

**14: Status of Southern Resident Killer Whales and Effect of
Salmon Fisheries–(Briefing)**

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“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: August 3-4, 2012, Commission Meeting

Agenda item #14: Status of Southern Resident Killer Whales & Effect of Salmon Fisheries (Briefing)

Staff Contact: Pat Pattillo, Special Assistant to the Director, Director’s Office

Presenter(s): Pat Pattillo, Special Assistant to the Director, Directors Office
Harriet Allen or Gary Wiles, Wildlife Program

Background:

Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW; *Orcinus orca*) are listed as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), the State of Washington, and the Species at Risk Act (SARA) in Canada.

Three threats have been identified as potentially the most problematic for SRKW. 1) scarcity of prey, 2) high levels of contaminants from pollution, and 3) disturbance from vessels and sound. As of the end of 2010 there were only 86 whales in this small population. Their small population size and social structure also put them at risk for a catastrophic event, such as an oil spill, that could impact the entire population. Despite the great increase in killer whale research in Washington and British Columbia since the early 1970s, researchers remain divided on which of these threats are most significant to the whales.

During 2010 while evaluating the Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan (Plan) developed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Puget Sound treaty tribes, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) advised that recently available scientific information and analyses about the SRKW indicated that fisheries affecting chinook salmon may pose an unacceptable risk to the achievement of recovery for SRKW. Although NMFS found the Plan to be consistent with provisions of the Endangered Species Act, the Plan’s term was reduced to address SRKW related concerns with fisheries.

To further address these concerns NMFS developed a process for international scientific review of all technical information related to the effects of salmon fisheries on SRKW to be completed by the end of 2012. Co-sponsored by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada, the process employs a panel of scientists independent of management agencies working with agency and management scientists to review scientific studies and analyses related to SRKW population dynamics, feeding behavior, and the abundance of salmon as key prey for SRKW. A series of three workshops were developed and two of these workshops have been conducted. The process is scheduled to be completed by December. WDFW scientists and managers from the Fish Program and Wildlife Program have been involved with this scientific review process, providing presentations and analyses of information on SRKW or salmon to the independent science panel and commenting on the panel’s preliminary conclusions.

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an overview of the key issues involved with this process and to discuss the potential implications of the scientific review process to the management of fisheries, Chinook salmon and SRKW.

Policy issues: Potential implications to management of Washington's fisheries that affect Chinook salmon, possibly with an impact on prey available to Southern Resident Killer Whales.

Public involvement process and outcome: None

Action requested:

None

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission Action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

N/A

COMMISSION REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT
"Blue Sheet"

DATE
NEXT MEETING
Date of Request: 12/1/11

Title of Request: KILLER WHALE LISTING AND MANAGEMENT

Commissioner: SCHMITZ

Priority Level (put one check in each row):

Importance: High Medium Low

Urgency: High Medium Low

Request Due Date: SUMMER 2012

Knowledge or Action Being Requested (narrative). Describe what you want to know. Be specific. A BRIEFING ON ^{WESA} LISTING OF PUGET SOUND KILLER WHALES TO INCLUDE STATUS OF THE SPECIES, REASONS FOR LISTING, AND RESULTING MANAGEMENT ACTION, INCLUDING IMPACTS ON FISHERIES AND HUMAN INTERACTIONS

Output Requested (e.g., telephone call, memo, material from files, new report, presentation, other):

- IN PERSON BRIEFING INCLUDING INVITING NMFS TO MAKE THE BRIEFING OR BE PRESENT FOR QUESTIONS.

For Commission Executive Assistant Use	
Date Assigned: _____ [At Debrief]	Assigned To: _____ [Program]
"Blue Sheet form revised October 2009 - sdy	