



Minutes

January 27, 2023- 10:00AM-12:00PM

Zoom – Virtual Meeting

Northwest Straits Commission meeting

Attendees:

Commission Members: Elsa Schwartz (Island-Chair), Tom Cowan (Vice Chair), Tim Ellis (Snohomish), Christina Koons (San Juan), Alan Clark (Clallam), Diane Hennebert (Skagit), Laura Blackmore (Puget Sound Partnership), Cecilia Gobin (NWIFC), Bob Cecile (Whatcom), Sarah Fiske (Jefferson-Alternate)

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

Others in Attendance: Brooke Friesen (NW Straits Foundation), Don Hunger (NW Straits Foundation), Monica Montgomery (Jefferson)

Absent: Julia Parrish, Nan McKay

Welcome and Introductions:

Chair Elsa Schwartz opened the meeting with introductions of attendees and the tribal acknowledgement. The Commission approved the minutes from the December 9 meeting as written by consensus.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Tom Cowan updated the Commission and attendees on the January 23 meeting. Tom Cowan reported that Nan McKay has been appointed to serve as chair of the External Relations Committee and will therefore now also be a member of the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee discussed the proposed budget and recommended the three-year budget proposal for approval. Lucas Hart shared the three-year budget plan with the Commission for review. The third year of the proposal is uncertain as that falls in the next state budget cycle. The Commission moved and approved by consensus the proposed three-year budget plan with the delegation of any final revisions to be approved by the Executive Committee. Tom added that at the retreat, there will be discussion of MRC and regional projects.

Science Advisory Committee: Dana Oster presented on behalf of Julia Parrish. Dana outlined that the Committee is finalizing their 2023 work plan and schedule, inclusive of updated articles of association and the shifted roles for the Committee. The Committee will be considering how to support projects put forward by MRCs, giving input on linkages to other projects across the Puget Sound, as well as discussing ways to expand and support MRC projects. The Committee is also working on how to integrate their Committee into MRC conference planning, and Committee member Tom Mumford will serve on the conference planning committee. The Committee is looking to gradually expand to 7-12 members and have nominations for Committee members they are working to appoint.



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External Relations Committee: Lucas Hart presented for the Committee on behalf of Nan McKay. The Committee met with Senator Patty Murray about Northwest Straits Initiative reauthorization bill, and the Committee will begin the process of outreach to the Washington state federal delegation about the bill. Lucas gave a brief update on the MRC state funding proviso, which made it into the Governor's proposed budget which has not been passed. The Commission is also a partner on a kelp funding proviso in the state budget for the Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan, which would provide funding for kelp work by the Commission as well as continuing to serve as a fiscal agent to direct funding to other partners for additional kelp work.

Puget Sound Partnership Update: Laura Blackmore presented her updates, sharing that last month, Congress passed the PUGET SOS Bill, which creates a Puget Sound recovery program office at the EPA, and puts Puget Sound on the same level as other nationally significant water bodies, such as Chesapeake Bay. The bill also codifies the Puget Sound Task Force, which is made up of 13 federal agencies operating under a MOU, working together on the Puget Sound Action Agenda. Laura stated that Senator Murray supporting increased funding for the [Puget Sound Geographic Fund](#). The Partnership is working on finalizing dates for the Puget Sound Day on the Hill, likely to be the week of May 8.

Business Items:

Staff provided updates on the following business items:

- Caitlyn Blair, new Program Coordinator at the Commission introduced herself.
- Lucas reported some legislative updates on bills that need to pass the House of Origin by February 17. Some bills include HB 1085, HB 1131, HB 1215 and SB 5266 Companion bills, SB 5104, HB 1170 and SB 5093 Companion bills, and HB 1145 and SB 5371 Companion bills.
- The May 26 in-person Commission meeting was changed to a virtual meeting, and the virtual June 23 Commission meeting was changed to in-person with the location in San Juan County upon consensus.
- Allie shared updates from the Annual Kelp Monitoring Data Review Workshop. The workshop had over 50 attendees, and some statistics that were shared from last season for kelp monitoring, were that 50 volunteers surveyed 22 different kelp beds and 311 acres of kelp.
- Leah shared about the MRC Forage Fish data meeting. Site leads shared sampling updates from their MRCs, attendees heard from WDFW about the results from their sampling efforts and heard from the NW Straits Foundation about forage fish sampling at nearshore restoration sites.
- Sasha reminded members about the November 3-4 in person conference in Port Townsend. All MRC members are encouraged to attend.

Partner Updates:



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Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission: Cecilia Gobin shared that they are keeping updated on the legislative season, reminding members that tribes made the request for standard riparian zone protection in 2019 at the Centennial Accord. Lucas, Dana, and Cecilia have been coordinating participation in derelict vessel removal with several tribes.

NW Straits Foundation Updates: Don Hunger shared staffing and board member updates, with Tom Mumford and Rachel Benbrook as new members of the Foundation Board. Don reported that the officer on the Board this year is Jerry Masters as the President, and Lee Whitford as the Vice President. Phil Salditt is the new Treasurer, and Nan McKay has been appointed to Secretary. Brooke Friesen updated members on the status of the Salish Sea Conservation Corps, they have ten members from Western Washington University and Bellingham Technical College. Their first community event is at the Fairhaven Library on February 8 from 4-5:30 PM.

MRC Updates:

Island County – Elsa Schwartz

- The MRC is continuing with forage fish monitoring and bull kelp surveys and invited 5th-8th graders to help with forage fish monitoring.
- Some Island County MRC members sat in on the Climate Action Panel and listened to high school students' ideas about climate change.
- Island County MRC has a few openings, and they are looking to target farming and Navy communities to represent on the MRC

Clallam – Alan Clark

- Clallam MRC was on the front page of the [Peninsula Daily News](#).
- Jefferson and Clallam County are partnering with Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe to restore oyster beds that were damaged during the heat dome this past summer.
- Forage fish sampling continues at Cline Spit as well as Ediz Hook.
- MRC members are planning a retreat at the Dungeness River Center in February.

Jefferson – Sarah Fiskén, MRC Alternate

- MRC voted to establish a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion subcommittee to better represent and engage the broader community in East Jefferson County.
- Storm surge monitoring continues, with recent surveys conducted on December 2 and 26, and a site assessment on January 23.
- Forage fish sampling and monitoring continues.



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Skagit – Diane Hennebert

- The MRC- Salish Sea School Intern and the Forage Fish STaRs student finished their research project in January. The Final Report is now available on the [Skagit MRC website](#) and the STaRS student presentations are available on [YouTube](#).
- The 2023 Salish Sea Stewards Training Program is now at full capacity (26), and we've started a waiting list. Classes start February 7 – April 25, 2023, Tuesdays from 1pm to 5pm at Padilla Bay NERR. The training schedule is available on the [Skagit MRC website](#).

San Juan County – Christina Koons

- A draft of the Marine Stewardship Area Plan is now complete. The MRC is now working on planning a Marine Managers Workshop in the spring to work on prioritizing actions in the MSA Plan.
- There are two open positions on the MRC, and four candidates have been interviewed. One candidate has a strong science background and is hoping they will be on the Science Advisory Committee.
- The MRC has decided to meet in person quarterly in the San Juan Islands.
- The Plastic Free Salish Sea Program is mentoring high school students to assist them in doing community projects.

Snohomish – Tim Ellis

- The Port Susan Subcommittee is reviewing the draft Communications Strategy. There was a subcommittee meeting on 29th with Island County and Snohomish County subcommittee members. Comments will be provided to ESA by early January, and a final Communications Strategy will be complete in late January.
- There are four openings on the MRC.
- 84 people showed up for the Edmonds starlight beach walk on January 18, which the MRC hosted in partnership with WSU Beach Watchers.
- The Marine Vegetation mapping project in partnership with WA Dept of Natural Resources (DNR) is complete. Snohomish County hired DNR to map the entire Snohomish County shoreline over the last 3 years. The report found that the shoreline of Snohomish County supports 912 hectares of eelgrass and 168 hectares of understory kelp. This was compared to an older dataset from 1999-2007 when there was approximately in Snohomish County. DNR will present their findings at the February 15 MRC Meeting.
- The Meadowdale beach restoration project is now complete and open to the public. The Snohomish MRC's Meadowdale webpage has been updated with the Story Map and information on Meadowdale: <https://www.snocomrc.org/projects/meadowdale-beach-and-estuary-restoration/>

Whatcom – Bob Cecile



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- The MRC Executive Committee wrote a recommendation to the County Executive for the appointments of Glen Alexander (Alex) to fulfill his second term in a Citizen-at-Large position, and Rick Beauregard to fill the Scientific Intern vacancy. Appointments are expected on January 24.
- A job announcement for an MRC extra staff person was posted on January 19. The announcement will close on February 12. For more information [CLICK HERE](#). This position is grant funded for an average of ~24hrs/week for the 2023 calendar year.
- The Committee discussed suggested amendments to their Policies and Procedures to address a clear protocol for MRC meetings now that most meetings are hosted virtually. Suggested amendments clarified the meaning of consensus when it comes to decision making, and protocols for voting and meeting summaries from a hybrid meeting.

Meeting Highlights and Action Items:

The Commission identified the following key highlights:

- The Commission has passed a budget plan for 2023-2025, which will include funding for MRCs in the next grant cycle in the amount of \$192,500 per MRC annually for the next two years if the proposed state budget passes.
- The Northwest Straits Commission conference will be held on November 3-4, 2023, at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend. The Commission is seeking members interested in participating in the Conference Planning Committee. Contact Sasha (horst@nwstraits.org) for more information about the committee or to join the group.
- The PUGET SOS bill was passed by Congress as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. The bill creates a Puget Sound recovery program office at the EPA and puts Puget Sound on the same level as other nationally significant water bodies, such as Chesapeake Bay. The bill also codifies the Puget Sound Task Force, which is made up of 13 federal agencies operating under a Memorandum of Understanding, working together on the Puget Sound Action Agenda.
- The Northwest Straits Initiative retreat is scheduled for March 30-31 at the La Conner Country Inn for members of the Commission and Foundation board.

Round Table

- Tom mentioned that several MRCs have openings, or have just filled openings, and wants to know if there are any county commissioners or council that do not rely on the MRC for recommendations for new members.
- If members have not responded to the February invitation to the in-person Commission meeting, please do so.



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*The next Commission meeting will be held in person on Friday, February 24 at the Stillaguamish Natural Resources Center.