



Marine Resources

Committee

September 21, 2005

Minutes

4:00 – 5:50 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland

www.islandcountymrc.org

PRESENT: Chair Phyllis Kind, Hi Bronson, Sayed El-Sayed, Joe Hillers, Jeff Tate, Dick Toft, Ken Urstad, Benye Weber, Executive Director Gary Wood, Admin. Ass't. Dan Pedersen. **ALTERNATES:** None. **ABSENT:** Tom Campbell, Ian Jefferds, Don Meehan, Rolf Seitle. **VISITORS:** Jeff June, Natural Resources Consultants (speaker); Nancy Waddell, Maxwelton Salmon Adventure (MSA); Scott Pascoe, MSA; Kim Bredensteiner, Coupeville, Island County Salmon Recovery Program; Linda Lyshall, Puget Sound Action Team.

CALL TO ORDER: 4:00 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted with addition of a report by Joe Hillers. **MINUTES** of 9-7-2005: Adopted by consensus, no objections. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

Summary of Decisions

Cancelled: MRC meetings of Nov. 2 and Dec. 21. By consensus the MRC cancelled the scheduled meetings of Nov. 2 and Dec. 21. The Nov. 2 meeting would have fallen two days before the NWSC fall training conference in Bow and the Dec. 21 meeting would have fallen during Christmas week.

Snagged gillnet at Keystone. The MRC asked Jeff June to inform us when he plans to recover a snagged gillnet on the old wharf at Keystone so we can publicize the work locally.

SPEAKER

Jeff June, Natural Resources Consultants, Seattle

Wood introduced Jeff June, who was awarded the original derelict gear removal pilot project in 2002. In 2001, Wood wrote a draft proposal for a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant to remove derelict gear under the Community-Based Restoration Program. Many experts questioned the point of this, saying there was little derelict gear in Puget Sound. The state had earlier appropriated \$400,000 to start a removal project but had run out of money and was worried about liability issues. The initial grant for June's work was \$70,000 and much to everyone's surprise, there was a lot of derelict gear. A major breakthrough came in 2001 when Tom Cowan of the NWSC and others convinced the legislature to change state law to remove the penalties for reporting lost gear. The old law had given commercial fishermen a huge disincentive to report lost gear.

June is a marine biologist, a graduate of the University of Washington, who worked for NOAA for about eight years in the Bering Sea doing groundfish work. He then joined a group of retired NOAA people to form Natural Resources Consultants. June said he understands commercial fishing, having studied it all his life, and recognizes that gear does get lost accidentally – it is terribly expensive and is not lost intentionally. The NWSC had some innovative leaders who identified this as a problem. Most were commercial fishermen who said they knew gear was being lost and was still out there; they knew it was a problem that needed to be addressed.

The first step in the pilot project was to look at state agencies and try to identify which one might have responsibility for derelict gear. Among these were *Department of Natural Resources* that manages

state aquatic tidelands; the *Department of Fish & Wildlife* that manages the fisheries; *National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration* that manages the international and offshore fisheries, and *Department of Ecology* that watches pollution in Puget Sound. As it turned out, none of these agencies took responsibility for derelict gear. WDFW does not have trained divers for derelict gear removal. In 2001, several of the NWSC commission members worked with Senator Bob Oake to pass Senate Bill 6313 giving joint responsibility to Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources. June's first step was to organize a group of experts to come up with a set of guidelines and protocols for safe removal. He worked with the state insurance commissioner, OSHA and others to write the protocols, and contracted with a commercial salvage company to test them. Their two main objectives were to assure safety of the workers and respect for the environment.

June shared with the MRC an 18-minute video about the derelict gear project produced by the NWSC. One of the benefits of the project is that it greatly streamlines a previously complex permitting process. June said it costs about \$3,000 - \$4,000 a day to operate the boat, pay the divers, have biologists on board, retrieve derelict gear and collect data. The law requires them to attempt to identify the owner of lost gear and return it if possible. About 130 crab pots have been returned to their owners. For safety reasons no scuba gear is used – the divers have an unlimited supply of air delivered by a surface line. For this reason they can work only to a depth of about 105 feet, which is enough to reach most of the known derelict gear. However, quite a few crab pots are being found deeper and an experiment is planned this fall to use a remotely-operated vehicle to go deeper and retrieve those pots. Generally, nets are found in places where a pinnacle, reef or other obstruction on the sea-floor catches them, and in some cases multiple nets are overlaid on these obstructions over the decades. The cost of an 1,800-foot gillnet typically runs \$3,000 to \$5,000, so it is a terrible loss to the fisherman.

Statistics since October 2002

Side-scan sonar surveys completed: 13
 Days of survey effort: 41
 Nautical square miles surveyed: 25
 Area surveyed: Sites from Canadian border to Vashon Island
 Derelict crab pots captured in surveys: 3,579
 Derelict nets captured in surveys: 12
 Removal projects completed: 17
 Operation time: 107 days
 Derelict nets removed: 300 gillnets, 2 purse seine nets, 1 aquaculture net
 Weight of nets removed: 50,000 pounds
 Surface area of gillnets removed: 83 acres
 Seabed acres covered: 60 acres
 Derelict crab pots recovered: 818
 Split between commercial and recreational pots: about 50/50
 Live crab released: 1,260

June said the Port of Seattle estimates it costs about \$1 million an acre to create intertidal marine habitat mitigation areas, so this 60 acres represents about \$60 million. The derelict gillnets contained 1,186 animals including 4 dead marine mammals, 91 dead seabirds and 350 dead fish and 740 dead birds. The project is now conducting diver training for tribal and Navy divers. In addition, the new project includes an export component to reach other parts of the U.S. such as Chesapeake Bay, Alaska, California and the Florida Keys. June said he believes we've only just scratched the surface of what's there, having looked at only 5% of the fishing grounds. Asked if he could make a recommendation on the best way to go forward, he said he thinks the highest priority is to look at known fishing areas where gear is most likely to be found.

June said he recently received reports from two separate diving parties that a gillnet has become snagged on two pilings on the old wharf at Keystone. He said a removal operation probably will occur in the next two or three weeks. This is a high priority because it's in an area where it endangers divers. Kind asked him to let the MRC know when the removal will take place so we can publicize it.

SPEAKER

Jeff Tate, Update on Island County Critical Areas Ordinance process

Tate explained that the state requires each county to update its Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) every seven years. This is a set of regulations to protect the environment, primarily in response to development. We are required to update our CAO by Dec. 1 – originally of 2005, but it was extended to 2006. We expect to complete our process early in 2006.

The CAO is concerned with five types of areas:

- Aquifer recharge areas
- Frequently flooded areas
- Geologically hazardous areas
- Agricultural best management practices
- Wetlands and fish & wildlife habitat conservation areas

Island County is tackling this process task-by-task, and has completed the first two. The remaining three are in process. Of these, the final two are the more controversial ones – agricultural best management practices and wetlands and fish & wildlife habitat conservation areas. The Planning and Community Development Department is responsible to come up with a recommendation for the Planning Commission, based on a review of state law, court cases, best available science, literature and permits issued in the last seven years. The Planning Commission is the core public venue. They hold the public hearings, hear testimony and make a recommendation to the county commissioners. The commissioners may conduct public hearings of their own if they wish, but more often than not they accept the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Wood asked what was the smallest unit of area the CAO might address, keeping in mind the data the MRC has collected on eelgrass beds and forage fish, for example. Tate said the fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas are probably the most difficult part of the CAO, but that the MRC's data absolutely would be considered as part of the body of information the Planning Commission is assessing. Accurate maps are extremely valuable to the planning and permitting process, Tate said, because they reduce the potential for customer service conflicts. Tate said for the wetlands review they've hired a professor from the University of Oregon who is helping lead the county's scientific review. He expects the CAO process to be complete in the early part of 2006. Tate says the county is using two peer review groups to look at its work on the CAO before it goes public. One is a group of outside consultants hired by the county. A second group consists of state agencies. In response to a question, Tate said the Planning Commission consists of nine members, three of whom are appointed by each of the county commissioners from their district. Of the nine, two go back to 1998 when the first Growth Management Act round was completed. Tate said their expertise is broad.

ACTION GRANT PROJECT REPORT -- Hillers

Water quality. Hillers reported the Beach Watchers who will be operating our water quality monitoring equipment recently tested it off Ebey's Landing, transmitting data to the computer at his house, which is on the hill near Sunnyside Cemetery. The buoy continuously measures conductivity, PH, water temperature and dissolved oxygen and the interval between reports can be specified to be very frequent, such as every minute. This is a wireless system with a range of more than a mile. Hillers characterized it as "portable but *not easily* portable." The buoy is large, requiring at least four or five feet of water to be functional. "It's a big piece of equipment" and has a strobe light on it. Hillers said he believes initial deployment will be somewhere in Penn Cove but the exact location has not been determined.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

To save time, Kind suggested skipping today's reports from the chair, county lead and executive director.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Maxwelton Salmon Adventure restoration projects. Scott Pascoe announced that Maxwelton Salmon Adventure currently is working on three creek-restoration projects under way every Saturday through October, and is soliciting volunteers. "This is a pretty intensive effort," he said, to complete riparian

plantings on about 600 lineal feet. MSA will provide all the equipment. For information or to volunteer, call 360-579-1272 or e-mail info@salmonadventure.org.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – none.

NEW BUSINESS

Two meetings cancelled. By consensus the group canceled the regularly scheduled MRC meetings of Nov. 2 and Dec. 21, since the Nov. 2 meeting falls just before the NWSC fall training conference and the Dec. 21 meeting falls during Christmas week.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Kind declared the meeting adjourned at 5:50 pm.

Coming Events

- Oct. 5**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at **Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.**
- Oct. 19**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at **Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland.**
Speaker: Jim Johannessen, Coastal Geologic Services.
- Nov. 2**, **Canceled**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at **Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.**
- Nov. 4-5**, Friday-Saturday: **NWSC** fall training conference at **Skagit Casino, Bow, Wash.**
- Nov. 16**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at Trinity Lutheran Church.
Speaker: Fred Goetz, fish biologist, US Army Corps of Engineers, on tracking bull trout with sounding devices and hydrophones.
- Dec. 7**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at Heller Road Firehall, Oak Harbor.
- Dec. 21**, **Canceled**, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, **MRC** meets at Trinity Lutheran Church, **Freeland.**