

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Dan Pedersen

Jan. 5, 2010

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

PRESENT: Vice-chair **Joe Hillers** (presiding), **Hi Bronson**, **Lenny Corin**, **Leal Dickson**, **Matt Kukuk**, **Steve Mitchell**, **Helen Price-Johnson**, **Linda Rhodes**, **Dick Toft**, **Ken Urstad**, **Stan Walsh**, **Frances Wood**, **Todd Zackey**, Communications Manager **Dan Pedersen**. **ABSENT:** Executive Director **Rex Porter** (Washington, DC), **Judy Feldman** (conflicting appointment), **Sarah Haynes** (California conference), **Ian Jefferds** (Kona, Hawaii).

VISITORS

Sarah Woehrman, Coupeville, coordinator, WSU Beach Watchers
Jim Somers, Oak Harbor, WSU Beach Watchers
Jill Hein, Coupeville, WSU Beach Watchers
Nancy Waddell, Clinton, Whidbey Watershed Stewards
Sarah Schmidt, Coupeville, MRC contractor
Chris Luerkens, Island County Environmental Health
Scott Chase, Camano Island, coordinator, Island County Shore Stewards
Peg Urstad, Greenbank, WSU Beach Watchers

CALL TO ORDER: 3:32 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Approved with several modifications. **MINUTES** of Dec. 15, 2009: Approved. Motion by Toft, second by Urstad, carried unanimously. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

Decisions / Action Items

Selection of 2010 Northwest Straits Commission representative. Hillers announced that Corin has agreed to be our Northwest Straits representative. **Motion by Urstad, second by Dickson, carried unanimously, to nominate Lenny Corin to the Island County Commissioners for appointment as our representative to the Northwest Straits Commission.** Corin commented that Porter has agreed to serve as alternate representative.

INTRODUCTIONS

Members introduced themselves. **Hillers** is vice-chair, substituting today for Ian Jefferds. Hillers was in the Department of Animal Science at WSU for 35 years. Upon retirement he moved to Coupeville, and he represents agriculture. **Zackey** is a coastal geographer with the Tulalip Tribes. He has worked throughout the Whidbey Basin doing pocket estuary monitoring for salmon, juvenile salmon out-migration studies, intertidal mapping and shoreline geomorphology. He is co-chair of the Island County Salmon Technical Advisory Group. **Pedersen**, of Langley, is an MRC contractor serving as communications manager. **Toft** introduced himself as perhaps the

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longest-serving member. His interests lie in sport fishing and Navy training issues. **Corin** has just completed his first year on the MRC and represents recreational interests. He retired from the US Fish & Wildlife Service 1-1/2 years ago and moved to Whidbey Island from Anchorage, Alaska, where he spent most of his career. **Dickson** is a resident of the West Beach area and a retiree from the University of Washington biology department. His interests are in marine science. **Walsh** is with the Skagit River System Cooperative. He's been with the co-op for 20 years, where he is the environmental services manager and deals with federal, state and local permit processes, intergovernmental relations and works with other entities. "I'm very interested in being here for the relationships we can build." **Kukuk** originally started attending MRC meetings about two years ago as an alternate representing the county's assistant director of planning. Six months ago Kukuk was transferred from planning to the health department where he is resource enhancement manager in charge of the water quality monitoring program and salmon recovery. **Mitchell** is a new member representing commercial fishing, and is also an environmental consultant. He has been a commercial fisherman for well over 30 years and an environmental consultant for 15. His interests include fisheries and habitat restoration and protection. **Urstad** is a retired Department of Natural Resources forester who represents sport fishing on the MRC. **Price-Johnson** is chair of the county commissioners and sits on this committee as their representative. **Bronson** is a former Navy helicopter pilot, later a program analyst in the Pentagon, who then studied environmental planning at Huxley College and became a county land-use planner, spending the last 12 years of that career working for Snohomish County. He represents environmental planning and the Camano Island Beach Watchers. **Wood**, of Langley, is former president of Whidbey Audubon and has done a great deal of bird monitoring. She worked closely with Phyllis Kind on the MRC's pigeon guillemot project. She is particularly interested in survey work involving the marine birds of our area. **Rhodes**, of Freeland, is a microbiologist with NOAA Fisheries in Seattle. She has lived on the island since the mid-80s and has been doing marine research in Puget Sound since the 1970s. For the last few years she has been working on fish diseases and now is moving into environmental toxicology. "This sounds like it fits in pretty well with the water quality objectives of the MRC."

SPEAKER

Update on Beach Watchers' Involvement in Cornet Bay Restoration – Seining and Forage Fish Egg Studies

Jim Somers and Sarah Woehrman

Woehrman explained that the Beach Watchers' work at Cornet Bay is just one small part of what the group does. In this particular case the Beach Watchers are accountable to the MRC as owner of the project. In the coming year Woehrman said the Beach Watchers hope to do more forage fish studies elsewhere, depending on which projects receive funding.

Somers explained that last spring, from March through June, the Beach Watchers collected fish-use data in Cornet Bay. Last summer they also carried out forage fish egg sampling.

Sarah Schmidt, the MRC's project manager for Cornet Bay, explained that the MRC received a \$175,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation several years ago to do some shoreline restoration, which led to the decision to focus on Cornet Bay. The specific site is bulkheaded with creosote, part of which extends over the upper intertidal zone. The project would restore a more natural beach slope and remove some blockages to sediment transport, improving

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habitat for forage fish and salmon. One of the attractive aspects of this project is that it is in a park accessible to the public, making it a good place to do education and outreach.

She pointed out that as part of any project, one needs to have before-and-after data, which is why the Beach Watchers are involved at Cornet Bay. “The plan from the beginning was to partner with Beach Watchers.”

Somers pointed out that the group selected its seining sites in collaboration with Kurt Fresh of NOAA Fisheries. Sites 1, 2, 3 and 10 are pretty much undisturbed habitat. Sites 4, 5 and 6 contain the creosoted bulkhead and severely altered shoreline, which is the area of particular interest. Sites 7, 8 and 9 are not within the creosoted area but are pretty disturbed shoreline because of sediment transport interference caused by the large state dock, resulting in the substrate being very mucky. The Beach Watchers were able to carry out this seining because Kurt Fresh allowed them to use his NOAA permit. Somers said Fresh initially was reluctant to carry out this project, but changed his mind after attending the planning meeting at Deception Pass. Somers said Fresh realized this was an opportunity to carry out an important restoration project on public land. He insisted on a small but very experienced volunteer team. Somers pointed that Jill Hein and Ken Urstad were key members of that team.

Somers pointed out that each time the team carries out seining they identify every species present. They measure the first 20 of each species at each site. They also measure water quality, salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen and water depth.

This past year the team captured almost exclusively chum salmon, with only two Chinook late in the year and no pink salmon. This coming year they anticipate a lot of pink salmon. April was, by far, the big month for fish. “There are some seines where we get five fish and others where we get 1,400 or 1,500.”

This past summer, Sarah Woehrman, Sarah Schmidt and Dan Penttila of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife developed the forage fish egg sampling protocol. Penttila spent a lot of time with the Beach Watchers developing their protocol, which involves sampling substrate samples at six sites once a month. They sieve the substrate and preserve the samples for analysis by Penttila’s lab in LaConner. To date not a single egg has shown up in any of the samples.

In 2010 the team expects to start its juvenile salmon studies in February and they anticipate a great many pink salmon. They will use a research permit issued through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and will continue to collect substrate samples for forage fish eggs once a month.

Somers added that in 2008 the seining team was asked by Wild Fish Conservancy to help with some fish data collection on west Whidbey and in 2009 at Cypress Island Aquatic Reserve, an exciting project. This seining goes deeper offshore and the net is launched by boat. In one sample at Deception Pass the team brought in several thousand greenling. In one seine at Keystone the net collected over 6,000 salmon, predominantly pinks.

Woehrman said that in working with Dan Penttila, the Beach Watchers realized there is a lot more they need to learn about forage fish. They have started a forage fish study group and will be meeting tomorrow at Padilla Bay to view the first-ever footage of sand lance spawning. Woehrman said she and her partner captured the footage this winter, in the process of spending days and nights on the beach studying forage fish. “We filmed ‘em!” she said.

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NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Selection of 2010 Northwest Straits Commission representative. Hillers announced that Corin has agreed to be our Northwest Straits representative. **Motion by Urstad, second by Dickson, carried unanimously, to nominate Lenny Corin to the Island County Commissioners for appointment as our representative to the Northwest Straits Commission.** Corin commented that Porter has agreed to serve as alternate representative.

Ocean policy letter. Because Nancy Waddell needed to leave the meeting before the public comment session, Pedersen suggested she jump into the agenda ahead of his strategic planning segment. Waddell asked whether the MRC has received an e-mail inviting them to sign onto a letter being widely circulated among scientists and environmental organizations that asks President Obama to adopt an ecosystem-based approach to protecting the oceans, coasts, Pacific islands and great lakes. Hillers asked Waddell to forward the e-mail to Pedersen for distribution to the entire MRC. *Note: Subsequently, Porter replied to Waddell that the Northwest Straits Commission is responding on behalf of all the MRCs*

Strategic planning. Pedersen explained that at the Dec. 15 meeting the MRC completed the review, revision and adoption of the first part of its strategic plan covering the mission, vision, assets, goals and objectives. “Now we are ready to start developing an action plan to carry out those objectives.” He commented that he had taken our first goal, Goal A, and developed a draft action plan. He pointed out this goal is very science-oriented and he feels rather unqualified to propose an action plan for it. As an alternative, he suggested the MRC appoint a science subcommittee and ask the subcommittee to develop an action plan for Goal A. Hillers said he likes the idea of reconvening a science subcommittee. Others agreed. Hillers said he would communicate this preference to chair, Ian Jefferds, and ask him to solicit volunteers or make appointments. Zackey said the Salmon TAG is in a similar position of needing to reassess its mission and it might be a good idea for the two groups to collaborate a bit on this. Toft said his impression from the Northwest Straits Conference is that we are further along in strategic planning than just about any other MRC. Rhodes expressed some discomfort with another section of the strategic plan that characterizes our county as rural and therefore not burdened with certain problems that go with urbanization. “We’re not as rural as people like to think; I think that’s not so much the science part as education and outreach.” Price-Johnson commented that some people think the individual actions they take on their own land really don’t affect anyone else, and this is where some of the problems arise.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

County commissioner. Price-Johnson thanked the group for all the work it has done over the years and said the importance of the MRC’s work is becoming better known through such developments as creation of the Puget Sound Partnership. She said the commissioners, in the recent budget process, preserved funding for WSU Extension and some important social safety net services. The challenge going forward will be to focus on economic development so they can restore stability to county finances and find new ways for county departments to support one-another’s work. Price-Johnson said she sits on the county tourism board, and that activities such as Sound Waters are a great draw for Island County.

County lead, chair and executive director: All unavailable today.

PUBLIC INPUT

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SRFB projects. Chris Luerkens reported on six projects in the county that have received funding from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, as follows:

2009 SALMON RECOVERY PROJECTS FUNDED (Salmon Recovery Funding Board – SRFB) **GRANTS IN ISLAND COUNTY \$1,143,187**

Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group \$24,862

Reconnecting Whidbey Island and Swan Lake

The Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group will use this grant to investigate options for opening the salmon rich waters off west Whidbey Island to Swantown Lake. Swantown Lake is a valuable and unique ecosystem that is threatened by development in the adjacent Oak Harbor watershed. The lake consists of more than 100 acres of coastal marsh with a freshwater stream. However, an old and dysfunctional tide gate system blocks salmon. The lake and its surrounding property were purchased by Island County in 1999 for wetland and wildlife habitat, storm water and flood control and low impact parks. The restoration group has joined with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to determine how to provide access into and out of Swantown Lake for young salmon species, including Chinook salmon, which is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act, as well as chum, pink and coho salmon, cutthroat trout and steelhead. The restoration group will provide a partial design for the most promising option. The restoration group will contribute \$4,387 in donated labor. (09-1459)

The Nature Conservancy \$509,675 (This includes two grants: 1) \$300,000 for acquisition; 2) \$209,675 for restoration.)

Protecting and Restoring Livingston Bay Shoreline

The Nature Conservancy will use two grants to permanently protect and restore 43 acres of important shoreline habitat in Port Susan Bay, including a 10-acre lagoon in Livingston Bay. Salmon species that originate in watersheds on the north Puget Sound mainland depend on the near-shore habitats of Port Susan Bay to forage for food and rear as juveniles before heading into the ocean. With more than 60 percent of Island County's coastal lagoons cut off from tides, restoring the 10-acre lagoon in Livingston Bay will open up near-shore habitat to help salmon during the critical transition to the ocean. The Nature Conservancy will remove about 100 feet of artificial dike, which will open the lagoon to tides. The dike was built about 80 years ago to create land for grazing livestock. This project is part of a larger project to protect more than 3,000 acres of tidelands that are used by Puget Sound Chinook salmon and bull trout, both of which are listed as threatened with extinction under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Nature Conservancy will contribute more than \$2 million from a private, state and federal grants and donations of cash. (09-1479, 09-1463)

Whidbey Camano Land Trust \$147,000

Designing Restoration Projects for Skagit Bay Shoreline

The Whidbey Camano Land Trust will use this grant to complete preliminary designs and prepare construction permit applications for restoring habitat-forming processes at the Shorecrest lagoon and the along Dugualla Bay on north Whidbey Island. The restoration projects to be designed will open the areas to the tides and fish, creating roughly 6.4 acres of additional habitat. The restoration will provide habitat for Chinook salmon rearing. (09-1468)

Whidbey Camano Land Trust \$290,000

Protecting Skagit Bay Shoreline

The Whidbey Camano Land Trust will use this grant to buy 39 acres with more than .4 mile of Skagit Bay waterfront. The purchase will protect the near-shore habitat for salmon. The land's location near the mouth of the north fork of the Skagit River is important because it is the most used pathway for migrating Chinook salmon in the Skagit River delta and is near eelgrass beds, a prime feeding area for salmon. The land trust will contribute \$386,000 in conservation futures and a private grant. This grant was funded in October. (09-1482)

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1 Conservation futures are property taxes used by local governments to buy land or development rights to protect natural areas, forests, wetlands and farms.

Wild Fish Conservancy \$171,650

Assessing Restoration Projects in Deer Lagoon

The Wild Fish Conservancy will use this grant to evaluate the feasibility and impact of multiple restoration strategies for Deer lagoon near Admiralty Inlet with the goal of increasing the amount and quality of salt marsh habitats open to juvenile salmon. The conservancy will assess restoration strategies using hydrodynamic models that will simulate water elevations, erosion and deposition. The conservancy also will develop a partial design for a restoration project. A series of dikes has limited tidal access to Deer Lagoon, resulting in the loss of more than 450 acres of potential salt marsh and mudflat habitat for juvenile salmon. These dikes also have degraded about 100 acres of existing salt marsh. (09-1458)

Leurkens provided these links for background:

News release RCO distributed December 15, regarding salmon recovery projects approved for SRFB/PSAR funding during this past round

(http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/Press_Releases/2009/070-SRFB_Grants.pdf). This press release provides good general background at the state level.

Link specifically describing the projects funded statewide, including a direct link to the Island County section, http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/SRFB/10th_Round/srfb_grants_county.pdf.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Hillers adjourned the meeting at 5:35 pm.

MRC Meetings and Events		
Jan. 19	Tue	3:30 – 5:30 Business meeting
Feb. 2	Tue	3:30 – 5:30 Educational meeting
Feb. 16	Tue	3:30 – 5:30 Business meeting
Mar. 2	Tue	3:30 – 5:30 Educational meeting
Mar. 16	Tue	3:30 – 5:30 Business meeting