

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Ann Prusha

August 4, 2020

WEBEX

PRESENT: Kelly Zupich, Chair, presiding, Barbara Bennett, Randy Berthold, Scott Chase, Ed Halloran, Gwendolyn Hannam, Andi Kopit, Kes Tautvydas, Matt Kukuk, Elsa Schwartz, Tim Lawrence, WSU Extension (non-voting), Anna Toledo, MRC Coordinator (staff), Ann Prusha (staff) **ABSENT:** Janet St. Clair (notified absence), Hannah Liss, Vice Chair (notified absence), Lori Clark (notified absence), Mike Bianchi (un-notified absence)

VISITORS: Dana Oster (NWSC), Dawn Spilsbury Pucci (Salmon Recovery)

CALL TO ORDER: Kelly called the meeting to order at 3:01pm. **INTRODUCTIONS:** Introductions were done. **QUORUM:** A quorum was declared. **AGENDA:** Elsa moved to approve the agenda. Kes seconded. The agenda was approved. **MINUTES:** Barbara moved to approve the July 7, 2020 minutes. Scott seconded. The minutes were approved. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

HISTORICAL KELP RESEARCH (Randy)

Randy presented about the early days of kelp research. People have been harvesting kelp since the 1700's. It's used widely in everyday products, and was grown and harvested in California. There was not a strong understanding of kelp ecology until the 1970's. Research was much different in the 1970's – there was less approval required, equipment was basic, and there was a lot of trial and error (like Randy learning how to arc weld under water!). A wide variety of skills was needed in a small group of people.

Randy tested early wetsuits, and acquired a diving reputation. He became a commercial lab diver. He joined a small team of biologists, botanists, and divers. They became the forefront of kelp research, and were based in California. The focus was on understanding the ecosystem, life cycle of beds, and impact of many factors (such as pollution, predation, temperature, etc.). Randy's job was to take scientists' ideas and make them practical in the field.

Early jobs were diverse and spontaneous. Randy's team was the go-to for many groups. Some of these jobs were:

- Surveying and measuring kelp beds all over the Southern California coast.
- Reestablishing a kelp bed, which involved removing an acre of sea urchins and snails by smashing them with hammers, locating adult kelp beds, and transplanting. One year later, there was an expanding, healthy kelp forest.
- Sending the Epcot Center a kelp plant that became the centerpiece of their marine exhibit.
- Experimenting with using different chemicals to encourage growth. This worked, but was impractical.

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- Sampling 1 liter water samples and other data points up the coast of California. This helped develop seasonal coastal profiles. The differences from year to year were amazing.
- Aerial photography.
- Making initial recommendations on projects. One of these became the first marine sanctuary.
- Supporting the process that helped create the Academy of Underwater Sciences.

The marine biomass program was developed to find a process to convert seaweed to methane in order to explore alternative energy options. Randy's team started building test farms using very large equipment. They initially had over 100 plants. It was a challenging worksite, and some innovations to fix this were not successful. The first farm was an expensive failure, but there were valuable lessons learned. The next farm was set up in a more controlled environment, in a remote calm cove. There were still challenges. The program got a lot of press and visitors, and not everyone understood the challenges involved. One pound of dry kelp will produce 6 square feet of methane. After 10 years, this project was not economically feasible. The report did not include the immense challenges. Today, the risks involved are bigger barriers, but there is improved technology.

Thank you, Randy!

KELP CONSERVATION AND RECOVERY PLAN (Dana Oster)

Dana presented a high level overview of the [Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan](#) published by Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) in early June. She spoke about what went into the plan, and overall goals and actions that came out of it. She asked the group to think about how the MRC's work can fit in with this.

The plan came out of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) rockfish report. Kelp is needed to support rockfish. This was started in late 2017 and the purpose was to determine if the Salish Sea is experiencing major bull kelp losses. A wide compilation of community members noted declines, especially in basins. Knowledge gaps and ways to address them were determined. They talked about policy with others in Olympia, and came up with a plan to address issues. This plan was made with as much stakeholder input as possible.

They determined that most stressors to kelp is from human activity, and created 6 overall goals:

1. Understand and reduce kelp stressors. This is lumped into reducing human impacts on water quality and kelp habitats, reducing impacts from biological stressors, and reducing impacts from climate change.
2. Deepen the understanding of the value of kelp to Puget Sound ecosystems and integrate into management. This quantifying service will help support management actions.
3. Describe kelp distribution and trends.
4. Designate kelp protected areas.
5. Restore kelp forests.
6. Promote awareness, engagement, and action from user groups, tribes, the public, and decision makers.

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This complements many other restoration initiatives. We need to keep these documents alive. Kelp monitoring and research is continuing, and kelp is part of a Vital Sign and an indicator of health. Island MRC had a part in developing this.

Dana asked that we put thought into our special niche. Island MRC already does a lot, and we don't want to spread ourselves too thin. We can help by thinking strategically, talking about the data we're observing, telling stories about the value of kelp, and making sure legislators know about it. Dana is planning to make a PowerPoint to tell the story to the community and legislators. Anna and Ann will ensure that it is available on our website and in the newsletter.

There was a question about sea stars causing kelp issues. If it is, it's localized to certain sites. They do help manage urchins.

There was a question about the relationship of kelp to pollinators. There has been some interest and research for kelp seed beds and spore distribution to populate other areas. There is research that looks at the difference in genetics of kelp to determine if and where there's mixing. There is also coordination with counterparts in British Columbia. There is a lot of collaboration in the research community and less in the management community.

Anna asked if Dana is aware of work Earth Economics is doing for ecosystem services valuation. They are conducting a basin-wide study for valuation of ecosystem services, and they want to conduct a case study on Island County (IC), with a specific focus on kelp. She was unaware, and they haven't reached out to her yet. NOAA has some formulas for valuation of ecosystem services.

OUTREACH NEEDS ASSESSMENT (Barbara)

Barbara led a discussion about the outreach needs assessment. She asked the group to think about this as we get ready for rollout in the fall. Island Local Integrating Organization (ILIO) is going to be doing their own survey, and she would like our questions to follow up on this. Interviews will take place September through October. Members who want to participate can conduct interviews, help come up with questions, or analyze results. She wants members to help with the tasks that appeal to them.

Barbara asked if members are comfortable in their understanding of this needs assessment. She went over the timeline, which was shared on the screen, and is attached to the minutes. There will be opportunities in November to talk to newly elected officials.

Barbara has a long list of potential ideas to find interviewees. Last time, we spoke with a County Commissioner, identified department heads in IC, informed decision makers within IC, and received feedback from individuals. This time, she is suggesting that we add more partnering organizations and members of our target audience. It could include Tribal affiliates and municipalities. It would also be interesting to interview each other. Once we develop an interview template there will be a training and outline. This is an opportunity to drill down into what the MRC does and ask if people know about our work. This will help us find ways to refine our outreach to get the results we are hoping for.

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Last time, we found many people who were interested and enjoyed the process. Some people did not have a lot of time to focus on it. Barbara used 30 minutes maximum for interviews. She suggests giving questions out ahead of time. The process of talking, rather than writing responses, opens up new topics such as emerging issues. Talking is valuable. It might make sense for some groups to have a virtual call.

Ed would like to participate in the early stages of question development. He's involved in politics, and has an idea about what others would like to know. Andi would like to help with interviews and analysis. We can strategize about batching target audiences, and Andi can help coordinate outreach to younger people. Kelly will help with question development and conduct interviews. Anna suggested adding ports, school groups, and teachers to the list of interviewees.

Barbara said that we can participate in the ILIO survey. This will be going out soon, to the general public. It will be a good addition to the more targeted work that we are doing.

COORDINATOR'S UPDATE (Anna)

We have an opportunity to collaborate on a *Whidbey Weekly* monthly column. The Whidbey Island Conservation District (WICD) has a column called "Make a Difference". Sound Water Stewards can do one month, then WICD, and then us. This gives us an opportunity to feature our work. They would have to be fully edited before they are submitted. The length is negotiable, but if it's shorter there can be more space for photos. Someone could write once a quarter. Members can take turns. Barbara is interested in participating. Andi would like to participate also – she could write from the perspective of a new volunteer and why citizen science is great. These articles could be shared elsewhere, including the *Crab Cracker*.

Commissioner St. Clair has been participating in the virtual Puget Sound Days on the Hill. There have been different Washington congressional members available to talk. She has been advocating for continued funding for citizen science monitoring.

There is potential for us to volunteer to monitor shellfish biotoxins. Ann is coordinating with the WA Department of Health and should have something to report next meeting. Kelly can potentially ask the Sound Water Stewards as well.

There is a study by Earth Economics occurring in IC. The goal is to assess the value of ecosystem services (loss or gains). Anna asked the group to let her know of any environmental data sets and contact information for groups who may have helpful data to contribute. This should help us tell the story about how landcover and zoning changes in IC have economic and social impact. She asked them if they can present at the September meeting. They are interested in local input. Anna will make sure that Commissioner St. Clair is aware of that meeting.

Barbara asked if there is potential for the Planning Department to present about the shoreline management modification regarding development within the Special Flood Hazard Area. Anna has reached out, but hasn't heard back yet (They are very busy right now).

Happy birthday, Dawn!

NWSC GRANT REPORTS

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Kelp Monitoring (Hannah/Randy)

From Linda Rhodes: Bull kelp teams have been active this season. Possession Point (R. Beier, lead) surveyed in June & July, Ebey's Landing (L. Rhodes, lead) surveyed in June & July, & Polnell Point (L. Rhodes, lead) surveyed only in July. Windy weather has caused some postponements of planned surveys. The beds look good, although not as large as this time last year. However, last year may have been an exceptionally good year for bull kelp.

We also conducted in-person training at the end of June for a team on Camano to survey Lowell Point. If that team becomes operational, it will represent a resumption of surveys at Lowell Point after a 2-year hiatus.

For the 1st time in 6 years, we were able to document Pacific sand lance feeding in one of the bull kelp beds. Here's a [short video of these important forage fish](#). Look for a couple of Pacific herring who decided to hang out with the sand lance school.

In case you are uncertain about what Pacific herring look like, [check out the video on the project webpage](#) or [this new video taken in the same bed with the sand lance](#). These videos definitely show that bull kelp beds are important for juvenile forage fish!

Update: None

Seining/Eelgrass (Kes)

The NWSC is putting together a grant application to fund establishment of more no-anchor zones in eelgrass beds. Gregg Ridder and Kes Tautvydas identified Cornet Bay as needing no-anchor zones.

Update: Seining is on hold until 2021. Dana commented that there are initiatives right now about increasing no anchor zones in the region.

OTHER REPORTS

Shoreline Restoration and Armor Removal (Anna)

The Shore Friendly mini-grant program will be ready to be launched in August. The NWSF (Northwest Straits Foundation) is developing a video series on Shore Friendly topics, such as beach processes, impacts of hard armor, drainage, and vegetation.

Update: Gwendolyn is presenting about Hoypus at the upcoming MRC symposium. It has been fully funded with Salmon Recovery money and has also been planned for in SRTCC's next cycle. Hoypus and Polnell will almost certainly be approved.

Sound Water Stewards (Scott)

Volunteer Education and Training, 2020

Due to COVID-19, spring 2020 SWS Volunteer Education and Training (VET) was cancelled, though the VET committee figured out a way to hold virtual training, while at the same time maintaining the high SWS standards. Training for the 30 members of the class of 2020 began in June. Here is what it looks like:

- Live presentations by experts including Q&A using Zoom meetings
- Small group prepared interactive exercises for sharing using Zoom Break Out Rooms

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- Curated reading materials, videos, and online resources, along with details for each presenter. These are also available to the public.
- Small group socially-distanced outdoor guided field trips to beaches, bluffs and forests
- Private “Slack channels” for sharing of photos, learnings, ideas, personal reflections, and topical interactions (Slack is a proprietary business communication platform that offers many features, including chat rooms organized by topic, private groups, and direct messaging).
- Handheld resources: Getting to the Water’s Edge book and laminated EZ ID Guides to intertidal invertebrates, seaweeds, and seagrasses.

Training participants have found the experience to be surprisingly engaging, educational and positive. One of the greatest benefits of virtual training is that trainees from both islands are able to interact and learn together. Class of 2020 members are eager to get involved whenever citizen science projects or stewardship projects are offered OR training is offered. Several have already gotten merged into existing programs.

The VET program is field testing this during our summer session along with beach tours focusing on intertidal species and geology on both islands. They have done at least nine on Whidbey and Dave Brubaker, Trent Lowe, and one of our class members have done a number on Camano. They are clearly one of the favorite parts of this year's VET curriculum. Some of these are also offered to volunteers who trained in past years, but each "field trip" is limited to a maximum of four people, plus the person leading the class. Masks and social distancing are required.

Kelly Zupich Hired As New SWS Executive Director

“Our own” Kelly Zupich has been promoted to Executive Director of Sound Water Stewards. Having taken Beach Watchers training in 2012, after which she was a very active volunteer. Kelly was the first SWS staff person hired in 2016, and helped chart the SWS future, both as a volunteer and as a staff member. Kelly started as a Staff Assistant, then as the first Whidbey Coordinator, and most recently as Administrative Coordinator. Through her roles, she has reached out into the community and is currently the Chair of the Marine Resources Committee for Island County. In her new SWS role, Kelly will help lead fundraising, strategic planning, maintaining partnerships, and providing oversight for all aspects of the organization, in collaboration with the Board, Committees, Volunteers and Staff.

Getting to the Water’s Edge, Third Edition is here

The book has been an immediate hit, with a large number sold in the first month, despite not having the advantage of being able to sell in-person at events such as Sound Waters University.

If you have not already picked up your copy, you can do so at:

- Ace Freeland Home Center, 1609 E Main Street, Freeland.
- Kingfisher Bookstore, 16 Front St NW, Coupeville
- Moonraker Bookstore, 209 1st St, Langley
- Wind & Tide Bookstore, 700 S. Pioneer Way, Oak Harbor
- Welcome Center at Cama Beach State Park, 1880 W. Camano Drive, Camano Island
- Camano Commons Marketplace, 848 Sunrise Blvd Camano Island
- Elger Bay Grocery & Gifts / Journey’s End Café, 1992 S. Elger Bay Rd, Camano Island

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- Kristoferson Farm Gift Shop & Canopy Tours NW, 332 NE Camano Dr, Camano Island
- J. Matheson Gifts, Kitchen & Gourmet, 2615 Colby Ave, Everett
- SeaPort Books, 106 1st St, Suite F, La Conner
- The Picnic Pantry, 8706 271st Street NW, Stanwood
- Village Books, 1200 11th St., Bellingham
- Or order online from Sound Water Stewards: www.soundwaterstewards.org

Update: Over 700 have been sold!

WSU Extension

Update at meeting.

Update: Despite the pandemic, there has been a very successful master gardener training, and the forestry program had a very strong showing by IC residents. More than half of those from IC had never attended before.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

Chair: None.

County Lead: None.

County Commissioners: None.

COMMUNITY COMMENT FORUM AND Q&A FROM THE PUBLIC:

Elsa commented that Restore America's Estuaries is having a summit September 29 – October 1. Registration costs \$275, and there will be access to an entire suite of on-demand and live presentations.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business and no further comments, the meeting adjourned at 4:57pm.

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MRC Outreach Needs Assessment Timeline

