

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

San Juan County
Marine Resources
Committee



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ABOUT THE MRC

The San Juan County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is a citizen advisory committee to San Juan County dedicated to the protection and restoration of marine resources in the San Juan Islands. The San Juan MRC was the first marine resources committee established in the region. The Committee was created in 1996 as a local management alternative to an initiative for establishing a national marine sanctuary in the San Juans. The MRC provides a citizen forum to advise the County Council on marine issues. In addition to policy issues, the MRC supports marine research and planning and provides education and outreach.

MRC GOALS

Ecological

- To protect and restore the marine biological diversity, ecosystem processes, representative ecosystems, and special natural features.
- To conserve fish populations and the upland, nearshore, and deepwater habitats that support them.
- Prevent further reductions in marine populations including marine birds and habitats within the San Juans and increase populations of marine species to levels exceeding present levels, within the range of natural variability.

Cultural, social and economic

- To recognize and appreciate the existence values provided by a fully functioning marine ecosystem.
- To protect and restore the marine ecosystem so that these benefits will be available for future generations.
- To recognize and protect direct use benefits for marine resources, including ceremonial, subsistence, recreational and commercial fishing.
- To acknowledge cultural heritage resources and encourage understanding and appreciation of them.
- To recognize the need for scientific research opportunities and the benefits that accrue from this research.
- To promote increased education and awareness of the marine environment.
- To protect marine-based recreational resources, including fishing, recognizing that on (and in) the water recreation and enjoyment is an important part of not only our local economy but also our community, culture and the coastal legacy we leave for our children.



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Under the leadership of Kendra Smith, San Juan County solidified its Department of Environmental Stewardship branch of our local government in 2022 by planning for the future. Their critical work included advancing the Marine Stewardship Area Plan, creating a Sustainable Tourism Management Plan and establishing a Climate and Sustainability Advisory Committee to work on a Climate Action Plan. With each of these plans the importance of understanding and protecting the marine environment is a priority.

With over 400 miles of shoreline within 620 square miles, San Juan County is a unique marine county in the United States. San Juan County commissioners established the entire County as a Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) in 2004. It was designed to protect the valuable marine resources of the 172 named islands while allowing sustainable use to occur.

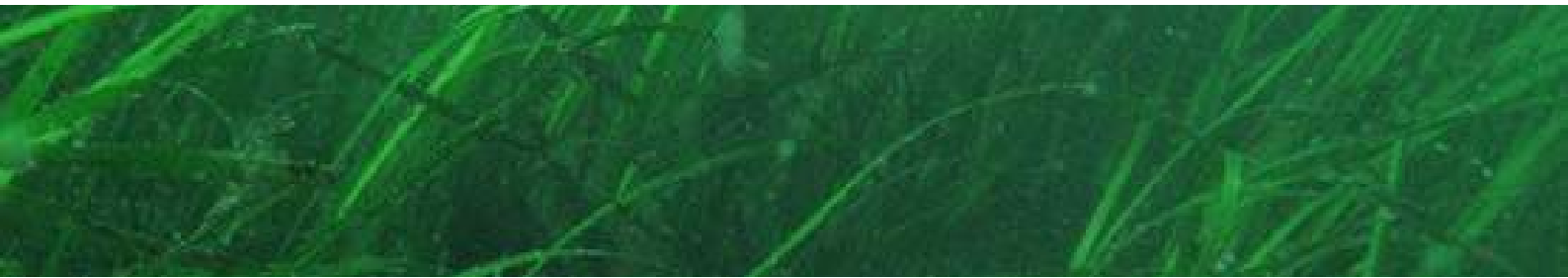
Frances Robertson, the Marine Project Manager for San Juan County, advanced the Marine Stewardship Area Plan update in 2022 using the knowledge of local, state and federal experts. The Marine Resource Committee (MRC) served as key advisors in this process, with local non-profits, researchers and businesspeople contributing as well. The MRC and San Juan County realize the importance of input from experts to ensure the threats identified in the Plan and actions determined as solutions are indeed making progress. San Juan County and the MRC have committed to a Marine Managers Workshop every two years for feedback and tracking the progress of the Plan.

The *Exploring Protection Priorities For Southern Resident Killer Whale Foraging Areas Along The West Side of San Juan Island* report was completed by the MRC and Marine Program in September 2022. In it the history of the protections for the San Juan Islands are documented, as well as data for ongoing management.

The MRC changed in 2022 with Ivan Reiff and Carl Davis reaching the end of their terms. Their expertise and input will be greatly missed and their service is much appreciated. New members include oceanographer Craig Smith, ecologist Aaron Boyles, Matt Arata of Friday Harbor based A -1 Marine Services, and Adam Parrott, Marina Operations Lead from the Port of Friday Harbor. Staffing changes for the year welcomed Sam Whitridge as Marine Program Coordinator and Tyler Davis as Marine Project Coordinator. Thank you to all the other MRC members and to Patti Gobin of the Tulalip Tribe for her dedicated participation.

None of the work described above could be completed without the support from the Northwest Straits Commission. The network created by the Northwest Straits Initiative links together Clallam, Jefferson, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, and Island with San Juan County to share knowledge about marine conservation. With long term stable funding, the structural support for local Marine Resource Committees ensures strong engagement with partnerships to share ideas and measure progress. The counties work from the ground up with local people. San Juan County and the volunteers on the MRC are grateful for the Commission as an invaluable resource for protecting and restoring our islands.

Christina Koons, MRC Chair



MEMBERSHIP



SAN JUAN COUNTY
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The San Juan MRC is currently comprised of representatives from San Juan County, the Tulalip Tribal government, the University of Washington’s Friday Harbor Labs, the Port of Friday Harbor, environmental organizations, local marine-based businesses, and residents, all of whom bring a diversity of perspectives and expertise to the San Juan MRC. In 2022 we added two new MRC members, Matt Arata, and Adam Parrott, to fill vacant seats. At the end of 2022, two longtime members stepped down from the MRC. We are grateful for the contributions of Carl Davis and Ivan Reiff and we look forward to filling their seats in early 2023.

MRC Members

Christina Koons, Chair	Karin Roemers-Kleven, Vice-Chair
Patti Gobin, Tulalip Tribes	Lovel Pratt, Friends of the San Juans
Dr. Megan Dethier, Friday Harbor Labs, University of Washington	Kendra Smith, Director, Environmental Stewardship, San Juan County
Adam Parrott, Port of Friday Harbor	Jeff Dyer, Lopez Island
Carl Davis, Orcas Island*	Laura Jo Severson, San Juan Island
Kailey Genther, San Juan Island	Phil Green, San Juan Island
Beth Tate, Jen Jay Consulting	Ivan Reiff, Pintail Marine & PWWA*
Matt Arata, A1 Marine	

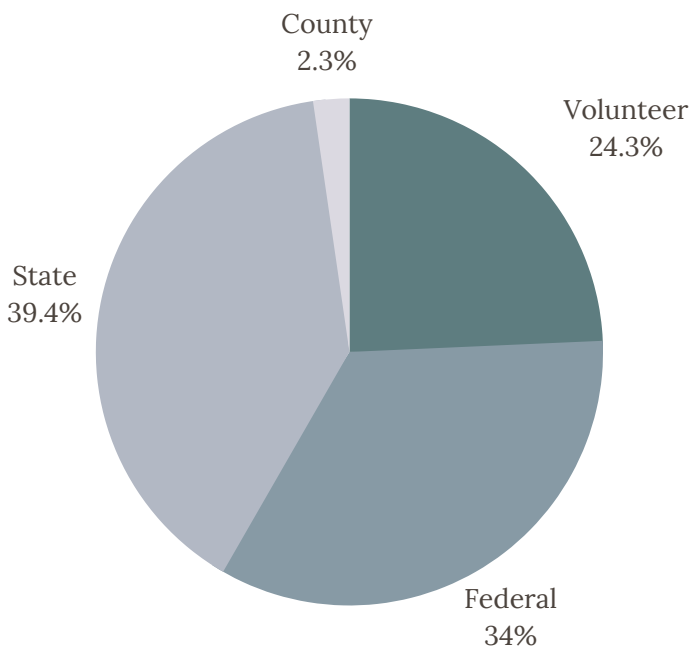
**Carl and Ivan ended their terms with the MRC in 2022*

Ex-Officio and Support Staff: Jamie Stephens, San Juan County Council
 Sam Whitridge, MRC Coordinator
 Dr. Frances Robertson, Marine Project Manager
 Tyler Davis, Marine Project Coordinator



FUNDING

The MRC is predominantly funded through a grant administered by the Northwest Straits Commission. This grant is comprised of state and federal dollars that fund the basic MRC operations as well as specific projects. In addition to these funds, the MRC also receives support from San Juan County and may also partner with the County in seeking external grants. The time and resources dedicated to the MRC by its members provide nearly a quarter of the annual support for the program.

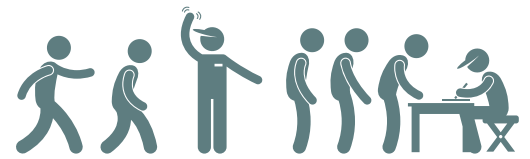


Value of volunteer hours



\$44,010

2022 VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



1,304 hours

The value of community citizens volunteering their time, expertise, and resources cannot be emphasized enough. Over the 2021-2022 grant cycle, MRC members and volunteers put in over 1000 hours. This included running and attending meetings, organizing a retreat, providing expert guidance in the County's oil spill prevention efforts, volunteering in monitoring efforts, participating in outreach, and beach clean-ups.



24.3%

value of volunteer hours and resources
2021-2022

MRC OPERATIONS

This year the MRC continued operations as we transitioned past some of the acute challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. We continued to primarily meet monthly via virtual platforms, keeping members connected and engaged, but we held our first in-person regular MRC meeting in September 2022 and we held an in-person annual MRC retreat in December 2022.

We also implemented a new staffing and meeting structure in 2022. Former MRC coordinator Frances Robertson transitioned into a Project Manager role in the summer and Sam Whitridge took over MRC Coordination duties. Tyler Davis was also hired to serve as Marine Project Coordinator to support all marine program efforts. We have also integrated the MRC, Salmon Recovery Citizens Advisory Group (CAG), and Local Integrating Organization (LIO) committee meetings, while still maintaining committee autonomy and independent membership. This new structure has allowed for increased efficiency and better cross-pollination between committees. MRC members now regularly attend all three committee meetings and as a result, are getting well-versed with the work of the CAG and LIO and seeing more opportunities for collaboration.

The MRC was represented at regular LIO regional meetings by Sam Whitridge and Tyler Davis – contributing to scope and funding decisions for LIO implementation – and the MRC was represented on the Northwest Straits Commission by MRC Chair Christina Koons.





ADVISORY ROLE

The MRC has been involved in advising the County on matters related to marine resources since its inception. This advisory role is a critical part of the MRC's activities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The MRC provides scientifically-based guidance on issues that affect the County's marine environment.

Core advisory activities in 2022 included:

- Participation in the Puget Sound on the Hill virtual events.
- Advising San Juan County Council on the FV Aleutian Isle oil spill reponse effort.

SALMON RECOVERY

The MRC also undertakes the role of Citizens Salmon Advisory Group for Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) #2, the local Lead Entity for Salmon Recovery in the San Juan Islands.

The MRC provides the final scoring for all proposed salmon recovery projects in the year's grant round. This is perhaps one of the most important roles that the MRC undertakes each year.

In 2022 the MRC helped ensure that **\$2,248,393** was awarded for Salmon Recovery projects in San Juan County.



\$2,248,393

Awarded to salmon recovery in San Juan County in 2022

OUTREACH



The majority of the San Juan County MRC's project efforts focus on education and outreach. Education and outreach are key components to the Marine Stewardship Area Strategy focused on fostering a stewardship ethic in visitors and residents to the County. During the 2021-2022 grant year, the MRC continued outreach efforts in the following core areas:

FALSE BAY VISITOR OUTREACH

False Bay is a popular beach and tidal flat on the west side of San Juan Island. But there is concern about the impact of human activities on the preserve's ecological integrity, particularly the eelgrass beds towards the mouth of the Bay, and disturbance to shorebirds from off-leash dogs.

In 2020, during the peak of the COVID-19 restrictions, the bay experienced growing numbers of visitors and a prevalence of off-leash dogs. The MRC initiated visitor outreach to better understand where visitors were from, the regularity of their visits, and the main reasons that they came to False Bay. Volunteers also shared information about the sensitivity of tidal flat and eelgrass habitats, and the importance of keeping dogs on leashes while walking at the bay.

In 2022, the MRC continued their outreach efforts with the goal of comparing the multi-year dataset. 2022 outreach efforts began in late May and continued through July. MRC members targeted times of day with low tides to connect with visitors and interview them at random to better understand their demographics and purpose. Interviews followed the same format used in 2020.



PLASTIC FREE SALISH SEA

Plastic Free Salish Sea (PFSS) is a partnership created and led by the San Juan County MRC. The initiative seeks to raise awareness and change citizen behavior and the culture of plastic use in San Juan County and the surrounding Salish Sea region. Through 2021 and 2022, the MRC continued to expand the efforts initiated in 2018 and expanded in 2020-21 with the development and launch of the PFSS website as a means of broadening the reach of its efforts throughout the county and around the Salish Sea with the following core goals:

- Growing the established Adopt-a-Beach program in San Juan County
- Engaging the community through regular beach clean-up events, such as the Great Islands Clean-up (GICU) in April and September
- Promoting Plastic Free July and making plastic reduction toolkits readily available
- Continued deployment and monitoring of SeaBin

The PFSS Adopt-a-Beach program continued through the 2021-2022 grant year. At the end of the reporting period, a total of 36 active beach stewards, including 4 new stewards this year, are covering 28 of the 32 locations listed on the website.

plasticfreesalishsea.org/adopt-a-beach



PLASTIC FREE
SALISH SEA

MRC members also participated in monthly and seasonal beach clean-ups. The Spring 2022 Great Islands Clean-up (GICU) event was our biggest event yet: **350** volunteers removed **3,500 lbs** of debris from **173** miles of roads and shorelines. The Fall 2022 GICU had **181** volunteers from San Juan, Orcas, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart Islands collecting **1,733 lbs** of trash from more than **100** miles of shoreline and roads.

In addition to the Great Islands Clean-up, PFSS also engaged with the community by:

- Distributing letters with the help of the San Juan Islands' Youth Conservation Corps, to local businesses educating them about Plastic Free July and reminding them of Washington State's single-use service ware law (RCW 70A.245.080) that went into effect January 1st, 2022.
- Hosting a booth at the San Juan County Fair showcasing the MRC and highlighting PFSS and GICU.
- Highlighting the PFSS initiative at the NWSC's Collaborative Conservation Workshop – a great opportunity to gauge interest and opportunity for scaling this program beyond our county borders



DERELICT VESSEL PREVENTION PROGRAM

The MRC and support staff contributed to the revival of the County's Derelict Vessel Prevention Program. Derelict vessels are a hazard to the marine environment as well as to other boaters. San Juan County's Derelict Vessel Program was first established by the MRC in 2013 as a proactive approach to identifying and removing vessels of concern before they became a hazard to the environment and/or navigation. The MRC partners with the County to identify vessels at risk of becoming derelict or abandoned in the County's waters. This allows the County to remove and dispose of the vessels identified to be of concern.

The long-term goals of the MRCs efforts to address derelict vessels in San Juan County are to:

- Conduct regular marine patrols with local partners to identify vessels of concern.
- Prioritize identified vessels of concern for removal by the County's Derelict Vessel Removal Program.
- Raise awareness of derelict vessels with county residents and the boating community.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Participated in two marine vessel patrols covering popular anchorage sites on three islands.
- Established the Vessel of Concern Database
- Identified three vessels for submission to the NWSC for inclusion in the commission's programmatic removal effort.
- San Juan County Marine Program removed four derelict vessels from County waters.



EELGRASS PROTECTION



Eelgrass anchor-out protection zones have been deployed or planned at the following sites around San Juan County in an effort to protect sensitive eelgrass habitats: Odlin County Park (Lopez Island), Bell Point (San Juan Island), Eastsound (Orcas Island), Blind Bay (Shaw Island), and Hunter Bay (Lopez Island). The expected outcome of this project is to reduce the number of boats anchoring in fragile eelgrass habitats around the county. The long-term efficacy of Anchor Out Zones is determined through vessel monitoring by MRC volunteers before and after buoy installation.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Vessel compliance monitoring at Odlin Anchor Out Zone
- Maintenance of Odlin Anchor Out buoys
- Continued vessel monitoring at 2 other sites ahead of Anchor Out buoy installation
- Addition of new vessel monitoring site at Blind Bay, Lopez Island
- Completed county-wide assessment of mooring buoys to determine the numbers and locations of mooring buoys in San Juan County



VESSEL MONITORING

Ahead of Anchor-out buoy installation, each site continued to be monitored to understand vessel density and pressure on eelgrass beds. MRC members visited their respective sites multiple times throughout the summer, ensuring inclusion of busy holiday weekends, regular summer weekends, and weekdays. Each survey consisted of counting the total number of boats anchored or moored, as well as other relevant data (date, time, tide height, weather conditions, and photos if possible).

Overall, MRC members made 37 site visits during the monitoring period (May 29 – Sept 30). Blind Bay (Shaw Island), a new site this year, had the highest count of 44 vessels and the highest average of 30 vessels. It is worth noting that in Blind Bay a good number of vessels observed are permanent or derelict, and have been tagged or added to a derelict vessel watch list. Compared to 2021, boat traffic at Eastsound was roughly the same, but vessel presence was lower at Bell Point.

RESEARCH & PLANNING

During the 2021-2022 grant year, the MRC finalized the update of the Marine Stewardship Area Plan and continued to engage and advise on oil spill prevention efforts, particularly in the aftermath of the FV Aleutian Isle sinking off the west side of San Juan Island in August with 2,500 gallons of diesel on board.

MARINE STEWARDSHIP AREA PLAN

San Juan County MRC began a review of the Marine Stewardship Area (MSA) Plan in early 2019, and hosted a successful Marine Managers Meeting in 2020. The MRC has continued to build off these efforts through 2022, dedicating their retreat, four monthly meetings, and regular sub-committee meetings to work on the plan revision, which is now complete. as of the end of 2022.

Identification of the Strategic Actions by the MRC began at the annual retreat in December 2021 and continued over the course of the following three MRC meetings in January, February, and March of 2022. Actions to address threats associated with shoreline development and recreation and resource extraction were identified during the 2021 retreat while actions to address threats associated with shipping and boating, climate change, and invasions and food web dynamics occurred during the January, February, and March MRC meetings respectively. The MSA Subcommittee continued to work on refining the identified actions throughout the spring and early summer of 2022. As a part of this effort, they also identified and incorporated the actions listed in the Ecosystem Protection and Recovery Plan for San Juan County and the recently published Salmon Recovery Chapter Update.



In total 71 strategic actions have been identified that address the 5 core threats identified in the revised plan. The key objectives groups (KOGs) include:

- Climate Resilience
- Oil Spill Prevention and Preparedness
- Protect Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
- Enhance Nearshore Food Webs
- Reduce Human Impact
- Improve Regulatory Compliance
- Ensure Shoreline Functioning
- Reduce Vessel Impacts
- Upgrade Marine Infrastructure
- Partner Coordination

With the plan revision now finalized, the MRC will host a Marine Managers Workshop in Spring 2023 that will once again bring together marine managers, researchers, non-profits, and others active in the management and conservation of the MSA's marine resources to prioritize the list of Strategic Actions and re-engage partners on areas for collaboration.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Completed the revision of the MSA Plan.
- Identified 5 core threats impacting the MSA
- Identified 71 Strategic Actions categorized into 9 Key Objective Groups.



san juan county
marine stewardship area
our sea • our source • our future



OIL SPILL PREVENTION

The risk of a major oil spill is of huge concern to the County. It was identified as the highest-ranking threat to marine biodiversity in the 2007 Marine Stewardship Area Plan and was again identified as a top threat at the 2020 Marine Managers Workshop. The MRC works closely with the County, the San Juan Local Integrating Organization (LIO), and local non-profit organizations to further efforts toward oil spill prevention.



2022 was marked by the sinking of the FV Aleutian Isle in Haro Strait. After the boat sank on Aug. 13, the vessel eventually settled to a depth of ~240 feet off the west coast of San Juan Island. The boat sank with up to 2,500 gallons of diesel fuel on board and a visible sheen appeared in Haro Strait. Members of the Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) J pod were spotted swimming just 5 miles south of the sunken ship, but they thankfully headed west toward the Pacific and away from San Juan Island before encountering the sheen. County staff and MRC members played an important role during, and in the aftermath of this incident participating in shoreline surveys, disseminating information to the public through social media, and hosting the Director of San Juan County Department of Emergency Management for a situation debrief at the September MRC meeting. The MRC also decided to draft a letter to County Council and the incident response team highlighting some of their most important concerns about the response itself to help better prepare our county for similar incidents in the future.



FALSE BAY MONITORING

False Bay, a biological preserve managed by The University of Washington's Friday Harbor Labs, has great ecological and recreational significance in the region. Marine algal blooms of ulvoids have become an increasing concern in False Bay. *Ulva* spp. blooms occur in the bay each summer, affecting marine life and human enjoyment of the area, and there are concerns that increased bloom intensity also negatively affects eelgrass beds at the mouth of the bay. However, there is little consistent historical data on seasonal changes in *Ulva* spp. mat density.

In 2021, Dr. Wendel Raymond and MRC member Dr. Megan Dethier of Friday Harbor Labs initiated an *Ulva* spp. monitoring project to provide a better understanding of which drivers may be influencing *Ulva* spp. growth in the bay. San Juan Marine Resources Committee (MRC) took the lead on this monitoring effort in 2022. They focused on monitoring mat density and density changes throughout the summer season. The San Juan MRC and Friday Harbor Labs (FHL) jointly supervised an intern to lead a monthly monitoring effort. The data collected in the summer of 2022 helps create a reference point from which research and management decisions can be made. The goal of the project was to generate a relative reference point of abundance and distribution data on *Ulva* spp. mats in False Bay during the summer. The effort included:

- Monthly surveys of *Ulva* spp. density in False Bay from May-August
- Create an *Ulva* spp. mat density map of False Bay during summer.



WHAT'S NEXT?



The San Juan MRC is expanding its core project list in the 2022-2023 grant year. The MRC is excited to embark on new projects in 2023. These include:

- **Cattle Point Interpretive Area-** DNR has granted the County and the MRC permission to create and install durable educational and interpretive signage, and curate local marine art to install within the existing building.
- **Jackson Beach Creosote Piling Removal-** Removal of 117 derelict creosote pilings from Jackson Beach on San Juan Island. The location is a documented surf smelt and Pacific sandlance spawning beach.
- **Outreach to address small oil spills in San Juan County-** With increased vessel traffic in the San Juans over the last few years, small oil spills at local marinas/fueling stations have increasingly become an issue. The cumulative effect of these small spills can have an enormous impact and the MRC would like to conduct boater outreach and awareness in order to encourage more responsible boating behavior. These efforts will be done in partnership with IOSA and WA Sea Grant.
- **Vessel Impact Plan for Ecosystem Recovery in the San Juan Islands-** The San Juan Islands have long been a premier destination for boaters. Boating has significantly increased in recent years, underscoring the need to manage impacts more effectively to protect our sensitive marine habitats. This project will develop management actions that preserve sensitive and critical eelgrass habitats, support a positive boating experience, provide unhindered access to Coast Salish Usual and Accustomed Treaty fishing and harvesting areas, and will serve as a model across Puget Sound.



PARTNERS

The work of the San Juan County MRC is made possible through grants, collaborations, and partnerships.



This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.



SAN JUAN COUNTY Marine Resources Committee

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Many of the photographs used throughout this report have been contributed by MRC members, staff, or partners. Credits and descriptions are provided below.

Cover page - Floating Kelp, Unknown

Page 1 - A Washington State Ferry moving through the Islands, *Unkown*

Page 2 - Eelgrass, *Phil Green*

Page 3 - Aerial photo of the San Juans, *US Coast Guard*

Page 4 - Clean-up volunteers, *Kelsy Kittleson*

Page 5 - Hikers walking along San Juan shoreline, *unknown*

Page 6 - San Juan Island westside sunset, *unknown*

North Shore Orcas Island, San Juan Preservation Trust

Page 7 - County Staff meeting with Congressman Rick Larsen at False Bay;

False Bay Visitor Outreach, Frances Robertson

False Bay Visitor Outreach, Frances Robertson

Page 8 - Trash collected during a beach clean effort. *San Juan County*

Page 9 - San Juan County Marine Program staff with young family at Jackson Beach

San Juan County Solid Waste and Marine Program staff with Lautenbach staff, unknown

Page 10 - Derelict Vessel in Friday Harbor, *San Juan County*

Page 11 - Eelgrass protection marker at Odlin County Park, *Frances Robertson*

Boats anchored in Blind Bay, Carl Davis

Page 12 - Moon Jellies, *Katy Foster*

Page 13 - Aerial view of the islands and recreational vessels, *Unknown*

Page 14 - FV Aleutian Isle being raised; Boom protecting San Juan County Park

following sinking of the FV Aleutian Isle, US Coast Guard

Page 15 - False Bay Monitoring; False Bay Preserve, *Frances Robertson*

False Bay, Unknown

Page 16 - Pacific Sand Lance, *Friends of the San Juans*

Sea Otter resting at the surface, Katy Foster

Page 17- 4th of July Beach at Low Tide, *Frances Robertson*

Page 18 - Eelgrass bed, *WA DNR*

