

Hi All:

Re: NOAA has extended the deadline for submitting comments on proposed vessels regulation to protect killer whales in Puget Sound to Jan. 15, 2010. And by extending the public comment period, they won't have enough time to issue a final rule before the 2010 summer boating season.

It's really unfortunate that the orcas will not get more protection in 2010 under improved vessel regulations. But of course enforcement would still be an issue. In order to provide more protection Lifeforce hopes that NOAA and WDFW will get more funds to step up enforcement in 2010. Whale watch companies do not comply with WA legislation when they are not being monitored by government agencies. This has been proven in our report, "Contact: In Pursuit of Orcas". Lifeforce photos have led to fines against a company.

Lifeforce urges all to email US Commerce Gary Locke to increase orca protection by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Email TheSec@doc.gov). In Canada contact Minister Shea (Email Shea.G@parl.gc.ca).

During public comment meetings the whale watch companies and their commercial/sport fishing buddies were somewhat rude and had a bias letter writing campaign. At least one company owner was a commercial fisher and others have connections with commercial fishing activities. The form letter targeted their whale watch tourists who were misled into thinking that the whale watch companies would go out of business if the vessel regulations are implemented.

It is clear that these industries are making their financial profits a priority over orca protection. Any doubts (lack of science) about what is best must be what is best for the orcas not private businesses.

Whale Watching operations must be changed. Companies have been able to do basically what they want over the years. This must be stopped by changing their operation methods and more enforcement. Lifeforce will be submitting additional comments by the new deadline.

Lifeforce recommendation will include:

1. A 400 yards safety zone around orcas to reduce noise levels, stress and collisions. Companies had agreed to 400 yards when orcas are nursing.
2. No Go Zone on the west side of San Juan Island and southwest side of Point Roberts. These are vital critical habitats.
3. Designated Go Zones to stop the relentless, day long pursuit of orcas.
4. A 30 minute time limit to view orcas (presently boats can stay for hours).

See: The proposed rule, draft environmental assessment, and other supporting documents are available on the Northwest Region Website at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Whales-Dolphins->Porpoise/Killer-Whales/ESA-Status/Orca-Vessel-Regs.cfm>, along with instructions for submitting comments.

Please help,

**Peter Hamilton
Lifeforce Founding Director**