



Island County Marine Resources Committee

2010-2020

Strategic Plan

And Action Plan

Adopted Sept. 21, 2010





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2010 – 2020 Strategic Plan Island County Marine Resources Committee

I. Purpose of the MRC

To contribute to the health of the marine environments of Island County and the Northwest Straits through education, protection, restoration, research and voluntary action. The MRC builds community awareness of the issues, recommends actions, takes actions and builds community support for these actions.

II. Problem and Opportunity

Marine species, habitat and water quality have declined in recent decades because of human influences. We can help our community change behaviors to protect and restore the natural abundance and diversity that make Island County an attractive and healthy place to live, work and visit.

III. Mission

Our mission is to help protect and restore the marine environments of Island County and the Northwest Straits by measurably raising community awareness of marine issues and generating support for actions taken by 2020.

IV. Vision

By 2020 we envision widespread community implementation of best practices and other actions to protect and promote healthy marine waters and sustainable marine life and habitat, contributing in turn to a strong Island County economy.

V. MRC assets

- A. The MRC represents diverse disciplines and interests.
- B. It is engaged and works cohesively.
- C. It is locally-led and locally knowledgeable.
- D. It has carried out excellent baseline science.
- E. It has strong outreach and education capability.
- F. It has a strong partner in WSU Beach Watchers – a large pool of trained volunteers.
- G. It has skill and experience in writing and procuring grants.
- H. It has strong connectivity with county and state professionals, universities, WSU Extension, and other community partners.

VI. Assess current condition

A. Positive

1. Island County has relatively healthy habitat.
2. Most residents, property owners and visitors appreciate our county's natural assets, marine recreation and rural lifestyle.
3. An active, well-supported Land Trust is helping protect sensitive habitat.
4. Several thousand Island County residents are working to educate the public and build support for remedies through their participation in such organizations as Friends of Camano Island Parks, Friends of Freeland, The Orca Network, the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Skagit River Systems Cooperative, Stilly-Sno Fisheries Enhancement Task Force, Waste Wise Volunteers, WSU Beach Watchers, Whidbey Audubon Society, Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Whidbey Institute at Chinook, Whidbey Watershed Stewards, The Nature Conservancy and The Wild Fish Conservancy.
5. Several community groups are engaging volunteers in restoration including both WSU Beach Watchers and Whidbey Watershed Stewards.
6. Additional support for the protection and restoration of marine resources is being provided by the Northwest Straits Initiative and tribal partners.
7. The Shore Stewards program is growing on both islands.
8. WSU Beach Watchers are engaging ever-larger numbers in science and outreach.
9. Much baseline science has been compiled and is available to county departments
10. Much of the shoreline is publicly owned, which facilitates protection and restoration efforts.

B. Negative

1. Many estuaries, creek mouths and sections of natural shoreline were altered during the early years of development—wetlands filled or diked, estuaries closed, creeks diverted, roads built.
2. Island County's population and shoreline development are growing rapidly.
3. State and local resources, and marine-related programs, are deeply stressed by a weak economy and resulting budget cuts.
4. Salmon, orca, steelhead and other marine populations are threatened – down sharply from mid-1900s
5. Many shellfish areas are closed because of fecal and other pollution
6. Specific sources of pollution have yet to be fully addressed, including septic failure, livestock, hydrocarbons and domestic pets
7. Nonpoint pollution is a growing threat but is not well addressed
8. Most people do not understand these problems, nor what they can do to help
9. Island County has extensive shoreline compared to most other counties – 212 miles -- a huge challenge to protect and restore
10. County departments may not be fully accessing or using much of the excellent baseline data collected in recent years.
11. In the most populous and urbanized area of north Whidbey, there is a large, mobile population that may not be as engaged in marine and environmental issues as residents living elsewhere on Whidbey and Camano islands.

VII. Goals, Objectives and Draft Action Plan

Definitions from NWSC strategic planning template

Goals: Broad statements of what the MRC expects to attain or achieve in the near-term or longer term. Goals should be realistic, based on identified needs and achievable in a reasonable or defined period of time. **Objectives:** Statements of specific, measurable and attainable **outcomes** that contribute to achievement of a particular goal. They focus on changing people's behavior or circumstances or establishing a process for achieving a particular goal. **Actions:** Detail specific actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives. Include **specific tasks** to be accomplished, **who** is responsible, the **method used** to accomplish the tasks, a **schedule** for **milestones** and **completion**, the **resources needed** to support these actions.

Integration with Puget Sound Partnership's Whidbey Basin Priority Actions

The objectives of this Action Plan reflect the protection and restoration priorities of the Puget Sound Partnership for the Whidbey Basin Action Area, which includes Island County but is not limited to it. Because the Whidbey Basin Action Area extends beyond Island County into neighboring counties and jurisdictions, some of these objectives are beyond our MRC's scope of work. They are included here to provide context for our actions within the area-wide effort.

Goal A – Protect intact ecosystem processes, structures and functions in support of the Northwest Straits Commission benchmarks and the Puget Sound Partnership Action Agenda.

Goal A Objectives

1. **Protect high-value habitat:** Examples include Northern Smith Island kelp, Padilla, Skagit and Fidalgo bays eelgrass beds, intact mainstem rivers, and unique spawning areas and bird habitat; evaluate need to protect ecosystem processes and quality of life needs when considering tidal energy projects.
2. **Update and implement regulatory programs:** Complete and implement Shoreline Master Program updates on schedule; adopt clearing and grading ordinances throughout Whidbey Basin.
3. **Protect and conserve water flows.** Implement flow rules and programs in all basins, upgrade flow rules in Snohomish, Skagit and Stillaguamish basins.
4. **Protect and support long-term working farms, forests and shellfish farms.** Support TDR/PDR programs, provide technical assistance to landowners.
5. **Invasive species.** Continue local efforts to identify and eradicate invasive species impairing habitat.

Goal A Action Plan	Leader	Method	Schedule	Resources
A1.1. Port Susan Bay Marine Stewardship Area. Partner with Snohomish MRC, the Northwest Straits Commission, The Tulalip Tribes, The Nature Conservancy and others to design and implement a science-based Port Susan Bay Marine Stewardship Area, in addition to our existing, educational Saratoga Passage and Admiralty Inlet marine stewardship areas.	Hi Bronson, Sarah Haynes	Participate directly in planning committee meetings. Propose MSA as a benchmark account project to the NWSC.	2011 - target for MSA creation.	Time. Funding.

<p>A1.2. Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve. Participate with The Department of Natural Resources and People for Puget Sound to design, implement and publicize a Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve that will extend protection from Smith and Minor islands to a section of adjacent nearshore of Whidbey Island. Extend additional protection to kelp beds, nesting seabirds and marine mammals. Improve oil spill response time and resources.</p>	<p>Dick Toft, Ken Urstad, Leal Dickson</p>	<p>Provide representatives to planning committee, tour site and participate in the planning process. Receive DNR progress reports and provide MRC input.</p>	<p>2010 summer – target for DNR to declare establishment of reserve.</p>	<p>Time.</p>
<p>A1.3. Admiralty Inlet tidal energy generation. Continuously monitor plans for tidal energy generation pilot project. Communicate the MRC's concerns and questions to the applicant. Maintain open channels of communication and collaboration.</p>	<p>Stan Walsh</p>	<p>Regular briefings at MRC meetings by Snohomish PUD.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Depends on Snohomish PUD rollout.</p>	<p>Time.</p>
<p>A1.4. Eelgrass distribution and health. Develop a comprehensive map of the distribution of eelgrass on the entire Island County shoreline and make data available to scientists, planners and the public. Monitor for changes over time. Conduct intensive studies of eelgrass distribution and health at select, high-value locations in Cornet Pay, Penn Cove and Holmes Harbor.</p>	<p>Ken Urstad</p>	<p>Partner with WSU Beach Watchers. Fund outfitting of private boat and aircraft for research. Receive periodic reports at MRC meetings. Fulfill some cost-sharing requirements for grants through Beach Watchers' in-kind services.</p>	<p>Initial baseline complete. Monitor through 2015.</p>	<p>Time. Some funding.</p>
<p>A1.5. Juvenile salmon use of pocket estuaries and nearshore. Determine how, when, where and how heavily juvenile salmon use Island County pocket estuaries and adjacent nearshore. Fill data gaps to inform future decisions by county planners. Make data available to scientists, planners and the public.</p>	<p>Ken Urstad</p>	<p>Fund WSU Beach Watchers to seine juvenile salmon using pocket estuaries and adjacent nearshore,</p>	<p>Mostly complete. Some ongoing at Cornet Bay for restoration project.</p>	<p>Modest funding.</p>
<p>A1.6. Forage fish spawning survey. Survey county shoreline to determine which beaches are important as spawning locations forage fish. Make data available to scientists, planners and the public.</p>	<p>Ken Urstad</p>	<p>Fund surveys by forage fish expert Dan Penttila, and by Beach Watchers.</p>	<p>2010. Mostly complete. Some ongoing.</p>	<p>Modest funding.</p>
<p>A1.7. Pigeon Guillemot breeding survey. Monitor the summertime population of Pigeon Guillemots. Assess the number of active burrows in which breeding takes place. Identify prey species and note any trends in types of prey delivered to the young. Raise awareness about this bird, its significance as an indicator species, and its needs. Reduce human disturbances. Make data available to scientists, planners and the public.</p>	<p>Frances Wood</p>	<p>Fund ongoing breeding survey by summer intern of this indicator species. Partner with Whidbey Audubon Society. Fund participation in seabird conferences and Puget Sound Georgia Basin conference.</p>	<p>2015. Ongoing. Indefinite.</p>	<p>Modest funding of intern's pay and some conference expenses and incidentals.</p>
<p>A1.8. Educate shoreline property owners in habitat best practices. Enroll shoreline property owners in voluntary educational program about managing the habitat on their land. Provide education about high-bluff management, erosion, native plants, septic systems, bulkheading, garden chemicals and related topics. Conduct workshops and seminars.</p>	<p>Scott Chase Tim Lawrence Hi Bronson Dick Toft</p>	<p>Fund the Shore Stewards Program.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Indefinite.</p>	<p>Significant funding for coordinator's position.</p>
<p>A1.9. Teach public about shoreline life, shoreline processes, beach etiquette, threats to habitat, invasive species, plastic pollution and other issues.</p>	<p>Tim Lawrence</p>	<p>Co-sponsor and participate in the annual Sound Waters Univ. Work with WSU Beach Watchers on educational projects.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Indefinite</p>	<p>Modest funding. Time.</p>

A1.10. Monitor shoreline for changes. Continuously monitor Island County shoreline, using scientific protocols, for changes in nearshore life and conditions.	Tim Lawrence	Support the work of WSU Beach Watchers.	Ongoing. Indefinite.	None.
A4.1. Working farms, forests and shellfish farms. Collaborate with Whidbey Camano Land Trust and support their land-protection projects on behalf of working farms, forests and shellfish farms.	Rex Porter Lenny Corin Ian jefferds	Periodic presentations by Land Trust E.D. Representation of Land Trust board on MRC.	Ongoing.	Time.
A5.1. Invasive species. Collaborate with WSU Island County Beach Watchers. Support their efforts to identify and eradicate invasive species. Train them as our "eyes on the beach."	Tim Lawrence		Ongoing.	None.

Goal B – Restore ecosystem processes, structures & functions.

Goal B Objectives

1. **Implement priority restoration projects:** Implement Salmon Recovery three-year work plan (WRIAs 3,4,5,6,7) and restoration components of shoreline management plans.
2. **Complete large-scale estuary restoration projects** in the Skagit, Snohomish and Stillagumish rivers and meet restoration targets set in the salmon recovery plans.
3. **Prioritize and strategically remove derelict gear.**
4. **Remove creosote debris** and treated wood from county shoreline.

Goal B Action Plan	Leader	Method	Schedule	Resources
B1.1. Cornet Bay shoreline restoration. Restore natural beach slope and opportunities for forage fish spawning and nearshore use by juvenile salmonids. Remove groin and other structures interfering with sediment transport. Remove creosoted bulkhead and pilings. Partner with Washington State Parks.	Rex Porter, Sarah Schmidt			National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant funding, NWSC grant and other sources.
B1.2. Dugualla Flats. Collaborate with Whidbey Camano Land Trust and support their efforts to restore natural function to a portion of this heavily altered shoreline, directly across from the mouth of the Skagit River.	Todd Zackey	Participatde in Dugualla Bay Stakeholder Advisory Group.	Ongoing.	Time.
B3.1. Remove 90% of derelict nets.	Ken Urstad	Participate in the Northwest Straits Commission's derelict gear removal project.	2010. Complete.	
B4.1. Map and remove creosote debris. Collaborate with WSU Island County Beach Watchers to map the distribution of creosote debris on Whidbey and Camano islands. Collaborate with Dept. of Natural Resources to remove it.	Ken Urstad	Partner with Department of Natural Resources for removal.		Time.

Goal C – Reduce sources of water pollution.

Goal C Objectives

1. **Prevent pollution.**

- a) **Implement watershed management plans** addressing temperature, dissolved oxygen, mercury and bacteria impairments.
 - b) **Evaluate low dissolved oxygen levels** in Penn Cove, Holmes Harbor, Saratoga Passage and Possession Sound, and develop and implement strategy to address low dissolved oxygen levels if necessary, using lessons learned in Hood Canal.
 - c) **Provide support for technical assistance** and cost-share programs for small farms and commercial agriculture to improve and integrate agricultural nutrient management; integrate small farms into current programs, and keep livestock out of streams.
 - d) **Implement shellfish protection plans.**
 - e) **Manage stormwater runoff.** Implement NPDES permits; use and increase site-appropriate LID techniques to manage for future planned growth; begin stormwater retrofits in dense urban areas.
2. **Manage on-site sewage systems.** Support local efforts to identify and control sources of pollution.

Goal C Action Plan	Leader	Method	Schedule	Resources
C1b1. Penn Cove wastewater diversion pilot project. To reduce the input into Penn Cove of nutrients that contribute to excessive algal blooms and low dissolved oxygen, explore feasibility of diverting wastewater from Coupeville sewage treatment facility to a bioswale on Ebey's Prairie for phytoremediation and irrigation of agricultural crops.	Joe Hillers Rex Porter Linda Rhodes	Partner with Town of Coupeville and other entities. Pursue grants.	2010 trees planted. Pilot project ready to start.	Time. Funding.
C1d1. Holmes Harbor Shellfish Protection District. Participate as a partner in the shellfish protection district's efforts to identify and eliminate the sources of pollution that have necessitated the closure of southern Holmes Harbor to shellfish harvesting.	Rex Porter Ken Urstad Matt Kukuk	Participate with representation in meetings of the Penn Cove Shellfish Protection District.	2010. Substantially complete.	Time.
C1e1. Penn Cove stormwater diversion pilot project. Explore the feasibility of diverting stormwater to Ebey's Prairie that currently flows into Penn Cove from town outflows. Provide advocacy for solutions that would remove pollutants naturally in a bioswale and make the resulting water available for agriculture.	Joe Hillers Rex Porter Tim Lawrence		2015	Time. Grant funding.
C1e2. Conduct LID education programs.	Tim Lawrence	Partner with Whidbey Island Conservation District to help sponsor LID education for contractors and citizens.	Ongoing.	Time. Funding
C2.1. Provide advocacy for implementation of more rigorous inspection protocols for septic systems, as part of a wider strategy to reduce local sources of pollution of marine waters.	Rex Porter Dick Toft	Briefings from county officials and MRC members participating in program.	Ongoing.	Time.

Goal D – Work efficiently and effectively together on priority actions.

Goal D Objectives

1. **Support integration of species recovery**, water quality, aquatic reserve, and natural resource management plans, shoreline master programs, and MRC strategies. Start with salmon recovery, MRC and water management plans.
2. **Work cooperatively with farming community** to develop a coordinated restoration strategy that balances the needs of agriculture and fish with the Snohomish and Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Boards and other farming groups. Support collaborative efforts to negotiate the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative.
3. **Sustain recent collaborative efforts** to identify protection and restoration opportunities in the Skagit watershed, maintain ongoing efforts in the Snohomish and Stillaguamish basins.
4. **Investigate a permit coordination project** in the Snohomish Basin.
5. **Implement Skagit Alternatives Futures Project results**, expand project as warranted, integrate and coordinate project with Skagit community efforts.

Goal D Action Plan	Leader	Method	Schedule	Resources
D1.1. Maintain open lines of communication and collaboration with county salmon recovery coordinator, Salmon Technical Advisory Group (TAG), county commissioners, county Water Resources Advisory Committee, tribes, and other entities with a stake in species recovery in Island County.	Rex Porter, Todd Zackey (TAG, tribes), Stan Walsh (tribes)	Encourage regular attendance and active participation in MRC meetings by a county commissioner. Appoint tribal representatives and county government representatives to MRC. Include representatives of TAG, tribes and other entities. Exchange minutes with WRAC. Maintain direct communication with these groups.	Ongoing.	Time.
D2.1. Partner with farming community to pursue phytoremediation pilot project to convert Penn Cove wastewater and stormwater to irrigation for Ebey's Prairie agriculture.	Joe Hillers Rex Porter	Maintain a seat on the MRC for a representative of the agricultural community. Work collaboratively with Whidbey Island Conservation District and other entities with a stake in agriculture.	Ongoing.	Time, funding.

Goal E -- Conduct outreach to share knowledge and promote the protection and restoration of healthy habitats and species.

Goal E Objectives

1. **Support the adoption** of environmentally friendly actions by county residents, visitors and seasonal residents to include recycling, composting, rain gardens and low-impact development.
2. **Brief county commissioners** and other leaders at least annually on MRC activities.
3. **Work with county government and NWSC** to assure accessibility of marine resource data, including MRC data, by the public and planners at all levels of government.
4. **Assess** the public's awareness, understanding and implementation of stewardship practices.

Goal E Action Plan	Leader	Method	Schedule	Resources
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E1.1. Saratoga Passage and Admiralty Inlet Marine Stewardship Areas. Implement educational marine stewardship areas in all Island County waters as a platform for public education about marine assets and their importance.	Dan Pedersen	Propose a resolution (subsequently passed) by county commissioners designating these areas.	2003. Complete.	Staff time.
E1.2. Marine interpretive signage. Deploy educational marine interpretive signage throughout the county to raise awareness of marine stewardship areas, the value of marine resources, and the need for protection.	Dan Pedersen	Write, illustrate, manufacture and install signs with the assistance of community partners – parks, cities, port districts and community organizations.	2011. Substantially complete.	Staff time, grant funding for writer, artist and manufacturer. Solicit community partners to share in costs.
E1.3. Shore Stewards. Maintain an ongoing habitat best-practices educational program for shoreline landowners in conjunction with marine stewardship areas and marine interpretive signage.	Scott Chase	Employ a coordinator to maintain the program and conduct workshops.	Annually.	Time, funding for coordinator.
E1.4. Getting to the Water's Edge. Maintain a stewardship and shoreline access guide in print and distribute it to the public in conjunction with marine stewardship areas, signage and Shore Stewards program.	Dan Pedersen	Store inventory at WSU. Deliver to bookstores as needed, primarily using volunteers.	Ongoing	Time.
E1.5. Website. Maintain the MRC and Island County MSA websites as a resource for the public, in conjunction with marine stewardship areas.	Dan Pedersen, Linda Rhodes	Communications manager creates content and supplies it to webmaster for posting.	Monthly	Time. Funding for webmaster
E1.6. News articles. Publish articles about MRC work in local newspapers, in print and online.	Dan Pedersen	Communications manager writes and submits articles to editors.	Ongoing.	Time. Staff funding.
E1.7. Sound Waters University. Support WSU Beach Watchers in presenting an annual, educational, one-day university on marine issues and the environment, attended by 500+ people from the community.		Contribute news articles and/or financial support. Provide an information booth. Provide instructors. Facilitate speakers.	Annually.	Staff time, committee time, funding.
E1.8. Workshops, educational events. Present workshops, talks and educational events to the public, including marine educational programs at MRC meetings.	Rex Porter	Partner with local conservation districts, Shore Stewards, Beach Watchers, Waste Wise and non-governmental organizations	Ongoing.	Staff time, funding.
E1.9. Youth outreach. Develop a youth outreach program or partner with an organization already operating an effective, marine-oriented, youth outreach program to increase its impact.		Discussions between executive director and representatives of organizations. Bring to MRC for decision.	Annually.	Time, funding.
E2.1. State of the Shoreline report. Deliver a written and verbal report to county commissioners and planning commission at a staff session once a year.	Ian Jefferds	Verbal and hardcopy report	Annually	Staff time
E2.2. MRC Nearshore Report. Update and distribute a report annually summarizing projects and priorities.	Dan Pedersen	On website and in hardcopy.	Annually	Time, printing cost, webmaster cost.
E3.1. Marine resources database. Establish and maintain a publicly accessible database of MRC research on eelgrass, forage fish, shoreline hardening, Pigeon Guillemot breeding data and other studies, in a format useful to county residents, planners and scientists.	Ian Jefferds	Grant funding from NW Straits Commission or other sources and collaboration with Island County departments.	2011	Staff time, funding

<p>E.4.1. Community survey. Assess community understanding of, and participation in, stewardship practices. Periodically re-survey to track changes.</p>		<p>Conduct a survey or participate in a survey using accepted, statistically valid assessment tools, including written and verbal surveys. May include postal mail, web-based, telephone and in-person interviews.</p>		<p>Staff time, funding.</p>
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