

Snohomish County Marine Resources Advisory Committee Strategic Plan 2011-2016



The Nature Conservancy Port Susan Bay Preserve, Port Susan, WA

Prepared by:
Snohomish County Marine Resources Advisory Committee & Staff
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FOREWORD

The Puget Sound affects our lives every day, in ways which are both visible and invisible. From the food on our table, to the commerce supporting our region, and our families recreation - the Puget Sound is fundamental to our way of life in Snohomish County.

Our environment, our health, and our economy are all threatened by the current trends in Puget Sound's environmental decline. If we are to continue the beneficial uses of Puget Sound and pass that legacy on to our children and grandchildren, stewardship must begin with us.

The Snohomish County Marine Resources Advisory Committee (MRC) was founded in 1999 with its primary purpose to advise Snohomish County on approaches to conserve our local marine environment. It is a citizen-based volunteer committee appointed by the Snohomish County Council, and is one of seven county-based MRCs which conduct restoration, conservation, and education projects with diverse partners and community members.

The success of the committee relies heavily on our members, partners, and volunteers. Our committee is made up of up to 13 dedicated members representing the areas of recreation and diving, environmental conservation, economic, tribal and local governments. This unique model of volunteer based citizen-science and on-the-ground projects is precisely the type of stewardship necessary to preserve the health of Puget Sound.

Protecting the health of the Puget Sound is a daunting task. This Strategic Plan is our attempt at providing goals, vision, and direction to guide us in our efforts over the next five years.

The Puget Sound is our identity, and stewardship is needed today more than ever. The dedicated volunteers of the Snohomish MRC understand this, and many thanks should be given to their hard work and commitment to this cause.

Sincerely,

Jared S. Bond
Chair, Snohomish Marine Resources Committee

INTRODUCTION

The Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Strategic Plan is an instrument for guiding policy decisions. Specifically, it provides broad direction through an overarching vision and mission, and a set of goals for the next five years. The strategic plan will clarify desired outcomes, and in turn aiding the MRC in identifying projects which lead to their achievement. Restoring Puget Sound is a long-term goal, which will not be fully achieved in the next five years. Some strategies, therefore, will continue to be priorities beyond the time frame of this document.

BACKGROUND

Snohomish County is growing rapidly. Currently, the thirteenth-largest county in Washington by area, it has the third-largest population, with over 704,000 residents – 100,000 more than in the year 2000. Over 10 percent of the state's population lives in less than 3 percent of the land area. This number is forecast to increase to 900,000 by 2025, an increase of 50 percent in just 25 years. Past and continuing human actions have radically altered shoreline habitat, disturbing ecological processes and impairing water quality: nearly 75 percent of marine shoreline in the county has been lost through diking, armoring, or other changes. The county has witnessed decreases in resident and migratory fish, clam, and shorebird populations, increased concentrations of toxics in marine mammals, increased stormwater contamination, and habitat loss and modification, among other concerns.

The MRC was established in 1999 by the Snohomish County Council to address growing concerns over degradation to the county's marine areas. Composed of 13 citizen volunteers representing economic, recreational, and environmental interests along with local and tribal governments, the MRC's role is to develop local solutions to regional problems and, guided by science and the needs of the marine ecosystem, to advise county officials on courses of remedial or preventive action. Since its inception, the MRC has striven successfully to increase the type and scope of the projects it adopts.

In addition to its responsibilities to the Snohomish County Council, the MRC is closely aligned with the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC), which was created in 1998 by the U.S. Congress to provide a bottom-up, citizen-driven forum for addressing local marine resource issues, on the recommendation of the Murray-Metcalf Commission. The NWSC, in turn, assisted the seven counties bordering Puget Sound's northern regions in forming their MRCs and continues to provide them with funding and administrative support. The NWSC/MRC model of scientific analysis and grass roots consensus-building produces cost-effective strategies for protecting and restoring the marine resources of the Northwest Straits.

The MRC's strength lies in its public-private partnership, which was designed to place decision-making responsibility in the hands of local citizens. Committee members are selected not only for their experience and knowledge, but also for their ability to act as representatives of their communities. By building consensus through education and collaboration, the MRC increases the sustainability of its actions and multiplies the effects of its contributions to the long-term health of Puget Sound.

In addition to the NWSC, other partner organizations include the Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife, and Ecology; the Washington State University Beach Watchers; neighboring-county MRCs; both the Washington and the Veterans Conservation Corps; and non-profit organizations such as the People For Puget Sound and the Puget Sound Partnership.

VISION

A healthy, enduring marine ecosystem in Snohomish County which contributes to the overall health of Puget Sound and which is shared and protected by all.

MISSION

The Marine Resources Advisory Committee is a team of citizen volunteers and stakeholders dedicated to promoting effective stewardship of Snohomish County's marine waters, habitats, species, and shorelines. Appointed by the County Council to represent diverse local interests, committee members are united by our dedication to managing our natural resources for the benefit of all. Together, we seek out the best available scientific information and use it to evaluate, prioritize, and implement strategies for achieving and sustaining a healthy Puget Sound. Speaking for our communities, we provide sound guidance to public officials. Through our partnerships with native tribes, government, businesses, and non-profit organizations, we protect and restore Snohomish County's marine environment.

GUIDING CONCEPTS

The MRC employs an open, collaborative, community-driven approach to find lasting solutions to marine-related issues, ensuring that our waters and shorelines are clean and that their living inhabitants are sustained for their inherent value, and for the use and pleasure of our fellow citizens. In our work, we are committed to:

- Fostering a healthy marine environment for people and wildlife
- Actively involving our communities and partners
- Remaining abreast of changing circumstances, and gathering and applying the most up-to-date scientific information
- Implementing innovative problem-solving techniques
- Maintaining the highest ethical standards

PROGRAM AREAS AND GOALS

For the period 2011-2016, the MRC will focus on three strategic program areas, and their related goals:

- I. Marine Ecosystem Health
 - a. Goals:
 - i. Protect and restore marine habitat and species in Snohomish County
 - ii. Protect and restore marine water quality in Snohomish County
 - iii. Inform policymakers' decisions using sound science through research and monitoring
- II. Community Action
 - a. Goals:
 - i. Enhance personal and community engagement to achieve marine resource health and sustainability
 - ii. Ensure that outreach to the community is effective
- III. Organizational Sustainability and Impact
 - a. Goals:
 - i. Establish mutually beneficial partnerships with key agencies and organizations
 - ii. Sustain and enhance MRC impact and capacity

Marine Ecosystem Health

Objectives

Strategies

Goal 1: Protect and restore marine habitat and species in Snohomish County

1. Establish protection and restoration priorities to guide projects and improve biodiversity in Snohomish County nearshore areas

- a) Analyze existing research (PSNERP, Candidate Site Analysis, etc.) for relevance to Snohomish MRC
- b) Develop Conservation Action Plan for Port Susan MSA
- c) Conduct protection and restoration prioritization analysis and identify projects with the highest significance

2. Protect and monitor key marine indicator species and habitat, and promote sustainable harvest practices

- a) Continue supporting NWSC Derelict Gear Program
- b) Support collaborative Dungeness crab population and critical habitat research with WDFW and Tulalip Tribes
- c) Encourage regional resource managers to establish sustainable harvest limits
- d) Support research to understand effects of habitat loss on forage fish populations and relevance to endangered salmonids
- e) Update and monitor the extent of Snohomish County eelgrass beds as a proxy for forage fish, salmonid, and crustacean populations
- f) Support partner organizations' projects to restore the Snohomish River estuary

3. Monitor invasive species and support research and removal efforts

- a) Develop relationship with WDFW and other partners to establish Marine Invasive Species Monitoring Program
- b) Coordinate with partner organizations to treat/remove shoreline and backshore invasive species

Goal 2: Protect and restore marine water quality in Snohomish County

1. Identify water quality indicators, critical areas of impaired water quality, and improvement priorities

- a) Investigate effects and sources of marine pollutants and prioritize source mitigation efforts
- b) Review and summarize existing monitoring effort on inputs to marine environment from streams, discharges, ocean acidification, etc...

2. Continue Mussel Watch Program

- a) Continue semi-annual Mussel Watch

- sampling
- b) Analyze Mussel Watch data and work with community partners to investigate and mitigate pollutant sources
- c) Complete water quality data assessment and determine action priorities
- d) Use Mussel Watch data to determine water quality program effectiveness
- e) Disseminate Mussel Watch data to interested partners and agencies to facilitate implementation of action priorities

Goal 3: Inform policymakers' decisions using sound science through research and monitoring

1. Establish MRC as critical marine science and policy advisory committee

- a) Expand and enrich citizen science data collection programs
- b) Incorporate government/academic research and literature into MRC Annual Work Plan priorities
- c) Coordinate information sharing and research opportunities with community stakeholders
- d) Use scientific research and monitoring to support and guide MRC recommendations and priorities

2. Increase local and regional officials understanding of marine conservation projects and priorities

- a) Schedule regular briefings/presentations/field trips with County Council and other officials
- b) Provide comments to Council on high priority issues as listed in the county code

3. Ensure decision-maker outreach is effective

- a) Attend public meetings for the purpose of providing advice, support and recommendation(s).
- b) Provide written comments and recommended strategies as requested
- c) Conduct annual review of decision-maker interactions to ensure adequate counsel has been provided

4. Provide sound scientific and policy advice to decision-makers on emerging regional marine policies and strategies

- a) Participate in development of regional policies and strategies through review and comment process

Community Action

Objectives

Strategies

Goal 4: Enhance personal and community engagement to achieve marine resource health and sustainability

1. Foster behavioral change in individuals and communities through stewardship activities

- a) Develop and distribute accessible, targeted, issue-based outreach materials
- b) Host community workshops and presentations to raise public awareness of MRC and its projects
- c) Support tiered participation programs to promote personal stewardship commitment
- d) Identify and recruit community leaders/early adopters who influence their community members

2. Enhance community engagement on project-specific goals

- a) Develop SMART community outreach plan for every project
- b) Ensure MRC products and deliverables are disseminated to appropriate audiences

3. Coordinate with stewardship groups (e.g. Sound Stewards and Beach Watchers) to promote and advance MRC priorities

- a) Identify and implement citizen science projects which reinforce community volunteer training and allow citizens to take action
- b) Track regional partners' regular meetings and take advantage of opportunities for presentations and outreach
- c) Advance MRC priorities through targeted funding support for partner programs that support MRC goals

Goal 5: Ensure that outreach to the community is effective

1. Establish effectiveness monitoring program for outreach programs

- a) Determine appropriate indicators of outreach effectiveness
- b) Utilize methods for following up with individuals contacted through outreach events
- c) Implement feedback loop with individual volunteers and project partners to determine strategies for improved outreach
- d) Evaluate community partnership program success in implementing desired behaviors

Organizational Sustainability and Impact

Objectives

Strategies

Goal 6: Establish mutually beneficial partnerships with key agencies and organizations

1. Identify and leverage program areas which overlap other organizations

- a) Coordinate with NWSC, other MRCs, and related organizations to understand current projects and interests
- b) Collaborate with NWSC on projects of regional significance and incorporate benchmarks into MRC priorities
- c) Coordinate with Puget Sound Partnership

2. Establish and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships

- a) Define guidelines for successful partnerships and continued relationships
- b) Evaluate working partnerships in conjunction with NWSC budgetary cycle
- c) Continuously identify and contact emerging organizations to form new partnerships

Goal 7: Sustain and enhance MRC impact and capacity

1. Ensure formal MRC Member positions are continuously filled with qualified, highly-motivated community members

- a) Define desired skill-set for MRC Members
- b) Define MRC Member roles and responsibilities and update committee by-laws/member handbook as required
- c) Monitor and evaluate MRC Volunteer pool regularly for project leadership potential or formal MRC membership

2. Recruit and train committed MRC Volunteer pool

- a) Regularly request candidate suggestions from Council and the County Exec to ensure broad based representation.
- b) Use outreach contacts to develop relationships (e.g. invite citizens to MRC meetings)
- c) Conduct volunteer orientation and identify community training opportunities for MRC members and volunteers
- d) Continuously evaluate projects' potential for MRC Member and Volunteer involvement
- e) Establish target outcomes for Volunteer involvement

3. Maintain strong financial resource base and relationships with elected officials and community leaders

- a) Prioritize coordination/cooperation with elected officials in the MRC Work Plan.
- b) Mobilize support for MRC priorities by

identifying and supporting community partners in their work plans

- c) Coordinate with County Council to ensure the MRC addresses issues relevant to the county
- d) Ensure consistent core funding by achieving desired benchmarks in the Work Plan set by our elected officials and community leaders
- e) Update county code to accurately reflect MRC role and interests

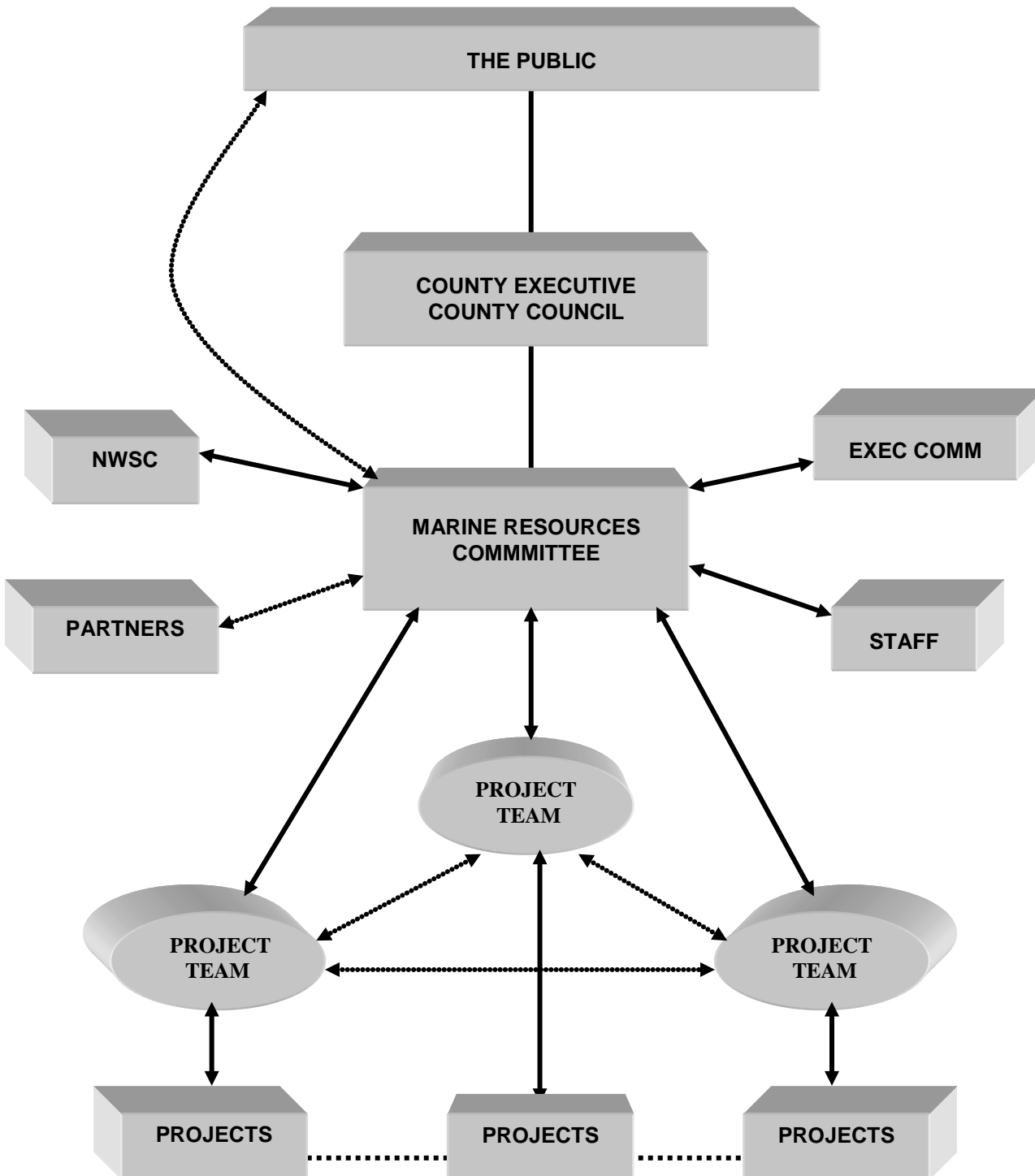
4. Support and maintain high caliber staff

- a) Facilitate MRC chair involvement in staff hiring process
- b) Coordinate with PW/SWM/Council to define staffing requirements to meet County & MRC needs
- c) Facilitate MRC Member involvement to significantly contribute to projects and maintain staff workload at SWM budgeted levels

5. Ensure that projects are successfully accomplished and achieve MRC goals

- a) Establish and maintain feedback mechanisms within all projects/programs to ensure successful results

MRC ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

County Council & Executive

Role: Utilize the MRC as an advisory committee to enable informed decision-making, support MRC work plan with annual funding from the Snohomish County General Fund

Members: Council and Executive

Reports to: Public

MRC

Appointment process: Membership consists of formally appointed and ex-officio members.

Role:

- Serves in an advisory role to the County Council and Executive on Marine Ecosystem Health, Community in Action and Organizational Sustainability & Impact.
- Identifies priorities and strategies, and implements outreach, research and on-the-ground projects targeted to maintain or improve marine resources in Snohomish County.
- Represents economic, recreational, scientific, conservation, local government and tribal interests to achieve the mission statement
- Approves advisory decisions to Council & Executive on marine issues
- Develops framework for work plans to ensure alignment with strategic plan
- Approves actions and review/monitor/evaluate activity/strategy/work plan success (high level)

Reports to: County Council and Executive

Executive Committee

Role: Develop quarterly and annual reports to County Council and Executive, and make key decisions when time does not allow for full MRC comment

Members: MRC Chair, MRC Vice Chairs, MRC Lead Staff

Reports to: MRC

Project Teams

Role: Support MRC through planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of Marine Ecosystem Health, Community Action, and Organizational Stability and Impact goals.

Members: Program Leads, interested MRC members, public volunteers

Program Lead:

- Ensures alignment of proposed projects with strategic plan
- Acts as manager for active projects under their program
- Leads project prioritization during work plan development

- Evaluates completed activities for effectiveness in meeting strategic plan goals
- MRC member or staff

Project Lead

- Develops project work plan and budget
- Makes progress reports to Program Lead and MRC
- Supervises and assigns responsibilities within project team
- Does not need to be MRC member

Project Participants:

- Participate in project implementation
- Review and evaluate activity/strategy success (low-mid level)
- Reports to Project Lead
- Does not need to be MRC member

MRC Staff

Roles:

- Manages the Marine Resources Program and serves as lead to resolve County issues or concerns
- Guides strategy development and work plans
- Coordinates implementation of MRC activities and projects
- Works closely with the Chair to:
 - Organize, prepare and distribute the monthly agendas and minutes
 - Provide periodic MRC updates to the Board of County Commissioners
 - Develop, finalize and submit MRC grant applications
- Works closely with Project Leads to:
 - Draft, finalize, and execute project-related contracts
 - Draft the annual work plan and update it on a monthly basis
- Serves as project lead for several MRC projects as agreed upon by MRC and the County
- Coordinates with regional partners to leverage efforts of the MRC; including the Northwest Straits Commission, Salmon Recovery Groups, the Puget Sound Partnership, Tribes, Local Universities, Federal, State and local agencies, and nonprofit organizations
- Administers and monitors grants and contracts that are awarded, as per County requirements and grantor requirements
- Assists the Chair and Project Leads as necessary by facilitating overall communication and by handling logistics for other meetings on their behalf
- Prepares the monthly administrative reports for distribution to MRC Members
- Supplies information to assist MRC in developing advisory recommendations
- Tracks budgets for all projects and prepares the periodic budget reports for distribution to MRC Members
- Provides other support to the organization as necessary for the success of the MRC, such as upkeep of the MRC web site

- Recruits new members to the MRC and recommends them to Council for appointment consideration

Members: MRC Lead Staff, interns, supporting staff, supervisory staff

Reports to: MRC, Surface Water Management, County Executive & Council

NWSC

Roles:

- Provide guidance and offer resources to the MRC, with the goal of mobilizing science to focus on key priorities and coordinating regional priorities for the ecosystem.
- Assist in implementation of MRC activities.
- Direct and coordinate scientific, technical and financial support to the marine resources committees.

Members: The NWSC represents each of the Marine Resources Committees, tribes, the Puget Sound Partnership and additional appointments by the Governor.

Reports to: Public

SNOHOMISH COUNTY CODE 2.800

(Added Ord. 04-091, Sept. 22, 2004, Eff. date Oct. 2, 2004; Reenacted by Amended Ord. 09-090, Sept. 2, 2009, Eff date Sept. 18, 2009)

2.800.010 Advisory committee established.

The Snohomish county marine resources advisory committee is hereby established as an advisory body to the county council and executive.

2.800.020 Purpose.

The purpose of the marine resources advisory committee is to address local marine issues and recommend remedial actions to the council, executive and, where requested by the council or executive, to other local governmental entities and tribes, guided by sound science and the needs of the marine ecosystem.

2.800.030 Duties and responsibilities.

(1) The marine resources advisory committee shall serve in an advisory role to the county council and executive on one or more of the following matters, as requested:

(a) Achieving a net gain in highly ecologically productive nearshore, inter-tidal and estuarine habitat within the county, as well as preventing significant loss of existing, high-value habitat;

(b) Achieving a net reduction in the number of shellfish harvest areas within the county closed due to contamination;

(c) Contributing to measurable increases in factors supporting bottom fish recovery (such as rockfish), including numbers of fish of broodstock size and age, average fish size, and abundance of prey species, as well as sufficient amounts and quality of protected habitat;

(d) Contributing to increases in other key marine indicator species;

(e) Identifying the local implications, needs and possible strategies associated with the recovery of Puget Sound salmonids listed under the Endangered Species Act in concert with federal, state and local governmental entities and tribes;

(f) Identifying and recommending local candidate sites for designation as marine protection areas (MPAs), consistent with a scientifically-based regional system of MPAs;

(g) Building public awareness on such issues as the link between healthy marine habitat and healthy resources and how MPAs can play an important role in habitat and resource protection;

(h) Working with the federal, state and local governmental entities and tribes to help map, assess, and protect nearshore habitat and prevent harm from upland and shoreline activities through local and state regulations and planning efforts;

(i) Creating and maintaining a scientific database on marine resources, including a scientific baseline, common protocols, a unified geographic information system (GIS) and shared ecosystem assessments and research;

(j) Providing assistance to federal, state and local governmental entities and tribes in assessing the status of marine resources and factors of their decline;

(k) Identifying, prioritizing and recommending current and future remedial measures;

(l) Working with local government leaders to implement local marine conservation and restoration initiatives; and

(m) Coordinating with the Northwest Straits Commission on marine ecosystem objectives.

(2) The marine resources advisory committee may collaborate with and assist county agencies in preparing, reviewing, prioritizing and recommending grant applications to the Northwest Straits Commission prior to submittal. The marine resources advisory committee may also collaborate with county agencies to develop grant applications to federal, state and local entities and tribes to address local marine issues.

(3) The marine resources advisory committee shall report annually to the county council and executive on its activities and progress in achieving its goals.

See County Code and MRC Bylaws for further information on: officers, membership, term, vacancies, and sunset provisions.

NORTHWEST STRAITS COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN

Benchmarks from the Northwest Straits Commission's strategic plan are presented below to assist the MRC in aligning its projects with NWSC's work.

Marine Habitat:

Outcomes

1. The Initiative provides data products and a forum to support policies that protect marine shoreline habitat. All Northwest Straits counties have enacted and are enforcing Critical Areas Ordinances and Shoreline Master Plans.
2. We are restoring degraded marine and shoreline habitat in all seven Northwest Straits counties.
3. Over 3,000 acres of marine habitat are restored.
4. We are working with federal, state, and local governments, industry and the tribes to prevent oil spills, small and large.

Goals

- Goal 1: Characterize, inventory, and assess the condition of marine and shoreline habitat throughout the Northwest Straits region.
- Goal 2: Protect marine and shoreline habitat by informing shoreline management policies.
- Goal 3: Expand the derelict gear program and restore marine habitats by removing derelict nets and pots sound wide. (This objective cross-references with our marine life benchmark.)
- Goal 4: Prioritize, select, and restore shoreline sites in Northwest Straits counties.
- Goal 5: Carry out survey and mapping activities to assess the extent of eelgrass beds and initiate eelgrass protection and restoration activities.

Marine Life:

Outcomes

1. MRCs have selected key valued species for protection and recovery (such as Olympia oysters, Dungeness crab, and rockfish) and populations of these species are increasing where protection and restoration programs are in place. Species recovery work is documented.
2. MRCs have selected key invasive species for control and eradication, and populations of these species are declining where control and eradication programs are in place.
3. MRCs and the Commission are providing information to federal, state, and local agencies and authorities to support management policies that protect marine life.
4. By removing 90% of the derelict nets in Puget Sound and derelict crab pots from high priority areas, we eliminate the impact of derelict gear and document species recovery.

Goals

- Goal 1: Restore priority native shellfish (including Olympia oysters, Dungeness crab,

- butter clams, and pinto abalone) in selected areas throughout the Northwest Straits region.
- Goal 2: Protect priority marine birds in selected areas throughout the Northwest Straits region.
- Goal 3: Protect priority rockfish species and populations.
- Goal 4: Protect forage fish and forage fish spawning sites throughout the Northwest Straits region.

Marine Water Quality

Outcomes

1. There is a demonstrated and measurable improvement in marine water quality at high priority sites in the Northwest Straits, as verified by testing.
2. Selected beaches which are now closed to shellfish harvest due to poor water quality are reopened.
3. Local governments are employing LID practices and supporting LID policies.
4. Sites where water quality is deteriorating are monitored and monitoring information is conveyed to appropriate government agencies.

Goals

- Goal 1: Support active monitoring programs focusing on identifying areas of reduced marine water quality and addressing source controls through non-regulatory means.
- Goal 2: Support pollution prevention programs aimed at private property owners and non-point source inputs.
- Goal 3: Support LID best design practices on new public construction projects
- Goal 4: Encourage and recognize small spill prevention, response, and containment practices at marinas, ports, and urban waterfronts.
- Goal 5: Reduce the introduction of pharmaceutical products to Puget Sound.

Science

Outcomes

1. Our data are used to inform local and state shoreline planning permits.
2. Our data are used to prioritize marine and shoreline restoration and protection activities.
3. Our science is referenced and used to inform the Puget Sound Partnership's 2020 action agenda.
4. Our projects are presented at professional scientific and marine management conferences.
5. Traditional knowledge is included in our scientific investigations.

Goals

- Goal 1: Create a Northwest Straits Initiative Science Team on par with the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team, the Puget Sound Partnership Science Panel and the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project Science Team.
- Goal 2: Collect data and traditional knowledge to support best science. Make this data available to all users.

- Goal 3: Support effective and efficient science that informs restoration and adaptation.
- Goal 4: Conduct research needed to understand the impact that derelict fishing gear has on marine life and marine habitats in Puget Sound.

Education & Outreach

Outcomes

1. Increased understanding and appreciation of local marine resources.
2. Increased involvement and cooperation in protecting and restoring marine habitat, expressed by:
 - Voluntary action to protect the Northwest Straits' marine environment;
 - Increased enrollment in local marine stewardship and outreach programs such as Shore Stewards and WSU Beach Watchers;
 - Increased funding for the Initiative; and
 - Federal, state and local legislation and policy that protects and restores the marine environment

Goals

- Goal 1: MRC and NWS Commission projects engage residents and managers in protecting local marine resources.
- Goal 2: MRCs and the Commission pursue partnerships with organizations with like goals and priorities to broaden the impact of our education messages.
- Goal 3: Continue to promote broad public understanding of marine stewardship by using local and regional media to reinforce key messages
- Goal 4: All projects that address marine life, marine habitat, and marine water quality benchmarks incorporate an education and outreach component.