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For Immediate Release:
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Friday, May 21, 2004

Sheriff's enforcement of no-wake zone temporarily suspended

Silverdale, Wash. -- Effective at 7:00 p.m. this evening, the enforcement of a temporary boating "no wake" zone within Dyes Inlet, Kitsap County, has been suspended.

The Board of Kitsap County Commissioners had adopted an emergency ordinance earlier this week (Tuesday, May 18) restricting marine vessel speeds to seven nautical miles per hour. The ordinance was intended to help protect the visiting pod of Orca whales that had migrated into Dyes Inlet.

The ordinance covered the water area from the Manette Bridge, Port Washington Narrows, northwards to include all of Dyes Inlet, in the Central Kitsap area. The Kitsap County Sheriff's Office Marine Services Unit was tasked with enforcing boating speed restrictions pursuant to the emergency ordinance.

As it appears that the Orca pod has departed Dyes Inlet, the Sheriff's Office will not be enforcing the boating speed restrictions contained in the ordinance. The ordinance itself remains in effect until June 28, 2004, and will be re-activated if necessary.

County signs outlining the provisions of the emergency ordinance, that were placed at boat ramps, docks and other water entry and egress locations, will remain posted until the ordinance is lifted.

The Sheriff's Office emphasizes that boating speed restrictions contained within the ordinance will again be enforced should whales return to Kitsap waters. The Sheriff's Office will advise the public, through media sources, if this occurs.

The public is reminded that if they observe a return of whales to Kitsap waters, they are to remain at a safe distance from the whales (100 yards minimum), reduce their boat speed, and are asked to notify local civilian authorities of the whales' presence.

Federal Protection Laws

Human activities in the vicinity of marine mammals may harass these animals resulting in a range of impacts, including: separation of mothers from their calves; disruption of migratory patterns; disruption of social groupings, interference in reproductive activities and the abandonment of nursing pups.

Federal regulations enforced by the National Marine Fisheries Service provide that any action that disrupts the normal behavior of whales, including negligent or intentional disruption of the whales' natural behavior, is a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Violators of the MMPA may be subject to a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 for each violation and criminal prosecution with a fine of up to \$100,000 or imprisonment for up to one year.

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