

Members in attendance: Austin Rose, Dana Daniels, Paul Meyer, Lisa Anderson, Laura Hanna, Mike MacKay, Rick Beauregard, Colin Wahl, Jackie Dexter, Glen (Alex) Alexander, Alexi Guddal, Kaylee Galloway.

Others: David Stalheim, Lauren Ode Giles (Herrera Environmental Consultants), Sasha Horst (NWSC staff), Kim Clarkin, Tyler Owens, Patricia Frost.

1. Introductions and Determine Quorum: Austin began the meeting with the land acknowledgement and roundtable introductions. A quorum was present.

2. February 5 Agenda: The February meeting agenda was approved with a few additions.

3. Approval of January Meeting Summary: The January meeting summary was approved.

4. Community Updates: N/A

5. Discussion about Concerns at Cherry Point

David Stalheim presented about his concerns regarding a plethora of environmental impacts at Cherry Point (vessel noise, habitat degradation, water quality issues, contaminants), specifically focusing on potential impacts of the AltaGas expansion. David discussed potential ways that the MRC could get involved including reviewing and commenting on shoreline permits/exemptions, assessing direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of development, and researching and supporting restoration efforts in the area. Austin suggested that one of the subcommittees dig more into this issue and potential avenues for the MRC to engage.

6. MRC Partner Committee Updates:

- **County Council:** Councilwoman Galloway relayed MRC related items that came up at the most recent County Council meeting on January 27th including approval of the MRC's OTGP grant agreement, appointments of 3 MRC members including Elizabeth Lorence and Kathy Kettridge (who are returning for a second term) and Abby Neal, a new MRC member. Kaylee mentioned that there is an upcoming council member retreat to better identify policy priorities and get a better sense of planning for 2026 and beyond. Council will also be discussing the remainder of the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Kaylee encouraged interested members to pass along any additional edits or comments on the Resource Lands Chapter and is happy to work with any volunteers on this. Austin also mentioned that Paul Cline applied for the Lummi Nation Representative seat on the MRC and is awaiting council approval on February 10th.
- **City Council:** Councilwoman Anderson mentioned that Bellingham City Council will be discussing the Salish Landing Park at their next council meeting, and she will provide an update to the MRC at the March meeting. She also provided updates on Lake Whatcom Management meetings including discussions around DNR timber harvest areas, phosphate impacts to the lake, and working towards a long-term restorative plan for Whatcom Creek west of I-5.
- **Port of Bellingham:** No update.
- **City of Blaine:** No update.
- **Northwest Straits Commission:** Rick Beauregard provided meeting highlights from the most recent NWSC meeting. He mentioned that Jeff Whitty, the NWSC Kelp Program Manager, gave an informative presentation on kelp monitoring project updates and could be a good person to ask for a Whatcom MRC presentation at an upcoming meeting. Rick connected with Jamie Stevens, the Vice Chairman of the

NWSC and president of the Island Oil Spill Association (IOSA), who would be willing to come speak/present to the MRC about the IOSA program given the MRC's recent interest and conversations about assisting with oil spill preparedness in Whatcom County. The Whatcom MRC has been monitoring vessels in Drayton Harbor as part of an effort to determine if the group wants to initiate a voluntary no anchor zone in this area. During the past week, 4 derelict vessels that have been anchored in the harbor for several years were removed by DNR! Lastly, Rick mentioned that Island MRC will be hosting a forage fish research workshop in Cornet Bay on April 27th.

7. Bluff Erosion Modeling Project: Lauren Ode-Giles, a GIS analyst with Herrera Environmental, presented on the Bluff Recession and GIS Analysis for Retreat/Restoration project that has been conducted in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. The goals of this project are to support nearshore stewardship efforts by identifying impaired shorelines that may be suitable for restoration activities, to identify intact shorelines that should be protected from future shoreline armoring, and to identify adaptive management pathways for impacted properties. Phase 1 of the project was completed in 2025 in partnership with the Northwest Straits Foundation. Phase 2 of the project will begin in 2026, expanding the study to the rest of the Puget Sound Region.

8. Staff Updates

a. *Coastal Protection Grant Letter of Support:* MRC staff explained that they have been working on a grant proposal to support additional Olympia oyster restoration efforts in North Chuckanut Bay in partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. If secured, the funding will be used to support additional Olympia oyster spat to enhance restoration plots in 2028 as well as PSRF and MRC staff time. MRC staff drafted a Letter of Support on behalf of the MRC to include with the grant application, and the MRC reviewed. The committee discussed recruiting volunteer assistance from Western Washington University and Bellingham Technical College for Olympia oyster enhancement efforts in 2026.

A motion was made to approve the MRC's letter of support for the coastal protection grant application. All approved.

b. *Brainstorming Future Projects List:* Dana shared a [Potential MRC Project List](#) that is housed on the MRC's Google Drive. The goal for this document is to start brainstorming ideas early so that the MRC is more prepared once the next grant funding cycles comes around.

c. *Additional Funding:* The Northwest Straits Commission announced an additional funding opportunity for MRCs, up to \$20,000 per MRC. This optional funding is available due to leftover funds from past NOAA Congressionally Directed Spending. The MRC would need to submit grant proposals by March 17th and funds must be expended by December 31, 2026. Because of this timeline, it is recommended that the funding be used for enhancements of existing projects unless there is a new project that is already "shovel ready". The MRC discussed a few potential options for this funding opportunity including supporting outreach and education efforts in Wildcat Cove to protect eelgrass habitat, creating educational materials about Olympia oyster restoration projects, supporting social marketing efforts in North Chuckanut Bay in effort to improve water quality in the area, supporting larger beach cleanup efforts, and supporting removal of derelict vessels within Whatcom County. Members will discuss ideas with MRC staff over the coming weeks and discuss more specific options at the March MRC meeting.

9. MRC Project and Subcommittee Updates:

- a. *Beach Seine with Schools*: Mike provided an update on the project, letting folks know that kickoff meetings have begun for 2026 efforts, and the field event dates have been set for April 14th, May 12th, and May 22nd, each from 11-1:30pm at Boulevard Park. Fourth grade classrooms throughout Whatcom County have been contacted, and schools will be selected in early March. Mike asked for interested volunteers to sign-up for the events they are able to help out at. Volunteers are primarily needed for the beach seining portion of the field event, to help students to observe and identify juvenile salmon, answer questions, help students fill out datasheets, and keep students engaged. Volunteer help would also be great for the pre and post classroom visits.
- b. *Forage Fish Monitoring*: The next forage fish survey is scheduled for 2/19 from 12-3pm at Little Squalicum Beach
- c. *Kelp Monitoring Surveys*: Kickoff meetings have started, and Dana will update the MRC with training and survey dates and times when available. If interested, you can also view the recording of the [2025 Marine Resources Committees' \(MRC\) Kelp Monitoring Review Meeting](#).
- d. *Harmful Algal Bloom Sampling*: The HABs team is sampling every other week on their winter schedule. The water has been pretty quiet in terms of HABs cell counts and biotoxins, but the water temperature has been very warm for this time of the year, so we may see increased activity earlier and in larger magnitudes as compared to past years.
- e. *Olympia Oyster Restoration*: The group discussed during the “Staff Updates” portion of the meeting.
- f. *Mussel Watch Program Updates*: Alex provided an update on the Mussel Watch Program that some MRC members participated in back in November. Alex mentioned that volunteers retrieved the mussel cages in early February and sent them back to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for analysis.
- g. *Crab Team*: There are 3 crab team sites in Whatcom County in which 3-5 people go out to set traps once per month from April through September in attempt to trap and remove invasive European Green Crabs. This program is conducted as a Washington Sea Grant project. Alex said if anyone is interested in volunteering for this, you will need to sign up now as trainings will be happening shortly. Alex has all of the details and encouraged interested members to reach out directly to him for more information.

No subcommittee updates were shared.

Before adjourning, Dana shared a volunteer opportunity through the Surfrider Foundation to assist in water quality sampling. This would entail weekly sampling at a few sites in Birch Bay during the summer months and driving the samples down to a lab in Bellingham. If any members are interested, please contact Dana at ddaniels@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Additionally, Alexi Guddal shared that the Whatcom County Native Plant sale is coming up in March and there is a promotional toolkit that folks can share out to help advertise.

10. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 7pm.