

# Southern Resident Killer Whale Executive Order Immediate Action Report May 1, 2018

Executive Order Task	
Develop a curriculum to improve and increase the number of trainings for vessels in the whale watching industry to become vessels of opportunity (VOO) to assist in the event of an oil spill.	

<b>Completion Date</b>	March 28, 2018		
<b>Lead Agency</b>	Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology)		
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<b>Supporting Agencies, if applicable</b>	Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Northwest Area Committee/Regional Response Team X (includes the U.S. Coast Guard, Environmental Protection Agency)		

Outcomes/Progress Narrative	
<p>The curriculum plan is published at <a href="https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/summaryPages/1808006.html">https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/summaryPages/1808006.html</a></p> <p><u>Background:</u></p> <p>The transport of large volumes of oil presents a risk of oil spills in the Pacific Northwest, and poses a threat to the long-term recovery of Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). Presently, the most viable option to avoid impacts to whales during a major oil spill is to monitor for their presence in the larger vicinity of the oil's trajectory (predicted impact areas), and be prepared beforehand with trained and equipped vessel operators to deter them away from entering oil-contaminated waters. The term "vessel of opportunity" describes an organized system to preregister volunteer boat operators who can be quickly activated after a spill occurs, and tasked to deter whales away from oil.</p> <p>Vessel operators and their crews would not be working in contact with oil; instead their actions will be limited to surveillance, reporting, and deterrence outside of oiled waters. The components of an SRKW deterrence program should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systematic method to survey and locate whales relative to the movement of the oil spill, using all available information from aerial reconnaissance, sighting networks, the whale watch industry, and other sources.</li> </ul>	

- Maintaining and continuing to renew the existing permit that allows the federal representative managing oil spills to deter whales from encountering the oil.
- Ready access to deterrence stimulus that will bother and turn killer whales away from oil, but not cause harm. This equipment should be strategically pre-staged to avoid delays in response.
- An organized fleet of competent vessels to field the deterrence stimulus between the whales and the oil.
- A Unified Command for the spill response, operating under a daily Incident Action Plan that will provide intelligence and direction to the deterrence team.
- Long-term funding mechanisms for implementing the program and continuing research into efficacy of deterrence measures.
- Coordination with British Columbia to ensure equal capability within the Salish Sea.

Plan of Action: The goal for this curriculum is to broadly recruit, pre-register, equip, and train whale watching VOOs to be able to safely conduct SRKW deterrence activities during a major oil spill. The steps forward will include:

- Conduct recruitment and outreach using established organizations, venues, and communities.
- Ask vessel operators to pre-register at the state's established website, <http://www.oilspills101.wa.gov/>
- Seek agreement from the vessel operators for at least one site visit for each vessel to ensure that it can be properly equipped with the necessary equipment.
- Develop and implement a competency-based training program that can be delivered both annually and "just in time," ahead of being activated as part of a response, providing maximum flexibility.
- Seek permanent funding opportunities to both implement and grow this VOO program.

Outreach will support three phases of the curriculum plan: awareness, training, and implementation.

### **Awareness**

- Partner with Pacific Whale Watch Association, Islands Oil Spill Association, and other similar organizations to provide awareness of the program to vessel owners.
- Employ many tools, including a website, brochure, video, targeted presentations, webinars, brochure, and social media to communicate goals of the VOO program and promote volunteer enlistment.

### **Training and Implementation**

- Develop a training plan, training schedule, and implementation plan after consulting the whale watching industry. Ask them what works best for them.
- Have a ready to go "just in time" training package to use should a large spill occur.

After training is completed, ongoing oil spill drills will be organized to provide on-water practice with boats and equipment.