

Boat Rescue

Owen Beach, Tacoma, Washington state, USA



During August 2026 a community member at Owen Beach reported what appeared to be an anchored sailing boat full of cats, with no human in sight! Police and animal-control officers boarded it and found some 60 felines living in squalor, with overflowing litter trays and no food or water in evidence. Obtaining a warrant, they seized about 30 of the animals, left food, water and traps so they could return later and corral the rest of the cats. In the end there turned out to be about 60 altogether, which were taken to the Tacoma Humane Society for examination, vaccination and parasite prevention.

The boat was parked and registered legally, but what had happened was that its owner, Derek Hieb, had some years before been given a cat, called **Missy**, who'd had a litter of kittens. He had her spayed and two of the kittens neutered, but was living on a limited income and couldn't afford to have the others neutered. So over time nature took its course and the number of cats multiplied; after six years he had dozens of cats living with him on the boat.

At the time of the discovery of the boat he'd been away for a couple of days getting treatment for a swollen hand caused by a cat bite, and had been living in his car. He hadn't intended to abandon the cats, but things just got out of control. Before long a number of the animals had been placed with fosterers, and in due course it was hoped all would be found homes.

[Seattle Times](#) | [MSN News](#) (both Aug. 2026)

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