

Stop Orca Cruelty!

Get up close with orcas or else those companies who harass them will go broke? Financial profits must not take priority over stopping orca cruelty! The innocent orcas can only try to avoid all the boats all day long. The whale watch business is not about education to protect endangered species. A Vancouver whale watch company owner was commercial fishing until that industry depleted fish stocks. He told me if orcas go extinct they will just find something else. Well I would suggest get another job now before it is too late.

I have studied the behaviour and travel patterns of orcas for 15 years. Some of that work was done under a DFO research permit. It is a fact that boat traffic has a negative impact on the lifestyles of orcas. Industry people want to hide behind any gap in "science" when it just makes common sense to respect orcas. Let Them Be!

Our 2008 report "Contact: In Pursuit of Orcas" provides many, many examples of whale watch companies' non-compliance with rules and legislation (see http://www.liforcefoundation.org/files/INPURSUITORCASJAN2009_sm.pdf)

For 15 years the Lifeforce's Boater Awareness Program has advised boaters of the rules and, most importantly, respect when operating in the vicinity of endangered orcas. We found that the pleasure boaters usually say they are just doing what the companies are doing because they thought at they knew what to do. When not watched by government enforcement agencies whale watch companies get too close and block the path ways.

More enforcement is needed so existing and any improved laws are adhered to. 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).

The US NOAA Fisheries has started a Public Comment regarding new laws to restrict boat traffic. Their web site is www.noaa.gov. Comments can be sent to orca.plan@noaa.gov up until October 27, 2009.

Lifeforce recommendations include:

1. Both Canada and the US must implement the same stricter laws.
2. The 200 meters should be 400 meters as recommended when companies are watching nursing orcas.
3. There must be No Whale Watch Zones, such as Active Pass, in high boat traffic locations (Companies were in agreement in 2005 to not enter Active Pass.)
4. There can be Whale Watch Zones where designated locations are defined to stop companies from continuously following them all day long.
5. In addition to the San Juan Islands, No Go Zones should include the Point Roberts, WA shoreline and critical habits in Canada.

6. Time limits of maximum 30 minutes must be implemented. Presently companies can be on the orcas for two hours or more.

7. Weather restrictions must include no whale watching during fog and stormy conditions such as seas greater than 3 feet. Commercial boats can't see the orcas and could hit them!

8. There should be government licensing of whale watch companies. This would include a restriction on the number of licenses issued.

9. There should be training of whale watch operators and ECO Certification of those in good standing.

10. Governments should promote land-based whale watching such as Lifeforce's Orca Trails.

The most important action to protect orcas is to promote land-based whale watching that is popular worldwide. Lifeforce's Orca Trails was created in the 90s. We would report to Park Managers when the orcas will pass by marine parks. One such location is Lighthouse Marine Park in Point Roberts (near Tsawwassen) where orcas will pass by as close as 50 feet off the beach. The Orca Center shows photos and provides education information about protecting orcas.

Over the past decade the whale watch industry has drastically grown. The lack of proper government actions has led to the chaos on the water. The victims are the endangered orcas. It is time that government provide the orcas with more peaceful and natural lives.

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WATCH THE NEW LIFEFORCE VIDEO "Stop Orca Cruelty!"