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{ REPORT
119-67

NORTHWEST STRAITS MARINE CONSERVA-
TION INITIATIVE REAUTHORIZATION ACT
OF 2025

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 1433



SEPTEMBER 29, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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SEPTEMBER 29, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. CRUZ, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1433]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 1433) to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act to promote the protection of the resources of the Northwest Straits, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of S. 1433, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025, is to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act to protect the resources of the Northwest Straits (NWS).

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

Stretching from Snohomish and Jefferson counties north to the Canadian border, the NWS region of the State of Washington includes the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the San Juan Islands, and the northern area of the Puget Sound.¹ In 1998, Congress authorized the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative (Initiative) in order to coordinate marine resource protection

¹“The Northwest Straits Region,” Northwest Straits Commission, <https://nwstraits.org/about-us/overview/>.

and restoration activities in the NWS region after a proposal to add it to the National Marine Sanctuary system failed.²

The Initiative established the Northwest Straits Commission (Commission), which is composed of five members appointed by the Governor of the State of Washington, a Tribal representative appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, one representative from each of the seven Marine Resource Committees (MRCs) that represent the seven NWS region counties, and the Puget Sound Partnership.³ MRCs coordinate their activities through the Commission, championing their local priorities.⁴ Past projects include oyster restoration in Skagit County, establishment of voluntary no-anchor zones in Jefferson County, marine debris removal programs in Clallam County, and shoreline surveys in Island County.⁵

The Commission is volunteer-based and MRC members are appointed by their local elected officials. As part of its original authorization in 1998, Congress required a program review for the Initiative. This review was conducted in 2004, and an evaluation panel of national experts recommended continued Federal authorization and expanded support for the Initiative.⁶

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS

S. 1433 would do the following:

- Establish requirements for appointing the Commission members and selecting a Chair.
- Require the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere to appoint an employee from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to serve as a liaison to the Commission.
- Authorize the Commission to enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Washington and with nonprofit organizations.
- Establish the goal and duties of the Commission.
- Authorize the Commission to accept donations.
- Require the Commission to prepare and submit an annual report to Congress.
- Authorize appropriations of \$3 million for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2031.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 1433 was introduced on April 10, 2025, by Senator Murray (for herself and Senator Cantwell) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On April 30, 2025, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 1433 reported favorably with amendments.

H.R. 2860, a House bill identical to S. 1433, was introduced on April 10, 2025, by Representative Larsen (for himself and Representatives Randall, Strickland, DelBene, Smith (WA), and

² Ibid.

³ “Commission,” Northwest Straits Commission, <https://nwstraits.org/about-us/commission/>.

⁴ “Marine Resources Committees,” Northwest Straits Commission, <https://nwstraits.org/get-involved/marine-resources-committees/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William Ruckelshaus et al., *Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative: Five-Year Evaluation Report*, Northwest Straits Evaluation Panel and Policy Consensus Center (University of Washington and Washington State University), April 6, 2004, <https://www.nwstraits.org/media/1257/nwsc-2004-evaluationrpt.pdf>.

Jayapal) and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives.

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S. 4579, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2024, was introduced on June 18, 2024, by Senator Murray (for herself and Senator Cantwell) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On July 31, 2024, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 4579 reported favorably with amendments.

H.R. 8783, a House companion bill to S. 4579, was introduced on June 18, 2024, by Representative Larsen (for himself and Representatives DelBene, Kilmer, Strickland, Smith (WA), and Jayapal) and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives. Representative Schrier was later added as a cosponsor.

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S. 4903, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2022, was introduced on September 21, 2022, by Senator Murray and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

S. 1433, Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025			
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on April 30, 2025			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2025	2025-2030	2025-2035
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	*	*
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	*	*
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	13	18
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply? Yes	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Mandate Effects	
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between -\$500,000 and zero.			

S. 1433 would authorize the appropriation of \$3 million annually for fiscal years 2026 through 2031 for the Northwest Straits Advisory Commission. Under the bill, that commission would coordinate with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and

state, local, and tribal governments to design projects to restore marine waters and habitats of the Northwest Straits region in the State of Washington. In 2024, the Congress provided \$1 million for those activities.

CBO assumes that the bill will be enacted in 2025 and that the authorized amounts will be provided in each year. On that basis and using historical spending patterns, CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost \$13 million over the 2025–2030 period and \$5 million after 2030.

In addition, the bill would authorize the commission to accept donations and spend them without further appropriation to carry out its responsibilities. The receipt and spending of those donations are recorded as direct spending. Because the receipt and spending would offset each other, CBO estimates that enacting S. 1433 would have an insignificant effect on net direct spending over the 2025–2035 period.

The costs of the legislation, detailed in Table 1, fall within budget function 300 (natural resources and environment).

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED BUDGETARY EFFECTS OF S. 1433

	By fiscal year, millions of dollars—						
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2025–2030
Authorization	0	3	3	3	3	3	15
Estimated Outlays	0	2	2	3	3	3	13

Enacting the bill would have an insignificant effect on net direct spending over the 2025–2035 period for the receipt and spending of donations.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Aurora Swanson. The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

In accordance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides the following evaluation of the regulatory impact of the legislation, as reported:

NUMBER OF PERSONS COVERED

S. 1433, as reported, would not authorize any new regulations and therefore would not subject any individuals or businesses to new regulations. It would create a new requirement that NOAA appoint an individual as a liaison officer to the Commission.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

S. 1433, as reported, is not expected to have an adverse impact on the Nation's economy.

PRIVACY

S. 1433, as reported, would not have any adverse impact on the personal privacy of individuals.

PAPERWORK

S. 1433, as reported, would not require a major increase in paperwork burdens. In the instance where the bill would require additional paperwork, it would require an annual report describing the activities carried out by the Commission during the preceding year and the progress in achieving certain benchmarks to the appropriate committees of Congress.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

In compliance with paragraph 4(b) of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides that no provisions contained in the bill, as reported, meet the definition of congressionally directed spending items under the rule.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

This section would provide that the bill may be cited as the “Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025”.

Section 2. Reauthorization of Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act

This section would define the terms “Commission”, “marine resources committee”, “Northwest Straits region”, “Tribal government”, and “Under Secretary”.

This section would set the requirements for membership of the Commission. It would also give the Commission discretion to appoint additional members as necessary and set the process for appointing these members. Additionally, this section would set requirements for filling vacancies, for selecting the Chair of the Commission, and on the frequency with which the Commission shall meet. Further, this section would require the appointment of a NOAA employee to serve as a liaison to the Commission and to coordinate activities related to the Commission’s goal. This section would give the Commission the authority to enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Washington for staffing and administrative services.

This section would also define the goal of the Commission as protecting and restoring the marine waters, habitats, and species of the NWS region, including through sustainability and awareness, improving collaboration with partner organizations and Tribal governments, supporting Tribal treaty rights, and related activities. It would define the Commission’s duties to include providing resources and support to MRCs, developing regional programs, collecting marine resource data, and serving as a public forum for policy discussions. This section would require the Commission to coordinate and collaborate with Federal, State, local, and Tribal governments and give it permission to enter into cooperative agreements with nonprofit entities. Additionally, this section would limit the authority of the Commission to issue Federal regulations and allow the Commission to accept donations.

This section would require the Commission to prepare and submit an annual report describing the activities carried out by the

Commission during the preceding year and the progress in achieving specified benchmarks to the appropriate committees of Congress.

Lastly, this section would authorize appropriations of \$3 million for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2031.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new material is printed in *italic*, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

THE NORTHWEST STRAITS MARINE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE ACT

* * * * *

[Title IV of Public Law 105–384; 112 Stat. 3458]

TITLE IV—NORTHWEST STRAITS MARINE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

SEC. 401. SHORT TITLE.

This title may be cited as the “Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act”.

SEC. 402. ESTABLISHMENT.

There is established a commission to be known as the Northwest Straits Advisory [Commission (in this title referred to as the “Commission”).] *Commission*.

[SEC. 403. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION.

[The Commission shall be organized and operated in accordance with the provisions of the Northwest Straits Citizen’s Advisory Commission Report of August 20, 1998, on file with the Secretary of Commerce (in this title referred to as the “Report”).

[SEC. 404. FUNDING.

[(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Commerce may, from amounts available to the Secretary to carry out the work of the Commission, provide assistance for use in accordance with the Report and the priorities of the Commission—

[(1) to collect marine resources data in the Northwest Straits;

[(2) to coordinate Federal, State, and local marine resources protection and restoration activities in the Northwest Straits; and

[(3) to carry out other activities identified in the Report as important to the protection and restoration of marine resources in the Northwest Straits.

[(b) PROVISION.—The Secretary may provide the assistance authorized by subsection (a) through the Director of the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, unless the Governor of the State of Washington objects. If the Governor objects, then the Sec-

retary may provide the assistance through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

SEC. 405. LIMITATION.

【Nothing in this title provides the Commission with the authority to implement any Federal law or regulation.】

SEC. 403. DEFINITIONS.

In this title:

(1) *COMMISSION.*—The term “Commission” means the Northwest Straits Advisory Commission established by section 402.

(2) *MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE.*—The term “marine resources committee” means a county government committee that assists in assessing marine resource and conservation needs.

(3) *NORTHWEST STRAITS REGION.*—The term “Northwest Straits region” means the marine waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and of Puget Sound from the Canadian border to the south end of Snohomish County.

(4) *TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.*—The term “Tribal government” means the recognized governing body of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, community, component band, or component reservation individually identified (including parenthetically) in the list published most recently as of the date of enactment of the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025 pursuant to section 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

(5) *UNDER SECRETARY.*—The term “Under Secretary” means the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere.

SEC. 404. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION.

(a) *COMPOSITION.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—The Commission shall be composed of 14 members, except as provided in paragraph (2), who shall be appointed as follows:

(A) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for San Juan County, Washington.

(B) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Island County, Washington.

(C) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Skagit County, Washington.

(D) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Whatcom County, Washington.

(E) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Snohomish County, Washington.

(F) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Clallam County, Washington.

(G) One member appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee for Jefferson County, Washington.

(H) *Two members appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and in consultation with the Tribal governments affected by this title, to represent the interests of such Tribal governments.*

(I) *One member appointed by the Governor of the State of Washington to represent the interests of the Puget Sound Partnership.*

(J) *Four members appointed by the Governor of the State of Washington who—*

(i) are residents of the State of Washington; and

(ii) are not employed by a Federal, State, or local government, excluding an institution of higher education.

(2) **ADDITIONAL MEMBERS.**—*The Commission may, as determined necessary to improve the ability of the Commission to perform the duties of the Commission under section 405(b), appoint members in addition to those appointed under paragraph (1). Any such additional member shall be appointed by a consensus of the members of a marine resources committee that is not described in such paragraph.*

(b) **VACANCIES.**—*A vacancy in the Commission shall be filled in the manner in which the original appointment was made.*

(c) **CHAIRPERSON.**—*The Commission shall select a Chairperson from among its members.*

(d) **MEETING.**—*The Commission shall meet at the call of the Chairperson, but not less frequently than quarterly.*

(e) **LIAISON.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—*The Under Secretary, in consultation with the Commission, shall appoint an employee of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—*

(A) to serve as a liaison between the Commission and the Department of Commerce;

(B) to coordinate programs of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with activities related to the goal of the Commission described in section 405(a); and

(C) to perform additional liaison functions benefitting the Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which may include, as agreed to by the Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, attending meetings and other events of the Commission as a nonvoting participant.

(2) **LIMITATION.**—*Service as a member of the Commission by the employee appointed under paragraph (1)—*

(A) is limited to the employee's service as a liaison; and

(B) does not obligate the employee to perform any duty of the Commission under section 405(b).

(f) **ADMINISTRATION.**—*The Commission may enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Washington for staffing and administrative services for the purposes of supporting the duties of the Commission under section 405(b).*

SEC. 405. GOAL AND DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION.

(a) **GOAL.**—*The goal of the Commission is to protect and restore the marine waters, habitats, and species of the Northwest Straits region to achieve ecosystem health and sustainable resource use by—*

(1) *designing and recommending projects that are driven by the best available science, local priorities, community-based decisions, and the ability to measure results;*

(2) *building awareness and stewardship and making recommendations to improve the health of the marine resources of the Northwest Straits region;*

(3) *maintaining and expanding collaboration with partner organizations, such as the Puget Sound Partnership;*

(4) *expanding partnerships with Tribal governments and continuing to support Tribal treaties, cultures, and subsistence and Tribal treaty rights; and*

(5) *recognizing the importance of economic and social benefits that are dependent on marine environments and sustainable marine resources.*

(b) *DUTIES.—The duties of the Commission are the following:*

(1) *To provide resources and technical support for marine resources committees.*

(2) *To work with such marine resources committees and appropriate entities of Federal, State, and local governments and Tribal governments to provide advice in developing regional programs to monitor the overall health of the marine ecosystem of the Northwest Straits region.*

(3) *To collect marine resources data and identify factors adversely affecting or preventing the restoration of the health of the marine ecosystem and coastal economies of the Northwest Straits region to inform decisionmakers.*

(4) *To develop scientifically sound restoration and protection recommendations, informed by local priorities, that address such factors.*

(5) *To serve as a public forum for the informal discussion of policies and actions, with respect to the marine ecosystem of the Northwest Straits region, of Federal, State, or local governments, Tribal governments, or the Government of Canada.*

(6) *To inform appropriate authorities and local communities about the marine ecosystem of the Northwest Straits region and about issues relating to the marine ecosystem of the Northwest Straits region.*

(7) *To consult with all affected Tribal governments in the Northwest Straits region to ensure that the work of the Commission does not violate Tribal treaty rights.*

(c) *COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION.—The Commission—*

(1) *shall carry out the duties described in subsection (b) in coordination and collaboration, as appropriate, with Federal, State, and local governments and Tribal governments, including by—*

(A) *providing technical support and assistance to any Tribal government seeking representation and participation on the Commission; and*

(B) *supporting the work and duties of the liaison to the Commission under section 404(e); and*

(2) *may enter into cooperative agreements with nonprofit entities, such as the Northwest Straits Foundation, to provide assistance, including financial assistance, in carrying out the duties described in subsection (b).*

(d) *LIMITATIONS.*—*Nothing in this title provides the Commission with authority to issue regulations or implement any Federal law or regulation.*

(e) *ACCEPTANCE OF DONATIONS.*—*For purposes of carrying out this section, the Commission may solicit, accept, receive, hold, administer, and use gifts, devises, and bequests without any further approval or administrative action.*

(f) *ANNUAL REPORT.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—*Each year, the Commission shall prepare, submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate, the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives, and the Under Secretary, and make available to the public a report describing—*

(A) *the activities carried out by the Commission during the preceding year; and*

(B) *the progress in achieving the benchmarks described in paragraph (2).*

(2) *BENCHMARKS.*—*The benchmarks described in this paragraph are the following:*

(A) *Protection and restoration of marine, coastal, and nearshore habitats within the Northwest Straits region.*

(B) *Protection and restoration of marine resources populations to healthy, sustainable levels.*

(C) *Improvement of the water quality of the Northwest Straits region.*

(D) *Collection of high-quality data and promotion of the use and dissemination of such data for the purposes of ecosystem monitoring.*

(E) *Promotion of stewardship and understanding of marine resources of the Northwest Straits region through education and outreach.*

SEC. 406. FUNDING.

(a) *AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.*—*There are authorized to be appropriated to the Under Secretary \$3,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2031 to carry out this title.*

(b) *ASSISTANCE.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Under Secretary may, from amounts made available to the Under Secretary to carry out this title, provide assistance to the Commission in carrying out the duties of the Commission under this title.*

(2) *PROVISION.*—*The Under Secretary may provide the assistance described in paragraph (1), and make available amounts to the Commission to carry out the duties of the Commission, through a contract with the Director of the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, unless the Governor of the State of Washington objects. If such Governor so objects, the Under Secretary may not provide such assistance and make available such amounts to the Commission.*

* * * * *