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<https://www.sanjuancountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/31654/250109-Wildland-Fire-Awareness-ESP>

January 13, 2025

## **Reflecting on wildfire risk in the islands in the wake of the devastating Southern California fires**

Fellow Islanders,

The news of the catastrophic fires near Los Angeles is heart-wrenching. As we witness from afar the magnitude of the loss, the relentless winds, and the extreme fire behavior, it prompts us to revisit our community's vulnerability to fire and what we can do to prepare.

The most important things to know are:

1. **Our wildfire risk in the islands is significantly less than Southern California, Maui, Eastern Washington, and many other places that have experienced major fires in recent years.** Even during summer, our high relative humidities keep risk and spread rates comparatively low in the islands. Visit [www.wildfirerisk.org](http://www.wildfirerisk.org) to learn more.
2. That said, fire is still a risk. Every summer, we experience a relatively narrow weather window when it is dry enough for a fire to ignite and spread. It is even more rare, every 20 years or so, that a time of actual extreme fire danger could occur. **Preparing your home and the immediate area around your home is the single most important thing you can do.** The best place to start is to go to <https://wildfireready.dnr.wa.gov/> and request a home inspection. These are FREE, completed by your island fire department or the San Juan Islands Conservation District, and they help to identify and address potential hazards.
3. Managing our forests and landscapes to minimize fire risk is also important, but **fire ecology here is much different than in drier climates.** It's important to recognize that our native understory vegetation can help retain moisture in the summer and reduce fire spread and severity. Minimizing risk is not as simple as clearing brush and thinning forests, and some well-intentioned efforts may lead to an increase of invasive weeds and/or drier site conditions. Forest property owners are encouraged to visit <https://www.sanjuanislandscd.org/forest-stewardship> for help and info. For those who

maintain pasture or fields (which can burn easily anytime during the summer), keeping grass mowed and also cleared from around structures is vital during drier months.

- 4. EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION DURING TIMES OF HIGH FIRE DANGER.** Preventing ignitions is a critical component of reducing threat in the islands. Refrain from operating tools with metal blades, building campfires, lighting fireworks, and engaging in other risky behaviors during fire season. Pay attention to summertime fire danger on the San Juan County Fire Marshal's website at <https://www.sanjuancountywa.gov/1088/Fire-Marshal>. The vast majority of wildfires in the islands are started by island residents.

Want to learn more: take a look at these frequently asked questions from 2022 (<https://www.sanjuancountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/28732/230822-Wildland-Fire-Risk>), or contact any of us listed below.

Sincerely,

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