Clallam County
MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

October 2026 Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, October 19th, 2026
Time: 5:30-7:04pm
Location: Hybrid meeting, Zoom and Clallam County Board of Commissioners' Meeting Room
Minutes: prepared by Chase O'Neil

Member Roll

	Member	Present?	Alternate	Present?
Academic Community	Ed Bowlby	excused	Ioana Bociu	
At Large	Alan Clark (*NWSC Rep, Vice Chair*)		Mary Sue Brancato	
At Large	Tim Cochnauer	X	Bev Burton	X
Conservation & Environmental Interests	Nancy Stephanz	X	Laura Garrard	X
Development Community	Brian Hilderman	X	*[vacant seat]*	---
District I	Jeff Ward	X	*[vacant seat]*	---
District II	Ann Soule	excused	Lyn Muench	X
District III	[vacant seat]		Dann May	
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	Jenna Ziogas	X	Robert Knapp	
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe	Allyce Miller	X	Chelsea Korbulic	
Makah Tribe	*[vacant seat]*	---	*[vacant seat]*	---
Marine Related Recreation & Tourism	Rob Casey		*[vacant seat]*	---
Port Angeles City Council	LaTrisha Suggs (*Chair*)	X	Jon Hamilton	X
Port of Port Angeles Commission	Jesse Waknitz		Katharine Frazier	X
Sequim City Council	Meggan Uecker		Kelly Burger	

Staff and Others Present
Chase O'Neil (Clallam County Habitat Biologist and MRC Project Coordinator), Rebecca Mahan (Clallam County Habitat Manager and MRC Coordinator), Mark Ozias (Clallam County Commissioner, District I), Eileen Bates (Abalone Program Co-Lead at Puget Sound Restoration Fund), Tamara Galvan (Facilities Director at Feiro Marine Life Center), Kathryn H (member of the public), John Worthington (member of the public).

Welcome / Call to Order / Introductions
Chair LaTrisha Suggs called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. LaTrisha welcomed Laura Garrard, a new MRC alternate representing Conservation and Environmental Interests. Committee members and others attending the meeting introduced themselves. A quorum was present.

Public Comment
- No public comments.

Approval of Minutes
- ***Lyn Muench moved to approve the September 2026 minutes, Tim Cochnauer seconded. The motion passed with unanimous consent and the minutes were approved.***

Presentation
- *Dr. Eileen Bates, Abalone Program Co-Lead at Puget Sound Restoration Fund, Pinto Abalone Project Update:*

  Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) is a non-profit that works on a variety of marine restoration projects. They collaborate with Clallam MRC on their work with pinto abalone. Pinto abalone are a gastropod mollusk. There are over 50 species in the world, with seven on the North coast of America and just one in Washington (WA) state, the only native species in WA state. They live mostly in subtidal rocky reefs, and act as Roombas of the sea floor, in that they clear off the rocky reefs so that other species can colonize there. This helps keep up the constant evolution of the rocky reef. Pinto abalone are also important to people. They were harvested by indigenous people for food as well as ceremonial and utilitarian purposes and they were also popular in a sport fishery. Washington abalone never supported a commercial harvest. It was the sport fishery and poaching which caused overharvest and massive decline. In the early 1980s, it was estimated that 40,000 abalone were being illegally harvested per year. This was mostly for meat, but the shells were also valuable.

  Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) did some initial surveying in the 1980s-90s, and they discovered that pinto abalone were declining. So, they established ten index sites in the San Juan Islands. These were 10x10m squares that they would

revisit to track populations. From 1992-2017, there was a 97% decline in abalone populations in these squares. The legal fishery was closed in 1994. Thus, populations were on a downward trajectory even despite harvest levels decreasing. This decline was likely due to poaching and abalone broadcast spawning methods, which make it challenging to reproduce, especially when populations are low or far apart. Officials decided that without human intervention, the population would not come back.

The restoration aquaculture program involves several steps: collecting broodstock, controlled spawning, rearing juveniles in a hatchery, releasing juveniles at outplant sites, and then monitoring and re-seeding as needed. Puget Sound Restoration Fund induces spawning with chemicals, and they make very specific crosses between males and females so they can track the genetics of the offspring. Juveniles are raised for about a year, then they get outplanted in PVC tubes. Divers place the tubes between rocks in the intertidal zone and abalone slowly crawl out of the tubes and into the wild. They usually outplant about 700 abalone at a time in an 8x10m square creating a very dense abalone area to increase spawning success. They monitor success by returning to sites and systematically counting and measuring abalone. This project has been going on for about twenty years with a large focus in the San Juan Islands. Puget Sound Restoration Fund has put more than 90,000 juveniles out in the wild at 63 sites. Survival is low, but recently they found an increase in abalone populations (albeit small) across the index sites. There was also a documented decrease in shell length across abalone populations which may mean there are more juveniles present.

In recent years, PSRF has been expanding their project to focus on more areas in the Strait, which includes their partnership with Clallam MRC. Clallam MRC and PSRF use a squares methodology to monitor and survey for pinto abalone populations in the County. They created 200mx200m grids across the ocean over the depth that abalone live. Divers then run tracks along these squares recording substrate, algae, habitat quality ratings for juveniles or adults, abalone present, aggregations present, etc. Ultimately, the goal is to have a map that shows where good or bad abalone habitat exists, where abalone are present, and where successful outplants could occur. In three years working with Clallam MRC, surveys have expanded from the East County side to West of Port Angeles. More than 40 abalone have been found in Clallam County waters. Using technology, PSRF has gotten faster at completing these surveys.

The State recovery plan for pinto abalone states that 11-12 index sites are needed in Clallam County with 15 total in Strait. So far, three index sites have been identified in Clallam County. Two outplant sites have been identified in the Eastern Strait with Clallam MRC. Next year, PSRF and Clallam MRC plan to outplant at least 2,000 abalone in the County.

Puget Sound Restoration Fund is interested in partnering with Feiro Marine Life Center to set up a satellite abalone nursery nearby. This would help with outplanting logistics as well as increase volunteer participation. Puget Sound Restoration Fund also collaborates with other satellite abalone hatcheries/nurseries; Tribes including Samish, Lummi, and Makah; as well as university partners (e.g., experiments on genetics, clear outplant tubes, and more).

Clallam MRC members asked additional questions. Nancy Stephanz asked about survival rates. Dr. Eileen Bates explained that this estimate is challenging because abalone are very hard to find, thus they call it a detection rate rather than survival. She said a good detection rate is 2-6% and that some of their older successful sites have a detection rate of 10%. Jenna Ziogas asked how these numbers compare to wild stocks. Eileen answered that wild stock numbers aren't well known but believes PSRF detection rates are not far off (definitely less than one order of magnitude). Eileen further explained the trade-offs of transplanting outplants (size and age) in order to increase survival rates. Rebecca Mahan asked when are abalone sexually mature. Eileen answered that it's mostly dependent on size rather than age. However, PSRF estimates sexual maturity from between two and five years old. Bev Burton asked if predators negatively affect abalone populations. Eileen answered that they have not looked into how predators affect abalone on the population level, however they are watching how predators may affect juvenile survival. They haven't found any direct evidence of a negative impact. LaTrisha Suggs asked if PSRF had looked into stories from Tribes and generational knowledge. Eileen answered that she did attend an Indigenous Abalone summit where stories and history were shared and while not all coastal tribes were present, there were some similarities across Tribes. Puget Sound Restoration Fund is interested in learning more about abalone from Tribal perspectives and LaTrisha suggested looking into oral stories and historical accounts, including those not typically shared with the public. Tim Cochnauer asked about the age structure of the population and Eileen said that they know more about the size structure. Tim also asked about how they keep good genetic diversity in their hatchery stock. Eileen explained that they try to cross broodstock with different families every year and have certain standards when outplanting, such as limiting the number of juveniles from each family at a site. Recently, PSRF has been able to collect broodstock for one summer, spawn them, and then release the individuals back in the wild. This will help keep genetic diversity in the breeding process. Chase O'Neil asked if the increases at the index sites were due to restoration actions or increases in wild populations. Eileen answered that index sites are far enough away from restoration sites that individual abalone are unlikely to move between sites, however, in theory, increased spawning from restoration efforts would be positively affecting index sites. Chase also asked how PSRF chooses a restoration or index site. Eileen said that, in general, if there are more than three abalone at a site it becomes an index site, as aggregations are rare, and if there is just one abalone it's better suited as an outplant

site. There's also a target number of index sites, so once that is obtained, then all the rest will be outplant sites. LaTrisha asked how abalone are displayed at the partner institutions (such as Seattle Aquarium). Eileen said that they can have displays, but they also usually have a backroom for rearing. Tamara Galvan, Facilities Director at Feiro Marine Life Center, chimed in that Feiro would most likely not have abalone tanks visible to the public, and instead house abalone in a quarantine space. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife typically has rules about quarantining animals if they are to be released into the ocean. Although Feiro Marine Life Center would still like to have some abalone out on display, their goal is to have the Port Angeles High School Marine Biology Club students involved in the abalone rearing and raising process. Jeff Ward thanked Rebecca for bringing this opportunity to the MRC and thanked DFW for their boat and dive team. He mentioned how positive it has been working with PSRF as well as their high level of skill and competency. Jeff also said this long-term program shows how much easier it is to preserve a species than to restore it. LaTrisha echoed Jeff's statement.

New or special business

- *Derelict vessel group participation:* Dana Oster, Marine Program Manager at Northwest Straits Commission, reached back out to MRC staff after her talk for the MRC on the derelict vessel program. She said that funding is moving forward and there is an opportunity for Clallam and Jefferson MRCs as well as the Ports of Port Townsend and Port Angeles to collaborate on a derelict vessel turn-in day. Dana is looking for a representative from Clallam MRC to participate in the meetings. Jenna Ziogas volunteered to participate.
- *Neah Bay Elementary School visit/talk opportunity:* Chase O'Neil explained that she was approached by a teacher at Neah Bay Elementary School named Angelo Bergs who was interested in having the MRC come speak in-person, to their 1st and 2nd grade students about their experience as an MRC member, marine stewardship, being a community helper, and/or highlighting an MRC project. The presentation would be about 20-30 minutes and ideally feature a hands-on activity. They were hoping to do it before December 14th (winter break). LaTrisha Suggs mentioned that her first thought was the pinto abalone project. Eileen Bates said she would potentially be interested in helping.
- *December meeting: tentative cancellation:* ***Lyn Muench made a motion to cancel December 2026 meeting, Nancy Stephanz seconded***. ***The motion passed with unanimous consent and the December meeting was canceled.***

Announcements

- *MRC conference: register by today, October 19th:* This was a reminder to register for the MRC conference. Several members mentioned that they are attending. Nancy Stephanz said that she will be presenting on the Oil Spill Readiness/HAZWOPER project.

- *Northwest Straits Commission update – Alan Clark:* Alan was absent. Chase O'Neil said that the update is attached to the agenda packet.

Committee and Project Reports

- *Project leads report only if an update is needed:*
    - Nancy Stephanz gave an update on SoundToxins. The crew saw a large number of organisms called *Akashiwo*. This organism produces four types of neurotoxins, burrows into the gills of fish, and can damage seabird feathers. They also saw *Alexandrium* and *Pseudo-nitzschia.* These observations caused a discussion in the MRC about why this organism appeared and what other global effects are in store. Tim Cochnauer mentioned the McKinley Mill and the potential data center proposal causing water temperature changes. LaTrisha Suggs also mentioned the Myno Carbon project on carbon removal which may have caused warmer temperatures.
- *Education and Outreach subcommittee:*
    - Fall Festivals 2026 recap: The Dungeness River Festival went very well with the live tank being a big hit. The new matching game with seafood images and shells went well but may need some improvement (specifically on the visuals). It rained at the festival, which convinced Nancy Stephanz that we need to get better rain proof containers for MRC outreach materials.
- *Advisory sub-committee:* no update.

Discussion of next meeting date and agenda

- *Next meeting:* The next meeting will take place on Monday, November 16th. The presentation will be on Dungeness crab population trends by Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and DFW.
- *Call for new agenda items:* Please reach out to executive team and Chase O'Neil for any suggestions.

Good of the Order

- Lyn Muench shared that she attended the County Commissioner's Working Session meeting and that the MRC letter was considered. She said that staff recommended to make the changes, although the Planning Commission prefers their own language. Commissioner Ozias spoke more on these details. He said the Commissioners were supportive of the language the MRC used, as was County staff. For example, the MRC added language to the oil spill response section that broadened the scope so the Commissioners felt it warranted its own policy. Director of Community Development, Bruce Emery, will work on keeping the oil spill section intact and incorporating this broader point into a separate policy goal. Commissioner Ozias mentioned they have at least one more public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan, could be more depending on

how that goes, and more working sessions on it as well. He appreciated the MRC's input and found it very helpful.

- Rebecca Mahan told the group that the County Critical Areas Ordinance update is ongoing and that a public hearing is planned sometime in November. There are several documents that may be helpful for review, such as a County Gap Analysis and Planning Commission summaries/documents.
- Chase O'Neil announced that the HAZWOPER Oil Spill Readiness Training is scheduled for next week on October 27th and 28th at the Elwha Klallam Heritage Center.

Public Comment

- John Worthington made public comment about piping ditches for irrigation districts and his concerns about the effects on the environment. He believes the kelp is in danger from this action.

Adjourn

Lyn Muench made a motion to adjourn, Jeff Ward seconded. The motion passed with unanimous consent and meeting was adjourned at 7:04 pm.