



Ocean Defenders Work to Secure Rights for the Southern Resident Killer Whales

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New York, NY (August 21st, 2018)—On September 15th, Legal Rights for the Salish Sea is hosting an event in Gig Harbor, WA for the [Salish Sea Day of Action](#). The event is free and will include a showing of the documentary “The Rights of Nature: A Global Movement” produced by Issac Goeckeritz, Hal Crimmel and María Valeria Berros with a panel discussion to follow. The event will discuss how rights of nature can save the Southern Resident Killer Whales and maintain the health of the Salish Sea ecosystem.

“This is a critical juncture for the Southern Resident Killer Whales. Our current system has failed these charismatic species. We need to do more and we need to do more now to prevent their extinction.” Michelle Bender, Ocean Rights Manager at Earth Law Center

The Salish Sea stretches from the north end of the Strait of Georgia in Canada to the south end of the Puget Sound and west to include the Strait of Juan de Fuca. More than 8 million of us live in the communities surrounding the Salish Sea and many communities have “orca-based economies.” Whale watching in Washington State provides an estimated [\\$65-\\$70 million annually](#).

However, salmon availability, noise and vessel traffic, and pollution have resulted in a population struggling for survival- only 75 are now left. This has led environmental and community groups to explore solutions outside the traditional system. Earth Law Center is collaborating with Legal Rights for the Salish Sea, Nonhuman Rights Project, and PETA amongst others to gain [legal rights for the Southern Residents](#).

“With the understanding that non-human inhabitants of the Earth, such as the southern resident orcas, are sentient beings comes the recognition that they, too, have rights. Not as “persons”, but in their own right as living beings with whom we co-exist. Recognizing that the southern resident orcas have enforceable rights in their own right is critical to their continued existence.” Elizabeth M. Dunne, Esq.

“The Southern Resident Killer Whales are unable to tell us what they need, or demand action to prevent their extinction. But we know, through years of research, what they need: more salmon, less vessel traffic, and healthy waters. Legal Rights for the Southern Residents makes it our legal responsibility to protect those rights and allows all community members to take the necessary actions to ensure the Southern Residents needs are met.” Michelle Bender

Learn how your community can be involved in the movement. The event will be held at Agnus Dei Lutheran Church, 10511 Peacock Hill Ave. Gig Harbor, WA. September 15th 7-9pm. The event is free.

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About the coalition

Earth Law Center (www.earthlawcenter.org) works to transform the law to recognize and protect nature's inherent rights to exist, thrive and evolve. This includes advancing the inherent rights of rivers through initiatives with local partners to secure rights recognition.

Elizabeth M. Dunne, Esq. graduated from Emory Law School in 2000. She has worked for non-profits, law firms, and federal judges, and for the past several years has managed her own visionary law practice focused on advancing and defending the rights of local communities and ecosystems in partnership with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (<https://celdf.org/rights/rights-of-nature/>).

Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP; www.nonhumanrights.org) works to secure legally recognized fundamental rights for nonhuman animals. The NhRPs mission is to change the legal status of at least some nonhuman animals from mere "things," to "persons," who possess such fundamental rights as bodily integrity and bodily liberty.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA- <https://www.peta.org/>) is the largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than 6.5 million members and supporters.

Legal Rights for the Salish Sea (LRSS- <http://legalrightsforthesalishsea.org/>) is a local community group based in Gig Harbor, WA, founded by Dr. Kriss Kevorkian, working to bring legal rights of nature to the Southern Resident Killer Whales including the Salish Sea to protect her inhabitants and ecosystems.