

County: San Juan
Grant No: SEANWS-2019-SJCoPW0002

PROJECT TITLE: Southern Resident Killer Whale Vessel Disturbance

DELIVERABLES FOR TASK NO: 2.4 – Final Report

PROGRESS REPORT: FINAL REPORT

PERIOD COVERED: July - September 2020

DATE SUBMITTED: October 2020

2.4 Final Report

Final report summarizing 2020 outreach efforts and overall metrics for the years outreach efforts, locally and regionally and the plan for 2021.



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Northwest Straits Progress Report

This report must accompany all requests for payment, along with any other deliverables per the scope of work.

Task 2: Summary of accomplishments for 2019-202.

The Fourth quarter saw the creation and installation of the boater safety kiosk for San Juan County Park. Due to the cancelation of Killer Whale Tales at the Friday Harbor elementary school funds were re-directed to design and purchase a supplies for the construction of a dedicated boater safety kiosk at San Juan County Park. The kiosk illustrates a combination of boater safety tips “Stay Alive – Learn These Five!” and information related best boating practices around whales and wildlife, including Be Whale Wise, KELP (Kayak Education and Leadership Program), the westside no-go zone, and the Whale Warning Flag. The boater safety kiosk created in partnership with San Juan County Parks is a model for additional signs and the MRC plans to assist County Parks with installing similar boater safety kiosks at other parks around the County.

San Juan County Westside marine spatial planning effort to identify quiet zones for foraging Southern Resident killer whales on the Westside of San Juan Island:

- Acoustic monitoring began again Memorial Day weekend and continued through to Labor Day weekend. Analysis of these data are now underway.
- user-group engagement and data collection began through this last quarter of the grant. This data collection is continuing through October with analysis expected to occur later in the fall.

A full summary of the year’s efforts is provided in the attached report below

For any work related to GIS, designate data standard utilized and associated data documentation:

no

Status of project schedule (Include percent complete and note any delays):

With all meetings and tasks provided within this time portion of this project are 100% complete.

Status of financial and funds disbursement (include percent spent and explain any delays in spending):

100%

Personnel changes:

No changes

Any difficulties encountered during the reporting period:

Due to COVID restrictions no in person outreach at Docks or the Anacortes Boat Show (which was moved to a virtual event) was possible. Signage was displayed at docks and marinas during key holiday weekends such as Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day weekends.

Anticipated (environmental, recreational, etc.) benefits of the project:

None to report



Photo: Kendra Smith, MRC Member and County Environmental Resources Manager

Southern Resident killer whale vessel disturbance: final report for 2019-2020

One of the key threats to the endangered Southern Resident killer whale (SRKW) is vessel disturbance. Following the outcomes of the MRC-hosted community workshops of 2017 and 2018 and areas of concern identified by the Governor's Southern Resident Orca Task Force, San Juan MRC continued their efforts to address boater behavior and awareness with respect to the SRKW. The long-term goals of the MRCs efforts to address SRKW vessel disturbance include:

- Continuing to engage with boaters at the local and regional scale to improve boater safety and compliance with whale related regulations.
- Identify innovative actions to protect Southern Resident killer whale core foraging habitat while integrating local community values.
- Provide education to local elementary students about whales and the Salish Sea, and instill a sense of place.

This report provides a summary of the outreach efforts, project participation and core accomplishments of the MRC over the course of the 2019-2020 grant year. Additionally, the report also provides an outline of expected efforts for the 2020-2021 grant year.

Engagement efforts and outcomes.

San Juan County MRC continued to engage with boaters on a local and regional scale, supporting the transboundary Be Whale Wise partnership at regional boat shows and with the distribution and installation of updated Be Whale Wise signage. MRC members volunteered their time for the Be Whale Wise booth at the Seattle Boat Show in January and assisted the County with installing Be Whale Signs at County and private marine facilities on San Juan, Orcas and Lopez Islands. In addition, sandwich board signage was displayed on San Juan and Lopez Island throughout the summer. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted all in-person outreach efforts that were planned for the summer boating season, including participation in the Anacortes Boat Show and dock talks around the County. However, the MRC was able to continue to share messaging through their social media platforms and through further establishing connections with the recreational boating community.

Efforts also continued around the whale warning flag. While direct outreach with boaters was limited due to restrictions related to limiting the spread of COVID-19 whale flags continued to be distributed through online sales direct with the County and through partnerships with Fisheries Supply in Seattle and the Marine Education and Research Society in British Columbia Canada. As a result, a further 294 whale warning flags were distributed over the course of 2020. Soundwatch continued to collect data on flag use and compliance rates and this will be analyzed during the fall 2020.

One of the key impacts of the COVID crisis for the MRC's planned outreach activities related to the planned partnership with Killer Whale Tales. The MRC had partnered with the Friday Harbor elementary school to host the Seattle based environmental education program Killer Whale Tales for the 4th and 5th grade classes. Due the forced cancelation of this project the MRC pivoted and identified a new partnership with San Juan County Park to create a boater safety kiosk that provided boaters with information on Be Whale Wise, KERP guidelines, the westside voluntary no-go zone and the whale warning flag. The kiosk was constructed, signage designed and installed, and life-vest procured for the life-vest loaning station during the 4th quarter of the grant. Other efforts that occurred over the course of the year included the publication of an online storyboard detailing the MRC and County's efforts for SRKW since 1993. This storyboard was created by a communications intern whose position was made possible through a grant with the NW Straits Foundation. Please follow this link to view the storyboard: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/h09XWPsveE876O/>

Accomplishments

- Published story board detailing MRC and County efforts for the SRKW since 1993.
- The MRC distributed or installed 37 metal Be Whale Wise dock signs; 16 to ports and marinas at the Seattle Boat Show (including Everett Yacht Sales, Dock Street Marina, Port of Port Townsend, Swanton Marina, Gig Harbor Marina, Port of Edmonds and Port of Seattle at Bell Harbor and Harbor Island). And a further 17 distributed between San Juan Island (3), Orcas Island (9) and Lopez Island (5).
- 1000 Be Whale Wise and Whale Warning Flag leaflets and over 60 Be Whale Wise posters distributed at the Seattle Boat Show.
- 294 whale warning flags distributed, including 110 flags to British Columbia allowing the flag to become more readily available to boaters across the border.
- Created a boater safety Be Whale Wise kiosk at the San Juan County Park.



SRKW marine spatial planning efforts and outcomes.

In 2019 the MRC partnered with the San Juan County Marine Program to embark on a marine spatial planning effort to identify innovative actions to protect Southern Resident killer whale core foraging habitat while integrating local community values. Over the course of 2019 and 2020 acoustic monitoring has occurred, fisheries data have been compiled, and SRKW foraging behavior data has been compiled resulting in data spanning 17 years (2003-2019) from 6 data holders providing a 14-fold increase in sample size over previous analyses. These data are now being used in spatial modelling to identify high priority whale foraging habitat to be identified. During the summer of 2020 efforts also began to collect social value data from core user-groups, including westside residents, whale watch and kayak companies, recreational boaters, recreational fishers, commercial fishers, and whale advocates. Data collection predominantly took the form of social surveys to allow for analysis and comparison between groups, but some follow up interviews were also conducted with some groups. Data collection and analysis is ongoing and will be presented during a 2-day technical workshop over the winter.

Accomplishments

- Acoustic monitoring
- Foraging data compilation and analysis
- Social value data collection.



Partners in the MRC's SRKW outreach efforts related to reducing the impacts of vessels include:

- The San Juan County Marine Program
- The Northwest Straits Foundation
- The Northwest Marine Trade Association
- Waggoners Cruising Guide
- Be Whale Wise
- Soundwatch
- Fisheries Supply
- The Marine Education and Research Society
- San Juan County Park

Leverage/Match

The grant funding available for the MRC's outreach efforts related to reducing the impacts of vessels on SRKW in 2019-2020 was \$11,965.

These efforts were also supported by the County's marine program and through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant that is funding the westside marine spatial planning effort. While neither the county's funding nor the NFWF grant may be considered match for the MRC grant this funding amounts to ~\$100,000.

What is the plan for 2021

As we continue to adapt to this COVID world the MRC's outreach efforts will look a little different in 2021 compared to what they anticipated in 2019 and early 2020. The key to successful project implementation will be in the committee's flexibility and willingness to adapt -qualities that the San Juan County MRC has exhibited through 2020. The committee will continue to use its networks to share Be Whale Wise and whale warning flag information with the recreational boating community, MRC Lead Staff are expecting to participate in virtual boat show events to amplify the committees' efforts regarding the whale warning flag. San Juan County Marine Program has applied for a number of grants to help continue the expansion of the flag program in partnership with the MRC and the move the westside marine spatial planning effort into the next phase to identify and trial potential voluntary management actions. These efforts alone will involve the organization and participation in community workshops, and during the boating season the MRC will lead monitoring efforts to collecting vessel count data to help monitor for the effectiveness of any trial actions that are implemented.

Given the promising progress that San Juan County has made against COVID schools are likely to be opening up to in-person instruction providing opportunity for the MRC to engage with the school districts and provide workshops on killer whales with the environmental story telling group, Killer Whale Tales. This has been planned in the three school districts in the County. The MRC and Killer whale Tales are able to offer the program on a spectrum from fully online to in person. The MRC is looking forward to this partnership with the school districts.

Finally, should funding for the projects mentioned above be successful, there is an opportunity for the MRC to redirect some of their grant towards the creation of two more boater safety kiosks in their partnership with San Juan County Parks. County Parks on Lopez and Shaw Island have been identified as ideal locations as both have a boat ramp and provide an excellent opportunity to educate boaters on the "Stay Alive – Learn these Five" rules, on Be Whale Wise and the whale warning flag and, also on sensitive nearshore eelgrass habitat that is found at the two park sites.

Attachments

Please see the following attachments that show the MRC's efforts:

- To install Be Whale Wise signage
- Whale warning flags in use
- Fisheries Supply advert about the whale warning flag
- The designs and final result of the boater safety kiosk
- Acoustic monitoring for the west side marine spatial planning project
- Aerial photo of Eagle Point on the west side of San Juan Island during the August salmon opening.



Be Whale Wise signage installed on Orcas Island at West Sound, East Sound and Olga public docks.
Photo: F. Robertson



Be Whale Wise signage installed at private marina, Brandt's Landing by MRC member Carl Davis. Photo: C. Davis



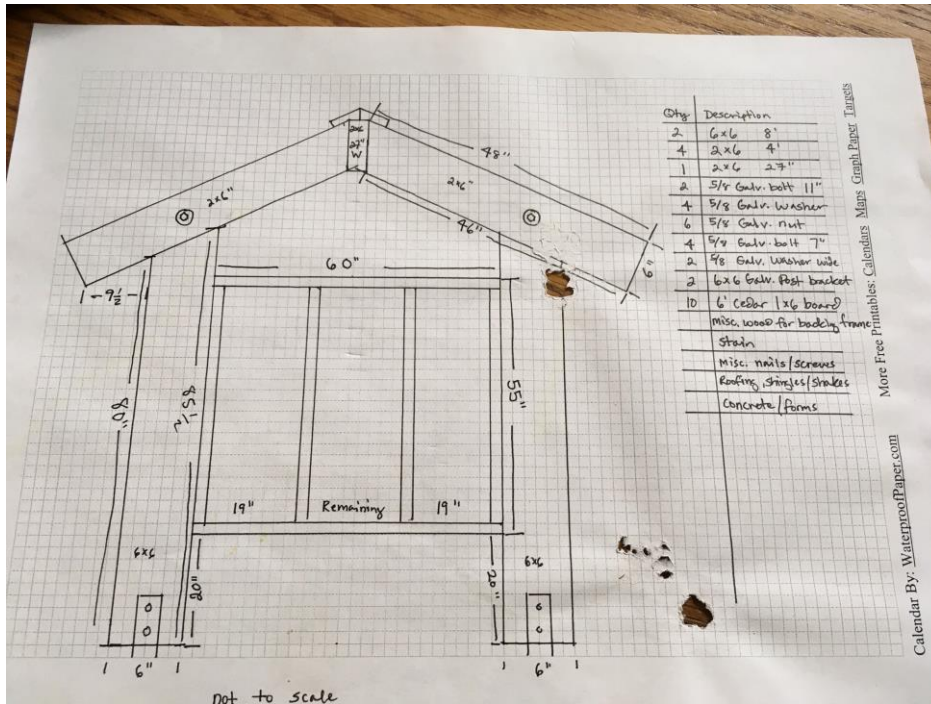
MRC member, Jeff Dyre pictured installing Be Whale Wise signage on Lopez Island.



MRC member Ivan Reiff's boat Western Explorer II displaying its whale warning flag. Photo: K. Rae



San Juan whale watch boat Kittiwake flying their whale warning flag. Photo: F. Robertson



Design plans for the boater safety kiosk by San Juan County Park Manager, Toby Haskett



Final, installed boater safety kiosk at San Juan County Park. A life-vest loaning station will be added once COVID restrictions will safely allow it. Photo: F. Robertson



Socially distanced and masked County Park Manager Toby Haskett (front left), and MRC members (Phil Green, Karin Roemers-Kleven, Laura Jo Severson, Lovel Pratt in the back, and Kailey Genter and Cathleen Burns in the front) at the opening of the kiosk. Photo: F. Robertson



Acoustic monitoring of the westside of San Juan Island with Coastal Acoustic Buoys (top) and an aerial image of recreational fishing activity off Eagle Point in late August 2020.

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This Summer Be Whale Wise!

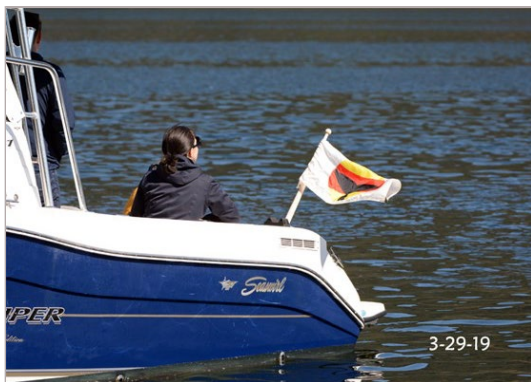
With a Whale Warning Flag



The Whale Warning Flag was first introduced around Northern Vancouver Island by the North Island Marine Mammal Stewardship Association (NIMMSA) as a means of addressing the growing number of negative interactions between boats and humpback whales. By using the same flag design we are collectively promoting and strengthening a consistent message of good boating behavior around whales throughout the coastal waters of British Columbia, Canada and Washington State, USA.

If you have a flag:

If you see a flag:



- When you encounter whales within 0.65 miles (1km) of you raise the flag
- Slow down to 7 knots or less






- Whales are in the vicinity of the boat or land station flying the flag.
- Slow down to 7 knots or less

- Maintain compliance with Be Whale Wise Guidelines and laws
- Turn off fish finders and/or depth sounders.
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- Turn off fish finders and/or depth sounders



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