



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

3/15/2024

Agenda item:

Orca Whale Periodic Status Review, Briefing, Public Comment, Decision

Presenter(s):

Taylor Cotten, Conservation Assessment Section Manager and Jessica Stocking, Marine Coastal and Flyway Section Manager

Background summary:

Many partners are acting to aid the recovery of Southern Resident Killer Whales (Orca). Primary stressors on the population include reduced prey availability and size, contaminants, disturbance from vessel noise and activity, and these have cumulative and interacting effects on the population. Additionally, small numbers of reproductively active individuals in the population over generations have led to inbreeding depression, which reduces the whales' resilience and has contributed further to population decline. Given the difficulty of isolating impacts from the multitude of stressors, efforts must be aggressive and multi-faceted. In 2018, Governor Inslee signed an executive order that included formation of a Southern Resident Orca Task Force to make recommendations for immediate and longer-term actions to ensure Southern Resident Killer Whale recovery. Those recommendations have helped galvanize support, partnerships, and funding, and management actions have increased as a result.

However, the main threats persist, some are increasing, and recovery won't be evident for years to decades. In addition, there are the growing stressors of climate change and human population growth on the ecosystem. Due to the small population of Southern Resident killer whales, long maturation and recruitment times, and continued threats, we recommend the species maintain endangered status in Washington.

Staff recommendation:

Maintain the Orca Whale as endangered in Washington.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

No policy changes with a maintain recommendation.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

None.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The agency sent out a press release and posted a request on our website to solicit information from the public to be included in the coming Periodic Status Reviews and Status Reports. In accordance with Washington Administrative Code (WAC) regulations, individuals and organizations had one year to contribute information for the reviews. Department staff included this information as applicable in the status review documents. The documents were then reviewed by Department staff and external species experts before 90-day public comment periods on the document and our findings. We incorporated appropriate edits received as part of that 90-day public comment period on the Periodic Status Review general support for the recommendation.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Briefing, time for public comment, and decision.

Draft motion language:

I move that the Killer Whale maintain its current status as an endangered species in Washington as recommended by Department staff.

Post decision communications plan:

Since the species is already endangered and we are recommending that it remain so, our current management of the species will not change. We will share information with the public affairs team for any necessary news release as well as update the website as appropriate. *Form revised 1-20-21*
