



THE BRANT

VOLUME 4

FRIENDS OF DUNGENESS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

AUTUMN 2019

2019 End of Season Picnic

Refuge staff, volunteers, and Friends gathered on a sunny Thursday in mid-October for the annual end of season picnic.

Visit the Friends web site:
Learn more about Friends,
become a contributing member,
or make a donation.
<http://www.fodnwr.org>



Photo: Brian R. Blais



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Photo: Gary Tarleton/USFWS



Photo: Brian R. Blais

Highlights from the 2019 Annual Meeting

by Jeanie McNamara

The annual meeting of the Friends of the Dungeness NWR was held in the conference room of the Refuge on November 14, 2019.

- Our main checking account increased by \$3,323.80. Most of this income came from our new Iron Ranger which we installed at the Kiosk in August 2017.
- Because of this we established a \$2,000 grant for unfunded Refuge projects and were able to establish an annual John and Margaret Maxwell Future of Conservation Award for Sequim High School students.
- Additionally we administer a renewable \$10,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Refuge projects including invasive species, biological services, volunteer support, and visitor services.
- The Refuge Protection committee continues to support the National Wildlife Refuge System regarding regional and national concerns.
- The Weed Warriors have been very active with restoration of Protection Island, removal of invasive species on the San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge, the genetic testing of invasive green crabs, and restoration of the oak savannah and native plant meadow near Refuge headquarters.
- The present board members were nominated and elected to serve another term.

Your donation to assist Friends in all of this important work can be put into the blue Iron Ranger at the Refuge entrance, mailed to Friends of DNWR at 715 Holgerson Rd, Sequim, WA 98382, or made a donation with your credit card on our web site: <http://www.fodnwr.org>

Volunteer opportunities are available. Email Friends at fodnwr@gmail.com for more information.



Mushrooms along the trail in October. Photo by Jason West

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FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Bruce Brod, Treasurer

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Dungeness Bay and the Washington Maritime National Refuge Complex Support Seabirds of the North Pacific

By Judi White

Tufted Puffin, the charismatic and iconic seabird of the Pacific Northwest, has the best of both worlds. It can fly above AND below water. The alcid family of diving seabirds in the Dungeness area also includes Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet, Ancient Murrelet and Marbled Murrelet. These seabirds have strong, short wings that can propel them at speeds up to 50 mph under water, while diving to depths of up to 600 feet, and most seem more comfortable and graceful under water than above it. Similar to penguins of the Southern Hemisphere, alcids in the Northern Hemisphere have compact bodies and short necks. Unlike penguins which cannot fly, today's alcids retained the ability to fly in the air. Their rapidly whirring wings propel them at high speed in the air, but they cannot soar.



Tufted Puffin Photo: Judi White



Common Murre Photo: Judi White

Protection Island supports one of the largest breeding colonies of Rhinoceros Auklets in the world, as well as significant breeding populations of Pigeon Guillemots, and is one of the last two breeding sites for Tufted Puffins in the Salish Sea. These seabirds excavate burrows for nesting, and most return to the open sea after breeding. Protection Island, part of the Washington Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Complex, can be seen from the Dungeness Spit, New Dungeness Lighthouse and Marlyn Nelson County Park at Port Williams.

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The Dungeness Spit Photo: Jason West

Seabirds of the North Pacific

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Even though they do not nest in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, thousands of Common Murres migrate in August and September into the Strait from nesting colonies along the outer Pacific Ocean, perhaps from as far as Oregon and California. In late summer, Common Murre chicks jump from their nesting cliffs when they are only about one-fifth the mass of their parents, and unable to fly. After jumping, the little chicks swim away to sea with their fathers, calling and begging to be fed. The adults also molt their flight feathers at the same time and become flightless as well. All the murres then migrate by swimming hundreds of miles along the coast into the Strait, ending up in large flocks in the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca. They are one of the main participants in local feeding flocks. From August to November, Common Murres far outnumber local-nesting Rhinoceros Auklets and Pigeon Guillemots in the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca.



Pigeon Guillemots on the bluffs at Dungeness NWR Photo: Jason West

Marbled Murrelet's nesting sites were more of a mystery, only discovered in 1974. These diving seabirds nest along the Pacific Coast, high in broad moss-covered branches of large trees greater than 200 years old. Both parents fly inland up to 50 miles each way to these rare nest-trees, carrying one small fish for their young chick, several times a day. Once the young bird is able to fly, it flies directly to nearshore waters and begins diving for small fishes on its own.

Diving seabirds are especially dependent of small fishes, often termed "forage fish," to provide the concentrated energy they need for diving, flying and rearing healthy chicks. The waters of the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca and Admiralty Inlet provide fertile forage fishing grounds. These nutritious schools of forage fish are a crucial link in the food chain, supporting not just birds but a wide range of larger fish and marine mammals. Monitoring and restoration of forage fish populations in the Salish Sea is an area of intense environmental and legislative action.

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Rhinoceros Auklet Photo: Judi White



Pigeon Guillemot Photo: Judi White



Marbled Murrelet Photo: Judi White

Seabirds of the North Pacific

Continued from page 4

One of the most important Salish Sea forage fish is the Pacific herring, which spawn in eelgrass beds. Native eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a flowering shallow water plant that needs soft-sediment habitat like that found in the Dungeness Bay. As the Dungeness River travels down from the mountains bringing soil and nutrients to the Bay, it mixes with salt water to create one of the premier Pacific Northwest estuaries, the Dungeness Bay. Here, one of the largest eelgrass beds in the Greater Puget Sound is found. Eelgrass beds are so important to the ecology of the Greater Puget Sound that the Washington State Department of Natural Resources closely monitors and protects eelgrass beds through the Nearshore Habitat Program and Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Project, but despite this protection, the eelgrass beds and local herring populations have declined in Dungeness Bay. In addition to the spawning Pacific herring, Dungeness Bay eelgrass stabilizes shorelines and supports young salmon and steelhead, crab, shrimp, shellfish, and thousands of Brant geese and other over-wintering waterfowl, which prefer it as a food source.

The nutrient-rich Dungeness River, our premier Dungeness Bay estuary and eelgrass beds, and the Washington Maritime National Refuge Complex together support the iconic Greater Puget Sound ecosystem from Puffins to marine mammals. Protect and enjoy this magnificent resource.



Rhinoceros Auklet Photo: Judi White



Dungeness Bay as viewed from Cline Spit Photo: Jason West



Pigeon Guillemots/DNWR Photo: Jason West

Green Crab Update

The Green Crab Team have been busy this year!

Our activities were highlighted in the most recent Washington Sea Grant's Crab Team newsletter:

- 30 volunteers have spent 230 days out on the spit since 2017
- More than 1,000 hours spent this season
- The number of green crab captured at Dungeness Spit is greater than any other spot along the inland shores of Washington.
- To date 222 European green crabs have been captured here. It has taken more than 8,800 trap sets to capture that many crab in the three trapping sites on the spit.



Invasive Green Crab Photo: Jason West

Oyster Farm – Decision Pending

On November 21, 2019 Clallam County hearing examiner Andrew Reeves received final public input on the proposed oyster farm. Both opponents and supporters of the proposal gave testimony. The hearing examiner extended his decision deadline to January 10, 2020 due to the volume of material to be reviewed. Friends will post an update on the web site when a decision is made.



Clallam County hearing Photo: Jason West

New Maps and Signs for the Refuge

Volunteer and Friends member Jason West, having 25 years of signage and map design experience, worked with Dave Falzetti and the Refuge staff to develop new maps for signage throughout the Refuge. New sign map panels will be installed soon. Three additional new signs will emphasize boating rules and how to access the Refuge. These will be located at Cline Spit, Dungeness Landing, and New Dungeness Lighthouse. The goal with the new signs is to help visitors find their way to the Refuge trailhead and encourage boaters to keep a safe distance from wildlife habitat.

One challenge the new maps should help resolve is directing visitors unfamiliar with the area to the Refuge entrance. GPS directions often direct to Cline Spit County Park. At times visitors have parked here and walked along the shore to the Refuge which is a violation, and can be dangerous with changing tides and weather conditions.

The new signs also make it more clear to boaters that they may only land at the lighthouse with a reservation, and keep a buffer from the spit.



New maps direct to entry Photo: Jason West