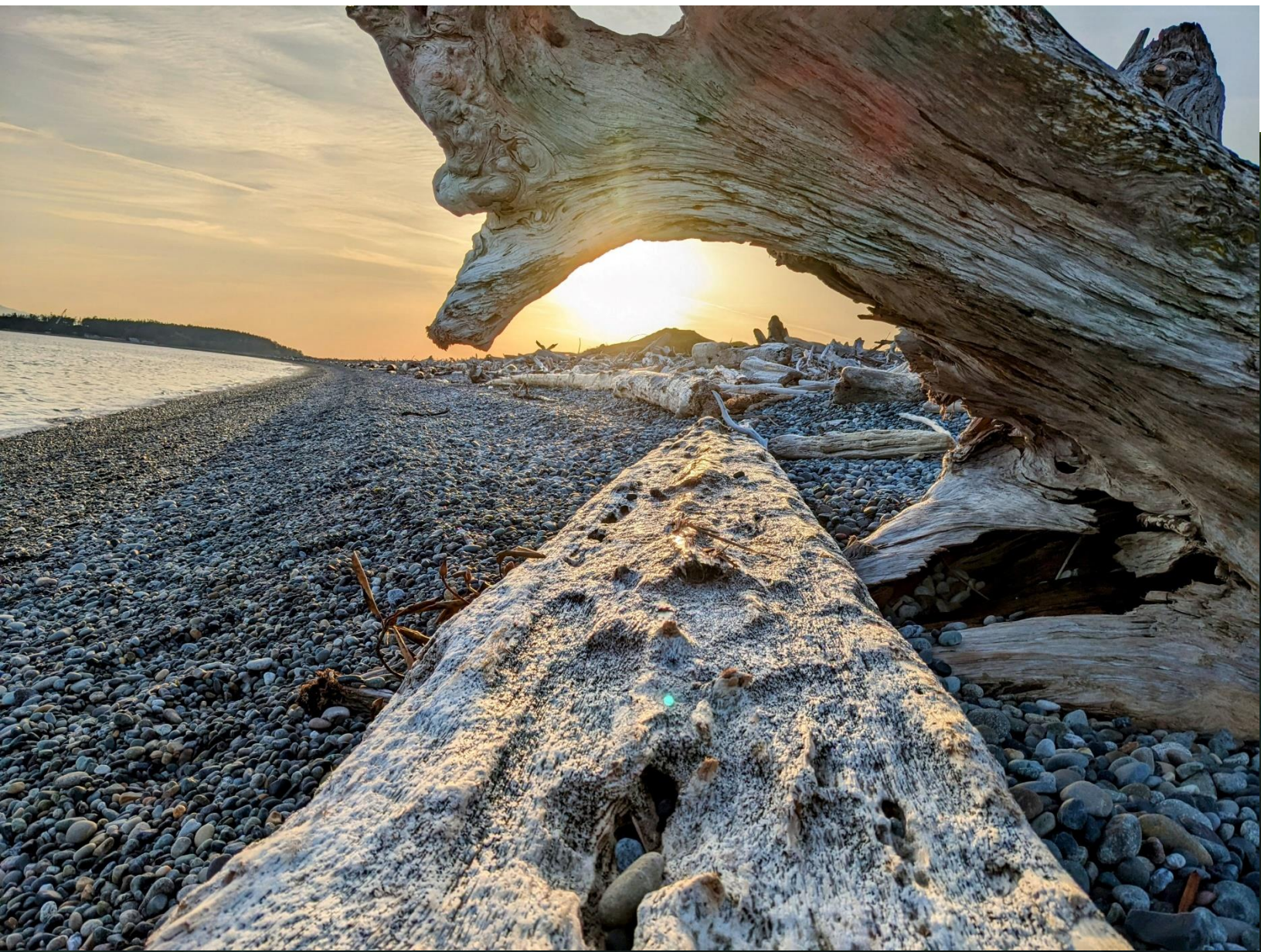


ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

2023 Annual Report



About the MRC

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), established in 1999, is an advisory body of volunteers appointed by Island County Commissioners. The members are from the local community, and represent a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and expertise, with the unified goal of protecting and restoring the local marine environment.

The MRC's purpose is to investigate, research, and identify local marine resources, and marine resource and habitat issues; recommend remedial actions to Island County agencies and authorities; carry out such recommendations where so approved; and build local awareness of the issues and broad-based community support for the remedies. The MRC conducts monitoring, restoration, and outreach projects, in addition to its advisory role to the County Commissioners.

The Island County MRC is one of seven Marine Resources Committees supported by the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (NWSI), with the goal to restore and protect our marine waters. In addition to collaborating with the Northwest Straits Commission, Foundation, and other MRCs, Island County MRC also works with many local and regional partners, including: Sound Water Stewards, Whidbey Island Conservation District, Snohomish Conservation District, Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Washington State University Extension – Island County, Washington State Parks, Swinomish Tribe, and others. These partnerships are key to the collaborative effort of protecting and restoring the marine species and habitats that surround our island home.



This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency under Assistance Agreement [CE-01J65401]. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

Membership

The MRC is comprised of up to thirteen voting members, appointed by the Board of Island County Commissioners, as well as non-voting ex-officio members and technical advisors. The MRC relies on the hard work and dedication of its members and other volunteers to conduct monitoring, restoration, and outreach. In the 2022-2023 year, the MRC recorded 1,240 volunteer hours! Thank you to our members and volunteers for your dedication to protecting and restoring the marine resources of Island County!



Member	MRC Projects, Sub-Committees, and Group Representation
Current Members: September 2023	
Barbara Bennett - Chair	Executive committee, Outreach, Bull kelp, Island Local Integrating Organization (ILIO)
Jill Lipoti - Vice-Chair	Executive committee, DEI Committee, Stewardship, Outreach
Scott Chase	Executive committee, Sound Water Stewards, Outreach, Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA)
Ken Collins	Executive committee, Bull kelp, Forage fish, Water quality
Kelly Webb	Derelict vessels
Andi Kopit	Outreach
Kirk Larsen	Forage fish, Water quality
PaulBen McElwain	Sound Water Stewards
Patrick Havel	Outreach
Greg Easton	Port of South Whidbey
Elsa Schwartz	Northwest Straits Commission Representative
Kestutis Tautvydas	Sound Water Stewards
Ex-Officio Members (non-voting)	
Jennifer Schmitz	Island County Department of Natural Resources
Sarah Bergquist	WSU Extension – Island County
Melanie Bacon	Board of Island County Commissioners
Technical Advisors (non-voting)	
Florian Graner	Outreach
Linda Rhodes	Science, Bull kelp, Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve
Todd Zackey	Tribal: Tulalip Tribes

Operations

In 2023, our MRC decided to begin hosting hybrid meetings part way through the year to help with member engagement.

The MRC meets on the first Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public, and often feature an educational speaker as well as discussion on business topics and project updates.

MRC Member, Ed Halloran, passed away late last year. The MRC will be forever grateful for the eight years Ed dedicated to this work. He will be missed.

With one fulltime staff member, staff support to the MRC is equivalent to approximately 1 FTE.

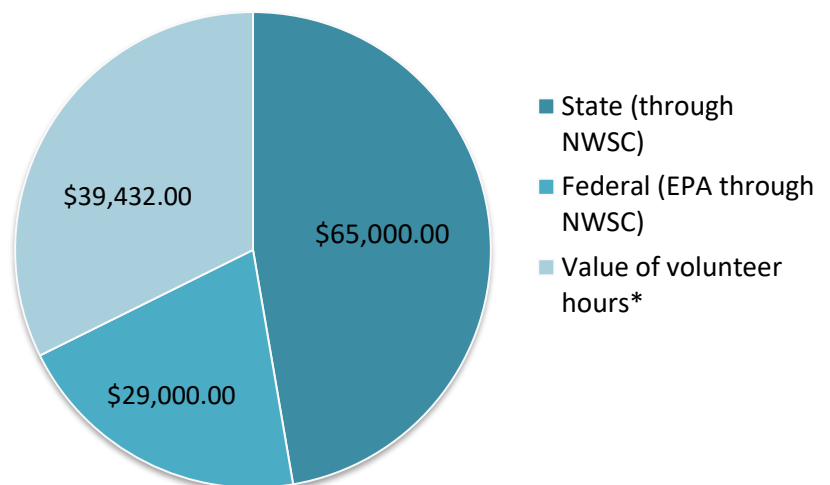
The MRC brings important environmental and economic value to Island County, and engages the local community to preserve and protect our beautiful Island home.

Through grants and volunteer hours, the MRC has brought a total value of **\$133,432.00** to Island County in 2022-2023.

Accomplishments

- Scheduled, organized, and held 11 MRC meetings.
- Finalized our 3-year Strategic Plan.
- Attended monthly Northwest Straits Commission meetings and seasonal MRC staff meetings.
- Participated in Island Local Integrating Organization Technical Committee meetings and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee meetings.
- Regularly updated the website with meeting agendas and minutes, project updates, and announcements.
- Authored a white paper on Climate Resiliency.

Funding Sources



**The value of volunteer hours is calculated using the most current [Value of Volunteer Time](#) from the Independent Sector.*

Advisory

The MRC is uniquely positioned as an advisory body to the Island County Commissioners, comprised of members of the community who understand and represent local issues and perspectives. The MRC also connects with marine issues of regional importance through representation on the Northwest Straits Commission, Island Local Integrating Organization, and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee.

This year, we met with each of our county commissioners to learn more about what their concerns were regarding the marine environment and how the MRC could be of assistance. The area that came up as an area of need was around Climate resiliency. Shortly after we were requested to provide a document covering the issues we are and will be seeing related to Climate change and some general recommendations for how to begin working on those issues. This paper has been a collaborative process with internal Island County departments along with external scientists and a lot of hard work from our volunteers. We look forward to presenting this paper in December. Additionally, we have been invited to participate in the Island County Comprehensive Plan update. We will be convening a subcommittee in 2024 that will be dedicated to this work.

Accomplishments

- Authored a white paper on Climate resilience.
- Began work on developing interdepartmental relationships with Island County departments doing climate work.
- Started working with the Planning Department on the Island County Comprehensive Plan Update.
- Held one-on-one meetings with each of the County Commissioners this year.



2022 MRC Strategic Planning Retreat. Photos by Kelly Zupich

Monitoring: Forage Fish

Forage fish are small schooling fish that are a key component in the marine food web, as a vital food source for salmon, seabirds, and marine mammals. Surf smelt and Pacific sand lance, two species of forage fish, lay their eggs on sandy-gravelly beaches around Puget Sound.

The MRC conducts forage fish spawn surveys at selected beaches in conjunction with completed, planned, and proposed shoreline restoration work. The MRC also partners with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to assist in conducting surveys at index sites – locations with public access and a known history of spawning presence. Volunteers collect and condense beach sediment samples, which are then transported to WDFW for analysis.

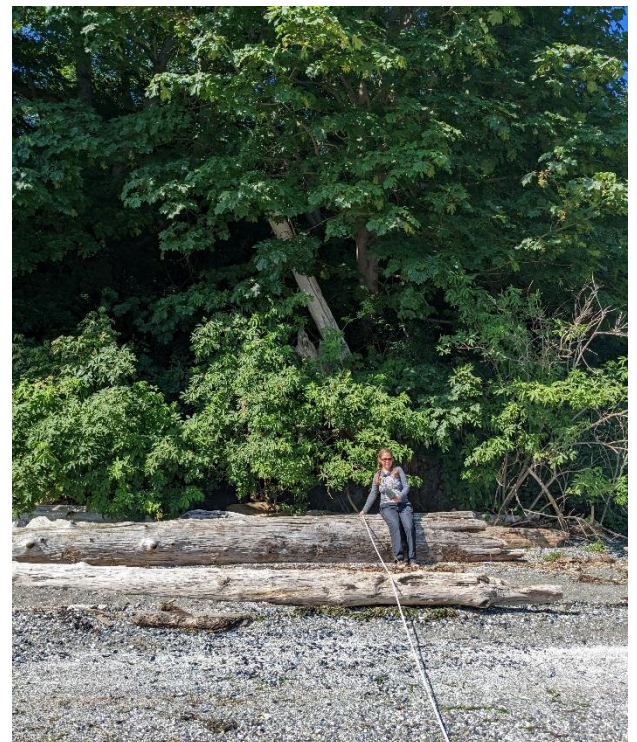
In August of 2023, the WDFW hosted Forage Fish Survey training sessions. We had three volunteers who attended for their first time.



Forage fish team collecting data. Photos by Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- Conducted surveys at five restoration sites: Hoypus Point (post-restoration), Cornet Bay (post-restoration), Hidden Beach (pre-restoration), Seahorse Siesta (post-restoration), and Sunlight Shores (post-restoration).
- Conducted surveys at two index sites: Glendale and Maple Grove.
- Trained 3 new volunteers.
- Volunteers reported 276 hours of service.



Monitoring: Bull Kelp

Bull kelp forests serve as an important habitat and feeding source to a wide variety of species in the marine environment, providing critical support throughout the marine food web.

Prompted by documented declines of bull kelp in South Puget Sound, the MRC initiated boat-based bull kelp surveys in 2015 in coordination with the Northwest Straits Initiative and other MRCs. Volunteers monitor the size of bull kelp beds using GPS units while paddling a kayak around the perimeter of the bed.

Kelp bed perimeters were tracked during the summer months at five sites around Island County: Hoypus Point, Polnell Point, Ebey's Landing, Possession Point, and Lowell Point.

Volunteers also collected temperature data using temperature loggers at varying depths and collected images of plants and animals observed in the kelp beds.



Bull kelp at Lowell Point. Photo by Linda Rhodes



*Volunteer conducting bull kelp survey at Possession Point.
Photo by Ron Beier*

Accomplishments

- Conducted kayak surveys at five key beds around Island County during the summer growing season.
- 21 volunteers reported approximately 287 hours for this project.
- Deployed temperature loggers to measure temperatures across multiple depths.
- Collected images of plants and animals within kelp beds.

Restoration: Hoypus Point

The MRC has continued its partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) and Washington State Parks (WSP) to conduct a restoration project at Hoypus Point in Deception Pass State Park.

This site contains remnants of an obsolete ferry terminal that served the location in the early 1900s. It is approximately one mile from the Cornet Bay restoration site where the MRC has been involved in restoration and monitoring efforts.

A feasibility study and conceptual design completed in 2020 recommended the removal of approximately 350 feet of shoreline armor, including large rock and concrete debris. The design also included removal of fill, regrading the shoreline to a natural slope, placement of appropriate beach substrate, and installation of native vegetation.

The project restored a bluff-backed beach and the marine riparian connection. Restoring these ecosystem elements and nearshore processes is expected to improve habitat for salmon as well as spawning habitat for forage fish.

The MRC has worked with the NWSF (project sponsor) and WA State Parks to care for the restoration plantings. The site has fared well over the summer months with help from volunteers and staff to weed and water as needed during the summer season.



Before at Hoypus Point. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- Restoration was completed in 2022.
- Most of the plantings survived the dry summer months.
- Watering took place every week July-September.
- 3 stewardship events took place over the summer.



After at Hoypus Point. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Restoration: Cornet Bay Stewardship

The MRC has been partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation, Washington State Parks, and other partners to restore shoreline habitat at Cornet Bay in Deception Pass State Park.

The first phase of restoration occurred in October 2012, and included removing a creosote-treated bulkhead, re-grading the beach to a natural slope, and planting native vegetation.

The next phase of restoration occurred in November 2015 and included removing fill along the shoreline, re-grading the slope, expanding the salt marsh area, and planting native vegetation.

The native vegetation has been maintained through regular weeding and watering. Additionally, staff carefully spot sprayed the Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) with herbicide to try and keep the thistle from continuing to spread. More native plants will be planted in the fall to help prevent further weed infestations.

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, this site continues to become more established and provides much-needed habitat for nearshore life.



Weeding on the beach. Photo Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- MRC staff and volunteers watered and weeded as needed throughout the summer months of 2023 in the newest phase of restoration.
- Volunteers kept the Canada Thistle flowers clipped to keep them from going to seed.
- Plants and trees survived the dry summer months.



Ocean Spray (*Holodiscus discolor*). Photo by Kelly

Education and Outreach: Meetings, Events, and Presentations

The MRC engaged in several outreach efforts throughout the year. Outreach is an integral part of each MRC project. By helping the community understand what the MRC does and why, the MRC strives to increase public interest in learning about and caring for the local marine environment.



Forage fish survey with students Photo by Kelly Zupich



Camano 101 with Commissioner St. Clair. Photo by Bonnie E.

Accomplishments

- Along with partners, honored volunteer John Lovie as the 2022 Jan Holmes Island County Coastal Volunteer of the Year.
- Made presentations to a retired Navy group, the NWSC, and the South Whidbey School District.
- Distributed crab gauges, rot cord, and educational handouts to recreational crabbers and to local businesses.
- Our MRC was featured on the American Shorelines Podcast.
- Participated in Orca Recovery Day and Sound Waters University.
- Contributed to Whidbey Weekly's "Make a Difference" column by submitting two different articles.
- Shared the "Discover our Island Shores" video and curriculum with local schools.
- Hosted a table at the Penn Cove Water Festival, Whidbey Island Fair, and Camano 101.
- Developed an educational brochure for the Port Susan MSA.
- Designed a new MRC booth display.

Education: Port Susan MSA

Between 2009 and 2012, the first iteration of the Port Susan Conservation Action Plan (CAP) was developed. A plethora of federal, state, local, tribal, and non-profits groups took part in this work. Since then, work has continued to protect and restore Port Susan. With the passing of ten years Island and Snohomish Marine Resource Committee's (MRC) wanted to review the plan, further develop a progress tracker, and educate the Port Susan community about the work completed, and actions they can take to help improve this important marine resource.

For this year, Island MRC was focused on supporting Snohomish MRC by attending planning meetings with the goal of developing a communication plan, progress tracker, and StoryMap. Island MRC's portion of the project focused on designing a brochure and webpage that would feature the work on the plan, action items for community members, indigenous connections, a progress tracker, and the ArcGIS StoryMap.

We contracted with Environmental Science Associates to create the design and content of the brochure. Our MRC is very happy with the product, and we look forward to getting it out to the Port Susan Community in the coming year.

Accomplishments

- Island MRC attended the Snohomish planning meetings for the StoryMap, Communications Plan, and Website update.
- Island MRC updated the Port Susan Webpage.
- Designed a new brochure featuring the Port Susan MSA project.

Protecting Port Susan's Diverse Resources

Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area

Habitat in Port Susan

Since Time Immemorial, these lands and waters are and have been the ancestral homelands of the Tulalip Tribes and Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians. As such, these lands and waters remain a center of cultural knowledge, traditions, and history. Maintaining access to traditional fish foods like salmon and clam are essential to tribal sovereignty. Treaty rights reserved through the 1855 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Affirmation through numerous court decisions secured Tribal nations' rights to take fish and shellfish from waters and tidelands in all usual and accustomed places.

Port Susan MSA Brochure pg.1

A Shared Vision

The Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) was established in 2014 through a partnership among the Snohomish and Island County Marine Resource Committees (MRCs), Tulalip Tribes, the Stillaguamish Tribe, The Nature Conservancy, Washington State University Extension of Snohomish and Island Counties, and Washington Sea Grant.

Goals and Progress

Conservation Action Planning

In 2012, Snohomish and Island County Marine Resource Committees established a collaborative planning process for the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area Conservation Action Plan. This plan serves as a key planning tool to address conservation, protection, and stewardship of the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area. The plan is a living document that will be updated as needed to reflect the latest information and science available.

River Delta Restoration

523 ACRES RESTORED

Stream Restoration

THREE CHANNELS RESTORED

Public Outreach

500 PARTICIPANTS

Landowner Outreach

100 SITE VISITS

Dungeness Crab

100+ DRENCH CRAB TRAPS REMOVED

What You Can Do to Protect Port Susan

• Please report any illegal activity to the appropriate agency.

• Turn up and throw away your trash.

• Plant or maintain trees for shade and habitat.

• Get involved - help out local projects and reach out to your local Marine Resources Committee.

For more information, please visit our website at www.portsusanmarinestewardship.com

Port Susan MSA Brochure pg.2



Gumweed (Grindelia) at Cornet Bay restoration site. Photo by Kelly Zupich

www.islandcountymrc.org