



# Marine Resources

Committee

## March 16, 2005

Minutes

4:05 – 6:05 pm, Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland

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

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

### VISITORS:

**Kim Bredensteiner**, Coupeville, Island County Public Works.

**Rex Porter**, Coupeville, Whidbey Island Watershed Project Manager.

**Scott Pascoe**, Watershed Coordinator, Maxwellton Salmon Adventure.

**Jeanie McElwain**, Beach Watchers, Maxwellton Salmon Adventure.

**Karen Lennon**, Whidbey Island Conservation District.

**CALL TO ORDER:** 4:05 pm, Kind called the meeting to order. **QUORUM:** Declared, including Pedersen as alternate for Bronson. **AGENDA:** Adopted. **MINUTES** of 3-02-2005: Adopted, hearing no objections.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** Wood said he received a response from the NWSC to our letter of intent, which he'll discuss during his report.

### Summary of Decisions

**NWSC letter of intent** for FY 05, category C projects. In response to the NWSC's rejection of all six of our proposed projects, Meehan suggested we create a \$20,000 derelict gear removal project by dropping two, and reducing one, of the projects we had earlier proposed in our letter of intent for category C funding in fiscal year 05. The two to be dropped are a \$16,500 youth science project and a \$1,500 flatfish research project. He suggested we reduce our proposed shellfish project by \$2,000. We will spend \$2,000 on a feasibility study of traditional Olympia oyster sites in Island County with an eye to reintroduction and, if sufficient funds exist, an Olympia oyster restoration project. **Motion carried.**

**Distress about NWSC direction.** Strong distress was voiced by all in response to the NWSC's rejection of our proposed projects. Members urged Wood to make a renewed attempt to explain our position and urged Meehan and Kind to communicate strongly our disaffection to the NWSC and to the other MRCs.

## Freeland Water Quality Improvement Program

Jeanie McElwain

Rex Porter introduced Jeanie McElwain, who has prepared an education / outreach presentation about nonpoint pollution to be given to both professional groups and middle-school science students in the Coupeville and South Whidbey school districts. This is the public education piece of the Freeland Water Quality Improvement Program, which was funded by a Department of Ecology (DOE) Centennial Grant. Aside from the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC), the MRC is the first group to hear the presentation.

McElwain began her presentation by putting Whidbey Island into context as part of an inland sea on a water planet. Our human bodies are over 2/3rds water. Clean, cool water is essential those who live on the planet, in the air or under the water. Puget Sound is an estuary. Whidbey Island sits between the open waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the very sheltered waters of Whidbey Basin. The outside waters are fresh and energized. The inside waters do not exchange very well, have low oxygen and are prone to pollution. Located on the already-sheltered inside waters, Holmes Harbor is even further sheltered from exchange. At the head of the harbor is Freeland, which is slated to be a growth area. It's south Whidbey's commercial center, with high-density housing, a great deal of hardscaping and industry. All studies done in this area have concluded that water is an issue. Much of the material in McElwain's presentation came from a study by Herrera Environmental Consultants. They performed stormwater-runoff testing in four areas of Freeland Basin and found high levels of contaminants – fecal coliforms, nitrogen and suspended solids. To address this problem the county is taking three actions: 1) Construct new stormwater conveyances, 2) Reduce and treat contaminants and 3) Expand public participation. McElwain's presentation is part of the third action.

The county has replaced old, undersized pipes and catch basins with new and larger systems that use high-technology catch basins to remove some of the pollutants. One of the major pollutants these systems are designed to reduce is silt, which settles to the bottom of the catch basins, from which it may be removed before it reaches the shore. One of the most effective ways to reduce pollution is to address it at the source through such strategies as increasing our use of public transportation. Collecting pet waste and discarding it in the trash will help reduce fecal coliforms. Increased recycling, rather than discarding of items, will also make a huge contribution. Planting sustainable landscaping that requires relatively little water also will make a great difference.

## OLD BUSINESS

NWSC Letter of Intent. Wood reported the six projects we proposed to the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) for \$50,000 of Fiscal Year 05 category C funding were rejected by Ginny Broadhurst, who is doing the initial screening. She said they did not meet the NWSC's criteria for on-the-ground restoration projects and asked us to reconsider our letter of intent. Our proposed projects were:

1. Updating and revising the Beach Watcher booklet, Getting to the Water's Edge, tying it to the stewardship areas and Shore Stewards.
2. Interpretive signage for the stewardship areas, tied to the booklet and Shore Stewards.
3. Volunteer / outreach coordination in support of fish-use assessment studies.
4. Island Sentinels school curriculum outreach program related to marine science in collaboration with Maxwellton Salmon Adventure and Beach Watchers.
5. Community shellfish (oyster bed restoration) project.
6. Flatfish research.

Wood said the NWSC is looking for projects that effect a measurable impact on the habitat. He said we could probably find some ideas in the recommendations Jim Johannessen will soon give us based on the work he did. Another possibility is derelict gear mapping of the west side of Whidbey Island, although derelict gear has become more of an NWSC regional project. One problem with any restoration project is the enormous cost. In addition, the political hurdles are complex and we have repeatedly been blocked in our efforts to move forward with our best project proposals at Maylor's Marsh and Cama Beach.

Meehan commented we have built a foundation for conservation by identifying the resources in our waters and establishing Stewardship Areas. We are now positioned perfectly to effect conservation through large-scale public outreach and education, but suddenly the NWSC won't fund this effort.

Kind said she senses a shift in the NWSC toward more top-down management. This concern was raised at the last conference but not addressed. She thinks we should discuss two points tonight – whether to make changes to our proposed projects and whether to initiate a conversation with the other MRCs about the NWSC's direction.

Ironically, our proposal for a community shellfish project apparently falls short of the NWSC's requirements because we specified Pacific oysters and the NWSC prefers restoration of Olympias. We chose Pacific oysters for their long record of success and because they reach harvestable size in about a year. The public would see results from their investment of effort much faster than with the slower-growing Olympias and we believe this would greatly contribute to public enthusiasm and the spread of a stewardship ethic among shoreline residents.

Nevertheless, even though we would rather use Pacific oysters, Meehan suggested we attempt to carry out an Olympia oyster restoration project in Penn Cove. Wood suggested we add a derelict gear project on the west side of Whidbey.

**Motion by Meehan, second by Urstad, carried unanimously. Drop the youth science program. Take the \$16,500 from this project and invest it in derelict gear removal. Drop the flatfish research project. Take the \$1,500 we had intended to spend on this flatfish research and invest it in derelict gear to make an \$18,000 project. Reduce our shellfish project by \$2,000 and invest this in derelict gear to make it a \$20,000 project. Spend \$2,000 on a feasibility study of traditional Olympia oyster sites in Island County with an eye to reintroduction and, if sufficient funds exist, an Olympia oyster restoration project.**

Meehan noted that Karen Lennon of Whidbey Island Conservation District has suggested a geoduck restoration project. Lennon said the Manila clam also is worth consideration. She thinks there may be a way to keep everything we want in our proposal as long as our outreach is framed around reintroduction and our signage indicates this at some level. Meehan said he also believes the Getting to the Waters Edge publication could include a section on reintroducing oysters on one's own property.

Lennon pointed out the conservation district holds native plant sales. As an outreach project to waterfront owners, she suggested the MRC consider holding a geoduck sale tied to Shore Stewards, pointing out to the public that this is what it means to be a steward. She said the conservation district would love to partner with the MRC on this. Wood pointed out that Drayton Harbor by Bellingham is being restored by the use of shellfish as filter feeders to improve water quality.

Scott Pascoe commented that Maxwelton Salmon Adventure, too, is looking for a way to engage the property owners.

The discussion ended with Kind and Meehan both stating they feel there is a fundamental problem with the NWSC's system that still needs to be addressed. Both said they plan to write letters, and members strongly encouraged them to do so. All were in agreement.

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

NWSC fall conference. Kind announced the NWSC fall conference will again be held at Skagit Casino at Bow, Nov. 4-5.

Whidbey Institute Lyceum. Kind announced that our MRC will have a display at the April 26 lecture of the lyceum series, which will be held at Bayview Cash Store.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Kind declared the meeting adjourned at 6:05 pm.

## Coming Events

**April 6, Wednesday, 4-6 pm: MRC meeting at Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.**

**April 20, Wednesday, 4-6 pm: MRC meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland.**

**Nov. 4-5, Friday-Saturday: NWSC fall conference at Skagit Casino, Bow.**