Soundwatch: eighteen years of monitoring whale watch vessel activities in the Salish Sea

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The Whale Museum’s
Soundwatch Boater Education Program

Photo credit: Jeanne Hyde
What is Soundwatch?

Soundwatch Boater Education Program was created by The Whale Museum in 1993. It's mission is to prevent vessel disturbance to killer whales and other marine wildlife in the Central Salish Sea.

The Soundwatch Boater Education Program is a vessel monitoring and public education outreach program.

Photo credit: Jeanne Hyde
Methods

Soundwatch educates and monitors vessels on the water gathering data on vessel numbers, vessel interactions with marine mammals from May-September, 10am-5pm, during the whale watch season in the Haro Strait region of the Salish Sea.

Photo credit: Jeanne Hyde
GUIDELINES FOR KAYAKERS WHEN ORCAS ARE PRESENT

The Kayakers' Code of Conduct is a set of San Juan Island Nearshore guidelines meant to be used along with regional Be Whale Wise Marine Guidelines and committed local/state/federal laws and regulations.

- Do not leave from shore if you are unable to maintain 200 yards from the orcas.
- Paddle to shore or further offshore to maintain 200 yards to the side and 400 yards out of their path.
- If within 400 yards of orcas, kayakers should paddle toward shore, secure themselves (ideally in keel/buck/brine), set up, stop paddling and wait until the orcas are 400 yards away.
- If offshore of orcas & within 400 yards, raft up for safety in boat traffic (preferably kayakers will always be inside of boat traffic).
- Adjust your plan of action according to the whales’ direction of travel and the state’s state/federal laws.
- Maintain a 100 yard distance from marine mammals.

Marine Preserves
Regulations (closed to all shellfishing & bottomfishing activities. See WDFW Marine Rules 7 for exact locations.) San Juan Islands shellfish fishing within 300 yards of Yellow & Low Islands to reduce rodent mortality.

National Wildlife Refuges
Boaters are advised to stay 200 yards away to avoid disturbing marine mammals & birds.

Botomfisky Recovery Zone
Guidelines: No bottomfishing within 1.4 mile of shore to protect & reduce regional fishing.

Sensitve Areas
Areas marked are for small watercraft & watered meeting sites. Kayak boats provide critical habitat for juvenile fish. Please avoid disturbing sediments & vegetation.
## Data sheets

### Recreational vessel contact data

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
<th>Vessel Type</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Vessel Name</th>
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<td>RY</td>
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**Notes:** Distance (from ship), Action (contact or pass), Reaction (if contact), Date, Time, Name, ID, Port, Comments.

### Vessel and Whale behavior data

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Crew</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Weekend</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Boating Event</th>
<th>Total Vessels</th>
<th>Total Encounters</th>
<th>Total Passings</th>
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**Notes:** Distance (from ship), Action (contact or pass), Reaction (if contact), Date, Time, Name, ID, Port, Comments.

### Incidence data

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<th>Lat Declination</th>
<th>Long Declination</th>
<th>Vessel Type</th>
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<th>Comments on Situation</th>
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</table>

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Results—entire dataset


Non-Sig trend. Kayaks: Sig trend since 2012

Photo credit: Jill Berger
Closer look at Kayaks: Sig trend since 2012

2012 vs 2015 Commercial Kayak Vessel Counts from San Juan County Park
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- 2012 - Commercial Vessels Launched
- 2015 - Commercial Vessels Launched
- 2012 Total People (8,510)
- 2015 Total People (12,230)

* Total people includes kayak guides and all guests

Photo credit: Jill Berger
I. Types used all years

I. Types not used all years

Significant upward trends:
- Within 880 m of Lime Kiln
- In the path of whales
- Under power within 0-100 m of whales
- In the Path (formerly Parked in the path of whales)
- Fast within 400 m
- 1st Approach head on, behind, or on shore
- Kayaks spread out
Conclusions

From 1998-2015 show slight increases in boats and recent increases in kayaks engaging in whale watching in turn there are increases in some incident types.

Long-term increasing trends in incidents are those inshore of whales and in the path of travelling whales placing boats near SRKWs

Education and enforcement matters! Recommend continuation and expansion of shore and water-based boater education as well as increased enforcement to accommodate the still growing popularity of wildlife viewing.
Thanks!

Photo credit: Jill Berger