

For Immediate Release

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U.S. and Canadian Whale Watch Tour Operators take New Voluntary Stewardship Actions

Creating a New Whale Sightings App is Just Part of the Effort

San Juan Islands, WA...“Pacific Whale Watch Association (PWWA) members on both sides of the border will be prioritizing their efforts on watching the abundant Bigg’s killer whales and humpbacks whales, instead of the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), when this option is available,” says Kelley Balcomb-Bartok, Communications Director for the Pacific Whale Watch Association.

This new action comes on top of PWWA members following new government regulations on both sides of the border—the US regulations require vessels to remain 300 yards from SRKW (up from 200 yards), while Canada requires 400 meters. In all cases, vessels must slow to 7 knots or less when approaching within a half-nautical mile of whales. There are also several new No-Go Zones established in select areas in Canadian waters that PWWA vessels respect and avoid when whales are present. “We are asking all boaters to slow down, look to us as the example of proper behavior around whales, when they see PWWA whale watch boats around whales,” adds Balcomb-Bartok.

The absence of Southern Resident orcas in June was a reminder of how much patterns have changed in recent years. In the past, they were a common sight during summer months, especially from Lime Kiln Point State Park on the west side of San Juan Island. The thriving mammal-eating Bigg’s killer whales and humpbacks are now filling in the gap. For those who have their hearts set on seeing whales in the wild, a whale and wildlife tour has become a much more reliable option than watching from shore. Naturalists onboard vessels and onshore provide education and instill a stewardship ethic in visitors that have helped make the plight of the Southern Resident orcas a global issue.

Launching in 2019, **The Pacific Whale Watch Association has created a new whale sightings app** as part of their stewardship actions. “Because members of the PWWA are committed to supporting efforts to help Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), they created a new app that will be used to record and provide sightings data to the scientific community, the general public, stakeholders, government agencies, and decision-makers on both sides of the border. The ‘eyes on the water’ efforts of the PWWA community provides an unprecedented amount of real-time effort that the enforcement and the scientific community recognize they can’t provide for themselves, along with a much deeper understanding of the numerous marine mammal species that call the Salish Sea home,” continues Balcomb-Bartok.

“PWWA members also have a voluntary policy of spreading out the fleet, so it is not all congregated around one group of whales. They limit the amount of time spent around a group of whales when there are several other boats present. Our captains and naturalists, along with our owners, are passionate, dedicated, and educated professionals who are all tremendously concerned about the health and plight of the Southern Residents,” said Jeff Friedman, U.S. President of PWWA. In addition to on-the-water education, PWWA members also collectively make annual contributions to research and salmon habitat restoration projects. Approximately \$500,000 a year is contributed from the association throughout the region.

Dropbox of hi-res photos:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/e4zt6t1jazhruss/AACjfKo5ocimA9eQZh_4qZ6la?dl=0

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