

# Concern for whales ends cruises

## Survival Center stops sponsoring tours

By Pat Malach  
Emerald Reporter

University students will have to look someplace besides the Survival Center to join whale-watching tours along the Oregon coast this year.

The possibility that noise from tourboat engines disturbs the whales has prompted the Survival Center to discontinue its whale-watching program.

"How could we consciously endorse whale watching when it could be disturbing their sonic hearing patterns, mating and migration," asked Brian Hoop, Survival Center member.

The Survival Center canceled its program at the end of last spring's migration season after several students expressed concern that the tours were detrimental to the whales.

The Survival Center had organized car pools to the coast and arranged for group discounts for tours through Newport Sports Fishing.

"The whale-watching coordinator came forward and said he just couldn't do it anymore," Hoop said.

Survival Center member Priscilla Willbourn said some students told her the whale-watching tours had been a negative experience because they felt they had been chasing the whales.

Willbourn added that sports fishermen who lead the tours might not have the whales' interests at heart.

Greenpeace and the Oregon Natural Resources Council disagree with the Survival Center's contentions and both groups continue to offer whale-watching cruises.

Greenpeace offers the cruises

to help people to better appreciate and understand marine life, said Kat McMillen of the Seattle Greenpeace office.

"We respect (the whales) and make sure we stay within the guidelines for observing them," McMillen said.

She added that Greenpeace uses small boats, and said tour guides are careful to prevent littering and other inappropriate actions during the cruises.

"Certainly there are people that abuse the situation and do not respect the whales," McMillen said. However, she added that if the cruises are done correctly they are a positive activity.

Linda Lunow of the Marine Science Center Aquarium agreed that in most cases, whale-watching tours are not harmful to the whales. "At this point they aren't being disturbed as long as boats stay within the guidelines," she said.

If whale watching continues to grow in popularity, Lunow said she could see where it might become a problem.

The ONRC began organizing tours about four years ago to help educate people about coastal issues, said Michael Carrigan, ONRC employee.

"We do it to raise awareness of threats to the coast through offshore drilling, mineral mining and over-development," Carrigan said.

About 300 people participated in the four cruises offered last weekend, Carrigan said. "We have been getting an excellent response," he said.

Whales use their hearing to navigate as they migrate along the coast, Lunow said. The whales listen for the sound of

the surf in order to remain within three miles of the coastline during their entire journey.

The whales migrate twice a year. In September, the whales leave the waters north of Alaska and migrate to southern waters near Mexico, where they spend much of the winter mating and birthing, Lunow said.

At the beginning of March the whales start their trip back to Alaska where they do most of their feeding, Lunow said this particular migration pattern has been going on for millions of years.

Anyone wanting to go on a whale-watching cruise should contact the ONRC at 223-9012 or 1-800-827-9001 to make reservations.

The two hour cruises leave from Embarcadero Dock in Newport at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday in March and April.

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