



Quiet Sound Strategic Plan | 2024-2028

- Affirmed as the working document by Leadership Committee: July 1, 2025
- Last updated: September 30, 2025

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. To support this, the Quiet Sound team will develop a high-level report on the metrics in this strategic plan annually.

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: Voluntary Vessel Operational Measures Program Manager (QS) LC Partners: Makah Tribe, PMSA, Port of Seattle, Port of Tacoma/ NWSA, USCG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing: 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. ● Ongoing: Analyze opportunities to build on the current parameters of the slowdown to create additional benefit to the whales relative to results from prior seasons. 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. ● Ongoing: 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: Voluntary Vessel Operational Measures Program Manager (QS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed: Quiet Sound conducted a desktop study (e.g. no in-water measurements) to identify potential areas and seasons for a new voluntary vessel slowdown, using analyses of vessel traffic density and whale presence together with safety and operational feasibility perspectives from stakeholders and tribes. [funded by NFWF in 2024] ● Ongoing: Continue tribal engagement and stakeholder engagement around prioritized slowdown locations to extend slowdown benefit to encompass a larger area of SRKW habitat. ● In progress: Develop recommendations to the LC on the costs and benefits, and potential timing of new voluntary operational measures in additional area(s) based on the study and engagement, and lessons learned from Admiralty Inlet (in the form of a decision support tool).

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<p>Develop recommendations for passenger-only ferries</p>	<p>Mitigate impacts (noise, presence, strike risk) to SRKW from fast ferries</p>	<p>Lead: Voluntary Vessel Operational Measures Program Manager (QS)</p> <p>LC Partners: USCG, Maritime Blue, Puget Sound Partnership (PSP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed: Quiet Sound interviewed Kitsap Transit, King County Water Taxi and FRSClipper to understand current practices for safe operation in SRKW critical habitat. Quiet Sound conducted a literature review of the best available science and guidance for reducing the impact of passenger-only ferries and similarly sized vessels on marine mammals. This information was collated in a best practices document which included an annotated bibliography. ● Ongoing: Continue to build relationships with fast ferry operators/operating agencies to 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). ● Ongoing: Define activities to continue this project such as: assessing passenger-only ferry use of WRAS after dark, trialing an onboard whale detection system, developing a passenger-only ferry standard of care, or voluntary operational measures recommendation for legislators.
<p>Develop recommendations for tugs</p>	<p>Mitigate impacts (noise, presence, strike risk) to SRKW from tugs</p>	<p>Lead: Quiet Sound</p> <p>LC Partners: PSP, Makah Tribe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project. ● In progress: Articulate findings of the 2024-25 slowdown trial recommendation for tugs (to tug operators, Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee). ● Not started: 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, PMSA, WSF, PSP).
<p>Motivate participation in voluntary operational measures</p>	<p>Expand participation in voluntary operational measures by providing non-monetary benefits (public recognition, ESG info, and 3rd party certification support) and articulating</p>	<p>Lead: NWSA</p> <p>LC Partners: Port of Seattle, NRDC, PMSA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project. ● Ongoing: Participate in West Coast-wide conversations with Blue Whales Blue Skies, WhaleSafe, and ECHO to align communication to shippers and clients of commercial shipping. ● Ongoing: Annually nominate a participant for a NWSA North Star award. ● In progress: NWSA is conducting a preliminary study of the co-benefits of a VSR program, to support their research around a year-round VSR program and accompanying incentives. ● In progress: Connect to IMO-related work.

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	co-benefits (strike risk, air emissions, fuel savings)		
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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: Whale Detections and Alerts to Mariners Program Manager (QS) LC Partner: Seattle Aquarium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New: Develop a charter for this project • Ongoing: Financially support the labor to collect and send Washington-based sightings to a WRAS-connected system. • Ongoing: 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. • In Progress: Work to send WhaleAlert sightings (non-ON) to WRAS. • Not started: Research visual sightings sources available in vessel lanes beyond Puget Sound. • Not started: Continue conversations with Pacific Whale Watch Association (PWWA). • Ongoing: Connect new sightings sources to WRAS. • Ongoing: Seattle Aquarium: Encourage public participation in sightings networks, particularly around the slowdown. Quiet Sound: provide content to the Aquarium.
Thermal imaging	Provide nighttime and foul weather detection of cetaceans	Lead: Whale Detections and Alerts to Mariners Program Manager (QS) LC Partner: WSF, PSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New: develop charter for next stage of the project. QS went beyond the activities detailed in the first year of the strategic plan. The whale detection system at Pt. Wilson is installed and successfully connected to WRAS. LC requested that the new charter include goals to measure the impact of alerts into vessels' situational awareness, potentially through AIS data. The next stage will also coordinate efforts to include new features into the system analytics: direction of travel, group size, and scope the process needed to ID ecotype. For further details on the project's initial stage, please refer to the project's charter. • Completed: Coordinate funding. • Completed: Background research (NARW and BC examples). • Completed: Scope a pilot project for a shore-based thermal imaging proof of concept. Include

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			<p>engagement with tribes with usual and accustomed fishing areas near any potential infrared cameras.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed: Report back to the LC. ● Completed: Work with Ocean Wise to assess suitability for connection to WRAS.
Acoustic detections	Provide nighttime and foul weather detection of SRKW	<p>Lead: Whale Detections and Alerts to Mariners Program Manager (QS)</p> <p>LC Partners:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project. ● New: Coordinate with partners and SMRU to conduct the design, location alternatives, permitting, and groundwork needed to deploy a calibrated permanent listening station. ● Completed: Complete hydrophone feasibility study and seek opportunities to establish additional hydrophones. Quiet Sound conducted interviews and a workshop to assess the hydrophone network in Washington's Salish Sea. Results indicate that current independent hydrophones lack calibration for measuring ship noise. The workshop concluded that developing a listening station similar to those operated by JASCO and SMRU would be a more effective solution at this time. ● Ongoing: Coordinate with tribes with usual and accustomed fishing areas near any new hydrophones. ● Ongoing: Coordinate with Orcasound and members to develop data usage agreement. ● In progress: Connect Orcasound hydrophones to WRAS via Acartia.io.
Hydrophone expansion	Support the optimal placement of new nodes in WA's hydrophone network	<p>Lead: Port of Seattle</p> <p>LC Partners: NOAA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed: Complete hydrophone gap analysis study with NOAA. ● In progress: Share results with LC. ● Ongoing: Evaluate hydrophone opportunities (for both whale detection and vessel underwater noise measurement) in coordination with QS Advisory Group and Leadership Committee.
Explore WRAS alerts via AIS messaging	Reach vessels w/o WRAS via AIS messages for real-time whale detections within the WRAS system	<p>Lead: Whale Detections and Alerts to Mariners Program Manager (QS)</p> <p>LC Partners: USCG, PSP,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project to account for changes in leadership as well as the AIS developments in Canadian partners' projects. ● Ongoing: Coordinate with Ocean Wise, USCG, CACG and ECHO to develop an approach that is consistent on both sides of the border. ● Not started: Seek feedback from commercial mariners on options and relationship going forward between WRAS and AIS. ● Ongoing: Coordinate with Ocean Wise for sending

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		WSF	detections from the WRAS system to vessels via AIS messaging.
Promote WRAS on electronic navigational systems	Expand the set of vessels receiving whale alerts	<p>Lead: Whale Detections and Alerts to Mariners Program Manager (QS)</p> <p>LC Partners: USCG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project. However, if the AIS notification system is successful, this component will become less relevant for commercial vessels. ● Stalled: Coordinate with commercial mariners for guidance and priorities. ● Stalled: Work with individual fleets to connect internet-connected navigational systems to WRAS. ● In progress: 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 national and international vessel quieting policy opportunities	Encourage Washington's participation in the IMO experience building phase for underwater noise guidelines as well as U.S. policies for shipbuilding and retrofitting.	Lead: NRDC LC Partners: Quiet Sound, Port of Seattle, Port of Tacoma, PSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed: QS present at MARAD vessel quieting workshop ● Ongoing: QS join steering committee of US Center for Maritime Innovation URN group ● Not started: Connect QS to UCMI call for research topics ● New: Develop a charter for this project. ● New: Collaborate with Green Marine to encourage vessel owners to develop underwater noise management plans. ● New: Work with Quiet Sound staff and Leadership Committee to submit paper to IMO on lessons learned from Quiet Sound slowdowns. ● Ongoing: Seek opportunities to integrate underwater noise emissions into vessel sustainability initiatives.
Support emerging vessel quieting technology	Support quieter options and vessel design choices	Lead: Maritime Blue (Non-QS staff, e.g. Blue Ventures, JIP) LC Partners: Quiet Sound, WSF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New: Develop a charter for this project. ● In progress: Orient new Blue Ventures director to Quiet Sound. ● Not started: Seek opportunities to support vessel quieting technology through Maritime Blue's incubator and accelerator programs. ● In progress: Connect QS with designers of Kitsap foiling ferry to encourage whale-safe choices. ● Not started: Support WSF design/build of new ferries by sharing vessel quieting information and connecting staff to experts. ● Not started: Explore engaging student base from maritime technical schools to further understanding of vessel quieting technology implementation.



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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: Quiet Sound Director (QS)	Ongoing: <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	Ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support new or expanded funds by cultivating donor/funder relationships. New: add corporate giving focus 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	Ongoing: <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	Ongoing: <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	Lead: All QS staff	Ongoing: <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.

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	transboundary habitat		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report back to LC from ECHO meetings.
Stakeholder and partner engagement	Strengthen programs through feedback from multiple perspectives	Lead: All QS staff	<p>Completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite the members of the closing workgroups to join the Advisory Group (ORCAs). Contract with a facilitator to support the Advisory Group and LC meetings if funds are available. Set up a quarterly ORCAs meeting schedule roughly equidistant between Leadership Committee quarterly meetings. <p>Ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead quarterly meetings of the LC and ORCAs.
Participate in external groups	Promote the Quiet Sound mission by representing the coalition in external decision-making bodies	Lead: All QS staff	<p>Ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in scientific and policy-making groups, such as PSEMP, WRAS Advisory Group, NANOOS Executive Committee, TC IMAG, USCFI URN, Green Marine URN, OCNMS Ship Strike Risk Reduction Working Group. Participate in ECHO meetings (monthly ECHO/Quiet Sound meetings and quarterly ECHO AWG meetings).
Facilitate LC funding committee	Advance projects and support the sustainability of the program	Lead: Seattle Aquarium LC Partner: QS	<p>Not started:</p> <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	<p>Ongoing:</p> <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

The Quiet Sound Leadership Committee is advised by the ORCAs (Opinions and Recommendations from Consulting Advisors), comprising a broad section of partners and stakeholders. The ORCAs purpose is to allow project leads to consult a group of experts to inform them of their projects. It meets four advance-scheduled times a year. Agendas are developed by Quiet Sound and project leads. Project leads should be proactive in suggesting agenda items to Quiet Sound staff to further their initiatives. Agendas include opportunities for input on projects, such as slowdown parameters, other project milestones, and a request for which types of expertise are requested. ORCAs members are encouraged to attend meetings where the agenda is related to their expertise. Agendas will be circulated well in advance of ORCAs meetings to support the convening of expertise. ORCAs 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.