

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Dan Pedersen

Jan. 15, 2008

COMMISSIONERS' HEARING ROOM B-102, ISLAND COUNTY ANNEX, COUPEVILLE

PRESENT: Chair **Dick Toft**, **Joe Hillers**, **Ian Jefferds**, **Phyllis Kind**, **Matt Kukuk**, **Don Meehan**, **Johnny Palka**, **Ken Urstad**, **Benye Weber**, Executive Director **Rex Porter**, Communications Manager **Dan Pedersen**. **ABSENT:** **Hi Bronson** (attending funeral), **Tom Campbell** (unknown).

VISITORS (4):

Lynae Slinden, Clinton, Port of South Whidbey nominee to replace Rolf Seitle on MRC board.

Cryilla Cook, speaker, People for Puget Sound

Kristen Cooley, Langley, coordinator, WSU Beach Watchers.

Scott Chase, Camano Island, coordinator, Island County Shore Stewards.

CALL TO ORDER: 3:33 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted. **MINUTES** of 12-18-2007: Adopted. Motion by Kind, second by Jefferds, no objections.

Summary of Decisions / Action Items

DNR Aquatic Reserve – Smith and Minor islands. At our Feb. 5 meeting we will discuss the proposal by People for Puget Sound to establish a DNR aquatic reserve around Smith and Minor Islands, extending to the west shore of Whidbey Island. We will consider whether to send a letter of support for this application.

INTRODUCTIONS – Lynae Slinden

Toft invited Lynae Slinden to introduce herself. She is one of three commissioners of the Port of South Whidbey and is the port's nominee to replace Rolf Seitle as their representative to our board. Slinden explained that as the new year begins, the three port commissioners are shifting some of their assignments. Seitle, who lives in Langley, will focus more on economic development relating to the port's large proposed project at Langley Marina. Slinden hopes to work more closely with the MRC on estuary restoration at Possession Point, which is within her district as a resident of Clinton.

CORRESPONDENCE

Friends of Camano Island Parks. Pedersen read excerpts of a letter from Carol Triplett of Friends of Camano Island Parks (FOCIP), thanking us for the signage we provided recently for two county parks and two state parks on Camano. Her organization already has installed three of them. She expressed the hope we can carry through with our plans to provide two additional panels for English Boom – one on the heronry and another on juvenile salmon. Pedersen said he is reasonably optimistic we'll be able to do that this year. He circulated a one-page document showing photographs taken by Barbara Brock of the three signs installed so far.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Signage – Freund Marsh. Pedersen reported that he, Toft and Sarah Schmidt met during the Christmas holidays with Oak Harbor city officials and toured Freund Marsh. What triggered this was that Schmidt had recently delivered one of the Saratoga Passage Marine Stewardship Area panels to the city's newly-hired environmental educator, Maribeth Crandall. She had shown it to others at city hall who wondered whether the MRC might be a source for Freund Marsh signage. The city would reimburse us from a conservation futures grant. In the weeks since this meeting Pedersen drafted the text for the three Freund Marsh signs and Toft attended a subsequent meeting where Crandall and planner Rob Voigt shared the proposal with the Oak Harbor Parks Board. The project is moving forward and, at this stage, is in the hands of our artist who will draft sketches of the images that would accompany the text on these three proposed signs. Toft added we are proceeding with some sensitivity, since Oak Harbor school children created the original signage in the marsh. The school kids' signs are weathering badly and need to be replaced. On a parallel track, Toft is talking with the Oak Harbor Rotary about the possibility they would help sponsor a local panel to install at the Navy end of the Oak Harbor waterfront.

BOCC presentation. Meehan reported the scheduled time of tomorrow's MRC presentation to the county commissioners' staff session is now 1:45 pm. Meehan said he thinks we'll have an hour. Toft said we should be prepared to cut to the chase and do it in 30 minutes. Pedersen said we can run through our talking points in any amount of time from five minutes to two hours. Jefferds suggested we add a piece to the outline explaining the benefits of the projects listed. The executive committee will adjust the outline after the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Eelgrass monitoring. Kristen Cooley reported that she and several Beach Watcher volunteers met last week with Sandy Wylie-Echeverria of Friday Harbor Marine Sciences Lab. He gave them leads on the existing data and research about eelgrass. The meeting was prompted by the concern of several volunteers that eelgrass seems to have disappeared from a large swath of the west Holmes Harbor shoreline where it had been present until recently. Beach Watchers are interested in prompting a more rigorous monitoring program and educating more of the public about the importance of eelgrass and the possible causes for its disappearance. The working group collecting all the data they can find on eelgrass, particularly on its extent and abundance in Whidbey Island waters. Kind mentioned funds are available from the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) for ecosystem-wide projects. Two projects of particular interest to the NWSC are mapping eelgrass and mapping forage fish spawning sites, since a baseline for both was established several years ago and it is time to resurvey. Kind suggested Cooley attend a meeting of the NWSC and let them know of the Beach Watchers' interest.

Spring speaker schedule. Porter led a discussion of potential speakers for our spring educational meetings, which resulted in this proposed line-up:

- Feb – **Jacques White** of The Nature Conservancy on San Juan and Port Susan MSA
- Mar – **Nancy Conard** (tentative), mayor of Coupeville, on Reclaimed Water Project
- Apr – **Graham Johnson**, Beach Watchers, on Marine Education Center (Coupeville)
- May – **Cornet Bay** Restoration field trip at Deception Pass State Park
- June – **UW/Luce Fellowship** project report on Salmon Recovery Plan adaptive management planning
- July – **Aundrea McBride** of Skagit River Systems Cooperative on Possession Point Restoration feasibility assessment report results
- Aug – Dec – open

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SPEAKER

Proposal to Establish a DNR Aquatic Reserve for Smith and Minor Islands and Adjacent Shoreline of West Whidbey

Cyrilla Cook, ccook@pugetsound.org, Shorelines Program Manager, People for Puget Sound

Cyrilla Cook of People for Puget Sound (PFPS) is here today to explain her organization's proposal for a DNR aquatic reserve off the west side of Whidbey Island. She is interested in our reaction and suggestions, and a possible letter of support. She hopes to identify candidate organizations with which to partner in this proposal. She said she would also welcome the MRC's technical expertise to help develop and guide this proposal.

Cook explained the process the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) offers by which the public may propose the creation of aquatic reserves in the marine waters it manages. The DNR manages 2.4 million acres of state-owned aquatic lands in Puget Sound and along the outer coast. The DNR acts as stewards of the tidelands, issuing leases for marinas, docks, aquaculture, tidal energy and other uses. Currently only two aquatic reserves exist -- at Maury Island and Cypress Island -- but two others are pending in Fidalgo Bay and at Cherry Point. The formal process of creating an aquatic reserve is complicated and takes about two years.

PFPS is proposing a DNR aquatic reserve surrounding Smith and Minor Islands and Partridge Bank, extending east to include the Whidbey Island shoreline from Joseph Whidbey State Park south to Partridge Point. This area is important for its kelp and other marine habitats and especially important for seabird breeding and marine mammal haulout. It contains the largest kelp bed in Puget Sound. Creation of an aquatic reserve would not limit fishing. It also would not affect any privately owned tidelands, nor regulate upland development. But it would limit new leases the DNR might otherwise award that could impact habitat and water quality. It would facilitate scientific research and education, enhance the opportunity for restoration, and manage human disturbance to bird nesting and rearing and the habitats that support their prey.

Jefferds asked Cook if she knew why the boundaries of the proposed area extend all the way to the shore of Whidbey Island to form what appears to be a rather arbitrary geometric shape. Cook said she did not know but could speculate. The proposed boundaries were taken from a DNR document in which a panel of scientists had described the top 20 areas for consideration as aquatic reserves. She said the intended boundaries were supposed to be drawn large enough to capture the ecological processes that support the species and habitat the reserve is intended to protect. In some cases the shapes of these areas are dictated by deep-water bathymetry. "We try to capture a whole habitat," she said. "Also, by including some of the Whidbey shoreline it is hoped the public will identify more closely with the reserve, rather than think of it as something that exists 'out there' in the distance." She emphasized that as the application process unfolds the boundaries can be vetted.

Cook said open houses will be held this summer to gather information and invite participation in developing the management plan. In the fall a DNR review team will visit the site, and next winter stakeholders will help develop the management plan. In the fall of 2009 the SEPA environmental review will take place.

Porter asked whether Cook has been in contact with any Whidbey Island people about this proposal. She said she has spoken briefly with county planning director, Jeff Tate. She said she

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wanted to approach the MRC first because this pertains to the marine waters. Meehan noted that his home overlooks this area and he sees a lot of commercial harvesting in these waters. He said he believes it's an important area for urchin harvesting and possibly geoducks, and he would be interested in knowing from the DNR what activity is taking place there. He said a good place for a public meeting might be the Sierra Country Club because it looks right out there. Toft said he is curious why the shape of this proposed area follows such straight lines that do not conform to the outlines of Smith and Minor islands.

Cook said the DNR has set Jan. 26 as the submission date for applications but she believes letters of support would still be welcome after that date. She noted Clallam MRC is thinking of commenting on a proposed reserve at Protection Island but they do not meet until early February. If we were to discuss this at our next meeting and then send a letter she believes it would be a welcome addition to the package.

Porter recommended Cook talk with Kim Bredensteiner, the county's salmon recovery coordinator, since she is just in the process of generating fish use data for the west side of Whidbey Island. "You would want to have her at the table," he said. He also urged her to provide a better explanation for the proposed boundaries because any letter is likely to be only as good as the delineation of the boundaries. "It's not intuitive to me that there is a biological connection." Porter and Hillers mentioned there is a group of landowners in the Swantown Lake area that may be interested and Palka recommended she approach Whidbey Audubon. Porter suggested she talk with Mark Preiss at Ebey's Landing National Wildlife Reserve and Weber suggested the West Beach Homeowners' Association. Urstad suggested she talk with Terry Doran, who manages the state parks in this region from his office in Burlington.

Toft commented, "Anyone who has been out around Smith and Minor islands knows you look at it and you don't want anybody to ruin it. That's the first thing. So anything that would protect that is well worth the effort. Your mission is noble." He commented that one consideration that might calm everyone's concerns would be to set the boundaries outside the kelp beds.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

Kind – Northwest Straits Representative

NWSC membership changes. Kind pointed out that three governor's appointees were up for reappointment at year end – Duane Fagergren, Kathy Fletcher and Andrea Copping. Fletcher was reappointed. Fagergren will be replaced by David Dicks of the Puget Sound Partnership, but Fagergren will be his alternate, so it is likely Fagergren will continue to attend meetings frequently. Copping's position will now be filled by an associate professor of marine sciences from the University of Washington.

Funding. Kind said \$44,000 of leftover NWSC funds have been designated to come to us for the Cornet Bay Project. She said another large chunk of money probably will go to Snohomish MRC for Kayak Point Restoration. So two big projects will benefit from these leftover funds.

Next Year's Funding. Next year the NWSC will receive \$1.6 million of Congressional funding, so the question is how it should be used. Several options are being considered.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Whidbey Lyceum Series. Palka shared the schedule for this spring's Lyceum Series, entitled "Sound Thinking: The Life and Health of Puget Sound." It offers a lineup of expert speakers on such marine topics as pollution, tidal energy, birds and mammals and the Puget Sound Partnership. The Lyceum is cosponsored by the MRC, WSU Extension, Whidbey Audubon, Whidbey Watershed Stewards and Whidbey Institute. The series runs on six consecutive Tuesday

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evenings from Apr. 1 – May 6 in The Front Room at Bayview Cash Store. Cost is \$6 per lecture or \$30 for the entire series.

ADJOURNMENT. 5:36 pm.

MRC Meetings and Events 3:30 – 5:30 pm, first and third Tuesdays, Commissioners’ Hearing Room B-102 in <u>Coupeville</u>		
Feb. 2	Sat	Sound Waters University: Keynote – David Dicks, PSP
Feb. 5	Tue	3:30 Business meeting
Feb. 19	Tue	3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Jacques White, The Nature Conservancy, on San Juan MSA lessons learned and Port Susan MSA.
Mar. 4	Tue	3:30 Business meeting
Mar. 18	Tue	3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative, Nancy Conard, mayor of Coupeville, on Reclaimed Water Project.
Apr. 1	Tue	3:30 Business meeting.
Apr. 15	Tue	3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. Graham Johnson, WSU Beach Watchers, on proposed marine education center for Coupeville Wharf.
May 6	Tue	3:30 Business meeting
May 20	Tue	3:30 Educational meeting. Program: Tentative. Cornet Bay site survey and project overview, Deception Pass State Park.
June 3	Tue	3:30 Business meeting
June 17	Tue	3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. UW Luce Fellowship on Adaptive Management Annex to Salmon Recovery Plan.
Summer Schedule – One Meeting Per Month		
July 15	Tue	3:30 Business / educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. Aundrea McBride on Possession Point Restoration Feasibility Assessment results.
Aug19	Tue	3:30 Business / educational meeting.
Sep 16	Tue	3:30 Business / educational meeting.