

Southern resident orca recovery

WDFW's 2019-21 Legislative Request



**Included in the
governor's budget
for 2019-21 biennium:**

\$20.8 million operating funds

\$97.5 million in capital funds

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Background

The population of southern resident killer whales has dropped to 74, the lowest number in more than 30 years. These endangered marine mammals are struggling to raise calves, due to increased disturbances from vessels, high levels of contaminants, and a lack of prey, such as chinook salmon.

In 2018, the governor assembled the Southern Resident Orca Task Force – comprised of members representing a wide range of sectors – to develop a long-term plan for orca recovery. Last fall, the task force issued a report with recommendations to alleviate major threats to orcas.

Many recommendations require increased efforts from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Such recommendations include boosting hatchery production of salmon, increasing the enforcement of laws protecting shorelines, reducing vessel traffic near orcas, and pursuing new options for managing the amount of predation on salmon from fish, seals, and sea lions.

WDFW's 2019-21 operating budget request to benefit Southern Resident orcas

Totals	Increase prey available for Southern Resident orcas	*
\$278,000	Prioritize the removal of fish passage barriers, restoring habitat for salmon.	1
\$761,000	Protect Chinook and forage fish habitat by funding payment in lieu of taxes, which compensates counties for revenue lost on lands the state purchases.	1
\$1.36 million	Increase enforcement and technical assistance for projects that affect Hydraulic Project Approvals (HPA) and shoreline protection laws.	3
\$699,000	Rulemaking for fishway, flow and screening statute and minor changes to HPA.	3
\$5.25 million	Sustain existing hatchery production that would be lost due to WDFW's budget shortfall and declining federal funding for hatcheries.	6
\$6.35 million	Maximize existing capacity at fish hatcheries to increase production of salmon.	6
\$524,000	Prepare an implementation strategy to re-establish salmon runs above Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River.	7
\$1.2 million	Collect additional information on pinniped predation on salmon in Puget Sound and evaluate management options.	12
\$1.2 million	Increase management of pinnipeds in Columbia River.	13
\$400,000	Evaluate predatory fish population reductions at McNary Reservoir.	14
\$743,000	Monitor and manage forage fish populations in Puget Sound.	15
Total: \$18.8 million		
Decrease disturbance of orcas from vessels and noise		
\$238,000	Establish a "go-slow" zone for boats near orcas.	17
\$721,000	Establish a limited entry whale watching permit system for commercial vessels and kayaks.	18
\$62,000	Reduce the threat of oil spills in Puget Sound.	24
\$62,000	Begin rulemaking to increase whale-watching buffer to 400 yards.	26
Total: \$1.68 million		
Ensure funding, information, and accountability		
\$280,000	Marine policy lead	
Total: \$280,000		

* Governor's Task Force Recommendations

More information about the recommendations can be found online at <https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/energy-environment/southern-resident-orca-recovery/task-force>.