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- Home
- About WDCS
- Features
- Action Alert!
- Whale Adoption Project
- Whale sightings
- Whale watching
- Education
- For kids
- Publications
- Get Involved
- Internship
- Go Green for whales
- WDCS Blogs
- See what we are up to

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### Dolphin SMART Program Grows in Coastal Alabama with Another Participant

GULF SHORES and ORANGE BEACH, Ala. – Bear Point Marina-based Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises

recently became the second nature tour business along the Alabama Gulf Coast to be accepted into the Dolphin SMART program, according to the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) and its partners. After meeting all of the standards that promote the responsible viewing and advertising of wild dolphins, this coastal business was officially recognized by the program, which is designed to protect wild dolphins.

“We are excited to be a recognized member of the Dolphin SMART Program,” said Sherri Reas of Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises “We hope that other dolphin watching charters join this program and help us preserve our best assets on the Gulf Coast.”

The first Dolphin SMART training session was conducted in Orange Beach on October 6, 2008. Ten boat tour operators attended. “This recognition program tells customers and potential customers that Skipper “J” and Sherrie Reas have received training in the natural behaviors of wild bottlenose dolphins and are committed to sustainable viewing practices that will protect and preserve this vital resource,” said Joanne McDonough, nature tourism specialist for the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. “As nature tourism continues to grow along the Alabama Gulf Coast, balancing the dual roles of conservation and public access is a challenge. The Dolphin SMART program offers an opportunity for Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises and other boat tour operators to set examples of good stewardship and sustainable wildlife viewing.”

NOAA’s Fisheries Service and National Marine Sanctuary Program partnered with the WDCS and Dolphin Ecology Project to establish the program in Key West, Fla., through funding support from NOAA Fisheries and “Protect Wild Dolphins” license plate through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The founding sponsors continue to expand the program in other

areas of the southeast United States.

In Alabama, Dolphin SMART is made possible by the founding sponsors and support of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Coastal Section), the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium.

“The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is happy to be able to partner with the original stakeholders of the program in order to bring Dolphin SMART to Alabama,” said Kelly Brinkman, Dolphin SMART coordinator for coastal Alabama. “ADCNR is dedicated to conserving Alabama’s land and marine resources and providing public education of those efforts. Through a variety of programs, ADCNR helps to ensure that our natural resources in Alabama are preserved for generations to come. I am confident that the Dolphin SMART program will also be able to meet that goal.”

Also, Courtney Vail, campaigns officer with WDCS, said, “We are excited to welcome Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises as the second participant in this progressive and positive program to promote sustainable dolphin viewing tourism in Alabama.”

The acronym “SMART” is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

Skipper “J” Cruises is recognized as a Dolphin SMART program participant and thus will display the current calendar year flag and decal with the Dolphin SMART logo on their vessel. They also can use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising and are listed on the Dolphin SMART web site as a current participant. Each year, the charter will be evaluated to ensure it is continuing to meet program standards.

For more information about Dolphin SMART, visit [www.dolphinmart.org](http://www.dolphinmart.org), or call program coordinator Kelly Brinkman at 251-621-1216, ext 232.

Nature tourism business owners who would like more information or assistance may contact Joanne McDonough at 251-974-4634 or [jmcdonough@gulfshores.com](mailto:jmcdonough@gulfshores.com). Additional online resources may be found at [www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature](http://www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature).

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