



Island County

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Island County Natural Resources Newsletter

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Natural Resources Newsletter

December 2025

Announcements



Newts on the Move!

When the weather turns wet in the fall, a mass movement starts happening: it's the **annual migration of newts** and other young amphibians that were born in the nearby stormwater ponds. The risk of this journey is high. These juveniles are the "teenagers" of the newt world, having hatched in the ponds earlier this year, and because newts are slightly poisonous, they move slowly and are unafraid of travelling during the day, which makes them easy to spot, but also dangerously exposed to traffic as they slowly march across the paths. This fall journey is only half the story: Older adult newts make a return trip to the ponds in the spring to breed.

Indicators, Adaptations, and How We Can Help

Amphibians are essential for ecosystem health, serving as natural pest controllers (like salamanders reducing mosquitoes) and playing a crucial role in the food web. Even the highly toxic rough-skinned newt contributes, participating in an "Evolutionary Arms Race" with garter snakes that have evolved resistance to their poison. Since the survival of the newt population depends heavily on the juveniles and adults successfully crossing paths during migration, people who share the landscape can help minimize fatalities by being vigilant. If a live newt is spotted, it can be safely moved to the grass on the opposite side, maintaining its original direction of travel (with handwashing afterward). **Simply avoiding stepping on them or running them over is vital, as these small actions can limit human impact and increase the long-term survival chances** of this newt population in an urbanizing environment.

To learn more, visit [March of the Newts | Salish Magazine](#)

Jan Holmes Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award

The **Jan Holmes Island County Coastal Volunteer of the Year Award** is named to honor the memory of Jan Holmes, an Island County resident and WSU Island County Beach Watcher who was an exemplary marine scientist, educator, and champion for stewardship of the marine environment. In recognition of the continuing need for volunteers to carry on this important cause, the Jan Holmes Award is presented annually to three individuals engaged in service, science, or outreach relating to the health of Island County's marine environment and whose work adds to knowledge about and/or protection of county marine waters and coastal resources. **Nominations are open to anyone, regardless of organization or affiliation.** The intent of the award is to **encourage and recognize the achievements of volunteers who work to understand, protect, and restore the marine waters and coastal resources of Island County.**

The award is sponsored by the Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC), Sound Water Stewards (SWS), and Washington State University (WSU) Island County Extension. The three sponsoring organizations will select three winners to receive their award during the opening ceremonies of Sound Waters University, an annual one-day series held on the first Saturday in February. You can submit your nomination by visiting IslandCountyMRC.org or <https://forms.office.com/g/8utNhDRH9H>.

Programmatic Updates & Events



Marine Resource Committee at the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC) Conference

Members from the Island County Marine Resource Committee recently attended the Northwest Straits Commission Annual Conference in La Conner! Joined by their fellow MRC's, the Island County MRC joined the two-day conference to learn more about the work of their fellow counties, hear from a diverse array of speakers and educators, and share about their recent Shoreline Armoring Analysis and Report.

The Island County MRC left the conference feeling motivated, inspired, and looking forward to using what they gained at the conference in the MRCs community projects!

Want to learn more? Check out the **Island County MRC Shoreline Armoring Analysis and Report** here: [071724-shoreline-armoring-survey-and-permit-analysis.pdf](https://www.islandcountywa.gov/71724-shoreline-armoring-survey-and-permit-analysis.pdf)

PIC Community Meetings

- Dec 8th 3:30 - 5:30 PM (Maple Grove)
- Dec 10th 5:00 - 7:00 PM (South Holmes Harbor - Bayview Hall, 5642 Bayview Road, Langley, WA))
- Dec 11th 5:00 - 7:00 PM (Maxwelton - Bayview Hall, 5642 Bayview Road, Langley, WA)

The Island County Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) Program is hosting Community Meetings in each of our three focus watershed areas. We will be presenting an overview of the PIC Program and providing space for community questions and feedback.

**Island County Public Health
Pollution Identification &
Correction Program**

Community Meetings

Join the Island County PIC Program in discussing the important work underway in your community to improve water quality and reopen shellfish harvesting beds.

Maple Grove Watershed
December 8th, 3:30 - 5:30 PM
Camano Convergence Room
121 N East Camano Dr, Camano, WA 98282

South Holmes Harbor Watershed
December 10th, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
Bayview Community Hall
5642 Bayview Rd, Langley, WA 98260

Maxwelton Watershed
December 11th, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
Bayview Community Hall
5642 Bayview Rd, Langley, WA 98260

PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Washington State Department of Health, Puget Sound National Estuary Program, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement PC-01J89801 to the Washington State Department of Health. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

December MRC Meeting

- December 2nd, 2025 - WSU Extension (406 N Main St., Coupeville, WA) or via Zoom

Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is an advisory body to county government established in 1999 and comprised of many community volunteers who represent diverse interests and industries, with the common goal to protect and restore marine resources in the Puget Sound area through scientific monitoring, restoration projects, and community education. They hold monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of every month.

Zoom information is available on the [MRC website](#)

Learn + Act

English Holly control

English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is a popular decoration come the holiday season, but is also a Class C noxious weed. Controlling this species can be very difficult. While using Holly is a wonderful way to celebrate, considering responsible management can make for a safe holiday for the environment as well as yourself.

To find out more including how to control common holly, check out our neighboring county's website here: [Common holly identification and control - Washington](#)

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that channels rain, snowmelt, and spring water into a common water body, such as a stream, lake, or ocean. Mountains and hills create the boundaries of watersheds also known as drainage divides and separate one drainage basin from another.

Watersheds vary in size and Island County is composed of several small drainage basins with local streams that feed into the Puget Sound.

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To see what watershed you live in, go to [ICGeoMap](#) and select the layer Health and DNR, DNR, then Watersheds.

To learn more about watersheds visit:

- <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/watershed.html>
- <https://ecology.wa.gov/ecologys-work-near-you/river-basins-groundwater/what-is-a-watershed-and-why-does-it-matter>

Thank you for your interest in Island County Natural Resources.

For more information, contact Jen Schmitz: J.Schmitz@islandcountywa.gov or 360-914-0841.

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