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### **Recovery Plan Outlined for Puget Sound's Killer Whales**

NOAA Fisheries Service today released its final recovery plan for Puget Sound's killer whales, saying that recovery of the region's iconic marine mammals will be a long-term effort requiring community support and that its plan provides a roadmap to help restore the population to healthy levels.

Killer whales appear in Puget Sound typically in May, with some remaining into the fall before most leave for the open ocean in the winter months. Puget Sound killer whales are officially known as Southern Residents and this distinct population was listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act in late 2005. Today's recovery plan is a requirement of that listing.

The population experienced an alarming decline of almost 20 percent from 1996 to 2001, when only 79 animals were counted. The current population stands at 88, although at its peak in the 1990s, it was as high as 97 animals.

The fisheries agency said availability of prey, pollution and effects from vessels and sound are major threats to the whales' health. In addition, it said, the whales' inherently small population size and vulnerability to oil spills were important factors considered in the recovery plan.

The agency said, however, that there is considerable uncertainty regarding which threats were responsible for the decline in the population or which may be most important to address for recovery. The plan identifies ongoing conservation programs and calls for action in a variety of areas, including improving availability of prey by supporting salmon restoration in the region, reducing pollution and contamination in the Sound, and monitoring the effects of vessel traffic and underwater noise.

Ongoing research programs, conducted by NOAA Fisheries and others, are providing important information that will help implement and update the plan.

Killer whales, which are actually the world's largest variety of dolphin, are found in every ocean. Males, generally larger than females, can reach close to 30 feet at maturity and weigh more than 15,000 pounds.

The agency said recovery of the Southern Resident killer whales requires cooperation from West Coast communities from California to British Columbia. The plan was developed with help from a variety of stakeholders, including federal and state agencies, tribes, non-profit groups, industries, the academic community and concerned citizens. Development of this plan was closely coordinated with the state of Washington and the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

See the Web to view the plan and related documents:

<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Whales-Dolphins-Porpoise/Killer-Whales/ESA-Status/Orca-Recovery-Plan.cfm>

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NOAA: [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov)

NOAA's Fisheries Service: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov)