



Island County Marine Resources Committee

<http://www.islandcountymrc.org>

MINUTES

March 19, 2003, 4:00 – 6:00 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church
Freeland

Present: Chair Tom Campbell, Martin Behr, Hi Bronson, Sayed El-Sayed, Mike Gallion, Phyllis Kind, Roger Sherman, Dick Toft, Exec. Director Gary Wood, Admin. Ass't. Dan Pedersen.

Absent: Don Meehan, Tom Roehl, Jeff Tate, Benye Weber.

Visitors: Pat Powell, executive director, and Kathleen Landel, president, Whidbey-Camano Land Trust (WCLT); Constance Wolfe, WCLT board member; Don Gambill, Freeland, landowner; Nancy Waddell, Maxwellton Salmon Adventure; Gwenn Maxfield, Island County Public Works.

Call to order: 4:05 pm, Chair Tom Campbell called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.

Agenda: Adopted. Neither additions nor objections.

Minutes of 03-05-2003: Adopted. Motion by Bronson; second by Toft: no objections.

New/unfinished business

> Campbell raised the question of the MRC's meeting schedule, which had been brought up at a previous meeting by Tom Roehl. The dates and times are difficult for some members because of other scheduled meetings and obligations. Gallion commented that the schedule is well known to all committee members at the time they join. The 2003 schedule was published and distributed at the beginning of the year. Members make their plans based on this, and for the most part our attendance is good -- we usually have a quorum. No action was taken.

> Behr again suggested scheduling a retreat to consider big issues such as land proposals and our Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) application. He first raised this suggestion at the February 19 meeting but there had been no follow up. **ACTION: Moved -- that we hold a retreat to deal with strategic issues during one of our regularly-scheduled business meetings in May, but expand the meeting from 4 – 9 p.m., including an hour of social time for dinner. This retreat will be led by a facilitator. Moved by Behr. Seconded by Bronson. Carried. No objections.** Discussion: Wood commented we might consider using a facilitator from the Puget Sound Action Team who led a retreat for the Northwest Straits Commission. Wood also pointed out that one of the issues we need to discuss is what happens if Congress does not renew funding for the NWSC after its five-year initial period. Right now, federal funding makes up only 23 percent of our MRC's budget. Phyllis Kind suggested we consider holding our retreat at the Oyster Catcher in Coupeville. Campbell commented members might have to buy their own meals.

Adjournment: There being no further business, Campbell declared the meeting adjourned, 6 pm.

Speakers:

**Executive Director Pat Powell and Board President Kathleen Landel
Whidbey-Camano Land Trust**

Kathleen Landel opened the WCLT's Powerpoint presentation, explaining that the organization's mission is to preserve our special lands – the open farmland, shoreline and forests that contribute to the unique rural quality of Whidbey and Camano islands. Genesis of the land trust was in 1972 at Ebey's Landing, with the formation of Ebey's Open Space Foundation. Harlow and Harriet Hayes donated an easement along the bluff trail to protect the trees in a 200-foot wide corridor from ever being cut, and the foundation owned the easement. The land trust in its current form

was founded in 1984. From 1984 through 1998, the land trust acquired four additional easements on Whidbey Island. In 1999, the 24-acre Maxwellton Wetlands Habitat Preserve was donated, and in 2001 the land trust took a huge leap, raising over \$750,000 from the community for the Saratoga Woods Preserve. In the wake of that action, the board concluded that if it was going to accelerate the preservation of land in Island County, it needed a full-time director and an office. Following a national search, Pat Powell was hired and an office was opened in the Sears House at Bayview Corner.

The WCLT strategic plan calls for developing the organizational infrastructure and capacity to establish a leadership role in land preservation in Island County. The organization wants to take a proactive strategic approach to land conservation, not simply a reactive approach to opportunities. It also seeks to increase its capacity to initiate and complete multiple and complex land preservation projects. Currently WCLT holds 438 total acres, of which the majority are in six private easements. Private parties own the land, but WCLT owns the conservation easement, trail easement or scenic view easement, for example.

Currently, WCLT is working on two exciting projects. The Davis Slough Heron Rookery would protect 188 nests on 30 acres of Camano Island through a potential conservation easement. The Bocker site for Golden paintbrush is a potential acquisition in the Ebey's Landing Reserve, which would protect this threatened plant on 33 acres.

Pat Powell: One of the questions people ask is how can a land trust help both the community and private landowners? A local land trust is very important to a community that cares about the special places. WCLT is community based – the board and directors are all local. It has expertise in conservation land transactions and a strong relationship with landowners. It is especially important for a land trust to listen to landowners about their objectives, and then work with them to help. The land trust is legally approved to be the recipient of conservation easements and lands – and can then steward those lands. And donations of land are tax deductible.

There are two main protection tools: 1) Buying the land in fee simple, and 2) Conservation easements. Conservation easements are the main tool. These are highly flexible easements binding upon the property forever. The restrictions travel with the land. For example, a landowner gives up the right to develop part of the land. If the donation meets certain IRS rules, the value of the land is thereby reduced and a percentage of it can be deducted from the landowner's tax.

Potential types of conservation easements include wetland restoration, shoreline protection, working forests, working ranches, reduce densities, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Kathleen Landel: WCLT put its toe into Salmon Recovery Funding Board process with the Deer Lagoon Project, which was suggested by Island County. WCLT was a project sponsor for a feasibility study. Ultimately, it did not move forward because they were unable to negotiate with the landowner, but this was the beginning of the educational process about that particular grant program and how it might benefit the island. The WCLT has also been participating as a member of a working group in Lower Maxwellton Valley that received an SRFB grant to look at the feasibility of making some changes to the lower reach – trying to see what alternatives might be possible there. One of the keys to this is involving and educating landowners about the available protection options, and the personal gains and losses involved. WCLT also is a project partner with Maxwellton Salmon Adventure on a lower reach landowner outreach and education proposal.

Statewide, in terms of land trusts and SRFB grants, there are 42 funded projects and 21 current applications. In north Puget Sound, Whatcom Land Trust has five funded projects; Skagit Land Trust has four funded projects and Jefferson Land Trust has one. The types of projects include acquisition, restoration, and landowner inventory/assessment and protection prioritization.

Powell pointed out she has worked on a great many innovative land trust projects over the years, and there's no reason we can't do that here. What's important is to form partnerships with a great many groups, such as the MRC, and then go after a great variety of grant fund sources. First it takes a vision – then it takes everyone working together. Powell re-emphasized that the land trust wants to make sure it is proactive, rather than reactive. The land trust will conduct a natural heritage strategy to make sure it is focused on the right projects and making the best possible use of its resources. It will create a resource inventory that includes all the available information, including the information being developed by the MRC, to enable identification of the priority areas that need protection in the county.

Wood commented this illustrates how greatly the MRC and land trust need to work together. By the end of this summer, the MRC will have finished all of its assessments of Island County – eelgrass, forage fish, feeder bluffs, shoreline hardening, etc. – and will have maps in GIS format. This fall we will need to submit projects for the next SRFB cycle.

**Frances Wood
Audubon**

Campbell introduced Frances Wood, explaining that she is the author of several books and has been editor of the Seattle Audubon newsletter for many years. She is also well known for her work in training indigenous people of Mexico and Central America in ecotourism. She has been involved in several bird surveys, including breeding bird surveys in 2001 and 2002 in Island County.

Wood is proposing a project to survey bluff areas of the Whidbey and Camano nearshore environment to gather data on three birds that nest directly in Island County bluffs – pigeon guillemot, belted kingfisher and northern rough-winged swallow. Data would be incorporated into the county's GIS system. The concept for the survey is for volunteers to walk the beaches of Island County with the people who will be collecting GIS data for the MRC's shoreline hardening study.

The pigeon guillemot is especially interesting because in most parts of its habitat it prefers rocky bluffs, but in Island County it has adapted to our sandy bluffs.

Wood said she would like to start at least a pilot project in 2003 and continue the survey during the summer breeding seasons of 2004 and 2005. Gary Wood said he felt it would be possible for bird volunteers to accompany the individual who is going to be doing the shoreline hardening survey for the MRC. The shoreline hardening survey will be using very precise GIS equipment. Frances Wood said it would be wonderful if the 2003 survey could actually be more than a pilot project. She said she envisions the volunteers walking with the GIS person and identifying the locations where nests are present. Then they would come back and study those areas at length later, so they would not slow down the work of the shoreline hardening study.

Behr asked Wood to explain the importance of this study. Wood said it really is unique that we've found pigeon guillemots nesting in our bluffs – since this is not their typical habitat. Secondly, these birds occupy an important niche in the nearshore habitat. It would be important data to have – to know what we have in our nearshore area.

NEXT MEETING: April 2, 2003, Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.