



Apr 26th, 4:30 PM - 5:00 PM

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

Erin Casellas
The Whale Museum

Alanna Frayne
The Whale Trail

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/ssec>

Casellas, Erin and Frayne, Alanna, "COVID-19 and the SRKWs: A New Suite of Problems Facing the Critically Endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales in the Salish Sea" (2022). *Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference*. 27.

<https://cedar.wwu.edu/ssec/2022ssec/allsessions/27>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Events at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

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



Erin Casellas¹, Alanna Frayne¹

¹Soundwatch Boater Education Program, The Whale Museum

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.

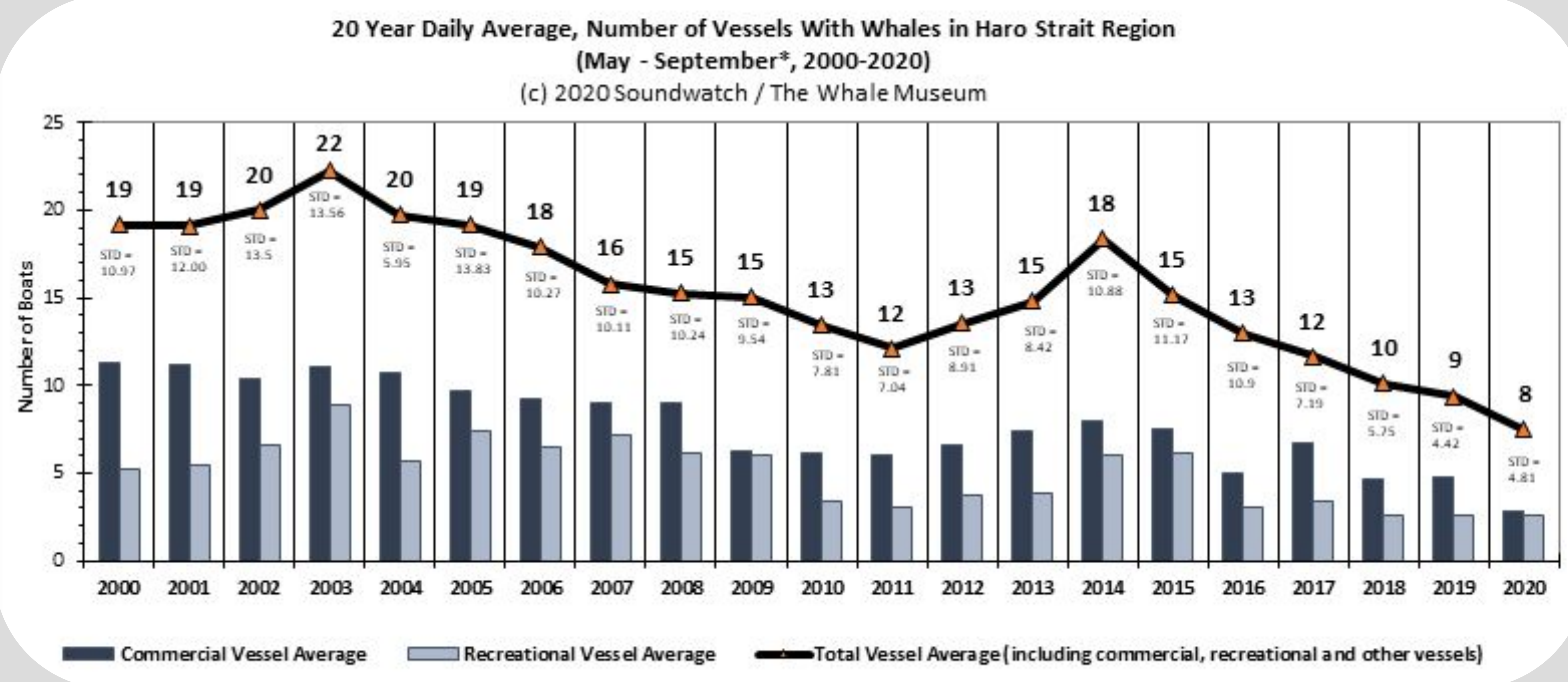


Fig. 1. Total average number of vessels observed within 1/2 mile of whales from 2000-2020.

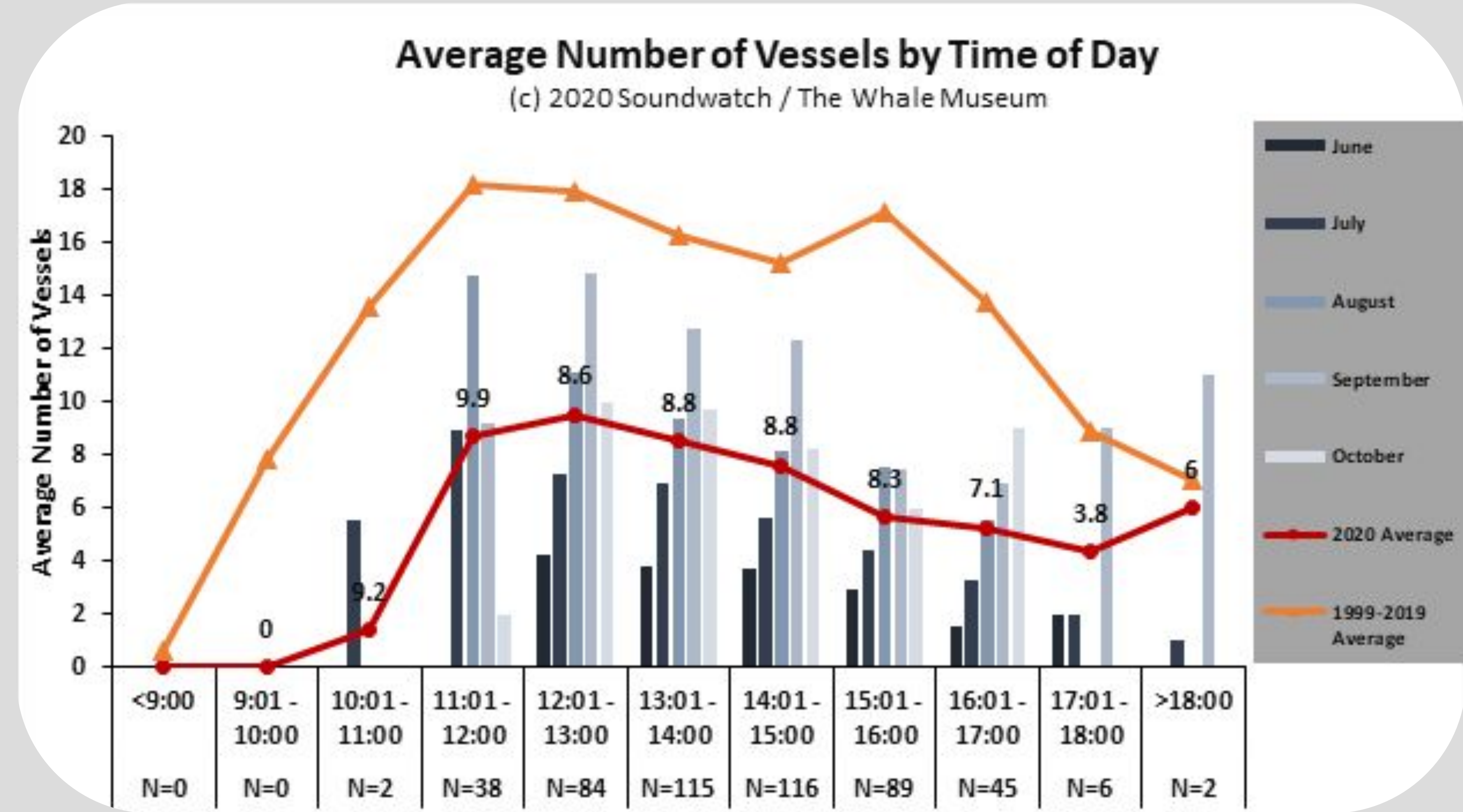


Fig. 2. Average number of vessels within 1/2 mile of whales per hour of the day from 9:00-18:00; 2020 (red) compared to 1999-2019 (orange).

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

We acknowledge the indigenous Coast Salish people and their role as the original stewards of this habitat and the SRKWs. Thanks to the entire staff of The Whale Museum; Lynne Barre with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW); the WA/BC Eco-Tour community. Funding for Soundwatch is provided through contracts with NOAA and WDFW and grants from the NFWF as well as The Whale Museum's general operating budget.