



Island County Marine Resources Committee

2020 Annual Report



About the MRC

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), established in 1999, is an advisory body of volunteers appointed by Island County Commissioners. The members are from the local community, and represent a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and expertise, with the unified goal of protecting and restoring the local marine environment.

The MRC's purpose is to **investigate, research, and identify local marine resources**, and marine resource and habitat issues; **recommend remedial actions** to Island County agencies and authorities; **carry out such recommendations** where so approved; and **build local awareness** of the issues and broad-based community support for the remedies. The MRC conducts monitoring, restoration, and outreach projects, in addition to its advisory role to the County Commissioners.

The Island County MRC is one of seven Marine Resources Committees supported by the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (NWSI), with the goal to restore and protect our marine waters. In addition to collaborating with the Northwest Straits Commission, Foundation, and other MRCs, Island County MRC also works with many local and regional partners, including: Sound Water Stewards, Whidbey Island Conservation District, Snohomish Conservation District, Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Washington State University Extension – Island County, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Washington State Parks, and others. These partnerships are key to the collaborative effort of protecting and restoring the marine species and habitats that surround our island home.

This report was prepared in September 2020 by Anna Toledo, Island County MRC Coordinator, and represents work conducted from October 2019 through September 2020.

Cover page photos, clockwise from top left: Native vegetation planting at Sunlight Shores for Orca Recovery Day. Pacific herring in kelp bed, photo by Linda Rhodes. Rain garden sign at Greenbank Farm. Chris Robertson indicates creosote-treated wood at workshop.

Back cover photo: Sunset at Sunlight Shores, photo by Dawn Spilsbury Pucci.



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Membership

The MRC is comprised of up to thirteen voting members, appointed by the Board of Island County Commissioners, as well as non-voting ex-officio members and technical advisors. The MRC relies on the hard work and dedication of its members and other volunteers to conduct monitoring, restoration, and outreach. **In the 2019-2020 year, the MRC recorded 1,892 volunteer hours!** Thank you to our members and volunteers for your dedication to protecting and restoring the marine resources of Island County!



Member	MRC Projects, Sub-Committees, and Group Representation
Current Members: September 2020	
Kelly Zupich, Chair	Executive Committee, Outreach
Hannah Liss, Vice-Chair	Executive Committee, Bull kelp, Outreach
Barbara Bennett	Outreach, Island Local Integrating Organization
Randy Berthold	Executive Committee, Bull kelp, Outreach
Michael Bianchi	Outreach, Navy
Scott Chase	Sound Water Stewards, Outreach, Port Susan MSA
Ed Halloran	Port of South Whidbey, Outreach
Gwendolyn Hannam	Restoration, Outreach
Matt Kukuk	Forage fish
Andi Kopit	Outreach, Schools
Elsa Schwartz	Executive Committee, Port Susan MSA, Northwest Straits Commission Representative
Kestutis Tautvydas	Eelgrass, Seining
Ex-Officio Members (non-voting)	
Lori Clark	Island County Department of Natural Resources
Tim Lawrence	WSU Extension – Island County
Janet St. Clair	Board of Island County Commissioners
Technical Advisors (non-voting)	
Florian Graner	Outreach
Tom Leschine	Science
Linda Rhodes	Science, Bull kelp, Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve
Mark Stamey	Restoration
Todd Zackey	Tribal: Tulalip Tribes

Operations

This year has looked a little different for everyone. Due to COVID-19 precautions, the MRC's April meeting was cancelled. The MRC resumed monthly meetings in a virtual format in May, and has been continuing with virtual meetings since then.

The MRC meets on the first Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public, and often feature an educational speaker as well as discussion on business topics and project updates.

The MRC was pleased to welcome new staff member, Ann Prusha, in February, who has been assisting the MRC with administrative tasks, as well as assisting with the forage fish program. With two part-time staff members, staff support to the MRC is equivalent to approximately 0.75 FTE.

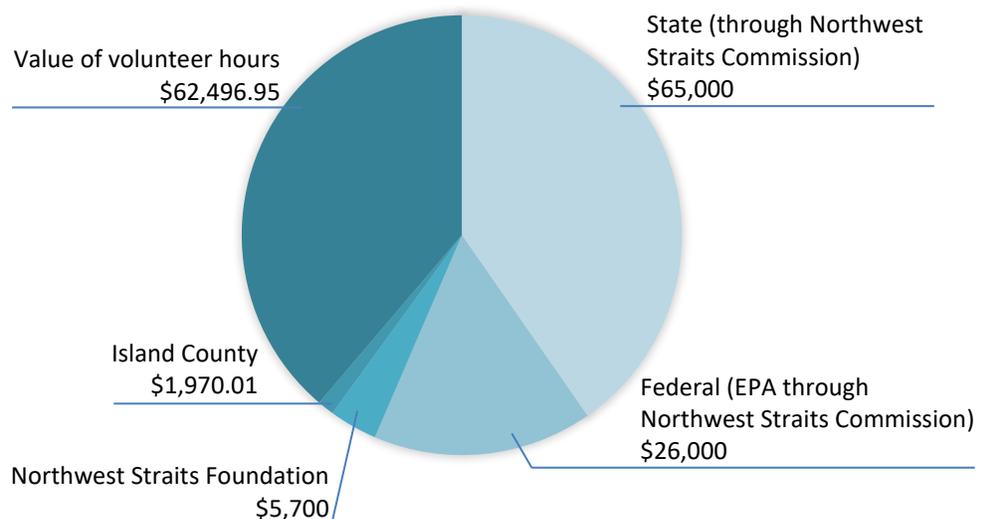
The MRC brings important environmental and economic value to Island County, and engages the local community to preserve and protect our beautiful Island home.

Through grants and volunteer hours, the MRC has brought a total value of **\$159,196.95** to Island County in 2019-2020.

Accomplishments

- Scheduled, organized, and held 12 MRC meetings, including 1 strategic planning retreat.
- Developed 2020-2021 work plan and grant amendment proposal.
- Presented proposed MRC projects to the Board of Island County Commissioners.
- Attended monthly Northwest Straits Commission meetings and seasonal MRC staff meetings.
- Participated in the MRC Conference and MRC Symposium.
- Participated in Island Local Integrating Organization technical committee meetings and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee meetings.
- Regularly updated website with meeting agendas and minutes, project updates, and announcements.

Funding Sources



Advisory

The MRC is uniquely positioned as an advisory body to the Island County Commissioners, comprised of members of the community who understand and represent local issues and perspectives. The MRC also connects with marine issues of regional importance through representation on the Northwest Straits Commission, Island Local Integrating Organization, and Salmon Recovery Technical and Citizen Committee.

The MRC participated in a nearshore restoration tour hosted by Island County Natural Resources for the Island County Commissioners. The tour highlighted the work and process of nearshore restoration, including: project identification, community and stakeholder engagement, feasibility, design and permitting, implementation, and stewardship.

The tour included stops at two sites the MRC has partnered on: Oak Harbor Marina Restoration Feasibility and Sunlight Shores Restoration. Island County Commissioners were able to see on-the-ground projects and the role of the MRC in conducting monitoring and community engagement to facilitate the identification, implementation, and ongoing care of this important work.



Island County Commissioners learn about Sunlight Shores restoration site. Photos: Dawn Spilsbury Pucci

Accomplishments

- Presented to Island County Commissioners about MRC projects.
- Participated in nearshore restoration tour for Island County Commissioners.
- Participated in virtual town hall to celebrate Earth Day, hosted by Island County Commissioner Janet St. Clair.
- Island County Commissioner participated in Puget Sound Days on the Hill. Highlighted importance of support for community science.



Monitoring: Forage Fish

Forage fish are small schooling fish that are a key component in the marine food web, as a vital food source for salmon, seabirds, and marine mammals. Surf smelt and Pacific sand lance, two species of forage fish, lay their eggs on sandy-gravelly beaches around Puget Sound.

The MRC conducts forage fish spawn surveys at selected beaches in conjunction with completed, planned, and proposed shoreline restoration work. The MRC also partners with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to assist in conducting surveys at index sites – locations with public access and a known history of spawning presence. Volunteers collect and condense beach sediment samples, which are then transported to WDFW for analysis.

After a pause in March-May due to COVID-19 restrictions, volunteers were eager to return to surveying in June. Volunteers adapted quickly to COVID-19 safety guidelines. New volunteers joined the team at Hidden Beach, while additional volunteers expressed interest in joining at additional sites in the future.

Accomplishments

- Conducted surveys at three existing restoration sites: Ala Spit (post-restoration), Cornet Bay (post-restoration), and Hidden Beach (pre-restoration).
- Initiated surveys at one new restoration site: Seahorse Siesta (pre-restoration).
- Conducted surveys at one index site: Glendale.
- Trained three new volunteers.
- Volunteers provided 225 hours of service.



Volunteers conduct forage fish spawn surveys.



Monitoring: Bull Kelp

Bull kelp forests serve as an important habitat and feeding source to a wide variety of species in the marine environment, providing critical support throughout the marine food web.

Prompted by documented declines of bull kelp in South Puget Sound, the MRC initiated boat-based bull kelp surveys in 2015 in coordination with the Northwest Straits Initiative and other MRCs. Volunteers monitor the size of bull kelp beds using GPS units while paddling a kayak around the perimeter of the bed.

Kelp bed perimeters were tracked monthly during the summer months at four sites around Island County: Polnell Point, Ebey's Landing, Possession Point, and Lowell Point.

Volunteers also collected temperature data using temperature loggers at varying depths and collected images of plants and animals observed in the kelp beds.



Sand lance in bull kelp bed. Photo: Linda Rhodes

Accomplishments

- Conducted kayak surveys at four beds around Island County during the summer growing season.
- Assessed near infra-red and visible light aerial imaging of bull kelp beds around Island County coastline.
- Deployed temperature loggers at three sites to measure temperatures across multiple depths.
- Collected images of plants and animals within kelp beds.
- Participated in review of kelp conservation and recovery plan.

Key Observations

- Beds were equivalent or slightly smaller than beds in 2019.
- Schools of juvenile Pacific herring and Pacific sand lance were observed in the Ebey's Landing bed.
- Surface temperatures were slightly lower than in 2019.
- Kelp crabs were observed at all beds except Polnell Point.

Restoration: Hoypus Point and Possession Point

The MRC partnered with the Northwest Straits Foundation and Washington State Parks to conduct a restoration feasibility study at Hoypus Point and Possession Point, both located within State Parks on Whidbey Island. The study recommended armor removal at Hoypus Point and the potential for future restoration of the nearshore and historic delta at Possession Point when the existing house and other infrastructure could be removed.

This project also included the development of a conceptual design for restoration at Hoypus Point. This site contains remnants of an obsolete ferry terminal that served the location in the early 1900s. It is approximately one mile from the Cornet Bay restoration site where the MRC has been involved in restoration and monitoring efforts.

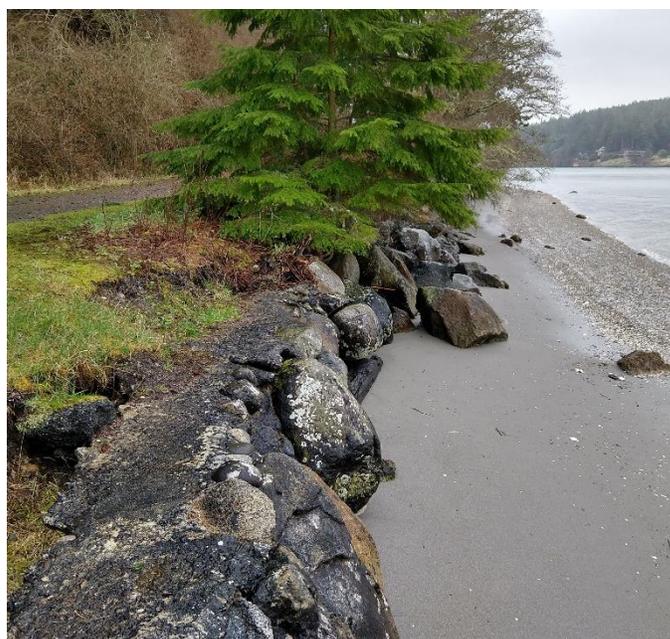
The conceptual design at Hoypus Point included the removal of 350 feet of shoreline armor, including large rock and concrete debris. The design also included removal of fill, regrading the shoreline to a natural slope, and placement of appropriate beach substrate. In addition, the design included the removal of asphalt from the existing road/trail to the beach, and replacement with a trail gravel substrate to create an ADA-compliant trail.

The Northwest Straits Foundation has successfully received funding to complete final design and permitting at this site. The MRC will continue partnering in the restoration and monitoring process.

Accomplishments

In addition to the feasibility study at Hoypus Point and Possession Point, the MRC engaged in additional restoration activities:

- Planted native vegetation at Sunlight Shores restoration site.
- Partnered on four vegetation maintenance events at Cornet Bay restoration site.
- Assisted with renovation of Greenbank Farm rain garden.
- Partnered on development of Oak Harbor Marina Restoration Feasibility Study.



Shoreline armoring at Hoypus Point.

Education and Outreach: Student Engagement

A local school group joined the MRC at a beach seining event at Cornet Bay in January to learn about juvenile salmon and the importance of preserving and restoring nearshore habitat.

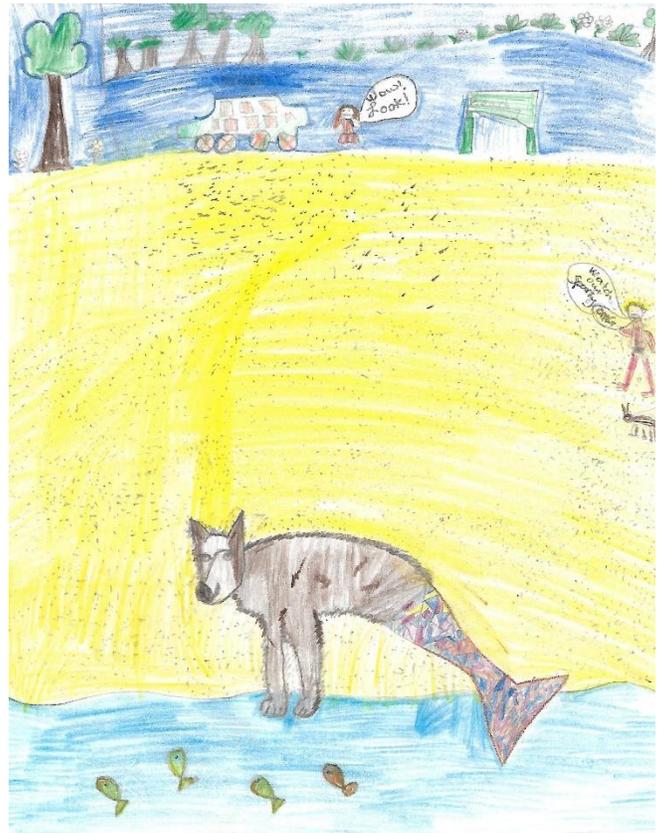
Pictured to the right, Jason Morgan, Northwest Straits Foundation Marine Projects Manager, talks to students about the beach seining project. (Photo by Dawn Spilsbury Pucci).

The MRC and Sound Water Stewards hosted two art contests. The contests invited students to view the film “Discover Our Island Shores” and design their own Salish Sea creature. Students let their creativity shine in this challenge.

To adapt to COVID-19 changes to education models, and to increase accessibility, the MRC made the “Discover Our Island Shores” film available to local students through an online streaming format.



The “Seacorn,” created by Amelia, 4th-5th Grade First Place winner in the “Design Your Own Salish Sea Creature” art contest.



The “Coyphin,” created by Inari, winner of the “Discover Our Island Shores” art and essay contest winner.

Education and Outreach: Creosote Workshops

The MRC has partnered with Washington Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR) on nearshore restoration work, including collaborating on identifying and removing creosote from local beaches.

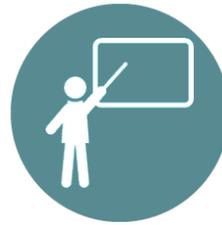
In recent years, the Snohomish MRC helped develop tools in the MyCoast smartphone app, one of which allows users to report loose creosote debris to help inform WA DNR's creosote removal program. With a desire to re-engage on creosote identification and removal efforts, the MRC partnered with WA DNR to host workshops for local community members and frequent beachgoers to increase awareness and utilization of the MyCoast app to report creosote debris.

The workshops featured speaker Chris Roberston, WA DNR Aquatics Restoration Manager, who provided an overview of creosote, including its impact on the marine environment. Workshop participants then took a field trip to a local beach to test out their identification skills and use the MyCoast app to report their findings.



Chris Robertson shows workshop participants how to recognize creosote-treated debris.

In Numbers



2 Workshops



27 Attendees



94%

Had better understanding of the impacts of creosote after the workshop.



84%

Had better understanding of how to identify creosote after the workshop.



94%

Indicated they would utilize the MyCoast app in the future.



27%

Increase in creosote reports through the MyCoast app in the month following the workshops.

Education and Outreach: Meetings, Events, and Outreach Tools

The MRC engaged in several outreach efforts throughout the year. Outreach is an integral part of each MRC project. By helping the community understand what the MRC does and why, the MRC strives to increase public interest in learning about and caring for the local marine environment.

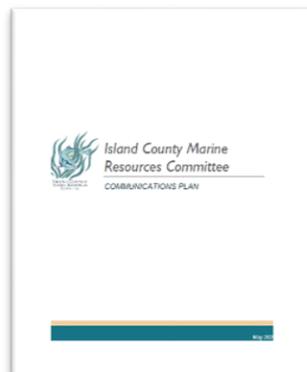
As like many organizations this year, the MRC adapted creatively to meet COVID-19 guidelines. The MRC made adjustments to its outreach efforts, such as offering contactless pickup of crabber outreach materials and making more resources available virtually.



Gwendolyn Hannam and Elsa Schwartz participate in OCTOPOD podcast. Photo: Nicole Jordan



Left: Crabber outreach materials. Photo: Scott Chase



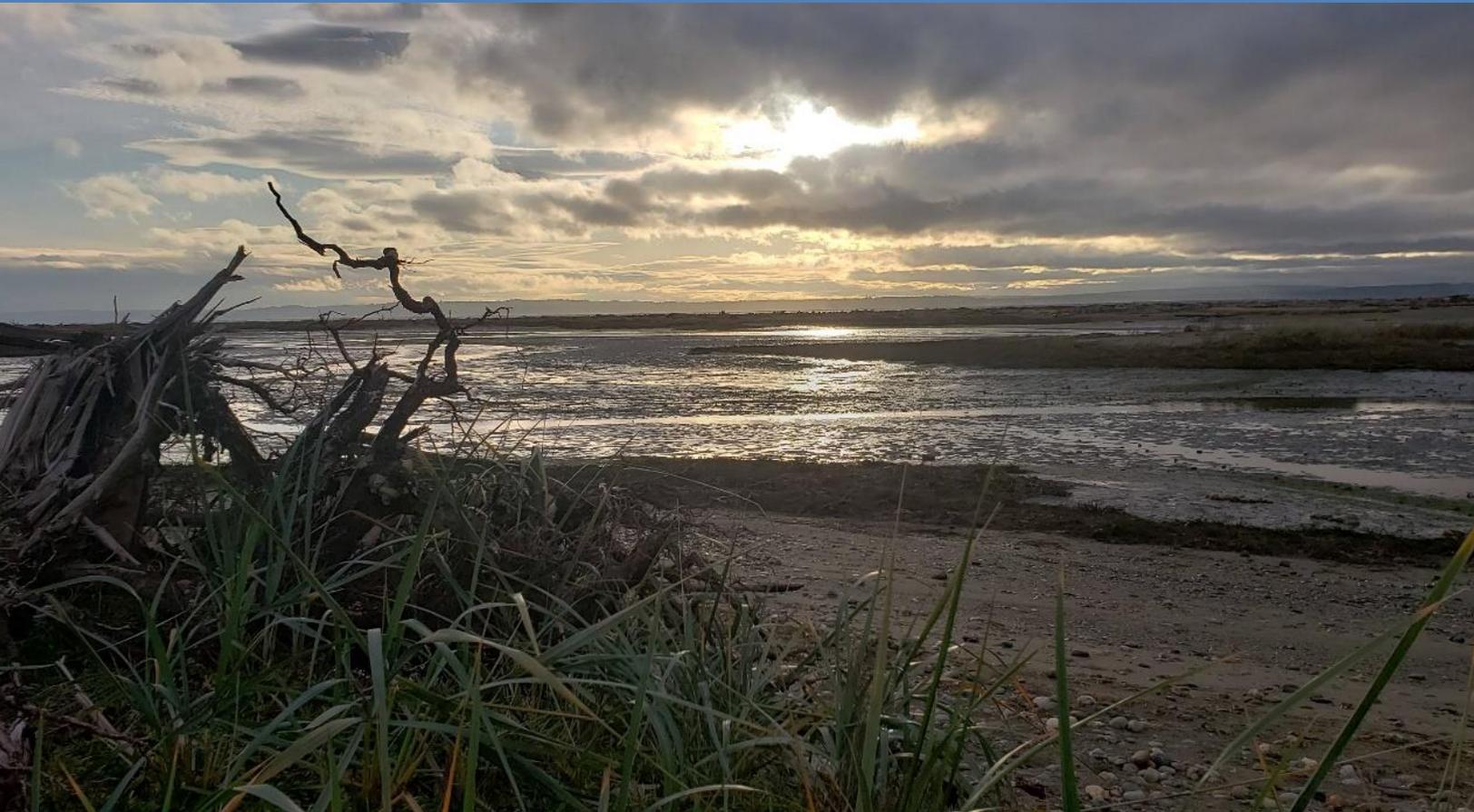
Right: MRC Communications Plan, led by Barb Bennett.

Accomplishments

- Displayed marine food web exhibit at Oak Harbor Library.
- Distributed crab gauges, rot cord, and educational handouts to recreational crabbers.
- Designed two interpretive signs for rain gardens at Greenbank Farm and Crescent Harbor Elementary School.
- Participated in two podcasts.
- Developed communications plan.
- Contributed to monthly Island County Natural Resources newsletter.
- Participated in Orca Recovery Day, Great Northwest Glass Quest, Sound Waters University, and Camano 101.



Marine food web display, developed by Kelly Zupich.



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