

MRC, CAG and LIO Committee Members in Attendance: Paul Andersson, Matt Arata, Aaron Boyles, David Checkley, Kailey Genther, Brian Goodremont, Christina Koons, Adam Parrott, Lovel Pratt, Craig Smith, Beth Tate, Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria

Ex-officio, County support staff and members of the public: Gina Austin, Carolyn Carlstrom, Audrey Coyne, Tyler Davis, Linda Degnan Cobos, Mark Donahue, Sage Enright, Ann Howell-Adams, Katie Johnson, Kari Koski, Jason Lim, Craig Mueller, Mike Ramsey, Frances Robertson, Giselle Sassen, Kendra Smith, Chris Springer, Jason Stutes, Sean Wilson, Sam Whitridge, Iain Wingard, Cindy Wolf, Jennifer Wynkoop

9:01 AM Convene MRC meeting

Christina Koons

Let us acknowledge we reside on the ancestral lands and waters of the Coast Salish people who have called this place home since time immemorial and let us honor inherent, aboriginal and treaty rights that has been passed down from generation to generation.

9:02 AM Introductions around both the physical and virtual rooms

9:07 AM Public Comment

none

9:08 AM Review meeting agenda, Approve MRC February meeting minutes

MRC members

No additions or edits to today's agenda. No changes or edits to the February minutes.

MOTION: all in favor of approving the minutes, none opposed. The February MRC minutes are approved

9:09 AM NWSC February Meeting Report to the MRC

Christina Koons

A rep from Patty Murray's office attended and gave some news, the NWS is kicking off a DEI assessment and Christina will participate, the 2023 impact report was released last week – Christina will make sure MRC gets a copy. Next conference will be November 15-16 in Snohomish, seeking people to serve on planning committee. May -16-17 is Puget Sound Day on the Hill. The NWSC approved adding a second Tribal seat. A new funding tool online.

9:14 AM Presentation on proposed kelp farm pilot project

Linda Degnan Cobos

Linda introduces colleagues Sean Wilson, Mark Donahue. We've had a project garden at the local school for past decade. Now looking for a local site for a kelp project in part of Jackson Bay – Sean is a landowner there.

We're looking for a site that already had DNR permitting. Sean is also interested in regenerative programs

Sean: I like the idea of lessening our impact on the world by growing kelp, specifically interested in

Mark: I applied for aquatic farm permit for seaweed in 2015 and shot down. I've been involved in Alaska shellfish aquaculture. It's a misnomer that our plans are industrial, more restoration minded. I've been helping with seasonal strings and growth. I'd like to see this as a demonstration project at Jackson beach.

Linda: We attended a Seagrass training - learned that kelp forests have been disappearing all along west coast. In the Salish sea, Samish and some others are looking at kelp, trying to map out historic and present kelp beds. In our Seagrass training, learned about permitting necessary due to multiple interests, how to apply for a JARPA permit. Kelp can sequester carbon, improve habitat and increase oxygen, decrease acidification. There's a group that's helping establish kelp farmers, they have plans available online for creating a small container lab, we're interested in exploring that. Aim to put in on the other side of where the barge-launching operation goes. We're making connections with the different agencies we need to get in touch with, creating a business plan. After harvesting, want to use kelp in soil amendment for agriculture. There's a market for it, it helps plants grow, great for mulch. Following Seagrass training, developed a WA seaweed collaborative, meet quarterly, the membership is 300 people, includes connections with consumers who want to use kelp as a crop amendment.

Mark: research from Maine shows thicker mussel shells inside kelp farms vs. outside. Hope this can be an oasis for of improved habitat. Also, there are techniques to avoid entanglement from marine mammals, that's a top priority.

Linda describes kelp operation: a couple of anchors (a helical screw instead of concrete) and then series of a few vertical and horizontal lines, weights added once kelp begins to grow; the only appearance at the surface is buoys. There's support from Puget Sound Restoration Fund, Seagrant, and similar efforts on Lummi and Hood Canal. We're talking with various entities, trying to move it all forward simultaneously and we wanted to make this group aware.

QUESTIONS

Craig Smith: how much is this mimicking the ephemeral nature of kelp beds? And when you're selling carbon sequestration, must consider the scale needed to actually affect it and how that would affect the marine ecosystems. AND about idea of use as fertilizer, then it's not going to store carbon because it'll go into respiration, but can it replace very fuel-intensive fertilizing alternatives? How will psori behave in nutrient limited environment?

Linda: the area we're talking about is Jackson Beach, old charts show kelp beds there. The psori we're going to take will be local so we have the best chance of preserving local genetic divert and survival. As far as using kelp as crop amendment, there's a lot of research on how they benefit crops, various methods. It can replace fertilizers, doesn't sequester carbon, but grows fast and gets consumed fast so it gets integrated in the food chain. Not trying for carbon credits but will be a benefit. Linda points to more research on benefits of kelp as a crop/soil amendment. Kelp is a filter feeder, benefits surrounding shellfish, when there are too many nutrients and acidification it can improve habitat, we'll be growing it, harvesting it and then it'll produce more spores and we'll re-grow

ACTION: Linda can provide that research to Craig

Sean: as far as not having an effect if it's not large scale, I think you can start small and be an example. If we can make it cost-effective and duplicable, and then we can find historical kelp bed locations and replant, that'll be great.

As far as the crop supplements go, having them for cattle and livestock, so we either eat less cows or else feed them something that produces less methane, maybe we'd only make enough for local cows

Craig: when you talk about sequestration you need to consider what it means at scale even if you start locally

Cindy: Mark, you may remember that we worked together on the idea of kelp at Orcas back in 2019. That was left in the permitting process. So does this JARPA take you through Tribal consultation?

Linda: we're doing outreach on that now. Looking at who has domain – Lummi, Tulalip...total of 14 tribes. Making contacts in the different Tribes and nations to hear concerns, check interests in partnering, etc. We're talking to Frankie as a resource. Starting small and not bite off more than we can chew and then scale up

Frankie: we're not talking about the Public Works part of Jackson beach, we're talking about a cove to the east, be aware there is eelgrass between those two points (and some specific advice about approaching Lummi)

Kendra: you should ask advice of Council, there's a lot of activity down there, existing barge landing and they're trying to pursue a hardened barge landing, and a large amount of restoration work

Question to Cindy, should this body make a recommendation to Council? Share what's going on and get direction? We as staff should know how to advise them and how frequency of barge landings gets considered.

Cindy: makes sense to get authorization from Council to use some county resources for some research into this.

MOTION: Lovel moves we request staff coordinate with Council regarding all the different work proposed and the partners proposing the work at Jackson beach and come up with a management plan. Sandy seconds, no further discussion, all in favor, none opposed. The motion carries.

9:55 AM MRC Updates/Business

- MRC interest in restarting kelp kayak monitoring program *Sam Whitridge/Brian Goodremont*

Some discussion over last few weeks about NWSC kelp kayak initiative, Phil Green was the lead for some years and program stopped partly due to amount of kelp in the SJI's. And Samish is doing some research on kelp as well. Now Brian and Jeff are both interested and ready to relaunch the program. We'd need to think about what we hope to achieve. Coordinate with Samish to understand where they're monitoring

Brian: I'm happy to be part of restarting this, I just don't know all the details about what's already being done so didn't want to start something that would be redundant or that wouldn't be helpful. Happy to restart with Jeff

Frankie: I suggest coordination with Samish nation and DNR to identify sites that would be helpful to them for you to monitor. Intensive monitoring at some sites rather than wide net would likely add/contribute to what's going on Phil was only doing this at one small site to monitor the impacts of development at Deer Harbor (the bridge there) Kari: years ago, we talked about doing a citizen science thing using commercial kayak groups, we've done that before on the west side of SJI. If we were doing a comprehensive area maybe other companies would also want to get involved as a community service work. That was part of KELP (Kayak education and leadership Program)

Kailey: are surveys counting species?

Frankie: it's percent cover and then some specific protocol from NWS that would be followed

Aaron: can we get a short description of what the past efforts looked like on the ground?

Sam: it was really just focused around Deer Harbor looking at any silting impacts around there. Just 2-3 sites near there. Can vary in terms of timing. We could tailor it to sites and the frequency of monitoring

Brian: paraphrasing Phil, he said the survey he was doing represented less than 1% of kelp in SJC

ACTION: Sam will connect partners in the structure, make sure Jeff Whitty and the Samish are partnered up

Brian: and I'm happy to engage some of the other companies like you suggested

Dave: any aerial surveys done?

Kendra: good question, we're trying

Cindy: on the eelgrass, there was a presentation from the Samish at the ECB of drone aerals for eelgrass

Dave: I thought data existed of aerial views, getting a true picture of kelp beds might require an effort of that scale

Sam: it would be mapping perimeter of kelp, getting temperature, depth, condition of kelp and other observations

Craig: the State is doing aerial surveys; kayak surveys are coordinated and designed to ground-truth what they see

Kari: it's also a matter of getting community members involved and therefore more proactive

Kendra: Phil was concerned it wasn't integrated into larger picture, before effort from Dana Oster and DNR/Samish

Now we have a better idea of where to look and a mechanism to get that data back to NWS

Beth: DNR has a new interactive map for floating kelp, looks like they have data from 2022 but not necessarily every site. They have comparison data from different years, can see extent over different years, etc. - interactive map

Sam: we just needed general head-nods of support

Kari: one last big piece of kelp news is next May 4-9, 2025 is the international kelp conference (<https://iss25.com/>)

Sydney has a group called Cascadia Sydney doing something similar to what Linda and Sean and Mark just proposed

10:11 AM • Update on ERTV subcommittee work

Sam Whitridge/subcommittee members

Subcommittee has sent some questions to Brian Kirk at Ecology through Kendra to confirm some data in their analysis. We've discussed in the subcommittee and decided to keep it high level, just confirm data we need to move forward with the ERTV rather than get down into the weeds picking apart the report. Sent requests to Brian Kirk just for data concerning the risk reduction for Victoria. Once we get that, we'll move forward with next steps

Lovel: Brian assured me they'd be responsive

Cindy: I took that one-pager to Cantwell's office and representative Larsen. Cantwell's office is preoccupied with trying to get NOAA instituted as a statutory agency. Then they'll move on to the coast guard authorization.

Lovel: My coworker Shannon Davis and can promote that one-pager as well, is that available for others to use?

Kendra: yes, we also have a simpler 3-bullet one-pager

Cindy: I also have a tone-policed version

Craig: moving on to the next step, we still need Ecology to respond, but still need a peer review from a competent group. That may require some funding,. That could come from the MRC or other outside organization

Christina: why didn't Ecology do a peer review?

Craig: their response was that it was deemed inappropriate for peer review because was based on assumptions.

Kailey: have we been in communication with Canada?

Cindy: yes the Trans Boundary Caucus, the ECB facilitate that, they're aware, TransCanada is aware

Level: a separate process through the Ocean Protection plan that TransCanada is doing to look at need for emergency towing vessels. Ships calling into port pay for the Neah Bay tug, we'd need funding from Canada for this

Christina: interest from other MRC's, if there's information I can present at the next NWSC meeting I'm willing

Kendra: refers to data collected by Marta that could be shared with the Canadians

Cindy: the MRC connection is important for getting more traction with Cantwell's office

- It was Patty Murray that was instrumental in setting up MRCs

Cindy: if we could get MRC's interested for Puget Sound Day on the Hill, put this forward with our priorities

Murray has been instrumental in setting up MRC's, and Cantwell has been making big efforts in oil spill prevention

Craig: we should think more flexibly about the funding model; not just consider Canada but also shipping industry

Level: all the MRC members got the survey from Sasha Horst – if not, can Sam re-forward

ACTION ITEM: Sam will reforward the survey, it's not too late to complete it

10:26 AM • State of the San Juan County MSA, peer review process *Frances Robertson*

Frankie sent the MSA out to everyone who had participated in MMW's in 2020 and 2023, shared link to the report and requested review. Hope to get those back by end of April, it went out to about 80 people and received a few responses. Sam also sent the link to the latest version along with agenda to this meeting last week.

Kendra: just to add that at some point this body needs to send that report up to Council for acceptance so the MSA plan is in the county code and it's tied into the shoreline management plan

Frankie: we plan to provide 2 months for review, and then incorporate reviews into appendices at back of report to provide transparency, that's how they did it with the 2007 MSA plan

ACTION ITEM: look at June for making a motion to move that up to Council

10:30 AM • MRC Membership – upcoming vacancies *Sam Whitridge*

Check in on membership, terms expire in June for MRC members. Sam shares MRC membership on SJC website. Terms that expire are Jeff, Kailey, Lovel, and Beth. Those are all first terms so those members are eligible to serve another term. People should let Sam know what they decide. Jeff is ready to step off. He's the only one from Lopez

Frankie: Jeff may have recommendations on others from Lopez

Sam: Technically Patti Gobin's seat has expired, she's had two terms. But how do we handle tribal engagement? Obviously Patti just speaks for Tulalip and not all tribes. Technically seat is vacant. How to recruit Tribal members?

Cindy: could we approach the NW Indian Fisheries Commission about a representative?

Sam: we've interviewed some folks we can circle back to

Dave: there is an individual at WWU, Scripps graduate, Samish tribe member and marine scientist -Marco Hatch

Kari: how can we rewrite the rules so that there are no term limits and welcome more Tribal participation

Cindy: the two terms has been consistent, for LTAC we needed a Council vote to change that

Frankie: I would argue for the tribal position not having two-term limit.

Level: if SJC are serious about having one-to-one relations with Tribes, it would make sense to have a different type of membership on the MRC, not appropriate same type of representation with Nations

Kendra: we also have ties to the NWSC and some of their requirements, same with LIO, CAG, and SWAC.

Cindy: let's put together a memo for Amy, when she gets to the MRC let's discuss. Every committee has its own foundational document and code, Amy is working to establish a unifying code

Kari: with 14 diff tribes having UNA in the marine environment, that makes MRC different from other committees

- Cindy points out some other ways a uniform ordinance wouldn't apply to all advisory committees

10:44 AM • Reschedule July MRC meeting date *Sam Whitridge*

Reschedule for July 10th Wednesday

10:45 AM • MRC Subcommittee updates: *Katie Johnson*

- o Outreach and Education

GICU (Great Island Clean Up) Saturday April 20th

o Derelict Vessel Prevention

Adam Parrott/Kari Koski

The turn in event applications are going well, we have a plan with DNR to move through as many boats as we can. Request from the MRC: we want video from the event!
Kari: NWSC is excited, working on some storyboarding and outreach. Reminder that official turn in dates will be April 1-15, but contract dates start mid-March so can start earlier with boats that are on-site

o other subcommittee updates

Frankie: for those involved in boat counts, please remember to go out on days like today for off season counts
ACTION: Frankie will send out reminder about that with the link to the form for boat counting

10:49 AM **Bellingham Bay MTCA clean-up and eelgrass harvest effort**

Jason Stutes and Iain Wingard

Iain and Jason introduce themselves. Colleagues from Landau associates are here as well - Jennifer Wynkoop, Gina Austin, and Carolyn Carlstrom.

The Cornwall Avenue Landfill and Salish Landing Park Project is large, an opportunity for eelgrass harvest and reuse. Beth Tate suggested this presentation to see if this group has ideas about how to reuse the eelgrass. This site is just south of Bellingham. Project proponents are the Port and City of Bellingham, we're helping to make it happen.

We'll talk about the eelgrass that's available and discuss some considerations for harvest and reuse. This material is from a couple of cleanup sites. Discuss project timeline and possible next steps for follow-up.

Project overview, 3 elements: Haley site cleanup, Cornwall Avenue cleanup, and Construction of Salish landing park.

All three elements constructed under one contract, project will impact existing eelgrass and mitigation is required. Focus here is opportunity to harvest and use the eelgrass prior to being impacted. Cornwall Ave site was historically used for lumber operation and solid waste disposal. There's debris and contaminants from past activities. This site is undergoing cleanup with oversight from Ecology. The Cornwall site is at the south end of the project area. The Haley site was used for lumber activities and wood treatment. Iain reviews some of the chemical compounds present

Salish landing park project will be constructed over top of the clean-up sites after they're capped. First phase will be implemented as part of the city's park master plan, public shoreline access, habitat improvement and amenities.

The project status and progress guided by the cleanup process, permits submitted and under review now. Ecology is reviewing design and we're talking to various entities about possible harvest and use of the eelgrass. Existing eelgrass in Cornwall project (shown in map), eelgrass used to plant the Cornwall site will come from the Haley site. Source of eelgrass transplants will be surrounding populations in Bellingham Bay. As part of the Salish park area, there's an additional 600 ft of e.g. available for use. Impacts mitigated under the combined cleanup/park project. Jason reviews the areas in acres that will be capped and the eelgrass shoots available (see in presentation). Eelgrass mitigation areas for eelgrass restoration are created in the design. Change in bathymetry from capping process, overlay will create a habitat bench suitable for eelgrass growth. Project sequencing and construction date will impact when eelgrass can be harvested. Vast majority of eelgrass at Haley will still be available, only small amount going to Cornwall. Because it's a remediation site divers will need to be OSHA HAZWOPER, process developed to decontaminate both divers and eelgrass. After that, eelgrass can be handled by volunteers. Harvesting can't impede construction timeline. We assume harvesters will take from remediation site and transport to reuse sites.

We did a literature review to examine the question of whether it was safe to replant this eelgrass given potential contamination. Jason reviews results of literature review, finding low concentrations of substances like metals and PCB's in Puget Sound. Conclusions were that uptake can be limited by low lipid concentration in eelgrass tissues. We've reached out to a list of entities that may benefit from reuse of eelgrass material, maybe in the San Juans.

There'll be approx. 700,000 shoots available. We want to hear concerns about risks, timeline and how to coordinate between large projects, how to codify, and how to come up with some possible next steps

QUESTIONS

Kendra: you couldn't find enough sites in the Bellingham area to use all these shoots?

Jason: sites in Bellingham are small and can't reuse all the shoots. Some are contaminated and need remediation

Gina: and timing needs to be correct. We're looking for shovel-ready projects that are already funded. Part of the cost of those project are often harvesting eelgrass material for transplant

Kendra: so not paying, you want projects already paying for restoration work that can use this material "free"

Craig: how efficient is sediment removal to get the contaminants from the eelgrass? Are these rhizomes/shoots?

Jason: these would be as intact as possible rhizomes with intact shoots, we'll do initial, secondary and tertiary pass

Gina: the contaminant removal is very effective, should remove all the sediment

Dave: what's the success rate of transplants?

Jason: depends on site selection and how material is handled. It's disruptive, ensure not to overheat or desiccate, keep in flowing water can optimize success. We've had a success rate of up to 70% after 3 years, describes method

Dave: best density for success?

Jason: can't plant at same density that it grows, plant in a unit of varying density in one bundle, Jason discusses the considerations for morphology, resource availability etc. for transplanting

Beth: I've been involved, connecting the cleanup team with CD and Jeff Gaeckle, who has a general permit to do eelgrass restoration in Puget Sound. The CD has been working with seeds recently but this is an unprecedented opportunity to have many shoots available, it's a reason to try transplanting. As for genetic variability; it seems like there's a line for the north sound and these shoots are likely to be successful here, not a totally foreign stock. I wanted to introduce this project to the MRC and the CD is here as well to make connections. This is a huge amount of eelgrass. Monitoring progress to this area could take up to a decade. If that restoration work is successful, we'll have a big lift in amount of eelgrass available in Puget sound. if we can't use it, 3.5 acres of eelgrass gets destroyed. One opportunity could be to harvest the seed heads and get those into restoration even if can't handle the shoots. One question is about the knowledge on the toxicity of the seeds, because they have a higher lipid content

Jason: we don't know, nobody has looked at it, that would be an interesting research topic. Most of Puget Sound has some contaminant levels. Already a lot of information available at these sites

Kendra: are shoots largely healthy and don't have eelgrass wasting disease?

Jason: observational data shows morphology of grass differs with depth. At Haley, low evidence of disease

Craig: about the metals, it would be important to do some analyses of the heavy metals in the eelgrass you're distributing. Since they seem to accumulate, could this get passed up the food web in eelgrass beds?

Jason: speaking from conjecture, most seagrass not primarily consumed, enters through detrital pathway, particles that deposit feeders ingest. Need to go from primary consumers to secondary. No direct studies that I know of.

Kendra: timing is the biggest issue. Spring would be the best time right before starts doing the season.

Paul: We're targeting 6-10 restoration sites largely through seeding due to costs and efficiency but if these shoots are available ideally we could put them in embayments and study and monitor. We've been asking about toxicity etc. We've been working with Jeff Gaeckle and DNR. With a site like Westcott Bay, total remediation would be needed and it would likely be a wasted to transplant there. We want to avoid transplanting into areas where there's loss like the intertidal so that means the deep edge which means divers. We'd need more funding to be able to employ divers and boats, we'd like to be able to do this but conversation needs to continue.

Jason: because these are Ecology remediation sites I'd approach them to look at seed funding to investigate that.

Gina: It would be that expensive to do some analysis of the grass that's there and do some analysis of contaminants

Paul: We have a list of sites we're working on now and going through a review, not necessarily all shovel-ready

Cindy: at the ECB meeting when they identified the sub-basins of interest, they didn't pick SJC and I raised questions about that, that resulted in an invitation to talk with DNR more about eelgrass projects here.

I wonder if this offer is an opportunity for some kind of cooperative project, maybe even something experimental

ACTION: Iain will send this presentation to Sam to distribute. We'll discuss further with eelgrass subcommittee.

11:33 AM **Adjourn MRC Meeting, Convene CAG Meeting**

11:33 AM **CAG Meeting**

- SRFB Letter of Interest Review

Sam Whitridge

First TAG meeting yesterday afternoon, discussed approach with sponsors.

ACTION: Sam will send Letters of Interest (LoI's) to the CAG so they know what's out there

Full proposals due April 17, two weeks before sites visits May 1-2. MRC/CAG members invited to see sites firsthand

11:34 AM • PSAR Cost Increase Requests

Sam Whitridge

In both SRFB and PSAR funds, we have more money requested than available. Plus return funds coming back from the Agate Beach project. We received two cost increase requests for that money, the Weeks Way and the eelgrass project which requested an additional 108K. TAG voted to fund the Weeks Way project for another \$20K, and not for additional funds to the eelgrass project at this point. We do have the opportunity to put those funds into the current grant round; that's what the TAG wants to do and use those funds for our current project list. If they end up not being needed, we can revisit active projects and cost increase requests

11:36 AM • another update related to Puget Sound Day on the Hill: This is Puget Sound Partnership's annual event in May. They're requesting support on letters from lead entities, MRC's and LIO's on appropriation. Opportunity for our MRC/CAG to sign on to these budget request letters, need to be sent off by March 11th

Cindy: I'm taking this before Council, but also ask for the Local Lead entity to sign off. Sam will send this out for review, three elements to the initiative, and the appropriation for the NWS Marine Conservation Initiative

MOTION: Craig moves to sign off on these appropriations, Beth seconds, all in favor. Approved

Craig: will any of that money trickle down here?

Sam: yes, to our local salmon funding board allocation and a few of these other items are also related to our work

11:40 AM **Adjourn CAG Meeting**