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Island County Marine Resources Committee 2021 Needs Assessment *Assessment Overview*

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) conducted a needs assessment in Winter 2021 to aid strategic planning for the coming 3-5 years. The goal was to identify pressing and emerging marine resource issues in Island County and to learn what MRC roles and projects are most valued.

Based on interviews, this assessment provided qualitative, anecdotal information to support stewardship of Island County's marine resources. This information is a reflection of the context of marine resource issues in Island County at this moment in time and we provide this overview with the hope it may be useful for county departments and conservation organizations as well as the MRC.

Methodology

Modeled after the [MRC's 2017 assessment](#), a questionnaire guided MRC volunteers' interviews of County elected officials and staff, and representatives of stakeholder groups related to the MRC mission. Questions that were replicated or adapted from the 2017 questionnaire asked about pressing issues (marine or otherwise) and emerging issues, short and long-term goals and what of the MRC's roles and projects are most valuable. Two new questions were requested by the Island Local Integrating Organization to pursue details from a recent [Natural Resource Values and Sense of Place survey](#).

Stakeholders closest to the MRC mission and individuals with related knowledge were sought out for interviews. These included local elected officials, State and County government executives and staff from key departments and local conservation partners. Interview types outside this marine-focused circle were recommended for future assessments, and several were added to this assessment.

Five (5) MRC members interviewed twenty-eight (28) individuals across six (6) interviewee types, with interviews averaging 50 minutes. Interviewers were trained on interviewing and confidentiality protocols. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted virtually.

Notes from interviews were entered into spreadsheets and entries were identified by interviewee type. Data were analyzed question-by-question for themes among and across *TOPICS* and within and across *INTERVIEWEE TYPES*. Analysis also searched for "macro" patterns across the entire pool of interviews. All raw data and analytical material will be on file in the MRC archives.

MRC Composition and Roles

Island County MRC is an advisory body to county government established in 1999 and comprised of many community volunteers who represent diverse interests and industries, with the common goal to protect and restore marine resources in the Puget Sound area through scientific monitoring, restoration projects, and community education.

While the MRC lacks the authority or resources to resolve complex and costly issues noted in this assessment, responses affirm the MRC's importance as a source of trusted information to support movement toward solutions. Several questions in the Needs Assessment asked about the work of the MRC and what is most valuable. Responses highlighted its neutral, science based, advisory and educational roles.

Roles of value for Island County Marine Resources Committee (see Appendix A, graphs 1 and 2)

Interviews indicated the MRC is uniquely valuable as:

- a balanced, science-based resource with integrity,
- a trust-worthy advisory and educational provider,
- an advisory resource for the Board of Island County Commissioners,
- a source of science-based educational information and outreach to engage residents,
- the convener of community science-based research projects, and
- a voice on behalf of marine conservation, stewardship and restoration and adaptive regulations in light of increasingly dynamic shoreline conditions.

Overview of Issues Raised (see Appendix A, graphs 3 and 4)

Current **Pressing and Emerging Issues** identified by the assessment include:

- the impact of upland development and forest management practices on erosion and sediment transport, storm water management and fresh and marine water quality;
- recognition of intensifying dynamic shoreline processes, such as storm surge and sea level rise, and limitations of engineering strategies to address risks associated with these changes;
- awareness of changing and deteriorating shoreline conditions which impact ecosystem functions and threaten to negatively impact the economic value of Island County as a site for recreation;
- and patterns of cumulative impacts generated by the combination of many small actions and incremental decisions that add up to significant pressures on marine resources.

“Island County’s shorelines are under greater pressure from erosion and development as compared to other counties with shorelines.”

This is supported by data showing that Island County has the second highest number of land parcels on Puget Sound and shoreline permitting requests from Island County exceed other Counties in Northwest Washington.

Washington Department of Ecology, from interviews for Island County MRC 2021 Needs Assessment

Many interviewees raised a combination of **Pressures and Tensions** highlighting a greater degree of complexity and interrelationships than was noted in the 2017 assessment (see Appendix A, graphs 3 – 5):

- the need for bluff management was combined repeatedly with the impact of upland development - but for two different reasons:
 - the need to sustain the beneficial function of erosion to sustain beach nourishment and
 - the need to protect people and property;
- the pressure to support private property rights was often combined with concerns about:
 - increased exposure to risks as more vulnerable sites are developed and
 - questions of safety and liability for private decisions made despite precautionary warnings;
- the intermingling on the shoreline of County infrastructure, e.g. roads and water management, with privately-owned property, infrastructure and buildings creates confusion regarding:
 - rights, risks and decision-making authority and
 - responsibilities and liability;
- tensions were reflected especially in comments regarding:
 - assuring and increasing public access,
 - addressing shoreline maintenance, protection and restoration,
 - sustaining historic uses even with changing shoreline conditions, and
 - introducing adaptive strategies for resilience and safety in light of changing conditions.

“The cascading impacts of changing climate and pressure to clear and develop land is destabilizing bluffs, compromising water quality, increasing runoff and stormwater in watersheds, and increasing demand for protective and resilience strategies for man-made structures and farming.”

From interviews for the 2021 IC MRC Needs Assessment

Suggested Next Steps (see *Appendix A*, graphs 5 and 6)

Interviews pointed to *Next Steps* toward solutions to address these complex issues while, simultaneously, protecting, sustaining and restoring Island County’s marine resources:

- increase awareness of interconnected ecosystem relationships from upland to shore and the historic and legal context for shoreline regulations and policy;
- communicate information about the value of the county’s marine resources for the local economy and for the well-being of all who live on and visit the islands;
- engage in collaborative problem solving to identify common ground regarding expectations;
- clarify distinctions between responsibilities and decision-making authority of local government and responsibilities and authority of private shoreland owners;
- develop adaptive regulations for resilience and safety in anticipation of increasing storm intensity and sea level rise, and
- integrate science-based elements into regulations.

“Public access to the shoreline and stewarding the health of marine and shoreline ecosystems are not only the right things to champion, they translate into economic and public health engines.”

From interviews for the 2021 IC MRC Needs Assessment

This overview reports highlights from the [Island County MRC 2021 Needs Assessment](#). For a copy of this summary and further information see the MRC web-based archive for summary graphs and/ or the raw data.

Respectfully submitted,
the Island County Marine Resources Committee, 2021 Needs Assessment Team

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Island County Marine Resources Committee 2021 Needs Assessment

Appendix A

Graph 1. What do you value about the MRC?

WHAT DO YOU VALUE ABOUT THE MRC?							Total
Advisory voice to Commissioners	Advisory voice to Commissioners						
Tally	3						Total 3
Reputation of integrity with Community and Elected officials	Encouragement and long term vision (helpful to State level regulators)	Collaboration (partner)	Nimble	Reputation of integrity			
Tally	1	2	1	1			Total 5
Connection with Multiple Audiences	Connection and Engagement with Community	Bring knowledge to specific groups	Tribal Connection	Volunteers on the ground	Is a resource to county staff and community		
Tally	3	2	1	1	1	Total 8	
Outreach and education	Neutral educational settings with dialogue	Education about history	Field Trips to the Beach for Commissioners	Field trips to showcase and explain shoreline dynamics	Examples of projects (Shore Friendly program)	General support of Outreach and Education role	
Tally	1	1	1	2	2	3	Total 10
Research and Restoration	Research and Monitoring specific to Island County	Restoration					
Tally	2	1					Total 3

Graph 2. Are you familiar with the MRC?

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE MRC?										
	Total	State Govt	IC Govt	other local Govt	other IC entities	conservation partners	other individuals	other orgs	Fed Govt	other local Govt entities
NO Total	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
SOMEWHAT Total	13	4	7	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
YES Total	14	1	5	2	1	3	2	0	0	0
TOTAL Interviews	28	5	12	2	1	6	2	0	0	0

Graph 4. What are emerging issues in your work (incl. responses that focused on topics and responses that synthesized topics)?

Abbreviations: SLR Sea Level Rise
 CC Climate Change
 SS Storm Surge

WHAT ARE EMERGING ISSUES IN YOUR WORK? Graph # 1 *RESPONSES THAT FOCUSED ON TOPICS*

RESPONSES THAT FOCUS ON TOPICS

	SLR	CC/ SS	Bluff Mgmt	Upland Magmt	Littoral Drift	Watershed/ Stormwater	Erosion	Water quality (fresh and marine)	Integral connections: snow cap to white cap	Total
Dynamic and Changing Shoreline Environment										
Tally	5	4	3	1	2	2	4	5	2	28
Shoreline Restoration, Education, Stewardship and Collaboration	Shoreline Sealife and Seafood	Monitoring	Shoreline Restoration	Stewarding unaltered shoreline	Resilient Shoreline	Shoreline Education	Shoreline Collaboration	Plastic pollution		
Tally	4	4	2	3	2	2	1	1		19
Competing Expectations	Public access to Shoreline	Expectations based on history	Competing Expectations	Urbanization	Human Safety and Resilience in relation to Structures	Human well-being in relation to shoreline				
Tally	4	2	2	2	4	2				16
Articulate for Privately owned infrastructure: rights, risks and decision making (roads, septic, stairs, elevator, docks, debris)	Private community structures	Private ownership & development	Private unused & deteriorating							
Tally	2	2	2							6
Govt functions, staffing, COVID	COVID impact	Environmental Requirements for permitting	Govt staffing, permitting and efficiency	Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion						
Tally	1	1	1	1						4
Publicly owned shoreline structures	Cost effective IC Govt solutions	Publically owned infrastructure: properties managed by ports, IC Public Works	Public debris: creosote,							
Tally	1	1	1							3

Abbreviations: SLR Sea Level Rise
 CC Climate Change
 SS Storm Surge

WHAT ARE EMERGING ISSUES IN YOUR WORK? Graph # 2 *RESPONSES THAT SYNTHESIZED TOPICS*

RESPONSES THAT SYNTHESIZE TOPICS

Total

Help public understand interconnected relationships from snow cap to white cap	2
Develop regulations that foster shoreline stewardship	2
Articulate differences, common ground and relationships between competing expectations	6
Re: privately owned sites & structures - clarify responsibilities, rights, risks & decision making	3
Develop regulations that incorporate awareness of SLR and CC, strategies for resilience and safety	6
Help public understand roles, responsibilities, rights, risks in relation to publicly owned facilities	10

Total Synthesized responses 29

Graph 5. How do these pressing and emerging issues relate to the marine environment?

HOW DO THESE PRESSING AND EMERGING ISSUES RELATE TO THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT?						Abbreviations:	SLR	Sea Level Rise	CC	Climate Change	SS	Storm Surge	Total
Unique relationships and pressures for Island County	IC more impacted by marine issues due to being islands	Bluff erosion is an increasing issue for shoreline structures	Marine dynamics are generating increasing pressure on IC infrastructure	Maintaining functional/ unaltered shoreline tends to reduce impact on human structures									
Tally	1	1	2	3									7
Tensions for IC in relation to marine issues	Tension: people want to live in high risk places and protect what they build	Tention: public works must balance timely and efficient solutions with environmental (fish friendly) requirements	Tention: Pressure to build on shoreline is at odds with retaining marine functions & rural character of IC	Tension: Impact of marine pressures compounded by increasing population along Puget Sound	Tension: Marine factors complicate and are impacted by maintenance of shoreline infrastructure								
Tally	3	3	3	3	4								16
General relationships	All impacted by Federal policies	Marine issues are related to environmental justice	Trash accumulation impacts shoreline conditions										
Tally	1	1	1										3
All relate/ all integrated/ impacts are cumulative	All related, tied together, impacts are cumulative												
Tally	6												6
												TOTAL	32

Graph 6. What changes in awareness, attitudes or behaviors would you like to see regarding these issues?

WHAT CHANGES IN AWARENESS, ATTITUDES, OR BEHAVIORS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE REGARDING THESE ISSUES?

							TOTAL
Themes for Focused Attention	Focus: Accept problems as they are and do something about them	Focus: Cultivate and leverage public's desire to do the right thing	Focus: Cultivate and leverage that the public values the environment	Focus on cumulative impacts	Focus on "connectivity" in messaging & regulations: everything flows downstream, all habitats are connected & all impact human well being		
	8	4	2	1	7	TOTAL	22
Messages	Message: Functional shorelines are IC's greatest asset and economic driver	Message: Public access & shoreline recreation are valuable for human well being & IC's economic vitality	Message: "How to be safe and resilient on shoreline" - leverage for enjoyment and value				
	1	4	3	TOTAL			8
Tasks	Tasks: Policies need to be crafted to encourage shoreline stewardship: protection, restoration, minimal impact	Task: Reduce IC use of fossil fuels	Task: Use science-based, social science-supported programs and those proven to have impact i.e. <i>Don't Drip and Drive</i>	Task: Help public understand the practical and daily impacts of Sea Level Rise and Climate Change	Task: Expand range of audiences by age and profession	Task: Increase opportunities for public to get involved	
	3	1	5	4	2	1	TOTAL 16