



Marine Resources Committee 2022 Annual Report

Restore, Conserve, Educate



Snohomish County
Marine Resources
Committee



Snohomish County
Conservation &
Natural Resources
Surface Water Management

Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee

2022 Annual Report

Snohomish County
Marine Resources Advisory Committee
3000 Rockefeller Avenue, M/S-303
Everett, WA 98201

The Snohomish MRC is a service provided by the
Snohomish County Surface Water Management Division

Questions or comments about the MRC can be directed to:

Elisa Dawson
Senior Planner, Marine Resources Committee Staff
425-388-6466
Elisa.Dawson@snoco.org

Joycelyn Blue
Planner, Marine Resources Committee Staff
425-308-2287
joycelyn.blue@snoco.org

Cover photo: Elisa Dawson

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Message from 2023 Chair, Matasha Coumou

Here at the Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), we are lucky to have amazing volunteers and dedicated Surface Water Management (SWM) staff united to manage our natural resources for the benefit of all. We partner with local governments, tribes, businesses and nonprofit organization to seek out ways to implement best strategies for achieving and sustaining a healthy Salish Sea.



We acknowledge that the lands and waters where we operate today constitute the ancestral homelands of the Tulalip Tribes and the Stillaguamish Tribe. We are committed to working with these sovereign tribal governments as co-managers to promote effective stewardship of Snohomish County's marine waters, habitats, species, and shorelines in order to support their treaty reserved rights and access to resources, and to honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water. This past year we adopted a land acknowledgment that reflects these values.

In 2022, we returned to in-person events through beach-cleanups and outreach activities in collaboration with Beach Watchers and Zero Waste Washington. We continued our scientific monitoring studies to evaluate the health of our marine ecosystem, collected monitoring info at the Meadowdale Estuary Restoration Project, and assisted in the removal of four derelict vessels from local waters. We worked with the UW Evans School and Island County MRC to complete a review of the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area Conservation Plan for its 10-year anniversary. To help facilitate coordination between agencies, we developed a one-page information sheet on opportunities for beneficial reuse of dredged material from the Snohomish River for salmon habitat enhancement projects.

I invite you to look through our annual report and read about the details of the efforts that our dedicated volunteers have selflessly engaged in to protect, conserve, and restore the Salish Sea for all of us to enjoy. If you are interested in joining us, you can find out how on our [website](#), join us on our [monthly meetings](#), or [subscribe to the MRC's mailing list](#).

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MRC Members



Mike Ehlebracht,
Chair



Natasha Coumou,
Co-vice Chair, Tulalip
Tribes Representative



Tom Doerge,
Co-vice Chair



Franchesca Perez,
Stillaguamish Tribe
Representative



Laura Gurley



Tim Ellis



Sara Maxwell



Julie Schlenger



Andrew Gobin



Brie Townsend



Michael Kundu



Allan Hicks



Bob Margulis



Susan Tarpley,
Ex-Officio



David Bain,
Ex-Officio

Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative

The MRC is guided by the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (NWSI) Strategic Plan.

Together these entities comprise a nonpartisan regional effort to protect and restore marine resources in the northern Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.



The Northwest Straits Commission provides funding, training and support to seven county-based Marine Resources Committees. It facilitates regional coordination among the MRCs and connects the MRC work to regional planning efforts.



Established in 1999 and authorized by Chapter 2.800 of the Snohomish County Code; the Snohomish Marine Resources Committee members represent a diverse group of environmental, recreational, conservation, economic, and local and tribal government interests.

The Snohomish County MRC is a team of citizen volunteers who are appointed by the Snohomish County Council and congressionally authorized to represent diverse local interests. Advocating for communities, the MRC provides sound guidance to public officials as an advisory committee. The MRC is essential to the protection and restoration of Snohomish County's marine environment. Without the partnerships or funding support from native tribes, government, businesses, and non-profit organizations the MRC could not continue this crucial work.



The Northwest Straits Foundation is the nonprofit arm of the organization established to leverage additional financial resources to accomplish the work of the initiative.

The Northwest Straits Foundation raises private and public funds and also manages large regional projects such as the removal of derelict fishing gear.

Program Support

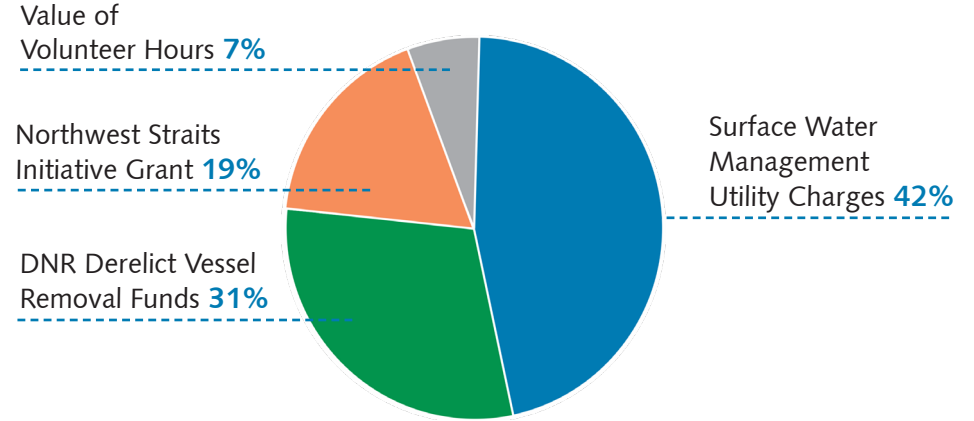
There were 1,085 volunteer hours donated by 13 Members and 2 Ex-Officio Members in 2022 to implement the MRC's annual work plan and related activities which:

- o Provided a forum to mobilize citizen support of marine conservation.
- o Generated and implemented practical, on-the-ground projects that benefit the ecosystem and the economy of our region.

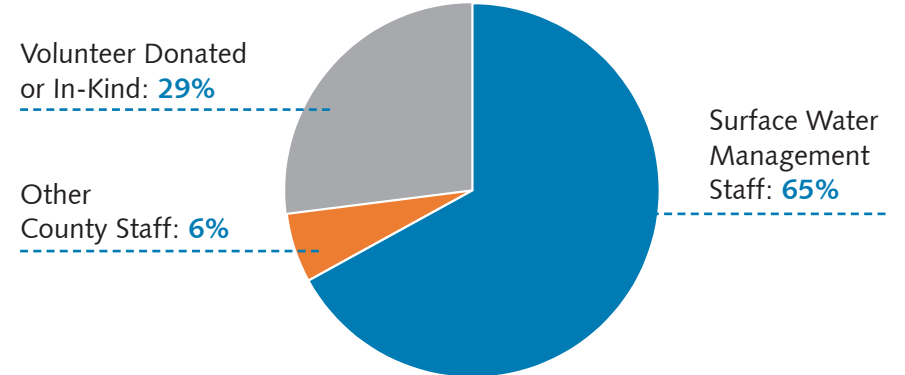
Spotlight:

SWM's utility charges provided 42% of the MRC's annual budget. The remaining was from grants and in-kind volunteer time. By leveraging county funds with significant grants and volunteer time, the MRC implemented cost-effective projects across Snohomish County.

FUNDING



SUPPORT



\$33.02
Washington State's estimated value of a volunteer hour.



1,085
Volunteer hours donated in 2022.

\$35,827

Total value to Snohomish County



MRC volunteers conducting a beach cleanup.

Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area 10-year Anniversary and Progress Tracking

As Phase 1 in this project Snohomish County MRC, in collaboration with Island County MRC, reconvened partners to assess the current status of the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) Conservation Action Plan (CAP) and identify opportunities to support conservation activities in Port Susan for the next decade and beyond. In 2023, the MRC is conducting outreach as Phase 2 of this project.



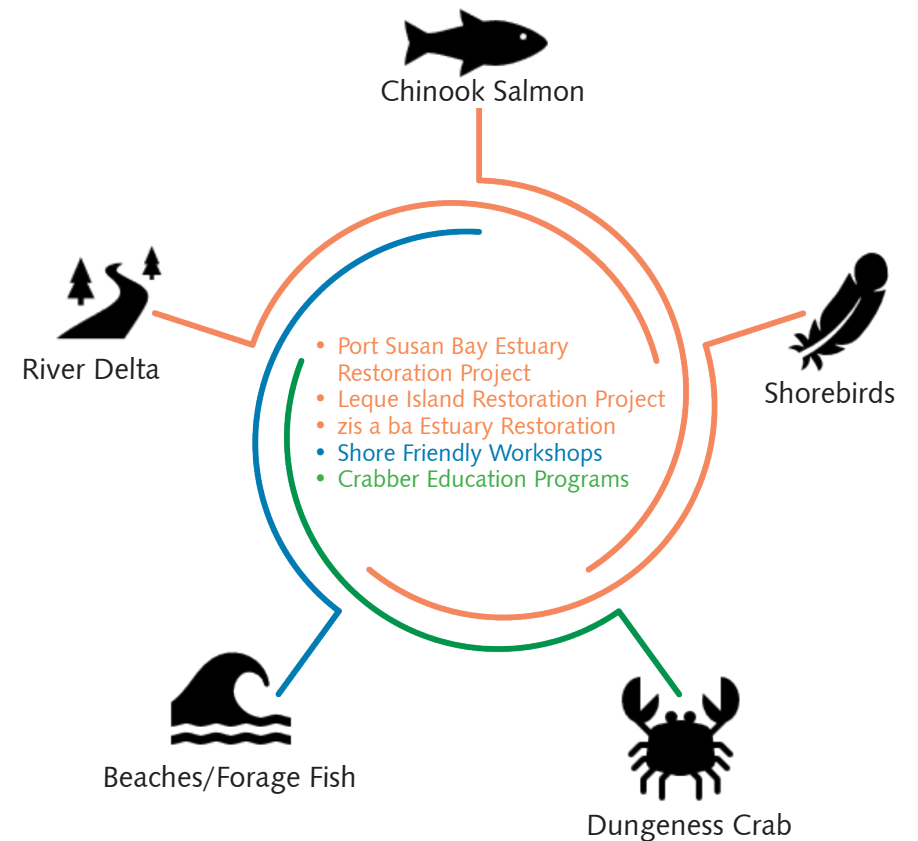
Since 2012, partners have been making strides in accomplishing many of the Strategic Actions outline in the CAP.



The CAP was first developed in 2012 with the goal of achieving a healthy marine and estuarine ecosystem in Port Susan with thriving biodiversity and strong recreational and resource-based industries.

Ten Years of Progress: Projects and Initiatives

CAP Conservation Targets



Meadowdale Beach and Estuary Restoration Project

After a decade of planning, construction was completed on the 1.3-acre estuary restoration project at Meadowdale Beach Park in 2022. Pocket estuaries like Meadowdale are important rest stops for young salmon, where salmon can shelter, feed and grow.

The total cost of the project was \$16 million, with nearly half of the funding coming from grants, including a Federal Rail Safety Improvement grant and several salmon habitat restoration grants.

A critical piece of the renovation is a new bridge for the railroad that creates a 90-foot opening for the creek to flow through. The bridge was installed in two phases from August-September 2022.



Rick Larsen visits Meadowdale as the beach reopens to the public.

In 2022, final estuary improvements were made and estuary plantings were installed.



Spotlight:

Snohomish County Surface Water Management, the MRC, Tulip Tribes, and multiple other partners are collaborating on a 10-year post-restoration monitoring program to investigate the ecological effectiveness of this project.

Restoration of a 1.3 acre pocket estuary began in 2021.



▶ Derelict Vessel Removal

The Snohomish estuary and Everett shoreline was improved during 2022 due to Snohomish County efforts to remove four owner-abandoned derelict vessels. The removals totaled nearly 100 cubic yards of marine debris, which helped eliminate pollutants while also improving boater safety. Funding for the County's removal work was provided by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Snohomish County Surface Water Management.

All derelict vessels were recycled or destroyed following a process to identify and work with the last known owners in accordance with Revised Code of Washington. For more information on this project, visit the MRC's [webpage](#).

Spotlight:

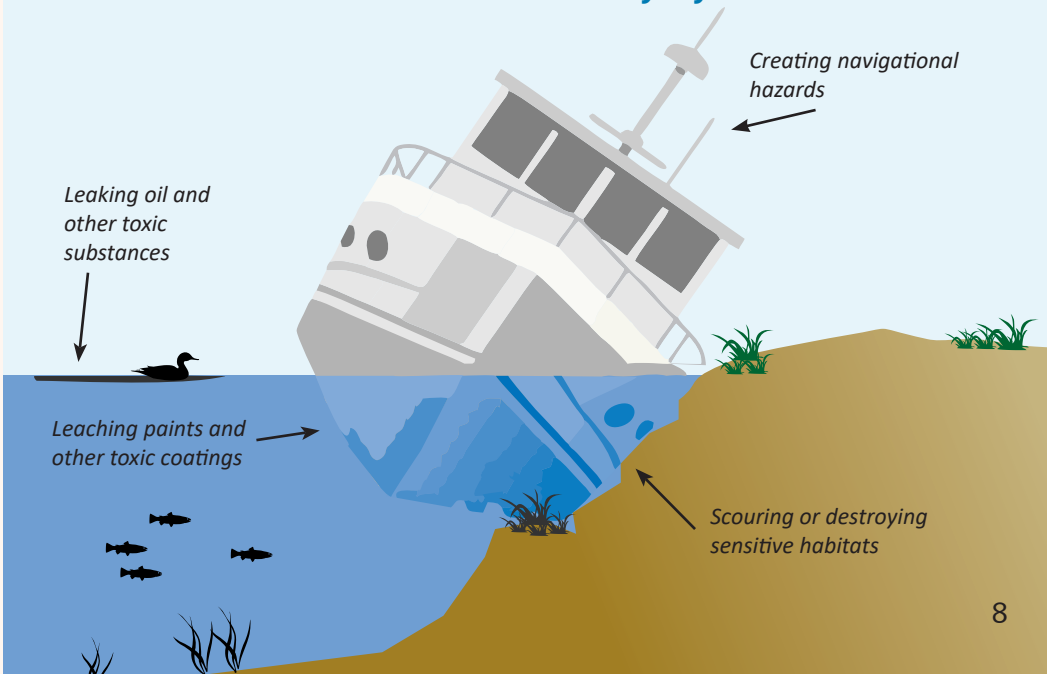
Snohomish County had partnered with DNR's Derelict Vessel Removal Program to remove 20 vessels from 2018-2022. This is over 500 cubic yards, estimated to be 175,000 pounds, of marine debris.

You can report a derelict vessel using the MyCoast App: www.mycoast.org/wa



One of four vessels removed from the Snohomish estuary in 2022.

Derelict vessels impact aquatic habitat and threaten human safety by:



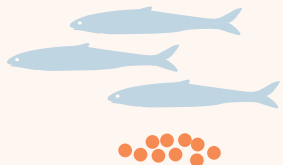
▶ Forage Fish Spawning Surveys

The MRC has been monitoring forage fish spawning in Snohomish County for over a decade. MRC forage fish spawning surveys use [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's](#) (WDFW) protocols focusing on surf smelt and Pacific sand lance. These species depend on sand and gravel beaches of the [nearshore](#) environment for laying eggs, spawning and rearing. Continued forage fish monitoring is necessary to determine the effectiveness of restoration projects. The MRC currently takes monthly samples at Howarth Park, Meadowdale, and Picnic Point.

Spotlights:



Forage fish species, including Pacific sand lance and surf smelt play a vital role in the marine food web by providing food for salmon as well as other birds, mammals, and fish. Their presence is a good indicator of a healthy marine ecosystem.



The MRC took 54 **forage fish samples** along the Snohomish County shoreline in 2022.



On top is an adult surf smelt; below is an adult Pacific sand lance.



MRC volunteers collect forage fish samples each month at Picnic Point, Meadowdale, and Howarth Park.

Sometimes the easiest way to conserve vulnerable habitat is to protect it. This involves knowing how much habitat you have in order to measure its decline or recovery. The Snohomish County MRC assists state and federal agencies by helping collect baseline and monitoring data for species or habitats of concern.

Kelp Monitoring

In response to concerns about declining bull kelp populations in some parts of the Puget Sound, and mounting interest in kelp restoration, the MRC gathered data for the Northwest Straits Commission's regional kelp monitoring project. The [MRC kayak surveys](#) cover the Snohomish County nearshore between Everett and Edmonds and around Hat Island.

- Watch the [Kelp Monitoring Video](#) on the MRC website to learn more.
- Read the [Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan](#), which includes kelp data from around the Puget Sound.
- Explore Puget Sound's Kelp Forests with this [interactive storymap](#) highlighting the Puget Sound Restoration Fund's 2021 Kelp Expedition.



MRC members use kayaks to monitor kelp by taking notes, photos and adding GPS tracking details.

Spotlight:

Bull Kelp is the largest of the 23 native species of large brown algae reaching 60' or more.

The kelp monitoring done by MRC volunteers and staff show an important trend in kelp canopy and beds over time. This information can help lead to science-based decisions on how to manage this resource, and has been used to inform regional kelp planning and conservation efforts. It is important to continue this monitoring effort annually.

Bull kelp forests provide **food and shelter** to dozens of species in our marine ecosystem, including rockfish.



Caged Mussel Water Quality Study

Since 2011, every other year Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) partners with local groups to conduct a monitoring study of toxins released into Puget Sound from stormwater runoff. Mussels are used in this study because of their ability to pick up toxins and filter water efficiently.

There are 96 locations monitored within the Puget Sound, and seven are within Snohomish County. Volunteers and partner organizations placed mussel cages at all locations within Snohomish County in November 2021. After a few months in the water, the mussels were retrieved on January 31, 2022 and taken to Olympia where they are analyzed for toxins.

MRC volunteers retrieved mussel cages at 7 locations in Snohomish County to monitor water quality in Puget Sound.



Marine Vegetation Monitoring

From 2020-2022, Snohomish County MRC has been working with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to conduct a comprehensive study of marine vegetation along the shoreline of Snohomish County. The area was monitored using towed underwater videography for marine vegetation species, including eelgrass, submerged kelp, and other macroalgae.

In 2022 the mapping was completed. Key findings from the monitoring include the following: **There was approximately 906 ha of eelgrass in 1999-2007 and 912 ha of eelgrass in 2019-2022.**

Compared with previous data (1999-2007), there appeared to be little change in eelgrass area over time at a broad scale, but variability at smaller scales. Sites with increases in eelgrass were mostly located in the northern part of Snohomish County (several sites between Port Susan and Tulalip Bay, one site on Hat Island, as well as directly south of Tulalip Bay). The site with a substantial decline is located directly south of Port Susan.

The depth distribution of marine vegetation in the study area was similar to other sites in the Central Basin of Puget Sound.

Marine vegetation data were collected using towed underwater videography. Eelgrass species shown here.



Plastic Free Salish Sea

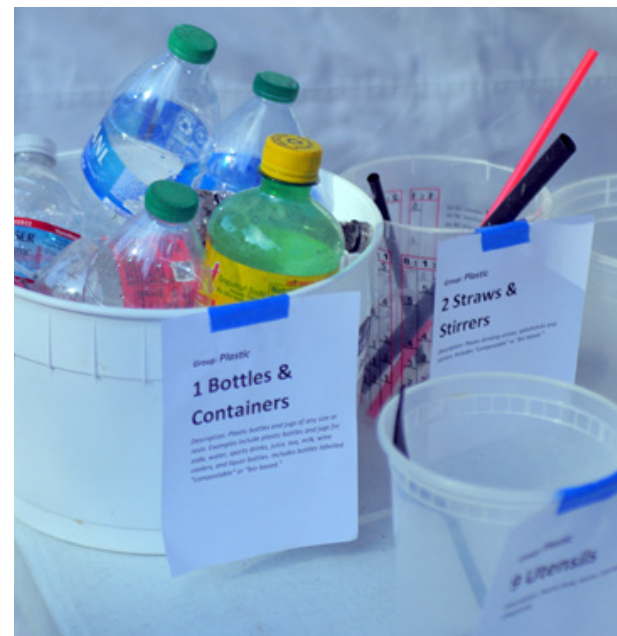
The Plastic Free Salish Sea campaign brings organizations, business, and individuals together to change the culture of plastic use across the Puget Sound area. They provide educational and practical resources through their website, Plastic Free Living toolkits, and community events.

Every year 8 million metric tons of plastic enters our oceans.

The Snohomish County MRC recognizes this as a major issue of concern and is taking steps to address this problem within Snohomish County. One way is through our quarterly beach clean ups with WSU Beach Watchers. Each year at least one of these clean ups utilizes the Escaped Trash Assessment Protocol (ETAP).



In 2022 MRC members and volunteers picked up over 550 lbs of trash off our local beaches.



Spotlight:

Escaped trash is any material that is intentionally or unintentionally disposed of or abandoned into the environment. The ETAP allows communities to better understand the extent and type of litter in their area so that they can reduce escaped trash sources. The data collected is also added to a statewide database and helps inform Washington Legislative Policy on plastics and escaped trash.



The Snohomish County MRC provides education on key issues relating to our 123 miles of shoreline, including best management practices for shoreline landowners, recreational fishermen, and other interested citizens.



Crabber Education and Outreach

Beginning on opening crabbing weekend, the Snohomish County MRC worked with WSU Beach Watchers staff and volunteers to connect with approximately 350 crabbers. Volunteers conducted outreach at the 10th Street boat launch in Everett on the mornings of July 1st, 2nd, 8th and 9th. They provided crabbers with the information and products to support sustainable fishing and crabbing practices in an effort to reduce both marine debris and wildlife loss.

In addition to in-person outreach, the MRC posted information on social media and issued a press release in coordination with the Northwest Straits Foundation. Videos from the social media campaigns can be seen [here](#).

Spotlight:

- Researchers estimate that **12,000 crab pots are lost** each year in Puget Sound.
- Lost pots catch and **kill** an estimated **129,000 crabs** annually.



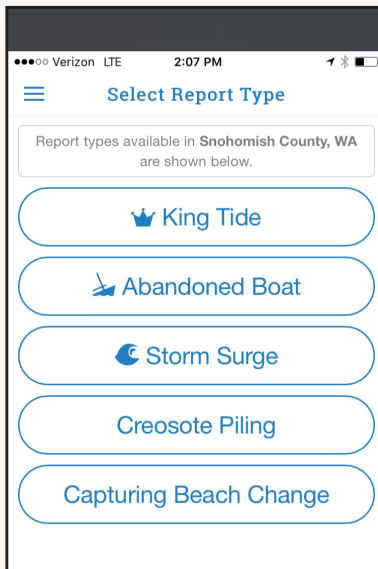
MyCoast

Citizen Science with the MyCoast App

The MyCoast App (mycoast.org) is a free smartphone app and webpage that can be downloaded by anyone who wants to participate in an MRC project. The MRC created “forms” which users can fill out to participate in MRC Projects.

These projects include:

- Storm Surge Monitoring Project
- Report derelict vessels
- Report creosote pilings
- Document king tides
- Capture beach change



Reports submitted on MyCoast are used both within Snohomish County and statewide to track environmental conditions and inform project work, including the MRC's derelict vessel removal efforts.

In 2022, **103 MyCoast reports** were generated in Snohomish County using the smartphone app.



Creosote logs on beach identified on MyCoast being removed by Washington Dept. of Natural Resources AmeriCorps Members.

Thank You

The MRC receives support from the Northwest Straits Commission, Puget Sound Partnership, Snohomish County Council and Executive Somers, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources Derelict Vessel Removal Program and Snohomish County Surface Water Management Division for the Marine Resources Program.

Thank you to our MRC Members. Your work and dedication to protecting and restoring the marine environment is making a difference in Snohomish County.

We would like to recognize the Tulalip Tribes and the Stillaguamish Tribe for providing staff support and coordination for MRC Projects. The MRC acknowledges that our work resides on the ancestral lands and waters of the Coast Salish people who have called this place home since time immemorial.

A special thank you to the MRC Program Manager Elisa Dawson and MRC Planner Joycelyn Blue. Thank you to Surface Water Management staff Sheila Hagen, Brett Gaddis, Alex Pittman, Joseph Geigel, Frank Leonetti, Stuart Baker, Luke Hanna, Steve Britsch, Adam Jackson and Meghan Jordan; Communications staff Rebecca Lindahl and to the many other Snohomish County employees who have contributed time and expertise to the 2022 MRC projects.

How to reach us?

- www.snocomrc.org

How to become involved

- Attend monthly MRC [meetings](#)
- Volunteer on local projects
- Become a member of the Northwest Straits Foundation
- Sign up for [MRC email distribution list](#) and [Northwest Straits Initiative newsletter](#)

When/Where are meetings held?

- **When:** Third Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m.
- **Where:** MRC Meetings are currently held virtually. Contact Elisa.Dawson@snoco.org for the meeting link.

MRC Staff



Elisa Dawson
SWM Senior Planner



Joycelyn Blue
SWM Planner