



November 18, 2016

Lynne Barre
Seattle Branch Chief
Protected Resources Division
National Marine Fisheries Service
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115
Email: Lynne.Barre@noaa.gov

Re: Petition--Whale protection zone (WPZ) to expedite recovery of the Endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW)

Dear Lynne,

The Coalition To Protect Puget Sound (Coalition) supports the Orca Relief Petition (Petition) to establish a whale protection zone (WPZ) to expedite recovery of the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). It is common public knowledge for anyone who loves these whales that they are already listed as an endangered population under the Endangered Species Act and depleted population under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Unfortunately, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) existing regulations have not worked, our whale population is declining and we cannot wait until they are only a memory if they become extinct.

We agree with the following major points the Petition calls for:

1. Increased regulatory steps to address the noise and disturbance from small motorized vessels experienced by the SRKW that is consistent from April through October. Within the WPZ, motorized whale watching should be prohibited from April 1 to September 30 for commercial and private motorized whale watching boats. In addition, a no wake speed limit is necessary when boats are closer than 400 yards to whales throughout their critical habitat.
2. A protected area in Haro Strait, Salish Sea, an area critical for essential orca life cycle including foraging, feeding socializing, resting and transiting. This protection zone is proposed to be along the western and southern coasts of San Juan Island, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the shore (with an additional $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide buffer area), from Mitchell point in the north, to Cattle Point in the south about 10-12 square miles, 0.5% of the currently designated critical habitat.
3. A permit system for motorized commercial and private whale watching, especially in the core critical habitat

Not only are whales an important economic driver for the State of Washington, we owe it to future generations to take care of these iconic Washington State species. We already have stood by as our salmon populations have declined to dangerously low populations that directly affect the survival of our whales.

Yes, we know that the word regulation is not popular. And yes, we understand that it will be inconvenient for boat operators not to be able to get as close to the whales. What is important--is that we will have no whale watching at all if these whales are driven to extinction because protections are not approved that help their longevity.



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So what are we waiting for? We hope your answer will be there is no valid reason to wait to approve this Petition as our whales' lives hang in the balance.

We would appreciate being listed as an interested party and receive all relevant information on this issue that is distributed.

Sincerely,
Laura Hendricks
Coalition To Protect Puget Sound, Director
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For more information on the Coalition To Protect Puget Sound, please see our website:
<http://coalitiontoprotectpugetsoundhabitat.org/>

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