

December 1st 2016

National Marine Fisheries Service
Protected Resources Division
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

Dear Ms. Barre,

We are all in agreement that the Southern Resident Killer Whales are in serious threat of extinction. The National Marine Fisheries Service has concluded that there are three primary threats to the recovery of the SRKW: shortage of food, contaminants in their environment, and noise and disturbance from vessels. A fourth element is potential oil spills, especially in light of the Canadian government's recent approval of the Trans Mountain Pipeline into Vancouver. All of these threats are forms of habitat degradation.

Orca Relief Citizens' Alliance, the Center for Biological Diversity, and Project SeaWolf recently submitted a regulatory petition to NOAA NMFS, which provides a framework for establishing a Whale Protection Zone in SRKW critical core habitat. The proposed protection zone is in Haro Strait off of San Juan Island. The WPZ would quickly and inexpensively reduce the noise and disturbance to the SRKWs and ensure unimpeded access to the core of their critical habitat on which they rely for hunting, communications, and rest. In particular, the commercial whale watching fleet and the private vessels that follow them impact the orcas extensively. It can often look like a Taiji dolphin hunt in that area. A WPZ would limit the orca's exposure to those vessels. While we support non-captive viewing of whales in the wild, we fear that, without limitations, the whales could suffer from too much interference.

OPS, after careful review of the proposal, supports the petition to establish a Whale Protection Zone and other efforts to help SRKW recover from the brink of extinction. Taking action now to establish a Whale Protection Zone should in no way detract from efforts to increase salmon populations and reduce contaminants.

We write to request that you begin the process to create a Whale Protection Zone will all due haste. The southern residents are counting on your help to ensure their future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Louie Psihoyos', is written in a cursive style.

Louie Psihoyos
Executive Director, Oceanic Preservation Society

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