

Andrea E. Copping

Protecting and Restoring the Marine Environment: A Citizen-Based Approach to Marine Protected Areas

Biography

Andrea Copping is a biological oceanographer who gave up studying the wonders of the open ocean for the even more fascinating interactions of humans and the marine environment closer to the coast. Andrea has spent the past 18 years looking at a variety of marine issues in Puget Sound and the Pacific Northwest with special emphasis on natural variability and human interactions in estuaries and coastal areas. She actively promotes the use of science in the management of marine resources.

Dr. Copping was educated at McGill University in Montreal, Canada (BSc Marine Biology) and at the University of Washington (MS and PhD Biological Oceanography). Her masters and doctoral work examined food chain efficiencies of plankton in coastal waters and the open ocean.

Dr. Copping is Assistant Director of the Washington Sea Grant Program (WSGP) at the University of Washington, and affiliate faculty in the School of Marine Affairs (UW). Andrea worked for private industry (1984-87) and state government (1987-1992) before returning to the University, where she has responsibility for the WSGP research program, and program-wide management authority. Andrea chaired the BC/WA Marine Science Panel (1994-1998), and the Northwest Straits Commission (2000-2001). She directs the Marine Invasive Species Team (MIST), a collaborative program with Oregon Sea Grant, and co-manages the Pacific Northwest Coastal Ecosystem Regional Study (PNCERS).

Presentation Abstract

Can ordinary citizens play a role in the restoration and protection of the marine environment? The ongoing experiment of the Northwest Straits Conservation Initiative indicates that they can!

The NWS Initiative engages citizens living in northern Puget Sound and the Northwest Straits (state of Washington) in a coordinated program that will benefit living marine resources, the marine environment, and the lives of the people in the region. This program is designed and implemented by

citizens; technical assistance is provided by university scientists, natural resource managers, and other professionals. Establishing a science-based network of marine protected areas (MPAs) will be a key outcome of the Initiative.

The Northwest Straits Conservation Initiative was authorized by Congress in 1998 to restore and protect the marine environment and resources of the Northwest Straits ecosystem. The Initiative is supported by seven county-based Marine Resource Committees (MRCs), one in each of the seven northwestern counties of the state (Clallam, Jefferson, San Juan, Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish and Island counties). Citizens are appointed to each MRC by their respective county commissioners or county councils. The range of expertise and commitment among the MRC members is stunningly broad. Oversight, coordination, and an ecosystem perspective is provided by the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC), which includes representatives from the MRCs, the tribes and the Governor of the State of Washington. A very small central program staff is located at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The Northwest Straits Conservation Initiative includes Benchmarks for Performance which guide the work of the MRCs and the NWSC, and provide measures of success for the program. Those benchmarks establish the need to recover and promote the health of key species in the Northwest Straits. Many of these species, including bottomfish, shellfish and marine mammals will benefit from the establishment and appropriate management of marine protected areas encompassing a variety of native habitats including the intertidal, fringing marshes, kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and deep water reefs.

Several NWSC counties are well on their way to developing MPAs within their boundaries, following different processes and aimed at serving different purposes. At the same time the NWSC is developing a process to establish a region-wide network of MPAs. All the work is citizen-driven; much is also carried out by citizen volunteers. This paper will provide examples of the role of citizen involvement in MPAs, as well as highlighting the management accomplishments of this new initiative.