



Quiet Sound Strategic Plan | 2024-2028

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- Last updated: 9/19/2024

Mission

Quiet Sound is a non-regulatory coalition whose goal is to better understand and reduce the cumulative effects of acoustic and physical disturbance from large commercial vessels (such as large oceangoing vessels, tugs, and public transit vessels) on Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW) throughout their range in Washington state. The Quiet Sound program will likely have added benefits for other species and sectors. Quiet Sound will implement voluntary shipping noise reduction initiatives and monitoring programs through the range of the Southern Resident killer whales in Washington State, in coordination with Canadian and United States authorities.

Guiding Principles

- Promote data-driven, targeted, and results-oriented projects that lead to reduction in acoustic and physical threats to SRKW.
- Hold the highest level of respect for treaty rights and coordinate actions with Washington State Tribes.
- Promote voluntary participation.
- Leverage relationships with public, private and non-profit sector partners to ensure cost-effective and coordinated utilization of resources.
- Employ 'best available science' in decision-making and support data collection to fill gaps as necessary.
- Be transparent and well-documented.
- Reflect equity, diversity and inclusion in hiring, contracting, participation, and implementation.

5-Year Vision: What outcome is Quiet Sound working towards?

Our vision is a quieter and safer critical habitat for Southern Residents killer whales. Within five years, whenever SRKW are present, voluntary programs to reduce the impacts from large commercial vessels (large oceangoing vessels, tugs, and public transit vessels) are active. Participation rates are high and rising every year. These measures are supported by highly effective detections of Southern Residents at all hours of the day and subsequent real-time alerts and communications to commercial mariners. Quiet Sound's work has added benefits for other protected whales in Washington waters.



Priority Focus Areas

The priority focus areas for Quiet Sound include the following:

FOCUS AREAS	DESIRED OUTCOMES
Voluntary commercial vessel operational measures	Most large commercial vessel operators are following Quiet Sound's recommendations to reduce their acoustic and physical impact on SRKW, at all times when SRKW are present in the WA waters of the Salish Sea.
SRKW detection and alerts to commercial mariners	SRKW are reliably detected at regular intervals, at all hours of the day, and professional mariners in proximity to whales receive these detections.
Promote and support the adoption of vessel quieting technology	Washington supports advances in vessel quieting technology with the goal of promoting quieter future maritime fleets.
Quiet Sound administration	Quiet Sound thrives by wisely managing resources, relationships, and communications.

Coalition Approach for Accomplishing Projects in this Strategic Plan

- Quiet Sound Leadership Committee (LC) designates a Project Lead. Projects may be led by Quiet Sound staff or Leadership Committee members.
- Project Lead will propose deliverables, schedule, and considerations for engaging with tribes if suitable. LC will approve.
- Project Lead will develop key performance indicators (KPIs) for each project as appropriate. The KPIs of each project will be discussed with the Adaptive Management group and presented to the LC.
- Project Lead will identify cost and funding avenues. LC and Quiet Sound staff will support Project Lead in securing funding.
- Project Lead will communicate regularly with Quiet Sound staff and LC. Project Lead will report to the LC quarterly (at least in a brief written update).
- Project Lead will provide required reporting to funders.
- Project Lead will provide content to Quiet Sound staff for communications purposes.
- LC will regularly evaluate progress across all projects.

Best Available Science

Quiet Sound and Leadership Committee members will monitor best available science and track upcoming research and findings coming from NOAA, Transport Canada, ECHO and similar entities as they might inform projects and goals within this plan. Quiet Sound will collaborate with ECHO, PSP, NOAA, etc. on tracking the development of regional conservation metrics.



Proposed Staff and Partner Responsibilities

Blue: CORE FUNCTION of Quiet Sound. Without these projects, we do not achieve our vision. Led by Quiet Sound staff.

Purple: CORE FUNCTION of Quiet Sound. Without these projects, we do not achieve our vision. Led by the Leadership Committee.

White: OPTIONAL FUNCTION of Quiet Sound. Nice to have but not core to the 5-year vision. Led by the Leadership Committee.



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Focus Area: Voluntary Commercial Vessel Operational Measures

Outcome: When safe and feasible to do so, most large commercial vessel operators are following Quiet Sound’s recommendations to reduce their acoustic and physical impact on SRKW, at all times when SRKW are present in the WA waters of the Salish Sea.

PROJECT	GOAL	LEAD & PARTNERS	YEAR 1-3 ACTIVITIES
Admiralty Inlet Slowdown	Provide SRKW with quieter, safer habitat in the Puget Sound portion of their range (Admiralty Inlet and south)	Lead: Sara (QS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to run a voluntary slowdown in Admiralty Inlet and North Puget Sound when SRKW are present for vehicle carriers, cruise ships, container vessels, bulkers and tankers. Continue to work with the Suquamish Tribe for approval of hydrophone deployment, and continue to offer opportunities for feedback and share results with other tribes. Analyze opportunities to build on the current parameters of the slowdown to create additional benefit to the whales relative to 22-23 and 23-24 results. This may include adjustments to: dates of the slowdown, the slowdown’s responsiveness to orca presence, geography, vessel speed, vessel types, engagement with participants and non-participants. Collect and track data over time to inform the adaptive management of the slowdown. Develop recommendations to the LC when adjustments to parameters are suggested by data.
Assess additional potential areas for voluntary operational measures	Provide SRKW with quieter, safer habitat in Washington waters beyond Puget Sound	Lead: Sara (QS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop study of area(s) where vessel traffic lanes overlap with SRKW critical habitat including vessel traffic, whale presence, bathymetry [funded by NFWF in 2024], including Admiralty Inlet slowdown for comparison. Tribal engagement and stakeholder engagement around options for operational measures that provide a benefit to SRKW. Develop recommendations to the LC on the costs and benefits, and potential timing of new voluntary operational measures in additional area(s) based on 1 and 2, and lessons learned from Admiralty Inlet.
Develop recommendations for fast ferries	Mitigate impacts (noise, presence, strike risk) to SRKW from	Lead: TBC Quiet Sound staff LC Partners:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect directly with fast ferry operators/operating agencies to initiate relationships and explore how Quiet Sound can support fast ferry whale safety through existing projects in this strategic plan or through existing resources from other partners (such as WRAS or Whales in Our Waters).

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	fast ferries	USCG, Marine Exchange, Maritime Blue, Puget Sound Partnership (PSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess upcoming publications, such as the Kitsap Foil Ferry Mariner Mammal Impact Analysis, UW master's student research on fast ferries. Explore potential for a new fast ferry project under this strategic plan such as: trialing an onboard whale detection system, developing a fast ferry standard of care, or voluntary operational measures recommendation. Provide a summary to the LC for further direction.
Develop recommendations for tugs	Mitigate impacts (noise, presence, strike risk) to SRKW from tugs	Lead: PSP initially, then Quiet Sound staff LC Partners: Makah Tribe, Marine Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puget Sound Partnership: Develop SRKW standard of care in Harbor Safety Plan in coordination with LC members who are on the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee (e.g. Makah Tribe, Marine Exchange, PMSA, WSF). Quiet Sound: Communicate with tugs about findings from Quiet Sound 23/24 study. Quiet Sound: Evaluate tug opportunities and provide summary to the LC.
Further participant recognition	Expand participation in voluntary operational measures by providing non-monetary benefits (public recognition, ESG info, and 3rd party certification support)	Lead: NWSA and members LC Partners: NRDC, PMSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in West Coast-wide conversations with Blue Whales Blue Skies, WhaleSafe, and ECHO to align communication to shippers and clients of commercial shipping. Make recommendations to the LC.
Co-benefits of operational measures	Promote voluntary operational measures by calculating co-benefits (strike risk, air emissions, fuel savings)	Lead: Sara (UW) LC Partner: NWSA and Port of Seattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope study. Find funding. Conduct study. Connect to IMO-related work.



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Focus Area: SRKW Detection and Alerts to Commercial Mariners

Outcome: SRKW are reliably detected at regular intervals, at all hours of the day, and professional mariners in proximity to whales receive these detections.

PROJECT	GOAL	LEAD & PARTNERS	YEAR 1-3 ACTIVITIES
Visual sightings	Expand visual sightings available in WRAS	Lead: Gonzalo (QS) LC Partner: Seattle Aquarium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financially support the labor to collect and send Washington-based sightings to a WRAS-connected system. Support Ocean Wise in their role as WRAS operator by participating in the WRAS Advisory Committee and facilitating transboundary relationships between Ocean Wise and Washington data owners and API users. Monitor roll-out of WRAS on Portable Pilot Units. Work with Acartia to send WhaleAlert sightings (non-ON) to WRAS. Research visual sightings sources available in vessel lanes beyond Puget Sound. Continue conversations with Pacific Whale Watch Association (PWWA). Connect new sightings source to WRAS. Seattle Aquarium: Encourage public participation in sightings networks.
Thermal imaging	Provide nighttime and foul weather detection of cetaceans	Lead: Gonzalo (QS) LC Partner: WSF, Marine Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate funding. Background research (NARW and BC examples). Scope a pilot project for a shore-based thermal imaging proof of concept. Include engagement with tribes with usual and accustomed fishing areas near any potential infrared cameras. Report back to the LC. Work with Ocean Wise to assess suitability for connection to WRAS.
Acoustic detections	Provide nighttime and foul weather detection of SRKW	Lead: Gonzalo (QS) LC Partners:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete hydrophone feasibility study and seek opportunities to establish additional hydrophones. Coordinate with tribes with usual and accustomed fishing areas near any new hydrophones. Coordinate with Orcasound and members to develop data usage agreement. Work with Orcasound to implement machine learning detection of SRKW. Connect hydrophones to WRAS via Acartia.io.
Hydrophone	Support the	Lead: Port	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete hydrophone gap analysis study with NOAA.

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expansion	optimal placement of new nodes in WA's hydrophone network	of Seattle LC Partners: NOAA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share results with LC. • Evaluate hydrophone opportunities (for both whale detection and vessel underwater noise measurement) in coordination with QS Advisory Group.
Stay informed on development of WRAS alerts via AIS messaging	Reach vessels w/o WRAS via AIS messages for real-time whale detections within the WRAS system	Lead: TBD <i>Consult:</i> <i>USCG</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with Marine Exchange, USCG and ECHO to develop an approach that is consistent on both sides of the border. • Seek feedback from commercial mariners on options and relationship going forward between WRAS and AIS. • Coordinate with Ocean Wise for sending detections from the WRAS system to vessels via AIS messaging.
Promote WRAS on electronic navigational systems	Expand the set of vessels receiving whale alerts	Lead: TBD <i>Consult:</i> <i>USCG</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with commercial mariners for guidance and priorities. • Work with individual fleets to connect internet-connected navigational systems to WRAS. • Coordinate with QS staff to research fast ferry and tug navigational system options.



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Focus Area: Promote and Support the Adoption of Vessel Quieting Technology

Outcome: Washington supports advances in vessel quieting technology with the goal of promoting quieter future maritime fleets.

PROJECT	GOAL	LEAD & PARTNERS	YEAR 1-3 ACTIVITIES
Connect WA to international vessel quieting opportunities	Encourage Washington's participation in the IMO experience building phase for underwater noise guidelines	Lead: NRDC LC Partners: Quiet Sound, Port of Seattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to IMO SDSC webinar. • Seek opportunities for vessels to develop underwater noise management plans. • Seek opportunities to integrate underwater noise emissions into vessel sustainability initiatives.
Support emerging tech	Support quieter options and vessel design choices	Lead: Maritime Blue (Non-QS staff, e.g. Blue Ventures, JIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient new Blue Ventures director to Quiet Sound. • Seek opportunities to support vessel quieting technology through Maritime Blue's incubator and accelerator programs. • Connect QS with designers of Kitsap foiling ferry to encourage whale-safe choices.



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Focus Area: Quiet Sound Administration

Outcome: Quiet Sound thrives by wisely managing resources, relationships, and communications.

PROJECT	GOAL	LEAD & PARTNERS	YEAR 1-3 ACTIVITIES
Budget and financial reporting	Support the sustainability of the program	Lead: Rachel (QS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide timely and accurate reports to funders Develop annual budget and periodic budget forecasts
Fundraising	Advance projects and support the sustainability of the program	Lead: All QS Staff Partner: LC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support new or expanded funds by cultivating donor/funder relationships. Apply for funding to act on focus areas in this Strategic Plan and track outcomes. Expand opportunities for individual donors. Coordinate with state and federal elected officials.
Support tribal treaty rights	Ensure QS programs respect tribal treaty rights and center tribal perspectives	Lead: All QS staff, Makah Tribe, NWIFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet regularly with tribal partners. Share project updates and reports when available. Report back to LC how tribal input will be incorporated into our work (if appropriate).
Comms	Provide windows into the program for stakeholders, partners, funders, elected officials and the public	Lead: All QS Staff LC Partner: Seattle Aquarium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain QS website, including project status and meeting notes. Send monthly newsletter updates; Send more frequent project email updates when appropriate Develop social media materials Develop slide decks, one-pagers Host executive briefing annually Coordinate with traditional media/reporters; Develop press releases Present at conferences Connect with the NGO community (Seattle Aquarium).
Coordinate with ECHO	Ensure that our actions are synchronized for the good of SRKW in their transboundary habitat	Lead: All QS staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend AWG meetings. Meet monthly with ECHO staff. Invite ECHO as a standing observer to LC meetings and to participate in the Advisory Group. Report back to LC from ECHO meetings.
Stakeholder	Strengthen	Lead: All QS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead quarterly meetings of the LC.

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and partner engagement	programs through feedback from multiple perspectives	staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Operating Procedures for the Advisory Group (see group description below). • Invite the members of the closing workgroups to join the Advisory Group. • Contract with a facilitator to support the Advisory Group and LC meetings if funds are available. • Set up a quarterly meeting schedule roughly equidistant between Leadership Committee quarterly meetings. • Lead quarterly meetings of an Advisory Group.
Participate in external groups	Promote the Quiet Sound mission by representing the coalition in external decision-making bodies	Lead: All QS staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in regional scientific groups, such as PSEMP. • Participate in ECHO meetings. • Participate in policy-making groups, such as relevant rulemaking, agency advisory groups.
Facilitate LC funding committee	Advance projects and support the sustainability of the program	Lead: Seattle Aquarium LC Partner: QS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene funding committee. • Co-lead funding and/or legislative initiatives for Quiet Sound with QS staff.
Adaptive management	Manage current projects for maximum conservation benefit and highlight what isn't being done yet but could be	Lead: NOAA and PSP LC Partners: All QS staff, NRDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet quarterly with Quiet Sound staff. • Report to LC. • Bring questions to the Advisory Group as needed.



Meetings

Leadership Committee

The Leadership Committee will continue to meet quarterly.

Quiet Sound and Tribes

Quiet Sound will meet regularly with tribal staff and NWIFC to ensure that work is consistent with treaty rights and will bring topics from these meetings to the Leadership Committee as recommended by tribes.

Adaptive Management

The Adaptive Management leads will meet quarterly with Quiet Sound staff and bring topics to the Advisory Group and Leadership Committee as needed.

Advisory Group

Quiet Sound workgroups will be replaced by an Advisory Group, comprising a broad section of partners and stakeholders. The Advisory Group's purpose is to allow project leads to consult a group of experts to inform them of their projects. It will meet four advance-scheduled times a year. Agenda to be developed by Quiet Sound and project leads. Project leads should be proactive in suggesting agenda items to Quiet Sound staff to further their initiatives. Agenda would include opportunities for input on projects, such as slowdown parameters, other project milestones, and a request for which types of expertise are requested. Advisory Group members would be encouraged to attend meetings where the agenda is related to their expertise. Agendas will be circulated well in advance of Advisory Group meetings to support the convening of expertise. Advisory Group members will be recognized on the Quiet Sound website and in presentations along with the Leadership Committee.

Small Working Groups

Project leads may also meet in small groups with key stakeholders and partners to further their initiatives. The small group approach is recommended when a small group of partners each need to do work between meetings to achieve Quiet Sound's goal.

Updating this Strategic Plan

This strategic plan will be reviewed annually by the Leadership Committee of Quiet Sound to track progress, incorporate new information, and add further phases or projects as needed.