



SAN JUAN COUNTY

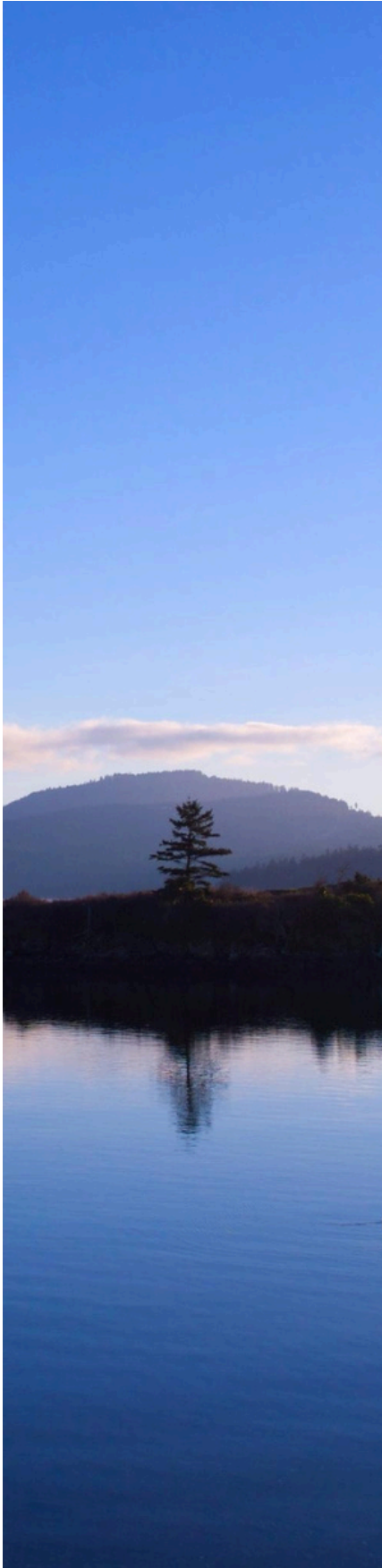
2025

YEAR-IN-REVIEW

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY
SAN JUAN COUNTY MANAGER'S OFFICE

Key accomplishments,
inspiring stories, and the
milestones that shaped our
work and community impact.

From innovative projects to
everyday wins, this report
showcases the dedication of
our staff and the progress
we've made together.



WELCOME MESSAGE

As we close out another year, let's take a moment to reflect on the progress, resilience, and collaboration that defined 2025. This year was marked by bold initiatives, strategic work and planning, and a shared commitment to building a stronger, more connected future for our community.

One of our most significant milestones was the successful adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update—a framework that will guide our growth and development for years to come. This achievement reflects countless hours of community engagement, thoughtful analysis, and cross-departmental coordination, ensuring that our future remains inclusive, sustainable, and forward-thinking.

Over the summer, the County's work was on display as we launched a Marine Transportation Pilot Project for ten weeks, as well as completed two large-scale capital projects on Bailer Hill Road and at the Bayhead Creek Culvert. These projects reinforced our public infrastructure, making it safer for generations to come.

This year also brought its share of difficult conversations and tough choices as we worked diligently to balance the biennial budget. In the face of rising inflation, shifting economic conditions, and reductions in external funding, County leadership was tasked with making decisions that were financially sound and also focused on mitigating human impact. These were not easy choices—each one required weighing community needs, long-term priorities, and the realities of limited resources.

As I look ahead, I remain encouraged by what we've accomplished and the opportunities that lie before us. Thank you for being part of this journey—and here's to an even better 2026.

JESSICA HUDSON
County Manager

Timeline

January

Councilmember Kari McVeigh assumes the role of Council Chair for 2025.



March

Town & County Councils discuss affordable housing, Comp Plan Updates, and more at joint meeting.

May

San Juan County's Public Works announces schedule to chip seal nearly 11 miles of roads.

July

San Juan County rejoins the Northwest Clean Air Agency to better monitor air quality, collect local data, & provide resources.

County Council meets with Governor Bob Ferguson to address questions about Washington State Ferry service in the San Juan Islands.

September

Conservation Land Bank acquires 225-acre parcel on Blakely Island.

County hosts ribbon cutting at new offices on Fern Street, Orcas Island.



November

County Council holds Public Hearing on the 2025 Comp Plan Update.

February

County Communications launches new newsletters & website updates to prioritize accessibility & connectivity.



April

County Council appoints Dr. Amy Harley as the new local Health Officer.

Public Works begins Douglas/Bailer Hill Rd improvement project to address sight lines, flooding, and congestion.

June

County concludes 10-week pilot project of Marine Transportation Services.



August

The County Fair, themed 'Into the Future, True to our Roots' welcomes over 8,012 people over four days for a total of 16,468 visits!

County awards \$815,000 in Public Facilities Assistance Funding to local organizations.

October

Fall 2025 Great Islands Clean-Up Collects Over 1,300lbs of litter across the county.

County Council engages in budget discussions.



December

Council adopts the 2026-27 biennial budget and the 2025 Comp Plan Update.

County publishes final 32HWW report.

Council Corner

Message from the Chair

"2025 has been a year of thoughtful planning and strategic decision-making as we implemented large projects like the Marine Transportation Services Pilot Project, navigated balancing the budget in the face of inflation and funding cuts, and adopted the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.

I'm proud of our continued efforts to build more affordable housing units and to find efficiencies for providing health and other essential government services.

This important work is the culmination of staff time, community volunteers, partner organizations, and countless others who dedicate their service to the islands. For that, I am so grateful and excited to continue affecting change together."

- Kari McVeigh, Council Chair, District 1



Notable ordinances, resolutions, & initiatives

- Council appointed a new **County Coroner** and **Public Health Officer**.
- Council adopted an updated **interlocal agreement** with the Lopez Solid Waste Disposal District.
- Council **awarded funding** to local organizations via the Public Facilities Financing Assistance Program, the Historic Preservation Grant, and the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee.
- Council rep participated in a **cross-border event** to strengthen collaboration across the Salish Sea.
- Council approved the **Development Agreement** for the Argyle Project for affordable housing.
- Council adopted the **2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update**.

Marine Transportation Pilot Project

In the winter of 2024/25, County staff developed Requests for Proposals for three transportation services as outlined the Council's initial funding ask to the State. Council reviewed the proposals, selected operators, and executed the contracts in the spring. Services became available the week of April 14, 2025 and ran through June 30, 2025.

Daily Passenger Service:

Available for 74 days & completed 148 round-trips that transported 2,399 passengers.

Emergency Interisland Service:

Activated for 9 days & completed 12 round-trips that transported 127 passengers.

Emergency Barge Service: Was not activated.

SAN JUAN COUNTY'S MARINE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

San Juan County is providing marine transportation services throughout the islands as part of a **pilot project available through June 30, 2025**. See what option is right for you:

- ✓ Available at no cost
- ✓ Family & pet friendly
- ✓ Book online

DAILY PASSENGER SERVICE TO ANACORTES
Available 7 days per week regardless of WSF ferry cancellations/delays




SAN JUAN SAFARIS
360-378-1323

EMERGENCY INTERISLAND PASSENGER SERVICE
Available during WSF ferry cancellations/delays




OUTER ISLAND EXCURSIONS
360-376-3711

EMERGENCY BARGE SERVICE
Available during WSF ferry cancellations for essential service providers




PINTAIL MARINE
360-317-8532

Learn more: <https://engage.sanjuancountywa.gov/san-juan-county-emergency-transportation-services>

Adopting a New Budget



The County Council spent the fall developing a new, balanced budget for 2026.

Throughout the fall of 2025, the County worked to reduce the originally projected \$6.6M deficit in the 2026–27 status quo biennial budget. The deficit could have been even larger – up to \$10M if all new spending had been approved.

After robust deliberation and a series of strategic cuts, the deficit was reduced to \$1.5M. At that point, Council determined that focusing on a one-year budget for 2026 would allow the organization to maintain some additional personnel and services while allowing more time to address changes for 2027 and beyond.

The adopted budget included cuts to staffing and other reductions across department operating expenses. Moving forward, the Council will engage in conversations about restructuring County services and departments, as well as evaluating other potential revenue changes.

“We’re putting together a stopgap budget to help manage our current financial situation,” said Council Chair McVeigh. “Our next task is to engage in more strategic, long-term conversations about how we might realign our finances and shape the impact these financial constraints have on our staffing and levels of service.”

VIEW THE BUDGET ONLINE

Visit the [Auditor’s Office website](#) to view the County budget, quarterly reports, and other budget information.

Managing Fiscal Health Alongside Mandated Services

San Juan County will continue to seek ways to manage the budget into the future that prioritize mandatory and essential functions, while not disproportionately decreasing services to the community.

The Council will also continue to discuss mandated and discretionary programs, possible changes to the level of County services, and other potential revenue options in the coming years.

The budget problems are not unique to San Juan County; many other jurisdictions across the state face similar budget issues. Challenges include:

- **Increased operating costs:** the cost of ongoing operations, specifically insurance costs, staffing, and inflation, has risen steadily over time.
- **Funding cuts from the federal and state governments:** the loss of several key operating grants, including state cuts to health care funding, is adding pressure to the County’s bottom line and putting existing services at risk.
- **Stagnated revenues:** property taxes, the County’s largest general fund source, are limited by the state to an increase of just 1% per year – far behind the rate of inflation. In addition, the County has not raised the levy since 2020.
- **New state and federal mandates on County services:** new required law and justice services did not come with funding, forcing the County to reallocate existing dollars to provide these new services.

County Communications

Listening to Community Feedback

This year, the County acted on feedback from its [2024 Communications Survey](#) that revealed how residents want to receive news and information. As a result, **County communications launched a series of informational newsletters, increased news flash subscribers, and added accessibility updates to the website.**

233

PRESS RELEASES

Sent to approximately 690 subscribers and published regularly in local media outlets

6 DIFFERENT NEWSLETTERS

The County distributes an all-inclusive, quarterly newsletter in addition to the five different topics published by specific departments. Subscribers vary by topic.

Newsletters

This year, the County **started a series of new e-newsletters that prioritize access to popular topics.** Islanders can subscribe to the 'County Connection' – a quarterly newsletter that highlights current and upcoming projects related to environmental programs, affordable housing, health services, Council news, and taxes/the budget, among others.

In addition to the general newsletter, several departments maintain program-specific newsletters.

You can sign up for these newsletters on the County's website:
<https://www.sanjuancountywa.gov/2180/Stay-Informed>

Website Accessibility

This year brought new features, buttons, and links to popular topics on the County website. Now, a new '[Stay Informed](#)' banner connects users to newsletters and news flashes, a comprehensive news section features the latest updates, a 'County Resources' section features a **searchable list of County meetings and agendas**, and more.

Helpful icons, including a **chatbot for answering questions** and a personalization tool for adjusting the website's fonts and colors to fit accessibility needs, were also added in 2025.

Language Access Plan

To strengthen communication and remove barriers to access, the County is finalizing a comprehensive Language Access Plan that will **make important resources more accessible** to residents who speak languages other than English. This effort reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that language is not an obstacle to receiving essential services or participating fully in County programs.

Initiative Spotlight

Ferry Advocacy

The County invested significant time in advocating for improvements to the Washington State Ferry (WSF) system. These efforts included:

- Maintaining a **resident-focused informational page** on the 'Engage' platform to assist locals in providing feedback, understanding the latest news, and more.
- Gathering survey data from locals regarding **Orcas and Lopez terminal closures in 2027**.
- Launched a **Marine Transportation Pilot Project** using funding from the 2024 'executive relief' request. As part of the project, the County collected regular feedback and provided updates to state and local stakeholders.
- Council **met with Governor Bob Ferguson** during an Orcas Community Meeting to discuss ferry service in the islands.

Climate Resiliency

With the development of a new **Climate Element** for the Comprehensive Plan and multiple **Sea Level Rise community workshops**, the County is engaging in climate resilience work. Learn more on page 9.

32-Hour Work Week

This year, the County published its final report on the impacts of the 32HWW. Data across two years of shows **\$1.9M in savings to the 2024/25 budgets, a 216% increase in job applications, and 18% less sick time used by employees**, among other data.

With this final report, the County affirms the 32HWW as the new standard for operations. We are concluding formal reporting and transitioning into a phase of thoughtful, ongoing management.

Affordable Housing

This year, four new affordable housing projects completed construction, thanks in part to funding from the County's Home Fund, which **helped 32 households secure affordable homes in the islands**.

\$6 MILLION

in funding from the County's Home Fund to support projects on Lopez and Orcas Islands.

\$967k

in Connecting Housing to Infrastructure Program (CHIP) Grants for projects on Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Islands.

San Juan County's **Home Fund is now in its seventh year of existence** since voters approved it back in 2018. This program contributes funding towards the creation and preservation of affordable housing funded by a Real Estate Excise tax (REET), and a 1/10th of 1% sales tax.



Health & Community Services

This year, HCS published its first **Youth Community Health Assessment Report** in February. This report examines the ways various organizations, schools, healthcare providers, health systems, and policies contribute to the health of our youth. The top needs identified were mental health education and support, reproductive health education, and better technology/ social media management.

**~930
VACCINES**

administered by HCS staff, including COVID, flu, and others

**+37,000
MEALS**

produced by the Senior Nutrition Program serving almost 750 seniors

**\$2
MILLION**

in grant funds collected to build a space to host Lopez Island's food resources



- The **Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program** expanded preschool access for 25 students on SJI & hired a bilingual family support person.
- HCS staff made 6,000 contacts with over 1200 individuals in the **senior services program** to help provide access to services, information, and assistance.
- **The transportation voucher program** supported 316 people's access to ferry fares (~689 trips) and taxi rides (~30 trips).
- HCS hosted **112 dental clinics** on Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Islands, treating 577 patients and providing about \$445k worth of dental care.
- **Growing Families** staff served over 100 families that were pregnant or had children under 2 years old by providing resources such as program information and newborn bags full of essentials.

Public Works

The department completed annual chip seal and roadway striping to provide for the continued safety of island roads. Public Works also **hosted several community meetings** on various islands to discuss potential projects, including on Shaw and Decatur Islands.

Bailer Hill Road Improvement Project

The Public Works Department undertook the Bailer Hill Improvement Project in an effort to **address flooding across the road, sightlines, and congestion** along the corridor.

The project, funded by the County Road Administration Board (CRAB) and the SJC Roads Fund **raised the elevation and realigned Bailer Hill Rd**, eliminated horizontal and vertical sight distance issues by **smoothing peaks and valleys**, and added paved, four-foot shoulders on both sides of the road to **provide safety accommodations for bicycle and pedestrian traffic**.



Financial Services

Assessor's Office

The County's cartographer led the seamless transition to an **updated GIS mapping system** for managing property lines. The office unveiled a new **interactive sales information link**, accessible on the website, to help taxpayers find market sales for value appeals.

Auditor's Office

The office reports progress with cross-training employees, which frees up time for staff to complete the **financial management software transition**. Training for inter-departmental partners continues as new staff are hired and as systems and procedures change.

Treasurer's Office

This year, the office initiated a lease for a **new postage meter**, which helped smooth operations. The team also transferred 19,719 Real Estate Excise Tax Affidavits (from 2009-2018) to the State Archives.

Community Development

In early 2025, interim leadership worked to standardize reporting metrics for outstanding permits, average review time, and other key measures of process, timing, and efficiency.

232

BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED

231

LAND USE PERMITS ISSUED

337

MECHANICAL PERMITS ISSUED

Long-Range Planning

The 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update

After two years of updating information and analyses, drafting policy revisions, gathering community input, and working with the Planning Commission and County Council, **the Comp Plan was officially adopted on December 9.**

Other Long-Range Planning

- **Critical Areas Ordinance:** Staff worked to update the document, completing a Best Available Science review, a Gap Analysis, and a public participation plan.
- **Shoreline Master Program:** The County used a grant from the Department of Ecology to create a Shoreline Master Program user guide. The process included community meetings and surveys.
- **Code Revisions:** Staff continue efforts to clarify land use tables and revise redundant and contradictory language in the County code.
- **Vacation Rental Compliance:** DCD launched an updated vacation rental certificate of compliance process, outlined on the website.



Environmental Stewardship



Bayhead Creek Culvert Replacement

The department led the successful replacement of the Bayhead Creek culvert under Killebrew Lake Road. In response to community feedback, **the construction window was shortened and the full road closure only lasted seven days.**

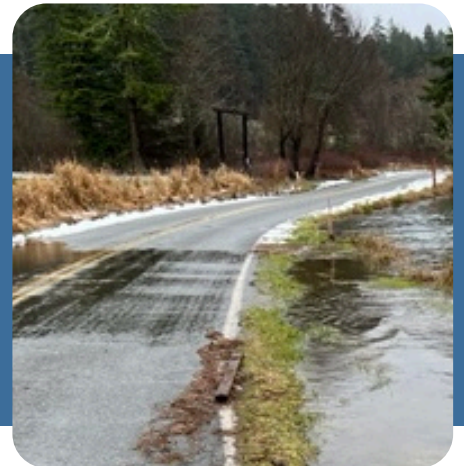
Now, a 12-foot-wide box culvert specially designed to handle storm water surges and improve fish passage will serve the area for years to come.



Climate Element for the Comprehensive Plan

The County adopted a **Climate Element as part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update** to address climate change. The document provides a long-term vision and strategies for preparing our community for current and future climate impacts.

20
OUTREACH
EVENTS
to share new whale distance regulations



Sea Level Rise Community Workshops

The department hosted a series of workshops dedicated to **planning for sea level rise in the islands.** Provided in-person and online, the workshops focused on specific island roads and infrastructure that are at risk due to rising tides and eroding banks.

16
DERELICT
VESSELS
removed from County waters

123
SITES
SAMPLED
for salmonid DNA research

Noxious Weeds

The San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Board marked its 22nd year of funding as a taxing district and its 27th year of operation.

In addition to helping dozens of property owners throughout the County, staff assisted State Parks, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Land Bank, Public Works, Port of Friday Harbor, OPALCO, and Environmental Stewardship with noxious weed services, by controlling Himalayan blackberry, tansy ragwort, English holly, common teasel, poison hemlock, English hawthorn, Italian arum, non-native thistles, shiny geranium, and other non-native invasive weeds on these lands.



1500
CONTACTS
with locals about noxious weed removal services & strategies

\$15k
for free noxious weed disposal services

\$72k
in WA State Dept. of Ecology grants for waterfoil control

Parks, Recreation, & Fair

The department completed a wide range of major repairs, renovations, and capital projects. **Four buildings were painted, three building roofs were replaced, and two new vault toilets were installed.** Additionally, **beach access stairs were repaired** at Blackie Brady and San Juan County Park, and the Eastsound Village Green restrooms saw new renovations.

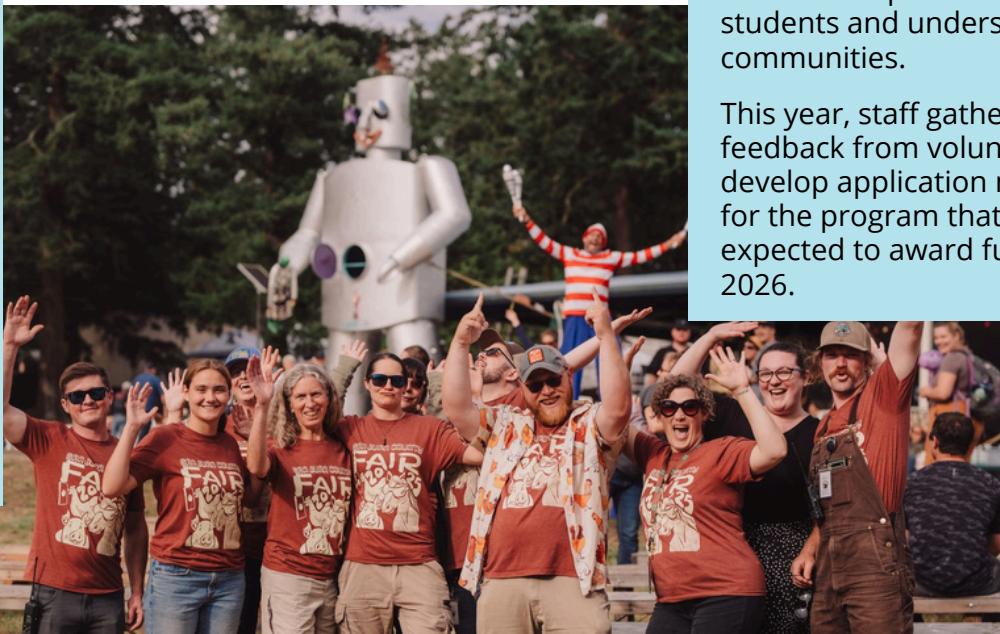
Cultural Access Program

The new Cultural Access tax took effect April 1, 2025 and is projected to raise about \$800k annually to **support access to cultural, historical, art, and scientific experiences for residents** - particularly students and underserved communities.

This year, staff gathered feedback from volunteers to develop application materials for the program that is expected to award funding in 2026.

County Fair

This year, the Fair welcomed approximately 8,012 people over four days for a total of 16,468 visits! This year, the Fair also introduced a new offering to help make attendees feel more welcome: a **“sensory-friendly” morning.**



Conservation Land Bank

This year, the Land Bank opened a **new trail to Watmough Head on Lopez Island** and acquired two new shoreline properties - one on Orcas and another on Blakely Island. The program also celebrated a first on Turtleback Mountain Preserve: a successful Golden eagle nest!



Anniversaries

- **One-year** anniversary of the Overmarsh Farm Project, which has engaged 34 participants caring for 24 plots in cultivation.
- **Ten-year** anniversary of the Salish Seeds Project.
- **Thirty-five-year** anniversary of the Land Bank’s inception!

84
EVENTS

44
PARTNERS

20,500
TREES, SHRUBS & PLUGS PLANTED

The Land Bank acquired a 23.8-acre parcel on Orcas Island. The property lies within a **high-priority area for salmon recovery**, hosts multiple forest species including yew and cedar, and **adds another public access point** to saltwater.

The department completed **ten stewardship projects**, including four to improve visitor access and six to restore local habitat.



The Courts

Carrying on Traditions

This year, the Courts hosted the **second annual 'Law Day' celebration** in May.

Approximately 65 seventh-grade students from Friday Harbor and Orcas Island visited the courthouse and participated in activities including a mock trial, career panel, civics lessons, games, and a tour.

- ✓ **District Court**
Staff concluded the Sequential Intercept Mapping Pilot program in 2025. This program seeks to **connect criminal court defendants with a care network** that will help them access healthcare, substance use disorder treatment, food assistance, and more.

District Court was able to allocate funds towards that goal through community partners, including Get Help WA, the Orcas Hospital District, and emergency medical services on Lopez, and Orcas and San Juan Island.
- ✓ **Superior Court**
Superior Court collaborated with District Court to create an attorney list and related forms for the appointment of attorneys to indigent petitioners in civil protection order cases where the opposing party is represented by an attorney. Appointment of counsel to petitioners under these circumstances, where the person from whom they are seeking protection has an attorney, **helps support access to justice in these particularly sensitive cases.**
- ✓ **Clerk's Office**
This year, the Clerk's office has been busy training new staff. **All staff are now authorized US Passport agents**, which enabled the team to hold a passport fair on Orcas. The event was well attended and received. Future passport fairs are being planned in the new year.
- ✓ **Superior Court Services**
Superior Court Services successfully **implemented targeted case management** within the newly launched Family Treatment Court. **This program has already led to the reunification of families.** This marks a meaningful step forward in supporting recovery, stability, and long-term well-being for children and their families.
- ✓ **Legal Services**
The Prosecuting Attorney's Office provided counsel and training to County staff and resolved a number of criminal cases. The Public Defender's Office experienced turnover in 2025, yet continued to defend people's constitutional rights at trial. A new Public Defender will join the County in 2026.

Public Safety & Emergency Response



Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office worked on **building the team in 2025**. The office hired a new dispatcher, a corrections/courthouse security officer, and two new deputies for Orcas Island.

Sheriff's Office staff **provided crime prevention training** to senior citizens on Shaw Island and visited Spring Street International School to engage in a series of presentations for students.

The Sheriff's Office team continues to sharpen its skills. A deputy and sergeant completed **hostage negotiator training**, and both detectives attended the ICAC internet crimes against children and WA Homicide Investigators Association training conferences.

Emergency Management

Island-Wide Trainings

More than 60 volunteers and professional staff from a wide variety of organizations (including SJC) converged in Friday Harbor for a two-day oil spill drill. Later in 2025, the County's Emergency Management and Derelict Vessel Program staff, along with Councilmember Paulsen, teamed up with responders from Orcas Island Fire & Rescue, the Islands' Oil Spill Association, and the Whale Museum to participate in another major spill response exercise.

Regional Coordination

Emergency Management staff traveled to Port Angeles to meet with other responders from across the region to brush up on coordination protocols and response strategies.



THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO MADE 2025 A WONDERFUL YEAR!



County staff at picnic



Noxious Weed volunteer event



Share the Table Project, HCS, WSU & SJI Food Bank



Noxious Weed staff



County staff at an Emergency training



Fun at the Fair!



HCS staff Mark Tompkins, Melinda Hallen & Kristen Rezabek at the Lucj B Wellness Van Fair booth



Staff photo at the Employee Appreciation Party



Public Works at the Employee Appreciation Party