

ISLAND COUNTY
MARINE RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

2024 Annual Report



About the MRC

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), established in 1999, is a volunteer advisory group appointed by the Island County Commissioners. Its members come from diverse backgrounds within the local community, sharing a common goal: to protect and restore the local marine environment.

The MRC's mission is to study, research, and identify local marine resources and habitat issues, recommend solutions to Island County agencies, and implement approved actions. Additionally, the MRC works to raise awareness and build community support for addressing marine challenges. In its role, the MRC conducts monitoring, restoration, and outreach projects while serving as an advisor to the County Commissioners.

Island County's MRC is one of seven Marine Resources Committees supported by the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (NWSI), which aims to protect and restore marine waters. The MRC collaborates with the Northwest Straits Commission, Foundation, and other MRCs, as well as numerous 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, the Swinomish Tribe, and more. These partnerships play a crucial role in the collective effort to protect and restore the marine species and habitats surrounding Island County.



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Membership

The MRC consists of up to thirteen voting members, appointed by the Island County Board of Commissioners, along with non-voting ex-officio members and technical advisors. The committee relies on the dedication and hard work of its members and volunteers to carry out monitoring, restoration, and outreach efforts. In the 2023-2024 year, the MRC recorded an impressive 1,363.75 volunteer hours! A heartfelt thank you to all our members and volunteers for your commitment to protecting and restoring the marine resources of Island County!



Member	MRC Projects, Sub-Committees, and Group Representation
Current Members: September 2024	
Jill Lipoti - Chair	Executive committee, Water quality, Outreach, Comprehensive plan
Kelly Webb – Vice Chair	Executive committee, Derelict vessels
Scott Chase	Sound Water Stewards, Outreach, DEI
Ken Collins	Executive committee, Bull kelp, Water quality, Northwest Straits Commission Rep.
Kestutis Tautvydas	Sound Water Stewards
Andi Kopit	Outreach, DEI, Shoreline workshops
Kirk Larsen	Forage fish, Water quality
PaulBen McElwain	Sound Water Stewards, Comprehensive plan
Patrick Havel	Outreach
Greg Easton	Port of South Whidbey, Comprehensive plan
Barbara Bennett	Executive committee, Comprehensive plan, Outreach, Island Local Integrating Org.
Jeff Wheeler	New member
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

Operations

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.

To be more inclusive we pushed our meeting time to 4:00pm - 6:00pm. The main observation about switching our meeting time is we have less Island County workers attending meetings because the county workday ends at 4:30pm.

The MRC has one fulltime staff member; staff support to the MRC is equivalent to approximately 1 FTE.

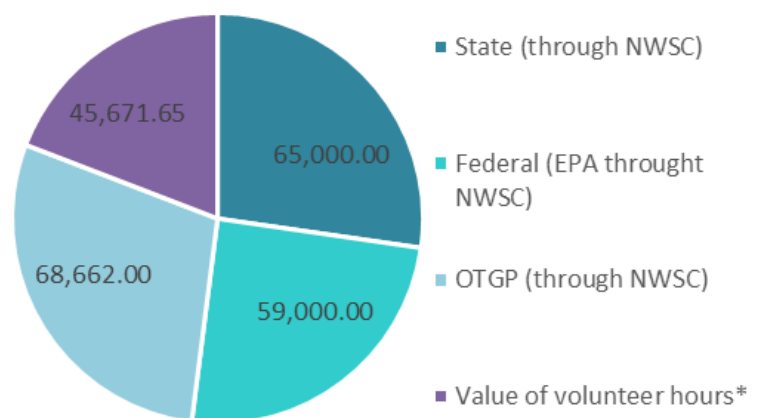
The MRC brings important environmental and economic value to Island County, and engages the local community to preserve and protect our beautiful Island home.

Through grants and volunteer hours, the MRC has brought a total value of \$238,333.65 to Island County in 2023-2024.

Accomplishments

- Scheduled, organized, and held 12 MRC meetings.
- 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.
- Submitted comments on all the Island County Comprehensive Plan elements.
- Held an MRC Retreat in the spring.

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, made up of community members who understand and represent local issues and perspectives. Additionally, the MRC engages with broader regional marine concerns through its participation in the Northwest Straits Commission, the Island Local Integrating Organization, and the Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee.

Our team has put a lot of hours into providing input on the Island County Shoreline Master Program and the Comprehensive Plan this year. In addition, we have written a letter to the commissioners to share our perspective on shoreline armoring. The Comprehensive Plan work will continue into next year.

This year we had the commissioners reach out to us on a few different issues to provide our advice. It is important to us to have a working relationship with our commissioners so we can be effective in our advisory role.

Accomplishments

- Worked with the Planning Department on the Island County Comprehensive Plan Update.
- Wrote a letter to the commissioners about shoreline armoring and its limitations to protect homeowners.
- Provided comment on all the Comprehensive plan elements.
- Attended BOCC and Planning Commission meetings.
- Gave verbal comments at multiple BOCC and Planning Commission meetings.



2022 MRC retreat. Photo by Kelly Zupich



HSIL site visits. Photo by Valerie dos Santos

Monitoring: Forage Fish

Forage fish are small schooling fish that play a crucial role in the marine food web, serving as a primary food source for salmon, seabirds, and marine mammals. Two key species, surf smelt and Pacific sand lance, lay their eggs on sandy-gravel beaches around Puget Sound.

The MRC conducts forage fish spawn surveys at selected beaches, often in connection with completed, planned, or proposed shoreline restoration projects. Additionally, the MRC partners with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to assist with surveys at index sites—publicly accessible locations with a known history of spawning activity. Volunteers collect and process beach sediment samples, which are then sent to WDFW for further analysis.



Forage fish team processing samples. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- Conducted surveys at four restoration sites: Hoypus Point (post-restoration), Cornet Bay (post-restoration), Keystone Farm (pre-restoration), Seahorse Siesta (post-restoration).
- Conducted surveys at two index sites: Glendale and Maple Grove.
- Volunteers reported 217 hours of service.



Substrate sample. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Monitoring: Bull Kelp

Bull kelp forests provide essential habitat and food for a wide range of marine species, playing a critical role in supporting the marine food web. In response to documented declines of bull kelp in South Puget Sound, the MRC launched boat-based kelp surveys in 2015 in collaboration with NWSI and other MRCs. Volunteers paddle kayaks around the perimeter of known and encountered bull kelp beds, using GPS units to monitor the size and extent.

During the summer months, kelp bed perimeters were tracked at five locations in Island County: Hoypus Point, Polnell Point, Ebey's Landing, Possession Point, and Lowell Point. Volunteers also gathered temperature data at different depths using temperature loggers. Additionally, we procured and tested new equipment this year, which we plan to incorporate more fully into our work next season.



Lowell Point survey. Photo by Kelly Zupich



Bull kelp. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- Conducted kayak surveys at five key beds around Island County during the summer growing season.
- 17 volunteers reported approximately 122.5 hours for this project.
- Deployed temperature loggers to measure temperatures across multiple depths.
- Tested a new Ecosense YSI and Striker GPS.
- Volunteers and staff attended a kayak safety training provided by the NWSC.

Restoration Stewardship: Hoypus Point

In 2022, approximately 350 feet of shoreline armor at Hoypus Point was removed, the shoreline was regraded to a more natural slope, and native vegetation was planted. This project restored a bluff-backed beach and reconnected the marine riparian zone. These restored ecosystem elements and nearshore processes are expected to enhance habitat for salmon and improve spawning areas for forage fish.

The MRC, in partnership with NWSF (the project sponsor) and Washington State Parks, has helped provide ongoing care for the restoration plantings, to encourage and promote vegetation establishment. With support from volunteers and staff, the site has thrived over the summer months thanks to regular weeding and watering.



Planting Dunegrass at Hoypus Point. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Accomplishments

- Most of the plantings survived the dry summer months.
- Watering took place every week, June-September 2024.
- 3 stewardship events took place over the spring and summer.
- The newly planted Dunegrass has survived.



Planting Dunegrass at Hoypus Point. Photo by Kelly Zupich

Restoration Stewardship: Cornet Bay

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 species 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.



Volunteers weeding. Photo by Kelly Zupich.

Accomplishments

- MRC staff watered weekly June-September 2024.
- Volunteers kept the Canada Thistle flowers clipped to keep them from going to seed.
- Established and new plants and trees survived the dry summer months.
- 3 stewardship events took place over the spring and summer.
- Canada Thistle was sprayed with herbicide.



Nootka Rose. Photo by Kelly Zupich.

Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (ADV)

The MRC has been partnering with the Northwest Straits Commission to work to get abandoned and derelict vessels off our shorelines.

In 2024, the Abandoned and Derelict Vessel (ADV) program began the evolution from strictly response, to response, prevention, and collaboration. Both boats removed in 2024 were accomplished by utilizing partnerships among the MRC, State agencies, local homeowners' association (HOAs), Northwest Straits, and the Coupeville Wharf. This collaboration resulted in the boats being removed before they endangered property and the marine ecosystems – before they sank or crashed into property.

The program's evolution also involved beginning an educational partnership program to create permanent partners who will work collaboratively with the MRC ADV program to change the stigma of being unable to operate and care for a boat and feel comfortable reaching out for assistance.

Accomplishments

- Our MRC facilitated the removal of two derelict vessels this year.
- Developed and strengthened relationships with new partners.



Derelict Vessel. Photo by Kelly Webb

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.



Panel Discussion with students Photo by Kelly Zupich



Family Discovery Day. Photo by Andi Kopit

Accomplishments

- Along with partners, honored volunteer Scott Chase as the 2023 Jan Holmes Island County Coastal Volunteer of the Year.
- Made presentations to the HSIL, the NWSC, and the South Whidbey School District.
- Distributed crab gauges, rot cord, and educational handouts to recreational crabbers and to local businesses.
- Our Forage fish and Bull kelp projects were featured in the local paper.
- Participated in Orca Recovery Day and Sound Waters University.
- Contributed to Whidbey Weekly's "Make a Difference" column by submitting two different articles.
- Hosted a table at the Penn Cove Water Festival, and Family Discovery Day.
- Led two beach field trips for students.
- Held a workshop for Shoreline homeowners.
- Participated in a panel discussion with South Whidbey ALE Students.
- Led a class for families at the Oak Harbor Library.
- Hosted site visits to Cornet Bay and Hoypus Point for the HSIL.



White Crowned Sparrow nest at Cornet Bay restoration. Photo by Kelly Zupich