



# Marine Resources

Committee

## October 20, 2004

Minutes

4:04 – 6:10 pm, Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland

[www.islandcountymrc.org](http://www.islandcountymrc.org)

**PRESENT:** Chair Roger Sherman, Hi Bronson, Tom Campbell, Ian Jefferds, Phyllis Kind, Don Meehan, Jeff Tate, Dick Toft, Ken Urstad, Bruce Wood, Exec. Director Gary Wood, Admin. Ass't. Dan Pedersen. **ALTERNATES:** Pedersen for El Sayed. **ABSENT:** Sayed El-Sayed, Rolf Seitle, Benye Weber

### VISITORS:

**Danelle Heatwole** (speaker), field biologist, Nature Conservancy of Washington  
**Rex Porter**, Coupeville, Whidbey Watershed Manager, Island County Public Works.  
**Kim Bredensteiner**, Coupeville, Island County Public Works  
**Nancy Waddell**, Clinton, Maxwellton Salmon Adventure (MSA).  
**Jeanie McElwain**, Clinton, Beach Watchers  
**Shala Racicky**, Oak Harbor  
**Kathy Floyd**, Freeland, Beach Watchers  
**Larry Bentfield**, City of Oak Harbor  
**John Hastings**, Freeland, Maxwellton Salmon Adventure  
**Karen Lennon**, Clinton, district administrator, Whidbey Island Conservation District.  
**Doug Shepherd**, Island County Trails Council  
**Kyle Renninger**, Oak Harbor, student, whose class studied Crescent Harbor estuary pollution  
**Susan Horton**

**CALL TO ORDER:** 4:04 pm, Sherman called the meeting to order. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted. **MINUTES** of 10-6-2004: Adopted. Motion by Bronson, second by Urstad, no objections.

### Summary of Decisions

**Freeland Basin bacteria study.** Rex Porter will work with Pedersen on the wording of a letter-of-support from the MRC for this grant application by Island County Public Works.

**Multiple lead-entity project proposal letter of support. MOTION CARRIED.** Wood will draft a letter to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board in support of a coordinated, regional, multiple-lead entity approach to fish-use assessments across watershed boundaries.

**Camano Town Hall Meeting.** Meehan will check with County Commissioner, Bill Byrd, to see if the MRC may join him in an informational presentation about the MRC to the Camano Island community from 6-9 pm, Thursday, Nov. 18.

**Maylor's Marsh.** Wood will write a letter to Dave Williams, addressing his points of concern about our proposed Maylor's Marsh project.

**Executive Director contract. MOTION CARRIED.** The MRC approves the contract to employ Gary Wood as executive director through June of 2005.

## **Predicted Impact of the Restoration of Full Tidal Access to Crescent Harbor Marsh**

Speaker: Danelle Heatwole

Meehan introduced Danelle Heatwole, currently a field biologist for Nature Conservancy of Washington at the Port Susan Bay Preserve. Heatwole recently published a Master's Thesis at the University of Washington on what will happen to insect, fish and plant communities when the Navy restores full tidal access to Crescent Harbor Marsh in 2006.

Heatwole studied with Charles Simenstad at the University of Washington. In the early 1990s the National Research Council conducted a review of aquatic ecosystem restoration in the United States and concluded that the approach was largely piecemeal and uncoordinated, and was not achieving the overall goals of restoration. They recommended that to move forward the practice of wetland restoration needed to move to a more predictive science. One way to meet that challenge is through adaptive management. Among the key principles are to have clear goals, a conceptual model and a decision framework within which to test one's predictions. The conceptual model should include the system's structure, function and major controlling factors. After restoration is done, provision should be made for the testing of predictions about how that ecosystem was going to change. The opportunity to apply these principles exists at Crescent Harbor in Oak Harbor.

Like many other coastal wetlands in Puget Sound, in the early 1900s the marsh was diked and drained for agriculture. A tide gate was installed in the channel to keep the saltwater out. In the 1960s Oak Harbor constructed a wastewater treatment plant in the marsh and locked open the tide gate. But the opening is quite small and it dampens the tidal height within the marsh by about 60 percent. The inlet's small size and location on the beach reduces the opportunity for marine fish to access the marsh. During the winter the small size of the outlet restricts the outward drainage of fresh water from the creek, resulting in freshwater flooding of the road within the marsh. So Crescent Harbor represents a degraded pocket estuary. Pocket estuaries with their small creeks are quite different from deltaic estuaries, which have much greater fresh water input, usually from a large river. Island County is home to many pocket estuaries but no delta estuaries. Not a great deal is known about what happens in pocket estuaries because they haven't been well studied. Emerging evidence suggests pocket estuaries are used quite a bit by juvenile, ocean-type salmon, particularly Chinook. During tidal flooding juvenile salmon gain access to many insects in the tidal channel, and once inside they gain insects from the upland riparian zone as well as the marsh vegetation. These insects are an important component of salmon diet.

Heatwole set out to compare the tidally-restricted Crescent Harbor marsh to several other pocket estuaries in Island County – Maylor's Point, Race Lagoon, Lake Hancock, Elger Bay and Cultus Bay. She collected data on both insects and vegetation. Heatwole wanted to determine whether restoration of tidal exchange at Crescent Harbor would recover some of the functions that had been lost over time.

In sampling for insects, Heatwole found, by far, the greatest insect density exists at Lake Hancock, which has the most tidal influence and greatest salinity of all the marshes. She found the greatest richness (diversity of insect types) at Crescent Harbor, which currently has the lowest salinity and fewest different types of vegetation. She concluded that a positive correlation exists between the duration of tidal flooding and the density of the insect population. The greater the tidal flooding, the greater the insect density, though salt marshes tend to offer less diversity in types of insects.

She predicted that when the Navy opens Crescent Harbor Marsh to full tidal influence, the greater tidal heights will result in an expansion of salt marsh vegetation and a doubling of insect density of the types that are favored by Chinook salmon fry. Since many plants cannot survive long periods of inundation by saltwater, fewer types of plants grow in healthy salt marshes. These marshes tend to be lower in insect diversity but higher in insect density.

## MRC Business Meeting

### Executive Director's Written Report (summary) – Wood:

**Restore America's Estuaries Conference** - Wood presented the MRC's Shore Stewards story to a great audience at RAE's *Second National Conference on Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration* in Seattle, Sept. 14. More than 800 scientists and habitat professionals attended RAE and our presentation reached several national NOAA leaders, Coastal America's director Virginia Tippie, and personnel teams from King County & Chesapeake Bay eager to borrow and implement the Shore Stewards model. Kathy Fletcher moderated the remarkable 90 minute discussion, after which the audience collected 125+ of our Community Report booklets. Now if we can just find the funding to make a replication model deliverable. The MRC also was visible in the poster showroom via a forage fish project poster designed and produced for us by Andrea Copping of UW SeaGrant. The final product will be redisplayed at the Fall Conference.

**Fall MRC conference:** Sasha from the Northwest Straits Commission home office advises that Island County registered a good turnout as always for the 10/29–30 gathering at The Skagit Resort. Friday night's speaker is **Dr. Julia Parrish** ([www.fish.washington.edu/research/birdfish/people.html](http://www.fish.washington.edu/research/birdfish/people.html)) who is fascinating on "Conservation & marine birds," and Saturday's session starts with coastal geologist **Jim Johannessen** discussing work he just finished on our Feeder Bluffs study.

### Director actions:

Meetings attended this month on behalf of the MRC include:

1. An important **forage fish project final report** session [10/5] with the whole team of partners -- the Salmon Board (SRFB), Straits Commission, WDFW biologists and data managers, all seven MRC project leads, the North Olympic Salmon Coalition and Friends of the San Juans. The participants summarized the findings and shared deliverables county-by-county. We discussed the planning and agency uses and deployment of the massive database generated. All 20+ in attendance agreed that the scope and final success of the three-year collaboration were unprecedented, and explored the major lessons learned here that may enable more regional work.

2. In late September the SRFB issued a request for **multiple-lead entity project proposals** to assess fish use in Puget Sound in response to the Washington Trout Island County Round Four application and four others seeking to undertake similar surveys. As with the forage fish precedent, the board wants to fund a regional, coordinated assessment that delivers data across Lead Entity boundaries and offers economies of scale. The SRFB staff hosted a meeting in Arlington with the WA Trout team, Eric Beamer of the Skagit Cooperative's 'pocket estuary' team, Russell Barsh (tribal biologist), Kurt Fresh (WDFW), Ann Schaeffer (Clallam MRC/WDFW), Kim Bredensteiner (WRIA 6 lead entity), Kit Rawson (Tulalip biologist). Kevin Ranker's team

Surfrider Foundation, San Juan MRC & Tulalip tribe recruited me to assist their participation. The MRC is actively endorsing the WA Trout proposal as well, which is wholly compatible. Proposals were submitted 10/8 and **we should discuss issuing an MRC support letter for the multi-LE regional effort.**

3. The MRC's executive committee met last week and concluded that a three-member **MRC science & grants subcommittee** (Phyllis Kind, Sayed El Sayed and Ian Jefferds) will shepherd proposals at the outset and use of deliverables/datasets; while each ongoing project or topic of interest will be designated an MRC liaison to assist the director's work, e.g., Dick Toft/Maylor's Marsh and Tom Campbell/Estuaries.

4. Meehan and Wood met last week with representatives of **Paladin Data**, a Poulsbo-based software developer seeking partners for a 'marine restoration projects' database product [**EKOSystem**] they intend to develop for web-based marine habitat mapping. This has great potential to be discussed further at length. On a related matter, I have drafted an "MRC Data License" that will eventually allow us to recoup at least our costs of production when third-parties request copies of our ever-more-popular assessment deliverables. I recommend negotiated fees where the user puts the data to use in the commercial sense, as a small percentage of the income they derive.

**Contracts:**

**Meehan** distributed the new county contract for my services (*Intertidal Consulting*), drafted to include the specific scope of work items recommended at the MRC retreat. Following tweaks from attorney review & BOCC approval, it shall become the law of the land soon.

The contract for spartina removal work by People for Puget Sound is signed, sealed and delivered.

The DNR contract for Maylor's Marsh needs MRC Toff's liaison talents to wrap.

Meehan and Pedersen are drafting a contract for Pedersen's tasks, replacing county employee status.

Shortly we will amend the Commission's annual MRC contract to effectuate 2005 funding without a delay until July, when all MRCs will apply for 2006-07 funding (two year awards), in amounts as are set by Congress.

**Grants:**

The reviews are underway for separate, pending MRC applications for **2005 Shore Stewards program** funding – one by the federal US Fish & Wildlife Service and a second by WA Department of Fish & Wildlife. The feds arranged a meeting Friday, 10/22 to discuss our proposal; and WDFW awards its grants in November.

The Hotel-Motel fund awards are announced in January.

Rex Porter requests MRC support for a "Freeland Basin Bacteria" study proposal. I will submit of letter of recommendation if the MRC wisely requests same.

As you know, grant funding has become severely restricted and under-supplied, requiring innovative strategies from the new subcommittee.

**Executive Director's Verbal Report**

WDFW Shore Stewards Grant. Wood announced the WDFW has approved our proposal for a volunteer cooperation program to be funded at about \$19,000. The timing is perfect because on Friday the Shore Stewards coordinator and Wood will travel to Port Townsend for a presentation to the US Fish and Wildlife Service on a major pending application for a turnkey replication model for Shore Stewards to export it to other communities.

Nov. 5 documentary film: The Troubled Waters of Puget Sound. This film will be shown as a benefit in the Front Room at Bayview Cash Store. Donations will be accepted at the door. This is an excellent film and will be introduced by Kathy Fletcher of People for Puget Sound.

Freeland Basin grant application. Sherman invited Rex Porter to comment on his request for a letter of support from the MRC for Island County Public Works' grant application for a Freeland Basin bacteria study. Hearing no objection, it was agreed the MRC would provide such a letter. Porter said he would work with Pedersen on it.

MRC letter of support for multiple lead-entity project proposals. Several organizations are pursuing fish-use assessments in Puget Sound across the watershed boundaries. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) would like to fund a regional, coordinated approach to deliver economies of scale.

**MOTION CARRIED: Motion by Kind, second by Meehan, carried unanimously: Wood will draft a letter of support on behalf of our MRC for this approach.**

Camano meeting: Meehan said he will check with County Commissioner, Bill Byrd, to see if we can hold an informational meeting about the MRC in conjunction with Byrd's regularly scheduled Camano Island Town Meeting from 7-9 pm, Thursday, Nov. 18. Bronson said he would encourage a good turnout of Beach Watchers.

Five-Year Plan: Sherman said we will postpone discussion of the Five-Year Plan until more time is available, but that Pedersen had assembled the conclusions of the MRC's September retreat into the outline of a five-year plan for the MRC.

### **County Lead's Report – Meehan**

Maylor's Marsh. Toft reported Dave Williams has asked for reassurance about our plans for the Maylor's Marsh project. He'd like a letter on MRC stationery addressing several concerns, stating that once he receives reassurance he is prepared to fully support the proposal. Meehan expressed worries that the delays are dragging on, making it very tough to secure permits and start the work within the available time window of seasons and tides. Wood said he will write the letter immediately. Wood is worried that if we don't move forward, we will lose Department of Natural Resources (DNR) funding for the project. Meehan said this is a small project but a great one, very well defined. Wood said he believes it is very much within Oak Harbor's interest for this project to be done.

Nov. 16 video program at Bayview. Nancy Waddell clarified that the Nov. 16 video download at Bayview is on how to involve multiple stakeholders in watershed projects, not as indicated in the previous MRC minutes to help landowners carry out environmentally-friendly projects. It's an interactive program to be held at 9 a.m.

Science, data and grant review subcommittee. Sherman reported that a new subcommittee is being formed. The members who have been appointed to it initially are Kind, El Sayed and Jefferds.

Executive director contract. **MOTION CARRIED. Motion by Bronson, second by Kind, carried unanimously, to approve the draft contract retaining Gary Wood as executive director through June of 2005.**

Feeder bluff study. Meehan shared several maps produced by Jim Johannessen as part of our feeder bluff study.

Paladin & Associates. Meehan said we will probably look into a joint project with a software firm, Paladin & Associates.

Jeff Tate alternate. Jeff Tate commented this has been an extraordinarily busy year for his department, and that because it is so difficult for him to attend MRC meetings he would like to have Joe Burcar represent him as an alternate when he is unable to be present. Burcar is shoreline planner and Meehan said his participation would be an tremendous asset to the committee.

### **Public input**

Oil-spill response. Nancy Waddell suggested we included something in our five-year plan encouraging greater citizen involvement in oil spill response. Jefferds commented that oil skimmers and other oil-spill response resources are on standby in Anacortes, ready to respond. Toft commented that the Navy has a full up-and-ready team at Oak Harbor as well, and they would also respond.

**Adjournment**. There being no further business, Sherman declared the meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.

## Coming Events

Nov. 3, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, MRC meeting at Heller Road Firehall in Oak Harbor.  
Nov. 17, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, MRC meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland.