

Support for Southern Resident killer whale monitoring efforts



Soundwatch and Be Whale Wise (The Whale Museum)

Soundwatch is an on-the-water education and research program that contacts boaters and kayakers to provide education on best practices, guidelines and regulations. Soundwatch also maintains a long-term dataset on vessel compliance and whale behavior.

Be Whale Wise is a transboundary effort to promote regulations and guidelines for best practices when operating vessels around marine mammals, notably orcas.

Objectives:

- Monitor vessel activity around SRKW and other whales, collect long-term data to describe trends in vessel activity.
- Systematically record instances of vessel non-compliance with state laws.
- Maintain/increase capacity at Lime Kiln State Park hydrophone to monitor killer whale presence and ambient noise levels.
- Increased presence in fall and winter in central and south Puget Sound.
- Coordinate sightings network and facilitate data partnerships.

Funding: multiple partners, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funds at \$300,000 for three years and state funds for \$100,000 in 2021.

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Oceans Initiative

This research will evaluate the effectiveness of vessel regulations and the commercial whale watching licensing program, including effects of vessel activity on Southern Resident killer whale behavior and on other vessels.

Objectives:

- Describe impacts of vessel number, type, speed, and distance on SRKW behavior, particularly foraging behavior.
- Describe impacts of commercial whale watching vessels on recreational boating activity and non-compliance.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of recent small vessel rules on SRKW behavior.

Funding: NOAA funds and state funds totaling \$162,000 per year

SeaLife Response, Rehabilitation, and Research (SR³)

This research will use photogrammetry to identify whales of concern in the first half of each year, with analysis completed in time to evaluate SRKW health prior to the beginning of the commercial whale watching season. Body condition, individual growth, and pregnancy will be evaluated.

Objectives:

- Identify vulnerable individuals within the SRKW population to inform emergency rules.
- Generate spring data for comparison and complement to existing fall data collection.

Funding: NOAA funds and state funds totaling \$48,418 per year.

WDFW is also funding broad and targeted outreach and education efforts to expand and enhance recreational boaters' awareness of SRKW conservation and recovery, including vessel regulations.