

Fall 2026 Newsletter

Diesel Emissions Reduction Act saves fishermen money

By John Evich, Commercial Fishermen, Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM, Wash. — For over four decades, the 58-foot commercial fishing vessel St. Zita has been widely regarded as the "Cadillac" of the North Pacific and West Coast fleets. Built in 1982 by the renowned Marco shipyard, once a global titan in constructing high-end crabbers and multi-purpose vessels, the St. Zita set a standard for stability and craftsmanship that few boats have ever matched.

For the current owner, who vividly remembers attending her christening as a young man and later fishing aboard her for Bob Glenovich in Alaska and California in 1988, keeping that legacy alive is deeply personal.



The F/V St. Zita, underway with her aging diesel engines. Captain and fisherman John Evich partnered with the Working Waterfront Coalition and Port of Bellingham to have the older, less efficient engines replaced through the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act program, or DERA. Note the exhaust smoke from her stack. Photo: John Evich

Keeping a Maritime Icon Local

Bob Glenovich built the vessel and then managed her until his passing in 2021. In 2022, after parting ways with his previous vessel, the 58-foot Delta Viking Star, the current owner purchased the St. Zita directly from Bob's wife, Sharon Glenovich.

"Sharon and her sons, Paul and Michael, were very happy to sell it to me and keep it local amongst family friends," the owner recalls. "Since the day I started fishing, I've continually upgraded boats. But the St. Zita made me realize she would likely be the last upgrade I'd ever buy. Spending five or six million dollars to build a brand new boat simply didn't make sense when you look at long-term net profit and the peerless platform we already had."

While the vessel's Marco-built hull has always required far less maintenance than expected due to its exceptional build quality, the owner recognized that long-term stewardship requires looking forward. Rather than settling for a routine engine rebuild down the road, attention turned toward a major modernization project: a vessel re-power.

Maximizing Efficiency Through the DERA Grant Program

The decision to move forward was heavily catalyzed by an invaluable environmental funding opportunity: a Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) grant administered locally to help vessel owners upgrade to cleaner, highly fuel-efficient modern engines. Navigating a project of this scale requires tremendous community collaboration, and the owner heaps high praise on the Whatcom Waterfront Working Coalition and Dan Tucker, whose dedicated guidance through the grant and administrative process was instrumental. Paired with the exceptional partnership of the Port of Bellingham, which works tirelessly to support local commercial fleets, the program provided a viable pathway to modernize without losing the historic character of the vessel.

Dropping in a modern, eco-friendly engine was no simple task. The intricate engineering required opening a structural passage between the fish hold and the engine room, cutting out and rerouting plumbing, refrigeration lines, and extensive electrical architecture. Ultimately, the project successfully replaced the legacy Caterpillar with a modernized Mitsubishi S6R mechanical main engine and one auxiliary generator (retaining a second generator that was already Tier 3 eco-friendly), while adapting everything from the shafting to the control systems.

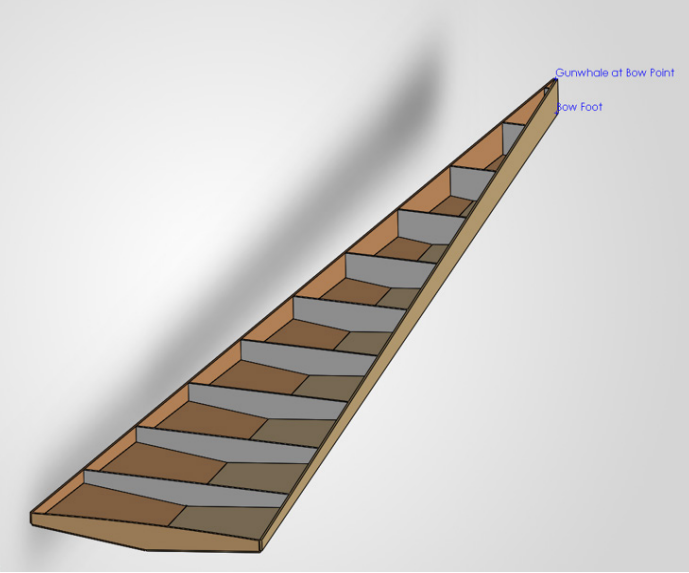
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New innovations in hull design shaping up at WWU

By Eric Leonhardt, Western WA University

Editor's Note: The maritime industry is in the midst of a major transition in technology. Along with new fuels, new designs in hull shape and other elements are making existing and future ships more efficient. Coupled together, alternate fuels and increasing efficiencies are changing, quite literally, the shape of maritime. Right here in Whatcom County, we are designing and leading the next generation of the world's blue economy. Thank you to Eric Leonhardt for this story.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) proposed net-zero carbon emissions for container ships over 5,000 gross tonnage.[1] The goal is challenging. Container ship powerplants are among the most thermodynamically efficient devices created by humans. Techniques to increase engine efficiency and utilize waste energy are already being used. Increasing container ship size to improve hull efficiency and reduce crew costs per container has diminished returns.



The shape of the hull being developed is designed to decrease wake and noise, along with increasing hull efficiency, saving fuel. Graphic: Eric Leonhardt, WWU

Container ships have increased in size dramatically, from 8,890 twenty-foot equivalent container units or TEU (Challotte Maersk, 2002) in the early 2000's to 24,000 TEU (MSC Irina, 2023) in the 2020's.[2] Only a handful of ports can support the largest ships.[3] Increases in engine power to support larger hulls may require multiple engines as present manufacturing constraints limit the size of the crankshaft.[4]

Wind propulsion is being tested to reduce fuel consumption and address the IMO goal.[5] A professor at Western Washington University is building a prototype hull to study a combination of sailing technology with an improved hull design. The hull follows principles that naval architect Alberto Calderon proposed more than twenty years ago to eliminate wave drag. The hull looks like a triangle from a bird's eye view. A waterline length to beam ratio of roughly five to one, with maximum beam at the stern contributes to the hull's properties. Maximum draft is at the bow and can vary between 4% and 12% of waterline length. Draft at the stern is minimal.

The prototype hull is 5m long (~16' 5") with a 1m (~39") beam. It is being built using strips of western red cedar and will be sheathed in layers of Innegra fabric and epoxy. The construction technique is the culmination of fatigue testing wood core composites with thermoplastic skins.

Further reference:

1. IMO approves net-zero regulations for global shipping: https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/imo-approves-netzero-regulations.aspx

2. World's largest container ship over time: https://www.container-transportation.com/worlds-largest-container-ship.html

3. Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs): Size, TEU Capacity, Ports, Costs & Future (2026): https://www.shipfinex.com/blog/ultra-large-container-vessels

4. https://wolfstreet.com/2018/05/28/the-engines-of-the-largest-container-ships-in-the-world-and-challenges-their-



The hull is being built and tested here in Whatcom County at Western Washington University. Whatcom continues to lead in maritime innovation after the successful launch of the first hydrogen-fuel-cell ferry MV Sea Change in 2023 by All-American Marine. Photo: Eric Leonhardt, WWU

Diesel Emissions Reduction Act

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Above: The old engines are required to be permanently destroyed with a 3-inch hole burned or drilled through their casing.

Below: This photo shows the engines running at high RPM, with a clean exhaust following the new engine installation. The more efficient engines saved the vessel nearly 1,000 gallons on one run to Kodiak, over the old engine efficiency. Photos: John Evich



A True Community Effort and Local Backbone

A defining feature of the St. Zita overhaul was an absolute commitment to Whatcom County's historic, tight-knit marine trades community. The project relied entirely on local, trusted businesses that have supported the commercial fishing industry for generations: Tri-County Diesel Marine. As a cornerstone local family business that has been in operation and a steadfast supporter of the commercial fishing fleet for a long time, Tri-County brought unmatched dedication to the build. Led by Austin Long, they provided top-tier mechanical expertise, assigning their incredible lead mechanic, Barry Vito, who dedicated himself completely to the project's success.

Northwest Fabrication (Joel Murry) and Seaview North Shipyard (Manager Kyle Elsasser) provided crucial structural and yard support. Walton Tool stepped in to expertly handle any and all custom machining needs required throughout the overhaul.

Accu-Steer, founded by Bill Pulse, a great friend of Bob and Sharon Glenovich and former owner of Radar Marine Electric, provided specialized steering systems and equipment.

The Port of Bellingham and the Whatcom Waterfront Working Coalition provided incredible leadership, community backing, and seamless grant coordination that keeps our local fleets viable.

Crucially, the grant structure allowed the vessel owner to keep the regular crew employed through the off-season. Led by cousin and captain Kyle Watkins and his crew, the team rolled up their sleeves to execute heavy labor alongside the contractors, saving on external overhead while ensuring meticulous craftsmanship.

Immediate Success and Fuel Independence

The gamble, and the stress, sweat, and long hours, paid off immediately on the St. Zita's very first post-repower voyage. Even while running hard for the engine break-in period, the results shattered expectations: a remarkable 36% savings in fuel consumption. In an era of volatile fuel prices, that efficiency is a game-changer for commercial viability.

Today, the St. Zita stands as a shining example of what happens when forward-thinking grant programs like DERA meet a dedicated local maritime community. Over forty years after sliding down the ways at Marco, she remains one of the best-built boats on the grounds—still based in Whatcom County, still family-owned, and still supporting the local economy and hardworking crews who keep the Pacific fishery alive.

"In the long run," the owner reflects, "I hope Bob is looking down smiling, right along with Sharon and the boys, knowing the iconic St. Zita is still one of the best-built boats on the grounds."

Waterfronts work for all.

Buoyant Beginnings wraps 2nd year

By Sierra Oliver

This year the pre-apprenticeship was completed by 18 young adults looking to break into the maritime industry. Backed by a powerhouse network of instructors and industry partners from across the waterfront, these students dove headfirst into hands-on workshops, worksite tours, job shadows, and a two-week work experience with our participating employers.

We're honored to share this program with Lummi Nation, and to know that our shared goal of preserving a workforce on the waterfront for future generations is deeply supported by our communities. Of the participants that enroll in each pre-apprenticeship cohort, half are tribal students and half are non-tribal, learning and working side by side. Last year's group set the tone with an environment built on collaboration, support, and respect — and this year's cohort carried that same standard forward.

About Buoyant Beginnings
What does it take to be a pre-apprentice?
The program centers around three core components: professional development, employability skills, and marine trades technical training. Each piece builds from foundational knowledge, to observing the trade in action, to actually doing the work themselves. Completing this program takes real dedication and responsibility. Participants had to show up consistently, adapt to new environments, and hold themselves accountable in professional settings. The end goal is to introduce participants to everything the waterfront has to offer — that requires an open-mind, a willingness to try new things, and the courage to step outside their comfort zone.

Every participant who completed this program walked away with new skills, new relationships, and a firsthand look at a career path many hadn't considered before. They learned so much this summer, and they have every reason to be proud of what they accomplished.

What Buoyant Beginnings means to the waterfront.
The Pre-Apprenticeship has the same goals as the Northwest Maritime Apprenticeship Program, but it looks a little different. While the apprenticeship takes apprentices through four years of extensive training, the pre-apprenticeship gives participants a small look into the life of marine trade industries.

One of the core missions of the pre-apprenticeship is helping students turn six weeks of summer learning into the first step of a lifelong journey. From here, the path forward is theirs to choose — whether that means returning to school to pursue higher education, stepping directly into a job on the waterfront, or continuing on into the Northwest Maritime Apprenticeship. Buoyant Beginnings is simply here to lay a solid foundation upon which they can build a career.

Buoyant Beginnings exists to power the future of the marine workforce — and in an industry facing a shrinking talent pool, that mission has never mattered more. We're incredibly fortunate to partner with marine industries across Whatcom County who don't just believe in what Buoyant Beginnings is building — they're actively investing in it, opening their doors to bring new talent onto the waterfront.

This summer, Buoyant Beginnings was proud to work alongside:
- Lummi Indian Business Council • Lummi Island Wild
- Marine Spill Response Corp. • NW Explorations
- Pacific Marine Yacht Systems • Performance Fiberglass
- Port of Bellingham • Safety West Coast Services
- San Juan Cruises • San Juan Sailing
- SeaView North • Top to Bottom
- Trident Seafoods • WA Sea Grant
- Working Waterfront Coalition • AkzoNobel
- All American Marine • Armstrong Marine Services
- Auxiliary Engine • Backcountry Medical Guides
- Barlean's Fishery • Bellingham Marine Repair
- Birdon • Salish Center for Sustainable Fishing Methods
- The Community Boating Center • Empire Marine
- Epic Yacht Management • Holdfast Marine
- Landings at Colony Wharf • LFS Distribution

Our graduation ceremony was made extra special with Port of Bellingham Commissioners and Lummi Nation Council members joining us to help present certificates to our participants. We're honored by their continued support and partnership in growing the next generation of marine trades talent.

A special thank you to everyone who made this program possible, including our program coordinators for the work that keeps everything running behind the scenes, our Lummi Nation partners and supporters for sharing this vision and backing it so generously, our industry partners for opening their doors and investing their time and expertise in the next generation of the waterfront, and to our participants, the heart of this program, for showing up with curiosity and dedication.

Buoyant Beginnings would not be the success it has been these last two summers without every one of you. Thank you, we're looking forward to what's next.



Buoyant Beginnings Class of 2026. Photo: Dan Tucker

AltaGas support helps protect Southern Resident Killer Whales across the Salish Sea

Submitted by AltaGas / ALA Energy

A $100,000 contribution to Quiet Sound is helping reduce underwater noise, improve whale detection and support safer shared waterways for marine life and maritime operators.

Across the Salish Sea, the work of protecting endangered Southern Resident killer whales depends on partnership. It takes conservation groups, Tribal partners, maritime operators, ports, public agencies and industry working together to reduce the pressures facing one of the Pacific Northwest's most iconic species, while keeping regional waterways safe and sustainable for the people and businesses that rely on them.

One year after AltaGas made a $100,000 contribution to Quiet Sound, a collaborative program of Washington Maritime Blue, new results show how that support is helping make a measurable difference. The funding has helped advance voluntary vessel slowdowns, expand real-time whale detection and support practical tools that help whales and vessels safely share regional waters.

Protecting whales in working waters

The Southern Resident killer whale population sits at just 76 whales, making every action to reduce stress on the population important. Underwater noise from large commercial vessels can make it harder for killer whales to communicate, navigate and find food. Quiet Sound works with the maritime sector to reduce those impacts through voluntary, science-based measures that are designed to support both whale recovery and safe marine transportation.

For AltaGas, supporting Quiet Sound reflects a broader commitment to collaboration in the communities and waterways where the company operates. The results from the past year show how targeted funding can help community-led programs continue delivering practical conservation outcomes.

"AltaGas' support was a crucial bridge that helped our program continue to deliver results during a challenging period," said Rachel Aronson, Program Director, Quiet Sound. "Because of this funding, Quiet Sound was able to advance programs that help whales and maritime trade safely share our Pacific Northwest waterways."

Slower vessels, quieter water

One of Quiet Sound's key efforts is the Admiralty Inlet Voluntary Slowdown, which encourages large commercial vessels to reduce their speed when it is safe and operationally feasible. During the 2025 to 2026 slowdown, more than 670 commercial vessel transits from over 13 shipping companies participated. Compared to a similar period in 2019 – before Quiet Sound began implementing noise reduction initiatives – the slowdown reduced underwater noise by 40%. For whales that depend on sound to hunt, navigate and stay connected with their pods, quieter water can make a meaningful difference.

Better information for mariners

Quiet Sound's work also includes tools that help commercial mariners know when whales are nearby. Over the past year alone, around 5,000 whale alerts were sent to commercial mariners through the Whale Report Alert System, giving vessel operators timely information to help them make safer decisions on the water.

The program also installed the first permanent shore-based thermal camera on the U.S. West Coast. The system uses human-verified artificial intelligence detections to generate whale alerts 24/7, with zero false alerts. Over the past year alone, the camera supported alerts for 73 killer whale encounters, 27 baleen whale encounters, 22 unidentified cetacean encounters, nine minke whale encounters, eight humpback whale encounters, two gray whale encounters and two toothed whale encounters, other than orcas. These alerts are sent to shipping vessels, Washington State Ferries, and other commercial mariners in real time, allowing these vessels to slow when whales are nearby.

Partnership that moves conservation forward

In addition to vessel slowdowns and whale alerts, AltaGas' support helped Quiet Sound publish a best practices guide for passenger-only ferries. These efforts are focused on practical, voluntary actions that fit the realities of a working waterfront while supporting the recovery of endangered whales.

"The results we've seen over this past year show what's possible when industry, communities and conservation groups work together," said Andrea McNamara Doyle, AltaGas' External Affairs and Tribal Relations Director for Washington State. "We're proud to support Quiet Sound's work to protect endangered Southern Resident killer whales while helping ensure the Salish Sea remains a safe and sustainable place for both marine life and maritime activity."

Investing in the local community

ALA Energy's support for Quiet Sound is one example of the many ways the company is investing in the Ferndale area and the broader Whatcom County community. In addition to supporting whale protection and safer shared waterways, ALA Energy has contributed to local workforce development initiatives, including the Buoyant Beginnings Maritime Pre-Apprenticeship Program, which helps create pathways into maritime careers through hands-on training, job readiness support and paid work experience.

Through these efforts, ALA Energy is focused on being a responsible, engaged community partner by supporting programs that strengthen local environmental stewardship, workforce opportunities, and long-term community resilience.

To learn more, visit altagas.com/ALAEnergy and QuietSound.org.

Member Highlight: Holdfast Marine

By Dani Baxter

Holdfast Marine was named after the holdfast on a bull kelp. To a naturalist, a holdfast anchors kelp onto rocks. To a mariner, to hold fast is to hang on tight, and ride out the storm. To our team, the holdfast has deep meanings of resilience, grounding, and perseverance. In our work, no matter the project, we strive to remain reliable and resilient. Anchored in skill, dedication and work ethic to keep our clients vessels in top condition.

Holdfast Marine was started in 2018 by Jon Robitaille. After his time as a whale watching Captain, living aboard his boat, and attending the Skagit Valley College Marine Maintenance program, Jon opened up shop. Jon's aptitude for diesel engines, electrical work, electronics, and general repair proved invaluable. His ability to think outside the box, manage a team, and cultivate an environment for his employees to thrive, while expertly fixing boats at the same time is a respectable balancing act done with grace.



Holdfast Marine's shop, located at Landings at Colony Wharf, on C-Street. Photo: Holdfast Marine

He started out in the back of Colony Wharf, in a single shipping container, quickly growing to need two, then four containers. Eventually Jon had a tent in the back of the yard that is still known as the Holdfast Tent. With more space, came more projects and inevitably more people.

Will Brune, a long time friend and skilled merchant mariner came back from his time at sea to work with Jon. Will has a specialty in marine engines and electrical systems. After serving as an engineer on various tugs, ferries and cruise ships, he combines his snappy humor with seasoned skill in his work at Holdfast. Jon and Will gave Holdfast its professionally humorous atmosphere, setting the tone for the growing company.

Many boats, and many laughs later, Colony Wharf began to build a new boathouse. The Holdfast team had grown to a solid team of six. Jon knew that it was time for him to upgrade. After five years working in the snow, rain, sun, or even just the classic Bellingham drizzle, it was time to move inside. Now, Holdfast holds the biggest boathouse at Colony Wharf, allowing us to perform work in a controlled environment year round. The shop has held up to 45-ft boats and provides a space for not just the Holdfast team, but many other contractors to perform their specialties, allowing Holdfast to provide all of the above personalized maintenance for our clients.

Holdfast has many specialties - from completely rewiring your boat to installing a new lithium battery system, high output alternators, air conditioning, or even a total engine swap. They have the crew and expertise to work on all vessel systems.

Beyond the boat systems, they have a detailing crew who spend their days making sure your boat is polished, painted and protected. After a few years with his detailers, Eros Quintanilla and Dani Baxter, they continued to show the desire to grow their knowledge, and their career in the maritime industry. Dani was a sailing instructor for eleven years and wanted to learn how to service the boats that she taught on. Eros has a knack for mechanics and dreams to own a boat of his own one day.



Holdfast Marine does a wide range of vessel services, from top-side work, to all the details on the bottom, including propellor work. They can even accommodate whole-engine repowers. Here, propellor blades hang to dry after coating has been expertly applied. Photo: Holdfast Marine



Work each day for the Holdfast crew is different - and it keeps the job interesting and exciting. New solar and power conversion projects are one of the many ways the Holdfast crew is helping to upgrade our recreational and commercial fleets. Photo: Holdfast Marine

Last year, Eros and Dani joined the Northwest Maritime Apprenticeship Program through the Working Waterfront. After a few years of buffing, waxing, painting, and more microfibers than they had ever imagined, they are now trying their hand at oil changes and bilge pump installs. They have now taken on several projects on their own, with expert instruction from Jon, Will, and Riley Ghio, who came to Holdfast last year, available when they need it. They work during the week, and they take classes in the evening and on weekends.

The Northwest Maritime Apprenticeship Program has allowed Holdfast to continue to operate at its full capacity, while training its next generation of marine technicians. As time goes, Dani and Eros will continue to train the next generation of detailers. Good work ethic is innate to the crew at Holdfast, and skilled labor is trained as the maritime knowledge continues to get passed down to the next generation.

In addition to Will and Jon's apprentices, the Holdfast team has continued to grow. Riley, a skilled sailor coming out of the Wooden Boat School with many years of experience repairing vessels and engines both on his own time and through the Community Boating Center, is a two-stroke enthusiast, and has provided valuable knowledge and time with our company. With our expert team of ABYC certified technicians, and our apprentices, they have created an educated, well rounded team, ready to approach any vessel.

One of Jon's very first working relationships as a marine company was his partnership with San Juan Sailing, a charter company in Squallicum Harbor. He began to service the boats in the fleet performing year round maintenance. Maintaining boats that are used hard for a whole summer is quite the task. Creating the relationships Holdfast has with their clients and with the boats they service is important to them. The charter business keeps the summertime packed full with turns, maintenance, and advisory to the charter guests, boat owners and students.

In addition to work on charter fleets, Holdfast also keep busy with their private clients. This year Holdfast won gold for Cascades Best Boat Repair and we are excited to continue providing top-notch service work. They provide service on sailboats, power boats and even the occasional fishing vessel. They provide personalized marine repair and prioritize long lasting relationships. From emergency work, to an oil change, to a major upgrade, the Holdfast team is ready for any task.



The Holdfast Marine crew, from left: Dani Baxter, Riley Ghio, Jon Robitaille, Will Brune, Eros Quintanilla, posing in front of a project in their shop at the C-Street marine trades area, Landings at Colony Wharf. Thank you, Holdfast, for all the work you're doing with our Northwest Maritime Apprenticeship Program, and our community of boaters and operators. Photo: Holdfast Marine

Port Election 2026: District 4



Paul Burrill

Elected Experience
First-time candidate, with decades of leadership in maritime business and Whatcom county public advisory service.

Other Professional Experience
30+ years as a commercial fisherman, shareholder in a Washington based seafood company and owner of a small interstate trucking company specializing in seafood and local agricultural products.

Education
High school graduate with additional collage education.

Community Service
Current chairman: Port of Bellingham Marine Advisory Committee; Current board member: Business and commerce committee, Purse Seine Vessel Owners Association, Whatcom Family Farmers; Served on: the Food Systems Committee, Whale Entanglement Task Force, Coastal Crab Advisory Committee and Tri-state Crab Management Committee; Lacrosse coach.

Statement

As a dedicated husband of 23 years and proud father of two, I am committed to listening to the community and balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship. I believe port industries can create family-wage jobs while supporting broader community priorities like affordable housing and childcare. I support protecting longshore jobs by limiting the use of AI in port operations and advancing a community first economy.

As current Chairman of the Port of Bellingham Marine Advisory Committee since 2018, a lifelong commercial fisherman, seafood company shareholder, and owner of an interstate trucking company, I can bring visionary leadership and decades of hands on port experience to ensure its strength for future generations.

I am committed to improving public access and upland storage for recreational users, strengthening workforce development in marine trades, aviation and first responder services, and expanding marine and aviation opportunities.

The Port of Bellingham is a powerful economic engine that impacts every community in Whatcom County, including our Tribal communities. A commissioner's duty is to bring historical perspective, practical experience, and economic understanding needed to keep that engine strong, ensuring the Port serves the entire county and that the community knows the Port of Bellingham is open for business.

Watch:
Working Waterfront Interview:
Paul Burril



Tor Benson

Elected Experience
Elected- Petersburg Alaska Planning and Zoning: Appointed- SE Alaska Power Agency providing clean renewable energy

Other Professional Experience
I bring extensive experience as an owner-operator running commercial fishing boats, budgeting and financial experience as a Certified Financial Planner, and logistics expertise coordinating 800' cargo vessels from around the world, which have prepared me well to be an effective Port Commissioner. I founded Streamline Advisory, a local small business, to help individuals and small businesses make informed financial decisions and will assist the Port in doing the same.

Education
Bachelors, Oregon State University; Certified Financial Planner

Community Service
Bellingham Bay Rotary Club Treasurer, Whatcom Working Waterfront member

Statement

Creating and protecting family-wage jobs that support our local communities will be my top priority as Port Commissioner. At a time when local families are being economically squeezed with rising costs, we need jobs and opportunities for everyone in Whatcom County.

The Bellingham Airport and Shipping Terminal are budgeted to run at a loss for the third year in a row and there is lack of trust by the community that the Ports assets are being run effectively. The loss of flights at the airport is troubling – we shouldn't have to travel to Seattle or Canada for business or pleasure. I come prepared to complete the hard work necessary to reverse these trends and ensure that your tax dollars are spent responsibly and with transparency.

As our community crafts the vision for our shared waterfront on the bay, I bring experience in planning and zoning to ensure that we plan for a variety of uses, including housing, industry, agriculture, recreation, commerce, and Lummi/ Nooksack fishermen along our shores. I look forward to the opportunity to use my practical experience and financial discipline to serve as the first Port Commissioner for District 4. Learn more: Torforport.com

Watch:
Working Waterfront Interview:
Tor Benson

More info available: WhatcomWorkingWaterfront.org/PortElection2026

Port Election 2026: District 5



Shawn Ensley

Elected Experience
First time Candidate

Other Professional Experience
I bring over two decades of hands-on experience working in industrial maintenance and safety-critical environments where reliability and getting the job done right matter every day. I spent 21 years in the Air Force Reserve in airport logistics while building a career in the instrumentation and electrical trade. Since 2004, I have worked at Cherry Point helping maintain complex systems, supporting field work, and keeping operations running safely and consistently.

Education
Airman leadership school, Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Bellingham Technical College AAS Instrumentation and Control, Mount Baker High School

Community Service
Served on the Bellingham Technical College Instrumentation Advisory Board.

Statement

The Port should be the economic backbone of Whatcom County, prioritizing people over politics by supporting living-wage jobs, balanced economic growth, and investments that strengthen long-term stability and prosperity throughout all of Whatcom County, not just a few areas influenced by special interests.

My career in instrumentation and logistics is built on hard work, accountability, safety, and solving real problems - values I will bring to this position. I will lead with transparency, common sense, and a commitment to restoring trust, representation, and public confidence to the Port.

My priorities are creating living wage jobs, investing in projects with clear purpose, and ensuring the Port stays focused on its mission statement: To promote sustainable economic development, optimize transportation gateways, and manage publicly owned land and facilities to benefit Whatcom County. We have the foundation to build on for a thriving Port.

The Port of Bellingham belongs to the people of Whatcom County, and every community deserves to be heard, respected, and represented. A vote for me is a vote for leadership focused on people, practical solutions, and results that benefit our entire county. I would be honored to earn your vote.

Watch:
Working Waterfront Interview:
Shawn Ensley



Chris Elder

Elected Experience
First-time Candidate

Other Professional Experience
For over twelve years I've worked with counties supporting farmland preservation, climate resilience, forest management and stewardship, floodplain planning and watershed management. Owner (6 years) of natural resource consulting firm, Rivershed SPC.

Education
BA Environmental Biology, Western Colorado University; MS Agriculture, Washington State University.

Community Service
Co-founded and Chaired Twin Sisters Market; Co-founded and Chaired Coastal Farmland Trust; Member and Administrative Chair of Washington State Food Policy Forum; Vice President of Northwest Chapter of River Management Society; Volunteer supporting flood response after Nooksack River floods; Member of Community Food Coop Farm Fund Committee

Statement

I moved to the South Fork Valley to start a farm and raise my two daughters. Since then I have had the privilege to work with Whatcom's farmers, fishers and foresters who care for our natural resources and provide jobs in our community. I've helped new farmers gain access to land, increased market access for local farmers and worked across ideological lines on habitat restoration, flood mitigation, and protecting working farms and forests from development.
I'm asking for your vote because I love this community. We grow our economy by investing in working land industries, restoring salmon habitat, and creating good jobs. Environmental stewardship is essential to that work. I'll continue supporting cleanup of legacy contamination and hold new development to the highest standards as we face rising seas and weather extremes. I'll continue the Port's work of creating welcoming and vibrant community spaces that complement our natural resources. These are the things that make our community great.

Trade, strategic airport opportunities, defending our working waterfronts — I'll push for these priorities with transparency and accountability. I'm proud to be endorsed by State Senator Sharon Shewmake, Representative Alex Ramel, Councilmember Jessica Rienstra, and more. Let's invest in Whatcom for all.

Watch:
Working Waterfront Interview:
Chris Elder

WORKING WATERFRONT COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY

PORT COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE FORUM

Wednesday, Oct 7, 6pm
Squalicum Boathouse Zuanich Point Park

Hear from the candidates for new Districts 4 & 5 of the Port of Bellingham Commission on their ideas and visions for the Port with a moderated discussion.

Check out their video interviews ahead of the forum by scanning the QR code.



TOR BENSON
District 4



PAUL BURRILL
District 4

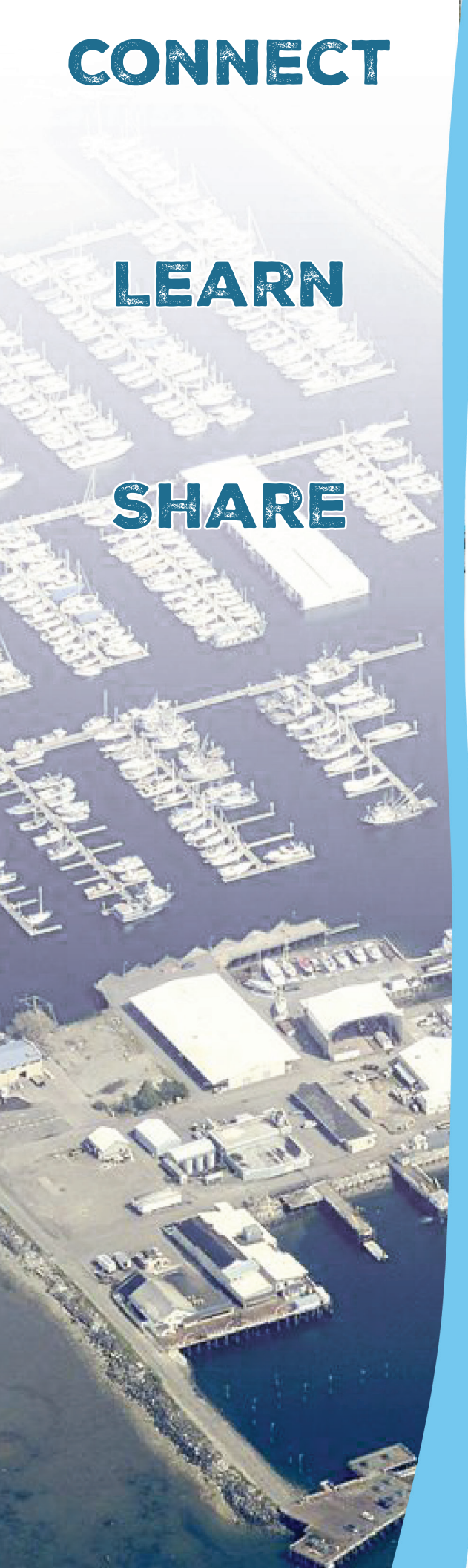


SHAWN ENSLEY
District 5



CHRIS ELDER
District 5

Hosted by the Whatcom Working Waterfront Coalition, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that promotes the benefits and vitality of a working waterfront.



Blue DRINKS

Blue Drinks is a public, open meet up to talk about our waterfronts. Come connect, learn, and share about our waterfronts, marine trades, and maritime economy!

Public Meet Up
Join Us!

Drayton Harbor Oyster Co

Tuesday, Sept 29th
6:00pm-7:30pm

Presented By

WORKING WATERFRONT COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY

Featuring a tour of
Blaine Industrial Wharf & Waterfront

5:00pm

Meet at Blaine Harbormaster Offices

Make New Friends
Learn about Maritime Endeavors
Create Connections
Share, and Have Fun!

Fisheries Update for Alaska & Puget Sound

By Pete Granger

Alaska:
The main producing commercial salmon fisheries for Whatcom County fishermen, be they purse seiners, gillnetters, or troller, are in Alaska. Most areas in Alaska this fishing season are seeing lower volume runs than predicted with the exception of the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak.

Kodiak has harvested over 12 million pinks, much higher than the predicted 7 million.

Bristol Bay harvested 29 million fish just below the 31 million sockeye predicted. In other fishing areas of Alaska (Prince William Sound and Southeast) where many Whatcom County-based fishermen fish - runs of chums, sockeye, silvers, pinks and chinook are below predictions with the season winding down in these areas. See below the table of predictions versus current harvest through August 29. Alaska has not seen a total salmon harvest under 100 million fish since 1987!

2026 Harvest vs. Projection
(Thousands of Fish)

	Harvest	Annual Projection	% Realized
Sockeye	37,610	44,901	84%
Pink	35,231	55,981	63%
Keta	9,708	17,184	56%
Coho	965	2,422	40%
Chinook	118	196	60%
Total	**83,632**	**120,684**	**69%**

Source: Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute & McKinley Research

Less salmon produced has increased the prices that fishermen receive when they deliver to a processor. This is especially true of sockeye. Bristol Bay fishermen are receiving in excess of two dollars a pound, the highest price in many years.

Salish Sea:
As for summer salmon fisheries in the Salish Sea, the big story is the failure of the Fraser River sockeye run. With a predicted run of over 7 million sockeye, local tribal and non-tribal purse seiners, gillnetters and reefnetters were expecting several days of good fishing. However, as the summer progressed, fewer and fewer fish were seen returning through US and Canadian waters. The U.S. fleet was able to fish for one day in mid-August and then the Pacific Salmon Commission closed the fishery for the season. As it turns out, only 2.7 million Fraser River sockeye returned to spawn.

Experts warn this appears to be part of a 16-year downward spiral for the Fraser River's dominant sockeye salmon run, which has seen reduced numbers of returning fish in each of the brood years – 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022 and now 2026. Sockeye migrate upriver four years after birth.

Fraser River Pink Salmon run only on odd-numbered years, so no pinks this year on the Fraser and on Washington state rivers such as the Nooksack and Skagit. Local tribal and non-tribal fishermen will have a chance to harvest some coho and chum beginning the third week of September.



Commercial fishing vessels in Squalicum Harbor. Photo: Dan Tucker

Upcoming Coalition Events

Blue Drinks Q3 2026
Sept. 29th, Blaine & Drayton Harbor Oyster Co
(Tour of BST 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. - meet in front of Container Village)

Port Commissioner Candidate Forum
October 7th, 6:00pm - Squalicum Boathouse (Register on our website)

Q4 Board of Director's Meeting & Member Holiday Social
Dec. 2nd, Working Waterfront Offices - Social @ 6:00pm

Visit our booth at Blaine Oysterfest - October 10th!

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Working Waterfront Coalition of Whatcom County
info@whatcomworkingwaterfront.org www.whatcomworkingwaterfront.org