

MRC Annual Retreat & Planning Session

Wednesday, January 17, 2018

Morning Session

Welcome - Arnie

Round Table Introductions:

Libby Concord, Arnie Klaus, Karin Roemers-Kleven, Kendra Smith, Lucas Hart, Sasha Horst, Caroline Gibson, Jamie Stephens, Marta Green, Ken Carrasco, Carl Davis, Phil Green, Elise DuFour, Jacklyn Fowler, Laura Jo Severson, Christina Koons, Terry Turner (Chair), Jeff Friedman, Byron Rot, Megan Dethier

Laura Severson's email is incorrect on the member list. It should be seversonlaurajo@gmail.com.

Northwest Straits 101 – Caroline, Lucas, Sasha

Reminder: Next NSMCI MRC group meeting is in Port Townsend in November

Questions:

Christina: Is there someone from the Lummi Tribe on the commission?

Lucas: It varies depending on the MRC. It is often linked to a specific project. Olympia Oyster Restoration is a good example right now. We were set up to have tribal representation. There is a seat on the commission for tribal participation.

Sasha: The committees are set up for any tribe to participate.

Caroline: There isn't a reservation in the San Juans, so that can make it tricky. Derelict fishing overlaps with tribes. Tribal fisherman can report their gear.

Ken: Legislation says that we must have tribal participation or give them the opportunity to take part. I suspect that we'll have participation from the Lummi. I'm very anxious to have their participation on the MRC.

Christina: We should be reaching out because it sounds like Patti is spread pretty thin.

Kendra: We need to go to them as projects develop and engage with them in a meaningful way.

Ken: One example is the Orcas Landing, on which we needed to have tribal input.

San Juan MRC Overview:

Brief History of the MRC – Phil

Questions:

Terry: I'm fascinated by the origins of it. The proposal that came from the feds for the Orca Pathways that was a marine sanctuary, was that seen in a poor light because people interested in marine conservation thought that the federal government wouldn't do a good job or that it would be too heavy handed?

Phil: It was too top-down. There was a second version that happened about ten years ago. We had talks with the DNR about making all of San Juan County into a reserve. Reserve sounded too extreme. You set up your reserve and then come up with a management plan. That came to a head and there was a public hearing that almost came to fistcuffs. The MRC was instructed to never look at that issue again. It was an issue with a bigger agency telling the County what to do. It's similar with the orca issue now.

Megan: That's a good example. We as the County do not have the jurisdiction to solve the problems we are being asked to solve. People said that we could manage our own problems, but we don't have the jurisdiction.

Jamie: However, I've seen that the top-down is not as inclusive as it should be. There has been a lot of work done up here and a lot of research. I know more than they do (big government). We know that we can't solve it and we can't manage it, but we don't need people who don't know coming up telling us to do things and redo research and leaving us out of the discussion.

Christina: How does a federal lawmaker or someone from NOA participate in the MRC?

Caroline: It's often project specific. We get a lot of funding from NOA. For instance, we just got a grant that we are sharing, working with the kelp recovery plan. A workshop in March or April is going to involve reps from NOA and the MRCs and experts on kelp. Often it's a one-off. We have big participation at the MRC Conference where members can meet NOA and fish and wildlife staff.

Kendra: We call them up and they come. They do participate.

Byron: They have a regulatory function, so they must retain a wall. They can't show favoritism, so they can't sit on the MRC commission. They are trying to avoid litigation. We have conversations with them, but they can't necessarily be involved.

Arnie: There is a clear indication from them that there could be a more locally-originating solution from San Juan County. They want to hear from this kind of committee to hear where solutions are needed.

Karin: I wonder if there is greater knowledge among the public, creating a greater opportunity for something like that to resurface again stemming from the community.

Phil: There are groups out there that see this and are pushing new proposals. I don't think that there is anything coming from the government like the Orca issue, but there is discussion.

Caroline: Senator Murray tells us that this is her pet project, the Northwest Straights Commission. We are trying to grow private support, as funding from the EPA could dry up at any point. The EPA is the core funding to the Commission. I was with the Commission when the NOA funding went away in 2010 overnight. Somehow we made it work. A huge part of that chaos was going around to all the MRCs and see which ones would continue without funding. This is one of the strongest. The concept would continue whether the funding was there or not. How are we going to come up with a million dollars a year to create that stability. This is our main job right now.

The MRC Mission – Megan

Role of the County Council and Liaison – Jamie

Questions:

Karin: What kind of controls does the County have?

Jamie: It depends on the situation.

Karin: Can it say we limit fishing or the amount of vessels that come through the area?

Jamie: Fishing is controlled by the state. Nine tribes have fishing rights. Then we go to the federal level. We have petitioned Fish and Wildlife asking that they would fund us to use our five sheriff boats to do patrols.

Karin: Does the County have the ability to control the whale watch industry?

Jamie: We are currently working with the whale watch people on this issue. It can be hard to determine who is at fault, private or for profit.

Karin: I'm trying to get a sense of where we should go for solutions.

Jamie: In Vancouver they did a voluntary slow-down that had a 65% success rate. And we would like to implement that here.

Kendra: This involves conversations with the prosecuting attorney, asking questions of where we can go legally. These issues come up and we take notes to ask if we have the legal right to do things. Then we come back with that information to the MRC.

Terry: Do we have speed zones in the County that we have jurisdiction over?

Jamie: Yes, a few.

Ken: I appreciate that the MRC is not an advocacy group because it allows people of all political backgrounds to come together. It is really important to have a place where everyone feels welcome.

Christina: In this County we have everything from human powered kayaks to giant tankers. How does the County regulate that? Is there a County body that regulates that?

Jamie: The Coast Guard regulates that. They keep track of all the vessel. They are slowly instating a new ID system, which will be mandatory. This is because most of the accidents are between fisherman and large vessels. The rest are rules of the road. We do have deputies that go out and patrol for bad boating.

Christina: Does the Coast Guard report to the County?

Jamie: No.

Role of MRC Coordinator – Arnie

Building and Sustaining an Effective Organization – Kendra

Questions:

Jamie: The Terrestrial Managers Group was created by the Secretary of the Interior. Important in coordinating different agencies.

Break 10:45-11:00

Ongoing Projects:

Southern Resident Killer Whales – Kendra

Questions:

Jaelyn: Are the top ten scoring items solutions that you are foreseeing for County, state, and federal level? Are they action plans?

Kendra: It's the "County Should" List. There are also state and federal items that have been shared with those organizations. They are aware of what we think they should be doing.

Terry: This is an indirect result of the proposal to have a whale watch exclusion zone on the west side of San Juan. We held a hearing and then wrote a recommendation to the council. We recommended that we should support the petition with a whole lot of changes to it. Get the process going and then we will take input from the people that it directly impacts. They said no, let's do it locally. The future conference is sort of a response to that.

Megan: It's a microcosm of the whole "sanctuary" issue.

Kendra: There is already a voluntary exclusion zone. I don't get the sense that the council members were opposed, just opposed to the Feds coming and making that call. Tomorrow they

will be announcing a committee dealing with this issue in Olympia. The County doesn't want to wait, as they want to do what is right for the whales right now. That is why they did the jet-ski ban. This is the body that will recommend to them what they should do. That's why we need to start thinking about the mechanism that will drive what needs to get done. We will need subcommittees to help us work through all of these pieces. The website is sjcmrc.org.

Arnie: The judge decided that the County has the right to protect its citizens and marine resources. If the government is silent on elements that need to be protected, the County can create law supported by law enforcement. Key elements are that we have law enforcement support and power to protect our marine environment.

Jaclyn: Who enforces the County's protections?

Arnie: An example is the distance from the whales. We locally set a 200 yard distance and it is now a federal regulation in the US and Canada.

Kendra: The sheriff enforces, but the County has to have funding in place to pay them to do that enforcement.

Arnie: There is a chart that shows that when enforcement is there, people do not violate. When there is no enforcement, people violate. There are other ways that we can create a presence as well. People on shore watching, etc.

Orcas Landing, Phase 1 and II – Terry and Arnie

Questions:

Ken: I've seen Larry's work at the Elwa Dam Removal site. They are works of art. I'm really impressed with his work. I have concern that we're going to put these two panels out on this dock with no context.

Terry: That's a logical part of our secret master plan.

Kendra: We will have some flexibility. We could change what goes on the board. We could use electronics to show underwater video. There are options, but we need to fundraise for them. Underwater sound would be interested.

Christina: Are you familiar with the whale trail? They are fantastic displays.

Carl: Having a children's display would be wonderful, too.

Elise: There is an interesting display in Vancouver that is called Fish Eye. They have a live diver that the kids can interact with while they are in and out of the water. The conversation would be engaging, no matter the age.

Kendra: I see a subcommittee forming!

Pinto Abalone – Ken

Questions:

Terry: They are providing stock, so is there a risk of loss of genetic diversity?

Ken: Apparently not. They believe that they have a diverse enough stock.

Phil: Will we be sponsoring new sites when the hatchery is up to speed?

Ken: Yes.

Terry: What are the numbers on this project? Isn't a low cost/high success project?

Ken: I don't know that they've been doing it long enough to have good numbers.

Caroline: This project has been going on for a long time, but the effort was not behind the idea for the entire time. They are trying to amp it up because there have to be millions of seeds planted in order to have an effect. The outlook is good if they can get the effort that they need. Several MRCs have talked about it. There is such a history of abalone in the San Juans and this would be a great place to ramp up the effort.

Ken: We should look at the language on the commission plan to see what we are required to do.

Carl: How many years has the muscle pollution program been going on?

Ken: They lost their funding for a while, but a few years.

Kendra: We do monitor storm water at the counter. Mostly what we find is bacteria. Keep your sewage systems up to date!

Ken: This is a prime example of data that could be brought under one umbrella to inform the County council.

Electric Boats – Ken

Questions:

Carl: How does this relate to the MRC?

Ken: Recommending to the County to make electricity available for charging electric boats, replacing County boats with electric boats, etc.

MRC Near Term Action Projects – Marta

Questions:

Carl: Is there an outreach to the Canadian tankers in all of this?

Marta: This has been a tough one. The thinking has been, what can we affect at the local level? We haven't interacted with Canada – I'll leave that to Jamie.

Ken: The Canadian pilots have been really good about this. The pilots have been right there to help.

Christina: How does the MRC interact with what you've described? How did you choose what to focus on?

Marta: We've decided to focus on environmental and economic consequences.

Christina: Do you have participation from the insurance industry? I would like this group to be able to give you feedback. The insurance industry should be involved.

Megan: It's safe to say that any project that takes your interest, get yourself on a list so that you can participate.

MRC as Salmon Recovery Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) – Byron

Afternoon session

Developing projects through the NWS – Sasha and Lucas

What are other MRCs of the region doing project-wise?

Questions:

There was a discussion about information databases. It involved whether the information in there would hold up in court and how the databases were updated. These databases could be used to evaluate areas for protections for certain areas. Some of this information was used to create San Juan County's salmon recovery plan.

Seining was also discussed, particularly with reference to young salmon and green crabs.

MRC Visioning - Lucas

Discussion:

Kendra: We also have a solid waste committee that deals with reducing plastic, derelict vessel work, beach cleanup, etc. We need more people in leadership roles. Maybe implement adopt a beach. Encourage volunteers.

Elise: There is a group called Hands Across the Sand that partners with locals to facilitate beach cleanup.

Kendra: Excellent. It would be really great to have the MRC more involved with that. Derelict vessels is another spot where we could use MRC help and input.

Ken: It's often a Coast Guard Auxiliary job to report on derelict vessels.

Lucas: It seems like you are looking for a liaison to work with the Solid Waste department on this issue. Leadership is key to keep a project moving forward.

Terry: Has the Youth Conservation Core been engaged?

Kendra: No.

Caroline: Taking the lead on a project doesn't mean that you need to do all the work.

Byron: (What needs to be done in the Salmon Advisory Subcommittee). We don't really have a policy framework to hang our projects from. We need a planning effort. Where do we want to direct people? For example, bank armor has hundreds of possible projects, but we need to be more strategic.

Kendra: Net pens, forage fish, salmon harvest issues, letter off about north of falcon process. There are quite a few things on the list that need attention.

There was discussion about surveying beaches for forage fish eggs, working with the Department of Fish and Wildlife. This would inform other departmental and construction projects.

Reminder: Salish Sea Conference April 4-6, 2018 in Seattle (talk to Christina if you would like to go to a free film showing on April 5)

Next NWSC meeting in Friday Harbor will be on April 27th, 2018, from 10am-12pm.

Key:

(R) = Regional project

Subcommittee	Volunteers
Southern Resident Killer Whales: Vessels/Noise	Christina, Laura Jo, Kendra, Ken, Jeff, Ivan
Southern Resident Killer Whales: Salmon/Prey	Byron, Karin
Southern Resident Killer Whales: Pollution/Water Quality	Laura Jo, Elise
Salmon Recovery Policy Plan	Byron, Karin, Terry
Orcas Landing/Education Outreach	Carl, Christina, Ken, Terry
Shellfish Restoration (Pinto)	Ken
Nearshore Restoration	Kendra, Terry
Environmental & Economic Impacts of Oil Spill	Lovell, Christina, Marta
Emergency Tug	Laura Jo, Marta, Carl
Invasives	Laura Jo
Catch More Crab (R)	Ken
Forage Fish (R)	Byron, Carl, Friends of San Juan
Be Whale Wise (R)	Karin, Jeff
Plastics, Beach Cleanup	Elise
Review Marine Stewardship Plan	Jaclyn, Ken
Alternative Technologies	Ken, Jaclyn
MRC Promotion	Carl, Ken
Derelict Vessel Outreach & Education	Elise