



Island County

Serving the communities of Camano & Whidbey

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Natural Resources Newsletter

January 2026

Announcements

Island County Conservation Futures Fund Program



The Island County Conservation Futures Fund Program 2026 funding cycle begins January 15th, 2026 for both land acquisition applications as well as maintenance and operations (M&O) applications for stewarding land previously purchased through Conservation Futures. If you have a conservation project in mind, please consider applying and check back in January for the application materials.

Reach out to the CFP Coordinator at cfp@islandcountywa.gov with any questions.

For more information, [please click this link](#).

Salmon Recovery Request for Proposals



Salmon Recovery Request for Proposals for funding in 2026! Please see the Island County Salmon Recovery Funding Board section of the website for more information on the 2026 grant round supported by your local Lead Entity. Lead Entities are local, watershed-based organizations in Washington that solicit, develop, prioritize, and submit habitat protection and restoration projects for funding to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB).

Due date for letters of intent is January 12th!

For more information about the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, [click here](#).

State of the Salmon in Watersheds - [Statewide Habitat Data](#)

Highly invasive European green crabs confirmed in Skagit Bay for the first time



Through a Washington Sea Grant (WSG) and Washington State University Extension [MoltSearch](#) early detection program, a molt (shed exoskeleton) from a highly invasive European green crab was discovered and reported by program volunteers at Similk

Beach, just north of the tip of Whidbey Island in the Skagit Bay. In response, WSG, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community staff conducted a more rigorous trapping project to determine the extent of these crabs in the area, and found several live European green crabs that appear to have been there for at least two years.

This species outcompetes native crabs such as Dungeness, destroys critical eelgrass habitats, and is a major threat to shellfish populations. It's presence in Island County is a huge concern, but the early detection program functioned exactly as it was intended, to alert state level biologists about the issue.

To get involved or keep up with this research, check out the [MoltSearch](#) website and get trained to identify and report European green crabs, as well as other invasive species through the [Washington Invasive Species Council](#).

Programmatic Updates

Marine Resources Committee

The next MRC meeting will be on the 6th of January, 2026.

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.

This is a hybrid meeting; for Zoom info, go to the [Island County Marine Resources Committee webpage](#)

For more information, contact Elise Adams, (360) 678-7892, e.adams@islandcountywa.gov

PIC (Pollution Identification and Correction)

Thank you to all who attended last month's PIC Community Meetings for the Maple Grove, south Holmes Harbor, and Maxwellton watersheds. We enjoyed discussing the PIC program, septic maintenance, and what we all can do to help improve water quality and reopen shellfish harvesting beds. Were you unable to attend? We plan to host additional meetings in the coming months, so stay tuned for more information.

For more information on this program, go to [Island County Pollution Identification and Correction \(PIC\) Program | Island County, WA](#)

Learn + Act



Keeping Safe After the Storm: Flooding and Shellfish

During the December flooding of the Skagit and Snohomish rivers, the Washington Department of Health issued shellfish harvesting closures for some Island County beaches. **When rivers flood, pollutants from land are flushed out into the marine environment.** Since shellfish are filter feeders, they ingest these pollutants and

temporarily become unsafe to eat. As the flooding recedes and water quality improves, pollutant levels in shellfish decrease and they become safe to harvest again.

Learn more about shellfish safety: <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/shellfish/recreational-shellfish>

The Wonderful World of Winter Wetlands



Winter is the rainy season here in the Pacific Northwest and wetlands play a vital role in reducing the impact of storm surges along the coast and by helping slow the flow of flood and stormwater runoff. Wetlands not only absorb these seasonal waters, but they also help to purify polluted runoff that can contain fertilizers, pesticides, and grease and oil from vehicles. Water purification is particularly important in Island County because we are entirely groundwater dependent. Wetlands help to recharge our aquifers with clean water for Island County residents. Clean water also helps in maintaining the health of salmon streams, estuaries, and the Puget Sound.

Winter Wetland Vegetation

Some wetland vegetation may seem like it has died off in the winter, but a lot of wetland plants go dormant and are still alive just below the surface. Western skunk cabbage grows from rhizomes (modified underground stems) a foot or more down in the soil and remain alive in the cool but not frozen soil throughout the winter. They become active again in early spring, producing a flowering stock with a bright yellow hooded bract, letting you know spring is just around the corner!



Migratory Waterfowl Over Winter in Island County Wetlands

Millions of birds migrate annually on a route called the Pacific Flyway. The Pacific Flyway extends from Alaska in the north to Patagonia in South America. Wetlands are of high value to numerous species of these birds, especially to migratory waterbirds in the winter months. November to mid-March is the peak season for winter birding in the Northwest region of Washington, starting in November with the return of migratory waterfowl. Island County wetlands provide critical habitat for bird species year-round but are of particular importance for vulnerable species in the winter.

A 1986 Washington Department of Game report concluded that Deer Lagoon is the single most important site on Whidbey Island in terms of use and importance to waterfowl. Concentrations of ducks, geese, and swans far exceed anything else found on the island. A 1989 University of Puget Sound report cited over 170 bird species: 31 species of waterfowl, 21 shorebird species, five species of grebes, and 62 songbird species, as well as Bald Eagle and Osprey." ([ArcGIS Dashboards, 2025](#))

On Camano Island, marshes, mudflats, and tidal channels of Port Susan Bay are home to the wintering ground for large flocks of shorebirds and waterfowl. The Port Susan Bay Preserve is located just off Camano Island and is a wonderful place to view birds that utilize the tidally influenced marshes and mudflats.

- Read more about this area at [Port Susan Bay | The Nature Conservancy in Washington](#).
- To learn about more great local birding spots, check out [Whidbey Audubon Society's Guide to 16 Special Spots Birding Whidbey Island](#)
- Find out more about vulnerable birds that nest or spend the winter in our area at [How Climate Change Will Affect Birds in Washington | Audubon](#)

King Tides and Shorelines



King Tides are the highest astronomical tides of the year and are coming soon! These natural events can bring water levels several feet higher than normal, sometimes causing temporary flooding or erosion, especially when combined with winter storms.

If you live along the Island County shoreline, now is the perfect time to prepare your property and minimize potential risk!

Three Key Steps to Prepare for King Tides:

- **Secure Your Outdoors:** Move or tie down anything that could float away, such as kayaks, patio furniture, garbage cans, and loose debris. A few feet of high water can easily carry away unsecured items.
- **Inspect and Clear Drainage:** Make sure all gutters, downspouts, ditches, and storm drains are clear of leaves and sediment. Allowing rainwater to escape quickly is critical when tide levels are already high.
- **Document and Learn:** Use the King Tides as a valuable opportunity! Snap photos of how the water approaches your property and shoreline. This helps us and you understand future sea level rise projections. You can even submit your photos to the [MyCoast App](#).

Want expert advice on protecting your home? If you are interested in exploring natural alternatives to hard armoring sign up for a free non-regulatory Shore Friendly site visit today! <https://www.islandcountywa.gov/365/Shore-Friendly-Program>

Stay informed and prepare your property now to help keep your home and family safe this winter!

Finally - A little winter tip!

With so much rain this time of year, it's the perfect time to do a quick walk-through of your property. Keep an eye out for any storm or waste water drainage issues while they're easy to spot. Catching them now can save a lot of trouble later!

SHORE FRIENDLY

5 WINTER TIPS FOR YOUR SHORELINE PROPERTY

- 01 Check for cracked or damaged drainage pipes which can increase erosion.
- 02 See if water seepage is visible on the exposed bluff face.
- 03 Inspect drainage systems for cloggs from sediment or debris.
- 04 Check for pools of standing water in low lying areas.
- 05 Watch for cracking or undercutting on your bluff which can be a sign of erosion.

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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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