



Island County Marine Resources Committee

<http://www.islandcountymrc.org>

MINUTES

January 22, 2003, 4:00 – 6:00 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church
Freeland

Present: Chair Tom Campbell, Martin Behr, Hi Bronson, Mike Gallion, Phyllis Kind, Don Meehan, Tom Roehl, Roger Sherman, Jeff Tate, Admin. Ass't. Dan Pedersen. **Absent:** Sayed El-Sayed, Dick Toft, Benye Weber, Exec. Director Gary Wood. **Visitors:** None.

Call to order: 4:04 pm, Chair Campbell called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.

Agenda: Adopted with one addition -- Sherman requests time on behalf of himself and Kind to discuss Marine Protected Areas.

Attendance Note: Meehan said he'd like the record to show that Weber contacted him to express regrets she could not attend tonight. Wood is attending a Northwest Straits Commission retreat. Toft is unable to attend because of an Island County H/R hiring matter. Pedersen said El Sayed had contacted him and explained he could not attend because he had to be out of town.

Minutes of 2003-01-08: Adopted. Motion by Kind, second by Bronson, no objections.

Reports:

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Kind reported that she and Sherman had met and concluded that the MRC should consider pursuing a grant to get some professional help on designing and thinking about MPAs. Articles published in Science Magazine suggest that for MPAs to be successful, they need to be part of a network. Typically, the professionals look at the entire system and design where the MPAs should be – then go to the stakeholders. Kind said she wonders whether the MRCs are taking the right approach when they think about MPAs independently, or whether it doesn't make more sense to think about the entire Puget Sound and try to get everyone together on it.

Sherman said he has accumulated a huge file on MPAs and, to him, it's overwhelming to expect volunteers to make something happen. Gallion asked if we aren't putting the cart before the horse – saying we're going to create MPAs instead of asking what needs protection and then looking at ways to provide that protection. Gallion said the two MPAs established so far by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in the county protect rockfish in areas where there are no rockfish and kelp beds where there's no immediate threat from anything except winter storms.

Kind said she agrees we need criteria for what we want to protect with our MPAs. But even if there is no immediate threat, we should identify what we want to protect from a future threat. She said Skagit County has developed an index score system that enables them to prioritize needs.

Roehl said he doesn't think it would be difficult to identify the list of things that need protection. One thing that should be part of an analysis is to identify what's lacking in the protection system right now. We should look at all of Island County and the current regulatory structure and find out what's missing in terms of protection. Is there a gap that warrants a new or different device?

Behr said there is an urgency – we are three years into our five-year MRC process and he'd hate to see us sunset without acting on some things that are almost obvious. We know there's a problem with salmon – it's an endangered or threatened species. We know we have 40 percent

of the eelgrass beds of Puget Sound right here in Saratoga Passage. Maybe the protections are adequate as they are, or maybe not, but this is such a focal point we ought to be making recommendations to protect this resource – whether it's MPAs or something else. That's our little gem right here in Island County.

Action: Motion by Roehl, second by Meehan: That Island County MRC pursue a grant for MPA evaluation and recommendations. Passed unanimously. .

Further discussion and clarification:

Behr asked if the motion just adopted was limited to MPAs or whether its scope included various levels of protection. Roehl responded that the motion was to pursue grant funding for MPA evaluation in the 2003 Workplan. He explained that MPA is the generic term for a broad range of protection designations, which can have an assortment of names or labels.

Behr asked if the motion could be broadened to include "MPAs or other forms of protection." He said, for example, that if we work with Whidbey-Camano Land Trust we may find that eelgrass beds are being polluted by runoff from uplands, and upland purchases might be a way of protecting them. Roehl responded that in the design of an MPA, acquisition of land might be one of the strategies.

Meehan said it would not be like the tenor of this group to be narrow in thinking about protection strategies. He said his vision in writing any RFP would be the broadest net approach – whether it's an MPA, reserve, preserve or whatever.

Roehl volunteered to work with Wood and Meehan to define the scope of the request.

Director's Report (Meehan)

- > Our Web site is now updated with the minutes: <http://www.islandcountymrc.org>. The files are displayed as PDFs, but there's an invisible html "back door" that allows them to be searched.
- > Our Feeder Bluff RFP is out and we're getting lots of responses. RFQ deadline is month-end.
- > Sound Waters, one-day university, takes place Feb. 1 – we have about 100 sign-ups so far.

Workplan 2003

Meehan led a discussion of benchmark progress in 2002. He emphasized that for purposes of our annual report to NWSC, we should provide relatively brief summaries for NWSC to combine with the summaries they receive from each of the other MRCs.

> Benchmark 1. Local participation (Meehan): We've had good participation from the MRC board and good public turnout at our educational meetings. He will go through the minutes and compile the statistics on attendance and programs.

> Benchmark 2. Marine Protected Areas (Sherman & Kind): Biggest accomplishment of 2002 was to critique the Keystone Jetty and Admiralty Head MPAs proposed by WDFW and correct their boundaries. These two were established May 1. We opposed their Scatchet Head MPA and this may have been important in WDFW's decision not to pursue it. We also have some goals for 2003, as discussed earlier in this meeting. Chief among them is to pursue a grant for MPA evaluation and recommendations. Gallion said he wanted to clarify that we supported the Admiralty Head MPA providing it did not cause a shutdown of sport fishing for salmon and steelhead, and this was ignored. Roehl suggested perhaps putting this into 2003 goals – to work with WDFW on reestablishing the shore-fishing. Meehan said we should also think about adding educational programs for meeting our 2003 goals.

> Benchmark 3. Net Gain in Nearshore Habitat (Tate & Behr): Tate shared a timeline of grants, workshops and programs in 2002 concerned with nearshore issues. Meehan says that as he thinks about habitat, what's significant is that we have X number of miles of shoreline that have been given higher levels of protection because we've found forage fish there we did not know

existed – that’s the kind of thing he’d want in a report on benchmarks. He added that, on MPAs for example, even though we haven’t generated our own MPAs, we helped WDFW create a couple of MPAs. Tate agreed that the timeline doesn’t capture the essence of the protection now being afforded. We’ve gathered a great deal of data that can now be put to use improving protection. Meehan said he’d also like to see the summary include goals for 2003. That’s what’s going into our workplan. Roehl suggested adding feeder bluffs to the nearshore report.

> Benchmark 4. Shellfish (Bronson): Meehan says this benchmark has always bothered him because it’s geared toward recreation, rather than protection of the shellfish organisms and their populations. Shellfish harvesting typically is closed because of bacteria that make them unsafe for humans to eat, but the shellfish themselves thrive. Bronson said he would do some further research and work up a report.

> Benchmark 5. Bottomfish Recovery (Toft & Gallion): Toft was not able to attend but did submit a list of the lectures and presentations of which he’s aware, and in which he’s been involved. Meehan said he’ll ask Toft to prepare a summary. Behr asked, aren’t we getting information from our video surveys that we don’t have much bottomfish habitat? Meehan said north of us, in Skagit County, there is all kinds of bottomfish habitat, but in Island County it’s very thin. Gallion clarified that the emphasis all along has been on rockfish, of which we have very little, although we do have flatfish, which are also bottom fish. Meehan asked Gallion to contact Toft and decide, between the two of them, what the 2003 goals should be with regard to bottom fish.

> Benchmark 6. Increase in Indicator Species (Campbell): Campbell said he asked at a Northwest Straits Commission meeting for the committee to identify for us “indicator species.” He said they indicated they’d had a lot of difficulty doing this, and had fallen back on the West Report of indicator species for Puget Sound. Campbell said the West Report is good, but he’d like to add a couple of indicator species for our purposes – eelgrass and forage fish. Campbell said the West Report does not deal with plants. He also said that at our last meeting we added three birds – pigeon guillemot, belted kingfishers and rough-winged swallows. He said the issue he’d like to throw on the table is that we’re studying eelgrass because we think it’s important, so shouldn’t we be reporting our eelgrass as an indicator species? Roehl said that, to him, an indicator species should be something that would immediately indicate a threat – that if this is happening, then something else is about to happen next, or soon. Kind said indicator species came up at a meeting she was attending, and that a good indicator species should be something toward the bottom of the food chain. Gallion said he thinks we need to look at the species that will indicate significant failure early on – that it makes a lot of sense to look far down on the food chain. Meehan said we know salmon use the eelgrass beds of Island County as a “salmon freeway” in and he wonders if there aren’t thin spots that still act as an important bridge for the salmon.

> Benchmark 7. Sharing Data (Roehl): Roehl said he’ll update it, but this benchmark mostly is about staying on track with our protocols. Meehan asked him to add a shoreline hardening piece.

> Benchmark 8. Outreach & Education (Meehan): Meehan said we are the shining stars in this – not just because we do great programs for ourselves, but because we’re always out there talking. Wood and Meehan both do it. Pedersen is producing press releases. Now as we start Shore Stewards that will give us another big boost. We have a new Web site, tagline, logo – we’ve come a long way. About half the Sound Waters classes are directly related to what we do here.

> Program preferences for 2003:

DNR – Feb. 5 and 19

Pat Powell, Whidbey Camano Land Trust – March

Keystone Jetty – underwater resources

Science – interpretation of data (Kind and El Sayed)

Flatfish

Frances Wood and the cliff-dwelling birds

Adjournment. 6:00 pm, with no further business, Campbell declared the meeting adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: 4 - 6 pm, Wednesday, Feb. 5, at Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.