WHATCOM MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY| October 1, 2026 5:00pm – 7:00pm| Hybrid

Members in attendance: Mark Fairhart, Audrey Taylor, Laura Hanna, Lisa Anderson, Julie Eastlund, Jackie Dexter, Rick Beauregard, Mike MacKay, Kaylee Galloway, Paul Meyer, Alexi Guddal, and Mary Lou Steward.

Others: Dana Daniels (MRC Staff), Jeff Whitty (NWSC), and Katy Chapman (NWSC).

1. **Introductions and Why We are Here Today:** Mark began the meeting with the land acknowledgement and roundtable introductions. The purpose of the planning meeting which was to clarify, inspire, and better understand the interests and priorities of the MRC.

2. **Review: MRC Resolution:** Jeff Whitty began by reading the MRC resolution, focusing on the "Purpose", "Mission", and "Tasks" sections of the document. The group acknowledged that the resolution likely needs updating, particularly to reflect more relevant tasks and mission statements and to update outdated terminology. A future project or subcommittee may choose to revise the language.

3. **Highlights and Progress Since 2023 Retreat:** Dana provided an overview of the key topics discussed during the MRC retreat in 2023. She explained that the retreat was intended to strengthen member connections and engagement, clarify roles and expectations, improve recruitment and volunteer participation, enhance the project planning and selection processes, and identify priorities. Since the retreat, the MRC has made significant progress toward many of these goals. Member expectations were clarified through revisions to the Member Roles and Expectations document, which now includes project leadership or support roles and participation in subcommittees. The MRC also strengthened its advisory function by establishing an advisory subcommittee to provide a more structured approach to this work. The MRC improved leadership and engagement via a strong MRC chair that has helped to provide more consistent direction, while subcommittees including Advisory and Education & Outreach, have expanded the organization's capacity. Additionally, the MRC has increased volunteer involvement by engaging more community members and students in its projects and activities. Dana also highlighted several opportunities identified during the retreat that have not yet been fully addressed, including more intentional member recruitment, increased engagement of less active members, improved utilization of the MRC's advisory role, and refinement of priorities. The remainder of the meeting focused on a discussion of MRC priorities and future areas of focus.

4. **2027 Items**: Jeff Whitty facilitated an exercise to better determine the priority areas of the MRC. The goal was to identify high-level priorities that are encompassing for marine resource issues specific to Whatcom County. The first phase of this exercise included 10 minutes of self-reflection in which individual MRC members wrote their priorities down on sticky notes and added them to larger charts separated by interest group (Scientific, Recreation, Economic, Conservation/Environment, and Citizen-at-Large). The next phase involved discussions within each interest group to narrow down the top 3-5 priorities. The final phase was a discussion with the whole group, with each interest group contributing 3 of their top priorities. The key priority areas that emerged included improving community engagement and outreach, strengthening collaboration across governments and organizations, advancing species recovery and habitat restoration, and increasing visibility and awareness of marine resources in Whatcom County. The discussions also highlighted the need to fill several vacant seats on the committee and the need to bolster engagement with students, recreational groups, and decision-makers to advance marine conservation efforts in Whatcom County. The top priorities from each interest group are included in the next section.

Economic

- Encourage shellfish / seaweed aquaculture opportunities in Whatcom County (may include creation of a map with recommended locations for future aquaculture opportunities)
- Increase representation for economic interests on the MRC
- Connect more with other organizations working in the same watersheds

Recreation

- Improve equitable access to marine shorelines: Provide ways for everyone to enjoy our shorelines
- Improve community engagement: Collaborate with other recreation groups (kayakers, boating communities, etc)
- Improve access to clean water for safe recreation

Citizens-At-Large

- Increase opportunities for student engagement and leadership
- Continue to expand advisory subcommittee activities (city, federal, county)
- Establish a Recruitment Chain: Mechanism to get people involved and a process to turn volunteers into members

Environment / Conservation

- Increase community awareness through education and outreach
- Enhance the recovery and resiliency of the Salish Sea:
    - Advance habitat recovery, restoration, resilience, and connectivity with a focus on species of decline
    - Improve water quality and climate resiliency, focusing on high-risk species
- Strengthen intergovernmental (cities, counties, state, feds, tribes, etc) engagement and coordination on relevant policies / projects

Scientific

- Educate and inform the community and decision makers about the significant marine resources present in the county and the threats they face
- Determine how to engage in oil spill response (responders, sample collection, natural resource damage assessment?)
- Improve collaboration across other resource agencies (POB, tribes, County parks and planning)

5. **Overview of Next Steps:** The MRC executive committee will distill the discussed priorities and bring the items back to the full group at the December MRC meeting to discuss, rank, and better establish the priorities of the group.

6. **Adjourn:** The meeting adjourned at 7pm. The next meeting is scheduled for November 5th, and it will be virtual.