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Whale-watching guidelines for vessel and aircraft operators

Oregon State University Extension Service
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In order to protect whales from harassment and to promote a better public understanding of the need to avoid this harassment, NMFS provides the guidelines at the right for vessel and aircraft operators when whale watching off the West Coast.

If you fail to follow these guidelines, your actions may be interpreted as harassment of whales.

Your cooperation in following these guidelines is essential to protect these endangered animals. These guidelines are subject to change.

For further information, phone or write the National Marine Fisheries Service representative at either OSU Marine Science Center, Newport, OR 97365 (phone 503-867-3011), or Post Office Bldg., Coos Bay, OR 97420 (phone 503-269-1861).

**Vessel operators**

1. When you're watching a single whale, and you're within 100 yards of that whale, do not operate any faster than the whale is swimming.
2. When you're steering a course parallel to a group of whales, and you're within 100 yards of them, do not operate any faster than the slowest whale in the group.
3. When you're steering a course between two groups of whales, and you're within 100 yards of either group, do not operate any faster than the slowest whale in either group.
4. Whether it's one whale or a group that you're watching, and you're within 100 yards, maintain a constant speed.
5. Do not operate your vessel to separate a whale from a calf.
6. Do not operate your vessel to herd or drive whales.

**Aircraft operators**

Maintain an altitude of 1,000 feet when you're within 100 yards surface distance from a whale.

**Vessel OR aircraft operators**

Do nothing to "substantially disrupt" the normal behavior of a whale. What's substantial disruption? You'll know you've caused one if a whale shows signs like these:

- a rapid change in direction or speed;
- escape tactics such as prolonged diving, underwater course changes, or underwater exhalation;
- evasive swimming patterns such as swimming rapidly away at the surface;
- attempts by a female to shield a calf from a vessel or a human observer by tail swishing or other movements to protect her calf.
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