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Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference

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COVID-19 and the SRKWs: A New Suite of Problems Facing the Critically Endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales in the Salish Sea

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Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Killer Whales via Vessel Trends



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Were there any positive or negative byproducts of the pandemic for SRKW conservation?

-*Positive* predictions: less tourism-related activities, reduced large vessel transit through critical habitat.

-*Negative* predictions: increased recreational boat traffic, loss of public outreach opportunities.

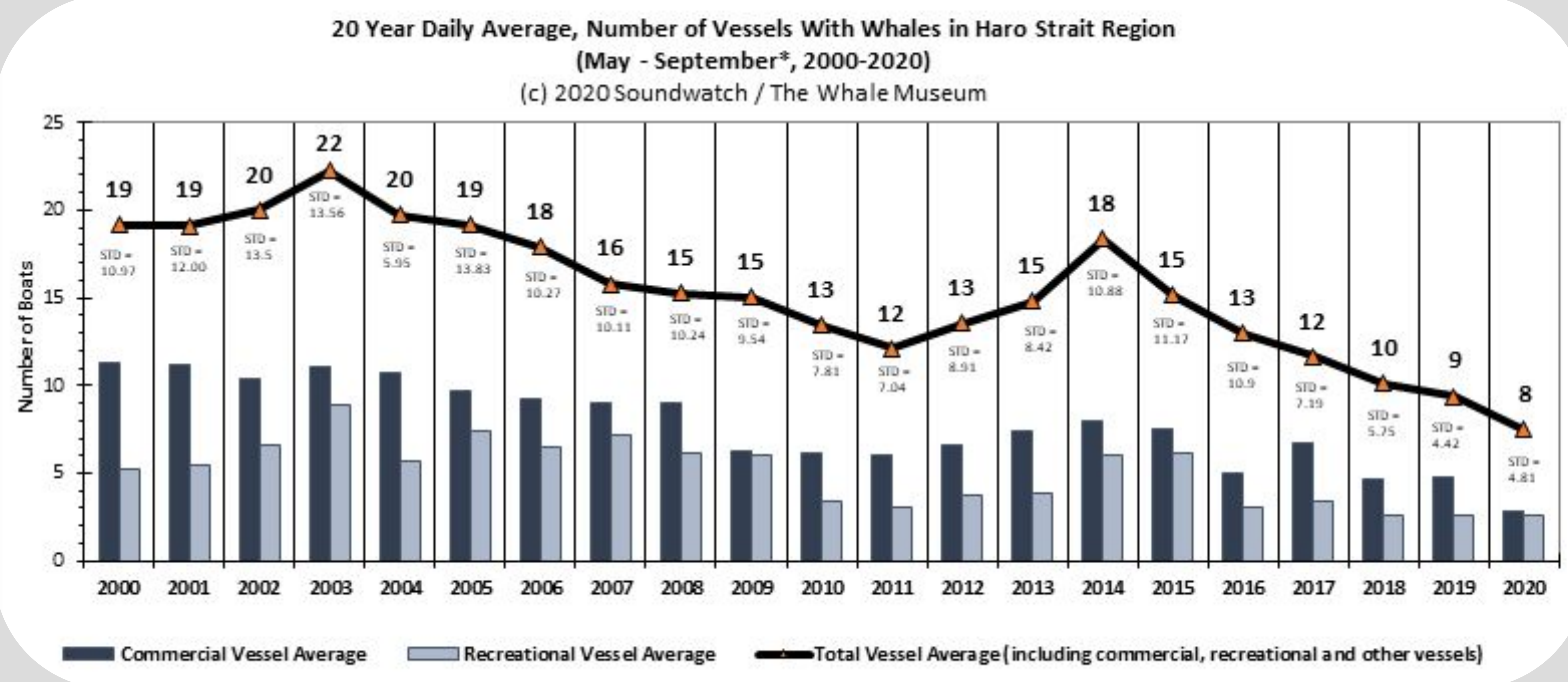


Fig. 1. Total average number of vessels observed within 1/2 mile of whales from 2000-2020.

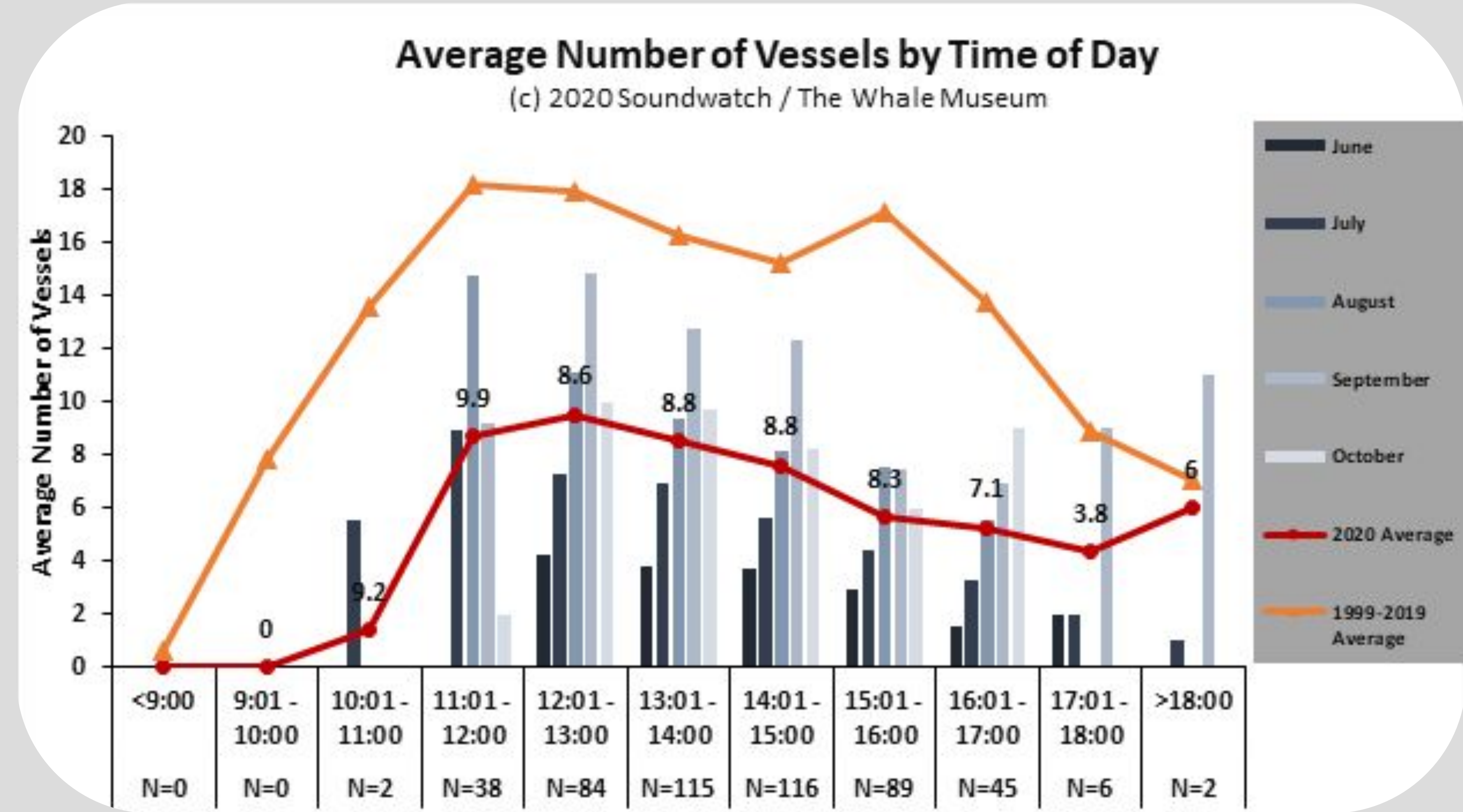


Fig. 2. Average number of vessels within 1/2 mile of whales per hour of the day from 9:00-18:00; 2020 (red) compared to 1999-2019 (orange).

Outcomes

-Loss of public outreach opportunities combined with an increase in private vessel sales in 2020 suggests an increase in uneducated or inexperienced boaters.

-Reduced capacity guidelines for Eco-Tour vessels altered daily trends from historical "peak times" to a schedule that suggests altered tour operations.

Methods

-We compared vessel trends from summer 2020 with the Soundwatch database of vessel presence and whale behavior trends.

-Outreach was conducted via on-the-water contacts, dockside booths, and through The Whale Museum exhibits (Friday Harbor, WA).

Acknowledgements

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