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Oak Harbor, WA

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RELAY FOR LIFE OF WHIDBEY ISLAND • MAY 31-JUNE 1, 2019 • OAK HARBOR, WA

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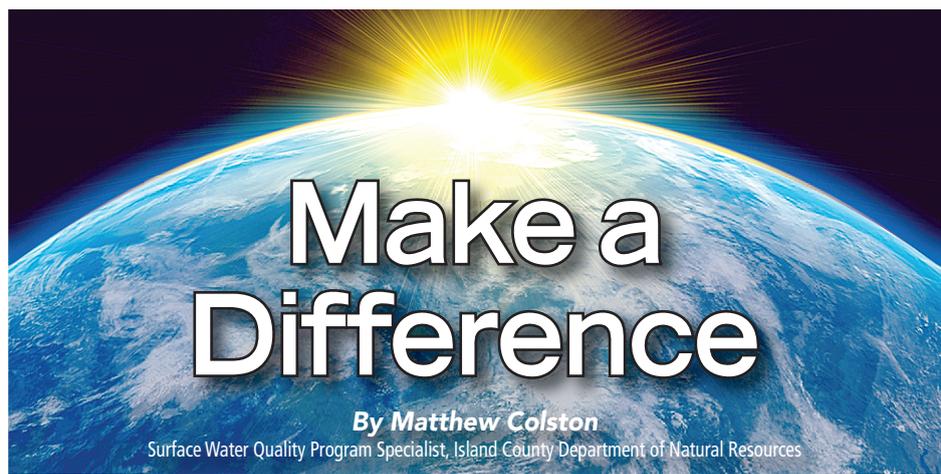
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for yourself what
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Relay Rally:
April 10, 7-8pm
Oak Harbor Elks Lodge

relaywhidbey@gmail.com
RelayForLife.org/whidbeyislandwa
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THERE IS NO FINISH LINE UNTIL WE FIND A CURE.



Make a Difference

By Matthew Colston

Surface Water Quality Program Specialist, Island County Department of Natural Resources

KEEPING WHIDBEY'S WATER CLEAN – WHAT WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

When my family moved from Whidbey Island to Arizona, it was a complete change in everything I knew. The contrast of a heat-blasted landscape opposed to a temperate rainforest was not lost on me, even as a child. The moment I stepped out of the car, I began counting the days until I returned home to Washington State. One thing western Washington has in abundance that Arizona didn't have is water. In Arizona, surface water was primarily used for agriculture. Creeks were dry throughout the year, except irrigation ditches. Needless to say, the water was polluted and was not safe for human contact by the time it reached Yuma. This experience gave me a deep appreciation for the clean rivers of Washington State. The awareness of the contrast between Arizona's and Washington's water quality is one of the reasons I began working in environmental protection.

Whidbey Island is a unique place. All activities on the island have the potential to impact the waters of Puget Sound. Water quality and temperature have huge effects on salmon and forage fish populations. With a few changes in our own daily lives, we can greatly reduce those inputs of pollution and protect our surrounding waters, which we all share.

Stormwater runoff occurs when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over the ground. Impervious surfaces like driveways, sidewalks and streets prevent stormwater from naturally soaking into the ground. Stormwater can pick up debris, chemicals, dirt and other pollutants, and flow into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland or coastal water. Unlike the gray water from our home water fixtures, like our faucets, toilets, showers, clothes and dish washers that is dispensed into septic tanks or community sewer systems where it is then treated, anything that enters a stormwater sewer system is discharged untreated and uncleaned into the waters that we use for swimming and fishing. Dirt, oil, and debris that collect in parking lots and paved areas can be washed into the storm sewer system and eventually enter Puget Sound. Often, pollution in Island County watersheds does not come from one significant source, but rather from many smaller sources. Some potential sources of pollution include discharges from poorly functioning septic systems, runoff from land treated with fertilizers and weed control substances, runoff from properties with improperly stored or applied manure, stormwater runoff resulting from rooftops, paved streets and parking lots that pick up an array of compounds – some harmful to aquatic plants and animals – along its way, as well as pet waste and natural decay of vegetation, like leaves from trees.

Water temperature is critical for supporting the health of salmon species and forage fish. Keeping water temperature low ensures fish eggs' survival and also prevents the conditions for algal blooms. There are several tips property owners can do that will help to keep water temperatures cool and reduce the potential impacts of stormwater runoff from their properties.

A great way to reduce water temperature and help with the filtering of stormwater is to plant woody hedges and trees to shade the water as it goes down the way, espe-

cially if you have a stream or creek flowing through your property or nearby. The thick shrubbery and trees also filter any contaminants or excess nutrients that might find their way into the water. For a list of native plant resources, consider checking out the Whidbey Island Conservation District's Backyards & Habitat page at www.whidbeycd.org/backyards-habitat/

With planting season around the corner, consider properly storing your fertilizers and gardening chemicals (i.e. pesticides) where they won't get into surface water. Increased nutrient (carbon dioxide, phosphorus, and nitrogen) input changes temperature and can lead to dangerous algal blooms that can cause massive die off of fish populations. Fertilizer mixed into stormwater and irrigation runoff from gardens, grass and golf courses eventually flows down the watershed into Puget Sound.

Consider avoiding the use of pesticides and fertilizers during the rainy season (October – April). Checking with the forecast and planning to fertilize when there is a 24-hour break in rain can prevent harmful nutrients washing into Puget Sound. For more information about planting season, your garden or farm, and sustainable practices, I recommend you talk with the great folks at the Whidbey Island Conservation District and visit their website: www.whidbeycd.org.

Consider regularly inspecting your onsite septic system to ensure it is functioning as designed. We live on a relatively rural island, which means that a large percentage of our population utilizes onsite septic systems. Like your car, a septic system requires regular inspection to ensure it is operating properly. Small problems with the system can cause larger, more expensive problems over time. Finding these small problems early not only protects public health and the natural environment, it protects your pocketbook! Keep up with your maintenance – protect your investment so it does not cause a problem and potentially "drain your wallet." If you have any questions about your onsite septic system, please contact Island County Public Health to learn about your particular parcel: www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/EH/Pages/Home.aspx.

We are the stewards of the land and of the oceans. We can't stop everything that goes out into the Puget Sound, but each one of us can take steps to prevent water quality impairment and work together to keep Puget Sound healthy.



Thank you for reading! Please recycle the Whidbey Weekly when you are finished with it.

