



## 2019 ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY

# Orca Emergency Response

HABITAT **HB 1579 | SB 5580**

VESSEL NOISE **HB 1580 | SB 5577**

TOXICS **HB 1194 | SB 5135**

Southern Resident killer whales (orcas) are on the brink of extinction, warranting an all-hands-on-deck commitment to urgent action. The highly visible deaths in 2018 of a calf carried by her mother for 17 days throughout the Salish Sea as well as a young female and a male orca gripped the region and drew unprecedented national and international attention. This was a stark reminder of the declining health of Puget Sound, an incredibly vital piece of the region's economy, recreation, and source of food and income for local tribal communities. In November 2018, the Orca Recovery Task Force recommended actions needed for the survival and protection of Southern Resident orcas, some of which require legislation.

## THREATS

First and foremost, with too few Chinook salmon, Southern Resident orcas are starving. Noise and harassment from vessels interferes with their ability to communicate with each other and to find food. Another risk is toxic pollution, which interferes with orcas' immune and reproductive systems as well as the survival of juvenile salmon and herring that provide food for orcas. All three of these threat areas must be addressed to save orcas and revitalize the health of Puget Sound for all.

## SOLUTIONS FOR ORCA PROTECTION AND RECOVERY

- **Increase Chinook salmon populations** by protecting habitat. Enforcing existing laws requires civil penalties and stop-work orders to prevent further habitat damage;
- **Protect forage fish populations** that rely on healthy shoreline areas by repealing fast-track permit processes for shoreline armoring under the Hydraulic Code;
- **Reduce vessel noise and disturbance** by establishing a "go-slow" bubble around Southern Resident orcas; and
- **Reduce toxic pollution** and prevent future cleanups by taking action on harmful chemicals in consumer products.

Complimentary actions include funding for programs and projects critical for salmon recovery, reducing toxic pollution, preventing oil spills, and implementing and enforcing existing laws and safeguards.



PHOTO: MIKE RITTER

# SAVING THE SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCAS AND RESTORING WASHINGTON WATERS IS A CLEAR PRIORITY FOR THE ENTIRE STATE

**Southern Resident orca populations continue to decline** – After three orcas died in 2018, the population is at a 35-year low. More are in poor health now. These whales rely on salmon from rivers throughout the state.

**Give the whales space and quiet** – Reducing noise and disturbance from all vessels (large ships, ferries, whale watching, and other small boats) is something we can do quickly to help orcas. Establishing a “go slow” bubble around the orcas will reduce noise immediately surrounding the whales and will reduce vessel disturbance that affects foraging and communication.

**Habitat protection must be the cornerstone of salmon recovery** – Protecting habitat that supports salmon is critical to the long-term food supply for orcas. Currently, shoreline armoring permits are often given fast-track approval without meaningful review. Fixing this gap means better habitat protection for salmon and orcas, and a clearer permitting pathway for land owners. In addition, enforcing habitat protection laws by issuing stop-work orders for illegal activity and taking civil action on permit violations will provide better protection for salmon habitat and more food for orcas.

**Reducing toxics in consumer products benefits orcas and people** – Toxic chemicals used in consumer products have been found throughout the environment, including in orcas and their favored food source, Chinook salmon. Now is the time to prioritize action for reducing sources of these harmful chemicals starting with five chemical classes widely used in consumer products: phthalates (plasticizers), nonstick PFAS, toxic flame retardants, PCBs, and phenolic compounds such as Bisphenol A. We must prevent toxic pollution to protect the health of our future.

**The whales cannot wait any longer and the public demands bold actions now** – Tens of thousands of people weighed in on actions needed for orca recovery during the Task Force process, and the public expects bold actions in line with the magnitude of the terrible threats facing the Southern Residents.



This is one of the 2019 Environmental Priorities presented by a coalition of over twenty organizations in Washington committed to advancing strong environmental policy.

## CONTACTS

Mindy Roberts | Campaign Manager  
mindy@wecprotects.org

Danielle Shaw | Lobbyist  
danielle@wecprotects.org

FOR QUESTIONS  
REGARDING TOXICS  
Laurie Valeriano  
lvaleriano@toxicfreefuture.org

*We face a generational obligation and shared responsibility to pass on the important legacy of a healthy Southern Resident orca population for future generations. With several of the 75 remaining whales exhibiting poor health, the time to act is now.*