

# Be Whale Wise

## Guidelines for Watching Marine Wildlife

Seeing killer whales and other marine wildlife in their natural environment can be a thrilling experience.

In our excitement, we sometimes forget that our presence has an effect on the animals and their habitat. Just like us, marine animals need space to find food, choose mates, raise young, socialize and rest.

When we get too close, approach too fast, or make too much noise we may be disrupting these activities and causing the animals unnecessary stress. In some cases, we may be threatening their lives. Please follow these guidelines for watching marine wildlife.

Set an example for other boaters, and help protect this area's spectacular wildlife resources.

## Why do we need guidelines?

The diversity and complexity of marine life in the coastal waters off British Columbia and Washington is truly extraordinary.

But it is a fragile world. Pollution, global climate change and other impacts are taking their toll at all levels of the coastal food web. Some species, such as the southern resident population of killer whales, are showing signs of vulnerability and decline.

Meanwhile, the number of boats in the area is steadily increasing, placing added pressures on marine animals and their habitats.

## We need to minimize our impact.

These guidelines are designed to help you enjoy your wildlife encounter, and reduce the risk of disturbance.



## To report a marine mammal disturbance or harassment:

**Canada:**  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada:  
1-800-465-4336

**US:**  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Office for Law Enforcement: 1-800-853-1964

## To report marine mammal sightings:

BC Cetacean Sightings Network  
[www.wildwhales.org](http://www.wildwhales.org) or (604) 659-3429  
The Whale Museum Hotline (WA state):  
1-800-562-8832 or [hotline@whalemuseum.org](mailto:hotline@whalemuseum.org)  
OrcaNetwork  
[info@orcaneetwork.org](mailto:info@orcaneetwork.org)

## Need more information?

**Canada:**  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
[www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca)  
Marine Mammal Monitoring Project (M3)  
(Victoria and Southern Gulf Islands):  
(250) 480-2656 or  
[www.salishsea.ca](http://www.salishsea.ca)  
Straitwatch  
(Johnstone Strait and Northern Vancouver Island)  
[www.straitwatch.org](http://www.straitwatch.org)

**US:**  
Soundwatch Boater Education Program  
(Washington State, Haro Strait Region)  
(360) 378-4710 or  
[www.whalemuseum.org](http://www.whalemuseum.org)  
NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Region  
[www.nwr.noaa.gov](http://www.nwr.noaa.gov)  
NOAA Fisheries, Office of Protected Resources  
[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/MMWatch/MMViewing.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/MMWatch/MMViewing.html)

## Whale Watching:

1. BE CAUTIOUS and COURTEOUS: approach areas of known or suspected marine mammal activity with extreme caution. Look in all directions before planning your approach or departure.
2. SLOW DOWN: reduce speed to less than 7 knots when within 400 metres/yards of the nearest whale. Avoid abrupt course changes.
3. AVOID approaching closer than 100 metres/yards to any whale.
4. If your vessel is unexpectedly within 100 metres/yards of a whale, STOP IMMEDIATELY and allow the whales to pass.
5. AVOID approaching whales from the front or from behind. Always approach and depart whales from the side, moving in a direction parallel to the direction of the whales.
6. KEEP CLEAR of the whales' path. Avoid positioning your vessel within the 400 metre/yard area in the path of the whales.
7. STAY on the OFFSHORE side of the whales when they are traveling close to shore. Remain at least 200 metres/yards offshore at all times.
8. LIMIT your viewing time to a recommended maximum of 30 minutes. This will minimize the cumulative impact of many vessels and give consideration to other viewers.
9. DO NOT swim with or feed whales.

## Porpoises and dolphins:

1. OBSERVE all guidelines for watching whales.
2. DO NOT drive through groups of porpoises or dolphins for the purpose of bow-riding.
3. Should dolphins or porpoises choose to ride the bow wave of your vessel, REDUCE SPEED gradually and avoid sudden course changes.

## Seals, sea lions and birds on land:

1. AVOID approaching closer than 100 metres/yards to any marine mammals or birds.
2. SLOW DOWN and reduce your wake/wash and noise levels.
3. PAY ATTENTION and back away at the first sign of disturbance or agitation.
4. BE CAUTIOUS AND QUIET when around haul-outs and bird colonies, especially during breeding, nesting and pupping seasons (generally May to September).
5. DO NOT swim with or feed any marine mammals or birds.

**DO YOUR PART TO  
PROTECT MARINE MAMMALS –  
FOLLOW THE VIEWING GUIDELINES**

## Viewing wildlife within Marine Protected Areas, Wildlife Refuges, Ecological Reserves and Parks:

1. CHECK your nautical charts for the location of various protected areas.
2. ABIDE by posted restrictions or contact a local authority for further information.

## The Laws:

Regulations in Canada and the U.S. prohibit the harassment and disturbance of marine mammals.

## What is a disturbance?

Disturbance is when we interfere with an animal's ability to hunt, feed, communicate, socialize, rest, breed and care for its young.

These are critical life processes, necessary for healthy marine mammal populations.

100 metres/yards  
= 1 football field

