



Islands Trust

News Release



San Juan County

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BC AND WASHINGTON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CALL FOR CROSS-BORDER ACTION ON OIL SPILL RISKS

VICTORIA — The Islands Trust and San Juan County Councils are asking their respective federal governments to begin working together immediately to improve oil spill protection for the Salish Sea, the inland sea that includes Washington's Puget Sound and British Columbia's Georgia Strait.

The agencies want Canada and the United States to reconcile conflicting regulations and create compatible world-class marine safety and oil spill response regulations on both sides of the border. In a joint letter, the two local governments urged the two national governments to undertake an immediate review of existing maritime safety standards.

"Boundary lines drawn on maps have no effect on oil spills," said Sheila Malcolmson, Chair of the Islands Trust Council. "As local governments for the islands of the Salish Sea, we are concerned about the risks presented by marine shipping in the region and the poor state of readiness to respond to a major oil spill in this area. This is a remarkable area, home to an exceptional variety of species and to protect it, we need to increase maritime safety on both sides of the border."

San Juan County Council Chair Richard Fralick added, "The health and well-being of our islanders is inextricably tied to the health of the marine waters around us. Because of the geography and marine conditions here, experts tell us more than 85 percent of the oil from a major spill would probably escape containment. A spill anywhere in the Salish Sea could be devastating."

The amount of oil and cargo passing through the Sea is huge. In 2009, there were more than 10,000 transits by large cargo and tanker vessels in the Salish Sea, with another 163,000 ferry trips in Puget Sound and over 110,000 ferry sailings in the Islands Trust Area in British Columbia.

The Port Metro Vancouver already ranks first in North America in foreign export shipments, and second on the west coast of the Americas in total cargo volume, and significant growth is expected. Canada and British Columbia have established Pacific Gateway programs to increase trade. In Washington State, a major terminal is proposed for Cherry Point and a number of port expansions have been proposed along the Columbia River.

The request of the Islands Trust Council and San Juan County reinforces the United States *Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010*, which strongly encourages the Coast Guard to enter into negotiations with the Government of Canada to update the comparability analysis which

serves as the basis for the Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service agreement for the management of maritime traffic in the Salish Sea. The *Act* places an emphasis on reviewing tug escorts for oil tankers, emergency towing and spill response.

The joint letter urges the two national governments to involve first nations and local governments, and other regional agencies in the development process to ensure that all of the region's cultural and economic interests are represented.

Together the Islands Trust and San Juan County represent the interests of more than 642 islands that share airspace, watersheds and a marine environment within the Salish Sea.

Joint letter - <http://islandstrust.bc.ca/news/pdf/tcltrdec162010maritimesafetystandards.pdf>

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Notes to media:

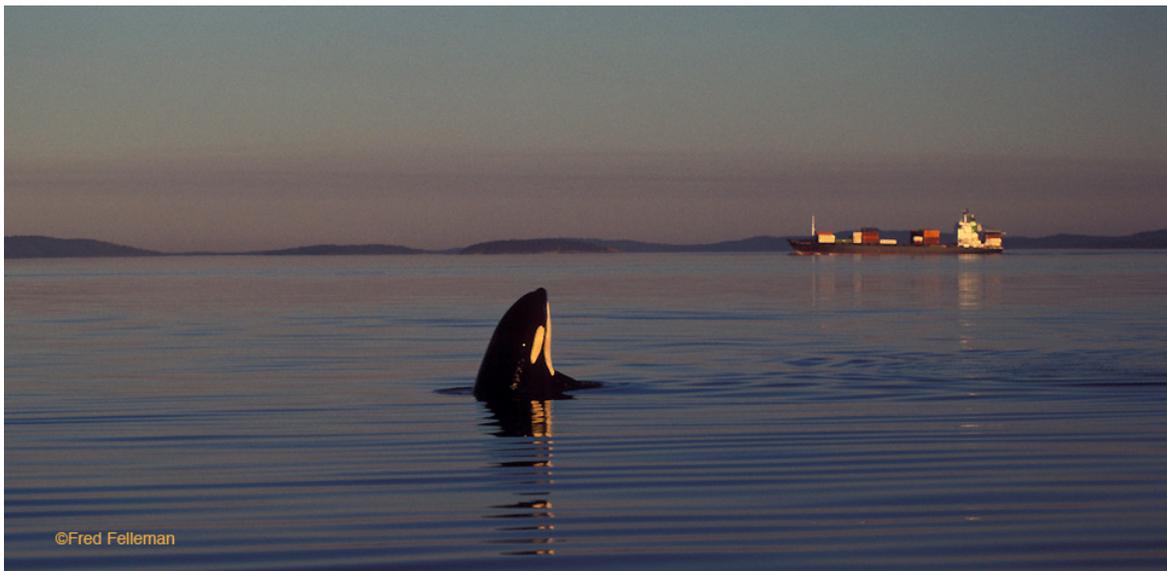
Sidebar and Fred Felleman photo attached (jpg available on request)

Real-time tracking of shipping traffic in the Salish Sea is available at www.marinetraffic.com

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Background or Sidebar

Current events related to marine shipping safety in the Salish Sea

1. The December 7, 2010 Report of the Canadian Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, which identified that Transport Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard are ill-prepared to deal with a major oil spill.
2. The December 7, 2010 release of the Public Comment Draft of the *Stakeholder Workgroup Review of Planning and Response Capabilities for a Marine Oil Spill on the U.S./Canadian Transboundary Areas of the Pacific Coast Project Report* which identifies many areas for improvement.
3. A November 2010 internal audit by the Canadian Coast Guard identified that the agency lacks the training, equipment and management systems to respond to oil spills.
4. The September 15, 2010 Canadian Pacific Pilotage Authority *Interim Operating Rules for Loaded Crude Oil Tankers in Excess of 40,000 DWT* for Boundary Pass and Haro Strait offer significant safety improvements for transiting tankers. We are especially pleased to note the new requirement for escort tugs.
5. The December 7, 2010 Canadian federal court ruling that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has failed to adequately protect the critical habitat of British Columbia's resident killer whales. Among other points, the ruling states that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of the Environment are required under section 58 of the Canadian *Species at Risk Act* to provide legal protection against destruction for all components of the Resident Killer Whales' critical habitat. This means that the Government of Canada is legally required to address the most significant threats to their critical habitat, such as the impacts of shipping, which include toxic contamination risk from oil spills, and physical and acoustic disturbances.
6. New US Coast Guard regulations for maritime salvage and firefighting for oil tankers transiting to and from US ports came into effect on January 22, 2010 as a result of Congressional direction in the *Oil Pollution Act* of 1990.
7. The *BP Cherry Point Refinery Marine Terminal North Wing Extension Environmental Impact Statement* will soon be released. It will include a state of the art vessel traffic risk assessment developed through a George Washington University leading-edge computer simulation program that incorporates existing and projected shipping information for Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Haro Strait and Boundary Pass.