Boaters Reminded - Stay Clear of Orca Whales

Local News

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During the summer months Mason County residents are often treated to the sight of Orca Whales in our Puget Sound and Hood Canal Waters. The Mason County Sheriff’s Office would like to remind all residents and recreational boaters to give the whales a wide birth. State law requires boaters to stay at least 100 yards away from orca whales. Boaters who find themselves unexpectedly too close are required to stop immediately and allow the whales to pass. These regulations apply to tour boats, private powerboats, sailboats, kayaks, canoes, personal watercraft, and personal floatation devices. Federal law also provides for broad restrictions against disturbing or harassing any marine mammal.

According to Mike Cenci, Deputy Chief of Enforcement, Washington State Department of Wildlife, ten citations and dozens of warnings were issued in 2008. Violating this statute can result in a fine of up to $1,025. The maximum under federal law is $10,000. Boaters are responsible for keeping their distance from these magnificent animals. Human disturbance can interfere with a whale’s ability to feed, communicate, and care for its young. Under state law, it is unlawful to: Approach within 100 yards of a southern resident whale. Cause a vessel or other object to approach within 100 yards of a southern resident whale.Intercept a southern resident whale by remaining in its path until it comes within 100 yards of a vessel.Fail to disengage the transmission of a vessel that is within 100 yards of a southern resident whale. Feed a southern resident whale.

Just yesterday at least two orca whales were spotted in Hammersley Inlet by a shore based whale watcher. The two attached photographs were provided to the Sheriff’s Office by the whale watcher clearly indicate that the boater depicted is too close to the whale. The Mason County Sheriff’s Office is investigating.