



WHATCOM MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY
September 7, 2023 5:00pm – 7:00pm
ZOOM [LINK](#)
Meeting ID: 898 4927 5200 | Passcode 98225
1-253-215-8782 US (Tacoma)

<p><i>We acknowledge the lands we're on today are the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous Nations who have stewarded them since time immemorial. We respect their sovereignty, support their Treaty rights, their right to self-determination, and we honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water. These Indigenous Nations include the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe.</i></p>		
1.	5:00	Introductions and Determine Quorum
2.		September 7 Agenda Action: Modify and approve agenda as needed. New business can be added if necessary.
3.		Approval of May 4, June 1, and July 6 meeting summaries Action: Review and approve summaries as final.
4.		Community Updates Objective: Community members attending the meeting who wish to address or update the Committee on Committee related matters will be provided up to five (5) minutes to speak.
5.	5:10	2025 Whatcom Comprehensive Plan Update: Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services
6.	5:30	Staff Update: Whatcom Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Round 2, Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grant, Letter to Birch Bay community re: European Green Crab, MRC Retreat, November MRC meeting, NWSI Conference , upcoming MRC vacancies, Evan School of Public Policy & Governance (UW), Objective: Provide staff with opportunity to relay information and updates to the full MRC.
7.	5:50	Project Updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chuckanut PIC • Wildcat Cove - Peak Sustainability, WWU, DNR • Kelp surveys • Derelict Boat Removal • Clayton Beach site visit • HABs • Mussel Watch?
8.	6:30	MRC Partner Committee Updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWIN/Speaker Series – Water Week, SeaFeast, Climate Adaptation Forum • County Council • Port of Bellingham • Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC)
9.	7:00	Adjourn

If you're not on our Northwest Straits Commission newsletter list, you can join here: <https://www.nwstraits.org/get-involved/join-the-mailing-list/>

Items of interest:

- MRC Retreat: Saturday, October 21, 9:00am – 1:00pm, Squaticum Boathouse
- [Bellingham SeaFeast](#)
- Recovering Lost Crab Pots of the Salish Sea – [A story map](#)
- Celebrate Bowman Bay! Deception Pass State Park, 11:00am – 3:00pm, Friday, September 22
- [Whatcom County Compound Flood Vulnerability Assessment \(June 2023\)](#)
- [Whatcom County European Green Crab Molt Blitz](#) – September 8

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In attendance: Austin Rose (staff), Dana Flerchinger (staff), Heather Spore (Chair), Paul Troutman, Rick Beauregard, Jackie Dexter, Bob Cecile, Dan Sulak, Glen "Alex" Alexander, Kurt Baumgarten, Kaylee Galloway, Beth Lorence, Jim Boyle,

Others: Matt Aamot, Chris Brown, Piper Olsen, Caitlyn Blair, Alan Chapman

1. **Introductions and Determine Quorum:** Heather began the meeting with introductions and the land acknowledgement.
2. **September 7 agenda:** Agenda approved
3. **Approval of May 4, June 1, and July 6 meeting summaries:** Summaries approved.
4. **Community Updates:** no community updates
5. **2025 Whatcom Comprehensive Plan Update:** Matt Aamot, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services, provided an overview of the 2025 Whatcom Comprehensive Plan update process. Comp plans must address issues identified in the Growth Management Act (GMA) and in the county wide planning policies. The GMA was created in the 90s to address rapid growth and development in the state. The current comp plan has 10 chapters that will be updated by June of 2025. House bill 1181 was also passed this year, requiring the county to develop a new climate change and resiliency chapter that includes 2 sub elements: greenhouse gas reduction (ways to reduce per capita vehicle miles travelled) and resiliency to natural hazards (floods, volcanoes, earthquakes). The Whatcom County population has seen about a 14.5% increase in population from 2013-2023, and in the coming plan, a high, medium, or low growth projection over the next 20 years will be selected for planning purposes. Currently, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of future growth is planned for current cities and urban growth areas until 2035. Future population growth through 2045 will be further expanded into urban growth areas. The basic components to the update process include public participation, consultation of advisory committees (including the MRC), public hearings hosted by the planning commission, and approvals by county council. The state of Washington provides grant funding for comp plan updates and the County will also be hiring consultants to help with updates. In August of 2022, County Council passed resolution 2022 036, which established priorities for the comp plan update. Priorities that directly pertain to the MRC within the scope of work are protections of habitats for fish and wildlife. These changes will be coming to the MRC and other committees for review.
6. **Staff Update**
 - **Whatcom VRA:** Final report: [Whatcom County Compound Flood Vulnerability Assessment \(June 2023\)](#)
Whatcom County Public Works applied for a second round of grant funding to continue the vulnerability assessment, expanding the assessment along the Nooksack riverine shoreline upstream to Deming. This will hopefully initiate applicable code review and adaptation planning. The initial grant focused on the impacts of climate change by investigating sea level rise and vulnerable communities. The second round of funding would focus more on riverine assessments.
 - **Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grant**
MRC staff shared the grant opportunity with the committee to learn about potential project ideas that the MRC could apply for.
 - **Letter to BB community re: EGC**
MRC staff are working with NWSC staff to prep a European Green Crab (EGC) letter for the Birch Bay community since there has been an increase in EGC in that area. The letter will be sent in October when the next MRC grant round begins.
 - **MRC Retreat**
The MRC retreat is scheduled for Saturday, October 21st from 9-1pm at the Squalicum Boat House. MRC staff and a member subcommittee are meeting with consultant to create the retreat agenda.
 - **November MRC meeting/NWSI Conference**
November 2nd MRC meeting overlaps with NWSI conference so date may be adjusted. Hotels (\$115 per night), travel, mileage, and meals (\$74/day; breakfast: \$18, lunch \$20, dinner: \$36) will be reimbursed, but original receipts are required!
 - **Upcoming MRC vacancies**
Come January of 2024, the MRC will have 2 vacancies for citizen at large and recreational interests. Depending on term renewals, there may also be economic and scientific seats available.

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- **Evans School of Public Policy and Governance**

The NWSC is applying to work with UW Evans school student consultants to build a needs assessment for MRCs. The goal is to develop a framework for working with each of the MRCs to assess community needs, diverse perspectives, and priorities to guide MRC project priorities. If they get the funding, the first year will be a pilot project working with a few other MRCs, but Whatcom County may be able to work with the consultants down the line in 2025 or 2026.

7. Project Updates:

- **Chuckanut PIC**

Sampling has continued throughout the summer. The 90th percentile water quality standard is not being met at any of the marine sampling sites, with particularly large amounts of fecal coliform counts at CM2 and CM6. Because water quality has not been ideal within the bay, Whatcom County is delaying a meeting with DOH to look at updating its shellfish closures. Staff are also looking into seasonal variation at the sites to determine the possibility of seasonal openings. County staff are looking into doing eDNA tracking to determine sources of fecal coliform within the bay, particularly at the most contaminated sites.

- **Wildcat Cove**

The drone survey in Wildcat Cove was completed by David Wallin. David went out before and after the crabbing season and documented an increase in vehicle tracks fanning out throughout the cove after crabbing season opened. MRC staff have also continued working with Peak Sustainability on a social marketing campaign in Wildcat Cove. Peak staff are taking observations within the cove to inform a survey to gauge attitudes toward marketing messages that will be used for the campaign. DNR also completed their survey within the cove to delineate eelgrass and to determine bathymetry. Preliminary results have been sent showing eelgrass presence within the cove, but the complete results from the survey will be sent in a final report.

- **Kelp Surveys**

4 kelp surveys were completed at Aiston Preserve, SW Lummi Island, Gulf Road/Cherry Point, and Point Whitehorn with the help of several volunteers. Kelp beds appeared to be healthy and were similar in size to previous years. Lots of marine life was also observed in and around the kelp beds. Austin is completing acreage maps and will send out to MRC once they are completed.

- **Forage Fish Surveys:** The MRC has been conducting monthly forage fish surveys at Little Squalicum Beach. Nine surf smelt eggs were found during the March survey at the entrance to the beach near the restoration site, but none of the other sites or sampling sites have yielded any eggs. The MRC is not hiring another MRC forage fish intern, but instead will complete these with county staff going forward. Dana will be conducting the surveys and gathering volunteers for the upcoming surveys.

- **Derelict Boat Removal**

Wanderlust was demolished and removed from the Nooksack River/ Bellingham Bay tide flats. DNR was delayed in their removal as they had to remove the boat by land rather than water. Bob Cecile and Jessica Owens (NWS Communications Coordinator) attended the demolition and removal. Smith Gardens offered their land for the equipment staging which made demolition and removal possible. The commission has remaining funds for derelict boat removal and DNR is looking into checking the custody of boats and hopefully getting some of them removed.

- **Clayton Beach Site Visit**

On August 18th, Dana and Bob attended the Clayton Beach site visit with Congressman Rick Larsen, other NWS staff, Skagit MRC members, State Parks staff, Herrera consultants, WA Fish and Wildlife representatives, and Sinclair representatives. The group walked down to the beach, experiencing the newly installed bridge that drastically improves access to the beach. Congressman Rick Larsen seemed impressed with the proposed plan to restore Clayton Beach (Essentially removing all of the boulders and debris that you can see in the photos and moving them into the pit that has developed behind the trestle), so we will see how that massive project continues to develop. Jason Morgan also mentioned interest in having the Skagit and Whatcom MRCs partner to conduct forage fish surveys at the main beach to assess its suitability as forage fish spawning habitat and to support the restoration project.

- **HABs**

The spring/summer bloom season is starting to wind down. Back in May, we started seeing Alexandrium in plankton samples and paralytic shellfish toxins in mussels soon after, corresponding with closures of Whatcom beaches throughout the summer that remain closed. The HABs team had 2 student interns during the summer

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and have been able to get more people involved in microscopic analysis. Piper Olson spoke about the interns also working with GSSC. Weekly sampling will continue through October, and will switch to biweekly starting in November. Beth Lorence brought up the need for more volunteers to conduct biotoxin monitoring (mussel sampling) in Squalicum Harbor.

- **Mussel Watch**

The mussel watch program is looking for more volunteers to help with mussel cage deployment and retrieval. The Birch Bay sites are particularly in need of more volunteers.

8. MRC Partner Committee Updates:

- **WWIN:** Water Week and Bellingham SeaFeast (October 14th) coming up. The speaker group is also working on a climate adaption forum.
- **County Council:** The next county council meeting is on Tuesday the 12th. The Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee will have presentations from the County's climate action manager, from DNR on forest management, and will be introducing ordinance to establish a forest resiliency task force.
- **Port:** Port adapting climate action strategy. Kurt attended an informative forage fish survey training with WDFW. The city applied for and was awarded the Federal Highway Administration National Culvert Removal and Restoration grant to look at lower Squalicum Creek to review fish passage barriers and flooding issues.
- **NWSC:** Austin sent out NWSC meeting highlights, which included all MRC proposals getting accepted by the NWSC.

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