

50% Less Protection for Orcas

In spite of campaigns to get more funding to protect orcas there has been a recent major blow to the orcas. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will have to cut their whale patrols by approximately 50% in 2009. WDFW has historically received funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) for "Outreach and Education Patrols". NOAA Headquarters cut the NOAA Protected Resources' budget severely for some unknown reason. This will leave WDFW struggling to enforce orca protection legislation and the orcas struggling to survive.

When a species is less than 1000 the population's gene pool is severely restricted and they are extremely vulnerable. This could lead to extinction. The local Southern Community of orcas numbers approximately 85 members. It appears inevitable that they will be gone within 50 years or sooner if hit with continue food loss, an oil spill and other human impacts.

In 2008, the Lifeforce petition was sent to Governor Gregoire. Signees urged Governor Gregoire to direct enforcement agencies to enforce marine mammal protection provisions and to establish a 1/2 mile voluntary boat exclusion zone in waters surrounding Point Roberts. As of June 15, 2008 it is illegal to be in the vicinity of orcas within 100 meters. If orcas are heading towards you must slowly move out of their way.

In February 2009 Lifeforce followed up by releasing a report entitled "Contact: In Pursuit of Orcas". In 2008 Lifeforce gathered conclusive evidence of flagrant disregard for the well being of orcas and the laws by whale watch companies. Pleasure boats imitate these illegal practises. The report is at http://www.lifeforcefoundation.org/files/INPURSUITORCASJAN2009_sm. Photographic evidence collected by Lifeforce led to fines against one Victoria-based whale watch company.

For the third year Governor Gregoire has declared June 2009 as "Orca Awareness Month" in Washington State. It's a great gesture but putting up enforcement money to increase WDFW boat time on the water is needed more than a proclamation hanging on a wall.

Please write to former Washington Governor and present US Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is under the Department of Commerce and they have provided the historic funding to WDFW for orca protection. Urge Secretary Locke to provide sufficient funds to WDFW. His email is: TheSec@doc.gov

For further information: Lifeforce lifeforcesociety@hotmail.com