

August 2009 Wildlife Report #1

August started off with an incredible orca pass by on August 1st off Lighthouse Marine Park, Point Roberts, WA. J. K and L pods did a number of breaches as they travel past for nearly one hour. They started at approx. 0610 and ended at 0710. They were very spread out and moving quickly into rough seas. At times there were groups of four to six orcas surfacing about 50 feet off the beach. No boats present to interrupt their lifestyles. This was the opening day of the Point Roberts Art and Music Festival. Lifeforce was present with our education displays, photos and our volunteer's craft work.

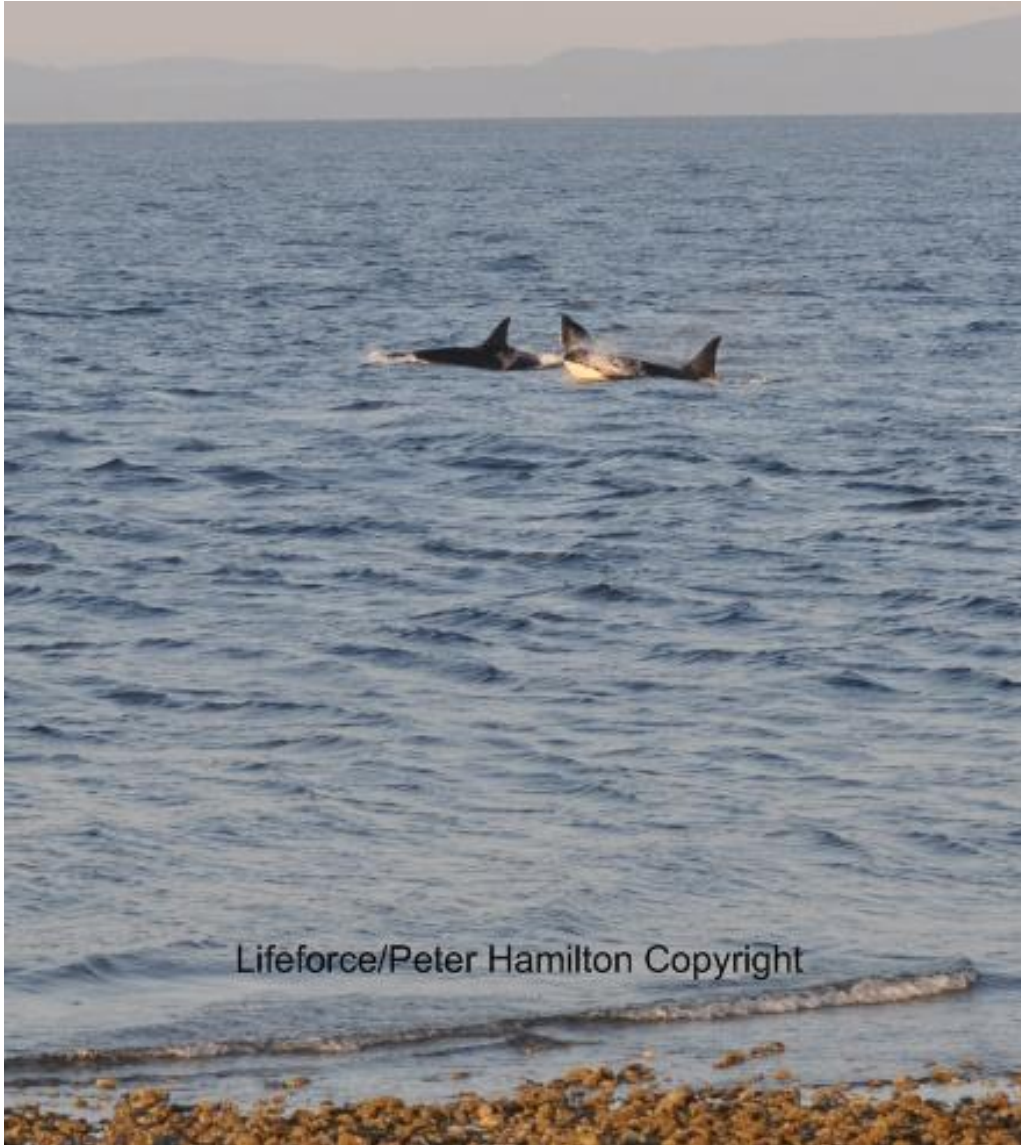
At least seven consecutive breaches by this young orca.





More action very close to shore





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August 2nd wasn't so good so good for the orcas as commercial and pleasure boats relentlessly pursued orcas through Active Pass and in Georgia Straight. In 2005 Whale Watch Companies had pretty much agreed to stop going into Active Pass when the orcas are travelling through it.



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The US government is proposing new boat vessel regulation in an attempt to protect orcas.

Fisheries Service Proposes New Rules to Safeguard Puget Sound's Killer Whales Endangered Whales Could Be Given Wider Berth, Safety Zone

NOAA's Fisheries Service is proposing new rules on vessel traffic aimed at further protecting Southern Resident killer whales in Washington's Puget Sound. These large marine mammals, the subject of intense curiosity from kayakers to tourists crowding the decks of commercial whale-watching vessels, were added to the Endangered Species list in late 2005.

The proposed rules would prohibit vessels from approaching any killer whale closer than 200 yards and

forbid vessels from intercepting or parking in the path of a whale. In addition, the proposed regulations would set up a half-mile-wide no-go zone along the west side of San Juan Island from May 1 through the end of September where generally no vessels would be allowed.

While Southern Resident whales are also threatened by degraded water quality in the sound and lack of prey, primarily salmon, biologists have known for years that vessel traffic may be tied to their low numbers.

The whales, which depend on their highly sophisticated sonar to navigate and find food, can be affected by underwater noise from boats and disturbed by vessels that approach too close or block their paths. The population peaked at 97 animals in the 1990s and then declined to 79 in 2001. It currently stands at 85 whales. The agency's recovery plan, released in early 2008, calls for actions to reduce disturbance from vessels.

If adopted, the earliest the rule would take effect would be May 2010. The agency said it will hold public meetings Sept. 30 in Seattle and Oct. 5 in Friday Harbor for people to learn more about the proposed rules. The public comment period on them closes Oct. 27, 2009.

See the Web at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Whales-Dolphins-Porpoise/Killer-Whales/ESA-Status/Orca-Vessel-Regs.cfm> for more information.

Here's Lifeforce's general position and we will be forwarding a detailed report/video to NOAA's Fisheries Service:

Get up close with orcas or else those 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.

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.lifeforcefoundation.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. Liferforce 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).

Liferforce recommends:

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!

The most important action to protect orcas is land based whale watching that is popular worldwide. Liferforce'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.

This is the first August Wildlife Report with others to follow with lots of surprises and adventures that are yet to be encountered.

For Freedom,

Peter Hamilton

Lifewatch Boater Awareness Program

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