

ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Minutes

Prepared by Dan Pedersen

Mar. 16, 2010

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

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

VISITORS: **Kyle Murphy**, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), **Sarah Woehrman**, WSU Beach Watchers – Island County; **Robin Clark**, Whidbey Watershed Stewards; **Scott Chase**, Camano Island, Island County Shore Stewards; **Prof. Terrie Klinger**, University of Washington (UW); **Tikvah Weiner**, director of keystone projects, UW Program on the Environment; **Gabriela Carvalho**, graduate student, Edmonds School of Public Affairs, UW; **Kris McArthur**, graduate student, civil engineering, UW; **Michael Grillot**, aquatic reserve program, on loan to DNR from Sea Grant; **Dave Peeler**, People for Puget Sound; **Betty Bookheim**, aquatic reserve program, DNR; **Melisa Snoeberger**, graduate student, public affairs, UW.

CALL TO ORDER: 3:30 pm. **QUORUM:** Declared. **AGENDA:** Approved with the addition of a short report from the DNR Smith-Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve advisory committee. **MINUTES** of March 2, 2010: Approved. Motion by M. Bronson, second by Urstad, carried unanimously. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

REPORTS

Smith-Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve proposal. Michael Grillot explained that today the advisory committee held the third of probably five meetings to discuss the proposed aquatic reserve for Smith and Minor islands. The process is on track and the committee continues to develop the goals and objectives. Today they brainstormed some of the management actions the plan would take. The next meeting will be held in late April or early May. They hope to have a draft management plan for the MRC to review before it goes out for public comment.

SPEAKER

Penn Cove Keystone Project Update

University of Washington graduate student team

Porter introduced the graduate student team from the University of Washington, led by Prof. Terrie Klinger. He pointed out we are tremendously lucky to have this resource, since the team will invest many hours of research in our project. Porter asked Tikvah Weiner to introduce herself. She is the

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graduate coordinator for the UW environmental program. She explained that all the students attending today are part of that program, and one of their requirements is to work with the community on an environmental management project. MRC member, Dickson, added that over the years many discussions have taken place among the county, the town of Coupeville and the MRC about the growth of macro-algae in Penn Cove. There have been discussions about phytoplankton, sometimes toxic phytoplankton. All these discussions have focused on how many are there and what can be done about it. "As an MRC we are about to embark on a major effort to try to answer some of those questions." That effort includes our participation in a grant application to the Environmental Protection Agency to study a strategy to protect and restore watersheds in Puget Sound. Dickson said we are fortunate to be located close to the University of Washington where we can use the resource of students in a multi-disciplinary graduate program. The group attending today includes two students from public administration, along with Kris McArthur from civil and environmental engineering. This winter the students have been gathering data and doing an assessment of water quality conditions in Penn Cove, along with the regulatory restrictions. In spring quarter they will work to formulate strategies for Penn Cove water quality improvement and expanded uses for our consideration.

Kris McArthur explained this is a certificate program in connection with the students' graduate degrees. While they are required to take a number of courses, the main focus of the learning experience is this project, so this is a tremendous opportunity to learn in a real-world situation. McArthur said today's presentation will address five points:

- Regulatory status
- Water body condition
- Threats to human health
- Strategies
- Next steps

Regulatory status. Gabriela Carvalho pointed out the Clean Water Act holds the state responsible for the water quality of all the bodies of water within its boundaries and identifying those that do not meet the standard. Under Section 303(d) states must prioritize water bodies for a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) assessment, basically assessing a water body's ability to absorb pollutants. Penn Cove is classified as having low dissolved oxygen, so it is on the Department of Ecology's list to conduct a TMDL assessment. Ecology currently is conducting a dissolved oxygen study in south Puget Sound, and as soon as they complete the development of their modeling activities, they expect to expand north in Puget Sound in about 2011. The model they are developing is coarse and is not expected to address concerns at the level of Penn Cove, but will answer some questions and bring the science closer to understanding Penn Cove's condition. And because this body of water is in the 303 queue, it remains on the radar of the Department of Ecology. In addition, the Department of Health classifies water bodies for shellfish growing and harvesting. To make these classifications the Department of Health carries out sanitary surveys consisting of three different studies. Their shoreline survey looks at all the land uses that could affect the water body including roads, development and septic systems. They also do a marine water quality evaluation in which they collect samples of the water and looking for levels of pollutants, and they do a hydrographic study to see how those pollutants are moving around in the body of water through currents, tides and wind. They look at all these studies together to arrive at a classification. As a result they will classify an area "approved," "conditionally approved," "restricted" or "prohibited." If they haven't finished their classification, or if something changes and more study is needed, the area is automatically "unclassified." Currently, Penn Cove is divided into four zones. Kennedy's Lagoon currently is unclassified because the Department of Health wishes to conduct some additional water quality monitoring. Most of the west

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end of the cove is “conditionally approved.” The central zone in front of the town of Coupeville is “prohibited,” and the east end is “unclassified” because no one has applied to the state to have the area classified for commercial shellfish production.

Water body condition. Melisa Snoeberger explained the team is compiling data from several sources to establish the cove’s water quality condition -- the state Department of Ecology, Island County Health, the state Department of Health and the Coupeville wastewater treatment plant. Another potential data source is Kathy van Alstyne of Western Washington University and the team is in touch with her. Snoeberger displayed a slide with color-coded dots indicating the locations of water quality monitoring buoys deployed by various agencies. Each agency measures different variables depending on their specific interests. The Department of Ecology’s station is particularly valuable because it has collected much of the data available over time. Snoeberger pointed out that data collected by the station just north of Coupeville exceeded the fecal standard more than 10 percent of the time. Graphs constructed by the team reflect, among other things, higher chlorophyll levels and algae blooms in the summer than the summer. As one goes lower in the water column, dissolved oxygen levels drop. These levels also drop later in the year.

Human health threats. Kris McArthur explained the team is proceeding on the assumption that nitrogen is the limiting nutrient in the cove. The high nutrient loading of the cove by nitrogen is degrading the water quality by providing food for algae. The most obvious point sources are the wastewater treatment plants. Obviously, there are also pathogens and the possibility of pharmaceuticals in the water from the proximity of the town and the hospital. Stormwater may be contributing metals and PAH hydrocarbons, and agricultural practices may be contributing pesticides. The failure of on-site septic systems may also be a factor.

Strategies to mitigate these threats. Enhanced treatment of wastewater is one option, but can be costly. McArthur pointed out that the local treatment facilities are quite good and this is confirmed by the Department of Ecology, but the quality of the effluent could be improved. Also, increased storage capacity would help, though space is at a great premium in Coupeville. Another option is biological nutrient removal. Tertiary treatment could help. Phytoremediation also would help both in reducing discharge from the wastewater plants, and in aquifer recharge. Diverting stormwater away from Penn Cove also could be beneficial. The application of best management practices to agriculture might make a difference by reducing overloading.

Next steps. Carvalho pointed out that aside from technical solutions, the team will explore other actions that could contribute to a more successful outcome in the community. From a policy perspective, the team will look for opportunities by reviewing case studies of what other communities have done to improve water quality. They will consider the local monitoring needs and potential sources of funding. They will consider opportunities for environmental education and new ways to engage the community. They will also develop alternatives to reduce the nutrient loading and recommend some policy strategies, and report to us again June 1.

NWSC GRANT REPORTS

Shore Stewards. Scott Chase reported he continues to give classes and presentations, including Sound Waters and Whidbey Gardening Workshop. In Island County there are approximately 700 Shore Stewards, and regionally over 2,500. It all started right here in this county.

Pigeon Guillemot survey. No report; Wood is traveling today.

Cornet Bay. Porter reported we are amending our agreement with parks to enable us to buy some permitting work through Herrera Consultants, our current vendor, and also another agreement to work

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with Whidbey Island Conservation District to hire the regional conservation engineers to take our conceptual designs and create real designs. “We’re on the cusp; we’re just a few legal agreements away from moving beyond assessments to having designs and getting into the water.”

Shoreline signage. Pedersen shared printouts of the art for the two signs we are completing under this year’s project, for Cama Beach State Park and Camano Island State Park. Toft noted he has been in conversation with Oak Harbor officials about installing the two signs we gave them a year ago for Flintstone Park. Pedersen reported we’re having similar delays with the City of Langley on two signs we provided a year ago for their installation.

Derelict gear. Urstad said the Northwest Straits Commission website is a good place to review the status of this project. About 3,000 nets have been located and so far about 1,200 have been removed. The project is going well. A recent study estimates about 188,000 crabs are killed each year in derelict pots in Puget Sound, so more will remain to be done after the nets are retrieved.

MRC website. Pedersen reported the website has been updated with the new members’ biographies, portraits and terms of office. He hopes soon to update the section of the website describing our projects, since this section is obsolete.

Water’s Edge. Pedersen reported the book is selling steadily. Several members expressed a desire to buy a copy. He will bring some to the next meeting.

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

February Northwest Straits Commission meeting. Corin represented us at the February meeting. He pointed out the NWSC has been scrambling to use the \$4.6 million they received at midyear for derelict gear removal. One unforeseen benefit has been a great deal of favorable press in the national media. At various times up to 30 people have worked in the removal project from four boats. Corin reported that reauthorization of the Northwest Straits Initiative passed the House by unanimous consent but is currently stalled in the Senate. With respect to a home for the NWSC within the federal budget, Corin said the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) “does not seem to know what to do with us.” He expects there will be an ongoing conversation between the NWSC staff and the regional administrator of NOAA. Corin said he volunteered to serve on an ad hoc committee to explore other possible homes for the NWSC including USGS, EPA and other agencies. He also said Joe Gaytos of the NWSC is intrigued with *Getting to the Water’s Edge* and may want to explore production of similar book for other counties or the publication of a multi-county version.

EPA grant proposal on Penn Cove. Porter reported the Northwest Straits Foundation has submitted a \$700,000 grant application to the Environmental Protection Agency to study stormwater and wastewater discharge into Penn Cove, with an eye to remedial measures that would enable the reopening of shellfish beds in eastern Penn Cove. The application is a partnership of multiple interests including Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL), NOAA, USGS, the University of Washington and Western Washington University. We will know in April if we have been successful, and funding will start in July. Dickson pointed out that the interdisciplinary nature of this proposal and the work that would be done over a 24-month period is such that it would bring huge quantities of data to bear on enclosed basins such as Penn Cove. He thinks the study’s value reaches far beyond Penn Cove and believes EPA will put us high on their list. Rhodes added that EPA probably is looking for their secondary indicators right now, good markers for contaminated sites, and one of their objectives is to look for indicators that will be useful in the future.

Science committee update. Hillers: “By the time we meet again, hopefully the science committee will be appointed – that’s my report.”

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Penn Cove bacterial assessment. Rhodes reported the Northwest Fisheries Science Center has some seed money available to help start projects, and she has obtained funding for a small project to carry out bacterial assessment in Penn Cove, around the sewer outfalls and the mussel beds. She will study productivity and abundance of all bacteria, not just coliforms, and also look at antibiotic resistance. Rhodes is carrying out the project with another employee from the lab. This will start generating some data about Penn Cove with a possibility of leveraging the project into something larger.

LEADERSHIP REPORTS

County commissioner. Price-Johnson thanked Zackey in advance for his participation tomorrow in the county’s series of public meetings on the future of Glendale Creek, and thanked Feldman for her role in facilitating the meetings. “It’s been a very successful model, providing an opportunity for a whole lot of community outreach and education.” Price-Johnson added that Commissioner Homola has taken the lead on a salmon restoration project on Leque Island, on the lee side of Camano Island. Several government entities have come together to look on the viability and impact of that restoration project. Price-Johnson said another area where Feldman is helping the county is on a civic-engagement project to help tell the story of what county government does, so the public can understand the available resources.

Executive director. Porter reported the MRC has been invited to have a seat at the table in an upcoming meeting to discuss forming a clean water district or stormwater district. He said this is obviously important to the county’s public works, planning and health departments. Price-Johnson pointed out the county has many more stormwater projects each year than it can fund. Such a district could help people understand that they are also stormwater managers. One way to fund it would be to establish a utility tax. Price-Johnson commented we are one of the few counties that does not have such a district. Porter also reported that he conducted an orientation session today for new members of the MRC.

County lead. Feldman reported that a new director has been hired for WSU Extension – Island County. He will become our MRC lead at the May 2 meeting. He is Tim Lawrence, currently of Moscow, Idaho. She said he has a great deal of experience with natural resource issues, including land and water use, and has been involved in California with Sea Grant. Currently he is a post-doctoral candidate at the Pullman campus, studying honeybee insemination. Feldman also reported that on the afternoon of Friday, April 2, WSU President Elson Floyd will be visiting the lighthouse. She would like to include someone from the MRC in Floyd’s meeting here, because he will be wanting to know specifically what kind of support Island County would like from WSU.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Hillers declared the meeting adjourned at 5:34.

MRC Meetings and Events			
Apr. 20	Tues.	3:30 – 5:30	Business meeting
May 4	Tues.	3:30 – 5:30	Educational meeting: Washington Dept of Natural Resources presentation on Smith and Minor Island Aquatic Reserve project
May 18	Tues.	3:30 – 5:30	Business meeting
June, July, August – Summer Schedule, One Meeting per Month			
June 1	Tues	3:30 – 5:30	UW Program on the Environment Team presentation on Penn Cove study
July 6	Tues	3:30 – 5:30	Business Meeting
Aug. 3	Tues	3:30 – 5:30	Educational Meeting
Fall Schedule – Back to Two Meetings per Month			
Sept. 7	Tues.	3:30 – 5:30	Business Meeting