



**March 25, 2022 • 10:00 AM-12:00 PM**  
**Zoom – Conference call**  
**Northwest Straits Commission meeting**

**Attendees:**

**Commission Members:** Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Jenn Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership alternate), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Julia Parrish, Nan McKay, Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Christina Koons (San Juan)

**Commission Staff:** Lucas Hart, Dana Oster, Allie Simpson, Leah Robison, Jeff Whitty

**Others in Attendance:** Dr. Drew Harvell, Rebecca Mahan (Clallam), Troy McKelvey (Jefferson), Frances Robertson (San Juan), Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation)

**Absent:** Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Alan Clark (Clallam), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Chris Castner

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgment. The Commission approved the minutes from the February 25 meeting as written by consensus.

**Congressionally Directed Spending**

Lucas shared details on the good news we received about the \$3 million in Congressionally Directed Spending secured by Senator Murray for fiscal year 2022. He explained that this was the result of 12 years of work. Lucas thanked the many entities and individuals that provided letters of support, and NWSC leaders who paved the way to this success over the years. This is a big milestone towards what we hope will eventually be an ongoing appropriation for the NW Straits Commission.

**Committee Reports**

**Executive Committee:** Tom Cowan noted the exceptional situation for the federal funding. Senator Murray would not have been able to secure these funds without the work of all the MRCs and the Commission. State biennial budget planning has started for the 2023/2025 biennium. The NW Straits Commission has several state funding priorities, including ongoing MRC funding, kelp and green crab funding.

**Science Advisory Committee:** Julia Parrish provided a short update, noting that the Science Advisory Committee is continuing its plan to bring scientists working in the Northwest Straits region in front of the Commission to share their work and potential opportunities for collaboration. This month Dr. Drew Harvell is presenting.

**External Relations Committee:** Chair Chris Castner was not in attendance. Lucas explained that Senator Murray is still leading on a reauthorization bill for the NW Straits Commission. Bill language is being reviewed by NOAA. We expect an update on progress from Senator Murray's office in the next few weeks.

**Business items**

In addition to the written update, staff provided the following business items:

- MRC grant amendments – Sasha shared a process and timeline for amending the current MRC grants, which include state funding as well as federal EPA funds via the Puget Sound Partnership. MRC staff have



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also received the information and Sasha will be working directly with MRCs to ensure that the agreement scope and budget are on track for year two.

- Northwest Straits MRC Conference – A tentative in-person conference is scheduled for November 18-19, 2022 at Maple Hall in La Conner, Skagit County. A planning committee will be forming in the near future to move forward with developing the content.
- Forage fish training – Leah reported that she is working with WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife to schedule a forage fish training for volunteers in July, potentially to be held on the Olympic peninsula. Leah will contact forage fish project leads with more information.
- Kelp conservation plan steering committee - Jeff reported that he is working on setting-up a Kelp Plan Coordination Advisory Committee and is also working on a survey to begin investigating what actions within the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan are and are not being undertaken by current projects within the Puget Sound.

## **Presenting Scientist – Dr. Drew Harvell**

Dr. Drew Harvell shared a presentation on how disease outbreaks in eelgrass meadows are exacerbated by a warming climate. Eelgrass meadows are vital habitat in Puget Sound, providing habitat, carbon storage, and filtering pathogens. However, eelgrass meadows like much of our environment are under threat from a warming climate and urbanization. Disease in eelgrass could be an indicator of potential declines in local meadows. Conservation of this key habitat is critical, and understanding areas of vulnerable and resilient eelgrass meadows will play a vital role in preserving for the future.

## **Partner updates:**

**Puget Sound Partnership:** Jenn Grimm gave another reminder about the Action Agenda which is open for public input and review from March 15 through April 15 (<https://www.psp.wa.gov/2022AAupdate.php>). Puget Sound Day on the Hill will be virtual and extended and more details will be provided next month. Jenn encouraged everyone to tune in on May 11 for the livestream and to sign on to the letter in advance at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZGydou3331d6WPMSVFLJEm5bDate0XbNUFeXpekRc2FhOg/viewform>

**Northwest Straits Foundation:** Don Hunger shared information from the Foundation's recent newsletter, which included an introduction to the three students selected for the Caroline Gibson scholarships. The NW Straits Foundation will be reaching out to MRCs to discuss opportunities for AmeriCorps members to support MRC and partner projects.

## **MRC Updates**

MRCs provided full written reports that are available in the pre-meeting materials. Highlights are included below:

### **Clallam – Rebecca Mahan**

- Marine Critter Outreach/Education cards all distributed to local venues.
- Organized Derelict Vessel presentation from WA Dept of Natural Resources staff to other MRCs and NW Straits Commission staff.



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### **Island** – Elsa Schwartz

- Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award: Frances Wood
- Strategic Planning: Our members have been preparing for our retreat by completing surveys and working on some pre-work provided by the retreat facilitator.
- Kelly Zupich: Is still working to get settled in the coordinator position. She is learning lots of new things and is very excited about this new challenge.

### **Jefferson** – Jeff Taylor

- The rain garden subcommittee is organizing a rain garden work party on March 18th to weed and cleanup rain gardens across Port Townsend.
- The Fort Townsend forage fish team conducted its last survey for the season on March 9th, marking 7 years of monitoring this site.

### **San Juan** – Frances Robertson

- The MRC continues to make progress on the Marine Stewardship Area Plan update.

### **Skagit** – Diane Hennebert

- Kids on the Beach: 360 students from 4 schools are participating in the Kids on the Beach program this year: Sedro-Wooley, Conway, Concrete, and Anacortes middle schools. The level of involvement ranges from fully virtual to in-person. 13 volunteers signed up to assist with the 5 (in-person) field days in March and April.
- MRC Project Planning Retreat: The MRC Project Planning Retreat will be held in-person at Padilla Bay on Wednesday, April 13, 9am-11am. The retreat will be facilitated by Lucas and Allie. MRC members will have 3 weeks to evaluate and rank the 11 MRC project proposals prepared by the project leads prior to the retreat.

### **Snohomish** – Tim Ellis

- Washington State Department of Natural Resources has withdrawn approximately 2,298.01 acres of aquatic lands from leasing as authorized under RCW 79.10.210 effective February 28, 2022. The data that the MRC collected in 2020 in partnership with Snohomish County Surface Water Management and DNR to survey and map the presence of marine vegetation within the Snohomish estuary helped inform this action by DNR. We are pleased to see the data that we gathered being used to help inform the protection of these important ecosystems.
- The Snohomish MRC partnered with WSU Snohomish County Beach Watchers to host a shoreline cleanup on March 3 at Howarth Park. Along with WSU Beach Watchers, MRC members and staff attended. Additional cleanups are planned on April 23 and September 17.
- Snohomish MRC closed the Port Susan Stakeholder Survey on March 2. The project team is continuing to conduct follow-up interviews with some stakeholders who expressed a preference to share information via one-on-one discussion. The Joint Island-Snohomish MRC Port Susan Team will reconvene in early April to debrief from the Stakeholder Survey and interviews and will begin to plan for stakeholder meetings this spring and summer.

### **Whatcom** – Bob Cecile

- The MRC has a vacancy for an Economic interest position and a Conservation/Environmental interest position. These vacancies are advertised on the MRC homepage <https://www.whatcomcountymrc.org/>



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- Whatcom County Executive Sidhu ordered full re-opening of County facilities for public business, which allows for the MRC to meet in person and host a hybrid meeting if they wish. The MRC Executive Subcommittee will determine whether the committee meets in person when they meet to develop the meeting agenda each month. The committee agreed to meet in person for the April meeting.

### **Meeting highlights and action steps for MRCs**

The Commission identified the following key highlights, which staff will share as a separate document to MRC staff and the Commission:

- Senator Murray secured \$3M in Congressional funding for FY22. MRCs are prioritizing projects they would like to fund with this money. The Commission is waiting for further instructions from NOAA regarding timelines and other details.
- The NW Straits Commission will be applying for FY23 Congressional funds. Lucas notified MRC staff. Letters of support from counties or other MRC partners are greatly appreciated. Letters can be sent to [hart@nwstraits.org](mailto:hart@nwstraits.org) by April 1. Contact Lucas if you plan to provide a letter.
- The NW Straits Commission is planning for future hybrid meetings, and have ordered an Owl camera to make those hybrid meetings more effective.
- The NW Straits Commission plans to hold an in-person conference November 18-19 at Maple Hall in La Conner. More information will be provided as planning commences.
- Leah Robison on NW Straits Commission staff is planning a forage fish spawn monitoring training for July. Contact Leah for more information ([robison@nwstraits.org](mailto:robison@nwstraits.org))
- The NW Straits Foundation is researching and designing an AmeriCorps marine conservation corps program. This is part of a planning grant to assess the need for a program in the Northwest Straits region. They will be reaching out to MRC staff starting in April to learn about emerging opportunities and to identify partnership opportunities where AmeriCorps members can provide capacity, knowledge, skills and abilities supporting local marine projects.

### **Public comment**

There was no public comment.

\*The next Commission meeting will be on Friday April 22, 2022, via Zoom.