

BEST PRACTICES



Springtime Whale Watching in Washington

Marine wildlife sightings in Puget Sound and even Thurston County have become increasingly common. Both resident and transient orcas travel our waterways in search of food. In 2019, whale sightings set a new record with 740 orca whale sightings in the larger Salish Sea! This includes the Strait of Georgia, Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. If you were lucky enough to spot any whales this winter, it was likely one of our endangered resident orcas from the J, K, or L pod. Our resident orcas travel throughout the Salish Sea from late spring to late summer and are often spotted between October and February each year.

Transient orcas travel the Pacific Coast throughout the year and enter Puget Sound in spring and fall. Some marine biologists theorize that the increase in sightings may be due to improved water quality and increased seal and prey populations. This is good news, but transient orcas still need our help to improve our local water quality and recover from human-caused challenges to their survival.

Better Water Quality Equals More Whale Sightings

Some Like all marine species, whales and porpoises need clean water and access to food free of contaminants for their survival. Unfortunately, water-borne pollutants accumulate in whales from eating contaminated prey, such as Chinook salmon, which make up 80% of resident orcas diet. Other challenges orcas and various whale species face, include underwater noise pollution, declining populations of prey species, and loss of habitat. Luckily, there are many ways to protect and improve local water quality.

Saving Orcas Begins with Protecting Local Water Quality!

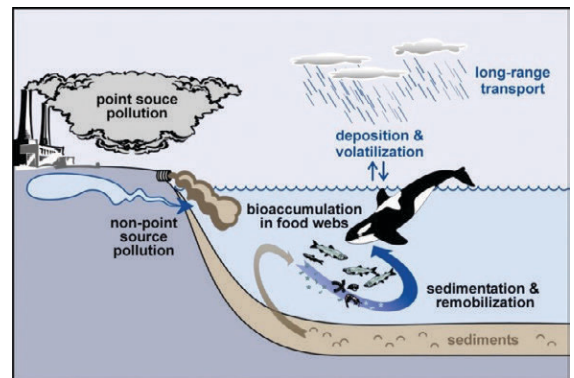
Remember, stormwater runoff flows directly into local streams and Puget Sound. Keep our waters clean by:

- Picking up after your pet—bag it, trash it, EVERY TIME
- Installing a rain garden
- Fixing vehicle leaks
- Practicing natural yard care and planting native vegetation
- Reporting spills—only rain down storm drains
- Taking your vehicle to a commercial car wash

To learn about more simple actions, visit the Georgia Strait Orca Actions page georgiastrait.org.

Where to See Whales

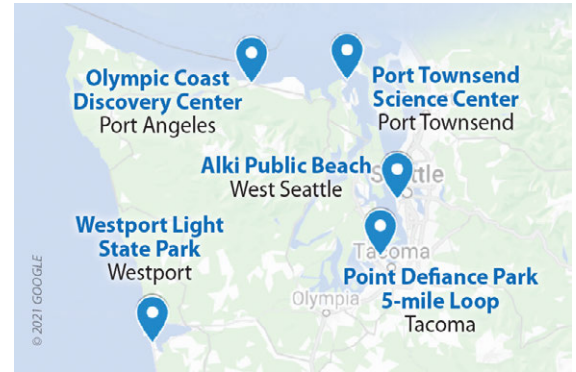
Whale watching can be done from watercraft or from popular whale-watching destinations accessible along Puget Sound and coastlines throughout Washington. Near Port Townsend or Seattle, gray whales, Minke whales



and dolphins can be spotted. Just a few of Stream Team's favorite road trip destinations for whale watching this spring are shown in the map at right.

Know Before You Go!

- Check out the Whale Trail viewing guide for more locations and whale-watching tips by visiting thewhaletrail.org/regions.
- Check the Whale Sightings report and Map for updated information on where whales are being seen at tinyurl.com/ya6knoqb.



Remember, when watching marine wildlife on shore or from boats and other watercraft, keep your speed slow and keep your distance. Follow NOAA's guidelines for safe viewing at fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/viewing-marine-life.

Watching Marine Mammals by Boat

- **Remain at least 100 yards from whales and at least 50 yards away from dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions.** Federal law has specific distance requirements for some species including keeping 200 yards away from killer whales in Washington State inland waters.
- **Limit time** spent observing individuals and groups of animals to **30 minutes or less**.
- **Do not chase, encircle, or leapfrog animals with any watercraft.** Do not trap animals between watercraft or the shore.
- **Avoid approaching marine mammals when another watercraft is near.** Multiple vessels are more likely to disturb marine mammals.
- **Avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction** near whales, dolphins, or porpoises.
- **When encountering marine mammals, slow down and operate at no-wake speed.** Put your engine in neutral when whales approach to pass.
- **Avoid approaching whales, dolphins, and porpoises when calves are present.** Never put your watercraft between a mother and calf.
- **Be wary of breaching and flipper-slapping whales** that might injure people or watercraft.
- **Stay clear of light green bubble patches** from humpback whales. These are sub-surface bubbles before whales rise to feed at the surface.
- **Never pursue or follow marine wildlife**—any vessel movement should be from the recommended distance and slightly parallel to or from the rear of the animal. If you need to move around marine wildlife, do so from behind. Never approach head-on.
- **Do not intentionally direct your watercraft or accelerate toward a marine mammals** with the intent of creating a pressure wake allowing them to bow or wake-ride.
- **Slowly leave the area if marine mammals show signs of disturbance.**

Share your whale watching experience!

Email pictures of your whale watching adventures to streamteam@ci.lacey.wa.us and we will share them on Stream Team's Facebook and Instagram pages! Happy viewing!

Source: Stream Team News, Spring 2021