



Minutes

September 30, 2022 - 10:00 AM-12:00PM

Zoom - Virtual meeting

Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Chris Castner, Julia Parrish, Dianne Hennebert (Skagit), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Cecilia Gobin (Tribal), Nan McKay, Karin Roemers-Kleven (San Juan-alternate), Alan Clark (Clallam), Jennifer Grimm (Puget Sound Partnership), Mike MacKay (Whatcom – alternate)

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

Others in Attendance: Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Phil Salditt (NW Straits Foundation), Austin Rose (Whatcom), Scott Pearson (WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife)

Absent: Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Christina Koons (San Juan), Tom Cowan, Jeff Taylor (Jefferson), Laura Blackmore

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with the tribal acknowledgment and introductions of attendees. The Commission approved the minutes from the August 26 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Lucas noted that the approved 2023 Commission meeting schedule did not include a retreat. The Commission approved by consensus to cancel the March 31 meeting in favor of a two-day retreat. Commission staff will identify potential retreat dates to confirm with the Commission at a later meeting. The Executive Committee recommended adoption of the Science Advisory Committee's draft Articles of Association, which the Commission approved by consensus. Lucas also reported that he is working with Department of Ecology staff to revise the language on the state funding proviso for the 2023-25 biennium.

Science Advisory Committee: Julia Parrish thanked the Commission for approving the Committee's Articles of Association. She plans to work on scheduling meetings, which will be less frequent but more pointed, as well as adding depth to the current membership. She also noted that the members of the Committee who were able to attend the Collaborative Conservation Workshop gave positive feedback on the event.

External Relations Committee: Chris Castner reported that Senator Murray introduced the Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization bill ([S4903](#)), which was referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. He will share updates on the bill activities as action happens and asked the members of the Commission to consider and share ideas on what outreach they might want to do on the bill once it passes.

Business items

- Collaborative Conservation Workshop – Sasha shared a summary of the evaluations submitted by participants at the September 16 event. Overall, there was a positive response, and staff will work on following up on any action items recommended.
- Green crab update – Jeff shared an update on the green crab trapping season to date, including a late season surge in the number of crabs caught predominantly due to the appearance of small (juvenile) crabs, many of which were caught in saline tidally-influenced regions of creeks. Members of the Commission had a variety of questions related to activities, what is known and not known about the population, as well as the Commission’s role and next steps.
- Staffing update – Lucas reported that the Program Coordinator position is vacant and will be posted soon, along with a Communications Consultant position.
- Derelict vessel turn-in event planning – Lucas updated the Commission on the discussions around derelict vessels. Interested MRC and tribal representatives will be forming a prioritization workgroup in October, and planning is underway with WA Dept of Natural Resources on derelict vessel removal as well as a pilot derelict vessel turn in event.

Monitoring Washington’s marine wildlife by air, water, and land: Scott Pearson from WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife shared a presentation on surveying Washington’s seabirds and marine mammals. He noted that they work closely in partnership with other agencies and entities. The reasons for monitoring include understanding population status, trends, and distribution; ecosystem impacts; impact of human activities; and emerging issues. The causes of declines, effectiveness of conservation actions, the importance of specific places, and the impacts of one species on another are all of interest to the state.

Data collected on marine birds and mammals can be explored online at <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/wp/MarineSeabird/index.html>, or data on winter seabirds at <https://gispublic.dfw.wa.gov/WinterSeabird/>.

Partner updates

NW Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin shared an update on the derelict vessel partnership between the NW Straits Commission and interested tribes. She noted that there is a lot of interest, but also some capacity and liability issues to resolve.

Cecilia also reported that tribal leaders will be travelling to Washington, DC to meet with headquarter officials about key habitat issues and asks that Tribes have asked for, and continue to ask for, through the Treaty Rights at Risk Forum. The trip is expected to occur in November.

Puget Sound Partnership: Jennifer Grimm updated on staffing for the Partnership, with Ahren Stroming joining as the Special Assistant for Federal Affairs, who will serve as Laura Blackmore's alternate for Commission meetings in the future. Jenn also noted that there is a Request for Proposals out from the Strategic Initiative Leads. Those are available at <https://pugetsoundestuary.wa.gov/rfp/>.

Northwest Straits Foundation: Don reported that the Foundation board recently approved their annual budget, which includes piloting the Salish Sea Corps in 2023, stewardship activities, continuation of the Caroline Gibson scholarships, strengthening outreach, and highlighting the work of MRCs through the Passport to Marine Adventure app.

MRC Updates

MRCs provided full written reports that are available in the [pre-meeting materials](#). Highlights are included below:

Clallam – Alan Clark

- MRC volunteers continued monthly Forage Fish sampling on three beaches.
- Monthly shellfish biotoxins sampling at Pillar Point and Freshwater Bay.
- Four MRC Members and Coordinator attended NW Straits Collaborative Conservation Workshop in Padilla Bay 9/16/22.

Island – Elsa Schwartz

- MRC Volunteer Appreciation Gathering: We hosted a volunteer appreciation gathering this month. Our MRC realizes our work would not be possible without the amazing, dedicated volunteers who conduct research, provide education, and steward our restoration sites.
- MRC Picnic
- Family Outdoor Day: We hosted an educational booth at the Family Outdoor Day at Fort Casey State Park. The event attracted around 200 children.

Jefferson – Troy McKelvey

- Eight MRC members helped to table the Wooden Boat Festival on September 9-11 in Port Townsend, reaching 353 direct contacts, and acquiring 16 new sign-ups for notification of MRC meetings and/or volunteer opportunities.
- The MRC is prepping for a new rain garden installation on September 28 behind the WSU Extension office building in Port Hadlock, to treat stormwater flowing into South Port Townsend Bay.
- The MRC is working with the Sea Dragons to create education outreach materials, including a StoryMap and website project page detailing the ROV derelict crab pot removal efforts (including results from the side scan sonar surveys).

San Juan – Karin Roemers-Kleven

- First in-person monthly meeting in 2+ years proved fruitful and was much appreciated
- Sinking of Aleutian Isle continues to be of critical concern and MRC held a subcommittee meeting to discuss merits of a town forum.

- All summer projects are wrapping up and data currently being summarized for Q4 reporting

Skagit – Dianne Hennebert

- Fidalgo Bay Day was held Saturday, August 20th at the Fidalgo Bay Resort. Thanks to the 36 organizations and 155 volunteers who helped make this year's in-person event a huge success! An estimated 400 people attended. The opening ceremony was led by MRC member Jay Lind and Samish tribal member Rosie Cayou James. The event offered a wide variety of indoor and outdoor educational booths and activities including a beach seining demonstration, a touch tank, a whale skull, microscopes, games, kids' crafts, and face painting. 175 attendees participated in the Discovery Passport activity and 35 kids competed in the coloring contest to win a spot on the cover of next year's Discovery Passport. Food included popcorn, a chowder competition from 3 local restaurants, complimentary samples of grilled shellfish, and a no-host traditional Samish salmon BBQ lunch. There were two newspaper articles about the event.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- Snohomish County's derelict vessel contractor has removed all 4 of the derelict vessels that were contracted for removal in 2022. Snohomish County is processing the invoices and then will seek reimbursement from DNR. DNR's new legislation allows for 100% reimbursement, up from the 90% previously available.
- The Meadowdale BNSF railway bridges were installed earlier in September. Work on the estuary continues through October 15. Elisa is working with consultant ESA on the Meadowdale Monitoring webpage which will be hosted on the MRC webpage, and the creation of a story map.
- The MRC is hosting a beach cleanup at Picnic Point Park on September 24th in partnership with WSU Snohomish County Beach Watchers and Zero Waste Washington

Whatcom –

- The MRC has a vacancy for an Economic interest position interest position. This vacancy is advertised on the MRC homepage <https://www.whatcomcountymrc.org/>
- A solicitation for the 2022/2023 forage fish intern closed on September 9. 8 applications were received. Applications are currently under review and a candidate will be chosen by September 23.
- The MRC will vote on a new agenda item titled "Community Update" to replace the Public Comment Period in order to no longer be subject to the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA).

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:

- **Northwest Straits Initiative Reauthorization:** The Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization bill was introduced in the Senate ([S4903](#)) by Senator Murray. It was referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- **Monitoring Washington's marine wildlife by air, water, and land:** Scott Pearson from WA Department of Fish and Wildlife gave an overview of how they monitor seabirds and marine

mammals, in partnership with other agencies and entities. To explore data collected, go to <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/wp/MarineSeabird/index.html>

- **Green crab:** Commission staff shared a late season update on green crab trapping, noting a surge in the number of crabs caught.
- **Derelict vessels:** Lucas updated the Commission on planning efforts for the derelict vessel removal and the pilot derelict vessel turn in event. A workgroup will be formed in October made up of interested MRC and tribal representatives. The workgroup will guide prioritization of vessel removals in 2023.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

October 28, 2022 - Northwest Straits Commission meeting: 10am-12pm via Zoom. Find more information [on our website](#).