

Saving Southern Resident Orcas

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The southern resident killer whale population lives as north as far Vancouver BC and travels as far south as Monterey Bay, California. The species was listed as endangered in 2005, as of spring 2024, there are less than seventy-five living southern resident orcas. The declining population of the southern residents results from several factors, low prey availability, pollution, and vessel noise. By understanding these threats to the survival of this orca population, communities can take steps toward replenishing their numbers. 80% of the southern resident's diet consists of chinook salmon. With limited access to their major prey source, the health of southern residents is impacted. The lack of prey these whales face has made them susceptible to malnutrition and infertility. Whale Scout is an organization that focuses on protecting Pacific Northwest whales through land-based conservation experiences. The organization restores salmon habitat in King and Snohomish County through educational events, planting of native plants, and invasive species removal. Repairing riparian zones helps to provide better conditions for salmon spawning and migration. With an increase in salmon populations, it is expected that the health concerns limiting population growth of the whale population will decrease. Through my work with Whale Scout, I engaged with the local communities and contributed to riparian restoration along the Sammamish River. Promoting the growth of the southern resident killer whale population is an ongoing project. Through continuous work on restoration and community engagement, we are expected to increase prey availability for southern resident orcas and support their growth.