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‘Hope for Orcas’ to Discuss Threats, Prospects for Southern Resident Killer Whales

TACOMA, WASH. — The University of Washington Tacoma is the venue for an event bringing together one of the world’s leading researchers on orcas and an engineer renowned for policy solutions to big problems.

In a talk entitled “Hope for Orcas,” organized by Citizens for a Healthy Bay, Ken Balcomb, the principal investigator and founder of the Center for Whale Research, will share his perspective on the endangered whales and the threat of their imminent extinction. He will be joined by Jim Waddell, civil engineer with Damsense who worked for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for 36 years. Balcomb and Waddell will discuss a range of actions in the Salish Sea and in the Columbia/Snake River system that could improve the outlook for the survival of orcas.

“Threats to orca survival have been said to fall into three main categories,” said Balcomb. “Shortage of food—primarily Chinook salmon—is the big one, followed by the accumulation of toxic pollutants in orcas’ fatty tissues, and, a distant last, impairment of living conditions due to boat and ship noise.”

“What we don’t yet know about the lives of these animals outweighs what we do know, but we do know enough to feel compelled to save them from extinction,” said Balcomb, “and what we are led to know about solving their endangered predicament is often based on misconceptions.”

For example, says Balcomb, it is a misconception that the group of orcas known as Southern resident killer whales lives only in the waters of the Salish Sea, including Puget Sound. “They currently spend as much as 95% of their time outside the Salish Sea,” said Balcomb. He cites evidence from a five-year coastal sighting study his organization reported in 2013, and a [NOAA Fisheries study](#) showing some satellite-tagged orcas spent a high proportion of time at the entrance to the Columbia River, searching for food.

Waddell, the engineer and retired Army Corps employee, relying on historical and empirical evidence, says the salmon runs all the way up into the Snake River are critical for orca food supply. During the talk, he will highlight information from government agencies that shows why it is immediately feasible to decommission and breach the four hydroelectric and navigation dams in the Snake River, as he outlined in a [2016 Seattle Times op-ed](#).

Melissa Malott, Executive Director of Citizens for a Healthy Bay, the event’s organizer, says only a united effort by the community will contribute to saving Chinook salmon and the Southern Resident

whale population. “We’re grateful for this chance to hear from one of the world’s leading experts on this special population of orcas, and look forward to hearing what can be done to prevent their extinction.”

In addition to [Citizens for a Healthy Bay](#), the event is co-sponsored by the [Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium](#), [Center for Whale Research](#), [Damsense](#), [Friends of the Earth](#), [Orca Network](#) and the [Endangered Species Coalition](#).

What: “Hope for Orcas: Orca Researcher Ken Balcomb and an Urgent Call to Action”

When: Thursday, May 17, 2018, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Where: William W. Philip Hall, University of Washington Tacoma, Tacoma, Washington

Who: Center for Whale researcher Ken Balcomb; Damsense associate Jim Waddell

Cost: FREE, but RSVP is required at <http://saveourorcas.eventbrite.com>