



SNOHOMISH COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Strategic Plan 2025-2030



Prepared by Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee
and Peak Sustainability Group
August 26, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Five-Year Strategic Plan 2025-2030	3
Mission	3
Vision	3
Guiding Concepts	3
Themes, Goals, Objectives and Results.....	4
Strategic Plan Implementation and Strategies	6
Background	9
Organizational Roles and Responsibilities.....	10
County Council & Executive	11
MRC	11
Executive Committee.....	11
Subcommittees.....	11
MRC Staff	12
Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC)	13
Snohomish County Code 2.800	14
2.800.010 Advisory committee established.	14
2.800.020 Purpose.	14
2.800.30 Duties and responsibilities.	14
Northwest Straits Commission 2019-2024 Strategic Plan	16

Five-Year Strategic Plan 2025-2030

The Snohomish County Marine Resource Advisory Committee (MRC) created a strategic plan over ten months in 2024 with input from members, county staff, and partners. This plan aligns with the Northwest Straits Initiative 2019-2024 Strategic Plan when possible. The plan is organized using the acronym CCARES, which covers six themes of the MRC's work. Each theme has a goal and desired long-term result, with high-level objectives that can adapt to changing conditions. Annual workplans provide details on projects that forward the vision of the MRC. The vision put forward by the Snohomish County MRC goes beyond the five years, and the goals and strategies within this document are steppingstones towards a regenerated and healthy Puget Sound.

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, private citizens, and non-profit organizations, we protect and restore Snohomish County's marine environment.

Vision

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

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
- Supporting Tribal Treaty Rights

Themes, Goals, Objectives and Results

Theme: Collaborate		
Goal The MRC collaborates with partners to bring together existing efforts that support the local marine environment and take actions that would not be possible alone.	Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a strong relationship with other MRCs and the Northwest Straits Commission and Foundation to share ideas, strategies, and opportunities to collaborate. 	Result Sustained collaborative relationships with key partners that build capacity for both organizations to achieve results.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to strengthen partnerships with local tribes by identifying shared interests and priorities. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with Washington state agencies to carry out local actions advancing statewide efforts on monitoring and conservation. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage partners that are representative of Snohomish County communities, including educational institutions, to foster collective action. 	
Theme: Conserve		
Goal The best available science is gathered and shared with the public and decision-makers to support local conservation efforts.	Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor, preserve, and improve water quality. 	Result No net loss of quality shoreline and marine habitat.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support monitoring efforts to track critical local marine flora and fauna. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include traditional ecological knowledge with other science sources. 	
Theme: Advise		
Goal County Council and local decision-makers have the best available science and community knowledge to support the marine environment and the people who depend on marine	Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report annually to Snohomish County Council to share results and provide key recommendations. 	Result County Council makes decisions supportive of a healthy marine ecosystem.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, anticipate, and comment promptly on local policy development and revisions as they relate to nearshore and marine protection. 	

<p>ecosystems for their culture, livelihood, and recreation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Council and local decision-makers reach out to the MRC when they need insight on marine ecosystems and policy options. 	
<p>Theme: Restore</p>		
<p>Goal Native species, habitat, water quality, and beaches are healthy and functioning with safe, harvestable, and abundant levels of marine resources.</p>	<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, prioritize, and contribute to local nearshore and marine habitat restoration projects. Collaborate with key partners to mitigate the adverse effects of human activities on marine ecosystems. Support ongoing restoration site stewardship. 	<p>Result The Snohomish County marine environment improves as a functioning and resilient ecosystem.</p>
<p>Theme: Educate</p>		
<p>Goal The public understands the connection between their civic engagement, personal actions and behaviors, and their impact on the marine environment.</p>	<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share monitoring data collected by the MRC to inform the public of local marine ecosystem threats and successes. Engage local communities with their marine environment through local outreach efforts. 	<p>Result Responsible and aware communities that are stewards of their marine environment.</p>
<p>Theme: Sustain</p>		
<p>Goal Stable funding, staffing, and engaged volunteers create a strong organizational foundation to foster and measure positive progress in protecting local marine ecosystems.</p>	<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and retain passionate committee members that reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of Snohomish County. Obtain two full-time staff equivalents. Sponsor interns to support projects and mentor future stewards. Pursue adequate funding for a robust Snohomish County marine program. Support training and community member involvement as project volunteers to build a coalition of community scientists. 	<p>Result High levels of volunteer and staff retention provide strong continuity from year-to-year to forward a shared vision.</p>

Strategic Plan Implementation and Strategies

The MRC carries out project work to meet its goals and objectives based on the energy of the committee members with support from Snohomish County staff. Members rated objectives and strategies during the strategic planning process based on five criteria to help prioritize work based on capacity. Discussion and further review produced the following list of current and potential future strategies. This list of priority strategies is intended as an example of the prioritization process and will be reassessed and further refined during future annual work plan development.

The five criteria used to rate objectives and potential strategies were:

- **Benefit to Community and the Environment:** How does this activity impact the local community and environment?
- **Feasibility:** Can the MRC reasonably accomplish this activity?
- **MRC Member Interest:** Do most MRC members support this project?
- **Partner Engagement:** Does this activity create an opportunity to engage with partner organizations?
- **Supports Multiple Goals:** Does this work contribute to or leverage other work the MRC is engaged in?

The strategies were organized into three tiers to identify projects that are a priority within member, volunteer, and staff capacity.

Tier A projects are projects of high priority as determined by the MRC committee members. These projects received high ratings from members and staff. Tier A projects are co-led by MRC members and Snohomish County staff. Projects associated with external grant funders are also considered Tier A since Snohomish County staff support is needed to administer grants with external partners.

Tier B projects are projects with significant support from MRC committee members. Tier B projects are led by MRC members with minimal support from MRC staff. Prior to committing to Tier B projects, Tier A projects should have adequate support and commitment.

Tier C work is committee member ideas that align with the mission and goals of MRC, but at the time they are brought forward there is not current structure or staff capacity to support the work. Tier C can serve as a holding space for future projects that could be prioritized in the future as capacity, resources, and member energy allows.

Strategies by Tier

Tier A	
Strategy	Themes the strategy supports
Coordinate with the Northwest Straits Commission, the Northwest Straits Foundation, and other MRCs to understand current projects and interests.	Collaborate
Collaborate with the Northwest Straits Commission on projects of regional significance and incorporate benchmarks into MRC priorities.	Collaborate
Continue to strengthen partnerships with local tribes by identifying shared interests and priorities.	Collaborate, Conserve, Restore
Partner with the Ocean Research College Academy (ORCA) to conduct marine water quality monitoring.	Conserve, Collaborate
Continue the Mussel Watch Program to understand local marine water quality in partnership with the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife.	Conserve, Collaborate
Perform data collection to support research on the effects of habitat loss on forage fish populations through forage fish surveys.	Conserve, Collaborate
Monitor and update the health of Snohomish County marine vegetation to understand the state of critical marine habitat.	Conserve, Collaborate, Educate
Report annually to Snohomish County Council to share results and provide key recommendations.	Advise
Identify, prioritize, and contribute to local nearshore and marine habitat restoration projects.	Restore
Continue support of the Northwest Straits Foundation Derelict Gear Program.	Restore, Collaborate
Sponsor interns to support projects and mentor future stewards through collaboration with the Northwest Straits Commission internship program.	Sustain, Collaborate
Tier B	
Strategy	Themes the strategy supports
Provide advice on Shoreline Master Program updates as requested by local governments to inform shoreline management and development permit systems that protect local marine ecosystems.	Advise

Identity and pursue collaborations to continue implementation of the Port Susan Conservation Action Plan.	Restore, Collaborate, Educate
Coordinate with stewardship groups such as Beach Watchers and Sound Stewards to activate the public through beach clean-ups and on-the ground action.	Educate
Engage local communities with their marine ecosystem, through local events and other strategies as needed, to raise awareness of local partners and actions.	Educate
Share monitoring data collected by the MRC to inform the public of local marine ecosystem threats and successes.	Educate, Conserve
Promote sustainable harvest practices through crabber outreach to protect key species and habitat.	Educate, Conserve
Actively recruit new members that reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of Snohomish County to represent the breadth of the community.	Sustain, Advise
Improve MRC member engagement and retainage to ensure formal MRC Member positions are continuously filled with qualified, highly-motivated community members.	Sustain
Promote oil spill prevention, preparedness, and response with the public during existing outreach activities; collaborate with WA Sea Grant small spills outreach and the Local Emergency Planning Committee.	Conserve, Educate, Collaborate
Tier C	
Strategy	Themes the strategy supports
Provide information and support on climate change impacts and planning to the Marine environment if requested by County Council or local governments.	Advise

Background

Snohomish County is growing rapidly. Currently, the thirteenth-largest county in Washington by area, it has the third-largest population, with over 867,000 residents – over 200,000 more than in the year 2000. Snohomish County houses over 10 percent of the state’s population in less than 3 percent of the state’s land area. The total population is forecast to increase to 1,136,000 by 2044, an increase of 31 percent in just 20 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, shellfish, and shorebird populations, increased concentrations of toxins 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 up to 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.

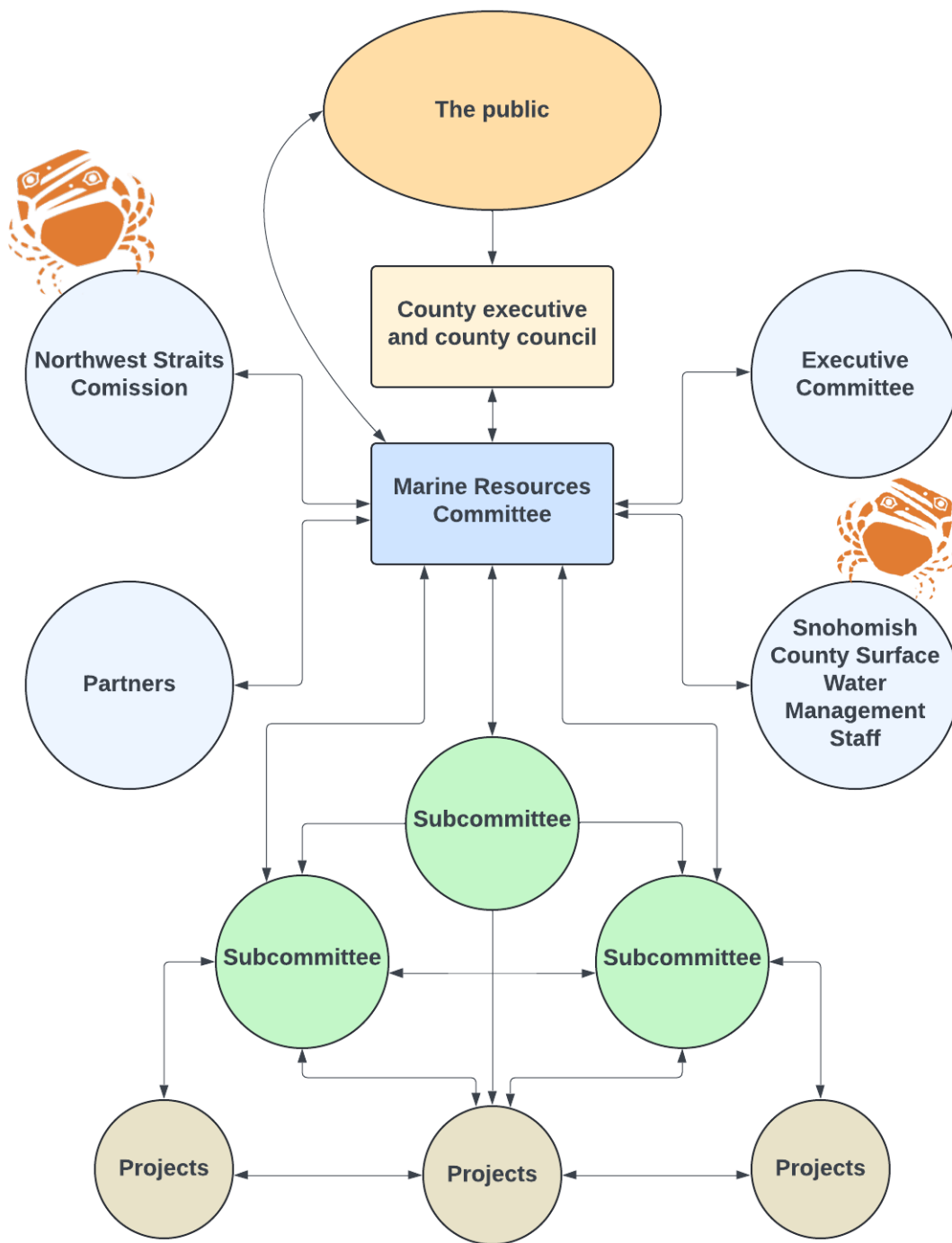
Partnerships have allowed the MRC to extend its impact by leveraging additional resources and coordinating related efforts to achieve successes in marine restoration. The MRC complements its role as advisor with on-the-ground work supporting both local and state-wide efforts. In addition to advising County Council, the MRC supports local monitoring efforts through citizen science. The MRC has contributed to major local projects such as the restoration of Howarth Park and Meadowdale Beach Park. Community outreach has increased knowledge of local marine resources and fostered stewardship.

The MRC’s strength lies in its partnerships, which were 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 local Tribes; the Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife; Washington Department of Natural Resources; Washington Department of Ecology; the Washington State University Beach Watchers; neighboring-county MRCs; both the Washington and the Veterans Conservation Corps; and non-profit organizations like the Puget Sound Partnership.

Organizational Roles and Responsibilities

Below is an organizational chart illustrating the relationships between the Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee and its various stakeholders. The diagram is a simplified framework of reporting and collaboration for the MRC. Further explanation of roles and responsibilities follows this diagram.



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

Roles:

- 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
- Co-lead implementation of work plans
- 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, lead monthly MRC meetings, and make key decisions when time does not allow for full MRC comment

Members: MRC Chair, MRC Vice Chairs, MRC Staff

Reports to: MRC

Subcommittees

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

Members: Program lead, MRC staff, interested MRC members, public volunteers

Subcommittee Lead:

- Ensures alignment of proposed projects with strategic plan
- Acts as manager for active projects under the responsibility of their subcommittee
- 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 Subcommittee 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 county council
 - 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 as needed
- 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

Members: MRC Staff, interns, other assigned Stormwater Management (SWM) staff, and SWM

supervisory staff

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

Northwest Straits Commission (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

Partners

Role: Build capacity to support monitoring efforts, public outreach, restoration projects, and additional work that improves local marine ecosystems

Members: Partners include other MRCs, non-profits, NGOs, Tribes, local governments, federal agencies, state agencies, and private citizens.

Reports to: Reporting structure is partner dependent

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.

2.800.30 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 2019-2024 Strategic Plan



Northwest Straits Initiative Five-Year Strategic Plan 2019-2024

Local people. Local solutions.

Mission: To protect and restore the marine waters, habitats and species of the Northwest Straits region to achieve ecosystem health and sustainable resource use.

Vision: We envision a thriving, resilient, and healthy Salish sea, where individuals are engaged in the health of their local ecosystems.

The Northwest Straits (NWS) Initiative carried out a strategic planning process over a one-year period. The plan is made up of insights from Marine Resources Committees (MRCs), NWS Initiative boards, staff, and partners. Six themes were identified. Each theme is supported by goals and objectives that guide us toward desired results. The objectives are broad to accommodate the grass-roots nature of the NWS Initiative. An accompanying operations plan provides details on the outcomes we aim to achieve.

This plan serves as a framework for the creation of MRC, NWS Commission, and NWS Foundation programs, projects and work plans.

Theme: Stewardship

Goal

Forge new paths to advance Northwest Straits recovery and complement the work of regional planning efforts.

Objectives

- Contribute to nearshore and marine habitat and species protection and restoration projects.
- Encourage communities within the Northwest Straits and Salish Sea to be stewards in their public and private activities.
- Protect and improve water quality.
- Exhort local decision makers to act on emerging and urgent issues related to the health of the region's marine waters and habitat.
- Review, anticipate, and comment promptly on local, and when appropriate, state policy development and revisions as they relate to nearshore and marine protection.
- Provide learning opportunities to the public in partnership with subject matter experts.

Result

The Initiative inspires action.



Theme: Long-Term Stable Funding

Goal

Provide organizational stability that allows the Initiative to focus more on advancing its mission.



Objectives

- Pursue and secure stable funding that supports Initiative goals without compromising the organizational mission.
- Obtain sustained funding for the Commission in a federal/state/local agency budget.
- Leverage Commission funding through the Foundation to supplement Initiative funding sources.
- Increase funding support for MRCs through counties.



Result

The Initiative completes and documents more projects to improve the health and resiliency of the Northwest Straits. More locals are actively engaged in stewardship activities. People are connected and invested to the ecosystem in which they live.

(continued on next page)

Theme: Structural support to MRCs



Goal

The NWS Initiative strengthens MRC capacity and presence within counties and across the Northwest Straits region and ensures the NWS are protected and restored.

Objectives

- Obtain one full-time equivalent staff for each MRC.
- Add one full-time MRC Liaison to NWS Commission staff.
- Assist MRCs during project development and with long-term, large-project planning.
- Sponsor interns at the MRC level to support projects.
- Emphasize work with county councils and commissions to assure MRCs are recognized as a valuable resource.
- Support training and community member involvement as project volunteers, build an army of community scientists.
- Foster strong communications among MRCs for cross-pollination of ideas and resources.

Result

The Initiative achieves conservation gains and impacts at the local level.

Theme: Engagement and Partnerships

Goal

Represent a broad range of interests in the Northwest Straits.



Objectives

- Continue to strengthen partnerships with tribes by identifying shared interests and priorities.
- Develop general tools for outreach that resonate with communities throughout the Northwest Straits and Salish Sea.
- Engage local, state, and federal elected officials and decision makers.
- Engage partners that are representative of regional communities to foster collective action, including educational institutions and transboundary partners.

Result

The Initiative serves everyone who inhabits the Northwest Straits.

Theme: Measuring progress

Goal

Quantify Initiative progress to support communications.

Objectives

- Create and carry out a project assessment program that applies to every project, every time.
- Document the Initiative's influence on and related changes to local and regional policy.
- Document funding that is leveraged by volunteer activities.

Result

The Initiative measures what matters to provide clarity to communities.

Theme: Messaging

Goal

Clearly distinguish the Initiative from the work of other organizations.

Objectives

- Develop clear Initiative-wide messages that promote the vision of the Initiative and articulate the Initiative's role and progress within the larger recovery system.
- Carry out Initiative communications.
- Maintain internal communication to assure streamlined and cohesive messaging.



Result

The Initiative is recognized for its unique contributions to Northwest Straits recovery and sought by other organizations for support and advice within its areas of expertise.