

# Wonders OF THE SALISH SEA

2026 webinar series

Photo: Katrina White

## 2026 Newsletter 2

**In this newsletter:** 1. March 23 presentations 2. In-person viewings 3. Prizes and Prompts 4. Field Trips 5. Did you know? 6. Upcoming Events 7. In the news | Read | Watch 8. Connect with us! 9. Meet the WSS 2026 planning committee

Hello everyone,

It's less than a week until the start of **Wonders of the Salish Sea (WSS) 2026!** We're delighted to see people registering from Puget Sound all the way to Desolation Sound—a wonderful representation of this bi-national ecosystem.

There's always room in WSS, so please feel free to share program information with your friends and colleagues.

If you have any questions about the program, email us at [salish.wonders@gmail.com](mailto:salish.wonders@gmail.com) or [gsa@georgistrait.org](mailto:gsa@georgistrait.org).

### 1. March 23 presentations—what a great start to WSS 2026!

7:00 - 7:55 PM

**Saturna Island in the Centre of the Salish Sea.  
Convergence of Unique Geography, Biodiversity,  
Human Activity**

*Maureen Welton*





Saturna Island occupies a unique position at the geographic centre of the Salish Sea, where distinctive marine geography, rich biodiversity, and intense human activity converge.

A visit to East Point can feel like standing at the edge of the world. Grasslands meet forest, sandstone cliffs drop to the sea, and the surrounding waters are alive with seals, sea lions, marine birds, and—on good days—orcas, humpback whales, and porpoises foraging close to shore.

But look a little longer and another reality appears. Commercial shipping lanes cut through the waters as tankers, container ships, and tug-and-barge traffic pass nearby. In the distance are the Cherry Point oil refinery, Delta Port, and the high-rise buildings of White Rock. Though Saturna feels remote, it sits at the heart of a region of more than eight million people.

This presentation explores what makes this location so productive—from underwater geography and ocean dynamics to the food webs that attract whales—and examines growing threats from vessel traffic, underwater noise, pollution, and climate change.

The talk also highlights the work of the Saturna Island Marine Research & Education Society (SIMRES), a volunteer-led organization supporting research, education, data collection, and informed decision-making in this vital marine region.

### About the Speaker

**Maureen Welton** is a resident of Saturna Island, a founding member, and President of SIMRES. While not a scientist by training, her relationship with marine science began in earnest in 2002, when she purchased land at East Point and gained a front-row seat to one of the most dynamic marine environments in the Salish Sea. Nearly two decades later, her fascination with this ecosystem continues to deepen—fueling her work in community science and marine conservation. She holds an MBA in Sustainable Innovation after a career in international trade and design.



8:05 - 9:00 PM

## The Resilient Salish Sea

*Lynda Mapes*

Journalist and author Lynda Mapes reviews 30 years of science and trends in the Salish Sea. Water quality is better than in a generation, the great whales are back—with some important exceptions—and marine mammals are booming. These successes show the Salish Sea is resilient and responds to public policies to protect species and fight pollution.

### About the Speaker

**Lynda Mapes**, for 27 years, was a staff reporter at The Seattle Times, specializing in coverage of the environment, Indigenous cultures, and governments. She has been awarded numerous fellowships and honors, including twice winning the international KAVLI gold award for science journalism from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the world's largest professional science association. Lynda and two of her colleagues at the Times also were finalists for the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for local reporting. She has written seven books and is the winner of the 2021 National Outdoor Book Award, and 2021 Washington State Book Award for non-fiction.

## 2. Meet other Salish Sea lovers at in-person viewings!

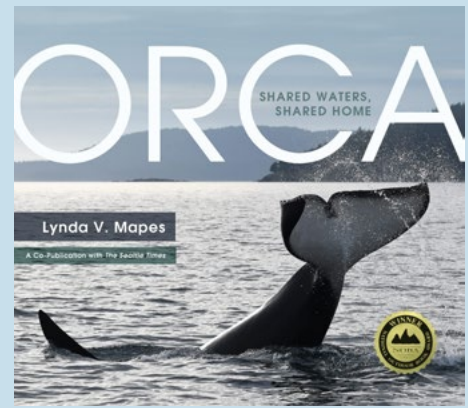
- ❖ **On March 23, the Patagonia store on 4th Ave, Vancouver, BC**, is offering their space for an in-person viewing of the first night's Zoom presentation. If you would like to attend, email [salish.wonders@gmail.com](mailto:salish.wonders@gmail.com) to give us an idea of numbers, or just drop by! I heard that there will be **treats**, and maybe even a **quiz prize** just for attendees!
- ❖ **On April 13, the Diving Locker store in Vancouver, BC**, will be opening up their space for a live “screening party” for the 3rd evening of WSS, hosted by Vancouver Queer Divers. All welcome! You can find more information and the [registration link here](#).
- ❖ **Would you like to organize an in-person viewing of a WSS evening?** Let us know at [salish.wonders@gmail.com](mailto:salish.wonders@gmail.com), and we can share the information in the next newsletter.



### 3. Prompts and Quizzes

As a way to get to know each other, we usually offer a discussion question to the group that can be answered in the Chat. If you have time, enter the Zoom meeting a bit early—we open it at 6:45 PM—and join the discussion. The discussion carries on during the break as well, which is from 7:55 to 8:05 PM.

**The Quiz!** The quiz question will be based on the first presentation of the evening, and will be announced at 7:55 pm. **To win**, enter your response in the Chat. The first correct answer wins! *Warning*—you need to be fast!



**The March 23 quiz book prize is** [Orca: Share Waters, Shared Home](#) by Lynda Mapes. You can find all of Lynda's books [here](#).

### 4. Field trips

There is one field trip being offered at this time. Stay tuned for more offerings coming soon.

#### **Intertidal Exploration at Vancouver's Stanley Park. Saturday, April 18 | 12:30–2:30 PM.**

The intertidal area off Figurehead Point in Stanley Park is submerged for part of the day, but as the tide recedes, surprising species are revealed. The exposed intertidal area becomes a stressful environment where only well-adapted species can survive. Who are these species, and what environmental conditions support their unique adaptations? Situated inside Vancouver Harbour, the flora, fauna, and algae that live here are surprisingly diverse.



**Join us on Saturday, April 18 | 12:30 - 2:30**, as we unravel these mysteries while searching for sea

stars, snails, crabs, clams, worms, seaweeds, and whatever else catches our eye! We'll follow the receding tide out to the rocky point at its lowest elevation of 0.6m, before gradually making our way back through the middle and high intertidal zones. This is the 10th year that WSS has offered this intertidal excursion to Stanley Park. In that time, some species have thrived while others have struggled to survive. What will we see this year?

**Our guides for this field trip are Sharon Adelman and Leesa Watt**, both long-time volunteers with the Vancouver Aquarium, and **Rebecca Hansen**, a marine biologist, ecologist, and researcher at the University of British Columbia. Rebecca was also a WSS speaker in 2025 on **Intertidal Ecology**. [You can watch that presentation here](#), beginning at the 40:45 minute mark. A great way to prepare for this field trip.

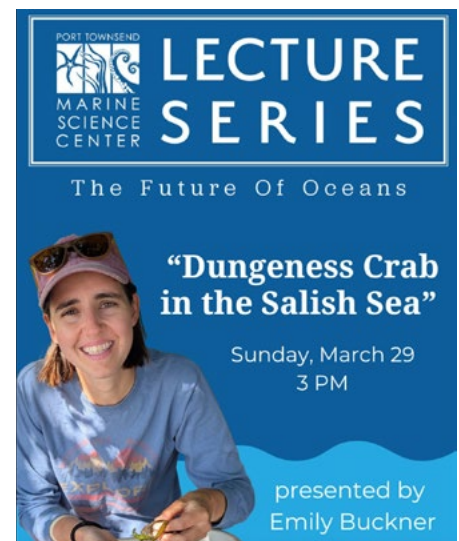


## 5. Did you know?

Have you ever found something on the shore and had no idea what it was? I once found these funny-shaped leathery things on the beach in Tofino. It turns out they were big skate egg cases, also called “mermaid’s purse.” Several skate embryos could have been inside! To learn more about skate cases and other mysterious marine life forms, [check out Sound Water Stewards’ “Beach Mysteries.”](#) Ever heard of a “By-the-wind-sailor??”

## 6. Upcoming events

- ❖ **March 24, 5 – 6 PM. PDT** [How are Salish Sea Stars Faring in our Ocean’s Menagerie?](#) Catch Friends of the San Juans Science Advisor Drew Harvell for one of her fantastic presentations on some super cool marine species, as well as incredible work that is being done in the Salish Sea. Online. Co hosts: NOAA’s Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and Feiro Marine Life Center
- ❖ **March 29, 3 PM,** [“Dungeness Crab in the Salish Sea: The Power of Collaborative Research.”](#) Emily Buckner will present on how a collaborative stakeholder-driven approach is generating new information on Dungeness crab in the Salish Sea. In-person at Wheeler Theater, Fort Worden State Park. WA. A [Port Townsend Marine Science Center](#) event.
- ❖ **March 30, 2026, 7:30 - 9:00 PM.** **Whale Sound: The Acoustic Tradition of Whales.** Janie Wray. Marine Night - Nature Victoria / Victoria Natural History Society. Online. [Register here.](#)
- ❖ **April 10 – 13, 2026.** [Brant Wildlife Festival.](#) The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region, BC, (MABR) is hosting a spring celebration of nature tied to the arrival of thousands of migrating birds to the shores of the Parkville and Qualicum beach areas. Activities available for all ages!
- ❖ **April 11 and 12, 2026, 11 AM– 3:30 PM.** Join [Orca Network](#) for their annual [“Welcome the Whales Festival and Parade!”](#) Welcome the ‘Sounders’ gray whales back to Puget Sound. There will be



fun and educational activities throughout the weekend. For more information about the “**Sounders**,” check out John Calambokidis’ 2022 WSS presentation: [‘Sounders’- the grey whales of Puget Sound](#).

- ❖ [Marine Naturalist Training Program](#). Whale Museum. Friday Harbor, WA.
  - » **April 14-19, 2026, 9:00-4:30**. In person. Wait list.
  - » **July 7-11, 2026. Hybrid**, virtual presentations and fieldtrips. 9-4. Some spots available.
- ❖ **Thursday, April 16, 2026 - Sunday April 19, 2026. [Olympic BirdFest 2026](#)**. Set on Washington State’s North Olympic Peninsula, between the million-acre Olympic National Park and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, this region is renowned for its rich birdlife and diverse habitats, making it one of the Pacific Northwest’s premier birding destinations.



**Do you have an upcoming education event to share?** Send the information to [salish.wonders@gmail.com](mailto:salish.wonders@gmail.com) and we can add it to the next newsletter.

## 7. IN THE NEWS

- ❖ [3 unidentified orcas spotted in Vancouver Harbour never before documented in BC](#). Experts say the unfamiliar whales could belong to a rarely seen killer whale population from the high seas. Shaurya Kshatri, CBC News, Mar 09, 2026
- ❖ [Killer whale moms struggle to regain body fat with more offspring](#). Drone photography reveals insights into northern resident orca motherhood. One and a half years of pregnancy, up to two years of nursing, then hunting and sharing food with their adult children who never leave. Anand Ram. CBC News, Mar 03, 2026.
- ❖ [From Vancouver Island to Howe Sound, spawning herring hit B.C.’s waters](#). The B.C. coastline is on the verge of one of its biggest natural events of the year: the annual herring spawn. John Kurucz, Times Colonist. March 2, 2026.
- ❖ [State resolution recognizes cross-border relationship with Canada](#). Washington’s ties with Canada were celebrated when Senator and WWU Associate Professor of Economics Sharon Shewmake’s resolution SR 8696, “recognizing Washington’s interconnected relationship with Canada,” was adopted and signed. WWU News, February 27, 2026.
- ❖ [Opinion: A story still being written for Southern Resident killer whales](#). As Vancouver and Seattle showcase orcas to the world with branding and storytelling ahead of FIFA World Cup matches, we must also show that Canada and the U.S. are—together—serious about protecting them. Beatrice Frank, Ginny Broadhurst, Chloe Robinson. Vancouver Sun. Feb 24, 2026.

❖ [Genetic diversity a plus for Padilla Bay eelgrass.](#)

Padilla Bay's expansive eelgrass meadow has a unique diversity of genetics, according to new research. Padilla Bay hosts one of the largest eelgrass beds in North America. The bed spans about 8,000 acres. Emma Fletcher-Frazer. Skagit Valley Herald. February 24, 2026.

❖ [Feds launch whale-safe fishing gear strategy to try to prevent entanglements.](#)

"Entanglement is a top threat for all large baleen whales on Canada's coasts, including humpbacks, minke, blue and fin whales." Rochelle Baker, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter, Canada's National Observer. Feb 15, 2026

## READ

❖ [State adjusts strategy to address low-oxygen levels in Puget Sound.](#)

Christopher Dunagan, Salish Sea Currents magazine, March 04, 2026.

❖ [Humpback whales of the Salish Sea.](#)

Puget Sound Institute. Encyclopedia of Puget Sound.

Authors: John Calambokidis, and Alex Vanderzee, Cascadia Research Collective; with contributions and edits from Joe Gaydos, Scott Veirs, Christie McMillan, Tasli Shaw, Mark Malleson, Jessie Huggins, Jenn Tackaberry. January 22, 2026.

## WATCH

❖ [The Hidden Secrets of Chinook Salmon's Long Winter.](#)

Pacific Salmon Foundation's Winter Ecology study is testing the leading hypothesis that juvenile Chinook salmon's first winter at sea is a period of increased mortality, mainly due to starvation. Early findings from their research suggest that might not be the case. Pacific Salmon Foundation. March 2, 2026

❖ [Herring spawn kicks off around Vancouver Island and BC's South Coast.](#)

The small, oily fish are an important species for many communities along the South Coast. For many, the tell-tale milky blue-green waters off some parts of Vancouver Island are a sign of good things to come. Maryse Zeidler. CBC BC. February 22, 2026.

## 8. Connect with us & learn more!

**Thank you for being part of this year's Wonders of the Salish Sea series.** To keep learning and stay connected, follow Wonders of the Salish Sea on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and visit [wondersofthesalishsea.com](http://wondersofthesalishsea.com) for more information, and to explore past presentations.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at [salish.wonders@gmail.com](mailto:salish.wonders@gmail.com)

**Follow us!**





Photo: Gene Helfman

## 9. Meet the WSS 2026 planning committee

The Wonders of the Salish Sea planning committee is a small group of devoted volunteers who strongly believe that the more we know about this uniquely biodiverse and spectacularly beautiful ecosystem, the more we will strive to protect it.

**Maithili Devadas:** Maithili grew up with a deep sense of responsibility to help conserve the beauty and resilience of our planet. From an early age, she felt a strong connection to wildlife, and witnessing the loss of species and ecosystems strengthened her commitment to protecting the natural world for future generations. With a background in conservation, she holds Master's degrees in Conservation & Land Management and Forestry. As a Biodiversity Campaigner at Georgia Strait Alliance, Maithili combines her passion for nature, communication, and advocacy to support communities and inspire collaborative action. In her free time, she enjoys reading, spending time with her cat, playing the ukulele and connecting with friends and family.

**Cindy Elliser** is a marine mammalogist and educator with over 25 years of experience. Early in her career, she spent a decade studying wild dolphins in the Bahamas with the Wild Dolphin Project. After moving to the Pacific Northwest, she founded Pacific Mammal Research in 2014 to study the behavioral ecology of harbor porpoises and harbor seals in the Salish Sea. Since 2023 she also serves as Associate Director of the Salish Sea Institute at Western Washington University, whose work helps to share knowledge across borders and disciplines to support the protection of the Salish Sea. Besides marine mammals, Cindy also loves tide pooling, hiking, puzzling and spending time with her family and pets.

**Liz Freyman's** favourite activity is going on outdoor adventures with family and friends, especially if there's an ocean involved. Liz worked as an Environmental Impact Assessment Biologist for the BC Ministry of Environment with a speciality in water quality and waste management. She gets energized by all the people eager to learn about the Salish Sea. Favorite Salish Sea animal: the [moon snail!](#)

**Joan Lopez** is a marine educator, previously employed as a nature guide with a local whale watching company for two decades. She holds a BSc from UBC, with a specialty in Marine Biology. She is also a member of the Marine Biology Committee of Nature Vancouver. Joan has explored many underwater locales in the Salish Sea while scuba diving. She now resides on Quadra Island, and is enjoying discovering the northern extent of the Salish Sea. Her favourite living thing in the Salish Sea is bull kelp, because it looks beautiful flowing just at the surface, is habitat for so many other creatures, buffers the waves approaching shorelines, and killer whales seem to love swimming through it and having it caress their bodies.

**Deborah Simpson** describes herself as a marine enthusiast. After a chance encounter with all 88 Southern Resident orcas in 2012 (sadly, there are now only 74), she was inspired to learn everything she could about these remarkable animals and their habitat. This curiosity led her to study Environmental Education (RRU), where the idea for Wonders of the Salish Sea was born. Deborah also volunteers with Nature Vancouver and NatureKids BC. She loves hanging out in intertidal zones and discovering the many mysteries of how life survives in this challenging environment.

**See you all soon!**

**Deborah**



Many thanks to [Georgia Strait Alliance](#) for hosting WSS 2026, in partnership with the [Salish Sea Institute](#) at Western Washington University.



**SALISH SEA  
INSTITUTE**



Wonders of the Salish Sea takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples.