Island County Natural Resources Newsletter July 2025

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Natural Resources Newsletter

Special Edition: Surface Water Quality Report

July 2025

Surface Water Quality Report for Water Year 2024

Introduction

Island County, with a population of around 87,000, highlights a rural lifestyle across its scenic shorelines and watersheds with few centralized wastewater treatment systems.

Since 2006, the Island County Surface Water Quality Monitoring Program (SWQMP) has been safeguarding human health and the environment by assessing water quality within the Water Resources Inventory Area (WRIA) 6.
In its 19th year, the SWQMP conducted extensive water quality monitoring and provided crucial data for the evaluation and planning of future development and environmental conservation projects.

Whidbey & Camano Island encompass more than

200 WATERSHEDS

ONLY

20%

U.S. homes are served decentralized wastewater (Ground Water 2022)

IN CONTRAST

72%

Island County Residents utilizing a septic system

One Health

One health is a collaborative approach with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes for humans, animals, and ecosystems. A One Health approach recognizes the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and our shared environments. Protecting the surface water in Island County safeguards those interconnections and ultimately protects the health of all who call this area home.

Example

Shellfish safety is a great example of how water quality, animal health and environmental health can have an impact on human health. Shellfish harvesting safety starts with safe water in growing areas. The Surface Water Quality Monitoring Program tests and monitors water that outpours into marine waters.

Where does Island County Natural Resources come in? We work together on the Island County Beach Program, Pollution Identification & Correction Program, and our partners at the Department of Health (DOH) to check the pollution risk in our watersheds.

DOH uses all of this information to create guidelines for when shellfish can be safely harvested in each growing area.

Residents Visit Shorelines for a Range of Reasons

Surface Water in Island County pours into the shorelines, affecting how residents interact with the water.

3% Shellfish Harvesting

2% Fishing

6% Other

21% Psychological Wellbeing

7% Social Reasons

11% Recreation

20% Relaxation

12% Escape

18% Health Reasons

The Work

Surface Water Quality Monitoring Program Highlights

48/200 Watersheds monitored across Island County, up 130% from 2023

MORE THAN
4000
Staff hours logged

OVER
550
Water samples analyzed

OVER
100
Source ID samples analyzed with R-cards

*Savings of over $2400 for the county

MORE THAN

20 Source ID investigations referred to Adaptive Management

Reconnaissance Monitoring

Monitoring revealed impairments that were shared with and addressed by the Island County Onsite Septic (OSS) team.
• Investigated complaints of onsite septic failures on Camano and Whidbey Islands.
• Monitoring in areas in anticipation of salmon recovery efforts and restoration projects.

Source Identification Investigations

Monitoring Intensification: Increasing the number and locations of monitoring points upstream and downstream to pinpoint pollution sources.
Increasing frequency and timing of monitoring at sample point to pinpoint activity in that location that may be influencing samples.
Successes: Collaboration with AMAT and OSS team allowed for investigating fecal pollution due to possible onsite septic failures on both Camano and Whidbey Islands. Outreach and notification letters were sent to homes. Resources were shared amongst multiple departments to provide additional information and education to community members.

In addition to Source ID, water quality information was reported and shared with AMAT to determine next steps and corrections using interdepartmental coordination and communication.

The Results

Understanding Stream Discharge

Island County streams flow both seasonally and year-round from smaller upstream waters such as wetlands or springs with added runoff from rainfall or other precipitation.
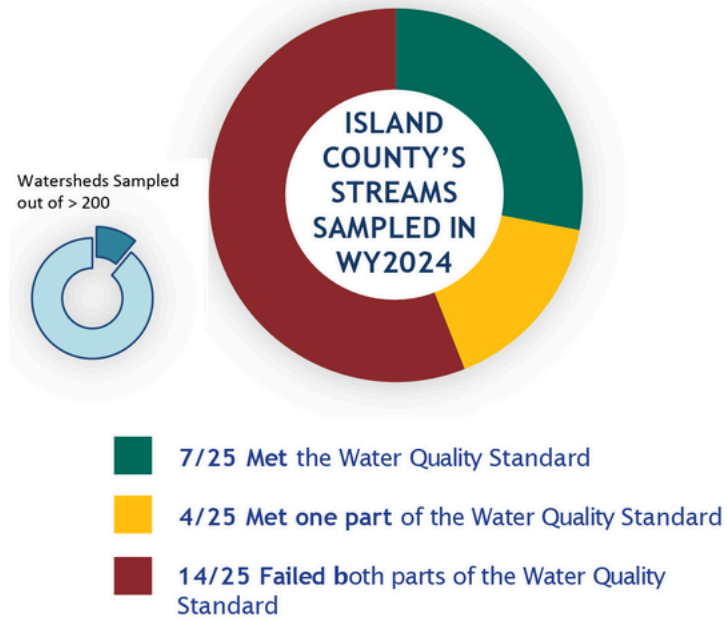Seasonal streams provide many benefits, including:
• Protect against floods
• Filter pollutants
• Recycle potentially harmful nutrients

- Provide food and habitat for fish and other wildlife.
- Maintain the quality/supply of our drinking water
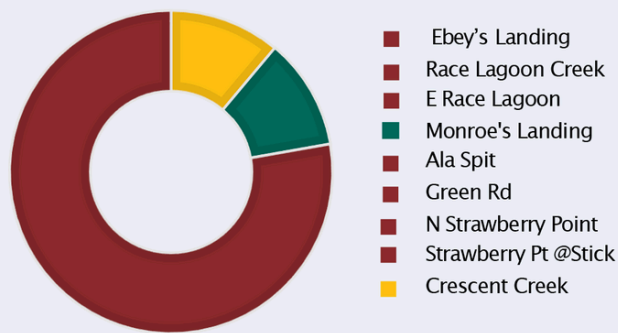- Help recharge underground aquifers.
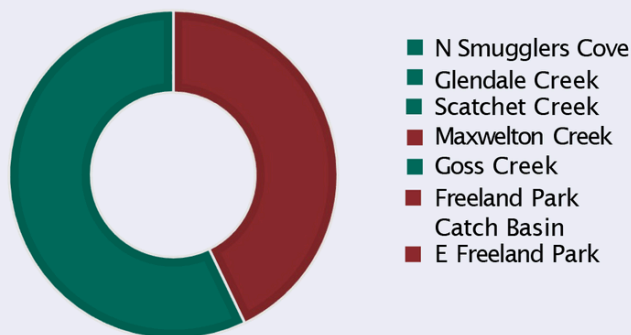
WY2024 Results:
Number of Streams Sampled: 25

Watersheds Sampled
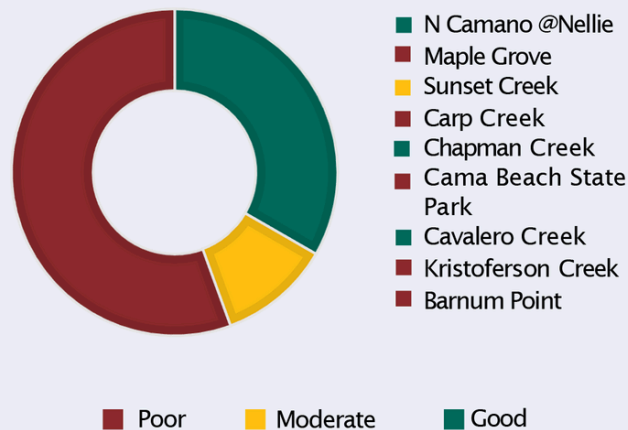out of > 200

ISLAND COUNTY'S STREAMS SAMPLED IN WY2024

7/25 Met the Water Quality Standard

4/25 Met one part of the Water Quality Standard

14/25 Failed both parts of the Water Quality Standard

Water Quality Status

North Whidbey Area Results

- Ebey's Landing
- Race Lagoon Creek
- E Race Lagoon
- Monroe's Landing
- Ala Spit
- Green Rd
- N Strawberry Point
- Strawberry Pt @Stick
- Crescent Creek

South Whidbey Area Results

- N Smugglers Cove
- Glendale Creek
- Scatchet Creek
- Maxwelton Creek
- Goss Creek
- Freeland Park Catch Basin
- E Freeland Park

Camano Island Results

- N Camano @Nellie
- Maple Grove
- Sunset Creek
- Carp Creek
- Chapman Creek
- Cama Beach State Park
- Cavalero Creek
- Kristoferson Creek
- Barnum Point

Poor   Moderate   Good

WY2024's water quality decline could have been influenced by a number of factors. This trend may be attributed to factors such as increased development, reduced rainfall, higher temperatures, and failing septic systems. Surface water quality is subject to fluctuations influenced by climate change and population growth.

Going Forward and the Full Report

Clean water and watershed health are fundamental for human, livestock, wildlife, and community health. One Health.

For a more **detailed and downloadable version of the summary, click here.**

For more information, including the full comprehensive Surface Water Quality Report, please visit our Surface Water Quality page or **click here** to be taken to the report directly.

If you have any questions, our dedicated team are always happy to respond. Please direct inquiries to **dnr@islandcountywa.gov.**