

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Dan Pedersen

March 3, 2009

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' HEARING ROOM B-102, COUNTY ANNEX BLDG., COUPEVILLE

PRESENT: Chair **Ian Jefferds**, **Lenny Corin**, **John Dean**, **Judy Feldman**, **Joe Hillers**, **Phyllis Kind**, **Lynae Slinden**, **Dick Toft**, **Ken Urstad**, **Benye Weber**, Executive Director **Rex Porter**, Communications Manager, **Dan Pedersen**. **ABSENT:** **Hi Bronson** (in Hawaii), **Leal Dickson** (unknown), **Matt Kukuk** (unknown).

VISITORS:

Scott Ashworth, Oak Harbor (speaker), of Service, Education, Adventure (SEA).

Chris Burt (speaker), educator and skipper, south Whidbey, SEA.

Susie Richards, Freeland (speaker), teacher, SEA.

Florian Grainer, PhD (speaker), Langley, cinematographer and diver.

Scott Chase, Camano Island, Island County Shore Stewards.

Peg Urstad, Greenbank, WSU Beach Watchers Advisory Council

Nancy Waddell, Clinton, Administrator, Whidbey Watershed Stewards.

Sarah Schmidt, Coupeville, MRC Contractor – signage and Cornet Bay projects

Kara Bloch, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.

CALL TO ORDER: 3:30 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Adopted. Motion by Weber, second by Kind, adopted without objection. **MINUTES** of Feb. 17, 2009: Approved. Motion by Weber, second by Urstad, adopted without objection.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Citizen Science Workshop, April 10-11. Jefferds reminded members he had circulated an e-mail recently inviting participation in an April 10-11 workshop called, “Exploring the Spectrum of Citizen Science.” The workshop is sponsored by the Port Townsend Marine Science Center, the Centers for Ocean Science and Education, and Sea Grant. Porter and Kind both said they couldn’t assess the workshop’s value until they see an agenda. **Frances Wood e-mail.** Porter shared an e-mail from Frances Wood, coordinator of the Whidbey Island Pigeon Guillemot study, which is co-sponsored by the MRC and Audubon. Wood thanked us for underwriting her registration and said she presented a poster of the study’s recent research and conclusions. She added that she was able to make valuable contacts and learn more about other seabird surveys in the greater Salish Sea.

SPEAKERS:

Service, Education, Adventure (SEA) Program

Scott Ashworth, Susie Richards, Chris Burt, Florian Grainer

www.serviceeducationadventure.org

Scott Ashworth said the concept for SEA grew out of a Coupeville / Cedar School boat expedition in 2006. He went along to assist as a parent who had donated the use of his vessel. He had so much fun he got talking with educators, Chris Burt and Susie Richards, about forming a non-profit organization to provide more of these marine educational experiences to school kids.

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Chris Burt explained that he and Richards both are certified school teachers, and this initiative originated in the classroom as part of an effort to make education more meaningful. He said school kids often are very passive learners, sitting and taking in information, but sometimes they really don't want to do that. "So we are always trying to make things more meaningful, more active, and help them become contributors to the community." He said about 14 years ago the South Whidbey School District started offering boat trips, creating opportunities to take kids into the environment and to such places as the San Juan National Historic parks.

Susie Richards said she is a born-and-raised island girl who grew up at Shore Meadows. "I have a real passion for getting kids out on the water and seeing their academics put to use in that very meaningful way."

Florian Grainer, PhD, is a marine biologist who has been creating wildlife documentaries for 18 years. Grainer said he moved to the island about three years ago, buying a house at Beverly Beach and starting to explore the waters in front of it. He became affiliated with the SEA program as a diver who shows the kids exactly what he is finding underneath the boat and in the waters around them. Grainer shared excerpts of a 20-minute video he shot in Holmes Harbor last summer, showing the eelgrass habitat and the diversity of creatures on the bottom right off Baby Island.

Grainer and Richards emphasized it makes a big impression on students to see live video of the marine life in the water right at their feet. Richards said she became interested in SEA because of her experiences as a teacher at the middle school level. "A lot of kids say, 'Why do I have to learn this? What's the point?' To be able to take them out and have them meet real people like Florian changes their lives in terms of getting those people engaged and excited about learning again."

Burt commented there is a need to make learning meaningful, but school districts cannot afford to go out and buy a pre-packaged program. "So we've had to make it up ourselves, but it's also pretty complex because school districts of course go by state law and we have to get the academic learning priorities in there, and have to go by very stringent risk management rules. All of that gets built in."

Burt said the program grew over time on South Whidbey. Then Coupeville also became interested and the program kept growing. "Little by little we became known for our ability to put these together and ask the tough questions we know that administrators and school board members are going to ask." He said they now work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as consultants around the state. The SEA program works as consultants and trainers helping other communities develop service learning programs in their districts. For 17 years the program has been doing continuous vessel trips on South Whidbey with various boats.

Richards explained that service learning is a teaching methodology in which a student's academic work is linked to a real issue in the community. "They're given an opportunity to take what they're learning and see it applied in a real setting that benefits the community." She said more than 30 percent of the nation's schools are using service learning because they're seeing amazing gains academically. "Attendance rates rise. Kids are actually excited about coming to school, and overall engagement rises. And what's exciting to us is that kids actually get to see what their skills are. So many kids don't get to find out what they're good at in a traditional classroom setting. It's only when other opportunities are presented to them in the real world that they begin to see their own skills."

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Burt pointed out one of the problems students have today is a loss of connections in the community. The state dropout rate is about 24 percent. “Students are trying to find the relevance of what they’re studying and figure out, ‘Where do I fit in the real world?’” He said experience learning brings back those connections. He emphasized SEA tries to avoid token roles and focuses on accomplishing real work so the students will know they bring value to the situation.

Ashworth described the vessels available as part of the program, the 65-foot cruiser “Indigo,” plus the 23-foot support vessel “Skipper” and two 14-foot aluminum skiffs.

Burt described possible connections between SEA and the MRC. He pointed out the MRC initiated two marine stewardship areas several years ago, but they are not well known. SEA could help design and implement service-learning programs with targeted schools in the stewardship areas, including ongoing monitoring projects. They could also help develop and implement marine-based expeditions aboard program vessels within the stewardship areas, or facilitate community presentations in partnership with students, Beach Watchers and other community groups on stewardship priorities. Richards pointed out SEA’s vessels, particularly the Indigo, might be useful in the Pigeon Guillemot study. Burt said the Indigo is a substantial vessel that could easily be in use on the water in Puget Sound year-round. Richards mentioned SEA is in the process of developing a close working relationship with WSU Beach Watchers. Ashworth said SEA is looking at the possibility of taking some marine scientists on a cruise to the Smith Island area in May, as part of the application process for the Department of Natural Resources to create a Smith Island Aquatic Reserve.

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Puget Sound Georgia Basin Research Conference – attendees’ impressions. Hillers and Sarah Schmidt shared their impressions of this conference, for which their registration was sponsored by the NWSC and MRC. Schmidt said she had last attended the PSGB Conference about eight years ago and had forgotten how inspiring it was, and what a valuable networking opportunity. She took 63 pages of notes. She mentioned a study of the function of drift logs in the beach habitat that compared the prevalence of sand fleas in relation to the amount of wood and subsequent shading. These creatures, which are important to the food web, were most abundant where the presence of wood, and subsequent shade, was greatest. Schmidt also mentioned a study of salmon in the nearshore. After salmon leave the rivers the greatest mortality occurs in the first year of marine life, which underscores the importance of nearshore habitat. The study found 44 percent of Chinook in north sound were of hatchery origin, but in the south sound it was 98 percent. The diet of north sound Chinook was predominantly insects, reflecting the greater availability of unaltered habitat. The diet of south sound Chinook was predominantly arthropods. One of the sessions Schmidt attended dealt with several beach restoration projects. The speaker stressed the importance of follow-up monitoring, saying this is routinely neglected but is tremendously important to establish the effectiveness of what was done. Schmidt said she took the message to heart, especially in light of our Cornet Bay project. Throughout the conference the Coast Salish peoples played a significant role, which Schmidt said served as a reminder that they lived here first and it is important for us to make connections. Hillers commented on the value of the 40,000+ water quality readings the tribes collected last year on their canoe journey between US and Canadian waters. He said he met a member of the Skagit MRC with whom he’d hopes to get together to talk about the possibility of collaboration, since Skagit River fish must pass through Island County waters. Hillers said there was a big discussion at the conference about the influence of nitrogen on Puget Sound. It’s the biggest reason for low oxygen levels, and some 80 – 90 percent of the nitrogen in Puget Sound comes from wastewater. He said farmers like nitrogen and would much rather reclaim nitrogen-rich wastewater for the land than discharge it into Puget Sound. He also said copper is tremendously harmful to salmon, and the vast majority

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of copper in Puget Sound gets there from storm water. He said Orange County is pumping 70 million gallons of reclaimed wastewater a day into the mountains. King County is also in the process of developing a large reclaimed water plan. **MRC speaker ideas.** Nancy Waddell said she found two posters at the conference that might be of particular interest to the MRC, possibly leading to speakers for MRC meetings. One was a poster of the **US Geological Service** that brought together the results of many studies of the Whidbey Basin, which might be of value to us especially because of our ongoing interest in data integration. Waddell will get the contact information and report back to us. The other poster that caught her eye was from a group of early-start students primarily from Everett Community College going by the acronym **ORCA, the Ocean Research College Academy**. She said this group has been collecting data in Island County waters for some time, without actually setting foot here. Schmidt said she also thinks we should invite **Eric Grossman** of the USGS. He has been floor-mapping Skagit Bay and was the individual who initiated the tribal canoes' water quality monitoring project.

WSU Extension budget discussion – continuation. Feldman reported Washington State University has received a great deal of input from individuals and groups such as ours, urging against deep cuts in the public service sector and Extension program. WSU has not said these cuts are off the table, but they are aware of community support for the programs and will do all they can. Feldman said she is hearing discussion of scenarios in which offices might be combined, for example, at the regional level. At this point WSU does not know what the cuts will actually be.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

County Lead's report. Feldman reported that the Beach Watchers program currently is interviewing 20 new trainees, assuming that the program will go forward despite the uncertain budget situation. She said Ralph Young of WSU is working as liaison to the 26 tribes in Western Washington. He visited Island County today to discuss how to create better relationships, but could not stay for the MRC meeting. She said her office also is working on strategies to respond to potential county budget cuts.

Executive Director's report. Because Porter had to leave early to catch a plane, Toft reported he had represented the MRC at the Northwest Straits Commission meeting on Friday. "It was a day well spent," he said, with three interesting speakers. Craig Collar of Snohomish Public Utility District presented an update of the presentation he gave our MRC earlier this year. Also speaking was Alan Mears, formerly of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and currently with Snohomish MRC. He spoke of the Mussel Watch program, explaining how mussels, which are filter feeders, can be used to monitor the pollutants present in marine waters. The third speaker, from San Juan County, explored why San Juan County's no-take zones have had disappointing success in helping bring back rockfish. On another topic, Schmidt reported that Jim Somers of WSU Beach Watchers met with Kurt Fresh of NOAA. Fresh has agreed to go forward with a seining project at Cornet Bay.

County Commissioner's report. Dean said the commissioners spent most of today working on new developments in the county budget. Yesterday they learned yet another \$1 million needs to be cut, in addition to the \$2 million earlier cut earlier and \$1 million cut after that. The commissioners are looking at the need for additional layoffs and perhaps reduced office hours.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Lyceum series. Nancy Waddell distributed a one-page flyer about the 2009 Whidbey Lyceum Series. Sponsors this years are seeking to make it more accessible for Central Whidbey attendees, so this year's series will be held from March 21 – May 5 at the Unitarian Universalist Meeting Hall about two miles north of Freeland.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.

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MRC Meetings and Events 3:30 – 5:30 pm, first and third Tuesdays, Commissioners’ Hearing Room B-102 in <u>Coupeville</u>		
Mar 17	Tue	Business meeting
Apr 7	Tue	Educational meeting. Northwest Straits presentation on forage fish and related nearshore data integration results for Island County and Puget Sound
Apr 21	Tue	Business meeting
May 5	Tue	Educational meeting. Tentative: Eric Grossman, USGS on Skagit River Delta survey and MRC resource protection/enhancement implications
May 19	Tue	Business meeting
SUMMER SCHEDULE – ONE MEETING PER MONTH		
June 2	Tue	Combined business / educational meeting
July 7	Tue	Combined business / educational meeting
Aug 4	Tue	Combined business / educational meeting