

INSIDE

## Liforce calls for day off for orcas

By Peter Hamilton

While the music and festivities celebrated Independence Day the three orca families in the endangered southern community reunited in waters near Point Roberts.

Orcas, also known as killer whales, are the largest members of the dolphin family. All family members live together for their entire lives in "pods." The southern community has J, K and L pods. While Js spend most of their lives in B.C. and Washington waters the Ks and Ls usually return in June and will stay until the winter. This year a sub-pod of L pod returned first in June, then the rest of L pod and K pod.

The reunion was near Saturna Island where the Vancouver Aquarium harpooned an orca to use as a model for a sculpture in 1964. They started the orca captivity business that led to one third to one half of the southern community being killed. There are presently only 86 orcas. There has been two new births in J and L pods while there was a loss of five orcas during last fall and winter. Since 1998 there has been 21 surviving newborns but 32 orcas have died.

U.S. and Canada are implementing orca recovery plans. Liforce, an ecology organization, believes that these plans fall short of providing immediate protection for endangered orcas. There are no immediate plans to stop harmful boat traffic, such as the increase of research boats, and to respond to emergencies such as oil spills.

One of the best ways to stop boat harassment is to give the orcas a day off and breaks during the day. Humans don't want to work continuously so why should commercial whale watch vessels and research boats be allowed to pursue orcas from sunrise to sunset? It's time for whale watch and research regulations. It's time to give orcas a break.

Since the designation of orcas as being endangered there has been an increase of research boats harassing the orcas. Prey studies and using a cross bow to shoot them for skin biopsies results in the researchers being well within the 100-meter recommended boundary. This interrupts their lifestyles and poses a threat to their health. Orcas have reacted with fear to being shot with skin biopsy darts. The experiments are unnecessary. In order to save them we are studying them to death.

### Orca Days Off/Orca Time Outs

As we know, stress affects the immune system and in highly contaminated orcas this would make them more susceptible to health problems and even death. The increase of commercial, pleasure and research boats also exposes these orcas to accidents such as boat collisions that can be life altering or fatal.

In order to relieve some of the ongoing stress and exposure to vessel impacts created by boat traffic I recommend 'orca time out periods' of two hours at noon and 5 p.m. each day. Companies can time their tour times to meet this requirement.

For further relief, there should be 'orca days off.' When the orcas are in local waters and have been pursued for one day the second day is a 'day off' in which no commercial or research activity is allowed. Operators can choose from a variety of other wildlife adventures for that day.

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