



2026 Schedule & Speakers

Wonders of the Salish Sea is back, and we have an exciting line-up of guest speakers this year!

Join us in this 4-part webinar series as we explore the Salish Sea, unravelling the beauty, life, and deep connections to our local waters.

Field Trip information still to come!

4 Mondays from 7 - 9 pm

- **March 23 & 30**
- **April 13 & 20**

MARCH 23, 2026

7:00 - 7:55 PM

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

Maureen Welton

Saturna Island occupies a unique position at the geographic centre of the Salish Sea, where distinctive marine geography, rich biodiversity, and intense human activity converge.

A visit to East Point can feel like standing at the edge of the world. Grasslands meet forest, sandstone cliffs drop to the sea, and the surrounding waters are alive with seals, sea lions, marine birds, and—on good days—orcas, humpback whales, and porpoises foraging close to shore.

But look a little longer and another reality appears. Commercial shipping lanes cut through the waters as tankers, container ships, and tug-and-barge traffic pass nearby. In the distance are the Cherry Point oil refinery, Delta Port, and the high-rise buildings of White Rock. Though Saturna feels remote, it sits at the heart of a region of more than eight million people.

This presentation explores what makes this location so productive—from underwater geography and ocean dynamics to the food webs that attract whales—and examines growing threats from vessel traffic, underwater noise, pollution, and climate change.

The talk also highlights the work of the Saturna Island Marine Research & Education Society (SIMRES), a volunteer-led organization supporting research, education, data collection, and informed decision-making in this vital marine region.

About the Speaker

Maureen Welton is a resident of Saturna Island, a founding member, and President of SIMRES. While not a scientist by training, her relationship with marine science began in earnest in 2002, when she purchased land at East Point and gained a front-row seat to one of the most dynamic marine environments in the Salish Sea. Nearly two decades later, her fascination with this ecosystem continues to deepen—fueling her work in community science and marine conservation. She holds an MBA in Sustainable Innovation after a career in international trade and design.



8:05 - 9:00 PM

The Resilient Salish Sea

Lynda Mapes

Journalist and author Lynda Mapes reviews 30 years of science and trends in the Salish Sea. Water quality is better than in a generation, the great whales are back—with some important exceptions—and marine mammals are booming. These successes show the Salish Sea is resilient and responds to public policies to protect species and fight pollution.

About the Speaker

Lynda Mapes, for 27 years, was a staff reporter at The Seattle Times, specializing in coverage of the environment, Indigenous cultures, and governments. She has been awarded numerous fellowships and honors, including twice winning the international KAVLI gold award for science journalism from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the world's largest professional science association. Lynda and two of her colleagues at the Times also were finalists for the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for local reporting. She has written seven books and is the winner of the 2021 National Outdoor Book Award, and 2021 Washington State Book Award for non-fiction.



March 30, 2026

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!).



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.



APRIL 13, 2026

7:00 - 7:55 PM

Sea Stars of the Salish Sea

Philip Lambert

What animal has no brain and no blood, digests food outside of its body, and is able to regenerate its own arms? Sea stars! This presentation will describe various aspects of the lives of sea stars common to the Salish Sea, including their internal anatomy, behaviour, predators, reproduction, prey, and ecology of west coast sea stars. We will also learn about sea star wasting disease and recent research on this ongoing issue.

About the Speaker

Phil Lambert is a retired Curator of Marine Invertebrates at the Royal BC Museum, where he worked from 1973 to 2007. He is the author of three identification handbooks: 1. Sea Stars; 2. Sea Cucumbers; and 3. Brittle Stars, Urchins, and Crinoids. From 1996 to 2025, Phil coordinated the Marine Night speaker series for the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS), and he also served on the VNHS board from 2008 to 2025.

8:05 - 9:00 PM

Feeding the People, Caring for the Land: Indigenous Food Systems of the Salish Sea

Jared Qwustenuxun Williams

This talk shares how Indigenous peoples of the Salish Sea built food systems that supported strong communities, healthy ecosystems, and long-term abundance. Practices such as fish weirs and clam gardens were grounded in responsibility, careful observation, and care for future generations. These systems fed families, supported trade and ceremony, and strengthened relationships between people, land, and water. By revisiting these teachings, the presentation invites listeners to understand Indigenous food production as living knowledge that continues to guide community wellbeing today.

About the Speaker

Jared Qwustenuxun Williams is a Hul'q'umi'num speaker, educator, and cultural knowledge holder from Cowichan Tribes. Their work focuses on Indigenous food systems, language revitalization, and the ways traditional land- and sea-based practices created abundance and ecological balance in the Salish Sea. Qwustenuxun shares these teachings through public talks, community education, and hands-on learning. They are committed to strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty by reconnecting people to place, responsibility, and ancestral knowledge.



APRIL 20, 2026

7:00 - 7:55 PM

Gulls: Far More Than Just A Seagull

David Droppers

Gulls are an often misunderstood yet charismatic sentinels of beaches, and many other habitats. David will introduce you to a number of our PNW gull species, from travelers to residents. Why is it that birders fear learning them? What is the real reason why many civilians despise them? Let's look under the hood at a unique and unmistakable group of birds that is anything but ordinary!

About the Speaker

David Droppers has been teaching courses on topics from birds to butterflies to trees to microorganisms for a variety of groups, including college biology courses and non-profit environmental groups. He has put his expertise to work for the National Park Service, Forest Service, University of Washington, and Woodland Park Zoo, among many others. He is ecstatic about sharing his passion for the natural world with others who wish to learn. His enthusiasm is said to be contagious!



8:05 - 9:00 PM

Whale Tale: The True Story of the Capture, Escape and Legacy of Some of the West Coast's Most Remarkable Orcas

Grant Lawrence

We end WSS 2026 with bestselling author and award-winning broadcaster Grant Lawrence sharing the incredible true story of the “Pedder Bay 5,” a unique family of transient orcas (then an unknown sub-species) captured in 1970 off the southern tip of Vancouver island, a pod that included the ultra-rare white orca, nicknamed “Chimo.” This is a story of tragedy and triumph: of humans and whales, heroes and villains, exploitation and activism, and a lasting wild legacy that lives on to this day in the waters of the Salish Sea.

About the Speaker

Grant Lawrence grew up spending weekends and summers—mostly against his will—at an off-grid cabin in Desolation Sound, the northern edge of the Salish Sea. Those early experiences shaped his life in deep and unexpected ways. Today, Grant is an award-winning author, and his Salish Sea adventures are among his most beloved works. In 2025, he hosted, edited, and produced *Whale Tale*, the gripping true story of a unique family of West Coast orcas, which he will share with us in this presentation.



Grant is also a musician, broadcaster, and live event host. His four best-selling books for adults are *Adventures in Solitude* (2010), *The Lonely End of the Rink* (2013), *Dirty Windshields* (2017), and his latest bestseller, *Return to Solitude* (2022), in which he “interweaves the rich and harrowing history of the Desolation Sound area with his own experiences of life on the coast,” (Harbour Publishing). Grant’s second children’s book, *Adventures in Desolation Sound*, was released in 2024.