

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

San Juan County
Marine Resources
Committee



ABOUT THE MRC

The San Juan County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is a citizen advisory committee to San Juan County dedicated to the protection and restoration of marine resources in the San Juan Islands. The San Juan MRC was the first marine resources committee established in the region. The Committee was created in 1996 as a local management alternative to an initiative for establishing a national marine sanctuary in the San Juans. The MRC provides a citizen forum to advise the County Council on marine issues. In addition to policy issues, the MRC supports marine research and planning and provides education and outreach.

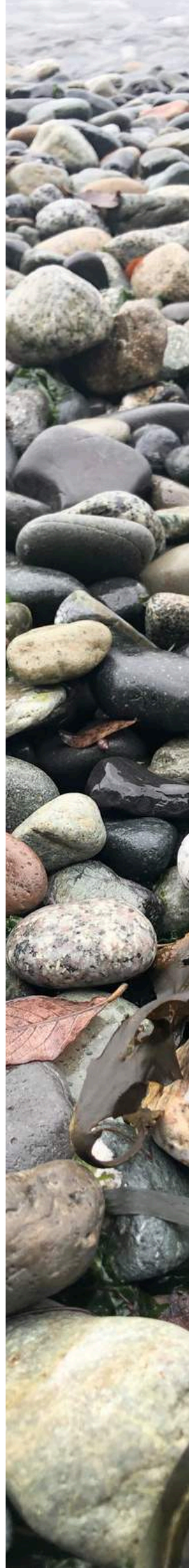
MRC GOALS

Ecological

- To protect and restore the marine biological diversity, ecosystem processes, representative ecosystems, and special natural features.
- To conserve fish populations and the upland, nearshore, and deepwater habitats that support them.
- Prevent further reductions in marine populations including marine birds and habitats within the San Juans and increase populations of marine species to levels exceeding present levels, within the range of natural variability.

Cultural, social and economic

- To recognize and appreciate the existence values provided by a fully functioning marine ecosystem.
- To protect and restore the marine ecosystem so that these benefits will be available for future generations.
- To recognize and protect direct use benefits for marine resources, including ceremonial, subsistence, recreational and commercial fishing.
- To acknowledge cultural heritage resources and encourage understanding and appreciation of them.
- To recognize the need for scientific research opportunities and the benefits that accrue from this research.
- To promote increased education and awareness of the marine environment.
- To protect marine-based recreational resources, including fishing, recognizing that on (and in) the water recreation and enjoyment is an important part of not only our local economy but also our community, culture and the coastal legacy we leave for our children.



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

With guidance from Sam Whitridge, Marine Program Coordinator for the Department of Environmental Stewardship, the MRC worked on a broad range of projects and issues. The MRC welcomed three new members: Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria, a UW Friday Harbor Labs research scientist, Brian Goodremont, a local San Juan Island business owner and recreation tourism specialist, and Dave Checkley, an emeritus oceanographer with Scripps Institute and Shaw Island resident.

The Jackson Beach Piling removal project on San Juan Island was a peak project of the year. Managed by Marine Project Manager Frances Robertson, the 132 creosote-soaked pilings were removed with the help of federally directed dollars. The planned restoration of the area is expected to rejuvenate a thriving habitat for forage fish, a critical resource for young salmon, shorebirds, and marine mammals. The beach is also used for barge landings, which will continue without harm to the habitat restoration.

The challenge of derelict vessels had its highs and lows over the last year. The county hired dedicated Derelict Vessel Coordinator, Kari Koski to take the lead on corralling vessels. In 2023, 8 vessels and 4 large vessel related debris were removed from county waters. The low of the year was the sinking of El Capitan, an 80-foot 1944 Army Towboat, at West Sound Marina on Orcas Island. The regulatory challenges of derelict vessels can be daunting despite the diligent work of many smart people over the last four years that could not resolve moving, salvaging, or disposing of El Capitan. So, it sank at the dock, and there it remains.

The MRC's concerns about Oil Spill Preparedness are fueled by the increased ship traffic because of Canada's planned port facilities expansion. The MRC is committed to pushing for an Emergency Response Towing Vehicle (ERTV) near the west side of the San Juan Islands. The MRC will continue to request Washington's Department of Ecology amend its September 2023 report on Oil Spill Risk Assessment Modeling to show a regionally focused risk analysis. The MRC is committed to Canada and the United States securing ERTVs to protect the San Juan Islands. MRC member and County Council representative Cindy Wolf is working hard to advance this effort.

The MRC is a flexible organization with skilled members able to advise the County on a broad range of issues effecting the 172 named San Juan Islands and surrounding waters. The 400+ miles of shoreline over 620 square miles are a unique marine environment and summer boating haven. To be better informed, after five years of planning the County's Marine Program and the MRC have secured funding for research to learn more about boater traffic in the cherished islands. Aerial surveys during the boating season will determine the highest impact areas and how they relate to sensitive marine habitats including eelgrass, kelp, and the proximity to forage fish.

The Northwest Straits Commission continues to provide extraordinary support for the seven MRCs who are linked by our common, but varied, Salish Sea work in Clallam, Jefferson, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom and Island Counties. Volunteers in the MRC system can thank our Congressional delegation, particularly Patty Murray, for their support to secure permanent funding. The success of the MRC system proves complex problems associated with marine protection and restoration are solved by local people sharing information and measuring progress together.

Christina Koons, MRC Chair

MEMBERSHIP



SAN JUAN COUNTY
Marine Resources
Committee

The San Juan MRC is currently comprised of representatives from San Juan County, the Tulalip Tribal government, the University of Washington’s Friday Harbor Labs, the Port of Friday Harbor, environmental organizations, local marine-based businesses, and residents, all of whom bring a diversity of perspectives and expertise to the San Juan MRC. In 2023 Dr. Meghan Deither and Phil Green, two longtime members, stepped down from the MRC. We were pleased to welcome three new members in 2023: David Checkley, Brian Goodremont, and Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria to the MRC.

MRC Members

Christina Koons, Chair	Karin Roemers-Kleven, Vice Chair
Dr. Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria , Friday Harbor Labs, University of Washington	Kendra Smith, Director, Department of Env. Stewardship
Patti Gobin, Tulalip Tribes	Lovell Pratt, Friends of the San Juans
Adam Parrot, Port of Friday Harbor	Jeff Dyer Lopez Island
Kailey Genter, San Juan Island	Beth Tate, Washington Fish & Wildlife
Craig Smith, San Juan Island	Matt Arata, A1 Marine
David Checkley, Shaw Island	Aaron Boyles, Jen Jay Consulting
Phil Green*, San Juan Island	Brian Goodremont, San Juan Outfitters
Dr. Meghan Dethier*, Friday Harbor Labs, University of Washington	

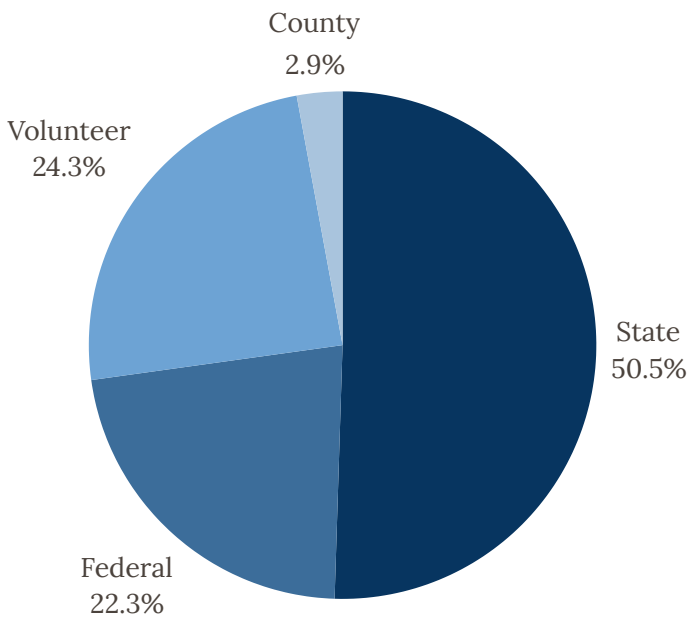
Ex-Officio and Support Staff:

Sam Whitridge, Marine Program Coordinator Cindy Wolf, San Juan County Council
 Dr. Frances Robertson, Marine Project Manager Katie Johnson, Marine Project Coordinator



FUNDING

The MRC is predominantly funded through a grant administered by the Northwest Straits Commission. This grant is comprised of state and federal dollars that fund the basic MRC operations as well as specific projects. In addition to these funds, the MRC also receives support from San Juan County and may also partner with the County in seeking external grants. The time and resources dedicated to the MRC by its members provide nearly a quarter of the annual support for the program.



Value of volunteer hours



2023 VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



926 hours

The value of community citizens volunteering their time, expertise, and resources cannot be emphasized enough. Over the 2022-2023 grant cycle, MRC members and volunteers put in over 1000 hours. This included running and attending meetings, coordinating workshops and roundtables, providing expert guidance in the County's oil spill prevention efforts, volunteering in monitoring efforts, participating in outreach, and beach clean-ups.



24.3%

value of volunteer hours and resources 2022-2023

MRC OPERATIONS

The MRC continued its regular operations throughout 2023, carrying on with collaborative meeting structure developed in 2022. We have integrated the MRC, Salmon Recovery Citizens Advisory Group (CAG), and Local Integrating Organization (LIO) committee meetings, while still maintaining committee autonomy and independent membership. MRC members regularly attend the CAG and LIO meetings, which allows for increased efficiency and better cross pollination across committees.

In 2023, we had several changes to our staff. Tyler Davis transitioned to a project management role within the clean water division. Katie Johnson was hired as Marine Project Coordinator midyear to assist with MRC operations and coordinate the LIO. Kari Koski was hired as the Derelict Vessel Coordinator and guides prevention efforts for the MRC.

The MRC was represented at regular LIO regional meetings by Sam Whitridge and Katie Johnson, contributing to scope and funding decisions for LIO implementation – and the MRC was represented on the Northwest Straits Commission by MRC Chair Christina Koons.



ADVISORY ROLE

The MRC has been involved in advising the County on matters related to marine resources since its inception. This advisory role is a critical part of the MRC's activities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The MRC provides scientifically-based guidance on issues that affect the County's marine environment.

Core advisory activities in 2023 included:

- Advising San Juan County Council about the urgent need for a dedicated Emergency Response Towing Vessel (ERTV) to be located in or near county waters.
- Presenting to the Ecosystem Coordination Board local forum about recreational vessel impacts, highlighting concerns around commercial shipping traffic and the increased threat of oil spills.

SALMON RECOVERY

The MRC also undertakes the role of Citizens Salmon Advisory Group for Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) #2, the local Lead Entity for Salmon Recovery in the San Juan Islands.

The MRC provides the final scoring for all proposed salmon recovery projects in the year's grant round. This is perhaps one of the most important roles that the MRC undertakes each year.

In 2023 the MRC helped ensure that **\$294,482** was awarded for Salmon Recovery projects in San Juan County.



\$294,482

Awarded to salmon recovery
in San Juan County in 2023

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

With over 400 miles of shoreline and 400 rocks, reefs, and islands, communicating the importance of marine resources is a large undertaking. The majority of the San Juan County MRC's project efforts focus on education and outreach. Education and outreach are key components to the Marine Stewardship Area Strategy focused on fostering a stewardship ethic in visitors and residents to the County.

SOUTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALE OUTREACH

In supporting partners for Southern Resident Killer Whale outreach, members attended the Seattle Boat show to pass out Whale Warning Flags to the public. Outreach efforts continued over the summer, beginning with the public at the UW Friday Harbor Labs open house. Summer interns and MRC members visited Roche Harbor Marina several times to pass out Whale Warning Flags and communicate with boaters.

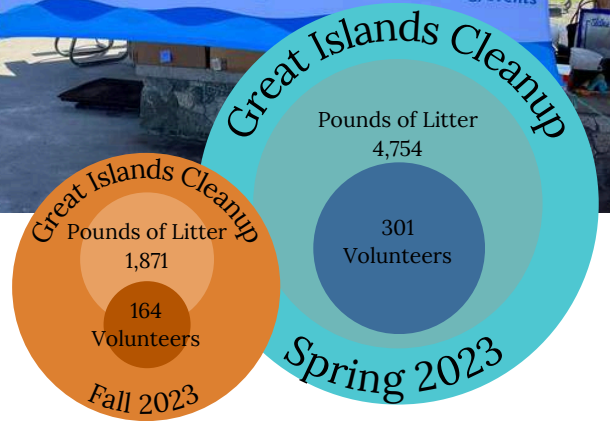
MRC members helped to host representative Debra Lekanov for a roundtable discussion about supporting Southern Resident Orca Recovery on October 14th. Scientists, researchers, whale experts, and enthusiasts came together to showcase the interconnected efforts of protecting these special creatures. It was a great way for the community to come together over their shared love and passion for SRKW and to discuss ways we can all work together to help recover the species.



PLASTIC FREE SALISH SEA

In 2023, Plastic Free Salish Sea (PFSS) intensified its efforts to combat plastic pollution and promote environmental stewardship across the San Juan County and Salish Sea region. Through its expanded outreach initiatives, PFSS engaged more community members in its mission, leveraging platforms like its public website and participation in events such as the San Juan County Fair.

The initiative continued to promote Plastic Free July and make plastic reduction toolkits readily available. Among the most successful PFSS programs is the Spring and Fall Great Islands Cleanups, where volunteers collected thousands of pounds of debris from shorelines and roads across San Juan County.



The PFSS Adopt-a-Beach program continued through the 2022-2023 grant year. By the end of the season we have a total of 52 active beach stewards, including 13 new ones. In conjunction with students at Friday Harbor High School, we expanded programming to create the Adopt-a-Road program inspired at motivating stewards along roadways. After a great year, PFSS has signed up 10 road stewards servicing 7 stretches of road.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Launching Adopt-a-Road program, sister program to Adopt-a- Beach, inspiring people to pick up debris along roadways to prevent more plastic from getting into local waterways.
- Coordinated a reporting contest to see which steward could spend the most time picking up trash and debris.
- Nearly 500 volunteers removed over 5,000 lbs of debris from beaches and roadways cross San Juan County during the Spring and Fall GICUs.



PLASTIC FREE SALISH SEA



DERELICT VESSEL PREVENTION PROGRAM

San Juan County's Derelict Vessel Program was first established by the MRC in 2013 as a proactive approach to identifying and removing vessels of concern before they became a hazard to the environment and navigation. With the successes of the program and more boats being identified, the program needed more structure. The county hired Kari Koski as Derelict Vessel Coordinator to lead prevention efforts with the MRC.

Throughout 2023, the MRC conducted boater outreach through a variety of methods including producing a short outreach and education video for sharing broadly with partners, as well as through the MRC website and social media to raise awareness of derelict vessels, how to recognize them, and how to report them. We received numerous reports of concerning vessels throughout the season.



The long-term goals of the MRCs efforts to address derelict vessels in San Juan County are to:

- Raise awareness of derelict vessels with county residents and the boating community.
- Conduct regular marine patrols with local partners to identify vessels of concern.
- Prioritize identified vessels of concern for removal by the County's Derelict Vessel Removal Program.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Removed 8 derelict vessels of varying size, weight and condition, from a 12' drifting speedboat to a sunken 47' wooden sailboat.
- Extracted 3 large vessels related debris from county waters.
- Resolved 16 vessels of concern from the SJ database, either through owners resolving their issues, vessel was sold, or moved out of the county.
- Performed 9 on-water patrols and 13 land-based patrols to identify, follow-up or check on vessels throughout the county.
- Salvaged and donated a boat to the Sea Scouts for a bunk house, salvaged items for marine re-sale and redistributed safety gear, including over 50 life jackets, from The Islander party-barge to islands-wide safe boating program at dock kiosks
- Successful outreach to the community about how to report derelict vessels through social media, fliers, prevention posters, and at in-person events like the County Fair and opportunistic dock talks.



EELGRASS PROTECTION

Currently, Odlin County Park is the only eelgrass anchor-out protection zone that has a permitted buoy, installed in 2021. Installation of anchor out buoys was planned for Judd, Fishing, and Ship Bays (Eastsound, Orcas Island), Westcott Bay (San Juan Island), and Hunter Bay (Lopez Island). After Tribal consultation plans have pivoted to a less-invasive approach. Friends of the San Juans has a strong eelgrass outreach network and will continue to engage with local organizations focused on the creation of virtual no-anchor zones. Through education, outreach, and public engagement via social media, there is hope that behavior change in these delicate habitats is possible.

Despite slowing momentum for buoy installation, vessel counts persisted at several locations to understand vessel density and pressure on eelgrass beds. MRC members visited their respective sites multiple times throughout the summer, ensuring inclusion of busy holiday weekends, regular summer weekends, and weekdays.



Each survey consisted of counting the total number of boats anchored or moored, as well as date, time, tide, weather conditions, and photos. MRC members made 13 site visits during the monitoring period (May 29 - Sept 30). While fewer vessel count surveys were performed this year, the data is encouraging. Throughout the 2022 and 2023 seasons, the anchor out buoy at Odlin Park has proved effective in that no boats have been observed within the zone. And only a few boats have been observed outside of the zone.



In pivoting from buoy installation, the 2023 MRC intern, Makenna Pittman, helped to progress our eelgrass protection work through the mapping of permitted mooring buoys across San Juan County. Makenna worked to cross reference permitted buoys with the GIS data and update the maps. Many of the buoys permitted were able to be found, but other maps and images showed some unpermitted mooring buoys. While we focus on the health and protection of eelgrass, knowing the location and density of permitted mooring buoys will be helpful.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Vessel compliance monitoring at Odlin Anchor Out Zone
- Maintenance of Odlin Anchor Out buoys
- Continued vessel monitoring at 2 other sites ahead of Anchor Out buoy installation
- Database maintenance and map creation for county record of mooring buoys
- Completed county-wide assessment of mooring buoys to determine the numbers and locations of mooring buoys in San Juan County



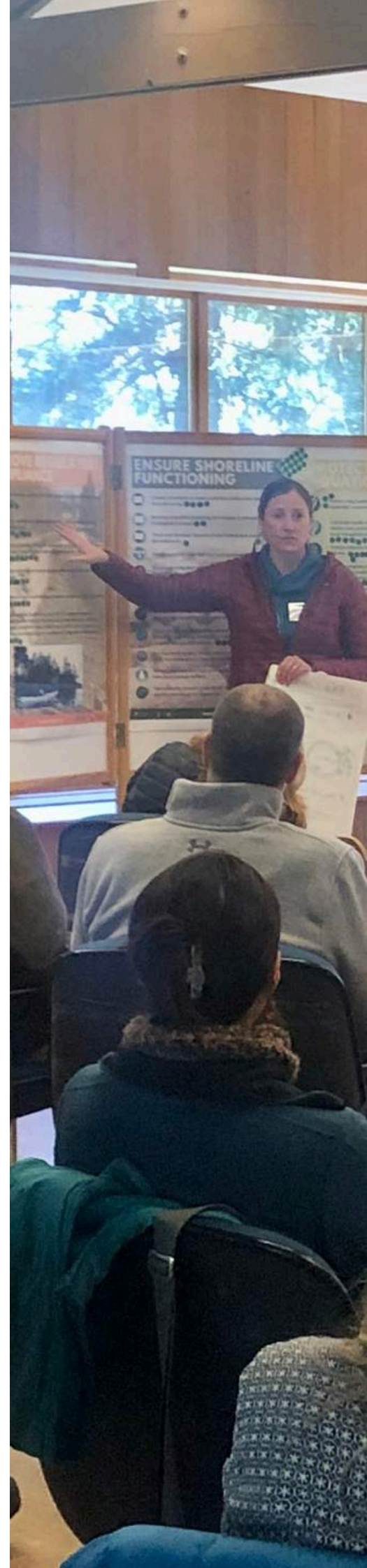
PLANNING & RESTORATION

During the 2022-2023 grant year, the MRC finalized the update of the Marine Stewardship Area Plan and continued to engage and advise on oil spill prevention efforts. The MRC also engaged in work to remove creosote soaked pilings from the shoreline at Jackson's Beach, helping to restore the nearshore area for public access, community enjoyment, and natural processes rejuvenation.

MARINE MANAGERS WORKSHOP

The Marine Managers Workshop was held on April 4-5 at Friday Harbor Labs on San Juan Island. Overall, the event was a huge success, not only in accomplishing the goals of the workshop, but to serve as great social gathering after the height of the pandemic. Stakeholders and co-managers who are involved in marine waters were invited to share their knowledge and expertise as the MRC examines key issues within the Marine Stewardship Area. Between 40-45 participants helped to identify the gaps and threats local marine ecosystems face.

Workshop participants were divided into nine subject expert groups to review and prioritize recommended actions within the following core objectives: climate resilience, oil spill prevention and preparedness, protection of submerged aquatic vegetation, enhanced nearshore food webs, reduce human impact, improve regulatory compliance, ensure shoreline functioning, reduce vessel impacts, and upgrades to marine infrastructure.



Participants prioritized the top actions and identified remaining threats or gaps. The information gathered was extremely valuable in prioritizing areas of focus as we work to implement these strategic actions.

The topic for the second day of the workshop involved identifying key partners and relationships. Attendees focused on determining who is working on strategic actions, what has been accomplished so far, and where partnerships already exist to allow us to collectively further our work to address the threats and challenges facing our marine waters in San Juan County.

This workshop will serve as a catalyst for implementing the State of the Marine Stewardship Area Report, and the San Juan MRC is looking forward to hosting a follow-up workshop in another two years to assess the level of progress and to adaptively manage actions outlined in the report.



san juan county
marine stewardship area
our sea • our source • our future

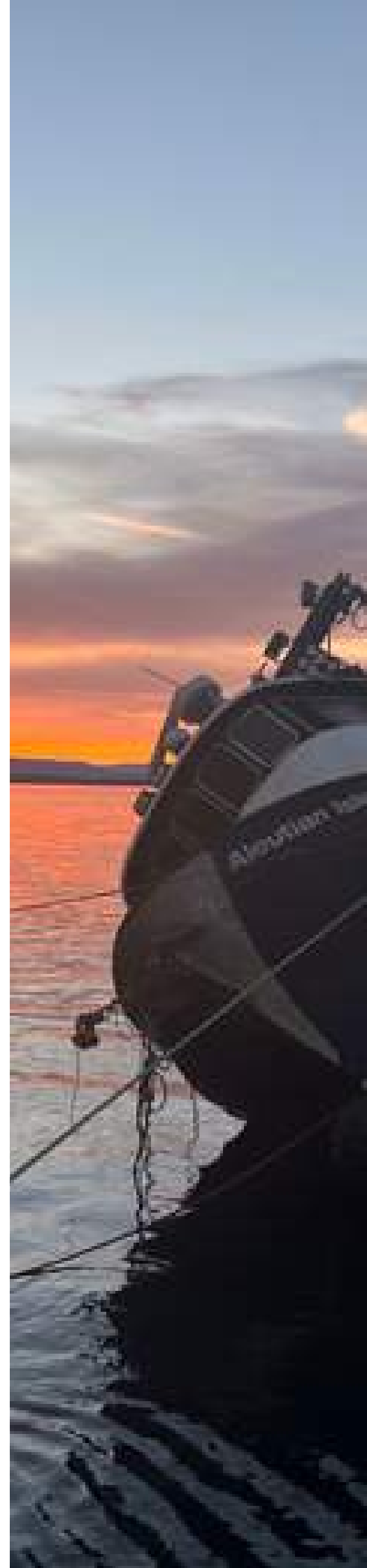
ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Reviewed, refined, and prioritized 60 specific actions to address the health and vitality of the San Juan County Marine Stewardship Area.
- Identified and addressed gaps and barriers facing the MSA.
- Outlined key partnerships for collaboration
- Re-invigorated the marine management community after several years of the pandemic.

OIL SPILL PREVENTION

The risk of a major oil spill is of huge concern to the County. It was identified as the highest-ranking threat to marine biodiversity in the 2007 Marine Stewardship Area Plan and was again identified as a top threat at the 2020 and 2023 Marine Managers Workshops. The MRC works closely with the County, the San Juan Local Integrating Organization (LIO), and local non-profit organizations to further efforts toward oil spill prevention.

Efforts in 2023 focused on advocacy for a dedicated Emergency Response Towing Vessel (ERTV) to be stationed in nearby waters to act in the event of a catastrophic oil spill. Following the sinking of the FV Aleutian Isle in 2022, which settled in Haro Strait with 2,500 gallons of diesel onboard, concerns about oil spills prevention and response are rising. The San Juan County MRC shared these concerns and the need for an ERTV with other MRC members at the 2023 Northwest Straits Initiative Conference in November. We are all connected by water and preventing oil spills throughout Puget Sound will take all of us.



In May, members of the MRC and County staff presented to the Ecosystem Coordination Board about concerns over oil spill prevention amidst increased vessel traffic in the Salish Sea. Prevention is crucial if we want to protect local waterways. The Ecosystem Coordination Board is comprised of 27 members who represent various watersheds, Tribes, businesses, commissions, federal agencies, and state representation that advise the Puget Sound Partnership's Leadership Council. By sharing this valuable information with key stakeholders from across the Puget Sound Recovery community, the message about oil spill risk and prevention can be elevated beyond San Juan County.

The MRC was represented at meetings with the Gulf Islands Trust as well as an Ad-hoc Transboundary Caucus. The Department of Ecology produced a report analyzing the effectiveness of an ERTV in the Puget Sound. Within the data, looking at risk reduction for an ERTV to be stationed in either Roche Harbor or Sydney, BC, the risk reduction jumps from 2% Sound wide to nearly 25% when looking at the response rate for the San Juan County Marine Stewardship Area.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Sharing about ERTV advocacy work at the Northwest Straits Initiative Conference.
- Connecting with transboundary governments to share concerns about the oil spill risk and options for preventative measures.
- Presenting to the Ecosystem Coordination Board, widely broadcasting the level of risk and concern for oil spills in County waters. in Friday Harbor
- Engagement with representatives in Washington D.C. surrounding requests for a dedicated ERTV in boundary waters.

JACKSON'S BEACH PILING REMOVAL

One of the biggest success stories for the MRC in 2023 was the removal of 132 creosote contaminated pilings at Jackson's Beach. The MRC was instrumental in spreading news of the project and highlighting its importance to the community. Removing toxic chemicals from this site is the first step in restoring the shoreline and helping to adapt habitats from human interventions, back to the natural processes that are vital for salmon, sea birds and marine mammals.



Originally used by LaFarge gravel operation, the derelict pier and creosote-soaked pilings degrade over time, impacting the nearshore environment.

Approaching from the water, the Quigg Brothers quickly and expertly dismantled the old pier pilings. Using a vibratory hammer, the crew safely removed the piles and took them to be disposed. In total, the removal took only 3 days to complete.



Now the beach is free of creosote soaked pilings and can serve as an asset to the community through a barge landing site, access for critical equipment, provide opportunities for research, and act as a beloved space for families and friends to beach comb, picnic, and play.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The San Juan MRC is expanding its core project list in the 2023-2024 grant year. The MRC is excited to embark on new projects in 2024. These include:

- **Free Derelict Vessel Turn-in Event** - In order to prevent future marine debris, we need to take action on concerning vessels before they become a problem. Through partnership with the Department of Natural Resources, the Port of Friday Harbor, San Juan County, and the Northwest Straits Initiative, the MRC will help host a turn-in event for derelict vessels in Spring of 2024 in order to remove derelict vessels and prevent debris from impacting the marine environment.
- **Outreach to address small oil spills in San Juan County** - With increased vessel traffic in the San Juans over the last few years, small oil spills at local marinas/fueling stations have increasingly become an issue. The cumulative effect of these small spills can have an enormous impact and the MRC would like to conduct boater outreach and awareness in order to encourage more responsible boating behavior. These efforts will be done in partnership with IOSA and WA Sea Grant.
- **Vessel Impact Plan for Ecosystem Recovery in the San Juan Islands** - The San Juan Islands have long been a premier destination for boaters. Boating has significantly increased in recent years, underscoring the need to manage impacts more effectively to protect our sensitive marine habitats. This project will develop management actions that preserve sensitive and critical eelgrass habitats, support a positive boating experience, provide unhindered access to Coast Salish Usual and Accustomed Treaty fishing and harvesting areas, and will serve as a model across Puget Sound.
- **Seafloor Habitat Mapping** - At the Marine Managers Workshop, participants identified the need for classification for the entire seafloor of SJC to allow evaluation of the proportion of particular habitat types within the county that might be impacted by anchoring. This project will allow the MRC to assess the area of potential benthic habitat types occurring in the county. High resolution mapping in select areas would substantially improve the knowledge of seafloor conditions that could be impacted from small boat anchoring and could help to identify areas disturbed by anchoring as well as the occurrence of derelict fishing gear.



PARTNERS

The work of the San Juan County MRC is made possible through grants, collaborations, and partnerships.



**San Juan County
Marine Program**



**San Juan County
Solid Waste**



San Juan County Lead Entity for Salmon Recovery



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, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Many of the photographs used throughout this report have been contributed by MRC members, staff, or partners. Credits and descriptions are provided below.

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