



December 22, 2016

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

Dear Ms. Barre,

I am writing in support of the federal petition requesting the expansion of protection for the Southern Resident Killer Whales in Haro Strait off San Juan Island. Killer whales are an iconic species, particularly in the Pacific Northwest; their presence in the Salish Sea is strongly reflected in Native culture and the staunch environmental ethic that is characteristic of our region. These whales deserve protection from noise and disturbance and, given recent trends, their very existence appears to depend upon it.

The proposed Whale Protection Zone would aid recovery of the southern resident killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), which is listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act and a depleted population under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. With the recent deaths of a mother and young calf, the population of the southern residents has dipped to only 80 individuals. The southern resident population is threatened by lack of food due to declining Chinook salmon runs, toxic pollution, noise, and disturbance — all forms of habitat degradation. I support the long-term goals of increasing the number of salmon and reducing

toxins in Puget Sound. However, a protection zone would quickly and relatively inexpensively reduce the noise and disturbance these whales experience and ensure unimpeded access to the core of their critical habitat on which they rely for hunting, communications, and rest.

It is entirely reasonable to expect that 0.5% of the designated critical habitat for this population of killer whales should be managed for the effects of motorized vessels and whale watching activity. I encourage the National Marine Fisheries Service to use its authority to establish a whale protection zone along the west coast of San Juan Island to provide much needed relief to this unique population of resident killer whales that are so much a part of the regional identity of the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you for your consideration,



Beth Pike, MEM

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CC: Penny Pritzker  
Kathryn Sullivan  
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