



Make a Difference

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BETTER GROUND FOR ISLAND & SOUND

Our Collective Conservation Actions at Home Help Our Marine Neighbors at Sea

No matter which direction your gaze may go, living here on Whidbey means capturing, at every turn, an eyeful of our island's strongest asset – the Salish Sea.

Depending where on-island you frequent most, perhaps you better know these waters as Puget Sound or Deception Pass, Possession Sound or Admiralty Inlet, Strait of Juan de Fuca or Saratoga Passage. We're surrounded on all sides by some of the most vibrant and biodiverse marine environs in all of the Pacific Northwest. Because we experience this direct connection with water each day, we Whidbey Islanders understand an important idea more readily than most in our region – what we do on land connects with our neighbors at sea, like our iconic orca whale.

Type "orca whale" in any search engine and I'll bet you'll see countless press reports stretching from coast-to-coast, documenting the current state of affairs of our southern resident killer whales. Since 2005, the resident orcas have been designated as endangered due in part to their primary prey – Chinook salmon – also endangered. Following the salmon, orcas migrate in the Salish Sea to the northern coast of British Columbia, going as far south as Seattle. With a local orca population of only 74, however – and in the past few months two whales have died due to a combination of malnutrition, polluted waters, and stress from local boat traffic – our marine neighbors are more than ever turning their gaze to us for help. Will we return that gaze?

When region-wide challenges come knocking at our doors and ask to be seen – like a neighbor asking for a cup of sugar – it's easy to fall into the trap of overwhelm, even hopelessness or apathy. Especially so if we, ourselves, feel as if we have no sugar to offer – no tangible actions we feel may actually help. We may ask ourselves – "Well, what can I really do to help these orcas? I'm only one person." Cloaked in vast size and scale, we forget although there may be differences between us land-dwellers and our next-door neighbors, we really aren't all that dissimilar. We must remember we all call the ecosystems of Whidbey Island "home," the greater Salish Sea our "neighborhood."

So, how exactly then are we connected? And how might we go about making a difference at home to help our marine neighbors at sea?

Connection

When it comes down to it, we – orcas, humans, and all other living things – share the same basic needs: food, water, shelter, and space. All these needs we can call "natural resources," and in the Pacific Northwest we may think they exist in greater abundance than in other regions of our world, but regardless, these resources are still all shared between us.

Orcas rely on salmon as a primary food source. And salmon rely on specific habitat in order to spawn, to reproduce. Born in fresh water, salmon spend most of their lives in the ocean, but migrate at the end of their lives back to the riverine systems in which they were wrought. Along their migratory journey, salmon touch vast swaths of sea – it's hard to find a place in our Sound where salmon haven't traveled. The open waters, estuaries, rivers, and streams salmon float through, all are habitat structured in beneficial ways to help the salmon. Perhaps its cooler water temperatures from shade of nearby native vegetation, or a complex and meandering waterway that provides adequate eddies and currents. All this and more, our salmon rely on. And all the places salmon and orcas touch may well be in own backyards.

It's obvious enough, especially if you live along our waterfront or bluffs. Even for us living upland of our shorelines, interior properties are only a stone's throw from nearby water. Throughout it all, our backyards are connected to the Sound through the interactions of surface and ground water on its never-ending journey from land to sea to sky, repeat. Depending on how your property is positioned, excessive nutrient transport from land can result in eutrophication at sea. Likewise, oils and heavy metals, or trash that escaped the weekly pick-up, even improperly disposed medicines, can become pollution if not handled properly. What we do on our ground can end up in the Sound.

Action

It isn't enough to just know these things, though. I'm sure you've heard factoid here, expert interview there. It's easy for your soul to get led astray with saga after saga. So let me encourage you to pause and I'll provide a reminder: in the midst of this awareness of our impacts in our neighborhood, there lies an opportunity for us to live lightly. At home, even the smallest of steps, if done collectively, can truly make a difference to our orca neighbors. So for starters, here are five tips to provide better ground at home for our island and Sound:

Use natural yard care practices – Countless benefits to your yard abound when you reduce fertilizer inputs, use of pesticides, and other harmful chemicals to maintain your landscaping. When selecting plants for your yard, consider Pacific Northwest native shrubs, trees, or groundcovers. Overall, native plants equate to less maintenance for you and yet provide similar beauty as their more intensive and less-adapted ornamental counterparts. If a lawn is your preference, when maintaining it, mow higher and mow regularly, leaving clippings to improve turf density and health. More vegetation is better as it captures and filters rainwater, improving water quality before it reaches the Sound. Consider also the creation of some wildlife habitat for birds or pollinators in sections of your yard in which you're unsure what to do. If you own waterfront or bluff property, become "shore-friendly." Start by reading this three-part series about landscaping using native plants at <https://bit.ly/2qq0zqH>. Or check out "Natural Yard Care" at <https://bit.ly/2Ompm8t>. Shore Friendly resources can be found at the Island County Shore Friendly website at <https://bit.ly/2qorjaL> and WSU Extension Shore Stewards at <https://shorestewards.cw.wsu.edu/>.

Manage runoff on your property through de-pave, rain barrels, rain gardens, or other low impact development (LID) techniques – During winter months, we receive more rain. This is what makes us the Pacific Northwest, right? It also means more runoff from impervious surfaces like our roofs and driveways, sidewalks, and even our lawns. This runoff, instead of washing pollutants into our Sound, can be put to good use and saved for summer irrigation (perhaps for that native plant landscaping you just installed!) or incorporated into your landscape as a design feature. Good stormwater management not only prevents damage to property from flooding, but protects water quality. Check out these two resources from Washington State University at <https://bit.ly/2SCTcl> and the Tulalip Tribes at <https://bit.ly/2qq6pID> to get you started with LID techniques.

Don't Drip and Drive – Regularly inspect the condition of your vehicles to ensure oils aren't spilled and accidentally carried by rain into surface and ground water. Ideally, have oils and fluids changed at a service center that recycles these fluids responsibly. The regional Don't Drip & Drive campaign has great resources to help you, so check out <https://fixcarleaks.org/>. If you're handy and do repair work yourself, just be sure no spills occur. Motor oils are considered residential hazardous waste, and there are places on Whidbey you can dispose of them for free, so check out <https://bit.ly/2DgCDyc>.

Properly Dispose of Pharmaceuticals – Do you have old prescription pills and are unsure how to dispose of them? Flushing down toilets or sinks can task conventional wastewater treatment and on-site drain fields, which result in added maintenance costs for you and do not eliminate the majority of the compounds in the medication before it enters ground water. Researchers suspect hormones and pharmaceutical compounds that end up in our marine waters may be responsible for a whole host of detrimental effects to wildlife, and humans, too. Instead, return unused, unneeded, or expired prescription medication to pharma-

ceutical take-back locations that allow for safe disposal. Island County has participating locations during the annual National Prescription Drug Take Back Day, held in April. Learn more at <https://takebackday.dea.gov/> or visit <https://bit.ly/2yLOT62>.

Scoop It, Bag It, Trash It – Man's best friend produces lots of poop. Although natural, pet waste is high in fecal coliform bacteria, among other things, and can cause not only eutrophication of vital salmon stream habitat, but also poses a health risk for Fido and your kids as well, exposing them to potentially harmful bacteria and parasites. The motto "Scoop It, Bag It, Trash It" is simple. Following it is even simpler and keeps our waterways – and your yard or walking path – clean. Some things are meant to be thrown into landfills and pet poop is on the list. In a landfill, waste and contaminants are contained and heavily monitored, so your "doggo" – and our orcas – will thank you when you scoop it, bag it, and throw it in the trash. To learn more, visit <https://bit.ly/2zllxuM>.

Join Us

Remember, we're in this together. We won't solve all the challenges immediately, but collectively, imagine the impact to the health of our island and Sound if we all commit to just one of the actions above and stick with it.

Here's your opportunity to get started: This Saturday, you're invited to join the first-ever region-wide Puget Sound Orca Recovery Day. Whidbey Island Conservation District (WICD), alongside nine other Puget Sound conservation districts, are banding together with partnering organizations to offer opportunities throughout the Sound for public education, action, and positive engagement to aid our marine neighbors in need. Conservation dDistricts are boots-on-the-ground organizations that work every day with landowners, home owners, volunteers, businesses, and schools to implement solutions to a variety of conservation goals. We here at WICD provide resources and technical assistance to you – for free – to inspire and help you implement your voluntary conservation goals, whatever they may be.

In honor of Puget Sound Orca Recovery Day, take part in one, two, or all three fun and free event offerings taking place in central Whidbey. Choose from a Native Plants to Enhance Land & Sea workshop, a rain garden planting project, or WICD's open house and awards ceremony, where you'll come away inspired by local conservation success stories and tips from keynote speaker Linda Rhodes of the Island County Marine Resources Committee. Visit www.whidbeycd.org/2018pugetsoundorcarecoveryday.html or give us a call at (888) 678-4922 or stop by the Whidbey Island Conservation District office at 1 NE 4th St. in Coupeville, Mon-Fri 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to learn more about Puget Sound Orca Recovery Day and the services the Conservation District has to offer.

Collectively, let's start by increasing our conservation toolkit, stockpiling our neighborly sugar stash, and following through with our commitment as good neighbors. That's how we can truly make a difference for better ground. Throughout it all, we benefit not just ourselves, not just orcas, but our home – Whidbey Island – and our neighborhood – Puget Sound.

Live Music Every Saturday Night At 6pm through the end of the year.

Thanksgiving Dinner Sold Out!

Looking to do a holiday/company party? Contact us at events@captainwhidbey.com

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