



Marine Resources

Minutes

February 21, 2007

4:00 – 5:55 pm, Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland

www.islandcountymrc.org

PRESENT: Chair **Dick Toft**, **Tom Campbell**, **Joe Hillers**, **Phyllis Kind**, **Don Meehan**, **Rolf Seitle**, **Ken Urstad**, **Benye Weber**, Executive Director **Rex Porter**, Communications Mgr. **Dan Pedersen**. **ALTERNATES:** None.
ABSENT: **Hi Bronson**, **Ian Jefferds**, **Johnny Palka**, **Jeff Tate**. **VISITORS:** **Eric Beamer (speaker)**, LaConner, Skagit River Systems Cooperative; **Bob Buck**, Beach Watchers; **Sarah Schmidt**, Coupeville, Beach Watchers; **Jackie and Graham Johnson**, Beach Watchers; **Jan Smith**, Island County Planning Department; **Clarence and Michelle Hein**, Beach Watchers; **John Hastings**; **Gale Saran**, South Whidbey Record; **Nancy Waddell**, Whidbey Watershed Stewards; **Kim Bredensteiner**, Salmon Recovery Program, Coupeville. **CALL TO ORDER:** 4:00 pm.
QUORUM: Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted. **MINUTES** of 2-7-2007: Adopted. Motion by Urstad, second by Seitle, no objections. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

Juvenile salmon-use data reports. In response to an inquiry from the MRC, Eric Beamer suggested the MRC consider a project to fund the creation of a landscape-scale report on how juvenile salmon use the Island County shoreline. Such a report would synthesize the data collected by several organizations and projects including Skagit River Systems Cooperative, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and Washington Trout. Cost would be about \$20,000.

NWSC Action Grant request for proposal. **The Executive Committee** will meet March 5 with Sasha Horst of NWSC to discuss our current work plan and ideas for the next NWSC grant cycle.

Strategic planning session. **Meehan** will check with Duane Fagergren to see whether he could facilitate an MRC strategic planning session from 3-6 pm, Wednesday, March 21, in Coupeville.

Signage presentation to Port of Coupeville. **Toft** and **Pedersen** will present the MRC's proposal for Coupeville Wharf signage at the Port of Coupeville's March 14 meeting.

Meeting-day change survey. **Toft** will survey the members by e-mail about changing the MRC's regular meeting schedule to either Tuesdays or Thursdays so we could use the commissioners' hearing room in Coupeville.

SPEAKER

Eric Beamer

Research Director, Skagit River Systems Cooperative (SRSC)

Kim Bredensteiner introduced Beamer, who has been with SRSC for 20 years. For the last 10 years he has focused on the estuary system of the Skagit River. His work has shown that the pocket estuaries and small coastal lagoons of Skagit Bay, Port Susan and Saratoga Passage are particularly important for juvenile salmon.

Beamer explained he would review for the MRC the research under way on how juvenile salmon use the Island County shore – what is being done, who is doing it, and what kind of reporting is being done. He prefaced this by saying that, in general, we know a lot about fish use of the nearshore landscape, but that there are a ton of details to understand and many are site-specific. Among the variables are:

- Species
- Time of year
- Size of fish
- Habitat type
- Specific part of the habitat
- Size of the salmon population in a particular year

He said these details make it complicated for salmon recovery managers such as Bredensteiner to determine specifically what they should protect and restore if they want to help salmon.

Human activity changes the shoreline over time, Beamer said, “and the inference is that if we change enough of it, it’s not good for the fish.” This is what the salmon recovery plans are about – to determine what can be protected or changed back. Development takes the form of roads, drainage ditches, homes, filling of marshland and armoring of the shoreline. This can change the salinity of a coastal lagoon, reduce the amount of fresh-water flushing, reduce the size of a lagoon, alter the dynamics of sediment transport, change the type of plant life, and perhaps even change a lagoon into a cove.

Beamer described four types of nets used in seining juvenile fish, depending on the specific area within an estuary or nearshore where a survey is being conducted. These are the Fyke trap (cone) for use in a narrow channel, the small-net beach seine, large-net beach seine and tow net. The small-net beach seine is suitable for shallow nearshore areas and this is what the Beach Watchers and MRC are using at Harrington and Race lagoons, Elger Bay and Ala Spit. It is often necessary to use all four types of nets to develop a complete picture of what fish are doing in a particular shoreline segment or estuary.

Beamer said juvenile fish are found virtually everywhere throughout Whidbey Basin and he believes scientists often face an unfair burden of proof. Conventional thinking assumes salmon are absent from a particular location unless they are found. He believes it’s more accurate to assume they present everywhere and we will find them if we look in the right way, enough times, at the right time. “Generally, almost everywhere we’ve looked we’ve found salmon.” Salmonids of one type or another are present along the shoreline almost year-round. Generally, smaller fish use the shallower and more protected habitats early in the year and larger fish use the deeper areas when they warm later in the year. But from one year to another, the number of fish and the timing of their presence can vary greatly.

After determining that juvenile fish from the Skagit were using nearby pocket estuaries in the Whidbey Basin, Beamer said biologists wanted to know whether this was also true of sites further away. This led in 2004 to a broader study of Whidbey Basin pocket estuaries and nearshore locations with the help of the Northwest Straits Commission. The assumption is that the further one gets from the source of the fish, the fewer there will be. This is based on the idea of connectivity within the landscape – on how easy it is for fish to find the habitat. Some areas are not as well connected to the source as others. The assumption holds true in a broad sense, though we do find fairly large numbers of fish even in sites seemingly in the middle of nowhere, such as Elger Bay. Beamer said he believes the fish using Elger Bay and other sites “in the middle” probably are a mix of fish from three stocks – Skagit, Snohomish and Stillaguamish.

Beamer said if the Beach Watchers continue to gather data at Harrington, Race and Elger, the body of information will be much more reliable because it will show year-to-year variations that would otherwise be missed. This will show how important these sites are in the greater scheme of the landscape. He said fish-use is complex and the Island County shoreline is probably important to fish from many different populations. And even though we may be focused primarily on salmon, we should still look at everything else we can learn about, such as forage fish and other species, since these are important food sources and indicators of habitat health. He also pointed out that the smaller salmon eat large quantities of insects and

later switch to forage fish when they grow larger. They are opportunistic about eating whatever prey is abundant and available.

Meehan asked whether there is something the MRC should be investing in that would help paint a better picture of what is happening to salmon in Whidbey Basin.

Neighborhood reports. Beamer said salmon recovery managers such as Bredensteiner need site-specific reports like the one he compiled in 2006 about Harrington Lagoon. He said it is not in his best interest to try to write all of these, but he would be willing to help someone get started. He pointed out that it is very important to know what is living “in the neighborhood” at specific sites. Bredensteiner pointed out that the county is working right now on funding these and she thinks this piece may be under control.

Landscape reports. Beamer said it would also be valuable to synthesize the data collected by a number of different projects – SRSC, NOAA Fisheries and Washington Trout – to produce a larger picture of how all the species we care about use the entire Island County shoreline. This would be powerful not only for the Island County Salmon Recovery Plan but for regional managers. It would show how important Island County is to recovering the populations from various rivers. He said he would like to work on this. Porter asked what the cost would be. Beamer said he could not speak for others who might be involved, but that if he could have access to all the data he would be willing to take the lead for about \$20,000. Beamer said it is important to involve the people who collected and analyzed the data. Toft pointed out we are just in the process of laying out our goals for the next five years and will include this in our discussions.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS: None.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

County Lead – Meehan

Whale-sighting database. Meehan reported that he and Bredensteiner had met with Orca Network and signed an agreement under which they will prepare a database of their 2006 whale sightings. This may be a precursor to something more complete in the future. Meehan pointed out we would love to use geospatial data but Orca Network’s information is based on sightings from shore and they cannot provide GIS coordinates. Bredensteiner said Orca Network is compartmentalizing Island County waters and will correlate the data to these various areas, and she felt this system would be just fine. Their goal in the future is to go back and add previous years’ data.

Executive Director – Porter

NFWF grant. Porter said it appears we may get some help from the Department of Natural Resources on the creosote-removal portion of our Cornet Bay projects.

NWSC Action Grant RFP. Porter pointed out the executive committee currently is working on our response to the Northwest Straits Commission’s request for proposals for the next action grant. Sasha Horst will meet with the executive committee March 5 to discuss our current work plan and our proposal for the next grant cycle. Our proposal to the NWSC is due in April.

Chair -- Toft

Shoreline signage. Toft reported he had met with Jim Patton, executive director of the Port of Coupeville, regarding our proposal for signage on Coupeville Wharf. Toft and Pedersen will attend the port’s March 14 meeting to explain our proposal to the commissioners. He said we want to do our signage professionally and right, with sensitivity to the historic character of Coupeville and the wharf.

Strategic planning. Meehan said he has not yet heard back from Duane Fagergren in response to our inquiry whether he would serve as facilitator of our strategic planning session. He will check again. We are looking at March 21 for this session, from 3-6 pm, probably in Room 131, the conference room next to WSU Extension in Coupeville.

March 7 meeting location. Our March 7 meeting will be in the county's Room 116, in the Administration Building, the old courthouse, across from Coupeville Town Hall.

Permanent meeting location. Toft said the commissioners' hearing room is not available on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month. In addition to county staff meetings on those Wednesdays, the room is used weekly at 4:30 by Weight Watchers, who currently have almost 30 attendees at each meeting. If the MRC wishes to use the room we will have to meet on a different day. He said the room offers some great benefits such as the capability for video-conferencing with the county's Camano offices. Kind suggested we poll the members to see whether they could meet on a different night of the week. Toft asked whether 4-6 pm was a good or bad time. Most indicated they did not want to meet later but could meet earlier. Toft said he would survey the members by e-mail about meeting on either a Tuesday or Thursday.

ANNOUNCEMENTS / PUBLIC INPUT

State of Salmon in Watersheds report. Bredensteiner distributed copies of the 2006 State of Salmon in Watersheds report.

South Holmes Harbor Shellfish Protection District. Bredensteiner also distributed the February 2007 newsletter from Planning and Community Development about the March 7 public hearing to form a South Holmes Harbor Shellfish Protection District.

Shoreline Workshop Letter from Scott Chase. Bredensteiner called attention to the letter circulated around the room earlier about the March and April shoreline workshops for residents of Harrington, Race and Elger Bay areas. She encouraged members who live in those areas, or who know people who might like to attend, to get in touch with Scott Chase.

Pigeon guillemot as the icon bird of Island County. Kind distributed some prototype note cards featuring Craig Johnson's spectacular photography of pigeon guillemots. She said these note cards give a sense of how pigeon guillemots could be promoted as an icon for Island County. Whidbey Audubon is exploring this idea. The cards she circulated included the logo of the Island County Marine Stewardship areas. Kind said Audubon is also considering a guillemot website that could convey some of the data collected in local guillemot research.

Water's Edge sales. Meehan said he learned recently from Melissa Russell that we are fulfilling orders for several copies of *Water's Edge* almost every day from the WSU website.

Water quality buoy. Meehan said our water quality buoy is just about ready to re-deploy. We are fixing a software issue at the moment so that the buoy will collect data continuously rather than once a day.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Toft declared the meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm.

MRC Calendar

- Mar. 7** Wednesday, 4-6 pm, MRC meets in **Room 116, County Admin Bldg, Coupeville.**
- Mar. 21** Wednesday, possible MRC strategic planning session, 3-6 pm, location TBD.
- Apr. 4** Wednesday, 4-6 pm, MRC meets at location TBD.