



# Minutes

**April 22, 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), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Chris Castner

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

**Others in Attendance:** Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Hannah Liss (Puget Sound Partnership), P. Sean McDonald (UW), Sarah Fiske (Jefferson), Lee Whitford (NW Straits Foundation), Mary Margaret Stoll

**Absent:** Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Alan Clark (Clallam)

## Welcome and Introductions

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

## Committee Reports

**Executive Committee:** Tom Cowan noted the importance of the fiscal year 2022 Congressionally Directed Spending and that a draft budget is in progress. Tom also noted that the committee reviewed a proposed signage project for Skagit and concluded that it doesn't meet the Northwest Straits Commission's funding policy. The Committee has also been engaged in discussions about a county-proposed restructuring of the San Juan MRC.

The Committee also recommended that the Commission move forward with the regional voluntary no-anchor zone project, including contracting for a social marketing campaign and site monitoring surveys. The Commission moved and approved by consensus to move forward with the voluntary no-anchor zone project.

**Science Advisory Committee:** Julia Parrish noted that the Committee met and discussed the next round of "speed dating with a scientist", such as the green crab presentation at the meeting today. They are now lining up the next round of speakers. The Committee also discussed the terms of reference for the group, and have more to discuss on that at future meetings. She encouraged members of the Commission to reach out with thoughts on what the Committee should or should not do.

**External Relations Committee:** Chris Castner provided an update on the draft Northwest Straits reauthorization bill. We are currently waiting for the next steps, which include feedback from NOAA and the Department of Commerce on the draft bill. Regarding the FY22 Congressionally Directed Spending, there is a letter in the works to thank Senator Murray for her efforts to secure funds and her ongoing work on reauthorization.

## Business items

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

- NW Straits Commission Chair and Vice-Chair Nominations – Nan McKay nominated Elsa Schwartz to serve as chair, Tom Cowan to serve as vice-chair. The Commission moved and approved by consensus to elect the slate of officers as presented.



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- Kelp monitoring season kickoff – Allie Simpson shared that the Commission hosted a kelp monitoring season kickoff this month, with a focused agenda on the protocol. Julia Ledbetter from WA Dept of Natural Resources shared detailed information about use of the protocols for collecting useful data.
- WCC Green Crab training – Jeff Whitty shared some slides from the recent training with the Washington Conservation Corps crew, in partnership with Padilla Bay Reserve. The crew training includes classroom and field work where they caught their first crab of the season.
- Forage fish training update – Forage fish volunteers are invited to join a Zoom training event on July 13. Leah Robison will send out the link and details.
- Staffing update – Lucas shared that the Program Coordinator position is now being recruited, and is open until filled.
- MRC Project Planning update - Lucas shared that NWS staff are working with MRCs to gather information on projects they would like to fund with FY22 federal funds. This information is being used to draft a preliminary budget. NWS staff are waiting for further guidance from NOAA.
- MRC State General Fund amendments – Sasha Horst shared an update on changes to the MRC funding in the state budget, which now requires that the first half be spent by June 30, 2022. She will work with each MRC to identify any potential shortfalls and execute the required amendments.

### **Presenting Scientist – Sean McDonald**

P. Sean McDonald representing Crab Team presented on their work on European green crab. Crab Team is mainly made up of WA Sea Grant staff, and they provide early detection and scientific advisory services to the department. He noted that green crabs are not a threat individually, but collectively they can impact habitat, shellfish beds, and crab populations. He invited attendees to reach out to him at [psean@uw.edu](mailto:psean@uw.edu).

### **Q & A:**

- Are there areas not being monitored? There are 55 monitoring sites, and they are not covering everything yet for a variety of reasons including capacity constraints. They are focused on having good coverage in top tier habitats, and use eDNA methods to streamline prioritization of habitat.
- What's going on in the rest of the Salish Sea? Colleagues are engaged in transboundary management plan, with nine governmental entities and First Nations participating. A SSEC session on this.
- Is there continued introduction from elsewhere? They are native to Europe and came to the East coast first. He doesn't believe that there is currently additional input, which would bring the input of new genetic material and potential for a much more rapid spread.
- Is eradication possible? They generally don't discuss this, since it is not possible to eliminate larvae.
- How do you prioritize sites? Look for the type of habitat they prefer, such as areas that retain water and isolated areas. Other considerations are whether the area is safe for volunteers, do we have volunteers, and is there access to the site.

### **Partner updates:**

**Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission:** Cecilia Gobin noted that the NWIFC provided a letter of support for the NW Straits Initiative's FY23 Congressionally Directed Spending application and support for reauthorization. She has been working with Dana and Lisa Kaufman to engage tribes in the voluntary no-



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anchor zone project, with some recent discussion about setting up a meeting to provide a briefing on the project.

**Puget Sound Partnership:** Jennifer Grimm shared that registration is open for Puget Sound Day on the Hill on May 11, 2-3pm. [Click here to register](#). The comment period for the Action Agenda has closed, and Partnership staff is now reviewing the comments.

**Northwest Straits Foundation:** Don Hunger noted that the Foundation is continuing to plan for AmeriCorps program, Salish Sea Conservation Corps to develop the next generation of marine conservationists. The program planning phase wraps up in July. A board member has contributed funding to develop an app for the Passport for Marine Adventure. MRCs will have an opportunity to share projects to include. Don introduced Mary Margaret Stoll, one of the recipients of the Caroline Gibson Scholarship, who is studying ocean acidification in the Salish Sea.

## MRC Updates

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

### **Clallam** –

- Continued Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Preparing for Port Angeles Earth Day Celebration (4/23) on the City Pier.

### **Island** – Elsa Schwartz

- Strategic Planning: Our members participated in a strategic planning retreat. The committee will continue to work out the details to finalize a plan at monthly meetings and subcommittee meetings.
- April Fool's Planting Event: The NW Straits Foundation, WA State Parks, and Sound Water Stewards partnered to add 20 yards of mulch and soil to the areas disturbed by the construction of a new dock. Additionally, over 200 shoreline plants were planted to work towards restoring the area to a more natural state.

### **Jefferson** – Jeff Taylor

- The rain garden subcommittee organized a work party in Port Townsend on March 18th and addressed maintenance needs of three rain gardens (see photos below), and will be organizing another work party on April 29th.
- The MRC presented its annual update to the Board of Jefferson County Commissioners on March 28.
- The MRC executed a contract for side scan sonar surveys of lost crab pots in Discovery Bay (Adelma Beach and Cape George areas), to be scheduled sometime mid-May.

### **San Juan** – Christina Koons

- Plans are ramping for summer projects; a summer intern has been found.
- Quarterly reporting was completed, and presentations created for the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference.
- The MRC approved the Annual Report.

### **Skagit** – Diane Hennebert



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- MRC Project Planning Retreat: The MRC Project Planning Retreat was held virtually on April 13 and was facilitated by Lucas and Allie. MRC members evaluated and ranked the proposals prior to the retreat. The comments and questions raised by MRC members from the evaluations were addressed which led to some really great discussions about the projects.
- Fidalgo Bay Day: Fidalgo Bay Day will be held in person this year! The event date has been set for Saturday, August 20, 2022, 11am-3:00pm at the Fidalgo Bay Resort in Anacortes. We are still working out the details, but it will be similar to past events with beach seining, a touch tank, bird watching, forage fish beach walks, interactive educational booths, games, face painting, kids crafts, and a no host salmon BBQ.

### **Snohomish – Tim Ellis**

- Snohomish MRC wrapped up the Stakeholder Survey and follow up Stakeholder Interviews in March for the Port Susan Conservation Action Plan (CAP) Update Project. Overall, the results demonstrate strong commitment to the responsible management of the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area. Key takeaways include:
  - Many partners are not regularly utilizing the Port Susan MSA CAP.
  - Partners broadly supported shifting the focus towards implementation.
  - Some objectives and strategies would benefit from additional context and framing, particularly as they relate to climate change, wellbeing, and new considerations.
  - Most respondents chose options to cross walk the plan with PSP's Action Agenda and host biannual implementation meetings to make the plan more useful.
- Three new MRC members (Franchesca Perez, Allan Hicks, and Bob Margulis) recommended for appointment to the MRC were formally appointed by Snohomish County Council on March 30.
- MRC staff posted 4 vessels for removal from the Snohomish Estuary on March 28. Contractor bids are expected in late April, with the hope to start removing vessels in late May.

### **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>
- Whatcom County Council and the Whatcom County Planning Commission will be discussing ways to increase public beach access in Whatcom County. Councilman Donavon has docketed the topic for future council agendas and has requested support from the Whatcom MRC.
- The Bellingham Community Boating Center (CBC) is offering more citizen science program and youth internship opportunities. There is interest in involving CBC participants in MRC field work.

### **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:

- The NW Straits Commission approved Commission staff to move forward with contracting necessary for eelgrass protection zone expansion. This includes social marketing and site monitoring. Commission staff are working with MRCs to identify sites.
- Securing \$3 million in Congressionally Directed Spending is significant. MRCs should reach out to Lucas or Sasha if they anticipate needing more than \$200,000 for project work using these funds. It will be possible to provide funding in excess of this amount.



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- The Commission elected Elsa Schwartz and Tom Cowan for another term as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.
- Forage Fish training will be held July 13 in Port Townsend. Contact Leah Robison with questions [Robison@nwstraits.org](mailto:Robison@nwstraits.org)
- The NW Straits Commission Program Coordinator position is currently open for applicants. Information and application at <https://bit.ly/3lz1tXk>.
- Changes to the account that MRC State funds come from now require that half of the funds be spent by June 30, 2022, requiring MRC grant amendments. Sasha has reached out to MRC staff to initiate the process.
- P. Sean McDonald presented on green crab at the Commission meeting. E-DNA methods for crab detection are being developed. Information and resources at [www.wsg.washington.edu/crabteam](http://www.wsg.washington.edu/crabteam).
- Registration for virtual Puget Sound Day on the Hill on May 11 is open. [Click here to register.](#)
- The NW Straits Foundation is scoping development of a Salish Sea Conservation Corps program. They will be reaching out to MRCs on needs.
- The NW Straits Foundation is creating an app for their Passport to Marine Adventure project. The app will include georeferenced NW Straits Initiative projects and encourage people to visit. The Foundation will reach out to MRCs to gather information on projects they would like to highlight.

### **Public comment**

There was no public comment.

\*The next Commission meeting will be on Friday May 27, 2022, via Zoom.