

PROPOSED BY: Executive

INTRODUCTION DATE: _____

RESOLUTION NO. _____

ACKNOWLEDGING THE RIGHTS OF THE SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCAS

WHEREAS, we make our homes and live our lives on Lhaq'temish and Coast Salish territories and strive to embody the traditional ways of this place by practicing right, reciprocal relationship with – and loving stewardship of – these lands and waters and the native life contained herein; and

WHEREAS, the Lhaq'temish term for orca – qwe'lhol'mechen – means “people under the water,” which recognizes how orcas mirror humans in many ways, including by their unique and complex societies, loving families, language, culture, rituals, and song; and

WHEREAS, ancestral teachings hold that that Lhaq'temish people and the Southern Resident Orcas in particular are one single family, with some members living above the water, and some below, all of whom depend on the wild Pacific salmon for physical, cultural, and spiritual sustenance; and

WHEREAS, the natural rights of the “people under the water,” like the natural rights of those of us on land, include but are not limited to the right to life; sovereignty; culture; free and safe passage; and freedom from human-caused conditions causing famine or any other physical, emotional, or mental harm;

WHEREAS, our Southern Resident qwe'lhol'mechen neighbors and relations face extinction if we humans do not take meaningful action to ensure their survival and well-being and the survival and well-being of the wild salmon on which they depend; and

WHEREAS, in May 2018, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States passed a resolution (Resolution #18-32) recognizing qwe'lhol'mechen as revered relations for which there is a sacred obligation to ensure they are treated “in a dignified manner that reflects tribal cultural values that have been passed down for countless generations;” and

WHEREAS, over 200 laws and policies exist in almost 40 countries, including dozens of local communities in the United States and several tribal governments, that recognize Nature has inherent rights, and that human society has the responsibility to protect and steward Nature in a manner consistent with our interconnected relationship;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Whatcom County Council hereby resolves that Whatcom County acknowledges the natural rights of qwe'lhol'mechen, which have existed since time immemorial, while also affirming that such recognition in no way compromises or negatively impacts any and all Treaty fishing rights of our Coast Salish family, and we call upon local, state, and federal governments to secure and effectuate the rights of qwe'lhol'mechen and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2023

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Dana Brown-Davis,
Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan,
Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

/s/Karen Frakes approved via email on 7/6/2023/MR

Karen Frakes, Civil Deputy Prosecutor