

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Elise Adams

August 4, 2026

VIRTUAL MEETING

PRESENT: Present: **Kelly Webb**, Chair, **Jill Lipoti**, **Patrick Havel**, **Josh Berkowitz**, **Greg Easton**, **Kirk Larsen**, **Jeff Wheeler**, **Andi Kopit**, **Commissioner Janet St. Clair**, **Elise Adams**, MRC Staff.

ABSENT: **Fran Horvath** – notified, **Marena Salerno Collins** - notified, **Ken Collins** – notified, **Brad Thompson** – notified, **Paul Ben McElwain** - notified.

VISITORS: **Jen Schmitz**, IC Natural Resources Manager/LIO Coordinator, **Lucas Hart**, Northwest Straits Commission, **Jeff Whitty**, Northwest Straits Commission, **Austin Greene**, WA DNR, **Florian Graner**, Sound Water Stewards.

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.

Strategic Planning Discussion:

- Round of introductions and ice breaker: What is important to or unique about Island County related to the marine and shoreline environment and how people interact with the environment.
- Jeff Whitty, meeting facilitator, went over meeting agenda.
 - o Goal of the meeting is to find a set of pillars to act as the foundation for the Strategic Plan.
- Jeff introduced the five pillars to be focused on during this discussion:
 1. *Pillar 1: Science, Monitoring, and Data-to-Decision Support (MONITOR)*
 2. *Pillar 2: Shoreline Habitat, Restoration, and Climate Resilience (STEWARD)*
 3. *Pillar 3: Advisory Voice and County Decision Support (ADVISE)*
 4. *Pillar 4: Community Stewardship, Education, and Partnerships (CONNECT)*
 5. *Pillar 5: Committee Resilience and Accountable Implementation (MANAGE)*
- Kirk Larsen of the Strategic Planning sub-committee overviewed the Pillars and Goals.
- The discussion began with all participants scoring the five pillars with a green dot (you support the general intent of the pillar), a yellow dot (you support the general intent of the pillar but have concerns that need to be worked through), or a red dot (you do not support the pillar, and it should be removed/replaced). Elise placed dots for the online participants.
- Once the dots were placed, the group began to discuss the pillars with the highest amounts of yellow or red dots.
- Jen voiced concern regarding the Strategic Plan and had the following questions/comments:

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- The MRC should a pulse check about what the MRC is facing with three new commissioners.
 - Over the next three years, all three current Island County Commissioners positions are up for reelection for new Commissioners.
 - While it's important to focus on big ideas, it's also probably the only time that we will have the chance to work and educate three new commissioners and make them understand and see the impact/importance of the MRC.
- The focus of Pillar 4 must be focused on decision-makers and not just the community. While educating the community is important and something the MRC always strives for, the current focus should be on current and new Commissioners.
- There is very real possibility we have new commissioners who don't care about the MRC/nor see the value.
- Jen's note about the MRC being insular; while the MRC knows their value and feel confident of that value; how can the MRC focus on sharing that value with decision-makers and taking that energy elsewhere.
 - How do we pivot away from educating and engaging with students and instead help communication between decision-makers/County staff. Andi agrees with this as an educational professional who engages with students and believes educational energy could be placed elsewhere.
- Kelly – with Coordinator sitting in this space between the MRC/IC/NWSC, how can Island County say no to funding? Jen responded and said that the County could say no and that they don't want the new contract thus not giving the MRC a home within Island County.
- Greg – this Strategic Planning process gives the opportunity for the MRC to craft and hone this message/value to build-upon the point Jen made.
- Jen wants to prioritize threading the above priority/need into the Strategic Planning process. Demonstration of value needs to happen in this process and throughout the next five years!
- Lucas – there should be a focus on interacting with new County government; the community engagement work could be de-emphasized as there is a chance that the messaging could get ahead of the County messaging (for ex. The MRC is out engaging using messaging that new Commissioners don't necessarily agree with)
- Jeff – A SWOT analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) could be a good option.
- Andi – We should be thinking about the value of sitting out and tabling vs. other types of outreach, like meeting with people where they're at. We should be thinking more about engaging and including with a youth member.
- Kelly – Prioritizing partner development is also critical for the next few years.
- Online comment from Austin Greene: *"The DNR Aquatic Reserves Program cannot fund an MRC position, but if the MRC does end up in a dire situation where local government affiliate support is lacking, your goals and locality may align well with existing goals of our program at DNR. Many reserves have Community Stewardship Committees and where these don't exist we often partner more closely with MRCs in their stead. Not a replacement in that dire situation, but perhaps a bridge that is independent of local*

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politics. Contact aquaticreserve@dnr.wa.gov if it appears that reality is coming to fruition.

- Online comment from Josh Berkowitz: *"I know we're not at a point of drafting specific language of the strategic plan, but when that time comes for the sub-committee, we'll need to be very thoughtful about what specific language we use since the future county commissioners will certainly review and reference the strategic planning document in their consideration of if/how we align with their political agenda."*
- Kelly – we should be more thoughtful on how we plan for our work; instead of changing the MRC workload for the Coordinator, plan the workload that is most important to the MRC and have the Coordinator flow into that work.
 - o Succession of the projects, priorities, etc. is important.
- Josh – Like most committees, we push towards more action and projects and can sometimes hit capacity issues; stretching the Committee or the Coordinator too thin; so we need to be realistic about capacity and what we have the bandwidth for.
- Florian – there is a very challenging fundraising environment, so putting efforts on finding knowledgeable, trained volunteers so there is consistency is vital.
- Kelly – the MRC isn't necessarily built for continuity (1-year Chair term, 3-year terms, etc.)
 - o Jen – This is where the BOCC/MRC identity crisis may stem from; there is a push for continuous scientific work and projects, but Jen is consistently hearing about how there is a lack of diversity – that the MRC and other committees are only including and adding similar perspectives and backgrounds to what is already apart of the committee.
 - o The value of the MRC is the scientific rigor from the prioritization of skilled volunteers and work; but the BOCC is looking to bridge that value with representation from the diverse public.
 - o Kelly – That is the issue with being on the island – diversity can be challenging and while the MRC has changed their meeting time to be more inclusive, its challenging. The BOCC tries to include more diverse representation and recommend new committee membership, which can often be challenging because they do not necessarily have all the information about the MRC, commitment, etc.
- Public Health was able to put a dollar value to their work; Jen was not able to do that for the MRC and we should be able to do that.
 - o Kelly – we are trying to work with more businesses to show that economic value, tourism value, etc.
 - o Jeff – Show them the economic value; we could do that via crab pot removals as an example.
 - o Andi – when she first started, there was a consultant who added ecosystem value report – do we still have that? Can we figure this value out for 2026?
- Online comment from Josh: *"Maybe we could partner with Island County EDC for such an effort – Economic Development Council"*.
- Elise – Diversity in recruitment is incredibly important; bringing in diverse knowledge bases is important for future recruitment.
 - o Lucas – Be mindful of diversity language in the Strategic Plan.
- Kelly – Retaining Coordinator is important!

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- Jen – Her goal is that in 1.5 years, when the Contract/Grant is back in front of the BOCC, they are excited and eager to sign it rather than Jen having to make a case for why they want to sign.
- Jen – Can the MRC endorse potential Commissioners? Maybe not necessarily endorse but meet and share the value of the MRC.
- Jeff – It seems as though the MRC is content with some iteration of these five pillars.
 - o Kelly – This document cannot be static; the MRC needs to be prepared to pivot and adapt to whatever need arises.
 - o We need to check in with this document regularly. We are going to build these check-in's into our monthly meetings.
- Andi – Pillar 5 needs to support Pillar 1.
- Patrick – Data intersection with partner organizations: how do we tie this back to economic benefit?

Public Comment:

Meeting adjourned at 5:30pm.

Volunteer Potluck Commenced.