using alternatives to shoreline hardening where feasible
- Identification of needed actions associated with increased vessel traffic and risks of oil spill
- Eelgrass protection areas expanded by 20 acres
- Improved protection measures for shorelines in shoreline master programs

Goal 2: Support water quality monitoring efforts and take measures to protect and improve water quality.

The following projects and actions will be carried out by MRCs, NWS Commission and NWS Foundation to make progress towards this goal:

| Project or Action | Who Does It |
|--|-------------------------|
| Characterize fecal coliform levels in the Chuckanut watershed and seasonal variation of those bacteria levels. Identify sources of pollutants and make recommendations for improvement projects. The goal is to achieve an upgrade in status from WA Dept of Health. | Whatcom MRC |
| Complete phytoremediation pilot study and share results and lessons learned | Island MRC |
| Install rain gardens to filter and treat stormwater in Port Townsend. | Jefferson MRC |
| Educate citizens and local governments about the connections between nutrient enrichment, water quality, and ocean acidification conditions. Promote actions that reduce nutrient enrichment of nearshore | NWS Commission and MRCs |

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| waters and help alleviate local ocean acidification conditions. | |
| Identify and develop appropriate projects that may mitigate effects of ocean acidification | NWS Commission |
| Participate in the Washington Marine Resources Advisory Council (MRAC), Washington Shellfish Initiative, and other relevant forums and groups in order to link the Initiative's work to regional work on ocean acidification | NWS Commission |

Measures of Progress: Individual project outcomes will be tracked through their own reporting mechanisms. Below are some of the cumulative results desired during the next three years for this goal:

- Water quality improvements in local water bodies (Chuckanut Bay and others)
- Obtain additional data to share with managers on the utility of phytoremediation as a method to treat surface runoff
- Ten new rain gardens in Port Townsend through community partnerships
- Local residents will have improved understanding of ocean acidification, its causes and possible adaptation strategies (as measured by evaluation surveys at events)
- Ready-to-go project plans for ocean acidification mitigation will be developed in preparation for implementation in 2018
- Reduced levels of nutrients and organic carbon from sources that contribute to restriction of shellfish harvest and acidification of waters in the Northwest Straits region

Goal 3: Protect and restore marine species and habitats to improve ecosystem health.

The following projects and actions will be carried out by MRCs, NWS Commission and NWS Foundation to make progress towards this goal:

| Project or Action | Who Does It |
|--|--------------------|
| Complete the removal of legacy derelict fishing nets in shallow water to 105 feet. Begin to remove legacy derelict fishing nets in priority deeper waters. | NWS Foundation |

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|---|---|
| Prevent re-accumulation of derelict fishing nets | NWS Foundation |
| Implement programs to reduce the annual loss of derelict shellfish pots | NWS Foundation, Clallam and Snohomish MRCs |
| Continue to document the impacts of derelict fishing gear and identify management solutions to prevent those impacts | NWS Foundation |
| Rebuild and restore Olympia oyster populations in areas where they were historically found | Clallam and Jefferson MRCs |
| Participate in projects to restore native abalone | NWS Commission and Skagit MRC |
| Monitor breeding pigeon guillemots around Whidbey Island | Island MRC |
| Develop a regional monitoring plan for surf smelt and Pacific sand lance | NWS Commission |
| Carry out priority actions to protect forage fish per recommendations of the PSEMP Forage Fish and Food Webs Workgroup | NWS Commission |
| Conduct boat-based surveys of floating kelp in northern Puget Sound with the goal of documenting kelp | Island, Jefferson, Snohomish, San Juan and Whatcom MRCs |
| Develop pilot projects to test kelp restoration strategies | NWS Commission |
| Establish a Salish Sea kelp alliance to increase awareness about the role of kelp in the ecosystem. Identify practical strategies to protect kelp beds. | NWS Commission |

Measures of Progress: Individual project outcomes will be tracked through their own reporting mechanisms. Below are some of the cumulative results desired during the next three years for this goal:

- All known derelict fishing nets will be removed from shallow waters by June 2015
- A pilot project will be conducted to remove deep water derelict fishing nets
- Ninety percent of newly lost nets will be removed before becoming derelict
- The annual loss of crab pots will be reduced by 25 percent

- Nine acres of oyster habitat will be restored
- Data will be available on populations trends, type of prey fed to young and probable breeding success for pigeon guillemots on Whidbey Island
- At least 50 citizens will participate in scientific research and advocacy to protect forage fish
- The amount and condition of floating kelp will be documented along shorelines in seven counties

Goal 4: Educate local residents about the health of the Northwest Straits marine waters and habitat and provide opportunities for engagement. Raise attention to and take action on emerging and urgent issues related to the health of the region’s marine waters and habitat.

The following projects and actions will be carried out by MRCs, NWS Commission and NWS Foundation to make progress towards this goal:

| Project or Action | Who does it |
|--|---|
| Convene forums on priority issues, bring in experts and promote community dialogue | NWS Commission, NWS Foundation and all MRCs |
| Raise scientific questions and issues of concern to managers and leaders | NWS Commission |
| Where there is a strong opportunity to affect change and where there is consensus, provide comments on relevant projects or issues | NWS Commission and all MRCs |
| Provide HAZWOPER and oiled wildlife trainings to improve oil spill preparedness and response | Clallam, Skagit and Island MRCs |
| Update geographic response plans (GRPs) with local data as it is generated and prioritize sensitive areas in GRPs | Clallam and Snohomish MRCs |
| Advise local leaders about local marine resource issues | All MRCs |

Measures of Progress: Individual project outcomes will be tracked through their own reporting mechanisms. Below are some of the cumulative results desired during the next three years:

- Local leaders and communities will be better informed on topics such as ocean acidification and sea level rise
- MRCs will focus on projects that have lasting impacts
- MRC projects and ideas will be incorporated into agency planning documents (e.g. Lead Integrating Organization (LIO) work plans, Puget Sound Action Agenda)
- Trained volunteers will be prepared to respond to an oil spill
- Data will be provided to the Department of Ecology to include in GRP updates

OUR OPERATIONAL GOALS

The success of this plan depends on achieving financial stability and maintaining strong MRCs, a strong Commission, and a strong Foundation. To ensure this occurs, we have developed and will implement three operational goals over the next three years with associated metrics, annual workplans and measures of progress, as described below.

1. Maintain strong Marine Resource Committees

Marine Resources Committees are the heart of the Initiative. It is through these locally rooted committees that much of the Initiative’s work is done.

Below is a list of actions that must occur to keep MRCs strong and viable.

| Actions | Who Does It |
|---|--|
| Maintain the diversity of membership on MRCs as required by MRC by-laws and in support of the spirit of the Murray Metcalf report. | MRCs in coordination with local elected officials |
| Maintain relationships with local elected officials through regular briefings to county councils or commissions and by responding to requests for advice on policy issues. | MRC staff and leadership |
| Participate in MRC Conference and training events to hear from experts about emerging issues, new technologies and research. Share MRC project successes and lessons learned. | MRC staff and members |
| Secure funding for base operations and projects. | NWS Commission and MRCs (base funding and projects), NWS Foundation (projects) |
| Leverage financial resources by seeking local matching funds and enlisting volunteers to work on projects. | MRC members and staff |
| Develop and share outreach and communication plans and strategies in order | MRC staff with assistance as appropriate from NWSC and NWSF staff. |

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| to increase the visibility of MRCs' work and the work of the entire Initiative. | |
| Ensure that project data is secure and available to the public and resource managers. | MRC and NWS Commission staff |

Measures of Progress (the nature of this goal and actions require a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures of progress):

- MRCs will be fully functioning committees, comprised of volunteers with different and complementary backgrounds who are in regular communication with their local elected officials about the work of the MRC.
- MRCs will share information about projects and lessons learned, and develop collaborative projects with other MRCs when possible.
- MRCs will be recognized for their work in local media.
- New MRC projects will be funded.

2. Strengthen the Northwest Straits Commission

The NWS Commission provides funding and support to the MRCs and provides a regional perspective to their work. The NWS Commission also carries out selected high-priority regional projects and participates in regional work groups and planning processes to integrate the Initiative's work with other efforts.

| Actions | Who Does It |
|---|--|
| Seek funding opportunities to support the Initiative's work that aligns with state and federal agency missions including protecting trust species and their habitats. | NWS Commission Director |
| Seek congressional reauthorization of the Initiative. | NWS Commission Director and members and NWS Foundation Board and staff |
| Participate in regional work groups to ensure that the Initiative's projects are linked to regional priorities and that local MRC projects are recognized by regional programs. | NWS Commission Chair and staff |
| Develop regional projects that support and expand the work of MRCs. | NWS Commission and NWS Foundation staff |

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|--|---|
| Update (as needed) and implement this Initiative-wide strategic plan. | Tracking and Implementation Committee |
| Carry out effective communication strategies to inform regional decision makers about the Initiative’s work, and to elicit increased interest and participation in it. | NWS Commission Director, staff and External Relations Committee |
| Work in coordination with the NWS Foundation to meet the goals of the Initiative and find suitable funding opportunities for MRC projects. | NWS Commission staff |
| Ensure that MRC reports and data are publically available through a web-based library and the GIS-based Sound IQ. | NWS Commission staff |

Measures of Progress (the nature of this goal and actions require a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures of progress):

- Funding sources will be identified and the Initiative will be increasingly financially stable.
- The NWS Initiative will be re-authorized by Congress.
- Organizations and agencies will recognize the Initiative’s work in planning documents and management actions.
- MRC projects will leverage funding in addition to funds offered through the NWS Commission.
- MRC reports and data will be available to MRC members and the general public. Sound IQ will be successfully expanded to seven counties and used by MRC members and others.

3. Strengthen the Northwest Straits Foundation

The NWS Foundation implements priority projects in collaboration with the Marine Resources Committees and other partners and coordinates areas of MRC support with the NWS Commission. The NWS Foundation provides the MRCs project management and funding capacity, fiscal management of private funds, and assistance in building community profile.

The NWS Foundation must develop leadership and capacity at all levels of the organization in order to sustain organizational health and fulfill the vision and mission of the Northwest Straits Initiative.

| Actions | Who does it |
|---|--|
| Weave philanthropy and community-building activities into the fabric of Foundation culture by contributing expertise, resources and community connections | NWSF Board of Directors Org. Advancement Committee NWSF Executive Director and |

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| | senior staff |
| Build a stable, diverse funding base that provides ample financial resources for the Foundation to achieve its mission in support of the NWSI | NWSF Board of Directors NWSF senior staff |
| Generate a stable financial position that is managed by a financially-fluent board and staff | NWSF Board of Directors, NWSF staff |
| Prepare, manage, and monitor organizational budgets that are balanced, realistic and achievable. | NWSF Executive Director, Finance Committee, NWSF staff |
| Participate in regional work groups as appropriate to ensure that the Initiative's projects are linked to regional priorities and that local MRC projects are recognized by regional programs. | NWSF staff |
| Collaborate with MRCs to develop fundable projects and programs | NWS Foundation staff, MRC members and staff |
| Provide proposal writing and other funding support services to MRCs | NWS Foundation staff |
| Serve as fiscal agent for donations and other funds dedicated to individual MRCs | NWS Foundation staff |
| Provide project design and management services for restoration projects, including those of MRCs | NWS Foundation staff |
| Sponsor the annual MRC conference; build in a fundraising component to the conference for MRC support | NWS Foundation staff |
| Fund and manage projects of regional import, such as the Derelict Gear Removal program | NWS Foundation staff |
| Implement effective outreach and communications to raise the profile of the NWSI, internally through the MRCs and to our external audiences. | NWS Foundation staff |
| Maintain a positive workplace environment and high-functioning professional staff | NWSF Executive Director NWSF Board of Directors |

Measures of Progress (the nature of this goal and actions require a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures of progress):

- Donor renewal rates and gifts, and rates of new donors and pledges will be used to measure success in cultivating long-term relationships, resources and partnerships with people and organizations that further the mission of the Foundation and Initiative.
- The Foundation will grow a stable, diverse funding base by maintaining a healthy mix of earned and contributed income and, annually increasing income generated from unrestricted gifts from people and organizations.
- Foundation Board members and staff understand the organization's financial position and priorities.
- Annual budgets are closely monitored in order to respond to changing financial conditions in a timely manner.

- Cash flow is managed through timely execution of grants and contracts, earned and contributed income.
- The annual MRC conference presents a high quality, cutting-edge program that is free or low-cost to MRC members due to Foundation procured sponsor support.
- MRC priority projects receive funding support due to the efforts of the Foundation.
- MRC restoration projects are managed in collaboration with MRCs to ensure design, feasibility, and construction activities are completed in an efficient manner and within budget.
- The Foundation will attract and retain excellent staff by encouraging a professional culture that is energetic and positive and that values accountability, compassion, honesty, integrity, community and professional growth.
- Board and staff annual work plans are aligned with the NWSI Strategic Plan.

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