

September 2, 2020

Invitation to Pledge to Protect Southern Resident Orcas

Dear Whale-Watching Operator,

We seek your help in recovering the critically endangered Southern Resident orcas. As you know, the population has declined precipitously to a current day near-historical low of just 72 individuals. The recent news that at least three females are pregnant is a ray of hope for this struggling population.

We are asking all U.S. whale-watching operators to voluntarily suspend watching the Southern Residents for at least a year, starting now. Your decision to avoid Southern Residents will complement and extend the agreements that are already in place in Canada, and give the orcas maximum space throughout the Salish Sea to forage and rear their young.

- Take the pledge to protect the Southern Residents by clicking [here](#), and commit to not watching them by staying one-half nautical mile (1,000 yards) away from them in U.S. waters.
- We will promote and publicize any companies that make this commitment, and ask our supporters to do the same.

As a whale-watching operator, you have a leading role to play in the recovery of J, K and L pods. Your voluntary decision to stop watching these orcas will send a powerful conservation message to your customers, your community and the world. The beneficial impacts of your decision will be amplified by other boaters who follow your lead.

We appreciate the steps you have taken so far—to slow down and to limit watching the Southern Residents if there are other whales to watch. But we all need to do more.

The threats faced by the orcas are all human-caused: lack of salmon, toxic accumulations, and noise and disturbance from boats. Studies show that noise and salmon availability are inextricably linked.

Reducing noise and disturbance is not the only thing we can or should do. But it's one thing we can do that will help right now, by making it easier for the orcas to forage, rest and socialize. Every decision you make to avoid the southern residents gives them a better chance to survive.

We support a thriving, sustainable commercial whale-watching industry that contributes to the local economy, educates the public and inspires conservation. A recent report confirms that the industry's economic viability is not dependent upon Southern Resident viewing. Over the past decade, during the same period the orcas declined, the number of commercial vessels more than doubled, and revenue nearly tripled.

The same report shows that avoiding the Southern Residents appears to be better for business. Last year while viewing was suspended in Canada, ridership on Canadian vessels increased. Passengers want to support businesses that are going the extra mile to protect the Southern Residents. Your decision to avoid watching them will attract local customers, and help offset losses from COVID restrictions.

We envision a brighter future when the orcas are recovered, thriving in healthy and abundant seas. But that day will never come unless we act boldly and courageously to protect them now, and give them the space and the salmon they need. Please commit to stop watching the Southern Residents, and join with us to make the Salish Sea a place that can sustain them again.

Pledge organizers are Friends of the San Juans, Natural Resources Defense Council, Seattle Aquarium, The Whale Trail, and Washington Environmental Council. We are joined by the undersigned in our request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to any of the organizers.

Thank you for considering, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Joe Scordino, Former Deputy Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries (Retired)

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D., Former Executive Director, U.S. Marine Mammal Commission (Retired)

Christopher W. Clark, Ph.D., Imogene Johnson Senior Scientist, Bioacoustics Research Program,
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Will Hall, Mayor, City of Shoreline
Former Member, Governor Inslee's Task Force on Southern Resident Orca Recovery

Butch Smith, Former Member, Governor Inslee's Task Force on Southern Resident Orca Recovery

Brendan Flynn, Puget Sound Commercial Fisherman
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Christianne Wilhelmson, Executive Director, Georgia Strait Alliance

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