



Island County Marine Resources Committee

<http://www.islandcountymrc.org>

MINUTES

June 18, 2003, 4:00 – 5:45 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church
Freeland

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

Absent: Sayed El-Sayed, Tom Roehl, Jeff Tate.

Visitors: *Speaker:* Ken Balcomb, Center for Whale Research, San Juan Island; Jerry Valade, Langley; Clodaugh Valade, Langley; Elaine E. Rost, Clinton; Jeanie McElwain, Clinton; Ellen Camin, Useless Bay; Frank Roberts, Greenbank; Patricia Seth-Tuttle, Clinton; John Dohrmann, Puget Sound Action Team; Janet Hall, Freeland; Kim Bredensteiner, Island County Public Works, Coupeville; Gail Kladden, Clinton; Aristanna Firethorne, Langley; Rev. Satyavati D'Antoni, Clinton; Dave and Karen Anderson, Clinton; Tony Frantz, Freeland; Bob Dippold, Langley; Rich Melaas, Oak Harbor, Navy Region Northwest; Bill Walker, Clinton; Rebecca Sundberg (no city identified); Susan Berta, Greenbank; Howard (no last name or city); Mira Lutz-Munich, Salish SeaLife Experience.

Call to order: 4:05 pm, Chair Tom Campbell called the meeting to order.

Quorum: Declared.

Agenda: Adopted. There being no objections, Campbell declared the agenda approved.

Minutes of 5-21-2003: Adopted. Motion by Bronson, second by Kind, no objections.

Reports: To free time for the speaker, Wood e-mailed his director's report earlier in the day, as follows:

Executive Director's Report to the MRC

Note: The timely 'Orcas v. Sonar' presentation at our regular MRC meeting will no doubt preclude a discussion of ongoing MRC business. This update is to advise members about recent important developments, in lieu of the usual song-and-dance presentation that you have all come to "love." As of this writing the Navy has only promised that a representative from Whidbey NAS will "attend, but not speak." Mike Motta, director of Environmental Affairs for the Navy's Port Everett facility (& the Navy's liaison to the Straits Commission) has used his best efforts to get us an active participant. Perhaps the issue has become too hot, with the Governor and politics involved. I still have not given up though, and know that several Navy personnel believe a spokesperson should attend our presentation and explain their position. Alas, tonight it is in the hands of Admirals.

Saratoga Passage Marine Stewardship Area

An interested MRC subgroup (Behr, Campbell, Toft, Wood & Pedersen) met June 11 to discuss this prospect. Full MRC discussion of the following is now proposed:

1. The MRC would sponsor and support a Resolution by the BOCC designating a single stewardship area ['the Area'], as named above or otherwise identified. The Area would consist of all the Island County marine waters adjoining or leeward of Whidbey's eastern shore, including all of Puget Sound surrounding Camano, east to the county boundary – north to Deception Pass, and south to the tip of Whidbey, or as the MRC, public & BOCC otherwise agree to outline as the Area.
2. The purpose of this designation is educational ~ and to foster public recognition of the important local habitats, species, processes, geology, benthic features and social interactions situated in the Area. *No new regulatory actions are involved.* Existing rules, uses, and restrictions would remain unchanged within the Area.

3. In preparation, the MRC will compile its resources data and all other existing relevant information about the Area, to be fully mapped – with explanatory supporting materials describing the quality, abundance, location and nature of the Area's marine resources. County use of, and assistance with such information is proposed. [*Jeff Tate, you've been drafted. . .in the first round!*]

4. When appropriate, the MRC will support a Resolution acceptable to the BOCC to identify, designate, name and recognize the Area.

5. The MRC will seek ALEA, IAC, CZM or similar funding to provide permanent, quality informational signage at proper viewpoints throughout the Area; and pamphlets, maps, posters and other appropriate literature.

Derelict Gear Project

I have reported the good news that NOAA/National Marine Fisheries Service awarded Phase 2 funding of \$100,000 for the DG project. That is the largest CRP grant awarded nationwide this year, and they ranked it number one.

The **Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Foundation** (a qualified 501c(3) nonprofit organization) is the applicant in all future DG grants, and will not sunset irrespective of Congressional action as to the Initiative.

The project team recently used side-scan sonar successfully to pinpoint and GIS map hundreds of crab pots. There are many more areas yet to be searched, including Island County (delayed by DNR lead diver Doug Williams' death).

Also, Virginia K. Tippie, Director of "Coastal America" [in USDA], Washington D.C., called last week to advise me that the DG project will receive the **2003 Coastal America Partnership Award**, to be presented at our October MRC training conference at Fort Worden. (Your humble servant prepared the nomination paperwork so we can claim the credit.) An aide to the President will announce this officially in the coming days. In the past, President Bush and/or the Senators have made such presentations – so stay tuned.

Immediately following our retreat, I joined NWSC director Tom Cowan at the SRFB meeting in Vancouver, WA, June 5TH & 6TH to formally present our DG grant proposal for Board consideration. Phase 1 of the project mapped over 100 derelict nets within salmon migratory corridors. No crab pots are covered by this proposal.

We showed the new DG project video produced for this very purpose (*primarily funded by Island County's 2003 Action Grant for DG outreach*). It runs 10 minutes and I will play it soon for the MRC – very nicely produced and persuasive.

The SRFB will act upon our \$150,000 request at its July meeting, and was favorably disposed. If awarded as state funds, this satisfies our CRP matching-funds requirement.

Another DG proposal (drafted by your HumbServ & Andrea Copping) was timely submitted to the National Whale Conservation Fund, seeking \$125,000 to fund Phase 2's cetacean entanglement component. That decision is expected in September. Senator Murray and Representative Larsen submitted letters of support for this proposal, the CRP grant and to Coastal America. Their unflagging support cannot be overly praised, and we are very appreciative – especially where very short deadlines required their immediate action (e.g., the whale RFP was open for two weeks TOTAL.)

Today, June 17, your HumbServ joined DG project manager Jeff June, of Natural Resources Consultants, Inc., to jointly present the DG program (via customized PowerPoint and the video) to a special King County panel, in Seattle. In short, the planned King County Wastewater/Brightwater plant -- to outfall in Snohomish Co. (!) -- has been ordered by USFWS and NOAA/NMFS to invest \$10MM in "mitigation projects" acceptable to USFWS, NOAA/NMFS. King Co. at first proposed freshwater stream projects, and was told that marine work was necessary, since they are building on a beach, etc.

We got the call after NMFS requested they check out the DG project (which NMFS has funded)! By Sept. 15TH the parties must submit their agreed-upon mitigation project list, per all the permits & law. It was a very heavy meeting of engineers, the feds, the

contractors & moneymen with all the proper questions asked. I hope our answers were as good. . . Nuff said, GW

New business/old business: Meehan reported that Shore Stewards should be ready to launch on Camano Island by early to mid-July.

Adjournment: There being no further business, at 5:45 pm Campbell declared the meeting adjourned.

Speaker:

Ken Balcomb

Center for Whale Research, San Juan Island

Ken Balcomb is a marine biologist and whale researcher who was trained in the use of passive sonar (listening) while serving in the US Navy. In recent weeks he has been interviewed widely regarding a May 5 event in which the US Navy conducted active sonar exercises (generating sound) in Haro Strait, west of San Juan Island, in the summer feeding ground of the orcas.

The Everett-based US Navy guided missile destroyer, Shoup, conducted sonar exercises over a five-hour period, at one point approaching within view of Balcomb's home and being video-taped by him. During the exercises, orcas stopped feeding and clustered in a tight group close to shore. Balcomb says this behavior is understandable because sonar noise attenuates near the shore, but is much louder in deeper waters. Following the Haro Strait exercise, several porpoises stranded themselves and died on beaches throughout the area, including Whidbey Island. Carcasses were collected – one of which is in Balcomb's freezer -- and post-mortem examinations will be performed by the National Marine Fisheries Service as soon as CAT-scan equipment can be scheduled in Seattle. At present, the examinations are being delayed for lack of a dedicated CAT-scan machine on the West Coast for marine mammal examinations.

The May 5 incident is reminiscent of one in the Bahamas in which Balcomb directly experienced the stranding of beaked whales in connection with Navy sonar activity. In March 2000, Balcomb was present when several whales beached themselves and died after a sonar exercise. Necropsies on the dead mammals showed evidence of hemorrhaging of the inner ear.

Balcomb showed the MRC audience an episode of Sixty Minutes describing the Bahamian incident and the Navy's response. After the Bahamas incident, the Navy adopted new sonar rules, using lookouts and spotters on helicopters to search for the presence of any marine mammals close to vessels using sonar. The Navy has adopted a one-kilometer exclusion zone. If marine mammals are within that zone the Navy will change course, cease the sonar operation or take other action. But he said one kilometer is not enough – that the sonar transmits noise at high decibel levels as far as 20 kilometers away.

Balcomb said it is not clear whether the whale deaths were caused by direct physical pressure from the sonar or from a behavioral response to the noise. These are deep-diving mammals. Normally, when they surface from the depths they do it slowly to avoid getting "the bends," but if frightened by loud, terrifying noise they may surface too quickly. In a stranding incident in the Canary Islands last year, the pathologist examining the animals said it looked as though they'd had the bends. And once bubbles form, it's a runaway situation—there's nothing you can do except stay at depth. If the whales surface and rupture the vessels and bleed into the brain, that's a behavioral response versus a purely physical response of pressure reaching the point where the whales' ears can no longer withstand it.

Balcomb said he would prefer to discover the damage was caused by an actual physical response because it might be possible to mitigate it technologically by changing frequency or taking other measures. Instead, it appears more likely to be behavioral. If so, he'd like to see the Navy conduct its sonar exercises in defined areas that are relatively uninhabited by marine mammals. And, as much as possible for routine training, he'd prefer the Navy use surrogate systems such as computer simulation of sonar exercises.

A representative from Whidbey Island Naval Air Station was present at the MRC meeting to listen, but had been instructed to make only a short statement. Rich Melaas, community planning liaison, said the National Marine Fisheries Service is conducting examinations of the dead porpoises found after May 5, and that the Navy is investigating the Shoup incident.