

J-Pod back in Salish Sea with healthy calf

DARRON KLOSTER
Times Colonist

All 25 members of J-Pod have returned to the Salish Sea, including the newest member, born in late February.

The pod of endangered southern resident killer whales appeared just off Pender Island on Tuesday and has been hunting for chinook salmon around Haro Strait, the U.S. San Juan Islands, Active Pass and the Strait of Georgia toward the Fraser River.

Scientist Monika Wieland-Shields of the Orca Behavior Institute said it's only the second time in the past five years that J-Pod has appeared in the Salish Sea in May. That's a good sign, she said, and the fact the pod seems to be sticking around indicates there is chinook salmon for the whales to feed on.

Chinook salmon is the principal source of food for the southern resident population of orcas, whose numbers in J-, K- and L-pods have dwindled to 75.

Traditionally, J-Pod spends most of the summer in the Salish sea, but with declining chinook-salmon stocks the family of orcas has had to look elsewhere to feed. Lately, the pod has been arriving closer to June and even July.

"We're very hopeful they stick around and find enough fish," said Wieland-Shields. The newest member of the pod, three-month-old J59, appeared healthy and active, said Wieland-Shields, who photographed the baby with its mom,



Mother J37 and calf J59 photographed from shore at Lime Kiln Point State Park on San Juan Island on May 24.

MONIKA WIELAND-SHIELDS, ORCA BEHAVIOR INSTITUTE

J37 Hy'sha, off Lime Kiln Point State Park on San Juan Island on Tuesday. J59's sex hasn't yet been determined.

"The calf looked really good," said Wieland-Shields. "It was super active, spy-hopping and rolling around. Her mother and big brother were giving [the calf] piggyback rides."

The overall health of the pod was also deemed to be good. Wieland-Shields and other orca scientists have managed to

see all of the members from the sides and top, but she said drone video will provide a more detailed look at their bodies.

"While they were very spread out heading south, they grouped up going north, making it an especially impressive sight to see all 25 whales together."

Wieland-Shields said she doesn't know exactly where the pod has spent the past several months, but suspects it may be on the west coast of the island,

around Tofino.

"The fact they have returned is a hopeful sign," she said. L-Pod is the largest southern resident group at 33 members, while K-pod has 17.

The Center for Whale Research on San Juan Island does annual counts of the pods each July and December.

Boaters are being reminded to keep their distance from the killer whales. For the third consecutive year, the Department

of Fisheries and Oceans said vessels must stay at least 400 metres from all killer whales in southern British Columbia coastal waters between Campbell River and Uchelet, including Barkley and Howe Sound. The rule is in effect until May 31, 2023.

There are also special fisheries closures in "sanctuary zones" around the Gulf Islands for the southern residents.

dkloster@timescolonist.com



Juan de Fuca Trail reopens after infrastructure repairs

DARRON KLOSTER
Times Colonist

Four large bridges, eight smaller spans and several sections of stairs and boardwalks have been replaced on the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail, giving hikers wide-open access after nearly a year of detours and section closures.

B.C. Parks spokeswoman Gina Bugslag said crews have completed most of the work over the past six months, including complicated cliff-ladder systems near Bear Beach campsite that were destroyed by a landslide that closed the section last October.

The majority of the repair work was done between Chin Beach and Mystic Beach campsites — the most difficult section of the trail, said Bugslag.

The 47-kilometre Juan de Fuca Trail runs from China Beach to Port Renfrew, following the old telegraph cable that connected Bamfield and Victoria in the late 1800s. It joined the provincial park system in 1995, with major trail infrastructure built using a legacy fund from the 1994 Victoria Commonwealth Games.

All of the infrastructure is coming to the end of its life at the same time, which posed challenges, Bugslag said.

Extreme wind and rain storms often topple trees and wash away sections of the trail,

she said, especially in sections where steep ravines lead to the ocean and are prone to landslides. "It's always an ongoing challenge to maintain the trail."

B.C. Parks this year allocated \$21.5 million over three years to expand outdoor recreation facilities across the province.

The repairs on the Juan de Fuca cost \$700,000 and were completed by two contracted crews. Helicopters were used to haul out old pieces of bridges and boardwalks, as well as carrying in wood for rebuilding.

Like the West Coast Trail, a 75-kilometre route from Bamfield to Port Renfrew, the Juan de Fuca can be wet and extremely muddy from start to finish — and it's been very busy as the spring and summer hiking season starts.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue had crews out Thursday searching for two lost hikers after receiving a call overnight.

Kathryn Farr, deputy chief of the search and rescue operation, said no details were immediately available on the status of the search. She said calls for rescues will become more common as the hiking season gets underway.

"One month we might get four calls, the next it could be two," she said.

"The trail is muddy, which is typical for the West Coast Trail and the Juan de Fuca Trail ...

even well into the summer."

With no cell service in the area, Farr said hikers should get to the beach and call 911 through U.S. roaming services.

A trail-preparation video from Adventuresmart, promoted by B.C. Parks and Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue, said fallen trees and other natural detours off the trail can cause hikers "to easily become lost in the dense forest, even if only a few metres from the trail."

Knowing the tide tables is also essential, as many parts of the trail are on the beach. High tides can push hikers into the forest where there are no trails, increasing the possibility of getting lost.

Hikers are advised to come prepared with good boots and eaters, waterproof wear and extra food and water.

Bugslag said it's also essential to prepare a trip plan, and let others know your schedule.

And be prepared for lots of tree roots and to "embrace the mud," said Bugslag. "You just can't avoid it."

She said the Juan de Fuca is used by about 40,000 hikers each year based on registration in its backcountry camping program, though the number is likely much higher, with day users having road access to sections of the trail at several locations along the route.

dkloster@timescolonist.com

Public hearing on new types of housing for Victoria delayed

ANDREW A. DUFFY
Times Colonist

A public hearing into what the city calls its "missing middle" housing program will be put off until late summer, which means it might not be considered before the next election, after council voted Thursday to refer the process over recent weeks.

The goal of the program is to amend bylaws, land-use procedures and official community plans to permit infill, house-

plexes and corner townhouses in some neighbourhoods.

On Thursday, most of council sided with Coun. Ben Isitt, who suggested the matter be referred back to staff to convene a public-engagement workshop and report back with the results.

Isitt, who has pushed to delay the process over recent weeks, has said he would like to see requirements for affordable units included in the more dense housing options the strategy proposes.

The goal of the missing-middle housing program is to increase the number of housing options in Victoria so families can stay in the city, while reducing dependency on cars and ensuring new housing developments suit the character of neighbourhoods and preserve heritage.

Where zoning currently only allows for single-family homes, it would allow duplexes, triplexes and four-plexes as well as townhouse projects on assembled land.

Isitt said Thursday the changes are complex and apply to more than three-quarters of the city's land base. "So I think it's reasonable for us to ensure the public has had an opportunity, an adequate opportunity, to consider what's proposed, that there's been a proper analysis, both by the public and by council, of the potential advantages and disadvantages of the proposed regulatory approach," he said.

The delay will allow extra time to determine how the program could be refined to optimize affordability and reduce the risk of land speculation, Isitt said.

Siding with Isitt were councillors Geoff Young, Sharmarke Dubow, Stephen Andrew and Charlayne Thornton-Joe.

"I do think it needs more time," said Thornton-Joe. "I also feel that we need to bring people

along with us and support this and celebrate this as a positive initiative. "I don't think I want to give people more stress than they already are enduring."

But Mayor Lisa Helps, who voted against Isitt's motion, along with councillors Marianne Alto, Jeremy Loveday and Sarah Ports, said the only thing accomplished Thursday was to delay until the next council a strategy that could actually be part of the housing solution.

Helps said there has already been two years of consultation with the public and affected stakeholders and countless hours of city staff looking at the strategy from every angle.

"There's nothing one more workshop would add in an interview. "Our staff have done a comprehensive study to bring this forward. So more engagement is not going to bring us anything new. It's just going to take more time. And while we're sitting there engaging, the costs of townhouses are going to continue to rise."

While the impact of the missing middle program isn't known, Helps said, the result of doing nothing is "massively escalating costs of housing in our city and in our region."

Helps said the program is not a silver bullet, but part of a suite of initiatives to tackle the housing crisis. "This is not the affordable-housing initiative, it's the attainable home ownership initiative," she said. "The expedited affordable housing and the villages and corridors planning [strategy] is the affordable and the rental-housing initiative."

Helps said increasing housing costs make it ever more difficult to attract city staff, doctors, teachers, mechanics and professionals to Victoria.

"We could be part of the solution," she said. "We could help with these problems by getting out of the way so more housing can be built. We need to make it easier to build homes that families who live in our city can afford — it is that simple."

Helps said it's unrealistic to expect staff to report back with the results of another engagement workshop, which is yet to be scheduled, before the fall. "I very much doubt we'll get to a public hearing on this before the election, which I think is a real disservice to the public," she said.

aduffy@timescolonist.com

Thieves take art from Campbell River charity

Campbell River RCMP are searching for two pieces of art taken from a charity over the long weekend.

One is a framed grizzly print by Brent J. Smith, while the other is a hand-painted drum by Greg Henderson.

Const. Maury Tyre said for now, the art can be returned with no questions asked, but if someone is found to be in possession of the missing pieces through a police investigation, they could end up being charged with possession of property obtained by crime.

"At this point in time, we're hoping that the thieves can redirect their moral compass, as the charity is really just trying to get its art back," Tyre said.

The art can be returned to the Campbell River RCMP at 275 South Dogwood St.

Call the detachment at 250-286-6221 with any information.

—Times Colonist



A hand-painted drum by Greg Henderson is one of two pieces of art taken from a Campbell River charity.

VIA CAMPBELL RIVER RCMP

Three arrested after bear spray attacks

Victoria police are looking for witnesses and dashcam video after three people in a vehicle reportedly sprayed pedestrians with bear spray early Monday.

Police responded to a report about 3 a.m. that the occupants of a black pickup truck had sprayed a group of people in the area of Douglas and Yates streets as they drove past, then fled the area.

Officers found four victims,

two of whom needed treatment from B.C. Ambulance Service paramedics. The suspect vehicle was located a short time later near Government and Fisgard streets.

The three men inside were arrested for assault with a weapon and later released with a court date and conditions.

Call Victoria police at 250-995-7654 with information.

—Times Colonist