

KELP 2010 STATEMENT

The Whale Museum's Soundwatch Boater Education Program promotes responsible boater behavior around marine wildlife. The Kayak Education and Leadership Program, KELP, is a Soundwatch program that targets recreational and commercial kayakers on issues specific to paddlers.

KELP informs recreational and commercial kayakers on marine wildlife regulations and guidelines with the aim of reducing human-powered vessel disturbance. Paddlers are instructed on correct behaviors around whales, seal/sea lion haul outs and seabird rookeries, including Marine Protected Areas within the San Juan County Marine Stewardship Area and the National Wildlife Refuge system. Special focus is given to behaviors around endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales.

From May 1 – September 30, 2010, KELP educators will assist the San Juan Island County Park to implement a new vessel launch permit program. Prior to launching, all vessel operators, including paddlers, will be given a brief instructional training from KELP educators. The training will include information on the laws protecting killer whales and other marine wildlife as well as laws and guidelines for responsible boating behavior. In addition to promoting WA State vessel laws and Be Whale Wise guidelines, a specific Kayaker Code of Conduct was crafted collaboratively with the San Juan Island Kayak Association with input from NOAA Fisheries and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Paddling is a quiet and potentially low-impact way to explore the Salish Sea. Even so, kayakers and operators of other human-powered vessels still have the potential to disturb marine wildlife. Human-powered vessel operators have unique challenges of limited maneuverability, limited sight distance, and a variety of safety concerns all requiring special consideration to remain in compliance with laws and to reduce their overall risks of disturbing marine wildlife. The KELP program promotes the Kayaker Code of Conduct to address these unique responsibilities.