



September 2022 Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, September 19, 2022

Time: 5:30-7:00 PM

Location: Zoom hybrid meeting

Minutes Prepared by Rebekah Brooks

Members present: Alan Clark (Community at Large Representative; Vice Chair; Northwest Straits Commission [NWSC]), Tim Cochnauer (Community At Large; Chair), Mike Doherty (District 3), Cathy Lear (Clallam County), Nancy Stephanz (Conservation and Environment Representative Alternate), LaTrisha Suggs (City of Port Angeles), Bob Vreeland (Conservation and Environment Representative), Jeffrey Ward (District 1)

Others present: Max Calloway (Citizen and Prospective CC MRC Member), Kara Cardinal (Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network Coordinator), Taylor Frierson (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife [WDFW]), Ken Gilbertson (Citizen), Sasha Horst (NWSC), Rebecca Mahan (CC Habitat Biologist; CC Marine Resources Committee [MRC] Coordinator), Alisa Taylor (CC MRC Intern)

Call to Order / Introductions / Changes to Agenda

Chair Tim Cochnauer called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM. Rebecca Mahan added a couple of items to the updates at the end of the meeting. Tim added that there were a few things to revisit from the August meeting.

Public Comment / Approval of August Minutes

Approval of the August CC MRC Minutes was postponed until a quorum could be present.

Presentation: Preliminary Assessment of Purple Sea Urchin Grazing on Kelp Communities in the Strait of Juan de Fuca

WDFW Subtidal Shellfish Biologist and Fishery Manager for Sea Cucumbers and Sea Urchins Taylor Frierson presented on the purple sea urchin (PSU) sampling project. The project is not yet complete, so there were only preliminary conclusions to report so far. The entire range of the PSU is from Vancouver Island in Canada to Baha California in Mexico. In Washington they are common in the rocky coastline habitat along the coast, but they are not seen south of Port Townsend. They aggregate and graze on kelp species. Only a small scale personal-use fishery occurs annually for PSU. Minimal PSU data exists, and very little historical data in Washington, but there are recent National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) diver observations of high-density aggregations in the western Straits. An increase in the PSU population is important to note because in California it was found to coincide with sea star decline from sea star wasting disease; when there was no competition for kelp from the sea stars, the PSU grazed on kelp and significantly decreased the kelp populations; healthy PSU then contributed to an increase in sea otter populations. In northern California, the PSU population increased by 60-fold and reduced the bull kelp canopy by 90 percent in a single year. This resulted in mass abalone mortality and fishery closure and the collapse of the red urchin fishery, wiping out a combined \$47

million in those industries. Although Washington kelp populations have been more stable because of healthy sea otter populations that help control the PSU increase, there have been some impacted sub-canopy kelp communities and there are red and green sea urchin fisheries, endangered pinto abalone, and indigenous peoples' ways of life at risk. To detect signals of expanding PSU barrens and kelp decline in Washington, WDFW partnered with other organizations in 2020 to design a survey complimentary to existing data collections. The dive survey selected paired index stations based on high and low PSU density, and collected PSU and kelp samples from two different depths at five meters and 10 meters, within 30 meter by two meter transects. They collected PSU and kelp counts, PSU test measurements, PSU for the gonad index, and photo quadrats. The project was very time consuming and dependent on help from volunteers; Taylor expressed special thanks to the CC MRC volunteers. The photo quadrats looked at macroalgae percent cover, kelp density by species, urchin density by species, and sea star density by species; this data is still being processed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Preliminary results for 2020 and 2021 indicate that PSU densities are higher in the shallower sample range, but red and green urchins seem to be more evenly distributed. PSU densities are overall stable between years, and kelp may be slightly increasing. There is a relationship between PSU density and kelp density: the higher the PSU density, the lower the kelp density, and vice versa. Higher PSU densities are seen in western sites near Neah Bay than in eastern sites near Port Angeles. Taylor noted that sunflower sea stars have been seen near sites, with more in the eastern sites and fewer in the western sites. PSU density and gonad percentage are negatively associated: where more PSU have grazed down the kelp, they are not able to develop healthy gonads. Deeper samples show similar trends, but are not significantly associated; this could be due to there being less kelp and PSU at greater depths. Average gonad percentages are much higher in the eastern sites, with clear differences between shallower and lower depths; averages are higher in the shallower sites where there is more kelp to graze on. The western sites showed much lower gonad percentages overall, with no real difference between the shallower and lower depths. Curious to look at populations halfway between Neah Bay and Port Angeles, the survey also collected samples from Sekiu. Those PSU barrens were found to be as healthy as the eastern sites, in spite of there being little kelp canopy. It is possible that there is adequate drift kelp to sustain these populations, but it raises more questions and areas to look into. While preliminary results indicate a PSU barren signal in the western sites, it is important to note that the overall floating kelp canopy is not showing signs of degradation from the WDNR aerial imagery, which is capable of tracking small scale changes. Next steps include continued collaboration, and more data throughout the time series from 2020 to 2022. Questions discussed the lack of signal so far from last year's heat dome, different regions and quotas for red and green sea urchin fisheries, the improvement in monitored abalone populations, and the observed decrease in giant kelp in this year's kayak surveys. Taylor invited inquiries by email: taylor.frierson@dfw.wa.gov.

NWSC Update

Alan Clark gave an update from the August NWSC meeting. Highlights from the meeting include the approval of the remaining 2022 dates, setting the 2023 schedule, and prioritizing derelict vessel removal. Congressionally directed spending funds have been awarded by NOAA and will be available starting 1/1/23. A presentation on the Yellow Island Preserve looked at opportunities for underserved groups to get involved in restoration. There is progress on the reauthorization of the Northwest Straits Initiative. The next meeting is scheduled for 9/30/22 over Zoom.

CC MRC Updates

Collaborative Workshop in Padilla Bay on September 16th from 11am to 4pm

Alan Clark gave an overview of the in-person workshop, which focused on networking and reacquainting, and featured presentations on MRC projects. Rebecca Mahan and Tim Cochnauer agreed

that it was great to meet with people face to face. Sasha Horst added that there will be more in-person events to come. *She will distribute some of the presentation materials.

Project Updates

Olympia Oysters

The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe oyster surveys took place from 5/31/2022 to 6/2/2022. Chris Burns was not present for an update. Rebecca Mahan said that the data was still being processed, and added that the Tribe was working on a proposal to use some of the congressionally directed spending funds for developing habitat areas.

Education/Outreach

Rebecca Mahan still has some coasters for distribution to local establishments. Nancy Stephanz has gone through 150 of her coasters at the Port Angeles Library. Bob Vreeland has been refilling coasters at The Rail, Bar Hop, Olympic Cellars, and Camaraderie Winery.

Forage Fish

Tim Cochnauer reported that surveys are ongoing. No samples have been collected this week due to tides. He is putting together a slide show to present to the CC MRC.

Biotoxin Sampling

Bob Vreeland sampled last Monday, and planned to sample next week. He noted that next week would probably be the last sample for the year since the tides would be changing. Rebecca Mahan added that she contacted the Department of Health about the inadequate signage at Freshwater Bay. They are working on reposting better signs.

Pigeon Guillemot Surveys

Ed Bowlby was not present for an update.

Additional Updates

Rebecca Mahan welcomed back Alissa Taylor, who has been reengaged as the CC MRC intern. The Clallam Conservation District reached out about Orca Week to see if the CC MRC would be interested in contributing again this year; it is scheduled from 10/8/22 to 10/14/22. The group discussed the annual Dungeness River Festival at the River Center, but it was not known if or when it would be held due to the construction at the Center. Rebecca has not heard back about the possible table at Crab Fest, so it was assumed that the CC MRC would not be participating.

Good of the Order

Mike Doherty announced that the Sea Grant advisory group meeting is undetermined; it may be moved to a virtual meeting. For more information, see: [Washington Sea Grant – It's the water, and a lot more.](#) The Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council meets this Friday; more information can be found at [Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary \(noaa.gov\)](#). Kara Cardinal added that the Strait Ecosystem Recovery Network meeting meets this coming Friday for a hybrid meeting.

Public Comments

Max Calloway asked about formal steps for joining the CC MRC; Rebecca Mahan gave him her contact information so that he could contact her about it.

Adjournment

Chair Tim Cochnauer noted that since there was no quorum, the approval of the August CC MRC meeting would be postponed until the October meeting, which will be a hybrid meeting. Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:50 PM.

Action Items:

****Sasha Horst will distribute some of the presentation materials from the NWSC Collaborative Workshop.***