

Wonders OF THE SALISH SEA

2026 webinar series

Photo: C.Elliser

2026 Newsletter 3

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Hello everyone,

What a start to Wonders of the Salish Sea 2026! Our opening night speakers, Maureen Welton and Lynda Mapes, gave such impassioned overviews of the ecosystem, each from their unique perch. You'll find brief summaries of their presentations below.

Note: Registering for any night (March 23, March 30, April 13 or April 20) gives you access to the whole series. [Here's the Zoom link \(to use for the whole series\)](#). You will also receive a reminder every Monday with the Zoom link.

REMINDER - no session on on April 6 due to the long holiday weekend.

If you have any questions about the program, email us at salish.wonders@gmail.com or gsa@georgistrait.org.

1. Recording Link

If you weren't available to attend the live Zoom on Monday, or you would like to see the presentations again, here is the [RECORDING LINK](#).

2. Missed a newsletter?

If you missed newsletters #1 or #2, [you can find them here](#). You can also find the full schedule, Zoom link, and recordings there too.



3. Summaries of March 23 presentations

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

Maureen Welton, President, Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society.

Maureen Welton, a long-time resident of Saturna Island (SI), took us on a journey into the depths of the waters off of East Point, revealing the “distinctive marine geography” that drives the “rich biodiversity” at the centre of the Salish Sea. East Point is where the waters of the Strait of Georgia and Boundary Pass converge. Combined with the mixing of tides and currents, an underwater reef and a dune complex, the waters become so turbulent they appear to be boiling—hence the name “Boiling Reef!”

The result of all this activity is seasonal upwelling, which brings nutrient-rich water to the surface and supports a thriving marine food web. It’s no wonder this is a great place to see marine life, from birds to invertebrates, and mammals such as seals, sea lions, harbour porpoises, and whales (from shore!).

Saturna Island has a relatively small population; however, its residents are very active. One of the ways they help protect this place that they love is through the [Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society \(SIMRES\)](#).

[The Southern Gulf Islands Whale Sightings Network](#) is one of their most important projects. Results of whale sightings by volunteer “sighters” are made accessible through the public, [online data base Spyhopper](#), which provides insights into how and when whales use this habitat over time. SIMRES also supports research in collaboration with Dr. Ruth Joy and grad students from Simon Fraser University, and other scientists, and they host an [education series called Sea Talks](#).

SIMRES is part of [WhaleSound](#), by the BC Hydrophone Network. A hydrophone in Boundary Pass captures ocean sounds, in particular those of species at risk, such as the Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW). Did you know that J, K and L pods each have their own unique dialect? [You can hear them HERE](#), as well as humpback sounds. The hydrophones have even recorded humpbacks singing in the Salish Sea, not heard here before!

Hydrophones capture not only animal noises, but noise from human activity, such as tanker traffic. The waters off of SI are a

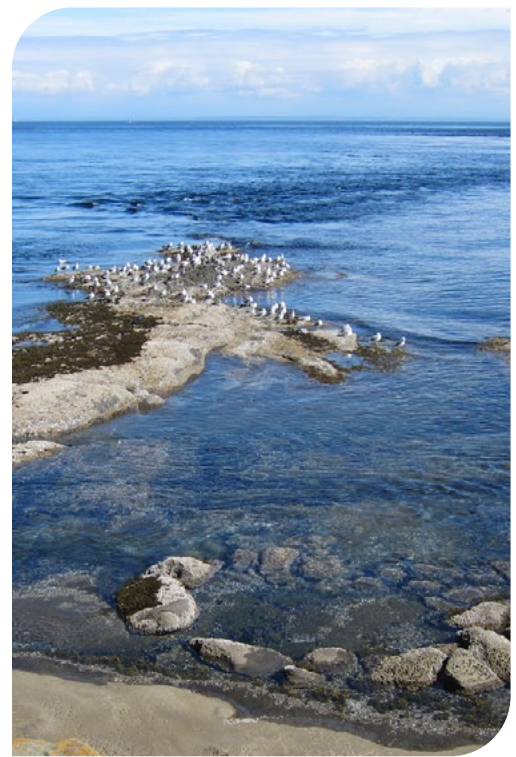


Photo: D. Simpson

transportation corridor, and vessel traffic to the Port of Vancouver is vastly increasing. For marine mammals, especially those that rely on echolocation for catching their prey like the SRKWs, this loss of quiet time is a huge problem. Tracking these trends, such as on Spyhopper, provides powerful evidence for research and advocacy.

SIMRES is also studying the over-population of sea urchins using an [underwater camera](#). These voracious grazers have devastated kelp forests along the SI coastline, creating an [urchin barren](#). Managing the sea urchin population is a complex problem, but there is hope that one day sunflower sea stars and sea otters will reinhabit the area, as they are natural predators of sea urchins.



SRKWs, southern Georgia Strait, taken with Zoom lens and cropped.
Photo: Joan Lopez.

Many thanks to Maureen for sharing her passion for the Salish Sea. It is always inspiring to learn about the efforts of small but impactful organizations like SIMRES. Knowing that there are so many other organizations like it, gives us hope in these challenging times.

Regarding the discussion about vessel traffic and endangered whales during the Q&A, please see the “Take Action” and “In the News” sections below.

The Resilient Salish Sea

Lynda Mapes, journalist and author.

Optimism. Enthusiasm. Passion. These three words sum up the heart and soul of Lynda’s presentation. She opened with images and reflections on the beauty of the Salish Sea, from the quiet reverence of Indigenous peoples gathering for a traditional beach cookout, to coastal scenery, to creatures great and small, that are all a part of this amazing place we call the Salish

Sea. One participant called her presentation, “A love letter to the Salish Sea.”

This is not to imply that the area is without environmental issues. Lynda recalled the building of a sewage treatment plant near Seattle, resulting in significant improvement in water cleanliness and clarity, with similar systems being built throughout the Salish Sea. She also spoke of the restoration of salmon streams, even in heavily industrialized areas, allowing salmon to return and Indigenous peoples to fish as they once did. Estuarine restoration and dam removal, such as on the Elwha River, improve outcomes for salmon, and simultaneously, for the Southern Resident Killer Whales and the local communities. Lynda often returned to a central theme: when people do the right thing for nature— restoration work, scientific research, decisions made by the government or business— the environment responds. Resilience!

Lynda had praise for the people taking a stand for salmon, whales and the environment. She advocated for activism to drive positive change, such as writing actual letters to government representatives and participating in rallies. She also emphasized the power of art in all its forms— street art, kid art, traditional art, and Indigenous art— to raise awareness and inspire action. She encouraged standing up for science and research to better understand the current state of the Salish Sea. Ecological and cultural recovery go hand in hand. Lynda suggested getting involved with traditional First Nations events to foster greater cross-cultural understanding. She concluded with a message of hope, and a call to do what we must for the future.

Questions to Lynda included what her recommendations of reliable sources were. Recommendations from here were: SeaDoc Society, Raincoast Conservation Foundation, Save our Wild Salmon, Wild Fish Conservancy, Biographia, Puget Sound Encyclopedia, and the Seattle Times! Also, see (6) below: Salish Sea News and Weather.

Thanks to Joan for this summary!



Photo: Janna Nichols

4. March 30 presentations

7:00 - 7:55 PM

Dive into the Shallows: Fishes You Might See in Shallower Salish Sea Waters

Janna Nichols

Although many fishes are found in deeper sub-tidal water, let's take a dip into the shallow end to see some of the fishes that hang out in nearshore environments of the Salish Sea. I'll cover about a dozen fish, and even teach you how to identify them. Pay attention, we'll have a quiz at the end!

About the Speaker

Janna Nichols has been a scuba diver in the Pacific Northwest for over 25 years and works for REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation) as their Citizen Science Program Manager. She has been a PADI scuba instructor, an AAUS scientific diver and a Dive Safety Officer for Washington State University. Many of her underwater photos of marine life have been published in guidebooks, textbooks, online resources, newspapers, and scientific publications. She lives in Vancouver, Washington (the other Vancouver!).



Photo: C.Elliser

8:05 - 9:00 PM

The Secret Lives of Harbor Porpoises

Cindy Elliser

Harbor porpoises are one of the most abundant marine mammal species in the Salish Sea, however there is much we don't know about this often elusive species. Pacific Mammal Research (PacMam) has spent over 10 years conducting behavioral and photo-identification research on harbor porpoises to learn more about their behavior, ecology, movement

patterns and more. Did you know that individuals can remain resident to an area, that they sometimes eat salmon, or that they wake surf? Recently, we have added the aerial perspective of a drone and are getting even greater insight into their foraging and social behavior. PacMam is one of the few organizations in the world conducting this type of long-term work on harbor porpoises, focusing on knowing the individuals. Come and dive into the secret lives of harbor porpoises in the Salish Sea, there is more to them than meets the eye!

About the Speaker

Dr. Cindy R. Elliser is a marine mammalogist with over 25 years of research experience. She received her B.S, M.S. and PhD in Biological Sciences and Integrative Biology from Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Before moving to the Pacific Northwest she spent 10 years working with Dr. Herzing and the Wild Dolphin Project studying dolphins in the Bahamas. In 2014 Dr. Elliser founded Pacific Mammal Research to study harbor porpoises and harbor seals in the Salish Sea. Her research focuses on using photo-identification and behavioral observations to understand the behavioral ecology, social structure and foraging ecology of individuals and populations. PacMam is a leader in harbor porpoise research and was the first to show the viability of doing long-term photo-identification work on this species. In addition to her research, Dr. Elliser is the Associate Director of the Salish Sea Institute, part of Western Washington University. There she helps to share knowledge and make connections across borders and disciplines to protect the Salish Sea.



5. In-person viewing

Thanks to Patagonia, 4th Ave. Vancouver, BC, for providing the space to watch Night 1! In Vancouver, BC, you can gather for another in-person viewing at the Diving Locker on April 13th, hosted by Vancouver Queer Divers. All welcome! [Register HERE](#).



6. Field trips

Saturday, April 18 | 12:30–2:30 PM. Intertidal Exploration at Vancouver’s Stanley Park. More information in Newsletter #2. [Register here](#).

7. Prompts and Quizzes

We now have over 400 people registered, and 200 attended the live Zoom on March 23. People used the Chat to share where they live as well as the Indigenous Lands they live on. There were people from all parts of the bi-national Salish Sea ecosystem, including lots of island folk, as well as from northern Vancouver Island, northern BC, Illinois, Alberta, Quebec, California, and Arizona!

We also asked people to share one thing they love about where they live. Answers included: access to the ocean, mountains, lakes and rivers; the amazing

marine mammals of the Salish Sea; being able to hike a mountain in the AM and beach it in the PM; the noisy cormorant rookery near my home, and feeling so blessed to be connected with Elders of these lands who are always so open and willing to share their knowledge.

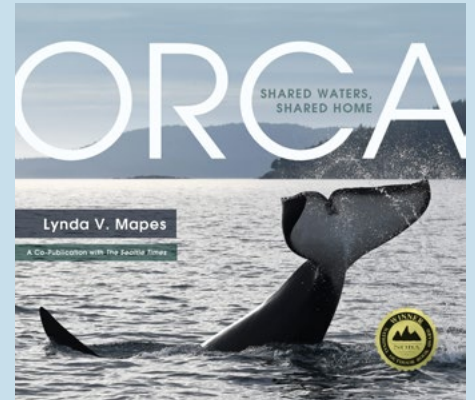
Thank you ALL for your participation in this discussion, as well as posting questions—and answers—in the Chat. We truly are a community.

You will find articles related to our discussion and action links further down in the newsletter.

The Quiz question was:

“What was the name of the public online database for whale sightings that SIMRES created? **Answer:** [Spyhopper](#). Check it out!

Our very lucky winner wins a copy of [Orca: Shared Waters, Shared Home](#), by Lynda Mapes. We’ll get in touch with you soon!



8. Did you know?

Chitons are not all peaceful algae eaters! Some of you may be wondering, “what’s a chiton?” or “it never occurred to me to wonder if chitons are peaceful or not”, but these prehistoric creatures hold many surprises. **Thanks to Jackie Hilderling** ([The Marine Detective](#)), their secrets are revealed in [Ky, Ky, Ky - Chitons!](#)

Do you have an upcoming education event to share? Send the information to salish.wonders@gmail.com and we can add it to the next newsletter.

9. Salish Sea News and Weather—an interview with founder Mike Sato

I first discovered the free and volunteer-run [Salish Sea News and Weather](#) over 10 years ago and it quickly became part of my daily routine. Every weekday morning, a compilation of Salish Sea news stories, thoughtfully curated by Mike Sato, lands in my Inbox. I especially enjoy the daily featured species. As someone who isn't a scientist or working in the field, I really rely on Salish Sea News and Weather to stay informed. It was through SSN&W that I was introduced to Lynda Mapes, as her excellent articles appeared so often.

Recently, I had the chance to ask Mike a few questions about how it all started—and what keeps him going. Here's our conversation:

What initially inspired you to start the Salish Sea News and Weather?

Mike: In 1997, I started what was then known as Puget Sound News and Weather when working as a communication director for People for Puget Sound. The goal was to curate environmental news items every weekday as part of our effort to protect and restore Puget Sound. After I left the organization, I continued the curation and publication as “Salish Sea News and Weather” with a wider focus on environmental news throughout

the Salish Sea region.

You have been doing this work—voluntarily—for 15 years. What keeps you going?

Mike: Curating environmental news articles that are trustworthy and freely accessible to all is a cause I've believed in since the beginning of my news and communications career. Environmental news accurately reported and edited is knowledge the public can use in regional and local policy, regulatory and on-the-ground issues and decisions facing our shared ecosystems.

How has the environmental news scene changed over the years?

Mike: Twenty years ago, most major Puget Sound newsrooms had a dedicated environmental reporter, as did the Vancouver Sun, Times Colonist, and CBC. Newsrooms have since shrunk, and, with a few exceptions, so has the scope, depth, and regularity of reporting. Bright spots include the work being done by The Tyee, The Narwhal, and Columbia Insight.

Why is “Tug Weather” included in Salish Sea News and Weather?

Milke: “Tug Weather” raises awareness of marine conditions at the mouth of the Strait of

Juan de Fuca where several oil spills and near-misses prompted environmental groups to lobby for stand-by rescue tug capabilities. A 24/7 rescue tug is now stationed at the mouth of the Strait. Perhaps “Tug Weather” should be extended to the Haro Strait passage as well, where more Canadian tankers are now in transit.

What do you see in the future for the Salish Sea News and Weather?

Mike: My hope is that there will always be enough trustworthy environmental news to curate and share with interested and engaged readers. I'll keep volunteering as long as I can, and I'd be happy to pass the banner on to someone who can carry on this public service.”

Thanks so much, Mike, for your dedication to this initiative—it's truly appreciated. We share your hopes for the future of environmental news and for Salish Sea News and Weather to continue for many years to come.

[Here is the link to sign up](#) for “a curated list of links to news stories published by U.S. and Canadian local news media around the Salish Sea.” You can choose Monday to Friday, or just Friday emails.

10. Take Action

- ❖ **Regulations Amending the Marine Mammal Regulations** (Southern Resident Killer Whale Approach Distance). Public participation is invited. 45-day consultation (until April 21, 2026 11:59pm EDT). [Canada Gazette, Part I, Volume 160, Number 10](#).
- ❖ **South Coast Ship Watch Alliance**. We advocate for the elimination of the anchorages in the Southern Gulf Islands and adjacent Vancouver Island waters. "[Take Action. Ways you can help.](#)"
- ❖ **The Great Bear Sea**, home to Canada's first marine protected area network, has been protected by an oil tanker moratorium since the 1970s, which was formalized in legislation in 2019. However, the area is under threat: Canada and Alberta entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in which they committed to prioritize a new crude oil pipeline and tankers project to the west coast. The federal government has committed to "adjust" the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act if required to allow this to happen.

A north coast crude oil pipeline and tankers project would pose an unacceptable risk of a



catastrophic spill that would irreparably harm the rich ecology of the area and the coastal economies that depend on it.

Thankfully, Coastal First Nations have stated their unwavering opposition to lifting the tanker ban, the Province of BC is staunchly opposed, and civil society groups are against it. However, it is crucial that the federal MPs and the Minister of Transport, who are responsible for the federal tanker ban, hear this message from all of us.

[Use West Coast Environmental Law's easy email tool](#) to contact your local MP and the Minister of Transport to demand they uphold the north coast tanker ban.

Thanks to Erin at [West Coast Environmental Law](#) for sharing this opportunity to take action in support of the Great Bear Sea.

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 for more information, and to explore past presentations.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at salish.wonders@gmail.com

Follow us!



11. UPCOMING EVENTS

- ❖ **April 9, 2026 | 7:30 to 9:00 PM.** [Physiology and the Wild Whale](#). Dr. Sheila Thornton is the Program Head of the Marine Mammal Conservation Physiology program with the Dept of Fisheries and Oceans. She will be providing updates on health concerns for the Southern Resident Killer Whales. Marine Biology Section, Nature Vancouver.
- ❖ **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 Parksville 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](#).
- ❖ **April 12 | 11:00 am.** [The Way of the Whale](#). A pre-release viewing. “This beautiful new film by Franco Lopez-Campos Benyunes tells the story of the remarkable lives of gray whales.” The Clyde theater, Langley, WA. Part of Orca Network’s “Welcome the Whales” festival. More information is coming soon.
- ❖ **Saturday, April 18, 2026 | 10 am - 3:30 pm.** [Ecology of our Changing Shores and Intertidal Exploration](#). **Waitlist.** There may be room for Zoom attendance for the morning presentation.
 - » The Pacific Institute for Climate Solution is sponsoring a free Symposium where participants will join UBC experts to learn about how climate change impacts the intertidal zone, followed by a (muddy) boots-on-the-ground expedition in Stanley Park to explore the intertidal zone. Complimentary lunch and transportation to Stanley Park provided for those registered for symposium in-person. More information and registration are at this [Eventbrite link](#).
 - » **Please note:** Wonders of the Salish Sea field trip participants will join this group on April 18 for the afternoon intertidal exploration at Stanley Park.

12. IN THE NEWS

- ❖ [DFO aims to increase distance between vessels and endangered orcas](#). The rule change would increase the distance boats must keep from the endangered orcas to 1,000 metres from the current 400. Darron Kloster, Times Colonist, March 23, 2026.
- ❖ [Rivers and tidal currents keep 80% of microfibers from reaching oceans, study suggests](#). “Up to 80% of polyester microfibers released from wastewater treatment plants in the Salish Sea ... are caught close to shore in rivers, estuaries, and shallow bays before they can drift into the open ocean.” Hannah Bird, Phys.org. March 20, 2026.
- ❖ [Harbour porpoises are chubby beacons of hope in the Salish Sea](#). The story of the harbour porpoise tells us that conservation can work ...our waters can still support vibrant, thriving populations of marine mammals. Comment, Times Colonist, Dr. Cindy Elliser, March 17, 2025. Looking forward to Cindy’s presentation on March 30!

❖ [Seattle’s only river comes alive again](#). “How one of the largest cities in Salmon Nation has restored the Duwamish River over the past three decades — community-first and one mucky step at a time.” Kathleen Tarrant, Magic Canoe.

❖ [When We Revive Buried Urban Creeks, What Can Happen?](#) Spurred by advocates, Vancouver has ‘daylighted’ some paved-over waterways. Ducks, and people, are flocking. Hanna Hett. The Tyee, March 16, 2026.

❖ [Stagnating Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park could be reconnected to ocean](#). Lagoon at entrance to Vancouver’s biggest park was disconnected from the ocean when the causeway was built in 1916. Nono Shen. The Canadian Press. March 11, 2026.

❖ [The Stillaguamish Tribe gives its river north of Seattle room to roam](#). Over the past 15 years, the Stillaguamish Tribe has purchased 2,000 acres of land for fish and wildlife habitat. John Ryan, February 7, 2026.

See you Monday when we’ll learn about some very charismatic Salish Sea species!!

Deborah, on half of the WSS 2026 crew, Maithili, Cindy, Joan, Liz, and Rebecca.



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



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