

Watch Your Weather

Getting Reports on Your VHF

The weather can have a very large impact on boating, not only from a pleasure point of view but also from a safety point of view. Therefore, having a good idea what the weather is likely to do in the near future should be a daily concern of all boaters. There are many resources available these days, like www.wunderground.com give a good overview of the region and have links to marine forecasts and radar images. But when we are out on our boats the internet is not always available.

This is where the VHF marine forecasts can be very useful. NOAA and the Canadian equivalent broadcast continuous reports on channels WX1-WX10. On most modern radios a button marked 'WX' (or something similar) needs to be pushed in order to receive the weather channels. Shown (right) is a brief, generalized list of which channels cover Puget Sound and adjacent Canadian waters:

The reports are generally broken into three segments; one listing the overall trend and forecast, another listing the current conditions at several weather stations and lastly more localized predictions. These localized areas are really fairly large, for example one area is Camano Island to Point Roberts, which includes all of the San Juan Islands.

When I first started to listen to these reports I found them somewhat confusing, mostly because they listed places I did not recognize. For example, the Canadian reports were always referring to Entrance Island; it took me awhile to realize this was basically Nanaimo. Then I discovered a map showing the locations of all these mysterious places. There are several places one can get these maps: for example, NOAA has one posted on the internet at <http://www.weather.gov/om/marine/images/msc10f.pdf>. But the one I find most useful is the one listed in the Waggoner Cruising Guide (mostly because I always have one on the boat), it is usually around page

30, or check the index under 'Weather Station Map.'

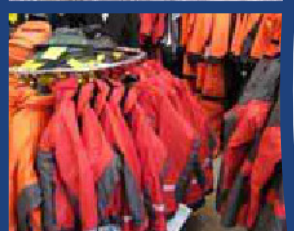
While these weather reports can be very useful I have found them to be better at the big picture than the local level. I frequently find the wind blowing in a different direction from the predictions, so be prepared (this is especially true in the summer when the winds are light and variable). For example, when I am getting ready to anchor I will listen to the weather to find out where to anchor – if the wind is supposed to come from the west that night I will not anchor in a bay open to the west. But I will always make sure I have room to swing just in case the folks at NOAA have it wrong.

Speaking of the folks at NOAA, I have never had a chance to express my appreciation for their hard work and services – Thank You.

Have a topic you'd like to see in Sailing Tips column? Contact Mike (mike@npinfo.com) with your suggestions.

Channel WX1	Seattle Area or Vancouver, Canada
Channel WX2	The Gulf Islands
Channel WX3	South Sound and Olympia Area or Victoria
Channel WX4	San Juan Islands
Channel WX7	Port Townsend
Channel WX8	Vancouver Island

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