

Lynda Guernsey

From: Sorrel <sorrel@seventhstone.net>
Sent: Thursday, August 16, 2018 5:37 PM
To: Lynda Guernsey; DL - Council
Subject: Whale Recovery Efforts, tomorrow's meeting

Dear County Council Members and Planning Commissioners,

I speak for a large number of Lopez Island citizens who strongly support a marine sanctuary, or Whale Protection Zone for our SRKWs. As a nearly 40-year resident of Lopez, I have watched first hand the decline of our SRKWs and understand there are multiple factors affecting the whale's survival. Various organizations, including Governor Inslee's task force, are focused primarily on salmon recovery, which is a critical issue, and also one that will take decades.

Of immediate concern is how the orca can hunt and forage most efficiently, especially here in the San Juan Islands, a traditional feeding ground. Despite multiple scientific studies that show the SRKWs hunt and navigate less successfully while being pursued by boats, the WW industry claims that vessel noise is insignificant. The 200-yard "no-approach" zone is impossible to enforce, as will be a slightly larger zone, as boats position themselves in front of moving whales. The unregulated industry has grown to 67 companies with 103 active vessels (only a handful of which are based in the San Juans).

The proposal originally created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a Whale Protection Zone in Haro Strait was resubmitted in 2016 by the Center for Biological Diversity and Orca Relief Citizen's Alliance. The 10 square mile zone off the west side of San Juan Island has historically been one of the richest fisheries in the San Juan Islands for literally thousands of years, for indigenous peoples and whales alike.

Not surprisingly, the 70-million dollar whale-watching industry bitterly opposes a WPZ, or marine sanctuary, in Haro Strait. Pacific Whale Watch Association, the mouthpiece of the industry, has called the WPZ "a distraction," and "ineffectual," and has, along with handful of local researchers they fund, promulgated misinformation such as the whales no longer congregate in Haro Strait and that the region is devoid of fish.

Aside from the 2016 Soundwatch study, which confirmed that both the orca and whale-watching boats were densely concentrated in Haro Strait for the entire summer, a cursory search of online whale watching blogs shows that in 2018, whale watch operators continue to take tourists most frequently into Haro Strait (listed as a "favorite feeding ground") and that the SRKWs were observed in the area frequently. Yes, for the past couple of years the SRKWs have ranged further afield, but it is patently untrue that they no longer frequent Haro Strait. Nor is it true the area is "devoid" of fish. If that were the case, the SRKWs would not be in the San Juans at all. Nor would there be fisherman in Haro Strait.

Marine (and wildlife) sanctuaries are a proven method of restoring ecosystems. The arguments against a marine sanctuary are not based in fact. If vessels were prevented from hovering over areas like the Salmon Bank, spewing gas and oil into the water and creating an acoustic hell for all marine creatures, there is every possibility that the ecosystem would repopulate itself.

Kevin Ranker wrote an Op-Ed for the Seattle Times yesterday and said he strongly supports whale sanctuaries. Please join him in support of giving the SRKWs every opportunity to hunt and forage as efficiently as possible. Arguments against this cost-free, benefit rich proposal are coming from a for-profit industry and researchers who want 24/7 access to the whales. The arguments against it are, quite frankly, lame. An online petition I created 2 days ago supporting the WPZ has already received thousands of signatures from people all over the world.

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/277/892/014/whale-protection-zone-needed-now-for-tahlequah-and-endangered-orca-whales/>

Please do the right thing for these whales. The world is watching, and your constituents are too.

Thank you,

Sorrel North

Lopez Island