

# THE WILDSIDE

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Winter Issue #23

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## SCIENCE WITH STENA

### Blue Water Task Force

Stena Troyer, Science Director



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March 2023

When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), select Harbor WildWatch as your charity of choice and we will receive a donation. Thank you!

As a SCUBA diver, polar plunger, occasional costume paddler, and tide pooler, I am one of the many people that play in the Puget Sound all year round. While the WA Department of Ecology BEACH Program monitors water quality in the warmer months (Memorial Day to Labor Day) our team of volunteers, known as the Blue Water Task Force, sample for harmful bacteria at eleven local recreation sites during the winter months. The winter sampling gives the public a snap shot look at the water quality which this season, helped us identify sustained high levels of harmful bacteria at the Thea Foss floating dock site. Our high enterococcus results were confirmed by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department and resulted in a public “high bacteria” advisory for the Thea Foss waterway. While the TPCHD did some exploratory sampling to determine the cause of high bacteria levels, a conclusive cause was not discovered, and levels dropped back into a safe range leading to the advisory being lifted. February sampling showed another spike at this site and then a return to low levels not warranting a second advisory. We are in conversation with TPCHD again and will share any possible announcements. Without the Blue Water Task Force supplementing water quality monitoring in the winter months, this high bacteria advisory would have gone unnoticed. It’s pretty neat to have the support of the Health Department to follow up on our community science efforts and publicize advisories to protect public health. Teamwork makes the dream work - so of course we’re delighted to recognize the water sampling volunteers and the partnership between the South Sound Surfrider Foundation, SaMI High School and Harbor WildWatch making this monitoring happen. Results can be viewed at [www.bwtf.surfrider.org](http://www.bwtf.surfrider.org)

## OUR STAFF



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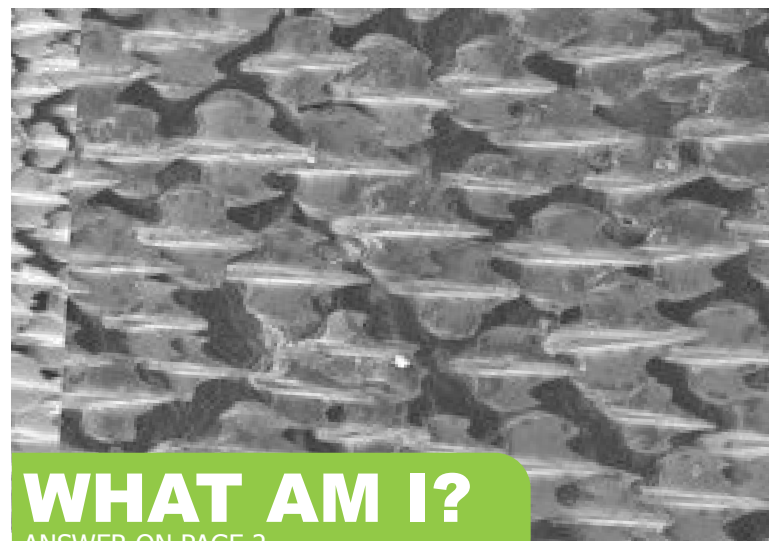
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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Pier Into the Night**  
Jerisich Dock  
March 4, 7pm  
Touch Tanks  
and a Live Dive

**Sharks of the Salish Sea Exhibit**  
Opening at the Skansie House  
March 8, 10am

**Cocktails & Fishtales**  
IN PERSON at OCEANS  
March 15, 5:30pm  
*Sharks of Washington*  
with Lisa Hillier, WDFW



## WHAT AM I?

ANSWER ON PAGE 2

## WHAT'S INSIDE

SHARKS OF THE SALISH SEA  
INTERNSHIP HIGHLIGHT  
MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

2

3

3

Photo above: Winter beach monitoring at Tacoma Narrows Beach Park, December 2022

## KIDS CORNER

What do you get when you cross a fish and an elephant?  
Swimming Trunks!

Why don't fish play basketball?  
Because they are afraid of the net!

Why did the fish get bad grades?  
Because it was below sea level!



Please recycle

## Sharks of the Salish Sea

Rachel Easton, Education Director

They aren't the biggest, most dangerous, or the scariest things in the ocean but sharks definitely have a reputation for all three. Perhaps it's because of the movie Jaws, or that shark encounters make headlines. Maybe it's all the teeth, their unblinking eyes, or their silent and deadly hunting strategy. Whatever the reason, we are here to try and change the stigma surrounding sharks and bring attention to their importance to the Salish Sea Ecosystem.

With our new "Sharks of the Salish Sea" exhibit, opening March 8, 2023, we will share what species can be found in the waters of the Salish Sea estuary, the incredible senses sharks have that make them such effective predators, their role in the food web, and the many threats to shark populations worldwide.

To most, sharks are more commonly associated with warmer climates and the majority of the 400+ species of sharks are found there. Of the 14 shark species found in the Salish Sea, there is a handful of species that are considered common such as the spiny dogfish shark which can be found year round. Then, there are several species that have been documented but are rare, either due to low numbers or because they may only stray into our region during warm water events, like the one-time observation of a great white shark.

With support from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Pacific Lutheran University we will have jaws, fins, and prepared specimens on display alongside educational signage and hands-on activities for visitors of all ages. Visitors can compare modern sharks with the ancient extinct Megalodon, and stand beneath a life-size megalodon shark jaw replica created by former seaStars & Beyond student, Ryan Dietrich as part of his Eagle Scout project. Younger visitors can enjoy our sandbox and excavate some shark tooth fossils, examine shark skin under the microscope, and take home some educational coloring sheets.



Shark conservation and research will also be featured. Visitors can learn how humans are a far greater threat to sharks than they could ever be to us. Sharks are in decline worldwide due to overfishing, competition with commercial fisheries, habitat loss, warming seas, and sport fishing. It's estimated that humans kill 11,000 sharks per HOUR! These important predators need our help. A world without sharks is far scarier than one with them.



The touch tanks are still a major focus of the exhibit, and the tanks have been deep cleaned, polished, and redesigned. We have a brand new aquarium in the front room of the Skansie House that greets visitors right as they walk through the door. It features a sandy, anemone-filled habitat focused on local species like hermit crabs, sculpin, and decorator crabs. There are many animals in the touch tank, from slippery leather stars, to feathery tube worms, to sticky anemones, and visitors can touch them all with one gentle finger. Updated signage will give more information about the animals in our exhibits, encouraging curiosity and wonder about the fantastic animals in our care and inspiring stewardship for Gig Harbor and the greater Salish Sea.

We hope you will come visit this "JAWsome" new exhibit opening March 8th!

*This is a the skin of a spiny dogfish shark viewed under a scanning electron microscope. This extremely, close up view lets us observe the dermal denticles, essentially the skin teeth of this shark! Grooved scales are an adaptation sharks have to reduce drag making shark skin a biomimicry inspiration for engineers to copy on things like airplanes!*



## Harbor WildWatch is excited to have PAID Interns!

Thanks to a grant from BECU, Harbor WildWatch is embarking on a new chapter - paid internships! We are excited to introduce you to the team!

### Meet Valeria Santiago:

Valeria is a first-generation college student working towards a bachelor's in Environmental Science at the University of Washington - Tacoma. She is passionate about environmental work and strives to inspire stewardship in her community. In her work as a research assistant for the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit, she surveyed resources regarding children's health and reproductive health to raise awareness of environmental health risks in vulnerable populations in AL, ID, OR, and WA. Additionally, she served as a research assistant for a professor to understand food insecurity amongst college students and explored how to improve food systems in her community. In the future, through her work with the UW Tacoma Sustainability Committee, Valeria hopes to utilize her academic and professional experience to promote research and environmental learning opportunities for marginalized communities.



**Meet Ramiro Marquez:** Ramiro is a first-generation Latino college student, working towards an associates degree in Environmental Engineering at Tacoma Community College, then looking towards achieving a bachelor's degree. He is motivated to fight climate change and restore the environment to its natural state, and to teach his community how to maintain a sustainable environment. He has worked with the Tacoma Tree Foundation community members on how to reduce fossil fuels in the community and how to involve schools with that process. Ramiro wants to utilize his academic and personal experience to provide information to the Latino community on climate change and reducing the use of fossil fuels in Washington state.



## Some Thoughts to Be Shared

Mary Buell, Board President

It seems that our news is filled with tales of widespread staff shortages, and the challenges created by such situations. Harbor WildWatch does not share such problems. Our remarkable HWW staff continue to demonstrate their commitment to the work of stewardship for the Salish Sea. To demonstrate this point: Lindsey Stover, our Executive Director, began at HWW in 2011 (12 years ago); Rachel Easton, Education Director, began at HWW in 2009 (14 years ago); Stena Troyer, Science Director, began at HWW in 2013 (10 years ago). Staff retention such as this is a rarity these days, and having decades or more of successful work history within one organization is to be applauded! It is their cheery faces we see at every event. They reliably serve our Harbor WildWatch mission with contagious enthusiasm, joy, limitless knowledge, and boundless energy. They are a true "Team" who support one another. Their considerable skills may differ, but they complement one another.

Lindsey, Rachel, and Stena are treasures, indeed. They are due many thanks for the decades of time they have devoted to keeping Harbor WildWatch vital, relevant, dynamic, and fun. Thank you Lindsey, Rachel, and Stena for always encouraging us to "Learn! Have Fun!"

## MEET THE INTERNS

### Meet Kat Barlow:

Kat is a sophomore at Tacoma Community College and is working on her Associates of Science with an Environmental Science Specialization and will be transferring to a bachelor's program to major in environmental science. She has worked as a lab assistant sampling and processing soils to study how local farmers may improve soil fertility through carbon sequestration. Having lived in the Tacoma area since she was two years old, she grew up in the abundant natural beauty of our area. Her mom instilled a great respect for the outdoors and a passion for habitat preservation. She remains passionate about habitat preservation and remediation. Her goal is to research how habitats and species continue to be affected by human activities and apply this information to expand community knowledge and understanding of environmental topics to ultimately further protection of natural environments so future generations can enjoy the environment's natural richness. She hopes to utilize her experience in soil sampling and her experience as an intern with HWW to accomplish these goals.



## FROM THE BOARD