

July 2, 2007

NEWS RELEASE

Re: Orca Days Off – Give Orcas A Break!

Canada's Orca Recovery Plan that was released last week falls short of providing immediate protection for endangered orcas. There are no immediate plans to stop negative boat traffic and to respond to emergencies such as oil spills. There will also be an increase of research boat traffic harassing the orcas.

"One of the best ways to stop boat harassment is to give the orcas a day off and breaks during the day. Humans don't want to work continuously so why should commercial whale watch vessels and research boats be allowed to pursue orcas from sunrise to sunset?" stated Peter Hamilton, Founder of the Vancouver-based ecology organization called Lifeforce, who has studied the problem since 1993, "It's time to give orcas a break!"

Boat Harassment

In general, the present situation regarding research boats, whale watch companies and pleasure boaters is appalling. The boats continually pursue orcas from sunrise to sunset. Monitoring activities and guidelines have not relieved the pressure. If monitors are not present the situation is even worse with the commercial vessels in flagrant violation of guidelines.

It is time for a totally new approach by establishing whale watch regulations, training (companies and traffic monitors), licensing of whale watch operators, better education programs, "No Whale Watch Zones", time limits for commercial/research boats, "Orca Time Outs and Orca Days Off", more enforcement and other recommendations that Lifeforce recently submitted to the US government.

Orca Days Off/Orca Time Outs

As we know, stress affects the immune system and in highly contaminated orcas this would make them more susceptible to health problems and even death. The increase of commercial, pleasure and research boats also exposes these orcas to accidents such as boat collisions that can be life altering or fatal.

In order to relieve some of the ongoing stress and exposure to vessel impacts created by boat traffic Lifeforce recommends "Orca Time Out Periods" of two hours at noon and 5PM each day. Companies can time their tour times to meet this requirement.

For further relief, Lifeforce urges "Orca Days Off". When the orcas are in local waters and have been pursued for 1 day the 2nd day is a "Day Off" in which no commercial activity is allowed. Operators can choose from a variety of other wildlife adventures for that day.

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1. Submission re: NOAA Fisheries Service public comment period on potential regulations to protect killer whales in Washington State from the effects of various vessel activities. Included is:

a) Studying Orcas To Death

Since the designation of orcas as being endangered there has been an increase of research boats harassing the orcas. Prey studies, focal follows and shooting them for skin biopsies results in the researchers being on top of the orcas and well within the 100-meter recommended boundary. This certainly interrupts the lifestyles and poses a threat to their health. Orcas have reacted with fear to being shot with skin biopsy darts from a crossbow.

In addition, pleasure boaters who observe close approaches will try to copy it. When Lifeforce had a Canadian Research Permit it was stipulated that there should not be any close approaches when other boats are presents.

b) Public perception

The aquarium shows that promote petting and/or swimming with dolphins instils a speciesist attitude that could lead to problems with wild orcas if these people have access to boats. For example, Lifeforce has stopped people from trying to swim with the Southern Community.

Also, Whale Watch Companies are still continuously blocking pathways and pleasure boaters think that this is permitted behaviour.

2. Land based Whale Watch Photos and Boat Harassment Photos/Video

The photographs depict both commercial and pleasure boaters in violation of the guidelines. Some of the most disturbing harassment was a Board Member of the Whale Watch Operators Association.