

# ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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## Minutes

Prepared by Ann Prusha

# April 6, 2021

ZOOM

**PRESENT:** Kelly Zupich, Chair, presiding, Barbara Bennett, Randy Berthold, Scott Chase, Ken Collins, Ed Halloran, Gwendolyn Hannam, Andi Kopit, Jill Lipoti, Alexandra Plumb, Elsa Schwartz, Kes Tautvydas, Jerilyn Ritzman, WSU Extension (non-voting), Lori Clark, IC DNR Manager/Island LIO Coordinator (non-voting), Anna Toledo, MRC Coordinator (staff), Ann Prusha, IC DNR (staff) **ABSENT:** Hannah Liss, Vice Chair (notified absence), Janet St. Clair, Island County Commissioner (notified absence)

**VISITORS:** Nolan Simmons, IC EH, Allie Simpson, NWSC, Hiller West

**CALL TO ORDER:** Kelly called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. **INTRODUCTIONS:**

Introductions were made. **QUORUM:** A quorum was declared. **AGENDA:** Kes moved to approve the agenda. Ken seconded. The agenda was approved. **MINUTES:** Barbara moved to approve the March 2, 2021 minutes. Jill seconded. The minutes were approved.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** Anna presented a letter of support for Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) FY22 Community Project Funding Request titled “Voluntary No-Anchor Eelgrass Protection Zone Boater Engagement and Education” to Representative Larsen. The total request is for \$72,500. This project has been presented to us in the past, and includes engaging with local boating communities. They are looking to work with other organizations, including some in Canada, so that messaging is consistent throughout the region. In addition to paper materials, they will be using social media and other electronic communication, and potentially navigation apps for their messaging. There was a suggestion to include informational pamphlets with boating licenses.

**Jill moved to approve the letter of support for NWSC FY22 Community Project Funding Request titled “Voluntary No-Anchor Eelgrass Protection Zone Boater Engagement and Education” to Representative Larsen. Andi seconded. The letter of support was approved.**

### SEA STAR RESEARCH (Ken)

Island County has habitat for the critically endangered sunflower sea star, *Pycnopodia helianthoides*. They are one of the biggest and fastest sea stars in the world, are a keystone predator, and consume sea urchins. Sea star wasting disease killed most of the sea stars on the west coast of North America, including these sunflower sea stars.

Ken pulled up a *P. helianthoides* in a crab pot in Island County (IC), and decided to investigate further. His research has shown that Holmes Harbor and Saratoga Passage both have viable populations. He set up a permanent monitoring site where he uses a grid system to conduct long term monitoring, month by month. The young ones use eelgrass for foraging and shelter, and they leave the eelgrass and move onto sand as they grow.

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He has found that kelp fastens onto intertwined tube worm tubes. Most sunflower sea stars in Saratoga passage that Ken sees are associated with kelp; either on top or hiding in the sand underneath. Tube worms need clean sand, food, and good water quality. The kelp that fastens onto these tube worm tubes attracts and aggregates sunflower sea stars. Sunflower sea stars broadcast spawn, and the young ones settle out of the water column and then go to the eelgrass beds. They then go down to sandy slopes and eat clams. This has never been described, and Ken is working on a publication to tie all of this together.

We are at ground zero for a very healthy set of critically endangered sea stars. The amount of kelp growing on the sand in Saratoga Passage is substantial but has not been looked at.

## Questions/Comments:

- There was a suggestion to do outreach to crabbers. They could be asked to take photos or share anecdotes.
- There was a questionnaire sent out to property owners in IC (possibly in the 90's) to draw, photograph, etc. in order to describe kelp by their properties. It was mapped at the time. Anna located the report, and can share it if there is interest.
- Do we know if crabs feed on tubeworms?
  - No, but they are not thought to because they're small and tough to access.
- Are *P. helianthoides* found in eelgrass just in Holmes Harbor and Saratoga Passage, or are they all over IC?
  - They are in every eelgrass bed that Ken has looked in, but he has not looked everywhere. Distribution is episodic. There are a lot of them, especially in Holmes Harbor.
- Besides wasting disease, what causes problems for them?
  - Seagulls and other sea stars prey on them. Habitat is incredibly important and is likely a key driver.
- There was a comment that sunflower sea stars were seen often at water monitoring sites, and now they are seen maybe once a year after the wasting disease. They were decimated.
- Ken provided more information about the wasting disease. The current thinking is that warm water was a mechanism for distribution of the disease, but the virus has been around for decades. The large outbreak was linked to the 2013 blob. Now, it is occurring every fall.
- Is ocean acidification a factor for the outbreak of wasting disease?
  - Ken does not think so.
- Kelly shared this article: <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2021/01/organic-matter-bacteria-doom-sea-stars-oxygen-depletion>

Thank you for this interesting presentation and all of your work, Ken!

## POTENTIAL MICROPLASTICS MONITORING PARTNERSHIP (Ken, Anna)

We have an opportunity to partner with the Seattle Aquarium on microplastic research. This could tie into the Forage Fish Monitoring Program because volunteers are already gathering sediment, and they could gather some extra to be analyzed for microplastics. The program is a simple sample collection process; volunteers go out and collect samples in jars at the beach, and

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those samples go to the Seattle Aquarium. Logistics would need to be organized for transporting them to Seattle, but the samples would be able to have a long shelf life.

The Seattle Aquarium does an analysis to see what kind of plastic is in sediment, its size, and color. They send some samples to Oregon State University (OSU) and University of Washington (UW) for in-depth polymer analysis. The Seattle Aquarium is interested in expanding sample sites throughout Puget Sound (PS). At the moment, we would not need to contribute funds to participate, but there might be a need to purchase supplies in the future. If that were to happen, there would need to be a larger discussion about project planning and budgeting. Seattle Aquarium is responsible for analysis and data management, and would share their data with us.

The goal of this would be to understand baseline measurements of microplastics in beach sediment, and to collaborate on a larger, regional project. We could potentially see if there is a correlation with the forage fish results we are getting, and we could look into correlation with restoration sites. We could help assemble a Salish Sea profile as part of outreach and messaging. Anna spoke with Dana Oster from NWSC to see if there is interest at the regional level. For any potential new project, she encouraged us to consider why we would participate; what do we want to know in order to assist with marine protection and management? We might find neat data about restoration, but the main purpose would be to help collaborate to build a big picture about microplastics in the Salish Sea. We would be unsure about what we would find, but it is an opportunity to participate in something important while allocating minimal resources and time.

There was then discussion about our interest in microplastics and the potential benefits and drawbacks of participating in this program. It uses few resources, but does not answer a specific question that we are asking. We need to find a balance between gathering data for very specific purposes and participating in data gathering opportunities as they come up. If we dive further into this, we need to have a clear timeline.

There was a comment about connecting this to the COASST Program's litter collection sampling. There was discussion about involving children with litter sampling projects (such as creating a bar graph of the types of litter they removed from the beach).

Anna will see if a representative from Seattle Aquarium can come and share more information with us about the program.

Jill has experience with this topic. There is a lot of research going on with microplastics. This is interesting because it is looking for microplastics in the sediment rather than the water column. Jill volunteered to take the lead on this, and will begin researching literature. We will see if we can assemble materials so that we can have good questions for a presenter from the Seattle Aquarium. We could potentially form a subcommittee.

Jerilyn wrote a newsletter article about microfiber pollution:

[https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2065/2020/05/Shore-Stewards\\_Spring-2020-Newsletter.pdf](https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2065/2020/05/Shore-Stewards_Spring-2020-Newsletter.pdf)

## EELGRASS STORYMAP (Ann)

Ann showed the group the final draft of the Eelgrass Storymap. This Storymap covers what eelgrass is and its role in our ecosystem, the research conducted by the Aerial and Underwater

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Videography Assessments of Eelgrass in Island County project community science team, the MRC, and ways to help protect eelgrass. It features local photographers in an immersive platform. She also covered the basics of using the Storymap platform. It will be published soon.

There was a suggestion to add navigation buttons to the top of the Storymap so that readers can go to the topics that they are most interested in.

## COORDINATOR'S UPDATE (Anna)

### NWSC Grant

The NWSC has issued their annual request for proposals. Proposal are due June 8, and Anna will share a draft of the proposal at the May meeting. The grant period runs for two years, though for now we are focusing on Year 1 (Oct 2021 – Sep 2022). We will have the opportunity to define our Year 2 projects about this time next year. The primary projects we have discussed included in this proposal are: forage fish monitoring, kelp monitoring, seining, the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) report card update, and some funds for general outreach (this could include support for crabber outreach, continued promotion of the MyCoast app, partnership with Shore Friendly, opportunistic outreach). This does not preclude us from doing additional projects, but these are the ones that will have specific budgets and deliverables associated with them.

### Whidbey Weekly Column

We have been partnering with WICD and SWS on providing articles to the *Whidbey Weekly* under the monthly column "Make a Difference." We have been on a rotating schedule to provide an article quarterly. Barbara recently wrote the March article. Andi will be writing the June article. In the past, WICD has led this effort, though there is the opportunity for one of the other partners to take the lead.

### Forage fish

- SWS presentation and project needs – Ann and Anna will be giving a presentation to the new SWS class on May 13, 12-1:30pm. Anyone can help present if they are interested.
- Project needs
  - We are looking for a few more volunteers at Hidden Beach and Seahorse Siesta. If you are interested or know someone, they can contact Ann. Andi expressed interest in sites near Langley if there are any weekend sampling dates.
  - Please let Ann or Anna know if you are interested in being the MRC lead for this program.

### Community outreach on SLR

We may have the opportunity to support the Planning Department in outreach around sea level rise adaptation this fall. The Planning Department is considering ways to help communities plan for sea level rise, and the MRC could be a great group to help provide some facilitation. The MRC agreed to continue pursuing this opportunity.

### Volunteer opportunities

- Tire/debris removal at Seahorse Siesta will take place Saturday, April 17 around 3pm, and maybe April 18 as well. If you are interested, please let Anna know and she will send you more information. If you have gloves, shovels, and/or small sledgehammers/mallets to beat the sand loose, bring those. Volunteers will be asked to be masked and stay socially distant.
- Pacific Mammal Research has been studying harbor porpoises to understand their behaviors and feeding and movement patterns. They are looking to expand research around northern Whidbey and Skagit County. It involves going to a specific lookout location (this could be done from your shoreline or a public shoreline), observing the

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water for 2 hours at a time, taking photos, and making notes of specific sightings. You would go out regularly (once a week to once a month). Any interested volunteers can contact Cindy Elliser at Pacific Mammal Research: <https://pacmam.org/wp/volunteering/>.

## Upcoming events

- Ian Miller presentation on sea level rise (SLR) at Sound Water Stewards (SWS) meeting: Monday, April 12, 10:30-11:30am
- DNR Symposium: Thursday, April 15, 11:00am-12:30pm
- Northwest Straits 101: Thursday, April 15, 12:00-1:00pm. Zoom information is on the NWSC website
- Kelp kickoff meeting: Thursday, May 6, 1-4pm
- Virtual MRC conference: Friday, October 29

## NWSC GRANT REPORTS

### Outreach

Needs assessment: The Needs Assessment Team will complete interviews in early April and is compiling results from interviews done. The team will present an initial report on themes that are emerging at the April 6 meeting and a final report at the May 4 MRC meeting.

- MRC member interviewers: 6 (Kelly, Andi, Ed, Randy, Scott and Barbara)
- Interviews to date: 25
  - Island County Government: 10 + 6 pending (delayed due to COVID responsibilities)
  - State Government: 5
  - Conservation Partners: 4
  - Other: 6

Update: For public access at Robinson Beach, this could be a policy tool to remind the community of the things that are behind the decision to have a public access point.

Port Susan MSA Update: The Port Susan MSA update subcommittee met to discuss roles of each MRC for the 2021-2022 NWSC grant round. Island County MRC will focus on researching and gathering new science, and will aim to work with a group of graduate students through the UW Evans School of Public Policy. The Snohomish MRC will hire a consultant to help update the status of the action items within the seven strategies of the plan. Members from each MRC will contribute to all aspects of the project.

Island County Natural Resources Symposium: Island County staff are hosting a virtual symposium to share about the range of services and programs offered through the county. Topics will include: shellfish harvesting, Shore Friendly, MRC, noxious weeds, water quality monitoring, and the on-site septic program. It will be held Thursday, April 15, 11:00am-12:30pm.

### Hoypus Point

Blue Coast Engineering continues to work on the design documents for this restoration site. The 90% design is expected towards the end of April. Lisa Kaufman is coordinating with the Multi-Agency Review Team (MART) to pilot this project through a streamlined permitting process for nearshore restoration work.

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## **Cornet Bay Stewardship**

Ann has confirmed the ability to use a County truck and water tank to assist with watering the native vegetation at Cornet Bay this summer. State Parks has granted access to fill the water tank at Deception Pass SP.

Update: Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and Northwest Straits will be installing plants this month. They may be able to use a few volunteers.

## **OTHER REPORTS**

### **Shore Friendly**

We partnered with the Northwest Straits Foundation on a Shore Friendly workshop geared towards Island County shoreline homeowners. The workshop drew 95 participants. Staff from Blue Coast Engineering presented on coastal processes, shoreline habitats, impacts of hard armoring, alternatives to hard armoring, and the Shore Friendly program. The workshop also featured breakout rooms divided by bank type (low/no bank, medium bank, or high bluff) to allow for more focused discussion.

### **Sound Water Stewards**

1. The Sound Water Stewards 2021 class is full with classes starting April 8. Training classes are once a week, beginning 4/8 -5/20, then resuming in fall 9/9 – 10/21. Staff is contributing significant amounts of time supporting the training, especially with the current virtual format and associated “breakout rooms.”
2. The Stewardship Committee has started offering beach cleanups on both islands. A training was held for leads on March 4th. Those interested in volunteering can find out more by contacting committee leads Kelly Webb at [kellybwebb@gmail.com](mailto:kellybwebb@gmail.com), or Scott Chase at [kschase80@hotmail.com](mailto:kschase80@hotmail.com).  
One unexpected challenge was the burning of a large sailboat that had washed up on the beach at Barnum Point County Park a long while back. Washington Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR) has arranged for a contractor to remove the bulk of the remaining structure and debris, and volunteers will pick up what’s left of the debris. Scheduled cleanup date is April 1st.
3. Sales of *Getting to the Water’s Edge* are going well with about 3,500 books sold of the 6,000 printed. Additional marketing will be undertaken shortly to take advantage of the upcoming summer months and increased interest to explore our beaches! An ad hoc team has been formed to explore options and costs of reprinting additional books, pursuing an electronic version of *GTWE*, development of a 4th edition, and possible development of an online app.

### **Island Local Integrating Organization (ILIO)**

Update at meeting.

Update: On Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup> the ILIO Technical Committee will be hosting a conversation about forestry practices in Island County.

## **LEADERSHIP REPORTS**

**Chair:** No updates.

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**County Lead:** The County is hiring for a couple of positions.

**County Commissioners:** No updates.

## COMMUNITY COMMENT FORUM AND Q&A FROM THE PUBLIC:

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business and no further comments, the meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.