

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

cc: Penny Pritzker, Secretary of Commerce; Kathryn Sullivan, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator; Eileen Sobeck, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries; Barry Thorn, Regional Administrator

Dear Ms. Barre,

I am writing to tell you that Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) and I support the establishment of a Whale Protection Zone for part of the Southern Resident Killer Whales' critical core habitat in Haro Strait off San Juan Island, Washington State. I am the author of 30 scientific papers, including several that include discussion of killer whales and Marine Protected Areas, plus 22 books mainly on whales, including Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises¹. I am co-chair of the IUCN SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, an invited member of the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group, and research fellow at WDC.

As you know, the Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKWs) are facing the threat of extinction. NMFS's scientific research has shown that there are three main threats to SRKW recovery: shortage of food, contaminants in their environment, and noise and disturbance from vessels. As a small population, the SRKWs are also vulnerable to potential oil spills or disease outbreak (perhaps exacerbated by climate change). All of these are forms of habitat degradation that can at least be partly addressed by spatial conservation.

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 covering part of the SRKWs' critical core habitat in Haro Strait. The aim of establishing a protection zone would be to reduce the noise and disturbance the SRKWs experience in their core critical habitat where they hunt, rest and communicate with each other.

After reviewing the petition, WDC and I fully support Orca Relief's request to establish a Whale Protection Zone as well as other regulatory efforts that would give enhanced protection to help SRKWs recover from the threat of near extinction, including but not limited to the Whale Protection Zone - such as efforts to increase salmon populations and reduce noise and contaminants.

There is increasing evidence in various parts of the world that habitat protection for whales and dolphins can reduce mortalities (e.g. Gormley et al 2012²), as well as to function as a control or monitoring area even if fairly small in size (Williams et al 2009³). We had no idea that Robson Bight would prove useful for monitoring Northern Resident Killer Whale habitat for comparisons with and without whale watching, as well as for considerations about the threat of oil spills.

I think the idea of creating a Whale Protection Zone, as described above, needs to be made a priority.

Sincerely,

Erich Hoyt

Erich Hoyt
Research Fellow, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

¹ Earthscan, Taylor & Francis, New York & Oxford, 477pp, 2011

² "First Evidence that marine protected areas can work for marine mammals." *Journal of Applied Ecology* (49):474-480.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2012.02121.x/pdf>

³ "The role of social aggregations and protected areas in killer whale conservation: the mixed blessing of critical habitat." *Biological Conservation* (142):709-719. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320708004710>