



# Safe & Humane Fireworks

## Island County

4/13/2023

Safe and Humane Fireworks

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# About Safe and Humane Fireworks

- **Grassroots** group of Island County citizens from across Whidbey and Camano Islands began working as a group July 5, 2022 after several of us posted our concerns on “Next Door” which led to dozens of people replying with their personal perspectives.
- The reckless abandon that has become the norm surrounding the 4th of July are harmful to pets, humans, wildlife and the environment has generated over 1800 signatures on our Change.org petition.

Craig Cyr  
Lee McGuire  
Jackie Lasater  
Sunny Fitzgerald

# Mission

Safe and Humane Fireworks is seeking a change to Island County Code that limits fireworks sales and use, in the unincorporated areas of Island County, to those permitted and sponsored by the towns, cities or County, and only on the 4th of July.

**<https://www.islandcountyfireworks.com>**

# Public Outreach Efforts to Date

- August 16, 2022 - S & H public comments at BOCC Meeting - first official "request that the Island County Board put ban on personal fireworks use in Island County on the 2023 Commissioners' agenda.
- August 22, 2022 - Met with the Island County Sheriff/Fire Marshal - discussed our initiative and discussed the implications on enforcement
- September 1, 2022 - Launched Change.org petition 1,800+ signatures/ S & H website launched
- December 6, 2022 - City of Langley passed a Resolution in support of the ban
- December 7, 2022 - WEAN letter of support
- December 8, 2022 - South Whidbey Fire District Resolution in support of ban
- December 14, 2022 – Melanie Bacon submitted resolution and draft code on the BOCC work agenda for discussion - no agreement to move forward for vote
- February 2023—Facebook and NextDoor Groups established
- February 2023—Began outreach to Veterans' groups
- March 14, 2023 - County Commissioners given a copy of the 22 page S & H Policy and Impact Document
- April 1, 2023 - Camano Town hall, meeting, bi-partisan, sponsored by the CID
- April 7th- articles in the South Whidbey Record
- April 11<sup>th</sup>—Public Town Hall Freeland

# Fire Official Outreach Efforts to Date

- August 22, 2022 – Met with Fire Commissioner Felici
- October 5, 2022 - South Whidbey Fire Chief Nicolas Walsh and Deputy Chief Terry Ney
- November 22, 2022 - Central Whidbey Chief Hartin
- December 8, 2022 - Presentation South Whidbey Fire and resulting Resolution
- February 27, 2023 - Camano Fire and Rescue Chief Levon Yengoyan
- March 14, 2023 - North Whidbey Fire District Chief & Board Meet & Greet
- April 6, 2023 - Presentation to North Whidbey Board of Commissioners

# Key Issues:

- Injuries and Accidents
- Domestic and Wild Animals
- Human Health Impact Including PTSD
- Pollution including Noise, Air and Water
- Fire Danger
- Enforcement



# Injuries and Accidents

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) 2020 report:

- Estimate 15,600 people with fireworks related injuries at emergency rooms
- Highest estimate in more than 15 years
- 2021- nine people died in incidents involving fireworks

The 2021 State Fire Marshal's report:

- Injuries due to holding or throwing fireworks = 40%
- Injuries due to being hit by fireworks or debris = 36%
- Legal fireworks accounted for 47% of the injuries reported in 2021.

# Safety Advocates Recommendations

- As the July 4th weekend approaches, a new report from the (CPSC) reinforces the long-held position of National Fire Protection Agency to avoid consumer fireworks.
- The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) strongly recommends only attending public shows put on by trained professionals. Fireworks in the hands of consumers can cause serious injury and damage due to their unpredictability.

Consumer Protection Safety Commission, Safety Source: Press Release, June 30, 2021



# What about Sparklers and Firecrackers?

- June 18 – July 18, 2021: 8,500 ER treated fireworks injuries of which:
  - 13% were from Sparklers
  - 18% were from Firecrackers
  - Body parts injured: hands/fingers (31%); head, face and ears (21%), eyes (14%)

**CPSC recommends - Never allow young children to play with or ignite fireworks, including sparklers. Sparklers burn at temperatures of about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit—hot enough to melt some metals.**

Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2021 Fireworks Annual Report, Fireworks-Related Deaths, Emergency Department Treated Injuries, and Enforcement Activities During 2021

Twitter



**Man Injured By Exploding Firework**  
**Asks First Responders To Share Pictures**

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# Impact on Animals

- Animals fleeing the “warzone from all directions” leads to panic, trauma, injury and death
- Fireworks and other loud noises account for 20% of missing pets (ASPCA)
- 30-60% increase in lost pets between July 4-6 (Pet Amber Alert)
- 2.8 million dogs take Xanax or Prozac—undue financial burden for low-income families

# Impact on Animals

- More sensitive hearing means more damage
  - Fireworks up to 190 decibels (115 decibels above range for human damage)
  - Dogs hear up to 60,000 hz (humans only to 20,000 hz) fireworks can cause permanent damage
- Tachycardia, gastrointestinal disorders, tremors
- Protected Species
  - Illegal to disturb endangered species (Eagles, Tufted Puffins) up to \$100,000 fine or 1 year in jail
  - Very little enforcement, even in Island County Critical Areas







# Pet Owner's Troubles

- *Always a nightmare spending these holidays (4th and New Year's) consoling my goats. It drives them crazy with fear. Certainly does not help with the seemingly daily blasts that are still occurring and it is September, not the first week of July. Out of control. –Change.org signer*
- *We have to leave our dogs with friends in Shoreline every year during the 4th of July. They are terrified. Panic attacks, etc. Also, we've seen bats fly into one another in the sky, birds flying erratically, etc.— Change.org signer*

# Noise Impact on Humans

- Numerous studies link loud noise with negative impacts on psychological and physiological health
- Fireworks increased relative risk of cardiovascular mortality by 125% and cardiovascular morbidity by 175% over a regular day per Forbes Magazine

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Island County has **14,000 to 17,000 veterans the highest number per capita** in the state per Veteran Resource Center in Langley.
- Up to 35% of veterans suffer from PTSD per The US Department of Veterans Affairs

*"I have a few veteran buddies who live the scars of their service in the form of PTSD. Independence Day has become a dark period every year for them. They are Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan combat veterans who suffer every Independence Day as their reward for defending the Constitution. I wish people would consider their humanity over blowing sh#t up."  
(Next Door, July 17, 2022)*





*I'd like to let you know that I'm in favor of a complete ban on fireworks in unincorporated Island Country.*

*In addition to all the great reasons for this listed on the Safe and Humane website, I'll add a couple of my own.*

*A Navy veteran friend of mine served in Afghanistan. He was pinned down in a trench for 6 days under mortar fire night and day. Every 4th of July evening, he rides his mountain bike as deep into the kettles as he can until it's over.*

*I live on Sunlight Beach. Every year there's a "war" between Sunlight Beach and Shore Avenue over who can piss away the most money on fireworks. These are second homes. These people don't live here full time. They're not registered to vote here. They have their fireworks here because they're banned where they live in Seattle or Bellevue.*

*I'm hoping you'll do the right thing and support this ban.*

*-WEAN member*

# Air Pollution

- Explosions of solid form chemicals creating millions of combustible fine particulates, poisonous gases and heavy metals are blown around for miles (as far as 62 miles)
- Within 1 hour the following heavy metals increase by:
  - Strontium --120 times
  - Magnesium -- 22 times
  - Barium --12 times
  - Potassium --11 times
  - Copper- 6 times

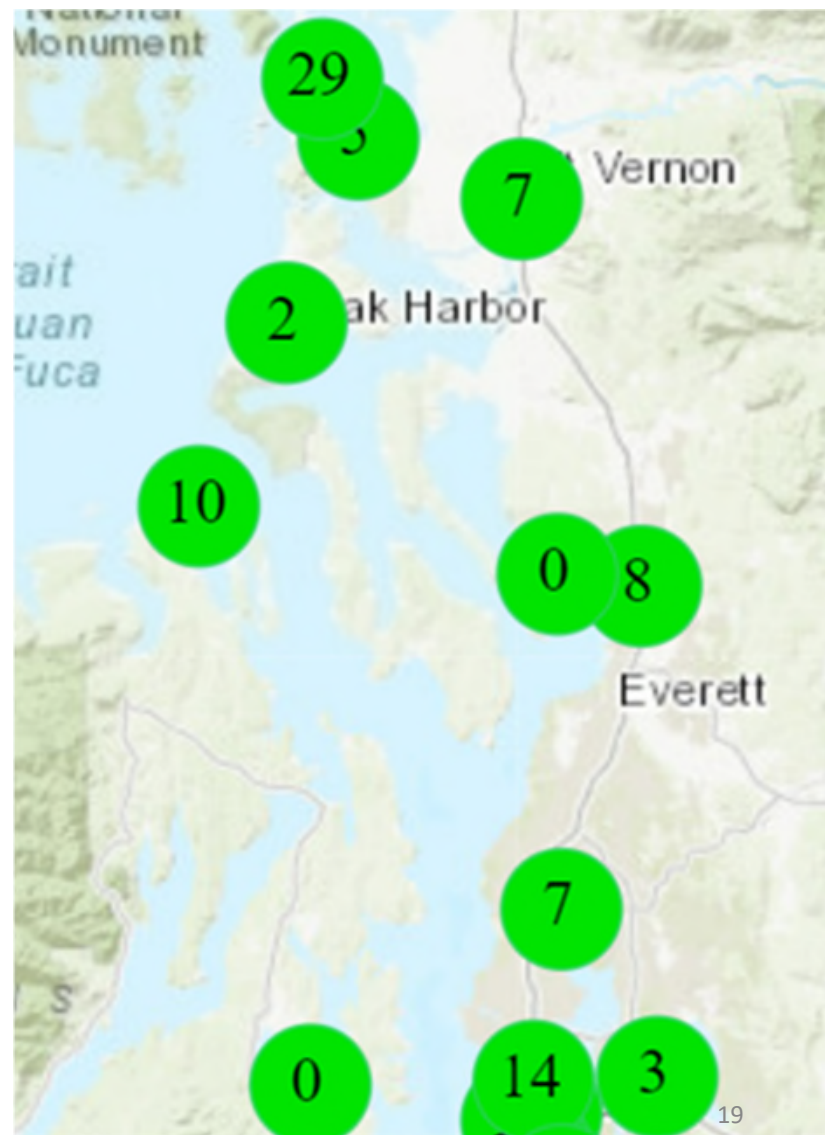
*Source: IQAir*

# Air Pollution in Puget Sound Area

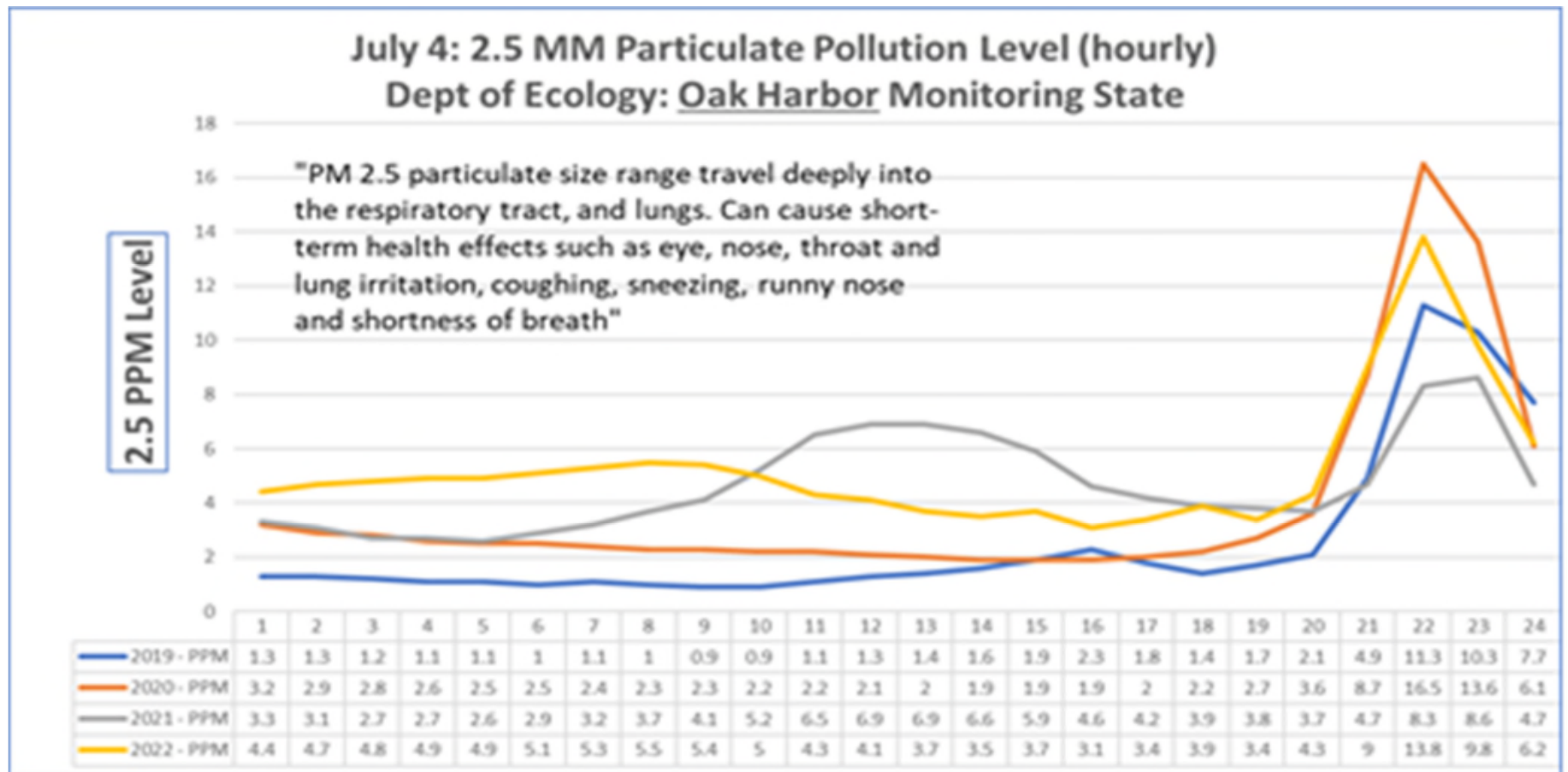
Puget Sound Clean Air Agency monitoring sites around region in 2020 indicate:

- 25% worse than 2019, a continuing trend for several years prior.
- Personal fireworks produce the lion's share of the small particulate pollution that degrades air quality on July 4 and 5

***“Community fireworks might contribute a little bit. But it's the personal fireworks that are the main source of such pollution.” -- Cliff Mass, University of Washington Atmospheric Sciences***



# Dangerous Spike (700%) in 2.55 mm Particulates



# Respiratory Conditions –Humans and Animals

- Hospital admissions for asthma and other breathing problems peak the day following fireworks activity per Forbes magazine
- Fine particles released by fireworks (less than 2.5 micrometers) hazardous when inhaled as it is absorbed by lungs and passed to other tissue in the body per Medical Life Sciences
- Other symptoms: headaches, anxiety, sore throats, airway inflammation, irregular heart beats, high blood pressure, pneumonia, heart attacks (ibid)

# Water and Beach Pollution

- Toxic emissions of fireworks are washed out of air by rain, polluting water and harming aquatic life per New Hampshire Department of Environmental Service and Forbes magazine
- Leftover trash with plastic, paper, fiberglass poses risk to marine and lake animals—when ingested results in loss of nutrition, internal injury, blockages and death

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# Fire Danger Rates

Well documented that fireworks are causing more fires:

Nationally: **19,500** fires resulting in **\$105 million** in property damage per the NFPA. Between 1992 and 2015 more wildfires started on July 4<sup>th</sup> than any other day

Washington State: **588** fireworks related fires in 2020 and **842** in 2021; an increase of 43% resulting in **\$4.5 million** property damage per WA State Fire Marshal

Island County: **14** fireworks related incidents in 2021 per WA State Fire Marshal



Island County has the **third highest** per capita fireworks incidents in Washington State.

Counties west of the Cascades with populations below 900,000, Island County has the **highest** per capita fireworks incidents.

Washington State Fire Marshall's Office					
Title: "2021 Fire In Washington"					
2021 Summary of Fireworks Incident Reports by County					
County*	Fire	Injury	Total	Population*	Per Capita Incidents (per 10,000)*
Pierce	460	8	468	910,225	5.05
Walla Walla	12	0	12	62,168	1.93
Island	14	0	14	85,938	1.63
Grays Harbor	12	5	17	74,737	1.61
Skagit	19	0	19	128,228	1.48
Adams	3	0	3	20,353	1.47
Franklin	13	0	13	95,313	1.36
Asotin	3	0	3	22,285	1.35
Klickitat	3	0	3	22,478	1.33
Pacific	3	0	3	22,974	1.31
Benton	26	0	26	204,551	1.27
Grant	12	0	12	97,874	1.23
Yakima	29	0	29	255,151	1.14
Stevens	5	0	5	46,057	1.09
Lewis	8	0	8	81,214	0.99
Pend Oreille	1	0	1	13,302	0.75
Cowlitz	8	0	8	109,457	0.73
Kitsap	19	1	20	273,072	0.70
Jefferson	2	1	3	32,590	0.61
San Juan	1	0	1	17,631	0.57
Clallam	4	0	4	76,727	0.52
Whatcom	11	0	11	224,533	0.49
King	108	1	109	2,240,876	0.48
Mason	3	0	3	64,964	0.46
Spokane	21	0	21	531,477	0.40
Thurston	10	3	13	290,642	0.34
Chelan	2	0	2	78,508	0.25
Douglas	1	0	1	42,622	0.23
Kittitas	1	0	1	44,147	0.23
Whitman	1	0	1	48,197	0.21
Snohomish	17	1	18	820,024	0.21
Clark	10	0	10	496,494	0.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>842</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>7,617,364</b>	<b>1.11</b>

\*www.washington-demographics.com/counties\_by\_population

\*www.wsp.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Fire\_in\_Washington\_Report.pdf

\*Per Capita Population is a calculated field by Safe and Humane

\*32 of 39 Counties Reported Incidents



# Wildfires and Climate Change

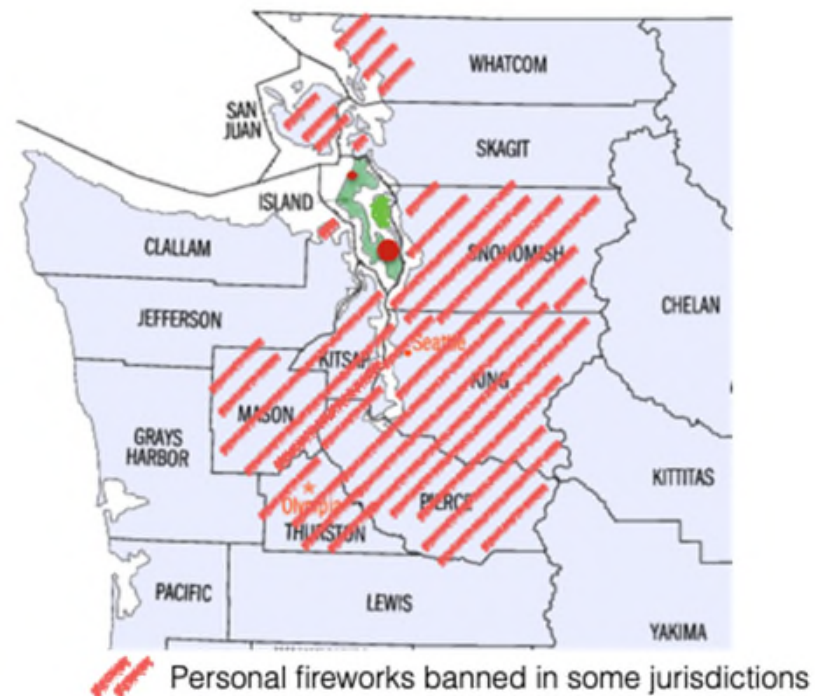
- Eagle Creek Fire – 2017 Columbia River Gorge ignited by fireworks, burned for 3 months and burned over 48,000 acres.
- Nakia Creek Fire – 2022 Camas, WA, 2022 – ignited by fireworks burned 2,000 acres, caused 2,900 evacuations and severe regional air quality issues

# Climate Change

- June 2021 Heat Dome—one of the most extreme heat waves ever recorded globally and most intense for the region (Seattle Times)
- Trees were scorched and died during heat dome, creating future fire fuel (Tree Physiology)
- DNR mapped 84,000 acres of heat scorched tree damage in Western Washington.
- 40% of Washington's wildfires in 2 of last 3 years were west of Cascades. (KING 5 news June 27, 2021)

# Fireworks Tourism

- Surrounding areas that have banned fireworks include: King County, South Snohomish County, Bellingham, Port Townsend, Langley, Whidbey Naval Air Station.
- Tribal Reservation that surround Island County sell illegal fireworks



# Homeowners Insurance

Fire Protection Ratings being used to determine premiums or coverages

- Protection class based on
  - Typical Response Times
  - Full Time Staff or Volunteer
  - Wildfire Score –annual score based on distance to closest fire in previous year
- Many companies will not write policies if Protection Class of 9 or 10
  - Example: South Whidbey current class = 8 for residential, 9 for commercial

# An Ounce of Prevention

*“The simple and painful fact is that Island County has become vulnerable to wildfire. For all the green we see, Island County is also very densely populated. Wildfire anywhere in the county would be devastating. A ban on recreational fireworks should be considered an ounce of prevention.” (Marianne Edain, Whidbey Environmental Action Network, December 7, 2022)*

# Island Resident Safety in Jeopardy

*“We are, after all, a very long island with very narrow roads and only one way on and off. Given these circumstances, it would be impossible to evacuate all residents in a safe and timely manner, should someone's fireworks spark a wildfire. Likewise, with residents attempting to flee, it would be equally impossible for outside resources and support for our very limited fire district to get on the island. The consequences would be devastating, not just from the perspective of the destruction of personal property, but with regards to the loss of lives, as well.”  
(Rhonda Paulson, Camano Island Preparedness Group and C.E.R.T Lead)*

# SUMMARY: Recipe for Wildfire Disaster

- Climate change - man made historic drought and heat
- Forest Health - drought stressed evergreen forests & grasslands
- Consciousness – many surrounding counties banned fireworks
- Short Term Rentals – no regulations and thus an abundance
- Fireworks Tourism – tourists with no attachment or appreciation
- Tribal Reservations – many nearby that sell illegal fireworks
- Illegal Fireworks – more explosive power & further range projectiles
- Lack of Enforcement – limited staff to enforce use illegal fireworks
- County economy – heavily dependent on ‘tourism’ dollars
- Evacuation challenges - limited evacuation routes on/off the Islands

# NO (legal or illegal) fireworks allowed in county parks--ICC 9-40-420

**No person shall possess, discharge, set off, or cause to be discharged, any firecracker, torpedo, rocket, firework, or other explosive on or into any Island County park area, unless authorized by the director in writing.**



## 54 Owned and Managed Island County Parks

Many in Critical Areas: wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas.

[www.islandcountywa.gov/PublicWorks/Parks/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/PublicWorks/Parks/Pages/Home.aspx)

### North Whidbey



### South Whidbey



### Camano



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# Enforcement –ICC 9-40-440

Sheriff	Parks and Recreation Department
Primary method of enforcement—request voluntary compliance or administrative sanctions	Implementing public educational awareness regarding the rules of the facility
Issuance of Civil Infraction	Encouraging voluntary compliance
Misdemeanor Sanction	Training staff on administrative sanctions
	Notifying law enforcement of violations

**Currently there has been very limited enforcement and there are few or no signs posted at county parks**

# Enforcement –ICC 9-40-440

- Class 1 Penalty--**\$250 per offense**
- Misdemeanors. Any person committing a third or subsequent violation of provisions of this chapter within a five-year period is guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction shall be punished by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars (**\$1,000.00**), or by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than ninety (90) days, or both.
- Administrative sanction. In addition to any of the prescribed penalties, any person failing to comply with any provision of this chapter shall be subject to the loss of county park and recreation facility use privileges and ejection from the county park area and associated marine park area.

## Immediate Enforcement of Current Code

- The county must create signage for all county owned and managed parks and other public areas (ferry, main roads, etc) including penalty and contact information for reporting violations
- Implement staffing plan to enforce fireworks bans at county parks

# Current Status—4/4 BOCC Meeting

## **Does S&H support taking proposed ban to a public vote?**

- Our research indicates that policy matters of public health and safety should NOT be up for a general vote. The BOCC are charged with overseeing county operations; financial and budgetary matters; and the adoption of laws that regulate county growth, health, safety and welfare of its citizens.

## **What about a South Whidbey only ban?**

- Our objective is to eliminate the risk of wildfire and the threat to public health and safety for all of unincorporated island county (which is the relevant jurisdiction for the BOCC). If the commissioners cannot agree that all of our citizens should be protected, then we would support a South Whidbey ban as an incremental step.

## S&H Next Steps

- Meet with Commissioner St. Clair to address her questions and concerns and to determine the path forward
- Continue to meet with fire chiefs and fire commissioner
- Meet with Parks and Rec to discuss enforcement
- Continue to do public outreach, including more town hall meetings—please contact us if you know an organization that would like to host

# Our 5 Asks--What YOU can do!

1. Sign **Change.org** petition and share on your social media--Access via website at “Petition/Sign up” tab or <https://chnng.it/KFFCZ5kx>
2. Email all of the Island County Commissioners  
Melanie Bacon – [district1@islandcountywa.gov](mailto:district1@islandcountywa.gov)  
Jill Johnson – [district2@islandcountywa.gov](mailto:district2@islandcountywa.gov)  
Janet St. Clair – [district3@islandcountywa.gov](mailto:district3@islandcountywa.gov)--CHAIR SETS BOCC AGENDA
3. Attend and speak at Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)  
Tuesdays at 10 AM (virtual or in person)  
<https://www.islandcountywa.gov/Commissioners/Pages/Home.aspx>
4. Write a letter to the editors of local newspapers
5. When the initiative is on the BOCC agenda to vote, **SHOW UP!**

# Additional Information

- Home Page of Website has a link to Policy and Impact Paper with more details and sources for data presented here today.



**[www.islandcountyfireworks.com](http://www.islandcountyfireworks.com)**





## Questions and Answers

*Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today!*