

# ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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# Minutes

Prepared by Dan Pedersen

Feb. 19, 2008

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

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

## VISITORS:

**Jacques White**, Director of Marine Conservation, The Nature Conservancy of Washington  
**Robert F. Warren**, Port Susan Bay Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy  
**Scott Chase**, Camano Island, coordinator, Island County Shore Stewards  
**Sarah Schmidt**, Coupeville, MRC contractor  
**Nancy Waddell**, Clinton, Whidbey Watershed Stewards  
**Simon Geerlofs**, Northwest Straits Commission, Mount Vernon.

**CALL TO ORDER:** 3:33 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted. **MINUTES** of 2-5-2008: Adopted. Motion by Kind, second by Palka, no objections. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

## SPEAKERS

### San Juan Marine Stewardship Areas Process and Lessons Learned **Jacques White and Robert Warren, The Nature Conservancy (TNC)**

**Jacques White** explained that in his role as TNC's Director of Marine Conservation for Washington he works with a diverse staff doing marine conservation work within estuaries, along shorelines and offshore in the deeper waters of Puget Sound and the coast. He was hired about four years ago to start this program but TNC has been doing conservation work in Washington for many years.

**Robert Warren** is TNC's Port Susan Bay Program Manager. He has been working primarily on the Snohomish County side of Port Susan but is now increasingly partnering in conservation planning with others on the Camano Island side, including Whidbey-Camano Land Trust. He came to his current position a year ago after spending eight years working in the Columbia River estuary.

White commented that several years ago TNC consulted with the San Juan County MRC in some conservation planning to implement marine stewardship areas for that county. This drew the interest of the Tulalip Tribes as a possible model for a community planning effort in Port Susan.

Toft pointed out that in 2003 Island County established two marine stewardship areas (MSAs) encompassing the entire county. The county's outside waters are the Admiralty Inlet MSA. All the inside waters comprise the Saratoga Passage MSA. This includes Port Susan Bay. We did not identify a Port Susan MSA separately by name but included it as a lobe of the Saratoga Passage area. Our jurisdiction extends only along the Island County side of Port Susan, the west side of the bay bordering Camano Island. Meehan added that we are now exploring with great interest

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the idea of partnering with Snohomish County MRC to create a specific, separate Port Susan MSA that would bridge both counties.

## **The Nature Conservancy's Interest in Port Susan Bay**

Warren said he's been attending meetings of the Port Susan MSA working group to gain a better understanding of what TNC's supporting role might be. He mentioned TNC is also working with a lower Stillaguamish delta group that will meet for the first time this Thursday to tackle community-based conservation planning. He hopes the two initiatives can work together effectively without being redundant. Warren said he believes these conservation efforts can succeed only if they grow from the community's desires, not if they are imposed from the top down.

He pointed out TNC is a large organization with lots of capacity and smart brains, but resources are always limited and TNC focuses where it can do the most good. TNC some time ago identified Port Susan Bay as an important place to work because it is a productive estuary – a rare, impacted habitat. A diversity of species rely on estuaries for different parts of their life cycle. Port Susan Bay is significant not only locally but regionally. Many of the species that use it seasonally are transients.

## **TNC and Whidbey-Camano Land Trust Cooperate in Port Susan**

TNC purchased the preserve in 2001. It is one of the largest privately-owned marine preserves in the country, encompassing 3,800 acres of tidal mudflats and fringing marshes, as well as a 160-acre piece of diked land. About a year ago Whidbey-Camano Land Trust purchased 3,000 acres on the other side of the bay and placed it in conservation and protected status. TNC is now going through a planning process to identify the ecological threats. They believe the threats are primarily habitat loss and the disruption of habitat-forming processes, as well as invasive species.

TNC's vision is to restore estuarine processes to a resilient condition that can adapt to future threats, one of which will be climate change. As they go through the planning process they are trying to learn as much as they can with an eye to exporting the lessons to other places with similar conditions.

## **Planning Must Grow from Community Stakeholders**

He said TNC believes their efforts will be most successful if the desire for change comes from the community. The Snohomish County lead entity for salmon recovery and the Stillaguamish Implementation Review Committee have put on their agenda the development of a strategic plan for the estuary. They are bringing people together to understand the competing interests and try to develop solutions. It's an ambitious and complex challenge involving various interests on the lower Stillaguamish flood plain including representatives of the City of Stanwood, Snohomish County, flood control district, the agricultural community, Twin Cities Foods, Snohomish Conservation District and others. He said he thinks this model might also work for the proposed marine stewardship area.

Meehan asked what he meant by "lower flood plain." Warren said TNC is recommending they define it as "head of tide." So it's basically the entire historic estuary. He also said they recognize that the upper flood plain poses some significant threats as well, resulting from development, and that when climate change is considered then it means all the habitats eventually are going to migrate upriver.

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Jacques White interjected that the project Warren is describing is basically a river delta project, whereas the one the Island and Snohomish County MRCs are considering is more of a joint project focused on Port Susan Bay.

## **The San Juan County Marine Stewardship Areas (MSA) Process**

White commented that TNC's work with the San Juan MSAs was to help them develop a planning model. The two people who deserve the most credit are Kirsten Evans, a graduate student in the University of Washington School of Marine Affairs, and Jody Kennedy, coordinator for the MRC. Evans was the engine who did the work, collected the data and set up the community meetings. She took the planning tools TNC provided and really did the work. This effort was very successful.

## **A Top-Down Failure**

But to illustrate an approach that did not work, White related an earlier planning attempt involving San Juan County that took place when he was with People for Puget Sound. This was a grant-funded, trans-boundary proposal involving Canadian and American interests to create the Orca Pass Marine Stewardship Area. Twenty non-profit organizations came together with the counties and the Islands Trust to identify ecological areas of high biodiversity and set up a network for an area that would receive special consideration for protection through a variety of tools such as marine parks or preserves. The group generated a plan but did not do an effective job of involving all the stakeholders, including the recently-formed MRCs. So when the idea was rolled out, reservations surfaced among key people who had not been bought on board, including the tribes and MRCs. Without their support, this project did not get recognition within the Northwest Straits Commission and funding ran out before it could achieve its potential. The key staffer was then hired by The Nature Conservancy and he went on to do the eco-regional assessment for the entire area. People for Puget Sound stopped working on conservation issues in the area.

## **Adding Social and Cultural Input to the Conservation Planning Tool**

Meanwhile, the Northwest Straits Commission was formed. The San Juan County MRC received funding and in 2004 designated the entire county a marine stewardship area. The county commission asked the MRC to develop a management plan. They soon ran into difficulty developing a framework for deciding what to do. In 2005 White suggested that TNC had a tool it used for its own properties that might help them identify what was important, what was threatening and to develop logical strategies. The MRC felt TNC's tool was the best available for understanding conservation issues but that it neglected human interests that were just as important to them – marine transportation, fishing and shoreline access. White knew that in Latin America, TNC had developed strategies that took into account social interests. So they added these to the model and developed an MSA that was citizen-based, science-based, collaborative and ecosystem-based.

White explained that TNC's planning model calls for identifying the ecosystem, its important pieces, what condition it is in, and then the sources of stress.

So for example in Port Susan Bay, one of the stresses on the system is that the dikes are keeping flood waters from reaching the land. It's not a "threat" because it is already a condition that exists. One of the strategies for relieving this particular stress might be restoration. If current overfishing were identified as a stress, it could be addressed by managing harvest. Another step in

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the planning model is to identify some indicators that would show if you were making progress as a result of your strategies. You want to know if the system is responding the way you expect.

In the San Juans TNC assembled a group of technical people, scientists, park managers, Beach Watchers, real estate agents, the port, whale watching groups and others to identify the targets in the system they wanted to protect. The goal was to come up with a relatively small set of biological targets (so that it's manageable) that reflect all the elements of the ecosystem. In addition, the community wanted to include social and cultural attitudes so TNC included these targets: **human enjoyment, thriving livelihoods** and **cultural traditions**. White said it was important to have a broad cross-section of the community develop the social and cultural targets because these are entirely outside the expertise of scientists and biologists.

## The Threat Analysis

This group came up with a "top 10" threat analysis that included oil spills, climate change, shoreline modification, non-local sources of salmon decline, invasive species and others. The MRC then looked at the list and asked itself which of the listed threats they could actually do something about. So their list was topped by habitat modification, invasive species, local harvest of salmon and pollution. The top 10 threats for social and cultural targets were: Not enough fish to catch, not enough opportunities for commercial fishing, etc. Most of these were associated with seafood recreational or commercial harvest and use.

White said it took about 1-1/2 years to complete this work. The San Juan MRC was very concerned about overstepping their jurisdiction. They did not look at land use. They felt the county commission was asking them to do something about the marine environment (only).

He said they had to work through some conflicts. For example, how do you address the fact that there aren't enough fish to catch? Some people felt it was because the state Department of Fish and Wildlife doesn't allow people to fish. Others felt it was because the fish populations are depleted. Some people had to concede that it might be necessary to limit the harvest now in order to allow sufficient recovery so there can be fishing in the future.

## Community Outreach Meetings

The MRC spent \$40,000 - \$50,000 doing outreach, holding public meetings on each of the ferry-served islands. These wintertime meetings attracted 220 people. They put up all the strategies and benchmarks and asked if these were the right ones. They asked which were the most important for county government and state government to tackle in priority order. The top one was better public education about the importance of stewardship of marine resources. The second was to address shoreline land use. This is something the MRC had not considered because they felt it was outside their purview, but they reported this back to the county council and said this was what they heard.

"I'm becoming very reluctant to recommend marine protected areas for any site without knowing that's really what's needed at that site," White said. But he acknowledged that voluntary bottomfish recovery zones in the San Juans do not seem to be working very well, so there may be a missing piece. Maybe these areas need to be patrolled by local residents who will ask people not to fish in them. Or maybe the only way to truly let fish recover is to enforce closures. Jefferds added that there is another necessary step. Once an area recovers sufficiently to allow fishing, it must be managed to the fishing can be sustained. There must be sufficient political will to manage areas adequately so they can recover and be sustainable.

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White said one of the reasons to close an area is so you can restore enjoyable, meaningful fishing for the long run. “I agree with you,” Jefferds said. “I think people have become skeptical of the state’s efforts in the past.”

White said the third driver in the San Juan process, after Evans and Kennedy, was Kit Rawson, chair of the San Juan MRC and a fisheries biologist. He was very, very skeptical of marine conservation for the sake of conservation. He’s a scientist and also a spokesperson for the tribal interests.

## Not About Creating Marine Museums

“People want to see the end plan,” Jefferds said. “You know, you conserve it, you close it down. People want to know when is it going to reopen and how much can we take out of there?”

White agreed, saying, “What we were trying to say in the context of this project, where fishing is important, is that one of the reasons to close it is so you can have productive, enjoyable, meaningful fishing in the longer term. People might think organizations like ours are after marine museums where nobody does anything -- biodiversity museums. We realize that isn’t a recipe for success. You have to engage in these kinds of processes because people are both the problem and the solution.”

## ANNOUNCEMENT

**Harder Foundation Grant.** Simon Geerlofs of the Northwest Straits Commission reported that the Northwest Straits Foundation has received a grant from the Harder Foundation to begin to do some stakeholder interviews regarding a Port Susan MSA. The grant is to conduct 15 – 20 stakeholder interviews and start to define the goals and vision statement for an MSA. Geerlofs is scheduling a meeting for March 5 at the Smokey Point Stillaguamish Tribal Center. Bronson and Chase will attend on behalf of Island County MRC. Once the right questions are determined, Geerlofs will hire a consultant to conduct the interviews and then do some focus groups with broader participation – including Camano Island people, elected officials, fishermen. Chase suggested Whidbey Camano Land Trust.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

**Additional NWSC funds in FY 2008.** Toft reminded the group we owe Kind a recommendation on how to vote when the NWSC decides how to disburse increased Congressional funding for our next budget year. We still have the basic \$92,000 each MRC is receiving, but we now have about \$150–160,000 additional that can be disbursed to the MRCs. We could split it equally resulting in about \$20,000 more for each MRC, or leave it in a pot and let the MRCs compete if they can use more. Kind suggested the funds might also be used in an ecosystem-wide project administered by the NWSC such as re-surveying all the eelgrass to determine what has changed. Palka suggested we empower Kind to take the pulse of the discussion at the NWSC meeting and let it shape her decision on how to vote. Toft pointed out one advantage of allocating the money equally is that it might give us some flexibility to adjust the budgets of individual projects as circumstances change. Kind reminded him that any such use would still require us to submit our proposal and get approval. Slinden asked if there are any regional projects to which the money could be applied. Kind replied that this tends to work against the bottom-up philosophy of the NWSC and MRCs. Geerlofs agreed, saying that regional NWSC projects tend to have a “top down” feeling and the MRCs are designed to encourage local initiative. Meehan added that we also need to be thinking about the importance of engaging in some joint projects in partnership with other MRCs, such as Port Susan. Toft pointed out that if we go forward with Port Susan we will definitely need money for it.

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**ADJOURNMENT.** 5:21 pm.

<b>MRC Meetings and Events</b>		
<b>3:30 – 5:30 pm, first and third Tuesdays, Commissioners' Hearing Room B-102 in <u>Coupeville</u></b>		
<b>Mar. 4</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business meeting</b>
<b>Mar. 18</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Nancy Conard, mayor of Coupeville, on Reclaimed Water Project. Presentation: UW / Luce Fellow student team, on their adaptive management project.</b>
<b>Apr. 1</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business meeting.</b>
<b>Apr. 15</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. Graham Johnson, WSU Beach Watchers, on proposed marine education center for Coupeville Wharf.</b>
<b>May 6</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business meeting</b>
<b>May 20</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Educational meeting. Program: Tentative. Cornet Bay site survey and project overview, Deception Pass State Park.</b>
<b>June 3</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business meeting</b>
<b>June 17</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. UW Luce Fellowship on Adaptive Management Annex to Salmon Recovery Plan.</b>
<b>Summer Schedule – One Meeting Per Month</b>		
<b>July 15</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business / educational meeting. Speaker: Tentative. Aundrea McBride on Possession Point Restoration Feasibility Assessment results.</b>
<b>Aug19</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business / educational meeting.</b>
<b>Sep 16</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>3:30 Business / educational meeting.</b>