

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Orca Regulations Communications Advisory (ORCA) Group  
Meeting 4 August 20, 2024**

### Meeting Details

Date: Tuesday, August 20, 2024  
Time: 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM, PST  
Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
[Link to Agenda](#)

### Meeting Objectives

- 1) Affirm the ORCA Group’s FY2025 messaging preferences, based on the pre-meeting survey and subsequent discussion.
- 2) Affirm the ORCA Group’s FY2025 approaches for informing boaters on complying with the new regulations, based on the pre-meeting survey and subsequent discussion.
- 3) Affirm the ORCA Group’s FY2025 recommended communication tools investment triage, based on the pre-meeting survey and subsequent discussion.
- 4) Provide feedback on second boater engagement workshop objectives.
- 5) Provide an opportunity for ORCA Group members and WDFW staff to continue to strengthen their relationships with one another.

### Discussion Topics and Highlights

#### Welcome, Introductions and Public Comment

Susan Hayman (Ross Strategic) opened the meeting and welcomed the Orca Regulations Communications Advisory (ORCA) Group Members, thanking them for taking the time to attend the in-person meeting. Susan reviewed the meeting purpose and agenda, and invited Group Members to self-introduce (see [Attachment 1—Meeting Participants](#)). The one public observer at the meeting declined an invitation to provide public comment.

#### FY 2025 Messaging

Susan provided an overview of ORCA Group Members responses to the SRKW Boating Regulations Communication Tools pre-meeting survey and highlighted results that covered the following three topics:

1. Perspectives on WDFW emphasis in messaging to recreational boaters on a sliding scale from, “Don’t try to view SRKW,” to, “WDFW encourages viewing from 1,000 yards.”
2. Messaging on advice to boaters for avoiding encounters with SRKW closer than 1,000 yards and what to do if they find themselves within 1,000 yards of an SRKW; and a
3. Potential taglines for an outreach campaign on the upcoming SRKW viewing regulations.

The highlights of the discussion on perspectives on WDFW emphasis in messaging to recreational boaters are as follows:

- A member shared that they believe that it is possible to message the intent of the upcoming SRKW viewing regulations to boaters in a way that encourages the correct behavior that protects SRKW.
- Multiple members raised that they believe that WDFW should not have messaging that encourages viewing from 1,000 yards, instead focusing on messaging that encourages boaters to maintain a distance from SRKW that doesn't impact their behavior.
- Education to boaters on the context of the law was agreed on as a necessary component of a messaging strategy.
- A member shared that messaging on viewing of SRKW should encourage land-based viewing.
- Multiple members shared that messaging to boaters should focus on avoidance of SRKW.

The highlights of the discussion on messaging on advice to boaters for avoiding encounters with SRKW closer than 1,000 yards and what to do if they find themselves within 1,000 yards of an SRKW are as follows:

- Members warned against developing messaging to boaters on using commercial whale watching (CWW) vessels as a guide for maintaining 1,000 yards away from SRKW since CWWs are not present in all areas of the Salish Sea and not all CWWs are members of the Pacific Whale Watching Association.
- Messages should be reviewed and affirmed by boaters on a regular basis to ensure that they are still effective and are resonating with boaters.
- Members shared that they believe messages should focus on educating boaters to assume that all orcas that they view on the water are SRKW and to move away, unless they are within 400 yards of the SRKW and need to turn off their motors.
- Members raised that messaging to boaters should still emphasize that safety on the water is the top priority for vessel operators during severe weather.
- Messaging should also include information to boaters on learning how to turn off acoustic instruments and similar systems before they go out on the water.
- A member shared that messaging on compliance with the new regulations should not be limited to motorized boaters, but to non-motorized boaters as well.

The highlights of the discussion on a potential tagline for an outreach campaign on the upcoming SRKW viewing regulations are as follows:

- Members raised concerns with the proposed tagline of "1k away" since this could be confused for 1 kilometer or 1 knot as opposed to 1,000 yards
- A potential tagline that includes distance information should consider the Canadian audience as well, the tagline "1k away" could work for these boaters since 1 kilometer is close to 1,000 yards.
- A member shared that if WDFW plans on developing a tagline that is specific to Washington State whale watching regulations, then they should conduct formal brainstorming and idea development process that should consider existing campaigns.
- Using units of measurement that boaters are already familiar with like football fields could help boaters understand the new distance regulation.
- Members warned against using specific distance numbers in a tagline since the distance regulations could change overtime, leading to multiple iterations of the tagline that could confuse boaters.

- Members shared that “Give them space” as a tagline that is being used by other organizations that focus on whale issues as a good example. There was some discussion of whether this was specific enough for SRKW, which is the focus for WDFW in these 2025 regulations.

In summary, ORCA Group members suggested the following focus areas for WDFW communications:

1. Educate recreational boaters to assume that all orcas they encounter are SRKW and to move away, unless within 400 yards of the orcas and need to disengage transmission.
2. Emphasize safety on the water is the top priority for vessel operators.
3. Instruct boaters on how and when to turn off acoustic instruments (e.g., sonar) and similar systems.
4. Clarify regulation compliance applies to both motorized and non-motorized boaters.

### FY 2025 Approach

Susan then provided an overview of the pre-meeting survey questions that asked ORCA Group Members to provide their interest level on various approaches to help boaters comply with the new regulations. The approaches that were discussed were on: notifying boaters of the locations of SRKW, tools to help boaters determine distances on the water, and tools to help boaters determine orca ecotypes. The highlights of the discussion on the approaches for notifying boaters of the locations of SRKW are as follows:

- Adding in regular SRKW location information into the coast guard weather broadcast loop was raised as a possible channel of communication to keep boaters informed of SRKW locations so they can avoid encounters.
- Members shared that adding in real time SRKW hotspots to Navionics could reach a good number of boaters.
- Members raised that if location information of SRKW is being widely shared then enforcement will need to be in these areas to enforce the viewing regulations and to discourage boaters from using the information as an opportunity to view whales.
- A member shared that the transmission of real-time SRKW location information should be done on trial basis initially to study the impacts it has on boater and SRKW encounters.
- Members shared that the use of map quadrants or general location information like “in Haro Strait” could be more beneficial than specific location information, since the location of SRKW is dynamic so a more general location could cause boaters in a larger area to proceed cautiously. However, it was raised that the more specific the location that is provided, the easier it can be for enforcement to prosecute bad actors.
- Utilizing multiple channels of communications over multiple mediums including VHF radios, phones and navigation apps would be most effective to reach the most boaters.

The highlights of the discussion on tools to help boaters determine distances on the water are as follows:

- Handheld range finding devices, commonly used for golfing, was shared as a current tool being used by boaters to determine distances on the water, however, it was noted that these are often not effective at distances further than 200 – 300 yards or during rough conditions.
- Members agreed that messaging for telling distances on the water should focus more on how to determine if something is 1,000 yards from the vessel operator as opposed to what an SRKW looks to boaters from 1,000 yards.

- Training materials and navigation maps that identify areas where potential SRKW conflicts could occur due to vessel traffic or narrow passages would be helpful for boaters.
- A member shared that there might be a potential training connection with the Navionics app since many vessel operators are trained on this app when they are learning to sail, and it already has built in distance finding features.
- Developing videos or materials that use reference objects at varying distances (200, 400 & 1,000 yards) could be helpful training tools.
- Connecting with boating clubs that require their members to take a training course before they operate one of their shared boats could help reach new boaters.

The highlights of the discussion on tools to help boaters distinguish orca ecotypes are as follows:

- Members agreed that WDFW should not provide messaging to boaters on how to distinguish orca ecotypes from 1,000 yards since whale identification from this distance is a difficult feat for even trained professionals and that messaging should instead encourage boaters to assume that any orca that is viewed is an SRKW.

#### FY 2025 Recommended Communication Tools Investment Triage

Susan introduced an exercise to the ORCA Group Members that had them provide their thoughts on which communications tools WDFW should prioritize moving forward into FY 2025 and beyond. Before this exercise, members discussed and clarified the following communications tools: ambassador programs, use of influencers for outreach, presentations to boating groups, and pledge programs. The highlights of the ambassador program discussion are as follows:

- Members shared that they believe an ambassador program would create an outreach network of informed individuals that could assist WDFW in informing yacht and boat clubs of the most current SRKW regulations and how to comply with them.
- Connecting with the yacht club Grand 14s was identified as good place for WDFW to start for outreach to yacht clubs.
- Members shared that they believe that WDFW's role in an ambassador program would be to create the initial training materials for becoming an ambassador and to develop regular communications for the ambassadors to share with their membership.
- Other ambassador programs for similar purposes in California, or the hunting ambassador program in Washington, were raised as examples that WDFW could model the program after.
- Multiple members stressed that any outreach that the ambassadors perform should align with the Be Whale Wise program to reduce confusion.

The highlights of the use of influencers for outreach discussion are as follows:

- Salish Sea boaters that are already active on social media were identified as potential influences that could be utilized to help share information on the upcoming SRKW viewing regulations.
- A member raised that influencers could help reach younger boaters that are not as familiar with the boating regulations.
- If influencers are utilized, members identified Facebook and YouTube as the priority social media platforms to perform this outreach.
- Multiple members shared that they don't believe the use of influencers would be beneficial since most boaters are older and not as trusting of social media influencers.

The highlights of the presentations to boating groups discussion are as follows:

- Multiple members stressed that the messages that are being shared to yacht clubs or other boater groups should be a streamlined and coordinated message that aligns with other presentations that are given to these individuals to reduce confusion.
- Members shared that they believe that these presentations could co-exist with the ambassador program, where the ambassador program would have lower barrier to entry than someone who provides the official WDFW presentation on the current regulations or information.
- Coordination with the other members of the Be Whale Wise coalition was raised as an important step to creating a singular unified message to boaters.

The highlights of the pledge program discussion are as follows:

- Members questioned the necessity of a pledge program since the pledge would be to comply with an established law that all boaters should be in compliance with.
- If a pledge program is developed, an effectiveness protocol should be developed to ensure that it is beneficial for the effort.

After these discussions, the ORCA Group Members began the exercise by providing check marks on a chart of the potential communications tools that asked if they believe the tools should be a standard outreach practice for WDFW that they should scale up (Baseline +), if the tool should be initiated now (in whole or in part) so that it can be up and running by the time the regulations go into place in 2025 (Priority 1), and if the tool should be prioritized at a later date (Priority 2). The outcomes of the triage exercise are as follows:

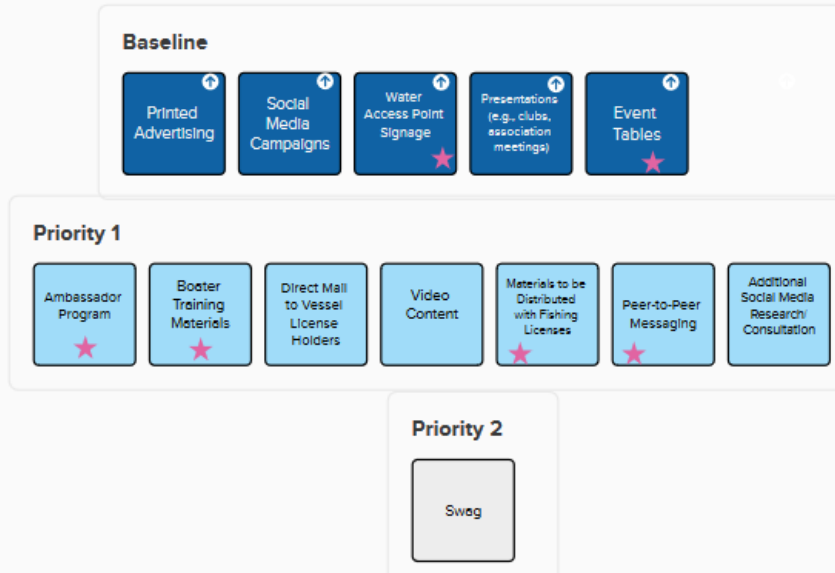
#### Legend

White boxes=Tools to triage; Dark Blue Boxes = WDFW Baseline;

Light Blue Boxes = Priority 1; Grey Box = Priority 2

Red stars = Agreement; Arrows up = Increase funding for these baseline activities

# Communication Tool Choices



After the exercise, Susan summarized the results and reviewed next steps for the ORCA Group.

## Next Steps

- WDFW to share the updated Be Whale Wise materials with the ORCA Group Members who provided input on the previous Be Whale Wise materials.
- ORCA Group Members to provide feedback to the WDFW and Ross team on the objectives for the second boater engagement workshop.
- The WDFW and Ross team will determine which example messages and tools will be shared at the second boater engagement workshop for feedback.

## Attachment 1: Meeting Participants

Name	Affiliation	Attendance
<b>ORCA Group</b>		
April Rebollo	NA	X
Chairman Thomas Wooten	Samish Indian Nation	---
David Bain	The Orca Conservancy	X
David Willis	Recreation Boaters Association of Washington	X
Donna Sandstrom	The Whale Trail	X
Erin Gless	Pacific Whale Watch Association	X
Frances Robertson	San Juan County	X
George Harris	Northwest Marine Trade Association	X
John Boyd	Western Prince	X
Justine Asohmbom	Washington State Department of Ecology	X
Stephanie Raymond	Orca Network	X
Tisa Annette	Puget Sound Orcas	X
Web Hutchins	NA	---
<b>Invited Guest</b>		
Maria Auxiliadora Sabando Plaza	The Whale Museum	X
<b>WDFW Staff</b>		
Aaron Provencio	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	X
Ben Anderson	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	
Captain Alan Myers	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	X
Julie Watson	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	X
Nate Pamplin	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	X
<b>Facilitation Team</b>		
Alec Ege	Ross Strategic	X
Shelby Thomas	Ross Strategic	X
Susan Hayman	Ross Strategic	X