

Project Summary Report

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones



Project Reporting Period: October 2024-September 2025

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Project Lead: Gordon King

Subcommittee Members: Troy McKelvey, Bryan DeCaterina, Frank Handler and
volunteer Brad Bebout

Project Overview:

The Jefferson County MRC has three buoy fields that protect eelgrass/submerged aquatic vegetation and shellfish habitats by encouraging boaters to anchor outside of these areas to prevent anchor chain damage and pollutants from anchored vessels being released in sensitive areas:

- Port Townsend Waterfront (Port Townsend Bay) – 13 buoys have been permitted for protecting eelgrass here, with 8 buoys installed in 2004 and 5 added in 2015. There are currently 11 buoys installed along the waterfront. An additional buoy location near the Port Townsend Ferry landing is awaiting DNR approval.
- Port Hadlock (South Port Townsend Bay) – 4 buoys were installed in 2014 to keep boats from anchoring too close to shellfish beds.
- Mystery Bay – 7 buoys were installed in 2010 to help limit the number of boats anchored near commercial and Tribal shellfish beds, with 5 buoys marking the voluntary shellfish protection area and 2 marking the seaward limits of the Mystery Bay State Park area where boats can anchor.

The weather conditions stay relatively calm in Mystery Bay and near Port Hadlock, so buoys here are left in place all year round and are periodically serviced to remove marine growth and replace underwater hardware.

The Port Townsend waterfront buoys experience significantly more wave and wind action in the winter months, so the MRC pulls the large (~66 pound) spar buoys out in the fall and replaces them with floats that do not exert as much pull on the anchors.

The MRC No-Anchor Zones Subcommittee monitors the buoy fields periodically throughout the year to ensure that the buoys are in place and functioning properly, and to assess boater compliance and effectiveness of the no-anchor zones.

Project Activities: Buoy Maintenance

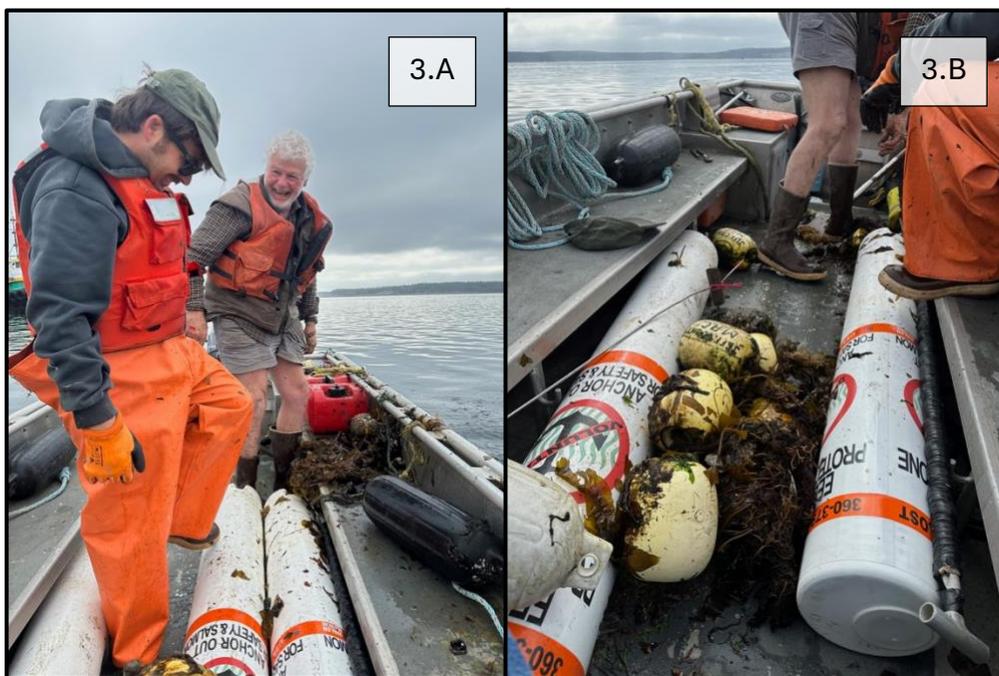
October 26th 2024

Brad Bebout, Troy McKelvey and Gordon King used a Taylor Shellfish truck and boat to remove eleven large spar buoys from the Port Townsend waterfront No-Anchor Zone. The large summer spar buoys were removed and cleaned (white with red stripes, 2.A and 2.B) and then replaced with the smaller winter “holding buoys” (yellow, 2.B). Photo 2.B shows the significant difference in size between summer and winter buoys.



April 26th 2025

Using the Taylor Shellfish boat and truck Troy McKelvey, Bryan DeCaterina and Gordon King (3.A) installed ten of the larger summer NAZ buoys along the Port Townsend waterfront. One winter buoy could not be located, so the eleventh summer buoy was taken back to storage. Photo 3.B shows the marine fouling (kelp attachment and growth) that occurred on the winter buoys (yellow) over a 6-month period.



July 19th 2025

Using the Taylor Shellfish boat (Photo 4.A) and truck Troy McKelvey, Bryan DeCaterina and Gordon King returned to the Port townsend Waterfront to reinstall the eleventh summer buoy (Photo 4.B). They located the anchor embedded in the benthos where the winter buoy had been missing, and reinstalled the summer buoy. They then did a dive inspection of the other eight spar buoys anchoring hardware that hadn't been inspected in the prior year.



August 30th 2025

After an ex-MRC committee member reported the four NAZ buoys at Port Hadlock were sitting low in the water, Brad Bebout, Gordon King and Troy McKelvey borrowed Hama Hama Shellfish's boat at Port Hadlock and scraped extensive epibiota from the buoys and anchor lines (Photo 5.A, 5.B). This included a dive inspection of the hardware, which was in good condition.



Project Activities: Boater Compliance Monitoring

From April through October, MRC members participate in boater compliance monitoring. Members will visit a site, note any compliance/non-compliance, and take a photo as documentation. During this project period, 26 observations were made. Several examples are shown below.



5/03/2025, Adams St. Park, Port Townsend Waterfront

At the Adams St. Park site, a small cruise boat is tied to the pier and the NAZ buoy is visible just off of its bow (6.A). Later that day, Photo 6.B shows the boats are anchored well outside the no-anchor zone.



May - July 2025, Tyler St., Port Townsend Waterfront

The Tyler St. monitoring site is located in the center of downtown Port Townsend, and is a popular mooring site. Observations taken on 5/30/2025 (6.C), 6/22/2025 (6.D), and 7/10/2025 (6.E) show boaters in compliance with the no-anchor zone.

In the event a boat is anchored near the edge or inside of the no-anchor zone, MRC members will regularly visit the site to monitor boater compliance. No-anchor zones are voluntary, and compliance is not legally enforceable. MRC members monitor boats sitting inside of the no-anchor zone to ensure they aren't drifting or abandoned, and to record any observations of ecological impact. In May 2025, a Catamaran was observed to be anchored along the edge of the no-anchor zone along the Port Townsend waterfront. Over multiple days, MRC members monitored the boat's drift, observed the shoreline for damaged eelgrass shoots, and made sure our County Commissioner Representative was aware of the situation.



May 2025, Port Townsend Waterfront

6.F - On 5/09/2025, a Catamaran was observed anchored on the edge of the no-anchor zone.

6.G - On 5/16/2025, the Catamaran was encroaching on the NAZ buoy, although anchored outside.

6.H - On 5/19/2025, the Catamaran drifted into the shoreline rock barrier, and the winter buoy has disappeared.

September 4th-7th, 2025 – Wooden Boat Festival boater compliance monitoring

During the Wooden Boat Festival (WBF), there is a large influx of dozens of vessels along the Port Townsend Waterfront. This year, all observations showed boats were in compliance with the No-Anchor Zones anchored in this area. Observations were not collected on 9/6/2025.

Table 1. Boater compliance observations taken during Wooden Boat Festival

Monitoring Date	Monitor	Number of vessel anchored inside the No-Anchor Zone
9/5/2024	Jon	0
9/7/2024	Jon	0
9/7/2024	Sarah	0
9/8/2024	Jon	0

Goal Achievement

The ultimate goal of most of our MRC projects is to have a functional healthy marine ecosystem. For this project we are trying to move the needle in a positive direction by providing visual messaging in the form of “no-anchor” spar buoys that indicate the boundary of sensitive marine benthos that benefits from not being degraded by anchors and chain or boat discharge and a very clear message to anchor past the buoys. We have been able to keep the large buoys in place especially during times of high boat usage in the area, and monitoring has shown that boats rarely come inside the NAZ buoys. I think this is a strong indicator that we are achieving what we set out to do.

Future Work

In the next year, the No-Anchor Zone subcommittee will continue to monitor boater compliance and perform regular maintenance at all three buoy fields. It is our goal to ensure regular and consistent compliance monitoring, and we will work to develop or adopt new tools/schedules to accomplish this. We also plan to install a new buoy along the Port Townsend Waterfront, near the Ferry landing, in Spring 2026.