

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

December 16, 2016

RE: San Juan Island Whale Protection Zone

Dear National Marine Fisheries Service,

Thank you for taking the time to consider our comment on the proposed Whale Protection Zone (WPZ) off the the west side of San Juan Island. Our iconic Southern Resident Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) are facing extinction and this is one step towards helping alleviate stress to this already overly burdened population.

RE Sources for Sustainable Communities is a local organization in northwest Washington, founded in 1982. RE Sources works to build sustainable communities and protect the health of northwest Washington's people and ecosystems through the application of science, education, advocacy, and action. Our North Sound Baykeeper program is dedicated to protecting and enhancing the marine and nearshore habitats of northern Puget Sound and the Georgia Strait. Our chief focus is on preventing pollution from entering the North Sound and Strait, while helping our local citizenry better understand the complex connections between prosperity, society, environmental health, and individual wellbeing. Our North Sound Baykeeper is the 43rd member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, with over 300 organizations in 34 countries around the world that promote fishable, swimmable, drinkable water. RE Sources has over 20,000 members in Whatcom, Skagit, and San Juan counties, and we submit these comments on their behalf.

The Orca Relief Citizens' Alliance, along with the Center for Biological Diversity and Project Seawolf, submitted their Petition to Establish a Whale Protection Zone for the Southern Resident Killer Whale Distinct Population Segment under the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act in November of 2016. The intent of this letter is to express support for this petition. A WPZ would help alleviate an already burdened marine mammal population listed as endangered. Many of the on-going efforts to save the Southern Resident Killer Whale population will take years before we see results, if any. This is an immediate action that can have fast-acting impacts. We defer to the Orca Relief Citizens' Alliance et al. petition, which eloquently outlines the necessity for a WPZ based on scientific evidence. Please consider establishing a WPZ along the western and southern coasts of San Juan Island, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a



mile from the shore (with an additional ¼ mile wide buffer area), from Mitchell Point in the north to Cattle Point at the south end.

Sincerely,

Lee First
North Sound Baykeeper

Eleanor Hines
Lead Scientist