2014 Annual Report
2014 Northwest Straits Commission Members

Christine Woodward  Skagit County MRC, Chair
Nan McKay   Governor’s Appointee, Vice Chair
Greg Ayers   San Juan County MRC
Diana Bob   Governor’s Appointee
Ken Carrasco   Whatcom County MRC
Lenny Corin   Island County MRC
Shannon Davis   Jefferson County MRC
Dr. Terrie Klinger   Governor’s Appointee
Lincoln Loehr   Snohomish County MRC
Jerry Masters   Governor’s Appointee
Sheida Sahandy   Puget Sound Partnership, Governor’s Appointee
Jeff Ward   Clallam County MRC
Terry Williams   Tulalip Tribes, Secretary of the Interior Appointee

Alternates
Marc Daily   Alternate for Sheida Sahandy
Dr. Ron Thom   Alternate for Dr. Terrie Klinger

Commission Staff/Support

Ginny Broadhurst   Executive Director
Holly Faulstich   Program Coordinator
Caroline Gibson   Marine Program Manager
Sasha Horst   Communications Manager
Paul Argites   Marine Debris Program Assistant in partnership with Department of Ecology WCC Veteran Crews
Suzanne Shull   GIS support in partnership with Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
Terry Stevens   Director of Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

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Cover photos: (top row, L to R) Steve Mlodinow, Cheryl Lowe, Caroline Gibson (bottom row, L to R) Caroline Gibson, Caroline Gibson, Snohomish MRC

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The Northwest Straits Region

This amazing place we call the Northwest Straits is home to a wide array of wildlife including bald eagles, Dungeness crabs, porpoises, octopuses and many more birds, fish and invertebrates than most of us will ever know. It also is home to endangered species such as orca whales, Chinook salmon and three species of rockfish. For over 30 years, pollution, wildlife disease, toxics, algal blooms and declining species have been all too common in Puget Sound.

The Puget Sound Partnership is tasked with coordinating the efforts of many organizations and agencies working to recover Puget Sound. The Partnership created an overarching Action Agenda, which lays out the work necessary to restore the Sound.

The Northwest Straits Commission works in the northern region of Puget Sound. Our niche is empowering residents to collaborate on actions that protect and restore local marine resources and we are one of the many partners to carry out the Partnership’s Action Agenda.

Protecting environmental treasures results from an ethic of caring and appreciation. This stewardship ethic has an important place in the Puget Sound recovery strategy. The Northwest Straits Commission leverages local stewardship and connects it to regional actions to build collective impact towards restoration.

Please take a look at what we’re doing. We hope that you’ll be inspired.

Ginny Broadhurst, Executive Director
Northwest Straits Commission
About the Northwest Straits Initiative

The Northwest Straits Initiative includes seven county-based Marine Resources Committees (MRCs) comprised of volunteers appointed by their local elected officials; the Northwest Straits Commission, made up of representatives from each MRC, five governor’s appointees and a tribal appointee; and the Northwest Straits Foundation, a non-profit partner with a board of directors.

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

The Northwest Straits Commission

The Northwest Straits Commission (Commission) is a regional coordinating body comprised of people who care about the marine areas where they live, and who work together to protect and restore marine resources.

The Commission’s focus is protecting marine habitats, wildlife and water quality through stewardship actions, restoration projects and education. The work of the Commission carries out goals of the Puget Sound Action Agenda.

“In the Pacific Northwest, we know that conservation isn’t just an environmental issue, it impacts our economy and our way of life, and the Northwest Straits Initiative is a great example of what an innovative, grassroots conservation effort can achieve. Through their work on issues including the removal of derelict fishing gear and the restoration of beach and nearshore habitats, the Initiative has always been a great partner for local conservation efforts, and I look forward to working with them to build on their excellent work researching, restoring, and conserving our marine environment.”

U.S. Senator Patty Murray
Northwest Straits Initiative Environmental Goals

**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.

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

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

**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.

*Photo: Sasha Horst*


Bottom row, L to R: Jerry Masters, Christine Woodward, Marc Daily, Shannon Davis, Dr. Terrie Klinger, Lincoln Loehr
Ocean Acidification

The Commission and MRCs are carrying out many recommendations from the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification. These projects, such as installing rain gardens, protecting eelgrass beds, planting native Olympia oysters, and sharing relevant information with target audiences and local communities, each have a role in keeping our marine waters healthy and absorbing carbon. The Commission also holds a designated seat on the Washington Marine Resources Advisory Council, which maintains a coordinated focus on ocean acidification for the region.

In 2014, the Commission and MRCs hosted public forums in Everett and Port Townsend. Over 130 people attended and received direct communication about ocean acidification from leading experts and local groups working on related issues. Participant surveys showed that the majority of attendees gained significant knowledge about ocean acidification and felt that they would use and share information from these events. Since 2013, the Commission has hosted six public forums on ocean acidification, reaching more than 650 local residents in five counties.

Learn more about our work on Ocean Acidification at www.nwstraits.org/our-work/ocean-acidification/.

Eelgrass Recovery

Eelgrass is one of the most valuable habitats in the Salish Sea and its protection is a cornerstone of our work. Eelgrass is a “vital sign indicator” of Puget Sound health and recovery identified by the Puget Sound Partnership. In 2014, the Commission worked with experts from around the region to prepare a recovery strategy that targets select sites with actions ranked most likely to restore eelgrass, such as reducing the adverse impacts of shoreline armoring and preventing anchor damage. Replication of Jefferson MRC’s highly successful Voluntary No-Anchor Zone Project is one of these actions. This project consistently achieves a 99% compliance rate by boaters during the busy summer season.
Kelp Recovery

In 2014, the Commission produced a new tool for generating needed information on changing kelp populations. The floating kelp survey protocol is designed for kayakers around the region, and is included in the Puget Sound Shoreline Monitoring Toolbox. The protocol is an outcome of the Commission’s NOAA Hollings Scholar internship. MRCs will begin monitoring local kelp beds during the 2015 summer field season.

The Commission also recently launched the Salish Sea International Kelp Alliance, with key charter members who are leading kelp recovery efforts in Puget Sound and British Columbia. The Kelp Alliance will promote a better understanding of the ecological and cultural value of kelp in the region, as well as the application of citizen science to research and recovery efforts across the international border.

“It’s wonderful that people are getting excited about kelp in Puget Sound. Our iconic floating kelp is dear to the hearts of those who have used it in coastal cultures, wandered beaches and snorkeled in kelp forests, and for kayakers and sailors trying to avoid rocks. The Commission’s leadership in promoting a better understanding about the importance of kelp is certain to advance the recovery of marine habitat in the Salish Sea.”

- Dr. Thomas Mumford, Marine Agronomics

Forage Fish Program

Surf smelt and sand lance are small schooling fish that feed salmon, seabirds and other wildlife. These ‘forage’ fish lay their eggs on beaches around Puget Sound. Documenting the location of spawning activity is one important step toward protecting beaches from impacts of shoreline development.

The MRCs have surveyed more than 40 miles of spawning beaches to date. In 2014, the Commission organized three forage fish survey workshops for MRCs and each was filled to capacity, with a total of 40 volunteers trained by experienced instructors. These volunteers will put their training to use at multiple sites in 2015.

Information about our Forage Fish Program can be found on our web site at http://www.nwstraits.org/our-work/forage-fish/

Data Coordination and Mapping

SoundIQ is a project of the Northwest Straits Commission to map MRC and Commission work along with other relevant natural resource information. SoundIQ also makes data collected by the MRCs and Commission accessible to agencies, organizations and other interested parties.

In 2014, data from Snohomish and Jefferson MRCs was added, including approximately 100,000 eelgrass points, and full expansion to include all seven Northwest Straits counties will occur in 2015.

SoundIQ is online at www.iqmap.org/soundiq

Reducing our carbon footprint

The Commission reduced its overall carbon footprint by replacing half of the scheduled in-person meetings with WebEx conference calls. The calculated carbon emission savings for 2014 was approximately 3.36 metric tons (7,407 pounds) of CO₂ with a cost savings of over $10,400.
Marine Debris Removal

The Commission coordinated marine debris removal projects for the Department of Ecology Washington Conservation Corps Veteran Crews. In 2014, more than 15.9 tons of marine debris was removed by crews at 10 locations. This included thousands of pieces of Styrofoam and plastic, metal, glass, rubber, processed lumber and fabric. A story map of marine debris removal accomplishments can be found online at http://bit.ly/1urZg8g.

Outreach and Communications

In 2014, the Commission created an Initiative-wide Strategic Plan that involved all seven MRCs, the Commission and the Foundation. The new Strategic Plan has four environmental goals that will provide a framework and vision for projects in the next three years.

The Commission organized the 16th annual MRC Conference in coordination with Northwest Straits Foundation, which provided information on project monitoring, the role of kelp and eelgrass in Puget Sound ecosystems, efforts to recover threatened and endangered species, and other relevant topics. Representatives from all seven MRCs attended.

Commission communications and targeted outreach included a monthly electronic newsletter, sent to a mailing list of over 900 individuals; expansion of social media efforts on Facebook (facebook.com/nwstraits) and Twitter (@NW Straits); redesign and launch of a new web site at www.nwstraits.org.
Marine Resources Committees receive funding through the Northwest Straits Commission to identify and carry out marine conservation projects of local importance. The funding is leveraged with volunteer hours and frequently multiplied by additional financial support from local government, state and federal grants and private dollars. In 2014, more than 9,300 volunteer hours were contributed by MRC members and other community volunteers in support of MRC projects.

“I am very grateful for the Island County MRC! These dedicated and talented volunteer members bring a world of experience to the table for the benefit of our whole community. Our MRC projects illustrate the power of local stewardship.”

Helen Price Johnson, Island County Commissioner
Jefferson MRC has a strong outreach program, reaching key audiences through a variety of creative strategies. In 2014, the MRC co-sponsored two educational programs for residents to learn how to safely and sustainably dig for clams, and about the connection between safe shellfish and water quality. The MRC hosted a nearshore restoration planning workshop to review how activities align with the Shoreline Master Program, with 28 participants from agencies, tribes, conservation organizations and partners.

For over 10 years, the Jefferson MRC has maintained a highly successful voluntary no-anchor zone to protect valuable eelgrass habitat. In 2014 they informed a new audience about this project through movie theatre messaging during the Port Townsend Film Festival, and continued traditional outreach to boaters through presentations at yacht clubs and interpretive signage at key locations. Compliance is monitored annually and is consistently near 100%. The MRC also collected videographic eelgrass data in preparation for an expansion of their eelgrass protection zone and completed a project to establish a no-anchor zone to protect shellfish in Port Hadlock.

The MRC installed interpretive signage to highlight Low Impact Development strategies at a Port of Port Townsend site. Effectiveness of the sign will be evaluated in the coming year. The MRC also completed the design phase for a new rain garden to be installed in Port Townsend in 2015.

The MRC has been a key partner in the Fort Townsend Shoreline Restoration Project Advisory Committee, working to prepare the project for construction in 2015. Approximately 9,000 square feet of nearshore habitat will be restored in partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation and Washington State Parks.

The MRC also continued with their earlier work to restore Olympia oysters by placing half an acre of shell cultch to serve as habitat for new oysters, adjacent to a small but thriving Olympia oyster population. This project tests a low-impact, long-term approach that adds substrate for natural oyster set. The MRC also relocated 5,000 Olympia oysters that were in the construction zone for a restoration project.

For more information: [www.jeffersonmrc.org](http://www.jeffersonmrc.org)

“Jefferson MRC has been instrumental in helping us achieve our goals by establishing and maintaining the very successful voluntary no-anchor zone along the eelgrass beds in downtown Port Townsend. They also wrangled the impromptu mooring fields/anchoring zones into organized mooring areas that still support nearby shellfish beds. We fully support the mission of the MRC and have collaborated on a variety of projects. We are very fortunate to have such an active MRC in our area.”

Steve Tucker, Port of Port Townsend
Island County

Island MRC focused on monitoring key local wildlife and habitats, taking advantage of substantial volunteer involvement in these efforts. In 2014, they continued tracking the health of eelgrass at 11 sites and shared data with Washington Department of Natural Resources. Analysis of five years of data showed few changes in eelgrass bed areas and notable damage due to human activity. The MRC continued monitoring Pigeon Guillemot nesting locations and behavior, sharing their data about this key indicator species with regional scientists and decision makers, including a presentation to the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program’s Marine Birds Workgroup.

The MRC continued testing at their previously-installed phytoremediation site to assess the ability of this process to reduce heavy metals in wastewater. Outflow water showed a reduction in some metals, such as copper and lead, while other metals increased or remained the same. Further testing on this experimental method of treating wastewater is planned for 2015.

Cornet Bay at Deception Pass State Park is a very popular shoreline access site where the MRC has been working in partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation and Washington State Parks to restore over 800 linear feet of shoreline and 1.24 acres of beach and uplands. The MRC’s collection of valuable data about fish use of the nearshore before and after restoration will help inform partners about this project’s degree of success and help to inform future restoration projects.

For more information:
www.islandcountymrc.org

“The Commission’s support of the long-term, citizen-science based pigeon guillemot program is fantastic. The work of the MRC and the Pigeon Guillemot Research Group on Whidbey Island has been quite visionary in its recognition of the insights that these small, dapper seabirds provide to us about inshore ecosystem health in the Salish Sea.”

Dr. Peter Hodum,
University of Puget Sound
Skagit County

Engaging local volunteers is a key focus of Skagit MRC’s work. In 2014, the Skagit MRC developed and implemented a pilot 40-hour citizen science training program called Salish Sea Stewards. The volunteers who graduated from the course contributed over 80 hours of service for MRC projects and over 200 hours for partner projects. The successful pilot project will be shared with other MRCs and is set to grow in 2015.

The MRC developed a volunteer interpretive training program to educate visitors, including school groups, at Washington Park’s Sunset Beach about the marine environment. The eight trained volunteers contributed over 200 hours, providing interpretive programs during low tide that promoted proper beach etiquette, marine life identification and nearshore ecology.

The MRC hosted the 11th annual Fidalgo Bay Day, drawing over 330 visitors to this one-day event that promotes stewardship of the marine environment and increases awareness of the marine habitat and life in Fidalgo Bay.

In 2014, Skagit MRC also partnered with the Skagit Land Trust to conduct a spatial analysis of marine shorelines to identify and prioritize the most ecologically valuable private parcels for protection. This Marine Shoreline Protection Assessment will help guide their future outreach efforts to landowners.

The MRC is partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation in large shoreline restoration projects at Bowman Bay and Shannon Point, which will remove rip rap from over 1,300 feet of shoreline and restore approximately one acre of nearshore habitat when complete.

For more information:
www.skagitmrc.org

Photo: Skagit MRC
Whatcom County

The Whatcom MRC focused on community outreach and education in 2014. A public speaker series brought in experts from a variety of organizations to present information on topics such as climate change, oil spills and runoff, Bellingham Bay chemistry and Fukushima radiation. The MRC also hosted an interpretive beach walk at Birch Bay State Park and a cleanup event at Whirlwind Beach during the annual Whatcom Water Weeks community celebration.

In partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, the Whatcom MRC conducted a clam survey in North Chuckanut Bay, involving students from a local elementary and Bellingham Technical College. The survey collected baseline information about the types, numbers, and sizes of clams found in North Chuckanut Bay in order to assess trends in clam abundance and distribution. This information is made available on the MRC web site and is being shared with local, state and tribal agencies.

The MRC also partnered with RE Sources for Sustainable Communities to conduct intertidal monitoring surveys at Boulevard Park to measure the diversity, distribution and abundance of intertidal species before and after a shoreline restoration project. The baseline information collected in the surveys will be used to assess the impacts of shoreline armoring, monitor the abundance of invasive species and track the recovery of this popular Bellingham beach over time. The results from the 2013-2014 intertidal monitoring surveys are available on the MRC’s web site.

For more information:
www.mrc.whatcomcounty.org/
Clallam County

Oil spill preparedness and response continues to be a priority for the Clallam MRC. The MRC hosted Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) refresher training and two oiled wildlife trainings in 2014. To date, over 500 local volunteers have been trained through the MRC program.

Clallam MRC established an internship program in 2014 to provide additional emphasis on MRC priorities and to engage local students in marine stewardship. Each intern conducted at least one public event to highlight the work of the MRC. The MRC’s marine debris intern was recently named Feiro Marine Life Center’s Science Student of the Year.

The MRC co-sponsored three beach cleanup events in 2014, removing 1.8 tons of debris from local shorelines. An analysis sponsored by the MRC that was completed by Washington Coast Savers provided recommendations to improve the effectiveness and coordination of coastal cleanup efforts, such as promoting cleanup events to local service organizations and developing a rapid response team to address short-term cleanup needs.

The MRC continued its partnership with the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe to restore a self-sustaining population of Olympia oysters in Sequim Bay that provide ecosystem services, such as water filtration. The project goal of restoring one acre was achieved, and the area was expanded in 2014 to include an additional half acre, for a total of 1.5 acres of restoration area.

For more information:
www.clallamcountymrc.org
Snohomish County

Snohomish MRC carried out a wide range of marine conservation research, outreach, and on-the-ground restoration projects in 2014. In Port Susan, the MRC held a workshop to identify the most effective incentives for shoreline landowners to protect the Marine Stewardship Area’s nearshore habitat. As a result, four incentives to prevent future shoreline armoring are being considered for a pilot project by Snohomish County.

The MRC’s Dungeness crabber education committee hosted a focus group with experienced recreational crabbers to gather information on best crabbing techniques and how to teach them to others. This project will continue into 2015 with a social marketing campaign aimed at reducing crab pot loss in Snohomish County waters.

Snohomish MRC members and staff attended a training to identify forage fish spawning areas, and used that training to conduct pre-restoration monitoring of potential forage fish spawning areas along a railroad-impounded shoreline near the mouth of the Snohomish River where restoration is planned in 2015. The MRC plans to conduct follow up surveys after restoration is done.

Two videos highlighting MRC projects were released in 2014. One featured the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area and the other focused on the MRC’s annual derelict crab pot removal from Port Gardner. The Port Susan video premiered at the Focus on Farming Conference attended by over 500 people and was also shown at the annual MRC Conference in Port Townsend. The video has received over 660 views on Vimeo since its release.

For more information:
www.snocomrc.org

Photo: Caroline Gibson
San Juan County

San Juan MRC continues to engage residents in a variety of projects to support the Marine Stewardship Area, adopted in 2007. Their 10th annual Marine Managers’ Workshop in 2014 focused on the implications of global climate change and ocean acidification for shellfish growers. Thirty-five participants attended this event and heard some of the top ocean acidification speakers in the state.

MRC members and staff participate regularly with a variety of county committees in order to integrate the Marine Stewardship Area into all facets of county environmental projects. The MRC participated in updates to the county’s Shoreline Master Program and Critical Areas Ordinance.

Outreach efforts include participation in the Stewardship Network, a collaborative sponsorship of a summer lecture series on Ocean and Global Climate Change, outreach at the County Fair, and collaboration on the national Leave No Trace initiative.

The MRC also highlighted the need to evaluate the state’s oil spill response capability in the San Juan Islands and adjacent waters given increasing vessel traffic.

For more information: www.sjcerc.org
partners in marine conservation