

Exploitation

Many marine mammal populations have been in decline due to overfishing. Overfishing occurs when more fish are caught than what is biologically sustainable, leaving a negative impact on that ecosystem and food chain that was affected. Fishing beyond biological limits makes fish unable to recover to their former population, to the point that the species survival is threatened. Due to public demand, one of the most commonly overfished species is salmon. The result of the salmon population declining affects killer whales due to the fact that Southern Residents' diet consists almost exclusively of chinook salmon. This is likely due to chinook salmon's large size, high fat content, and its availability. Wild killer whales need to consume one to four percent of their body weight in food each day, this evens out to be about 800 Chinook salmon a day. The entirety of the 75 whales in the Southern Resident pod need at least 317,000 Chinook salmon a year based on their caloric needs. Currently, there is not enough chinook salmon to sustain the Southern Resident population. Because of their heavy reliance on the stability of the salmon population, the decline of salmon is a major threat to the Southern Residents, and without an adequate food source they will soon be extinct.

My motivation for this art piece was to convey that killer whales are endangered partially due to overfishing of salmon. After my experience with killer whales and actually seeing what I had been researching and trying to raise awareness for, this art piece completely changed for me. My motivation became stronger and I felt more connected to my art piece. Before I visited the San Juan Islands, we had read the *Blackfish Prophecy* which focused on the connection between the main character and the killer whales. I had been skeptical of the book because it heavily emphasized communication between humans and killer whales. But after actually seeing them up close, I finally felt like I understood what the connection the author was getting at, that these animals are truly special. The orcas had chosen to come so close to us, out of all the classes before us and the boats around us. I was stunned and that made me think that there was more to orcas than I thought. We had been learning about how intelligent and socially complex they were for the whole semester, but I had not fully realized or appreciated that until I saw them.

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