



Marine Resources

Committee

April 6, 2005

Minutes

4:02 – 6:00 pm, Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor

www.islandcountymrc.org

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

VISITORS:

Kim Bredensteiner, Coupeville, Island County Public Works.

Rex Porter, Coupeville, Whidbey Island Watershed Project Manager.

Richard Turner, Lagoon Point.

CALL TO ORDER: 4:02 pm, Kind called the meeting to order. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted with the addition of Rich Turner's talk on Olympia oysters and a few remarks during public input by Kim Bredensteiner. **MINUTES** of 3-16-2005: Adopted, motion by Seitle, second by Urstad, no objections. **CORRESPONDENCE:** Wood said he had received a written response from the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) to our revised letter of intent for Category C projects.

Summary of Decisions

Subcommittees were established for each of the NWSC benchmarks, as follows:

Marine Life and Habitats -- **Campbell**, **Meehan**, **Urstad**, **Tate** (appointed by Kind) and **Kim Bredensteiner**. An invitation will be extended to **Jan Holmes** and **Mary Jo Adams** of Beach Watchers. This subcommittee currently has no chair.

Marine Water Quality -- **Weber**, **Bronson**, **Hillers** (appointed by Kind) and **Rex Porter**. Kind will ask Hillers to chair the subcommittee; he was not in attendance today. An invitation also will be extended to **Janet Hall** of Waste Wise Volunteers to serve on this subcommittee.

Science -- **El Sayed**, **Kind**, **Jefferds**, **Meehan**, **Bredensteiner**.

Education and Outreach -- **Weber** is added to this sub-committee, which also consists of **Pedersen** (chair), **Urstad**, **Nancy Waddell** and **Scott Chase**.

Spring retreat Wednesday, May 4. The MRC will hold a spring retreat Wednesday, May 4, probably at the Sierra Clubhouse at Partridge Point.

Growing Oysters from Private Docks

Richard Turner

Wood introduced Richard Turner, whom he met a few weeks ago at Sound Waters. Turner is a Whidbey Island resident who has been growing oysters in plastic trays suspended from private docks. Wood invited him to speak since we are considering a shellfish gardening project in FY 2005 involving Olympia oysters.

Turner introduced himself as a former Boeing employee and Naval Reservist who now lives at Lagoon Point and runs a garden and yard service. Oyster growing is his hobby. In 2002 he got to thinking about the possibility of raising oysters from private docks and started doing so, using recycled garden trays.

Turner said he started in May, 2002, with Pacific oysters, which are common and fast-growing. They grew sufficiently fast that he could have harvested some in nine months. Then he became aware of the slower-growing, native Olympia oysters and started growing them. These oysters are smaller and very sensitive environmentally. They were pretty much wiped out years ago by the pulp mills in Puget Sound. Sawdust is detrimental to all shellfish and particularly to Olympias.

Turner's proposal is to take spat on shell and pour water over it containing larval oysters. Then they are set out on trays in the water column, about two feet underwater, where nutrients are abundant and they can grow quickly. He said one of the side benefits of this method of raising oysters is that other marine creatures love nesting in and among the oysters – scallops, mussels and various fish. This activity allows waterfront owners to become involved in a clean water project and habitat enhancement through filtration, encouraging people to take care of their water environment.

He said this concept of growing oysters in trays lends itself to the little-used shore side of floating docks, since boats generally approach the deeper-water side. Little labor is required – the oysters can largely be neglected for months at a time. His system uses recycled materials (plastic trays and discarded rope) that would otherwise occupy space in landfills. The oysters fix excess nitrogen and other nutrients in the environment. The use of private docks, as opposed to beach land, eliminates predation from Dungeness and red rock crabs, and starfish, and allows easy access at all times.

Turner said he obtained his oyster spat from the Lummi Indian Tribe, which raises them for the Olympia Oyster Restoration Fund. They have a hatchery in Bellingham. Taylor Shellfish also holds a sale, and a couple other companies would do it for a big enough order.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S WRITTEN REPORT -- Wood

Puget Sound/Georgia Basin Research Conference

This was the most relevant conference I have attended re. our area of interest. Island County's MRC was represented in the poster session (forage fish project), and by my presentation on Shore Stewards for the Education and Outreach panel session. Jim Johannessen also gave a comprehensive report on our coastal geology project, which we will feature at a meeting soon. Bob Simmons, the WSU liaison to Ecology for one of our pending Shore Stewards grants, attended my session and was very generous and supportive with his comments afterwards. The WSU Beach Watcher poster on their intertidal monitoring project was also a hit. Gov. Gregoire gave a stem-winder of a luncheon talk, and many good contacts were initiated. One message was clear: Island County MRC is well known for our many efforts, and highly regarded. Positive reinforcement is very dear, and y'all can be proud.

FY 2005 NWSC FUNDING

As revised, our Letter of Intent for category 'C' projects was given the green light (see attached letter from Ginny Broadhurst), with useful suggestions and retention of our Booklet, Signage and Shellfish projects, together with the Derelict Gear component. Snohomish is also doing Gear recovery, so we'll be able to team up for cost-savings. We need to discuss allocation of the \$40,000 category 'B' and Admin funds so I can finish the final proposal.

SHORE STEWARDS expansion

April and May will feature the long-awaited, full bells & whistles roll out of Shore Stewards on Whidbey. We need a host of new members to satisfy the grants and I am actively seeking MRC support from members. Know a shoreline property owner we can sign up? A farmer? Business? Time to use those networks! I am preparing a major newspaper piece to herald the event, and we want to deploy at the Water Festival big time. I am also planning on direct contact with the marinas, ports, Nichols, the Reserve, etc. Thank you Ian for signing up our first AquaBiz membership.

Grants summary

South Whidbey Rotary declined our signage funding request for Clinton Beach Park; and the Fund for the Northwest declined to request a full proposal. On the bright side, the Puget Sound Action Team selected our Shore Stewards proposal (for an Ecology grant, via WSU and the Direct Implementation Fund -DIF) to PARTNER with, committing \$3,000 up front. This will not hurt our chances for funding, hopefully.

During my Seattle week I also attended a meeting with Jim Fox, SRFB staff, and sponsors of the multi-lead entity fish-seining projects that include Whidbey. The Board will decide their fate April 14th, and preliminary signs are improved for funding. This ties in with the WA Trout work.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT -- Wood

Wood said Jim Johannessen delivered a remarkable report at the Georgia Basin Conference on our feeder bluff project. Wood said he looks forward to scheduling Johannessen to speak to our MRC as soon as he completes his final written report to us. Johannessen has identified a long list of potential conservation and restoration sites that puts us way ahead of other MRCs.

NWSC Letter of Intent. Wood said spoke with several NWSC board members at the Georgia Basin Conference and they reacted thoughtfully to our concerns about the A,B,C format and the disapproval of our original set of projects. He said the current thinking seems to be that the format is too rigid and should be modified to be more sensitive to the differences among the MRCs. Wood said the NWSC responded favorably to our revised letter of intent and accepted our list of projects, with some comments and tweaks. **Shellfish.** Wood said we can include Pacific oysters in our shellfish project, in part because Whatcom County has set a precedent with their Manila clam project. We can go ahead with a community shellfish garden using Pacific oysters but the NWSC would like us to include some Olympias also. Wood said he thinks Richard Turner's proposal ties in nicely with Shore Stewards and that we could design the shellfish project to have several components. **Derelict gear removal.** Wood said we may be lucky on this project because Snohomish County also is doing it and we can achieve some cost savings by sharing the dive team, barge and side-scan sonar mapping with them. He said it also appears additional money may be available because the Congressional budget included \$5 million for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for marine debris removal. The project director heard about the NWSC's derelict gear recovery program and was extremely impressed, and may allocate some money to it. **Signage and Water's Edge Book.** NWSC approved our signage proposal, asking us to target our signage at specific projects we've completed and to include a monitoring component in these projects if possible. Kind pointed out we can monitor the booklet's impact by the number of copies we sell.

Shore Stewards rollout on Whidbey. Wood is launching an intensive sign-up effort for Shore Stewards in April and May, partly in support of grant applications currently in progress. He is preparing an article featuring Kelly and Susie Williams on south Whidbey and Dave and Patty Cohick on north Whidbey as model shoreline citizens for the program. Wood will also begin personal recruiting at organizations such as Nichols Brothers, the marinas and ports. He said the Shore Stewards booklet currently is being updated by Camano Beach Watchers and that the new, shortened application for Shore Stewards membership has given a huge boost to on-the-spot sign-ups.

COUNTY LEAD'S REPORT -- Meehan

Getting to Water's Edge booklet. Meehan said Sarah Schmidt will be working with Pedersen on this as soon as her contract is finalized.

Estuary data collection work. Meehan invited Bredensteiner to report on the Beach Watchers' seining effort in Island County estuaries, under the direction of Kurt Fresh. Bredensteiner said she could report on Camano Island's Elger Bay. Recent samples taken outside the spit at Elger Bay found large numbers of salmon fry, primarily chums but also some Chinook and pinks, some so small they still had the egg sacks attached. The speculation is that they were carried by the current from the Stillaguamish River mouth. Since February, sampling has been under way at Harrington Lagoon, Elger Bay and more recently Race Lagoon. This collection program needs to continue over a period of many years and he is hoping we can keep our volunteers involved. Meehan said our volunteers have done such a good job the NOAA people are nearly ready to turn the project over to them.

Invoices from Wood and Pedersen. Meehan said he'd like to have the Executive Committee review the invoices from Wood and Pedersen so they will become more involved.

CHAIR'S REPORT -- Kind

Science Committee. Kind said the Science Committee will meet tomorrow and try to give Wood some help on where we want to go with the projects itemized in the letter of intent.

Regional projects. We also need to resolve how we want to use our \$10,000 share of NWSC regional project funds. The NWSC has offered three choices -- allocating it to eelgrass surveys, shellfish restoration or the Bay's Blueprint. She said at the last NWSC meeting these three choices came down as marching orders, which did not set well with the Clallam representative nor with Kind. Meehan and Jefferds both said they feel this top-down approach takes away the power of the MRC. Wood said the NWSC's intent had been to unite the MRCs around several larger regional projects, rather than have this money dispersed over many different small projects. In hindsight, they now realize that when they developed the list of regional projects, they did not include any of the recommendations submitted by Island County, which is why this appears so top down. Kind said if the NWSC wants to propose a list of regional projects they should frame them as recommendations rather than absolutes. Campbell said hopes one of the benefits to come out of this is that MRCs will get together on projects. Wood said historically it's been very difficult to get MRCs to work together.

A,B,C formula. Kind said she'd like to see our MRC develop a proposal for an allocation formula to replace the A,B,C system, which now appears to have outlived its usefulness. The A,B,C system was developed in part because, at the time, some MRCs were not initiating any projects. Wood said only two counties originally had staff for their MRCs, other than county employees for whom the MRC was an extra duty. The idea of creating a B category was to make funding available to hire staff. With the other money, the C category, the NWSC wanted actual restoration, as opposed to just studying. Currently, all the MRCs have staff.

Lyceum series. Kind said she and Campbell attended last night's Lyceum and the speaker made the point convincingly that exotic species are not always bad for the environment and native species are not always good for other native species.

PUBLIC INPUT

Salmon Recovery Funding Board round 6. Bredensteiner said the schedule for the next round of SRFB funding will be set at the board's April 14-15 meeting, and it appears likely the WRIA 6 deadline for letters of intent will be May 9. Meehan asked what types of projects the SRFB is seeking and Bredensteiner said protection is at the top of the list.

Salmon Recovery Plan. Bredensteiner explained that the new draft salmon recovery plan steers away from listing specific sites, instead focusing more broadly on geographic priority areas. The highest priority areas are those within about five miles of the mouths of the Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish rivers. She said protection is at the top of the list with the Salmon Technical Advisory Group (TAG) right now. The plan highlights ecosystem processes, especially habitat forming processes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Benchmark subcommittees. Subcommittees were appointed and staffed as indicated on page 1.

Spring retreat. A date of Wednesday, May 6, was set for an MRC spring retreat.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Coming Events

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.