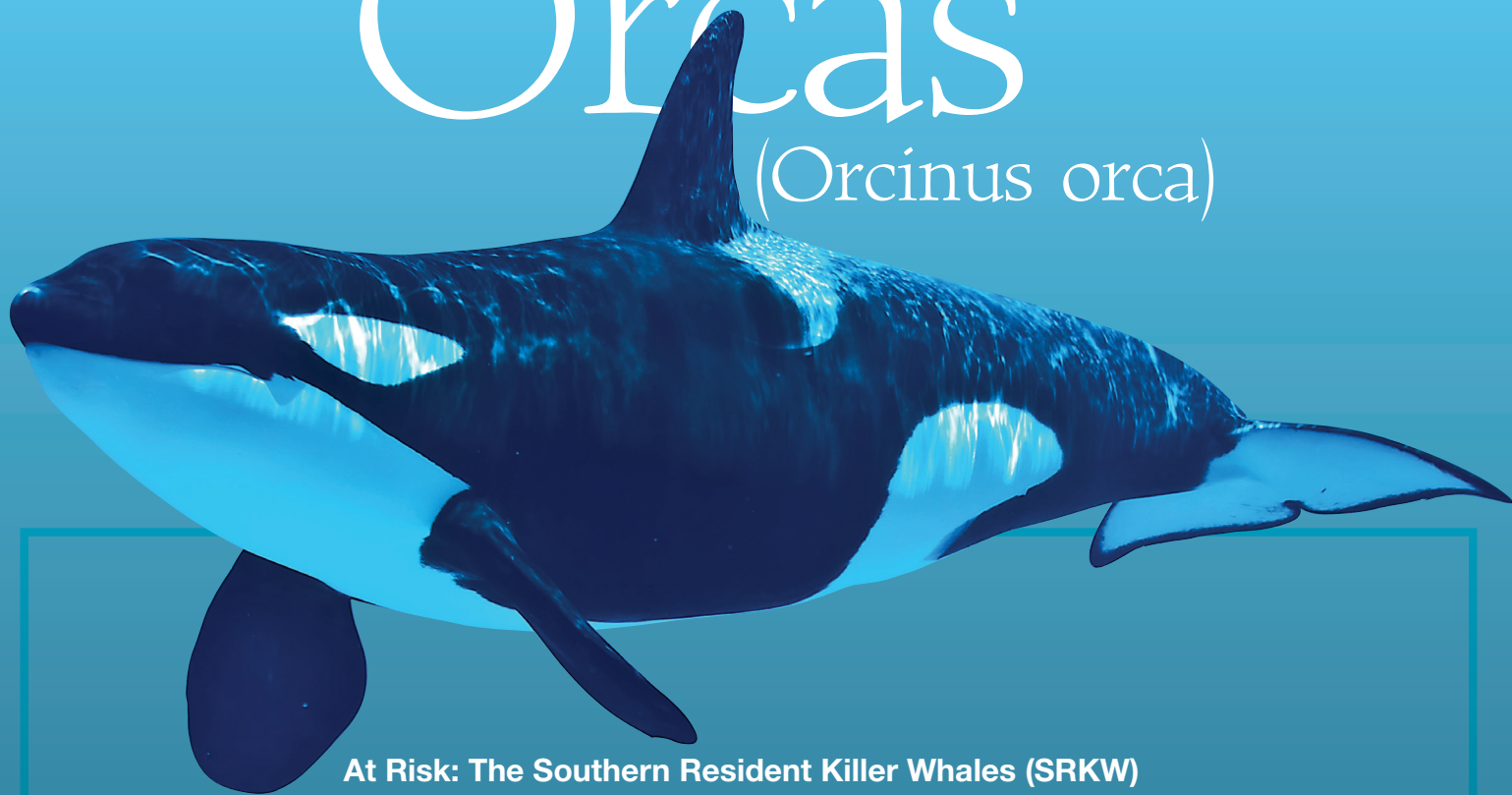


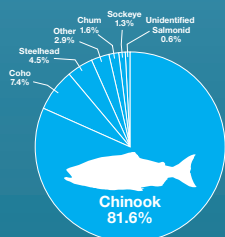
# Orcas

(Orcinus orca)



## At Risk: The Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW)

These endangered whales live in the Salish Sea. The Southern Gulf Islands are part of their critical habitat. With a 49% chance of extinction within the next century, it is crucial we act now to protect these majestic marine mammals!



### SRKW Diet

#### Importance of chinook

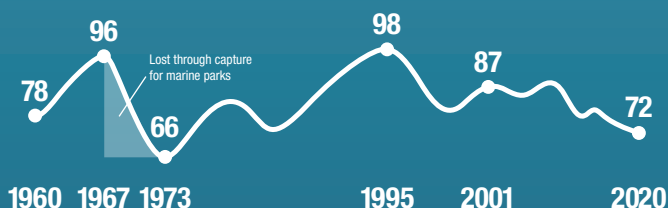
Unlike the Northern Resident Killer Whales who eat sea birds and squid in addition to salmon and other fish, the SRKW only eat salmon—and 81.6% of those salmon are large chinooks.

Environmental stresses such as increasingly warmer rivers, pollution, and degradation of spawning beds are taking a toll on the health of many of the chinook runs in the SRKW critical habitat. Scarcity of this food source is likely a contributing factor to the declining SRKW populations.



**Critical habitat** (white) is the SRKW preferred summer feeding areas designated by Species at Risk Act (SARA) in Canada and NOAA Fisheries in the USA.

### Population levels over the past 60 years



### Social structure, relationships & language

The Southern Resident Killer Whales are comprised of 3 pods—J, K, and L. Each is a matriline—meaning the sons and daughters, and granddaughters of a mother remain with her for their entire lives. These matriarchs lead their families to hunting grounds and improve their chances of survival.

Sons that lose their mothers are 3 times more likely to die in the year following her death.

“Granny” led the J pod until 2016 when she went missing and was presumed dead. She was the oldest known orca, estimated to have been 105. Orcas share food. The best hunters ensure that other members of their pod don’t go hungry—nurturing young and old. Just like human dialects, each orca pod has distinct acoustic sounds which scientists can use to distinguish them.

### Biology & reproduction

Orca males reach sexual maturity at 20-25. Females start reproducing at 15 and stop in their 30s or 40s. Orcas and pilot whales are the only 2 species, aside from humans, known to go through menopause. These limitations make populations very slow to increase in size.

All whales are known as cetaceans and include a group called dolphins. Orcas are the largest members of this group.

### Major threats include:

#### Decreased Prey

The SRKW collectively need to catch 1,200 to 1,400 adult salmon every day. Their preferred species, chinook, average 14 kg each. Research shows chinook in this region have less fat than northern chinook. This decrease in nutritional value requires higher rates of consumption.

#### Pollution & Contaminants

Because orcas are apex predators their tissues accumulate fat-soluble contaminants such as DDT, PBDEs and PCBs—all of which have adverse health effects. They are the most polluted animals on the planet and their carcasses must be disposed of as hazardous waste.

#### Vessel Traffic & Sound

Noise from tour boats and ships can scare away prey and interfere with the whales’ echolocation. Powerful sonar used by some vessels is believed responsible for panicked escape, behaviour often resulting in beaching and death. Approaches to mitigate this are now being researched.

### What you can do...

- Tell your MP you care and the changes you would like them to make.
- Join local Streamkeepers to protect & enhance wild salmon habitats.
- Avoid anchoring in eelgrass meadows – important chinook habitat.
- Eat sustainably sourced seafood & always follow fishing regulations.
- Steer clear of orcas: 400m June 1-October 31 & 200m year round.
- Report boating infractions by calling 1-800-465-4336.
- Use natural cleaning & beauty products to reduce ocean impacts.
- Reduce your consumption of single-use plastic.

