

ISLAND COUNTY
MARINE RESOURCES
COMMITTEE



3-Year Strategic Plan
2021-2024

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, Washington State Parks, Swinomish Tribe, 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 project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency under Assistance Agreement [CE-01J65401]. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

Strategic Plan

Vision

To sustain and enhance a healthy, resilient marine environment where individuals are engaged and strive to support life for all inhabitants of Island County.

Values

The MRC values collaboration, inclusivity, and community-driven projects which are scientifically based, meaningful, and generate lasting results.

Adopted April 5, 2022



Presenting Opportunity – a confluence of pressures:

As a jurisdiction made up solely of islands, Island County is faced with a unique opportunity - and necessity - to develop strategies that simultaneously address human and ecological interests. This opportunity opens in the face of pressures from weather and sea level changes, deterioration of aging structures along shoreline, estuaries, and bluffs, and increasing pressures for new development on privately owned land. Successful consideration of both human and ecological priorities promises to benefit both.

Changing storm and drought patterns are combining with long anticipated, and now emerging, evidence of sea level rise to pose threats to human safety, economic investments, and human benefits from marine and intertidal ecosystems along Island County's 200 plus miles of shoreline. These changes also pose threats to marine resources, habitats, and species critical for sustained ecological health of Puget Sound and the greater Salish Sea.

Designing policies and employing practices with an eye for sustainability and resilience using best available science will position Island County to address both human and ecological interests. Island County has an opportunity to incentivize use of science-based best practices to serve the current and long-term interests of:

- Residents as they seek to protect and use their property and enjoy marine resources;
- Local government as it strives to address public utilities, public health, and public shoreline access while implementing fiscal responsibility;
- All stakeholders as their roles interface with uses and stewardship of marine systems valuable for human and marine quality of life
- Shoreline and intertidal ecosystems which need to be functional to provide marine services.

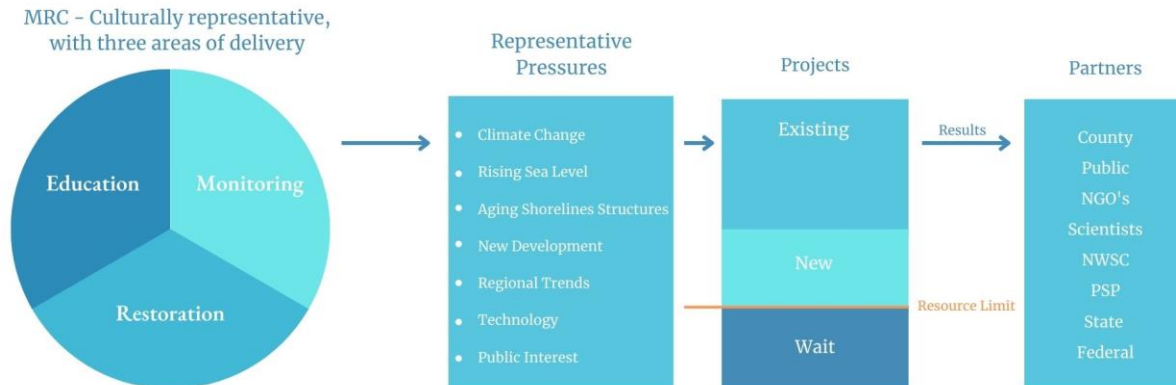
Public understanding and support of sustainable and resilient practices are now and will be essential for the County to successfully manage pressure for development and delivery of services and preservation/restoration of habitats of ecological importance.

The MRC recognizes that Island County shores are just one part of the larger Puget Sound region within Washington state and the greater Salish Sea shared with Canada. We rely on partnerships with the WA Department of Ecology, WA Department of Natural Resources, US Environmental Protection Agency, Puget Sound Partnership, and, of course, Northwest Straits Initiative to ensure that our efforts can be widely applicable and useful.

Implementing an Adaptive Approach to Marine Stewardship:

Throughout its work, the Island County Marine Resources Committee applies an adaptive, science-based approach to a cycle of monitoring critical marine habitats and species, implementing strategies for stewardship and restoration of these resources, educating decision makers, the public, and other stakeholders of these practices and what we are learning and annually refreshing our strategies for next cycles of focus.

An adaptive approach to Marine Resource Stewardship



NGO's - Non-Profit Organization, NWSC - Northwest Straits Commission, PSP - Puget Sound Partnership

Organizational priorities - Looking inward

As MRC membership has dwindled, it is an ideal time for the MRC to be intentional in inviting new members to join. Objectively, the MRC would like to ensure that it represents the diversity of perspectives represented throughout Island County. Based on the census data for Island County, the MRC seeks to increase the representation from certain segments of the population, including military or former military members, agricultural workers, and people of color. The MRC also seeks to improve cultural representation by including perspectives of Native Americans. If it is not possible to get representation from these groups, the MRC will endeavor to invite representatives to attend one meeting a year to provide comments on the MRC work.

Monitoring Priorities - Looking outward

Monitoring is a crucial part of the MRC focus and is not standalone. It is required to measure the impact of restoration, provides factual content for outreach and shares study findings and data with our many partners. Our monitoring strategy falls into three areas, all of which work together to be more intentional in resource utilization and increase outreach.

Within the current portfolio, we will refine our focus. As an example, as interest in kelp across the Salish Sea grows, it is logical to collect additional data to support integration and new questions. In other areas, we may be able to move monitoring to other groups that currently overlap with MRC efforts. The second area is to incubate new monitoring in line with County and Salish Sea-wide goals. An example of this is a renewed focus on water quality that spans a variety of marine vegetation habitats. The final area is the integration of and access to our monitoring data. We intent to make it easier for our user community to find and discover information about our marine resources.

Restoration Priorities - Looking forward

The MRC is continuing restoration work on the north end of Whidbey Island, extending the work at Cornet Bay to Hoypus Point. By having nearly contiguous shoreline restoration areas, it is hoped that the benefits to forage fish will be compounded, and that important gains will be made in the Salmonid population. Additionally, by concentrating in one geographic area, a cadre of volunteers will be developed to assist with long-term care of the restoration.

The MRC has realized that simply planting native plants on a restored shoreline area is not enough to ensure that they will survive and flourish. It is necessary to have continuing care for the plants, eliminating invasive species and allowing the natives to develop their root systems and begin to reproduce. The north end is near the military installation which makes developing a relationship with military families a natural fit.

The MRC is also working with the Shore Friendly program to deliver a series of educational programs that provide information about both programs, since they are complementary. As shoreline families express interest in the Shore Friendly program, the MRC can support that interest with additional restoration efforts.

To assist with prioritization of shoreline restoration efforts, the MRC has received grant funding to contract for a shoreline survey, to provide a baseline of hardened shoreline and to target areas for outreach and education.

Education Priorities - for life-long learning

The MRC proposes to support the County's work by designing and implementing a persuasive educational plan with the goal to build an informed public, supportive of efforts to apply best available science to simultaneously address stewardship of marine resources, delivery of County services, and pressure for development.

This plan will target themes of importance engaging a variety of audiences and will be delivered in multiple venues. Educational programs will be evaluated to allow for continuous improvement and on-going reports to the County Commissioners.

Together these three focus areas address the most efficient use of resources for engaging diverse constituents in the restoration of marine resources, monitoring environmental changes, and promoting access to the ecological wonders of Island County.

Officially adopted 2/7/2023