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NATIONAL  
OCEANIC AND  
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ADMINISTRATION

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**NOAA FISHERIES DESIGNATES LOCAL KILLER WHALES  
“DEPLETED,” EMBARKS ON CONSERVATION PLAN**

A popular and highly visible group of killer whales that frequents Puget Sound, but whose numbers have declined over the past six years, has been officially designated a depleted stock by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). NOAA Fisheries, an agency of the Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is the federal agency responsible for protecting marine mammals throughout the nation.

The designation – under the Marine Mammal Protection Act – will lead to a conservation plan to address factors that may be causing the population’s decline. When a stock is formally designated as depleted, the act calls for the creation of a conservation plan “as soon as possible.”

“As promised, we are moving ahead to protect these magnificent animals that are a Puget Sound icon,” said Bob Lohn, head of the NOAA Fisheries northwest region in Seattle.

A conservation plan contains measures to restore depleted stocks to optimum levels. The killer whale conservation plan will define goals for population recovery, identify specific measures to help restore the population and estimate the associated time and cost. During development of the plan, NOAA Fisheries said it will work with the local community on measures to benefit the whales.

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The agency will meet with other government agencies and members of the public to discuss development of the plan, with a draft plan for public review expected by the end of next year. The agency said it would also consult with its counterparts in Canada, because the whales' range includes British Columbia.

NOAA Fisheries said it was submitting the official designation today for publication in the Federal Register.

The population of this killer whale stock, known officially as the Eastern North Pacific southern residents, has fallen from a high of around 97 animals in 1996 to 80 last year. In spite of some encouraging new births, there remains keen concern for the population. The southern residents range as far south as California and north into British Columbia. They are typically seen in Puget Sound during the summer.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources, and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. Our stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Internet:

NOAA <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>