



Marine Resources

Minutes

January 18, 2006

4:06 – 6:00 pm, Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland

www.islandcountymrc.org

PRESENT: Chair **Phyllis Kind**, **Hi Bronson**, **Tom Campbell**, **Joe Hillers**, **Ian Jefferds**, **Don Meehan**, Admin. Ass't. **Dan Pedersen**. **ALTERNATES:** Kim Bredensteiner for Weber, Pedersen for Toft. **ABSENT:** **Rolf Seittle**, **Jeff Tate**, **Dick Toft**, **Ken Urstad**, **Benye Weber**, Executive Director **Gary Wood**.

VISITORS: **Susan Berta**, The Orca Network (speaker); **Kim Bredensteiner**, Coupeville, Salmon Recovery Coordinator, Island County; **Bill** and **Karen Crochotti**, Freeland; **Bonnie McKee**, Freeland, Bush Point Wharf B&B; **Debbie Tasoff**, **Megan Smith**, **Connor Tasoff**, Coupeville, attending for History Day; **Marty Behr**, Freeland.

CALL TO ORDER: 4:06 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared, with Bredensteiner as alternate for Weber and Pedersen as alternate for Toft. **AGENDA:** Adopted, with minor additions. **MINUTES** of 1-4-2006: Adopted. Motion by Bronson, second by Jefferds, no objections. **CORRESPONDENCE:** **San Juan County Marine Stewardship Area Celebration, Jan. 28.** Meehan read a letter from San Juan County MRC inviting us to this event, to which they have also invited the Governor, Sen. Maria Cantwell, Joe Gaydos of Sea-Doc Society and other distinguished guests. **Letter to Nan El-Sayed.** Pedersen circulated a copy of a letter he had sent to Nan El-Sayed, passing along our reminiscences of Sayed from the Jan. 4 meeting. **Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Aquatic Reserves Program.** Pedersen also shared a letter from David Palazzi of the DNR inviting us to comment as part of a DNR process to identify and prioritize 10 – 15 additional sites for aquatic reserves. Jefferds will follow-up.

Summary of Decisions

MRC vacancies. Pedersen will prepare a press release inviting persons with a background in commercial fishing or science to contact the MRC about serving on the board. Meehan would like to give the county commissioners a list of several names from which to choose.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Publicizing Fort Casey Underwater State Park. Meehan said he is going to explore showing Jim Ramaglia's CD presentation Feb. 4 in the entry area to Sound Waters University at Coupeville Middle School. As an alternative he might make it available for viewing during the lunch hour.

Candidates to fill MRC vacancies. Members have mentioned several names as candidates to fill our science and commercial fishing slots -- **Vin Waldron**, Oak Harbor, (Jefferds), longtime commercial fisherman and owner of Seabolt's Smokehouse and Seafood Deli; **Rodger Bergquist**, Langley, (Pedersen), a well-known, long-time South Whidbey resident who fishes commercially in Alaska, recommended by Dave Anderson; **Johnny Palka**, Freeland (Kind), retired University of Washington professor who ran environmental programs. Meehan recommended we submit a list of several candidates to the county commissioners so they may have the opportunity to choose. He also emphasized each candidate should talk with either Kind or himself to make sure they understand the level of commitment this appointment represents, and that they are willing to attend our meetings and do some work. Each candidate also should address a letter to the Board of Island County Commissioners, expressing interest

and asking to be appointed. Jefferds suggested we issue a press release letting the public know we are looking for individuals willing to serve. Pedersen will prepare a release after conferring with Meehan.

Stewardship area brochures. Meehan distributed draft copies of two stewardship area brochures and invited the members to provide feedback to him and Pedersen. After revisions are made, we will print these brochures for distribution as needed. If larger quantities are needed, we will print them commercially.

NEW BUSINESS

Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) grants. Bredensteiner reported the SRFB has funded four grants for Island County projects -- the Livingston Bay Acquisition (Whidbey-Camano Land Trust), Skagit Bay Nearshore Assessment (Skagit Systems Cooperative, partnering with Shore Stewards), Ala Spit Protection Assessment (Island County Public Works), and West Side Whidbey Fish Use Assessment (Washington Trout). Altogether this represents about \$850,000 for Island County projects. Meehan said he believes we agreed to a \$10,000 match for the Skagit Bay project and that this continues to strengthen our Shore Stewards work.

Draft Water Quality Monitoring Plan. Bredensteiner shared a hardcopy draft of the newly-released Water Quality Monitoring Plan created by the Island County Planning Department and its consultants. This plan may be viewed at: <http://www.islandcounty.net/health/Envh/WRAC/WRAC%20Main.htm> They are proposing to sample nonpoint pollution on 24 watersheds for five years. No estuarine sampling is included.

Water quality buoy. Jefferds reported he was going to set the water quality buoy last Thursday but ran into a permit delay with the Coast Guard. He said he offered to amend his existing application but the Coast Guard wants a new one. Meehan said he has an application ready to go, if Jefferds will supply the latitude/longitude.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

County Lead -- Meehan

Sound Waters University. Meehan said registration for this year's Sound Waters University, Feb. 4, now stands at 502. It's "super full," he said, but a video feed will be available to the Music Room for those who can't fit into the auditorium for the keynote speech.

Chair -- Kind

Northwest Straits Commission retreat. Kind said she spent the last couple days at the NWSC retreat. We will receive increased funding next year for staffing and projects, and should be doing some thinking about this. About \$30,000 will be available for a regional project, such as oil-spill training, and there will be a \$90,000 piece for an ecosystem-wide project that will be considered by the Science Committee of the NWSC.

SPEAKER

Protecting the Southern Resident Orcas

Susan Berta, The Orca Network

Berta explained The Orca Network engages in four main activities: 1) Whale-sighting network, 2) Educational programs and materials, 3) Marine mammal stranding program, and 4) the "Free Lolita" campaign. Lolita is the only surviving Southern Resident of 45 that were captured in the 1970s. Another 13 were killed during the captures. It appears that about 1/3rd to 1/2 of the Southern Residents were taken at that time, and the population did not recover until 1993. The capture era substantially reduced the population and also the gene pool, skewing the population and removing many whales in their best reproductive years.

The stranding network engages in volunteer training and urges the public not to remove baby sea lions from the beach. They also investigate incidents such as the one a few years ago when injured mammals were found after the USS Shoup activated its sonar in the San Juans, and they attempt to help mammals that become entangled in derelict fishing gear.

The whale-signing network grew from a small, informal e-mail list of friends who would inform one-another of whale sightings. It has become a list of nearly 1,500 including many researchers, government agencies, military people, teachers, students and others interested in keeping track of whale locations. Whale sightings have become increasingly important to the work of assessing trends in whale deaths and researching the possible causes. These causes include declining salmon runs, PCBs and toxic pollution, and the effects of a rapidly increasing human population, including increased marine traffic and noise.

Goals of the sighting network are to increase the data gathered on Puget Sound orcas and gray whales, increase knowledge and awareness of issues, increase collaboration and cooperation in efforts to clean up Puget Sound, restore salmon runs and preserve threatened populations. But the main reason for starting it was to increase opportunities for shore-based whale watching, including sites on Whidbey such as Langley and Bush Point.

Berta said orcas are found worldwide and each population has its own dialect and unique habits. In the Pacific Northwest the orcas belong to two resident groups that eat salmon (the Southern and Northern residents). In addition, there are transients that eat other marine mammals, and offshore orcas that are believed to eat salmon but are not well known. Transients travel in smaller, quieter groups more suited to sneaking up on larger prey. The residents travel in larger groups.

PCB levels in Northern Resident whales run about 46 parts per million; the Southern Resident males have about 146, and the transients tested have about 250. PCBs are dumped into the water and enter the food chain, and in some cases are released into the atmosphere. The new threat is fire-retardant PBDEs used in furniture and computers. It is believed transients have higher levels of toxins because they feed higher on the food chain, on sea lions and other mammals that have accumulated PCBs in their fat cells over a period of time, whereas the resident orcas feed on salmon that live a shorter time and do not store as many PCBs. Female orcas generally have fewer PCBs than males because they off-load fat cells when they nurse their first calf. The orca gene pool is limited, but they generally breed with those furthest from them within their community. Berta said the *greatest threat to Southern Resident orcas appears to be salmon depletion*. Other recovery actions that would help the orcas include:

- Minimize contamination of Southern Resident habitat and prey
- Minimize vessel disturbance
- Minimize risk of oil spills
- Monitor and minimize risk of infectious diseases
- Minimize impacts of sound sources
- Develop public education and outreach
- Respond and investigate reports of orcas that are in trouble.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Kind declared the meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.

Coming Events

- Feb. 4,** Saturday, **Sound Waters University**, Coupeville Middle School, speaker Julia Parrish.
Feb. 15, Wednesday, 4-6 pm, MRC meets at Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland.