

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

San Juan County
Marine Resource
Committee



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ABOUT THE MRC

The San Juan County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is an 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 1996 as a local management alternative to an initiative for establishing a national marine sanctuary in the San Juans. In addition to policy issues, the MRC supports marine research and planning and provides education and outreach.

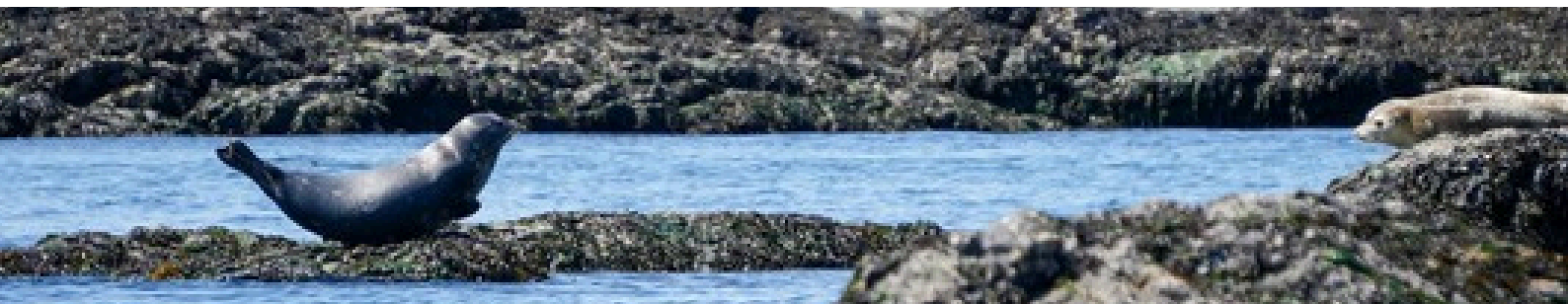
MRC GOALS

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.





SAN JUAN COUNTY
Marine Resources
Committee

MEMBERSHIP

The San Juan MRC is currently comprised of representatives from San Juan County, the Tulalip Tribal government, UW’s Friday Harbor Labs, environmental organizations, marine-based businesses, and residents, all of whom bring a diversity of perspectives and expertise to the San Juan MRC. This year the MRC said goodbye to Craig Smith. The committee welcomed Joey Ullman and Charles Bookman. In 2025, the committee wanted to expand to include the voices of youth within the community. Two youth representatives were added, and everyone is excited to welcome Flora Vaught and Lola Walker.

MRC Members:

Adam Parrott, Chair	Karin Roemers-Kleven, Vice Chair
Beth Tate, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife	Kendra Smith, Director, Department of Env. Stewardship
Christina Koons, Orcas Island	Lovel Pratt, Friends of the San Juans
Patti Gobin, Tulalip Tribes	Mike Ramsey, San Juan Island
Craig Smith, San Juan Island	Brian Goodremont, San Juan Outfitters
David Checkley, Shaw Island	Matt Arata, A1 Marine
Olivia Graham, Friday Harbor Labs	Charles Bookman, Lopez Island
Kailey Genter, San Juan Island	Joey Ullman, Orcas Island
Lola Walker, Orcas Island Youth Rep	Flora Vaught, San Juan Island Youth Rep
Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria, Friday Harbor Labs	

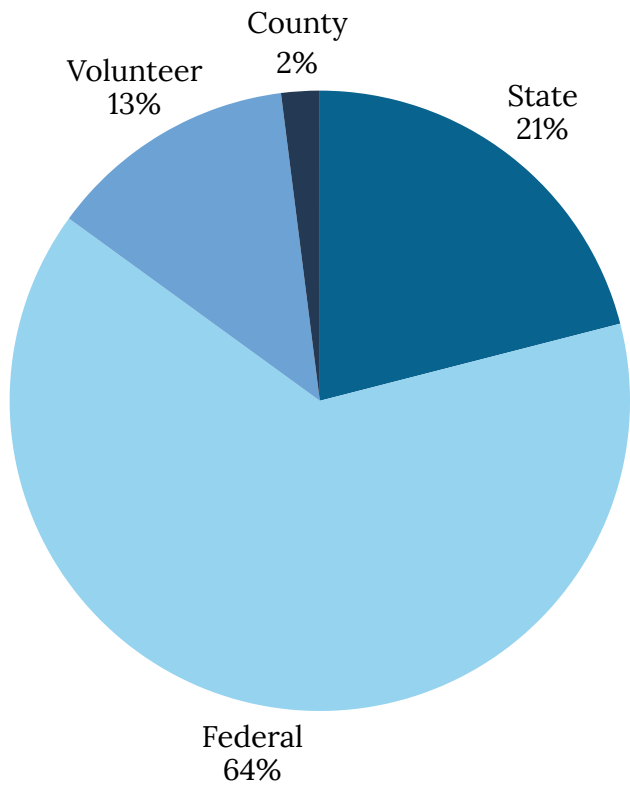
Ex-Officio and Support Staff:

Sam Whitridge, Marine Program Coordinator Kari Koski, Derelict Vessel Coordinator
 Dr. Frances Robertson, Marine Project Manager Katie Johnson, Marine Project Coordinator
 Jane Fuller, San Juan County Council



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 invaluable support for the program.



\$33,497 Value of volunteer hours

2025 VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



779 hours

The value of community members volunteering their time, expertise, and resources cannot be emphasized enough. Over the 2024-2025 grant cycle, MRC members and volunteers put in good work towards protecting marine resources including conducting meetings, volunteering in monitoring efforts, participating in outreach and beach clean-ups.



13%

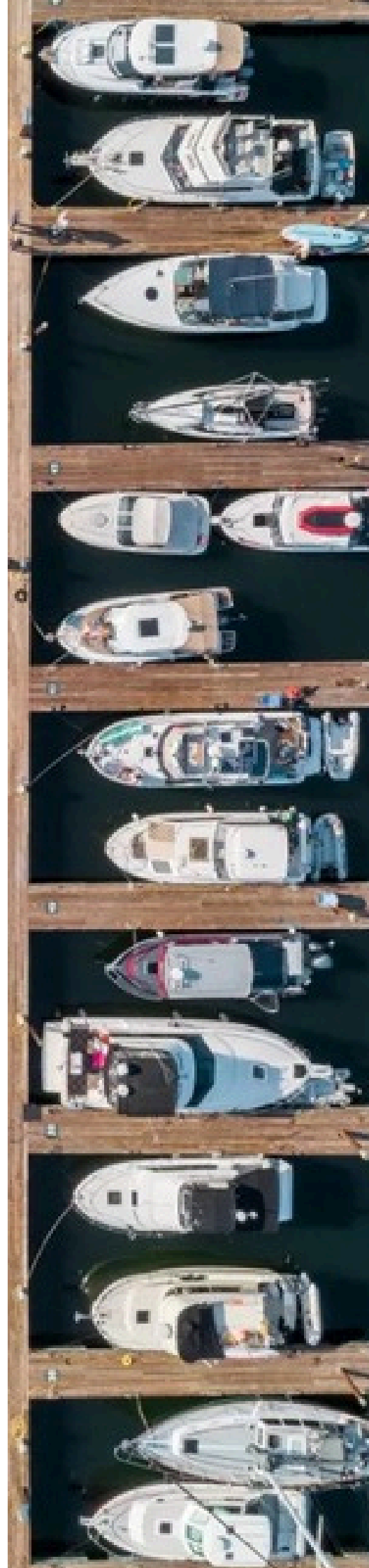
value of volunteer hours and resources 2024-2025

MRC OPERATIONS

The MRC continued its regular operations throughout 2025, carrying on with collaborative meeting structure developed in 2022. We have integrated the MRC, Salmon Recovery Citizens Advisory Group (CAG), and Local Integrating Organization (LIO) committee meetings, while still maintaining committee autonomy and independent membership. MRC members regularly attend the CAG and LIO meetings, which allows for increased efficiency and better cross pollination across committees.

The MRC was represented at regular LIO regional meetings by Adam Parrott, Sam Whitridge, and Katie Johnson, contributing to scope and funding decisions for LIO implementation. The MRC was represented on the Northwest Straits Commission by Christina Koons.

MRC members and support staff participated in the annual Northwest Straits Initiative Conference in November. The two-day event was filled with inspiration for how to achieve full MRC potential, words of wisdom from legislature, and artistic ways to celebrate the marine environment.



ADVISORY ROLE

The MRC has been involved in advising the County on matters related to marine resources since its inception in 1996. This advisory role is a critical part of the MRC's activities and has a widespread impact on San Juan County.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The MRC provides scientifically based guidance on issues that affect the County's marine environment. Core advisory actions for 2025 included:

- OPALCO tidal energy proposal, including drafting a comment letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Public comment on the value of marine programs integrated into county government.



SALMON RECOVERY

The MRC also undertakes the role of the Citizen's Advisory Group for Salmon Recovery in Water Resource Inventory Area #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 one of the most important roles the MRC undertakes each year.

In 2025 the MRC helped to ensure that \$1.09 million dollars was awarded for Salmon Recovery Projects in San Juan County.



San Juan County Lead Entity for Salmon Recovery

\$1.09M

Awarded to Salmon Recovery in
San Juan County 2025

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

With over 400 miles of shoreline and 400 rocks, reefs, and islands, communicating the importance of marine resources is a large undertaking. The majority of the San Juan County Marine Resource Committee'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.

MARINE STEWARDSHIP

In 2025, the MRC built upon its work to advance marine stewardship by securing County Council approval of the State of the Marine Stewardship Area Report and expanding outreach to partners and decision-makers. This report highlights the unique characteristics and challenges of maintaining a healthy marine ecosystem in the San Juan Islands and provides recommendations for future management and conservation efforts. The MRC focused on sharing this roadmap more broadly by engaging at community events and coordinating with state agencies to align priorities and strengthen partnerships.

Under the umbrella of marine stewardship, the MRC continues to serve as a connector—bringing together scientists and researchers, marina operators, and recreational boating and fishing managers. Together with the MRC, we are helping protect the marine resources that define the San Juans.



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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Received Council approval for the State of the Marine Stewardship Area Report
- Engaged community members and visitors through tabling and public events
- Increased visitor awareness of marine stewardship opportunities.

SOUTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALE OUTREACH

Beginning in 2025, Washington State increased the distance regulations for Southern Resident Killer Whales. Vessels need to leave 1,000 yards of space in order to give these endangered whales enough space to hunt, travel and socialize. The MRC engaged with the boating community by providing information about the updated regulations. Letting boaters know about policy changes and providing education about why these whales in particular need extra space is a large part of our outreach work.

Over 100 Whale Warning flags were passed out at dock talks and other events throughout the year, including the Seattle Boat Show, University of Washington' Friday Harbor Labs Open House, and the San Juan County Fair. Lead by youth interns and volunteers, these events engaged people in ways to protect marine resources, like Southern Resident killer whales, and raise awareness of the San Juan County Marine Stewardship Area.



SOUTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALE OUTREACH

Another way the MRC helped to demonstrate this change in distance was to host an Orca Recovery Day event in the form of a fun run. “Dash the Distance, Walk for Whales” brought together community members, whale enthusiasts, researchers, conservation organizations to walk or run 1,000 yards along the beach.

Our summer intern, Sonora Tate produced three educational videos about utilizing the Whale Warning Flag, knowing regulations and safe distancing, and local whale and salmon sanctuary zones. These videos can be found on the MRC website and on YouTube. Check them out!



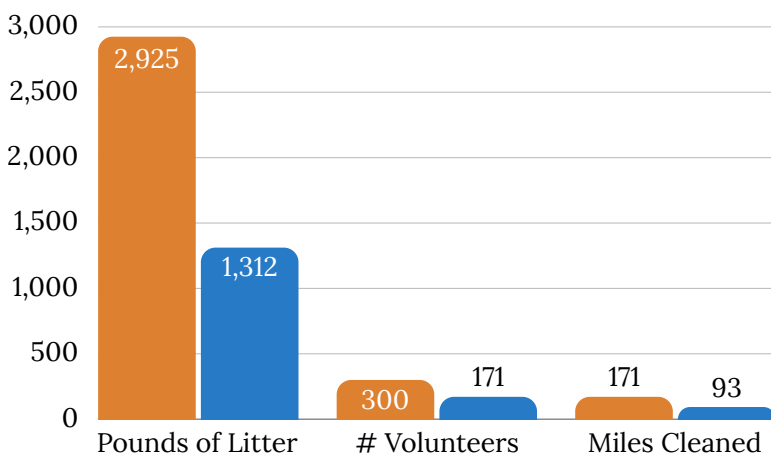
ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Spread awareness about new boating distance rules to give Southern Resident Killer Whales more space including a family fun run/dash.
- Successfully engaged recreational boaters at Roche Harbor Marina on San Juan Island
- Passed out over 100 Whale Warning Flags, through events, tabling and email inquiries.
- Engaged with Be Whale Wise partners at the local and state level to ensure whale warning flags have appropriate materials conveying distance messaging.
- Produced educational videos for boaters about safe regulations and tips for boating amidst SRKW.

PLASTIC FREE SALISH SEA

Plastic Free Salish Sea continues to inspire our community to keep plastics out of marine waters through monthly beach clean ups, the Adopt-a-Beach and Adopt-a-Road programs, the bi-annual and beloved Great Islands Cleanup. The major highlight of 2025 was how many people took part in keeping the Salish Sea plastic free!

A series of spring monthly beach cleanups helped tackle the ongoing microplastics issue at Jackson Beach. Host organizations included the Youth Conservation Corps, ASCFME Local 1849, San Juan Island Visitors Bureau, the SJI Pride Foundation. Plastic Free Salish Sea also partnered with the San Juan Island Yacht Club and Washington State Parks. Over a long weekend, Yacht Club members volunteered their time and sailboats to travel between Jones, Stuart, and Sucia Islands, helping to clean up beaches at these beloved marine parks.



It was inspiring to collaborate with a new group of volunteers who share a deep passion for the Salish Sea and a strong commitment to protecting and caring for our marine environment.

At the San Juan County Fair, PFSS hosted a Litter Critter Lab. This interactive activity invited youth and adults to transform pieces of plastic from the County's plastic film recycling bin into whimsical "critters," turning pollution into playful art. As participants assembled their creations, they learned about how plastic litter affects marine life and the overall health of the Salish Sea. The activity was well-received, drawing steady participation throughout the fair and sparking meaningful conversations about waste, reuse, and creativity.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Hosted 5 monthly beach clean ups, gathering 114 individual volunteers
- Successfully hosted bi-annual Great Islands Cleanup Events engaging over 300 separate volunteers made up of the public, boat clubs, kayak groups, and student groups
- Engaged children and the community in a Litter Critter Lab at the San Juan County Fair
- Ran successful social media campaign for Plastic Free July
- Continued to inspire beach and road stewards to complete clean ups and share data from what they find
- Continued to support SJC Solid Waste program with the plastic film recycling bin on San Juan Island.

PREVENTION

Prevention efforts are hard to quantify, but ultimately prevention is much more cost effective than responding to active threats. Being prepared and aware before a disaster strikes makes a huge difference for wildlife and human health, as well as ecological, recreational and economic impacts. Preventing marine hazards, like derelict vessels and oil spills, helps to keep marine waters safe, minimizes risk, and safeguards all who call the Salish Sea home.

OIL SPILL PREVENTION

The greatest threat to the Marine Stewardship Area is a catastrophic oil spill—being prepared is critical to an effective response. One way the MRC plays a role in oil spill prevention is to be prepared. MRC members and staff participated in the Island’s Oil Spill Association (IOSA) multi-agency response exercise. The exercise simulated key aspects of a large-scale spill, testing San Juan County’s local response plans and the deployment of on-island responders. It also served to deepen coordination among agency and industry partners and IOSA.



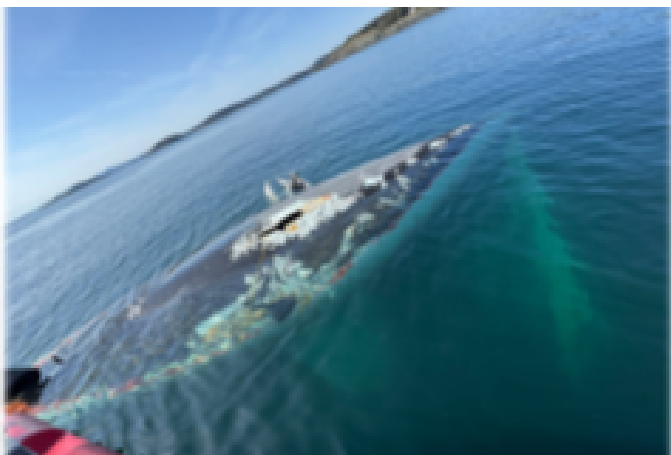
In 2025, MRC members also shared oil spill prevention tips to boaters at dock talks, pass out anti-spill stickers, and continue to raise awareness around risk. This issue is not just specific to San Juan County, but with increased vessel traffic to the Port of Vancouver in British Columbia it is also a transboundary issue of concern. County Council meets annually with the Islands Trust Council to discuss this threat.

DERELICT VESSEL PREVENTION PROGRAM

Preventing vessels from becoming derelict continues to be the key focus of the San Juan County and Marine Resources Committee's Derelict Vessel Program. For over a decade, San Juan County and the Marine Resources Committee have partnered to reduce the hazards posed to the marine environment through prevention and removal of vessels in county waters. Conducting regular vessel patrols to identify Vessels of Concern (VOC), recording vessel information for tracking and reaching out to those vessel owners has proven to be the most successful prevention actions of the program. Contacting owners of VOC to share concerns, review their options, including public assistance programs, and reiterating the consequences of non-action most often results in owners taking responsibility for their vessels. Prevention work is often difficult to quantify, but the benefits far outweigh the tremendous cost of removals. Not only does prevention save money but it is a proactive approach to protecting the marine environment and preventing disasters.



Prevention work is conducted by the Department of Environmental Stewardship's Derelict Vessel Program Coordinator, members of the MRC's Derelict Vessel Subcommittee and community volunteers with assistance from the San Juan County Sheriff's Office, the Port of Friday Harbor and TowBoat US Friday Harbor. Prevention and removal work is supported by multiple federal and state agencies including Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Northwest Straits Commission.



The SJC Derelict Vessel Program actively works to engage the public in preventing and reporting derelict or abandoned vessels. In 2025, the DV program benefitted from the expertise of two interns within the County's marine and solid waste programs specializing in community outreach. The DV coordinator worked with the interns to create seasonal short-form videos for social media, DV reporting flyers, press releases and other creative tabletop media for dock talks at opening day boat festivities, marinas, fairs, and farmers markets where they and MRC volunteers had many generative face-to-face conversations with boaters. Placing Report & Prevent Derelict Vessels Posters at marinas, public and private docks, boat launches, parks and on the ferries is an effective way to remind people to be a part of the solution by reporting funky looking vessels when they see them- not just complaining about them.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

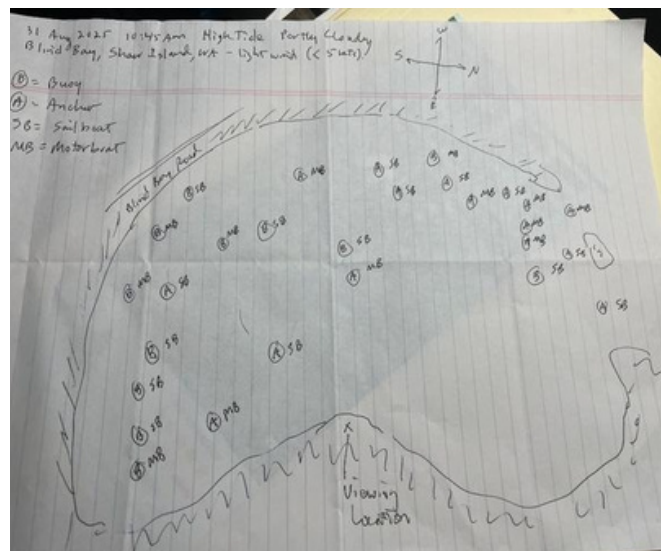
- Performed 13 on-water vessel patrols and 21 shore-based monitoring patrols to identify, follow-up or check on vessels throughout the county.
- 27 vessels in county tagged with Vessel of Concern (VOC) notices (9 New, 11 Known Problems, 7 Re-tagged) and 31 on Watch status, all added to the DV database.
- 20 vessel owners responded to VOC notices/follow up (5 remedied problems, 3 sold vessels, 4 removed from the water, 8 surrendered vessels to VTIP program).
- Widespread community outreach by social media videos, tabling at events and posters at boating locations promoting how to prevent and report derelict vessels.
- 15 vessels were removed in San Juan County in 2025. 5 by San Juan County Derelict Vessel Removal Program including: 2 previously VOC tagged sailboats drifting anchor, 1 large power boat of a deceased vessel owner, 1 illegally moored vessel and 1 capsized sailboat secured by SJC DVP and later removed by DNR; 2 vessels removed in San Juan County by DNR & Washington State Parks; SJC DVP assisted 8 county vessel owners using the WA DNR Voluntary Turn-in Program to surrender their vessels.
- Assisted with removing 2 large Marine Debris events plus 1 car in False Bay
- Assisted with Great Islands Clean-up efforts on outer Islands
- Assisted with securing a drifting vessel expediting DNR removal efforts

RESEARCH & MONITORING

Research and monitoring studies are essential to provide the scientific foundation needed to protect and restore local marine ecosystems. Data collected through local monitoring efforts empowers the MRC to make strategic, evidence-based recommendations that protect critical habitat and strengthen the long-term resilience of marine environments.

KELP & EELGRASS PROTECTION

Healthy, flourishing eelgrass beds are vital to Puget Sound recovery but are in decline in the San Juan Islands. To better protect the important marine vegetation in San Juan County, the MRC participates in monitoring efforts at known eelgrass zones. 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). During the 2025 boating season 62 shore-based vessel surveys were conducted at 12 different sites throughout the San Juan Islands including Beaverton Cove, Bell Point, Blind Bay, Buck Bay, Crescent Beach, Eastsound, Friday Harbor, Mud/Hunter Bay, Odlin County Park, Parks Bay Reserve, Spencer Spit, and Watmough Bay.



The only current designated Anchor Out buoy is located at Odlin County Park. This site continues to be documented as effective for keeping boats from anchoring in sensitive habitats with very few boats at rest in this location over the past few years. With eelgrass beds in decline it is hopeful to see this buoy preventing further loss.

In late September, the MRC co-hosted a Kelp Soiree at the San Juan Island Museum of Art in conjunction with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, Above/Below, Friends of the San Juans, Friday Harbor Labs and the Sammish Indian Nation. The evening was a wonderful celebration of art, storytelling, and camaraderie around kelp. Many thanks to all who attended and especially those that made this event possible.

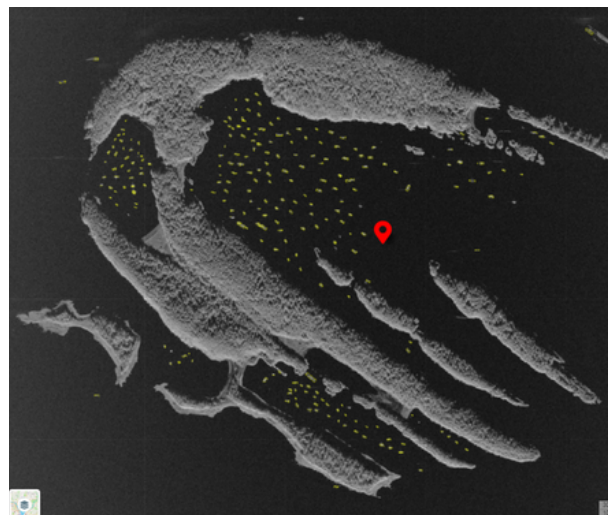
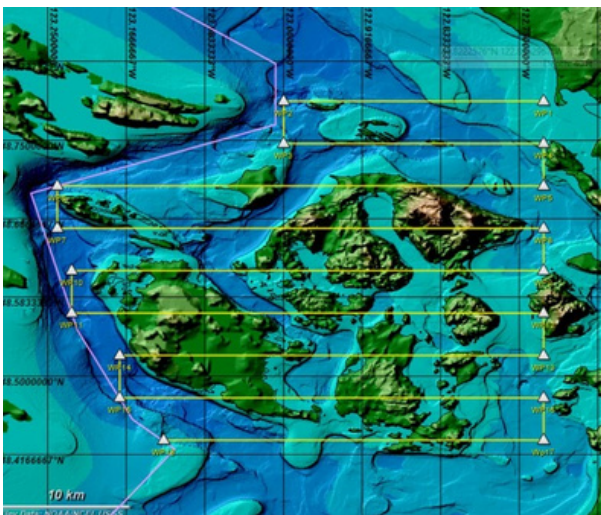
ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Vessel compliance monitoring at Odlin Anchor Out Zone
- Maintenance of Odlin Anchor Out buoys
- Completed 62+ shore based vessel monitoring surveys throughout the busy boating season.
- In partnership with other kelp and eelgrass enthusiasts, co-hosting a Kelp Soire at the San Juan Island Museum of Art.



VESSEL DENSITY SURVEYS

In 2025, the MRC built on the work started in 2024 by taking a closer look at where and how boats are using the waters around San Juan County, one of the most heavily visited boating destinations in the country. While earlier surveys helped identify boating “hot spots” and gave early estimates of how many boats were on the water, the 2025 work added more layers to the data by overlaying resource areas with those zones of high use. More aerial surveys were completed during the summer, along with counts at popular anchorages, helping confirm where boats gather most often and when activity is highest.



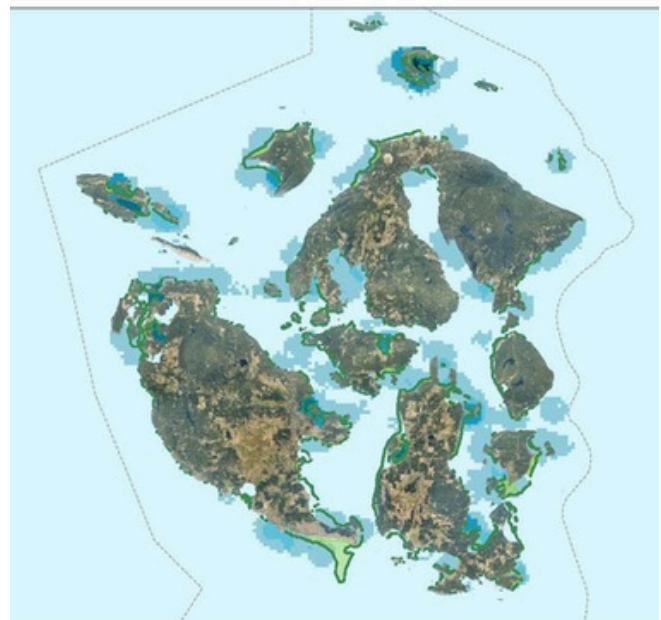
This work represents the first successful application of distance sampling methods to vessel monitoring at this scale in San Juan County. Findings show that an estimated 1,200–1,500 vessels occupy county waters on typical summer weekends, with notable overlap between high vessel density and critical habitats such as eelgrass beds and important shellfish areas.



This phase of the vessel assessment addresses a critical gap in understanding how boating activity overlaps with sensitive marine habitats already experiencing decline, including eelgrass and kelp. Sharing the results of the initial vessel survey with marine scientists and tribal resource managers gave us insight into where protection efforts should be focused. The MRC is helping to identify areas that need greater protections and explore management strategies to do this. It is a balance of protecting these important areas, while still making sure people can enjoy being out on the water.



Vessel Density and Eelgrass Habitat



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Flew 8 days of aerial surveys from May through September 2025, with 2 county-wide surveys flown during each sampling day
- Counted 10,196 vessels over the 8 survey days, (*not including those at marinas or private docks*) averaging 970 vessels per survey day with a peak count of 1,192 vessels on Labor Day Weekend
- Completed technical reports and mapped density hotspots
- Undertook a preliminary assessment of satellite image technology for monitoring vessel presence.

BENTHIC HABITAT STUDY

Seafloor mapping studies throughout the Salish Sea can give us insight into the depth and composition of the seabed, but there are data gaps. In an effort to fill those gaps the MRC worked with scientists to map the shallow, east side of Lopez Sound. Gary Greene and Emily Roland presented results to the MRC about their findings from the benthic habitat surveys of Lopez Sound, funded through the 2024 OTGP. It was fascinating to learn about their methodology in mapping the shallow seabed and discovering what lies beneath. Using multibeam sonar (MBES) they were able to detect cable crossings, derelict fishing gear, and other signs of human activity. The maps also show the range of eelgrass meadows, tidal scour marks, and can detect changes in seafloor substrate. This data provides important insight into missing details on the map, allowing for better understanding of habitats and potential human impact, which can influence management recommendations.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Multibeam sonar (MBES) survey data collected for roughly two-thirds of Lopez Sound.
- Constructed comprehensive benthic habitat map.
- Shared results and data, including GID layers, bathymetric imagery and conclusions.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The San Juan MRC will continue expanding upon its core project list in the 2025-2026 grant year. Maintaining momentum for Plastic Free Salish Sea, derelict vessel prevention, eelgrass protection, and marine stewardship is fundamental to continued protection and recovery of marine resources in the Salish Sea. In addition to our core work, the MRC is excited to embark on the following project in 2026:

- **Kelp and Eelgrass Community Engagement** - With the completion and adoption of the State of the Marine Stewardship Area Report (2024) now is the time to focus on a dedicated outreach strategy. Using kelp and eelgrass as the first focal point, the MRC will create a plan for community engagement including educational signage at key locations, events and celebrations, and helping the community understand the Marine Stewardship Area. It is more than just a designation or set of recommendations, but a powerful tool to emphasize protection and collaboration.



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.

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.

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