

Scientists deliver live salmon to sick orca

By JOHN RYAN
KUOW

Scientists have taken an unprecedented step to save one of the Salish Sea's 75 endangered orcas: They tried to feed her in the wild.

Onboard a Lummi Nation police boat off San Juan Island, biologists dropped eight Chinook salmon, one by one, into a plastic tube off the boat's stern on Sunday. The tube disgorged each thrashing fish into the path of the emaciated young killer whale known as J50.

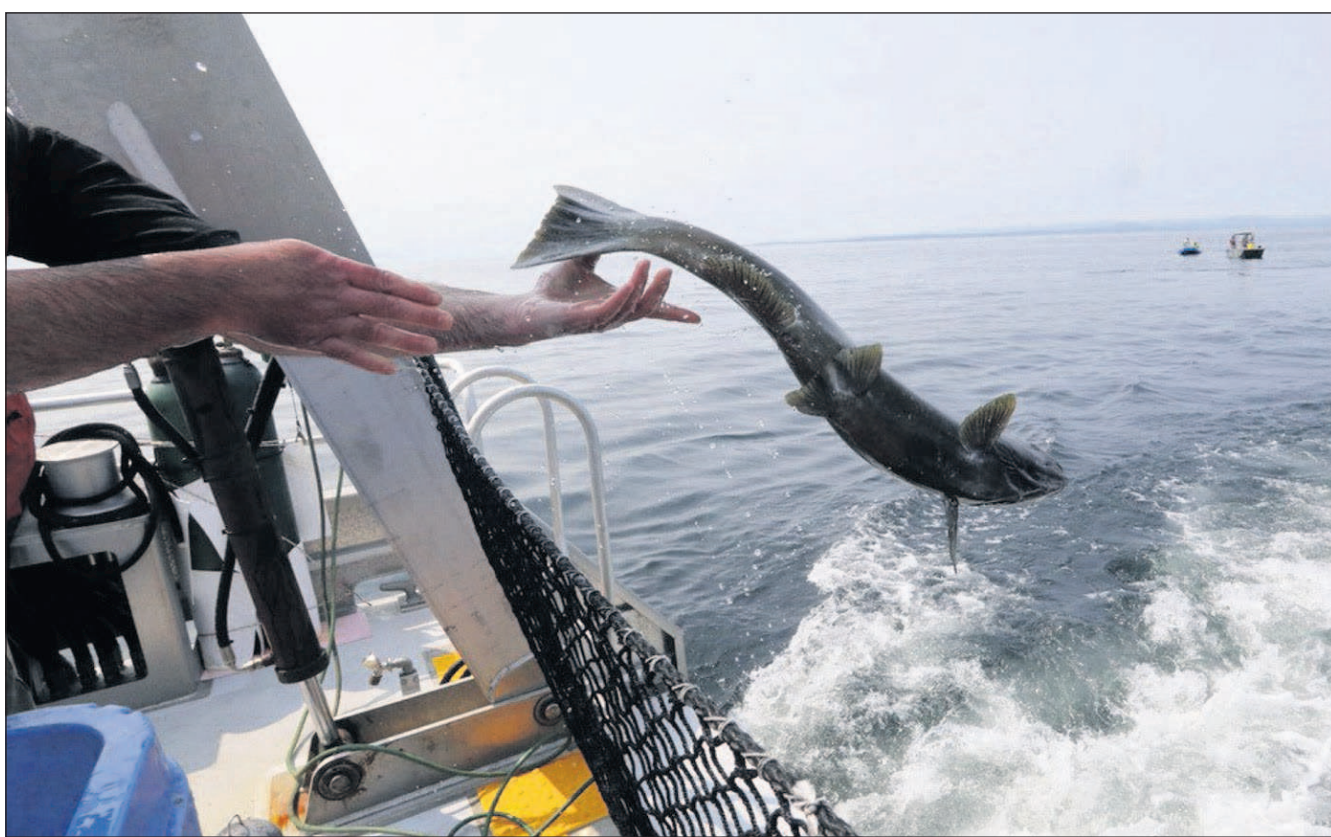
The dinner delivery by boat was a test run for a new way of medicating one of the ocean's top predators.

"This type of thing has never been tried before, and there were lots of potential things that could potentially go awry," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration biologist Brad Hanson said. "So we were very, very pleased that we were able to do this."

Yet it's unknown whether the 3½-year-old cooperated and ate her dinner. Hanson said they did not see her change course as she approached the spot, about 100 yards in front of her, where the salmon had been released.

The weekend's new moon brought strong tides and currents that roiled the waters as well as any evidence of salmon being chomped.

"Any scales or prey remains that would've been in the water would've been obscured by current," Han-



Live Chinook salmon aboard the King County research vessel SoundGuardian are released into waters off San Juan Island.

Alan Berner/The Seattle Times

son said. "It was quite rough in this particular area."

These salmon, Chinooks from the Marblemount Hatchery 78 miles up the Skagit River, had not been medicated, but future deliveries of the orcas' favorite food could be dosed with antibiotics or other medications.

Vancouver Aquarium veterinarian Martin Haulena described J50 as "incredibly skinny." He said she had "a very distinct depression behind her head" caused by her lack of blubber.

Scientists don't know exactly what ails this orca but have observed her emaciation and, over the weekend, her difficulty keeping up with her relatives.

"She was essentially slogging along and not necessarily able to keep up with the rest of the whales," Hanson said. "We haven't seen her partake in any socialization, where she would be splashing around."

At times, strong tidal currents actually pushed J50 backward even as she tried to swim forward.

Haulena was part of a crew that used a dart gun and a 10-inch dart to administer a broad-spectrum antibiotic to J50 from 50 feet away on Thursday.

They took the action despite not knowing whether the antibiotic would do any good. Antibiotics do not cure viral diseases, for example.

"If you had one chance of delivering something that would have a likelihood of helping this animal without harming this animal, given what we know, what would

it be?" Haulena said. "The consensus was it would be a long-lasting antibiotic."

Haulena's medical marksmanship delivered at least a partial dose of the antibiotic Convenia into the whale as it surfaced. Convenia, marketed mainly for skin diseases in dogs and cats, can last up to two weeks in domestic animals.

"We followed this whale for about six hours, and out of six hours, we had probably just two chances," Haulena said.

He said the dart found its mark, but he noticed some medicine spraying out as the dart hit.

"It's not an easy target, and their skin is kind of rubbery," he said.

On Saturday and Sunday, researchers were able to obtain fecal samples that might help them pinpoint any diseases J50 is suffering and what medical treatment to pursue. The main problem: they're not sure if the sample came from J50, its mother or its sister, since the three were swimming together at the time.

Nor do these extraordinary, emergency measures on behalf of one orca address the problems that have endangered her and her salmon-eating relatives: primarily a dearth of Chinook salmon, an excess of toxic pollution and vessel noise.

Another whale in J-pod recently carried her dead newborn calf for more than two weeks, in a display of mourning that grabbed the world's attention and that scientists called unprecedented.

Monday morning, J50 and her family group were seen swimming west toward the Pacific, off the southern shore of Vancouver Island.

This time of year, the whales typically head out to sea for several days or more, according to scientists. They said their team is on standby to conduct more veterinary assistance once J50 returns to the sheltered waters of the Salish Sea.

Breathing wildfire smoke could have long-term consequences

By COURTNEY FLATT
Northwest Public Broadcasting

The skies across much of the Northwest are choked with smoke from wildfires.

Air quality east of the Cascade Mountains has deteriorated as wildfires burn across

Oregon and Washington state. In southern Oregon, the air is hazardous. In central Washington, air quality is unhealthy for everyone.

"The acute effects cause irritability, nausea, shortness of breath," said Sam Joseph, a pulmonary and critical care physician and professor at

the Washington State University Elson S. Floyd School of Medicine.

While the air might be annoying on a day-to-day basis, doctors say chronic exposure to smoke, year-in and year-out can lead to long-term health problems, especially for people with underlying heart

and lung problems, children and senior citizens.

Joseph said long-term exposure to wildfire smoke can lead to chronic cardiovascular diseases, like heart attacks (both fatal and nonfatal), irregular heartbeats and increased severity of asthma. These health problems are most troublesome

for people who already experience heart and lung issues.

"That is what we're most concerned about, not only the acute but the long-term effects (of wildfire smoke exposure)," Joseph said.

He said many studies have shown an increase in premature death for people with heart

and lung diseases who breathe in wildfire smoke over long spans of time.

"In all smoke exposure, you're exposed to lots of particles and chemicals," Joseph said. "Some of the chemicals include carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide and particulate matter, which we call soot."

Buehler: Nearly 14,000 people are considered homeless in Oregon

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Buehler did not give an estimate on the total cost of the project.

Gov. Brown's campaign said Buehler's plan "doesn't add up."

"Building 8,000 shelter beds will cost 10 times the \$10 million he's proposing to spend," said Christian Gaston, a spokesman for the Democrat's campaign. "If half of those are supportive housing units, the price tag will climb higher. This isn't a serious proposal."

Buehler's seven-point plan includes the following:

- Convene a statewide summit on solving homelessness and create a position of a state-level chief homeless solutions

officer. The homeless solutions officer would be authorized to lead efforts to align state, federal, local, nonprofit and private sector policies and resources toward common priorities and goals.

- Dedicate state Medicaid dollars for both physical and mental health care to community-based, street-level clinics for homeless populations. Seek state legislation and changes to Oregon's federal Medicaid agreement to allow the program.

- Allocate \$10 million in the 2019-20 state budget, combined with community-based resources, to create an additional 4,000 temporary emergency shelter beds and 4,000 long-term supportive-housing beds to move peo-

ple from streets and camps to shelters with access to transition services and longer-term treatment.

- Provide local governments stronger legal tools to manage and regulate activity on streets and sidewalks. Introduce legislation modeled after House Bill 2963 from 2013 to help clarify the state law giving local jurisdictions the right to more strictly regulate street and sidewalk activity.

- Establish the Oregon Workplace Housing Assistance Fund, a \$50 million, five-year fund to provide up to three years of rental assistance to working families.

- Address Oregon's housing supply shortage and affordability crisis. An example is to

remove barriers to developing more multifamily apartments, innovative modular and tiny homes and communal neighborhood arrangements.

- Establish a Governor's Council on Re-entry Employment where employers and nonprofits can coordinate efforts to teach life and workplace skills and train and employ formerly homeless people. Direct Regional Solutions Centers to work with trade unions and industry to connect transitional homeless to intensive job training programs that lead to career and technical education apprenticeships.

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