

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Jill Lipoti

August 5, 2025

HYBRID MEETING

PRESENT: Present: **Jill Lipoti**, Chair, **Kelly Webb**, Vice-Chair, **Barbara Bennett**, **Joshua Berkowitz**, **Scott Chase**, **Ken Collins**, **Greg Easton**, **Patrick Havel**, **Andi Kopit**, **Kirk Larsen**, **Paul Ben McElwain**, **Jennifer Schmitz**, **Jeff Wheeler**, **Elise Adams**, MRC Staff

ABSENT: Note if notified or un-notified – Commissioner Melanie Bacon

VISITORS: **Kelly Zupich**, Shore Friendly Coordinator, **John Lanier**, IC Long Range Planner, **Jessica Reid**, Lead Entity Coordinator WRIA 6, **Renee Zavas-Silva**, IC Surface Water Quality, **Carlie Miller**, IC Surface Water Quality, **Quinn Farr**, Pollution Identification Coordinator and Beach and Shellfish Lead, **Linda Rhodes**, technical advisor, **Caitlyn Blair**, NWSC, **Carlos Anderson**, Whidbey Island Audubon, **James Watson**, Department of Ecology Regional Shoreline Compliance and Enforcement Specialist and technical advisor, **Carter Webb**.

CALL TO ORDER: Jill called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. **INTRODUCTIONS:** Introductions were made. **QUORUM:** A quorum was declared. **AGENDA:** The agenda was approved. **MINUTES:** June minutes will be approved in the September meeting with August meeting minutes. The July meeting was cancelled.

TRIBAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We acknowledge the lands we're on today are the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous Nations who have stewarded them since time immemorial. We respect their sovereignty, support their Treaty rights, their right to self-determination, and we honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water.

REPORT FROM KEN COLLINS:

NWSC will be approving project proposals in the August NWSC meeting. The NWSC Conference is November 7th and 8th and there will be an email coming out soon for registration. There have been a lot of questions about funding at the federal level and it looks like our EPA and NOAA funding is moving along. There is a bill for reauthorization that would set aside a permanent amount of money for NWSC and will expect to come to a vote in the future. A big thanks to all our legislative sponsors.

The NWSC “Norms for Discussion,” a helpful document that supports healthy and diverse discussions and how to handle challenging conversations, were circulated prior to the August meeting.

There is a new launch of the SoundIQ platform through NWSC. MRC is able to add “layers” for different projects.

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There is a good amount of work being done for Pinto Abalone work in the San Juans, Skagit County, etc. and in more than half of those sites, the abalone have reproduced and are dispersing.

Future conversations could include the recent work surrounding sea star wasting disease and the research surrounding sunflower sea stars and sea star wasting. Sea stars involved in the research came from IC waters and could offer an education and outreach opportunity, or presentation for the MRC in the future.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Jill received a letter from Linda Rhodes, who serves on the Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) for the Conservation Futures Fund (CFF) and wrote a letter regarding the recent BOCC decision to adjust from 3-year terms to 1-year terms for committee members and the impacts to their work. The MRC also recently began having 1-year terms. The CAB drafted a memo for the BOCC, passing it through Jennifer Schmitz, and discussed the impacts of this change on the CAB/CFF. CAB has asked BOCC to change the 1-year term's back to 3-year terms and modify the 1-year term members to 3-year terms. Jennifer Schmitz responded to Linda Rhodes' inquiry and noted that she had passed the CAB letter memo to the BOCC clerks to decide how the clerks would bring this letter to BOCC. County has hired a DEI consultant and BOCC clerks advised County committee staff to wait for the DEI consultant to publish their final report regarding committee terms and their decision will prompt future committee action. MRC is welcome to write their own letter in support. Joshua Berkowitz supports writing a letter and asked if there was any timeline regarding the consultant's final report. Kelly Webb supports writing a letter with an emphasis on the amount of work that the County Coordinator's need to do to recruit new volunteers. Ken Collins supports writing a letter and asked if the number of terms is also in question in this decision. Jennifer Schmitz suggests that these questions and need for clarification would support waiting on the letter to better understand the consultant's role and see their report before acting. Linda Rhodes suggests providing DEI data in the memo/letter. Joshua Berkowitz affirms Jennifer Schmitz's suggestion on waiting on the letter and in the time being, getting in touch with the MRC Coordinator or have them attend an MRC meeting. Jennifer Schmitz will follow-up with the BOCC clerks regarding the DEI consultation process and MRC action. MRC would like to highlight the committee's diversity in the DEI consultation process.

LEADERSHIP REPORT FROM JENNIFER SCHMITZ:

Welcome to the new MRC Coordinator, Elise Adams. There were 32 highly qualified applicants with Elise being the top candidate. Thanks to Patrick Havel and IC staff who helped in the interview process. Thanks to the MRC for helping in the few months of transition. A big thanks to Kelly Zupich for coordinating the role during the transition and helping to onboard Elise. There will now be an MRC Coordinator and Shore Friendly Coordinator working in collaboration for IC shoreline process work. Kelly Zupich asked if MRC was interested in her staying on as a technical advisor and MRC approves. Shore Friendly Summit and LIO hosted ECB in May and continued Shoreline conversations with the State. IC contract conversations have been occurring and there has been a lot of budget conversations happening with October being the hopeful date of all the contracts being complete. Jen is hiring for a CFF Coordinator. Thank you to IC staff who are in attendance today. Reminder to MRC that Kelly Zupich at Shore Friendly is non-regulatory. Jill Lipoti was invited to a sub-committee from Snohomish County to discuss presenting shoreline armoring study information. James Watson to attend September meeting with Department of Ecology Shoreline Compliance and Enforcement information. Kelly

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Webb brought up the question regarding the MRC role and shoreline armoring. Elise, Kelly Zupich, and Jen to connect on MRC plan of action/and role for IC shoreline armoring. Paul Ben McElwain and Barbara Bennett agree with need for roles and responsibilities clarification.

DEER LAGOON DRAFT PLAN:

MRC received a copy of the Deer Lagoon Draft prior to the meeting. Carlos Anderson was in attendance to discuss his role in the draft plan, what is including in the draft plan, and how the report could be used in the future. The report has been sent to IC for distribution. The report has also been sent to the Department of Ecology and Senator Patty Murray's office, as well as the Whidbey Camano Land Trust and Whidbey Environmental Action Network.

MRC discussed what role they would have in the Deer Lagoon Draft Plan moving forward. Barbara brought up the role that Deer Lagoon plays as an asset to IC. MRC to send a letter of endorsement to IC directly. MRC will read over draft plan. Policy committee has offered to draft the endorsement.

NWSC CONFERENCE:

Caitlyn Blair from NWSC joined to discuss the upcoming NWSC Conference that is taking place in La Conner on November 7-8. Conference registration information will be sent out in the next few weeks. Committee members are allowed to bring a guest to the Keynote Dinner. Keynote Speaker is artist and science communicator, Josie Iselin. Her website, "The Mysterious World of Bull Kelp," was distributed to the MRC.

REPORT FROM KIRK LARSEN:

Kirk discussed with the NWSC Scientific Advisory Council members to work through the second proposal, which is to host a forage fish research workshop to talk about regional forage fish research. In early 2026, ICMRC with help from NWSC to host a forage fish research workshop of these partners. Kirk to own the coordination of this workshop and partners/collaboration opportunities, with assistance from small MRC sub-committee. Possible coordination opportunity for IC organizations (Sound Water Stewards, Whidbey-Camano Land Trust, etc.) Opportunity to present to BOCC on the work being done by MRC and its partners.

Kirk and education and outreach subcommittee will connect to put together a small working group of not just MRC members but of regional partners to present an update.

GRAY WHALE STRANDING UPDATE:

Deceased gray whale landed at Ebey's Landing and has since moved to YMCA Camp Casey who has gotten approval and permitting to preserve the skeleton of the whale for education purposes and there is a volunteer work party planned to collect the skeleton for 8/8 and 8/9.

COORDINATOR'S UPDATES:

Big thanks to MRC project leads who submitted their project status updates for today's meeting and proposal comments for the next grant cycle. Annual reporting will be due in September and Elise will send out the new reporting format. Project leads will submit their report draft to Elise by EOD August 22nd.

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Sea Level Rise workshop update: 40 attendees between the May 20th and June 17th workshops, and all attendees have received follow-up outreach materials.

Hoypus Point stewardship event on July 17th was incredibly successful with a lot of volunteer participation. Next stewardship is August 27th at 10am.

Volunteer hours tracking and reporting template has been sent out to MRC. Project leads can include both their own personal volunteer hours and any volunteers who work on their projects. Tracking volunteer hours helps support grant work and required deliverables.

Meeting attendees were given an up-to-date budget rundown and discussed where remaining budget funds will be allocated.

REPORT FROM BARBARA BENNETT:

Barbara introduced the School of Marine and Environmental Affairs capstone program and presented the opportunity for MRC involvement.

MISC UPDATES:

Jill suggested the need to finish the strategic plan. Strategic plan could incorporate NWSC “Norms for Discussion” document. Attendees discussed revisiting bylaws next year.

Andi asked for education and outreach support from MRC members to participate in MRC youth education and outreach volunteering.

Meeting adjourned at 4:51pm.