

Mike Milburn
Chair
Montana

Doug Grob
Montana

Jeffery C. Allen
Idaho

Ed Schriever
Idaho



Northwest **Power** and **Conservation** Council

Thomas L (Les) Purce
Vice Chair
Washington

KC Golden
Washington

Margaret Hoffmann
Oregon

Charles F. Sams III
Oregon

August 4, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole, Fish and Wildlife Division Director

SUBJECT: Update on the Orca Task Force recommendations

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Tara Galuska, Orca Recovery Coordinator

Summary: At the August Council meeting we will receive an update on recommendations from Washington's Orca Task Force, including implementation and emerging issues.

Relevance: The recommendations of the task force are now being implemented throughout the state of Washington including in the Columbia River basin.

Background: The Orca Task Force, established in 2018, includes state, federal, tribal, and local governments, as well as Public Utilities Districts, utilities, and environmentally focused citizen groups. The Task Force and its subcommittees developed recommendations for Governors Inslee and Ferguson to consider and pass on to the Washington state legislature. One major goal is to increase the number of chinook salmon in the Columbia River basin through hatchery releases and habitat improvement. Tara Guluska, the Orca Recovery Coordinator for the state of Washington, will provide an update on the final task force recommendations, report and emerging issues.

More info: [Washington Governors Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force](#)



Southern Resident Killer Whale Recovery

Washington State

Northwest Power and Conservation Council,
August 12, 2026

Tara Galuska, Orca Recovery
Coordinator

Governor's Salmon Recovery Office

The background of the slide is a collage of two images. On the left, there is a close-up, slightly blurred image of several salmon swimming in water, showing their characteristic silver and pinkish-orange scales. On the right, there is a blue-toned image of several orcas (killer whales) swimming in the ocean, with their dorsal fins visible above the water's surface. The two images are separated by a white, curved line that forms a partial circle.

Today

- Task Force Recommendations
- Highlight Progress and regional work
- Emerging issues



OFFSHORE WHALE



RESIDENT WHALE



TRANSIENT WHALE

Figure 1. Photographs depicting morphological differences in killer whale ecotypes.

**KILLER WHALE, ORCINUS ORCA
3 ECOTYPES IN THE NORTHWEST**



Too much noise



**Too much
pollution**



Too few fish

THREATS TO SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCA

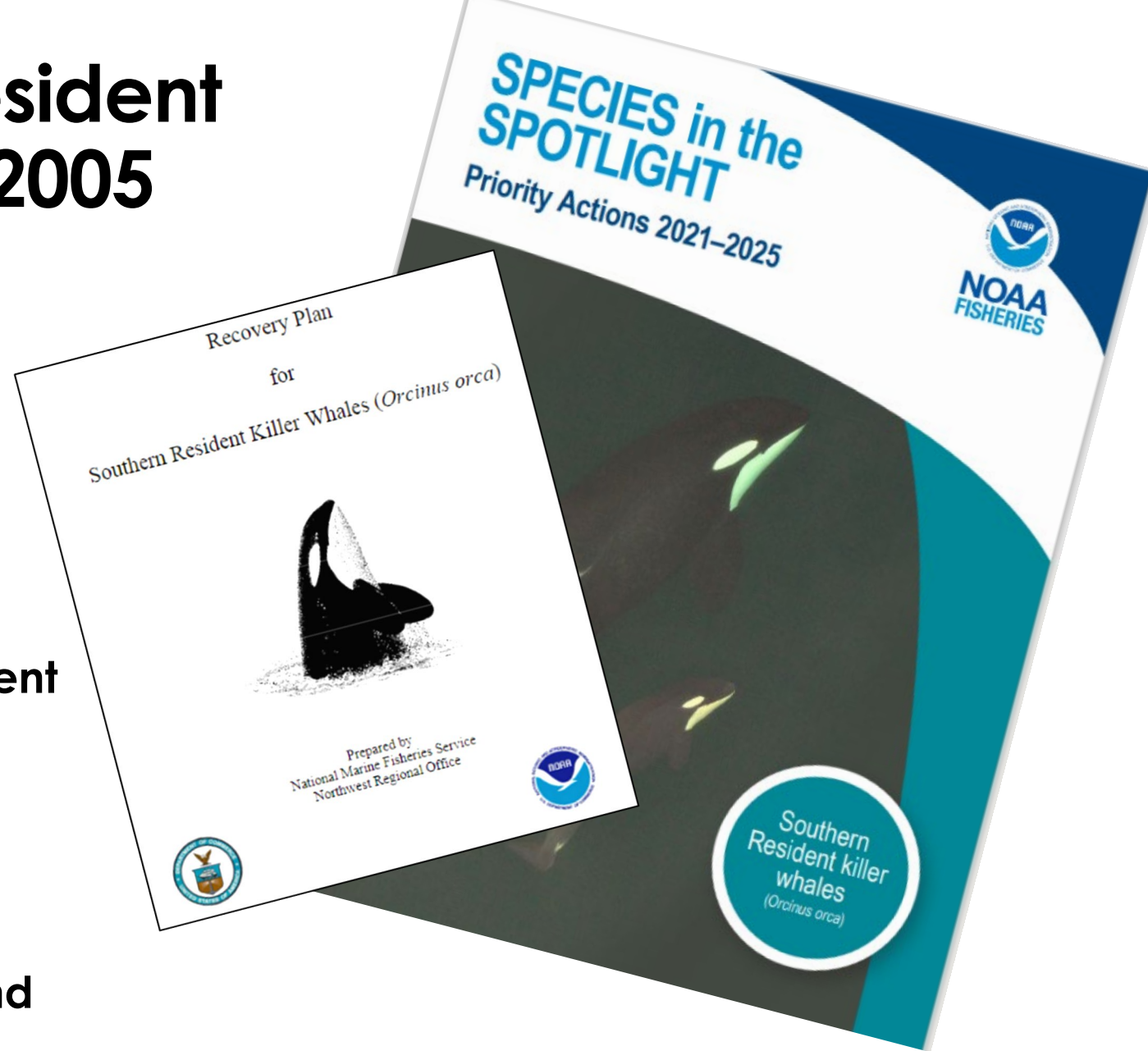
- Climate Change
- Population Growth
- Inbreeding

NOAA listed Southern Resident Orca as endangered in 2005

-Recovery Plan -Species in the Spotlight

NOAA's Action Plan for 2021-2025

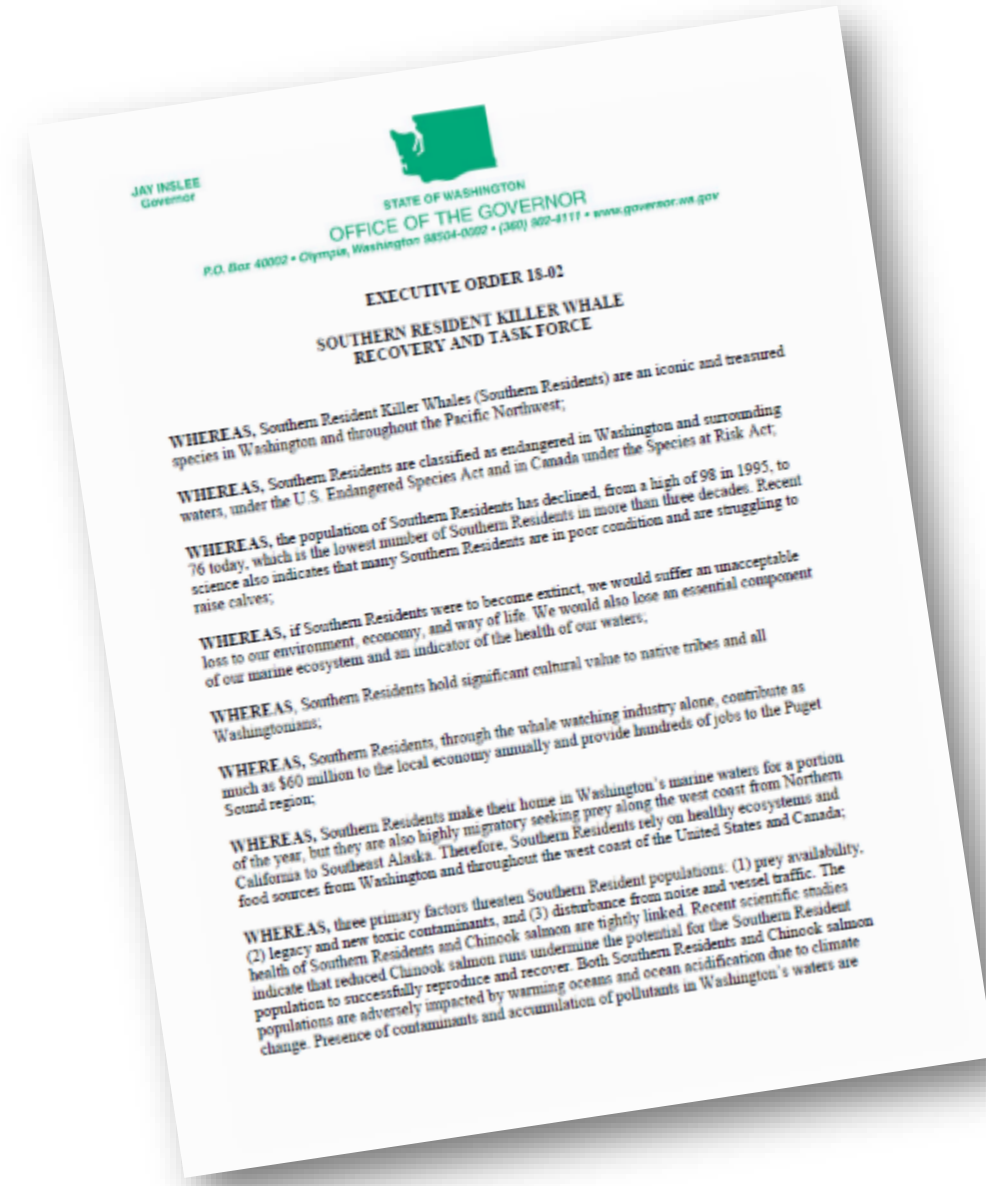
- Protect from vessels through enforcement and education
- Conserve critical prey – salmon
- Improve health knowledge
- Raise awareness through education and outreach



Executive Order 18-02

Immediate Actions in 2018

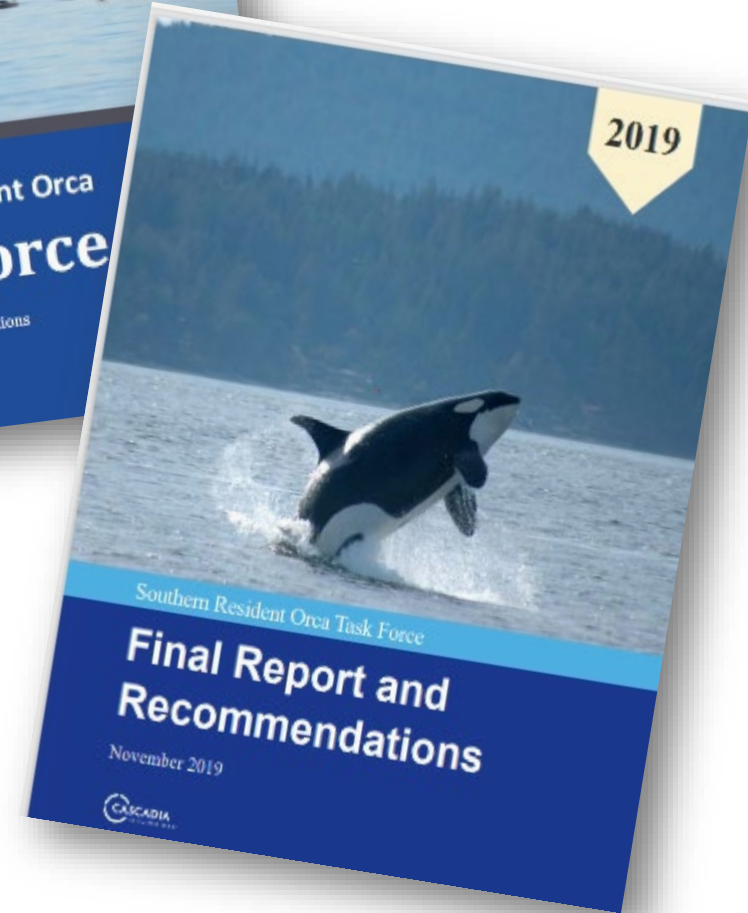
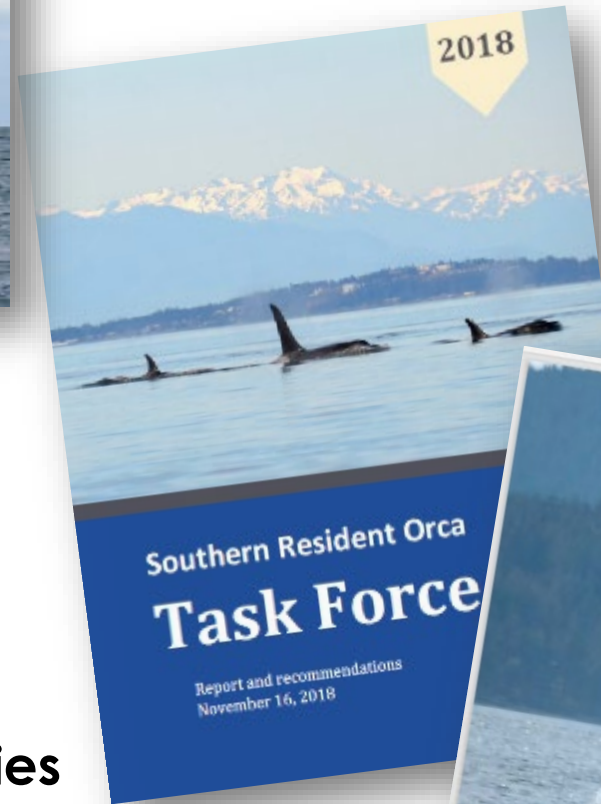
- Identify high-priority prey areas to focus resources
- Increase enforcement and education
- Quiet ferries
- Demonstrate how Chinook recovery projects benefit SRKW
- Prioritize outreach efforts to support SRKW
- Develop criteria for stormwater projects that benefit SRKW



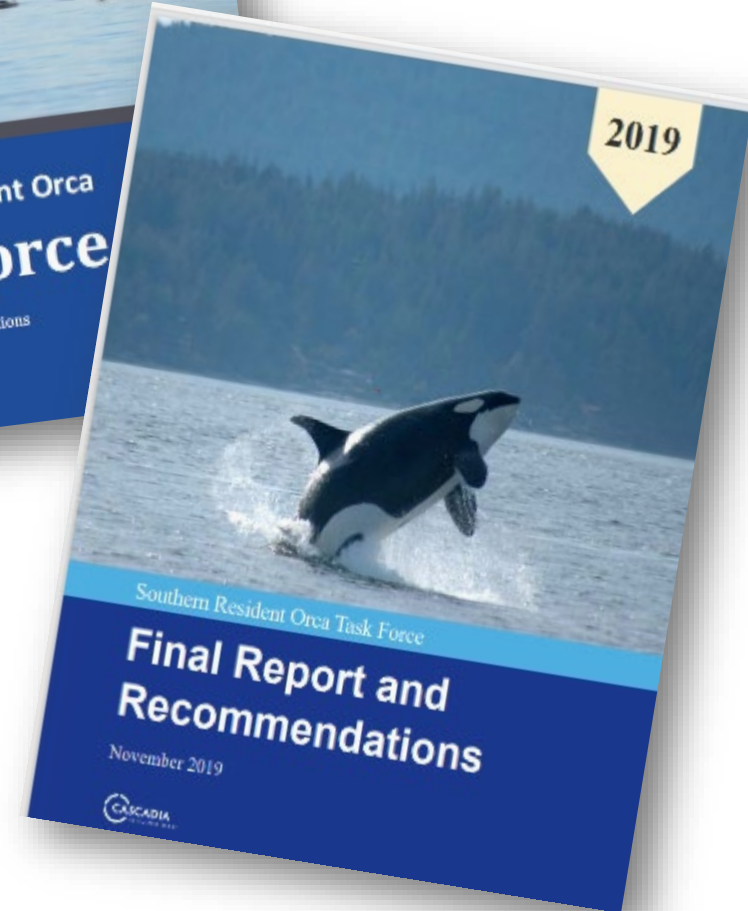
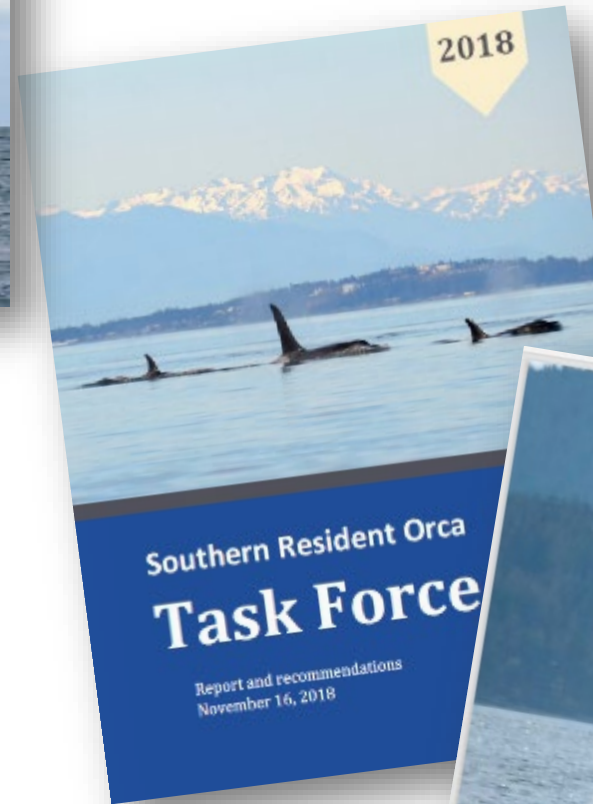
Orca Task Force



- Multiple representatives to create recommendations including:
 - Tribes
 - legislators
 - State, local and federal & Canadian agencies
 - non-profits
 - Business
- Extensive public comments
- 2 reports with Final Recommendations
- 3 Working Groups: Prey, Vessels, Contaminants



Orca Task Force Year 2



Added 2 New Goals on Climate Change and Population Growth

- 5 recommendations on contaminants
- 4 recommendations on climate change
- 2 related to population growth
- 1 on implementation of recommendations

49 Orca Task Force Recommendations



The Washington State Governor's Southern Resident Killer RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORCA

www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/OrcaTaskForce_FinalReportandRecommendations_11.07.19.pdf

MORE SALMON

1 Significantly increase investment in restoration and acquisition of habitat in areas where Chinook should most benefit Southern Resident orcas.	2 Immediately fund acquisition and restoration of nearshore habitat to increase the abundance of forage fish for salmon sustainability.	3 Apply and enforce laws that protect habitat.	4 Immediately strengthen protection of Chinook and forage fish habitat through legislation that enforces existing statutes, agency rulemaking and/or agency policy.	5 Develop incentives to encourage voluntary actions to protect habitat.	6 Significantly increase hatchery production and programs to benefit Southern Resident orcas consistent with sustainable fisheries and stock management, available habitat, recovery plans and the Endangered Species Act. Hatchery increases need to be done in concert with significantly increased habitat protection and restoration measures.	7 Prepare an implementation strategy to reevaluate salmon runs above existing dams, increasing prey availability for Southern Resident orcas.
8 Increase effort to benefit Chinook for Southern Resident orcas by increasing the abundance of Chinook in the Puget Sound and Strait of Juan de Fuca.	9 Establish a statewide process to evaluate and prioritize habitat restoration projects for Chinook and forage fish.	10 Support full implementation and funding of the 2019-20 Pacific Salmon Treaty.	11 Reduce Chinook bycatch in West Coast commercial fisheries.	12 Direct the appropriate agencies to work with tribes and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to determine if proposed harbor seal and sea lion protection is doing harm to Chinook in Puget Sound and along Washington's outer coast and evaluate potential management actions.	13 Support authorization and other actions to more effectively manage proposed protection of salmon in the Columbia River.	14 Reduce populations of nonnative predatory fish species that prey upon or compete with Chinook.

LESS NOISE AND DISTURBANCE

15 Monitor forage fish populations to inform decisions on harvest and management actions that provide for sufficient levels to support increased abundance of Chinook.	16 Support the Puget Sound compliance sampling program as a Chinook and forage fish management tool.	17 Establish a statewide "go-slow" bubble for small vessels and commercial whale watching vessels with in-lift a national title of Southern Resident orcas.	18 Establish a limited-entry whale-watching permit system for commercial whale watching vessels and commercial kayak groups in the inland waters of Washington state to increase acoustic and physical refuge opportunities for the orcas.	19 Create an annual Orca Protection endorsement for all recreational boaters to ensure all boaters are educated on how to limit boating impacts to orcas.	20 Increase enforcement capacity and fully enforce regulations on small vessels to provide protection to Southern Residents.	21 Discourage the use of echo sounders and underwater loudspeakers within 1 kilometer of orcas.
22 Implement shipping noise-reduction initiatives and monitoring programs, coordinating with Canadian and U.S. authorities.	23 Reduce noise from the Washington state ferries by accelerating the transition to quieter and more fuel-efficient vessels and implementing other strategies to reduce ferry noise when Southern Residents are present.	24 Reduce the threat of oil spills in Puget Sound to the survival of Southern Residents.	25 Coordinate with the Navy in 2019 to discuss reduction of noise and disturbance affecting Southern Resident orcas from military exercises and Navy aircraft.	26 Revise chapter 77.15.740 RCW to increase the buffer to 400 yards behind the orcas.	27 Create a permit system for all vessels to ensure all boaters are educated on how to limit boating impacts to orcas.	28 Create a permit system for all vessels to ensure all boaters are educated on how to limit boating impacts to orcas.

LESS POLLUTION

29 Accelerate the implementation of the ban on polychlorinated biphenyls in state-purchased products and make information available online for other purchasers.	30 Identify practices and take action on chemicals that impact orcas and their prey.	31 Reduce stormwater threats and accelerate clean-up of black harmful to orcas.	32 Improve effectiveness, implementation and enforcement of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits to address direct threats to Southern Resident orcas and their prey.	33 Increase monitoring of toxic substances in marine waters, create and deploy adaptive management strategies to reduce threats to orcas and their prey.	34 Provide sustainable funding for implementation of recommendations.	35 Conduct research, science and monitoring to inform decision-making on adaptive management and implementation of actions to recover Southern Residents.
36 Monitor progress of implementation and identify needed enhancements.	37 Prevent against regulatory on the federal and state level.	38 Establish a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for advanced wastewater treatment in Puget Sound to reduce nutrients in wastewater that enters Puget Sound by 2022.	39 Establish a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for advanced wastewater treatment in Puget Sound to reduce nutrients in wastewater that enters Puget Sound by 2022.	40 Better align existing nonpoint programs with nutrient reduction activities and explore new ways to achieve the necessary nonpoint source nutrient reductions.	41 Collect high-quality nutrient data in watersheds to fill key knowledge gaps of baseline conditions.	42 Create one or more entities with authority and funding to recover and allocate for Southern Residents by implementing recommendations, creating nonpoint source programs as needed and working with the state, governor and tribal co-managers on status.

FUND, MONITOR, ADAPT

ADDRESS CLIMATE

43 Take aggressive, comprehensive and sustained action to reduce human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, with the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.	44 Increase Washington's ability to understand, reduce, remediate, and adapt to the impacts of climate change on orcas and their prey.	45 Mitigate the impact of a changing climate by accelerating and increasing the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures.	46 Expand the Governor's Maritime Blue scope of work and provide funding to implement climate change and ocean acidification, prioritize actions that positively reduce exposure while the increased impacts are expected to be most severe.	47 Identify and mitigate increased threats to Southern Residents from contaminants due to climate change and ocean acidification. Prioritize actions that positively reduce exposure while the increased impacts are expected to be most severe.	48 Adapt and implement policies, incentives and regulations to support implementation of recommendations, create nonpoint source programs as needed and working with the state, governor and tribal co-managers on status.	49 Conduct a comprehensive environmental review and take action to minimize potential whale strike risk and avoid whale noise posed by the growing number and distribution of two-stroke and water taxis in Southern Resident orca habitat.
---	---	--	---	---	---	--

FUTURE GROWTH

Columbia River

-Most habitat and contaminant recommendations apply

- Hatchery production
- Re-establish runs above existing dams
- Increase spill to benefit SRKW at Snake and Columbia dams
- Stakeholder process to discuss potential of lower Snake dams
- Support Implementation of Pacific Salmon Treaty
- Support authorization to manage pinnipeds in Columbia
- Reduce populations of non-native fish preying on salmon



Goals and Progress



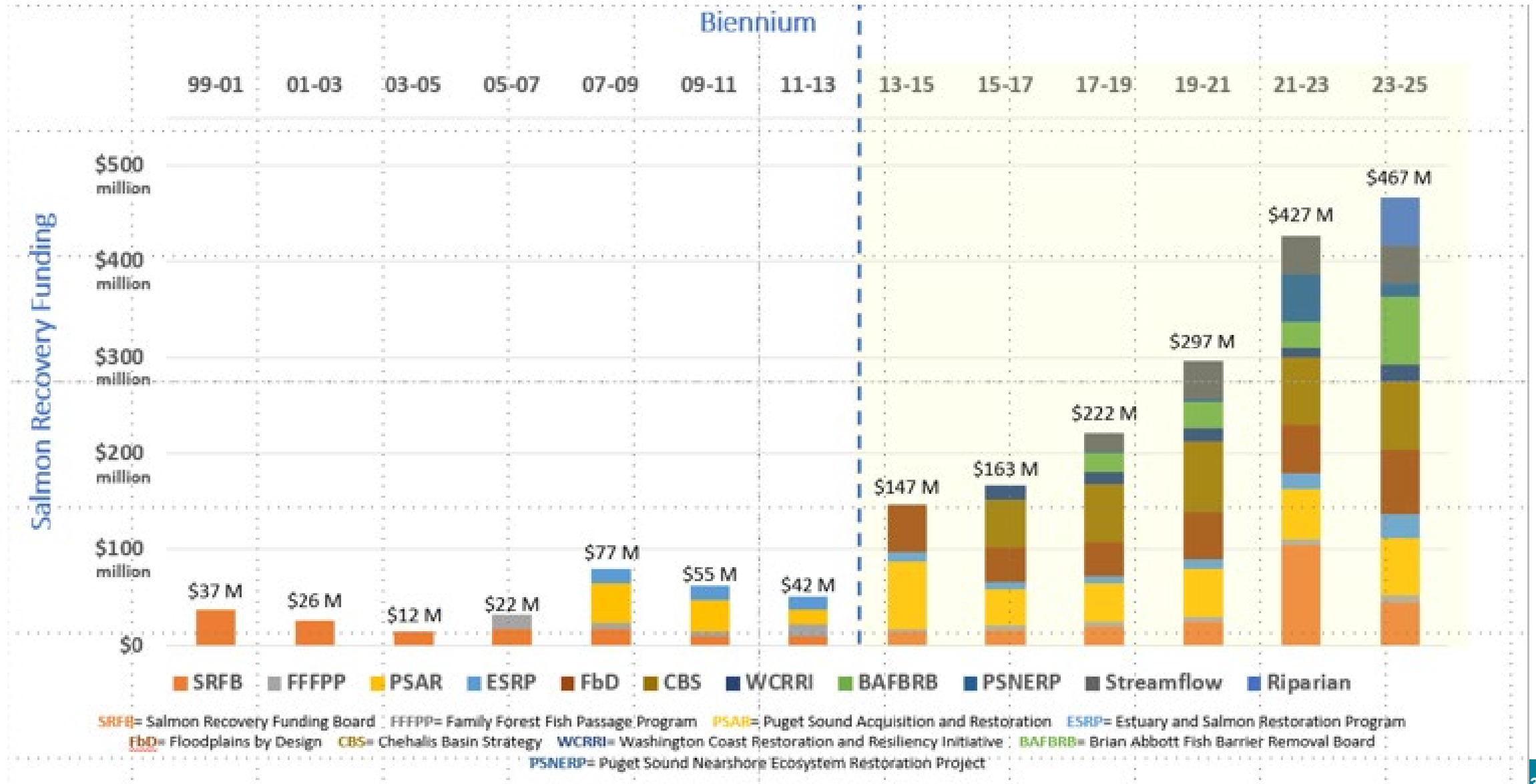
State Budgets to Support Orca Recovery

- 2019-21 \$700 Million
- 2021-23 \$1.2 Billion
- 2023-25 \$1.3 Billion
- 2025-27 \$737 Million

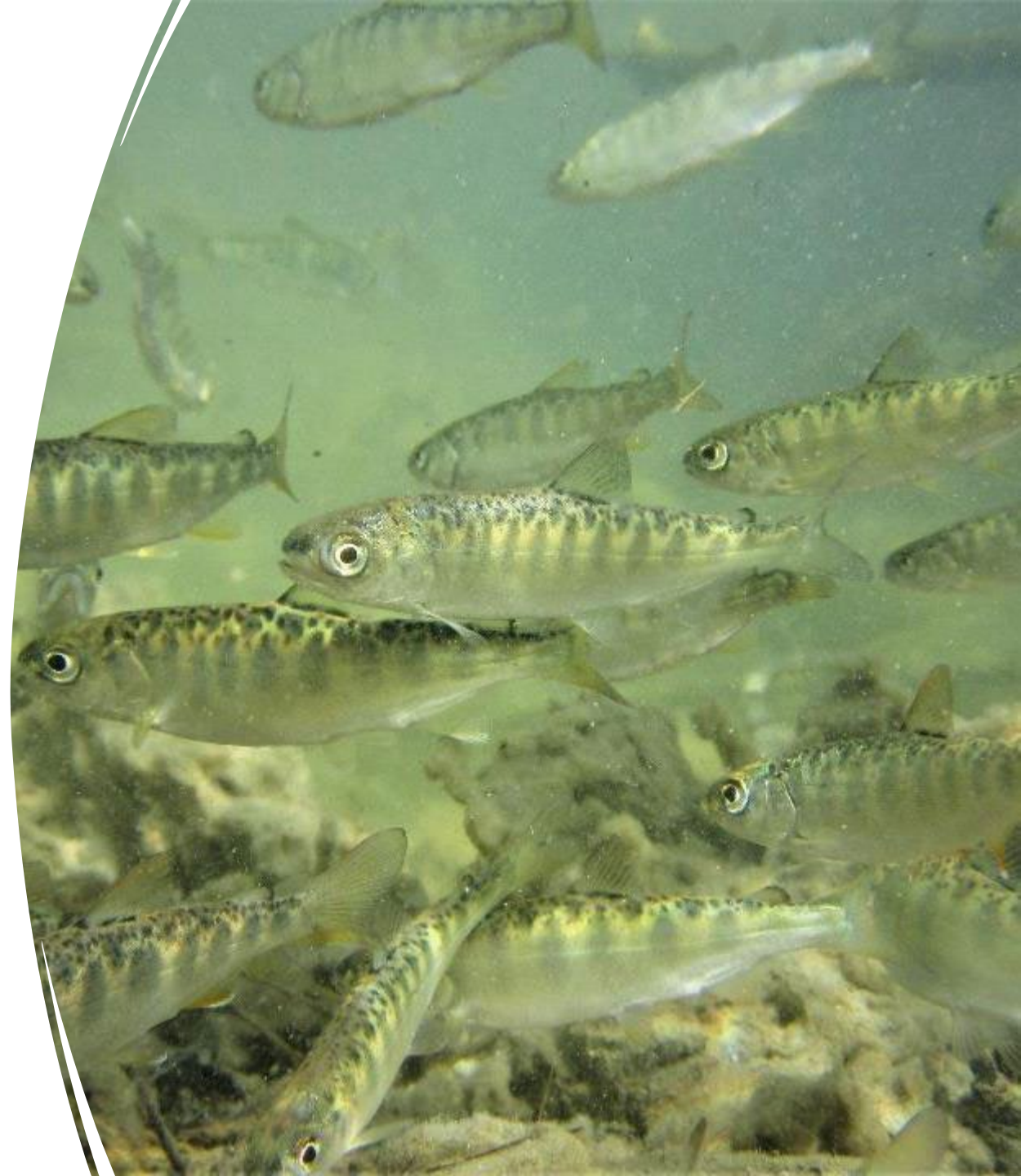
Note: Funding does not reflect Department of Transportation culvert injunction for fish passage or electrification of ferries



Increased Salmon Recovery Habitat Funding



Goal 1:
Increase
Chinook
abundance.



Prey Progress Highlights:

- Governor's Statewide Salmon Strategy Update in 2021, workplan and funding
- Increased Habitat programs and overall funding
- SRKW prey stock prioritization
- Pacific Salmon Treaty habitat implementation
- Focus on increased prey base, including hatchery production



Statewide Salmon Strategy Update 2021

Strategy Priorities

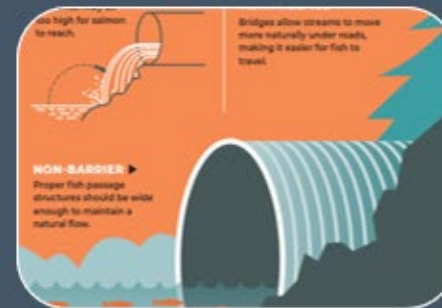
2



Protect and restore vital salmon habitat



Invest in clean water infrastructure



Correct fish passage barriers and restore salmon access



Build climate resiliency



Align harvest, hatcheries, and hydropower



Address predation and food web issues



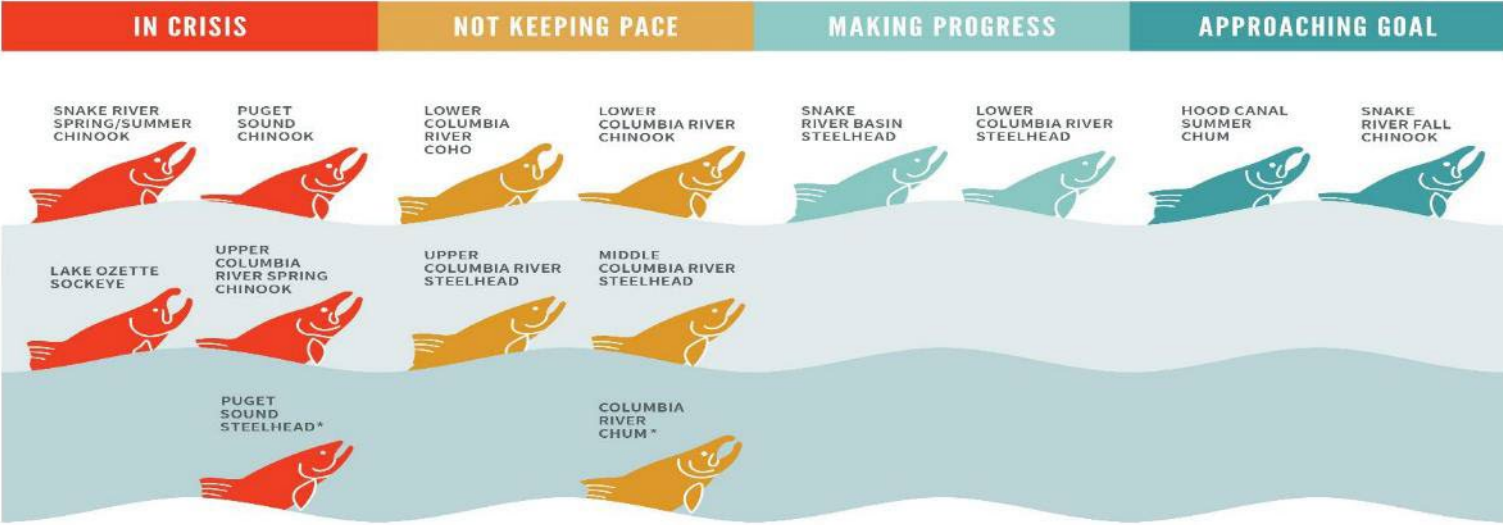
Enhance commitments and coordination across programs



Strengthen science, monitoring, and accountability

State of Salmon Update due December 2026

Salmon Abundance



* Lacks complete data
Data Source: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

TOP 10 PRIORITY CHINOOK POPULATIONS FOR SOUTHERN RESIDENTS

1. Northern and southern Puget Sound (fall)
2. Lower Columbia River (fall), Strait of Georgia (fall)
3. Upper Columbia River and Snake River (fall), Fraser River (spring), and lower Columbia (spring)
4. Mid-Columbia River (fall)
5. Snake River (spring-summer), Northern Puget Sound (spring)
6. Washington Coast (spring and fall)
7. California Central Valley (fall)
8. Mid-Columbia River and upper Columbia River (Spring and summer)
9. Fraser River (summer)
10. California Central Valley (fall/late fall), Klamath River (fall and spring)

LEGEND

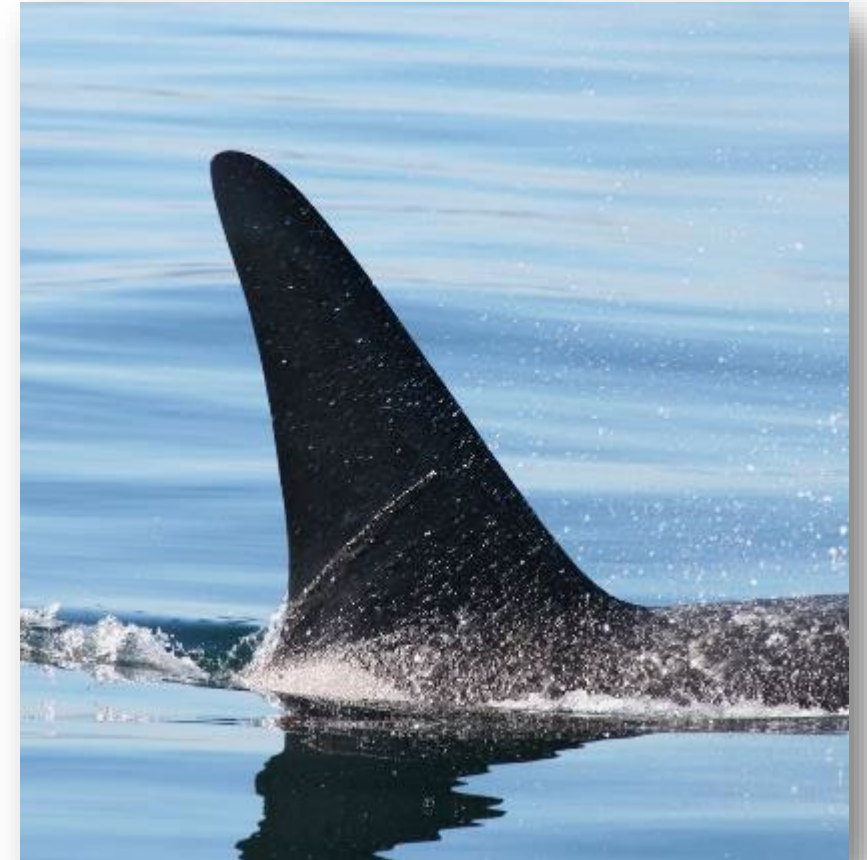
 Southern Resident Killer Whale range

 Salmon stock shown near river of origin



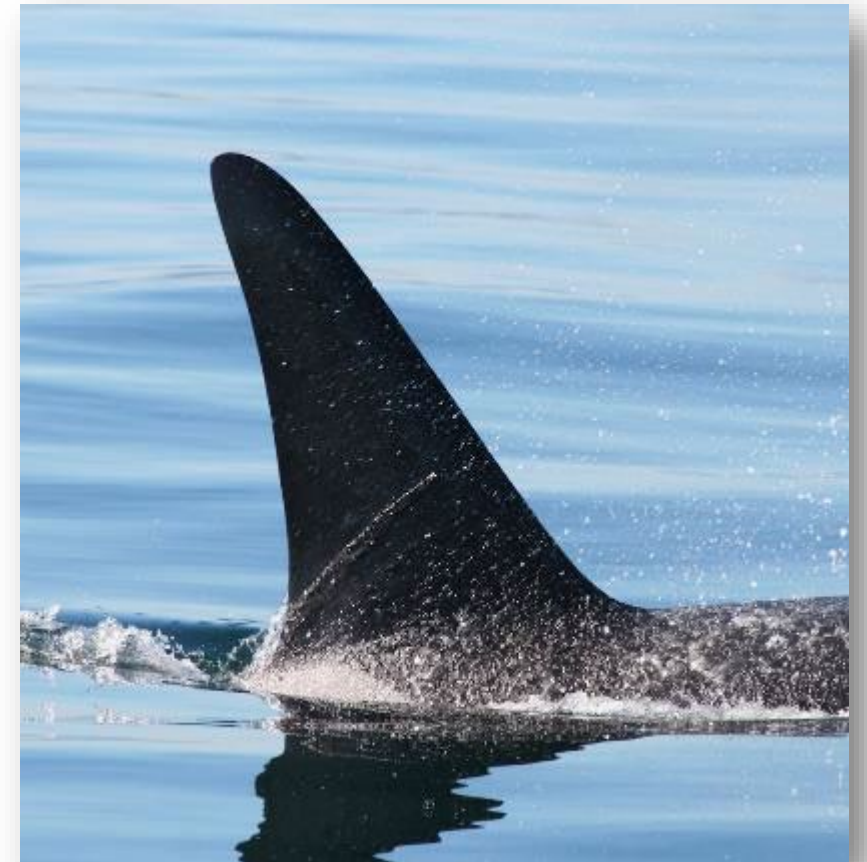
Prey Legislative Progress

- **SB 5273:** Least impactful shoreline armoring
- **HB 1661:** Kelp and Eelgrass Conservation
- **HB 1382:** Permit streamlining bill
- **SB 5381:** Fish passage project streamlining
- **2SHB 1579:** Increase Chinook and other orca prey abundance.
- **HB 1700:** Derelict Vessel Removal
- **SB 5104:** Surveying Puget Sound marine shoreline
- **HB 2199:** Reducing Impacts from Derelict vessels



Prey Legislative Progress

- **SB 5273:** Least impactful shoreline armoring
- **HB 1661:** Kelp and Eelgrass Conservation
- **HB 1382:** Permit streamlining bill
- **SB 5381:** Fish passage project streamlining
- **2SHB 1579:** Increase Chinook and other orca prey abundance.
- **HB 1700:** Derelict Vessel Removal
- **SB 5104:** Surveying Puget Sound marine shoreline
- **HB 1631:** Establish Bull Kelp as state marine forest



Goal 2:
Decrease
vessel and
noise
disturbances.



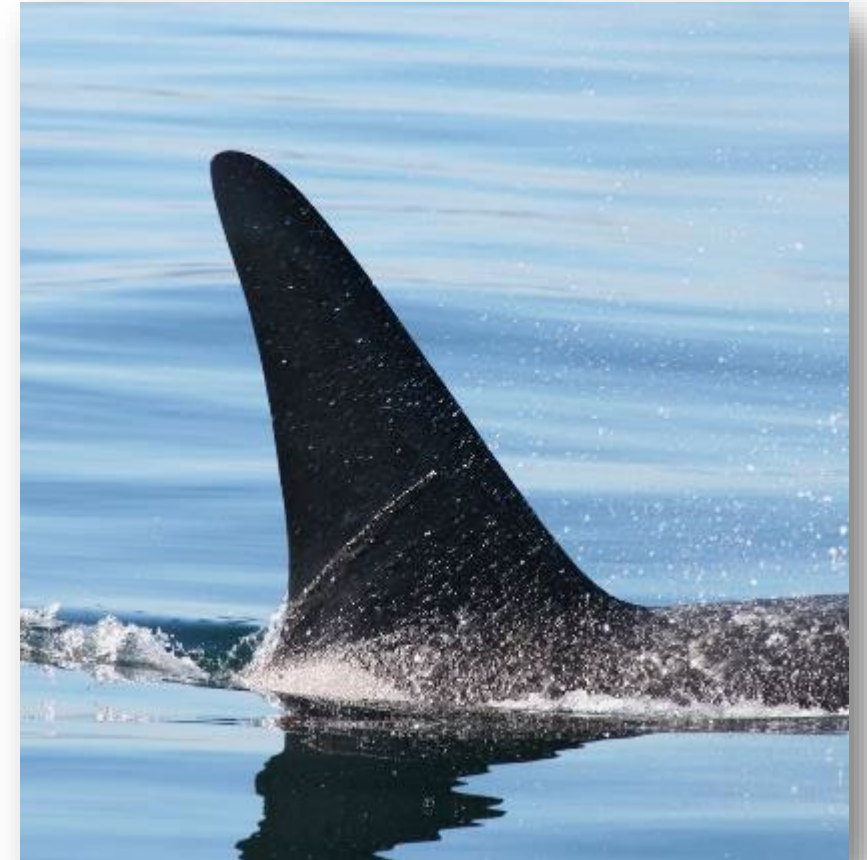
Vessels Progress Highlights:

- Quiet Sound
 - Ship slow downs
 - First Thermal imaging whale camera
- Oil Response
- Be Whale Wise
- New distance rules of 1000 yards in 2025
- Thermal Imaging Camera to detect whales
- Implement and streamline Commercial Whale Watching Rules



Vessels Legislative Progress

- **2SSB 5577:** Reduce vessel noise and disturbance.
- **SB 5918:** Whale watching guidelines in boating safety education program.
- **ESB 5330:** Commercial whale watching
- **SB 5371:** Protect SRKW from vessels set distance at 1000 yards
- **5747:** Statewide Oil Spill Plan
- **1691:** Financial responsibility for oil spills
- **ESHB 1578:** Oil transportation safety.





ADOPTED in ESSB 5371

Signed 5/15/2023

**Boats must stay 1000 yards
from Southern Resident
Killer Whales**

Goal 3:
Reduce
exposure of
orcas and their
prey to
contaminants.



Contaminants Progress:

- Puget Sound General Nutrient Permit (revoked)
- Toxics in Fish Implementation Strategy
- Chemicals of Emerging Concern priorities
- Puget Sound Toxic Clean up
- Stormwater retrofits (6PPDE)



Photo courtesy of Erin Gless

Legislative Progress- Contaminants:

- **HB 1047:** Safer Products –chemicals in cosmetics
- **SSB 5135:** Toxic pollution prevention
- **HB 1085:** Reduce plastic pollution
- **SB 5369:** Reassess standards for PCBs
- **SSB 5433:** Removal of derelict aquatic structures
- **SB 5033:** PFAS sampling required in biosolids
- **HB 1670:** Sewage Spills transparency



Goal 4 : Funding and Accountability

- Track implementation of Task Force recommendations
- Share information with public
- Support the use of the PSP's science framework for the SRKW vital sign



Goal 5 : Climate Change

Goal 6: Population Growth

-
- Continue to support funding for monitoring in Puget Sound so we can understand the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.
 - Support climate resilient solutions to benefit SRKW, salmon, and overburdened communities
 - Policies, incentives and regulations result in net ecological gain



Legislative Progress- Climate & Growth

- **HB 1138, 1170, 1181:** Climate change response
- **SB 5126:** Climate Commitment Act
- **HB 1091:** Clean fuels standard



Life After the Task Force



- Task Force sunset in 2019
- 2021 - Orca Recovery Coordinator-Governor's Salmon Recovery Office
- State Agencies Workgroup
- Coordination with Tribes
- Working Groups & Partners
- Monitoring with Puget Sound Partnership
- SRKW Intergovernmental Workgroup
- www.orca.wa.gov



Transboundary Work

- Canada has an Indigenous and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group on SRKW
 - Announced 1000-meter distance Interim Order June 2026
 - Amending Marine Mammal Regulations
- 2025 Oregon Listed SRKW as state endangered species
- 2025 California petitioned to list SRKW on state list

Emerging / Continuing Issues

- US Navy Northwest Testing and Training Area
- Thermal Imaging cameras and underwater listening station to detect whales
- Pacific Salmon Treaty negotiations
- Pinniped predation
- Hatchery Infrastructure for prey species
 - Columbia hatcheries operating and maintenance infrastructure
- Fish Passage and funding
- 6PPD and stormwater treatments
- Toxic and nutrient reductions
- Cold water refugia



Thank you

