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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1580**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** House Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Blake, Kretz, Kirby, Peterson, Appleton, Shewmake, Morris, Cody, and Jinkins; by request of Office of the Governor)

AN ACT Relating to the protection of southern resident orca whales from vessels; amending RCW 77.15.740 and 43.384.050; adding new sections to chapter 77.70 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 77.15 RCW; prescribing penalties; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 77.15.740 and 2014 c 48 s 22 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, it is unlawful for a person to:

(a) Cause a vessel or other object to approach, in any manner, within ((~~two~~)) three hundred yards of a southern resident orca whale;

(b) Position a vessel to be in the path of a southern resident orca whale at any point located within four hundred yards of the whale. This includes intercepting a southern resident orca whale by positioning a vessel so that the prevailing wind or water current carries the vessel into the path of the whale at any point located within four hundred yards of the whale;

(c) Position a vessel behind a southern resident orca whale at any point located within four hundred yards;

(d) Fail to disengage the transmission of a vessel that is within ((~~two~~)) three hundred yards of a southern resident orca whale; ((~~or~~

~~(d)~~)) (e) Cause a vessel or other object to exceed a speed greater than seven knots over ground at any point located within one-half nautical mile (one thousand thirteen yards) of a southern resident orca whale; or

(f) Feed a southern resident orca whale.

(2) A person is exempt from subsection (1) of this section if that person is:

(a) Operating a federal government vessel in the course of ((~~his or her~~)) official duties, or operating a state, tribal, or local government vessel when engaged in official duties involving law enforcement, search and rescue, or public safety;

(b) Operating a vessel in conjunction with a vessel traffic service established under 33 C.F.R. and following a traffic separation scheme, or complying with a vessel traffic service measure of direction. This also includes support vessels escorting ships in the traffic lanes, such as tug boats;

(c) Engaging in an activity, including scientific research, pursuant to a permit or other authorization from the national marine fisheries service and the department;

(d) Lawfully engaging in a treaty Indian or commercial fishery that is actively setting, retrieving, or closely tending fishing gear. Commercial fishing vessels in transit are not exempt from subsection (1) of this section;

(e) Conducting vessel operations necessary to avoid an imminent and serious threat to a person, vessel, or the environment, including when necessary for overall safety of navigation and to comply with state and federal navigation requirements; or

(f) Engaging in rescue or clean-up efforts of a beached southern resident orca whale overseen, coordinated, or authorized by a volunteer stranding network.

(3) For the purpose of this section, "vessel" includes aircraft while on the surface of the water, and every description of watercraft on the water that is used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on the water. However, "vessel" does not include inner tubes, air mattresses, sailboards, and small rafts, or flotation devices or toys customarily used by swimmers.

(4)(a) A violation of this section is a natural resource infraction punishable under chapter 7.84 RCW and carries a fine of five hundred dollars, not including statutory assessments added pursuant to RCW 3.62.090.

(b) A person who qualifies for an exemption under subsection (2) of this section may offer that exemption as an affirmative defense, which that person must prove by a preponderance of the evidence.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) A commercial whale watching license is required for commercial whale watching operators. The annual fee is two hundred dollars in addition to the annual application fee of seventy-five dollars.

(2) The annual fees for a commercial whale watching license as described in subsection (1) of this section must include fees for each motorized or sailing vessel or vessels as follows:

(a) One to twenty-four passengers, three hundred twenty-five dollars;

(b) Twenty-five to fifty passengers, five hundred twenty-five dollars;

(c) Fifty-one to one hundred passengers, eight hundred twenty-five dollars;

(d) One hundred one to one hundred fifty passengers, one thousand eight hundred twenty-five dollars; and

(e) One hundred fifty-one passengers or greater, two thousand dollars.

(3) The annual fees for a commercial whale watching license as described in subsection (1) of this section must include fees for each kayak as follows:

(a) One to ten kayaks, one hundred twenty-five dollars;

(b) Eleven to twenty kayaks, two hundred twenty-five dollars;

(c) Twenty-one to thirty kayaks, four hundred twenty-five dollars; and

(d) Thirty-one or more kayaks, six hundred twenty-five dollars.

(4) A person who is not the license holder may operate a motorized or sailing commercial whale watching vessel designated on the license only if:

(a) The person holds an alternate operator license issued by the director; and

(b) The person is designated as an alternate operator on the underlying commercial whale watching license.

(5) No individual may hold more than one alternate operator license. An individual who holds an alternate operator license may be designated as an alternate operator on an unlimited number of commercial whale watching licenses.

(6) The annual fee for an alternate operator license is two hundred dollars.

(7) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Commercial whale watching" means the act of taking, or offering to take, passengers aboard a vessel in order to view marine mammals in their natural habitat for a fee.

(b) "Commercial whale watching operators" includes commercial vessels and kayak rentals that are engaged in the business of whale watching.

(c) "Commercial whale watching vessel" means any vessel that is being used as a means of transportation for individuals to engage in commercial whale watching.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department must adopt rules for holders of a commercial whale watching license established in section 2 of this act for the viewing of southern resident orca whales for the inland waters of Washington by January 1, 2021. The rules must be designed to reduce the daily and cumulative impacts on southern resident orca whales and consider the economic viability of license holders. The department shall at a minimum consider protections for southern resident orca whales by establishing limitations on:

(a) The number of commercial whale watching operators;

(b) The number of days and hours that commercial whale watching operators can operate;

(c) The duration spent in the vicinity of southern resident orca whales; and

(d) The areas in which commercial whale watching operators may operate.

(2) The department may phase in requirements, but must adopt rules to implement this section. The department may consider the use of an automatic identification system to enable effective monitoring and compliance.

(3) The department may phase in requirements, but must adopt rules pursuant to chapter 34.05 RCW to implement this section including public, industry, and interested party involvement.

(4) Before January 1, 2021, the department shall convene an independent panel of scientists to review the current body of best available science regarding impacts to southern resident orcas by small vessels and commercial whale watching due to disturbance and noise. The department must use the best available science in the establishment of the southern resident orca whale watching rules and continue to adaptively manage the program using the most current and best available science.

(5) The department shall complete an analysis and report to the governor and the legislature on the effectiveness of and any recommendations for changes to the whale watching rules, license fee structure, and approach distance rules by November 30, 2022, and every two years thereafter until 2026. This report must be in compliance with RCW 43.01.036.

(6) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Commercial whale watching" has the same meaning as defined in section 2 of this act.

(b) "Commercial whale watching operators" has the same meaning as defined in section 2 of this act.

(c) "Inland waters of Washington" means Puget Sound and related inland marine waters, including all salt waters of the state of Washington inside the international boundary line between Washington and British Columbia, and lying east of the junction of the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the rivers and streams draining to Puget Sound as mapped by water resource inventory areas 1 through 19 in WAC 173-500-040 as it exists on July 1, 2007.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.15 RCW to read as follows:

(1) A person is guilty of unlawfully engaging in commercial whale watching in the second degree if the person:

(a) Does not have and possess all licenses and permits required under this title; or

(b) Violates any department rule regarding the operation of a commercial whale watching vessel near a southern resident orca whale.

(2) A person is guilty of engaging in commercial whale watching in the first degree if the person commits the act described in subsection (1) of this section and the violation occurs within one year of the date of a prior conviction under this section.

(3)(a) Unlawful commercial whale watching in the second degree is a misdemeanor.

(b) Unlawful commercial whale watching in the first degree is a gross misdemeanor. Upon conviction, the department shall deny applications submitted by the person for a commercial whale watching license or alternate operator license for up to two years from the date of conviction.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.384.050 and 2018 c 275 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) From amounts appropriated to the department for the authority and from other moneys available to it, the authority may incur expenditures for any purpose specifically authorized by this chapter including:

(a) Entering into a contract for a multiple year statewide tourism marketing plan with a statewide nonprofit organization existing on June 7, 2018, whose sole purpose is marketing Washington to tourists. The marketing plan must include, but is not limited to, focuses on rural tourism-dependent counties, natural wonders and outdoor recreation opportunities of the state, including sustainable whale watching, attraction of international tourists, identification of local offerings for tourists, and assistance for tourism areas adversely impacted by natural disasters. In the event that no such organization exists on June 7, 2018, or the initial contractor ceases to exist, the authority may determine criteria for a contractor to carry out a statewide marketing program;

(b) Contracting for the evaluation of the impact of the statewide tourism marketing program; and

(c) Paying for administrative expenses of the authority, which may not exceed two percent of the state portion of funds collected in any fiscal year.

(2) All nonstate moneys received by the authority under RCW 43.384.060 or otherwise provided to the authority for purposes of matching funding must be deposited in the authority's private local account created under RCW 43.384.020(4) and are held in trust for uses authorized solely by this chapter.

(3) "Sustainable whale watching" means an experience that includes whale watching from land or aboard a vessel that reduces the impact on whales, provides a recreational and educational experience, and motivates participants to care about marine mammals, the sea, and marine conservation.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Section 1 of this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately.

**--- END ---**