SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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This issue of Shore Stewards News was prepared by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, Island County.

Five Easy Steps to a Cleaner Puget Sound

Small actions by each of us can make big changes in the health of Puget Sound. We would all love to help improve the health of our marine waters by installing rain gardens, or replacing our lawns with native plants and vegetation. And many of us would like to remove our bulkheads and install soft-shore armoring to replicate a more natural beach habitat. But that is not always possible, due to tight budgets and time constraints. There are a lot of small steps each of us can take on a daily basis, however, that can cumulatively make a big difference in the health of our Sound, and can be done quickly and economically. This newsletter will suggest five of those steps that you can take beginning this spring and summer, some of which can be accomplished as soon as this weekend.

Where Does Your Rainwater Go?

You may have cleaned your gutters this past summer, in preparation for the fall and winter rains. But when was the last time you checked to see where your roof runoff drained to once it left your downspouts? For many of us, the downspout runoff is diverted away from our foundations by splashblocks, with the water draining into our yard. If you have a septic system, however, this can be a problem. The drain field will not work well if it is oversaturated with surface water, so be certain that it is not in the path of your downspout runoff. By simply moving the splash blocks so that they do not divert the water over the drain field, you can help ensure your septic system is functioning property, and that any pollution from an oversaturated drain field does not run off into the Sound.

If you live on a bluff, you should also make sure that your roof runoff from the splashblocks is not being diverted towards the bluff face. Even if it soaks into the soils before reaching the edge of the bluff, the extra weight of saturated soils near the bluff can cause erosion or slide problems. If you have runoff being diverted to a tightline that runs over the bluff and channels the water to the beach, be sure that you check the tightline at least twice a year, at the beginning of fall and the end of winter, to make sure that it has not had any damage from winter storms or slides. Often this can occur without your knowledge, resulting in severe damage to your bluff. The photo at right, taken on Camano Island, shows how a tree ripped away an adjacent tightline as it fell. This allowed the runoff to drain onto the bluff face, causing the slide damage shown near top of photo. You can prevent this from happening by simply checking for damage to your tightline on a periodic basis.

Clean Car Choices

When a car is washed on pavement, whether it is your driveway or at a fundraiser being held in a parking lot, all of the detergents, automotive fluids, heavy metals from brake pad dust, and road grime flow into a storm drain and eventually ends up in Puget Sound, harming marine life. Commercial car washes, on the other hand, have filtration systems that clean and recirculate the water, making them the preferable fish-friendly choice when your car needs washing. If you prefer to wash the car yourself, you should do so over the lawn or other pervious surface, rather than in the driveway.

Septic / Sewer Suggestions

Several past issues of the newsletter have focused on septic system information, the latest one in 2010: http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2010/Sept2010Newsletter.pdf

A septic system is dependent on millions of naturally occurring bacteria throughout the system in order to operate properly. Daily, we add many beneficial bacteria to our septic systems; bacteria typically found in wastewater, our bodies, and other waste materials we dispose of. The use of "antibacterial," "disinfectant," or "sanitizing" products in the home can destroy both good and bad bacteria in septic treatment systems. Excessive use of these products in the home can cause significant and even total destruction of the bacteria population. Normally, the use of any single product or single application will not cause major problems. However, the cumulative effect of using too many such products and excessive application may cause serious problems and damage to the septic system. The list of potentially damaging products include sink/counter top cleaners; tub, tile and shower cleaners; drain cleaners; toilet bowl cleaners; laundry bleach products; and many industrial strength cleaners

Again, you don't have to drastically change your practices to make a difference. One change you can do right away is to not use liquid hand soaps that have "anti-bacterial" on the label. Washing your hands with bar soap and warm water should be just as good in killing most of the bacteria, but if you prefer liquid hand soaps, there are products on the market that do not kill the bacteria in your septic tank. Ivory is just one brand that does not add anti-bacterial ingredients, yet does a fine job of cleaning your hands. Another quick step is to not use "every flush" toilet cleaners, typically placed in your tank or below the bowl rim, and which add bacteria-killing chemicals to your septic tank every time you use the toilet. Cleaning your toilet only when needed takes a little more time, but saves a lot of expense when compared to a failed septic system.

For those who are on sewer systems, avoid using cleaning products that have microplastics as one of their ingredients, and avoid washing polar fleece blankets, vests and sweaters in your washing machine. These microplastics and microfibers bypass the filtration systems of most sewage treatment plants, and are mistaken for food by smaller organisms in the marine food chain.

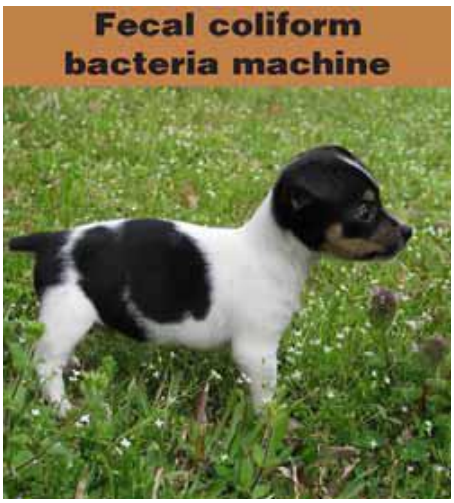
See the December 2011 newsletter for more information on microplastics and their harmful effect on our marine environment: http://county.wsu.edu/island/nrs/shorestewards/Documents/123111.pdf

Reclaim Land for Natives

You've often thought about replacing your lawn, or a good portion of it, with native vegetation, but the task seems too large or too expensive to consider right now. Why not try just a small amount at a time, without all that backbreaking work of digging up your yard, and without use of chemicals? Find an area of lawn (or invasive blackberries or nettles) that you'd like to practice on. This could be as small as a hundred square feet or less. Cut whatever lawn or vegetation is currently there down to 2" or less in height, and place layered newspaper or cardboard over the area, overlapping the layers by several inches. Wet the materials before placing on the ground whenever possible. If using newspaper, use it in thicknesses of six or more sheets. Cardboard should be flat. When you have the area covered with cardboard or newspaper, get it nice and wet, and then weight it down to keep it from blowing away. Rocks work well, but if you don't like the look of cardboard or newspaper in your yard, you could cover it with bark or other mulches.

The cardboard or newspaper will prevent sunlight from reaching the grass or weeds, and they will eventually die off. After several months, you can work the now-decomposed paper or cardboard and dead vegetation beneath it into the soil, and plant with the native plants that you have researched over the past months as being appropriate for the location. Another alternative is to punch holes into the paper layer and plant directly into the soil beneath, leaving some cardboard or paper as "mulch" between the plants. Warning: slugs and some insects may make their homes beneath the layers, so you'll want to check first before planting if you leave some of the layers intact, to avoid creating a convenient "critter diner".

Do Away with Dog Waste



Puget Sound is home to over 1.1 million dogs. The bulk of our dogs are in the most urban areas of Puget Sound, at an average rate of 1.5 dogs per dog-owning household. Dogs in the Puget Sound region produce almost 400,000 pounds of dog waste per day. Almost all dog waste in the region is 'deposited' in backyards. Left untreated, it can pose many dangers for the health of Puget Sound, pets and the people around them.

Pet waste can pollute ground and surface water. Many Puget Sound streams exceed state limits for fecal coliform, bacteria that is relatively cheap to test and indicative of other pathogens / bacteria present in the system. These bacteria are in the digestive tracts of mammals and aid in the digestion of food. Easy solution: Clean up after your dog every day or every other day. When she poops, scoop it, bag it and put it in the trash. That is the best, and least gross, option. In some communities, you can flush it down the toilet if your home is on a public sewer system – check with your local waste treatment plant. Do not flush dog waste if you are on a septic system! Processing pet waste may exceed the design capacity of your septic system. High volumes of hair and ash, not found in human waste, can

clog the drain field. If you are on a septic system, place the waste in the trash that goes to the landfill. The goal is to prevent the waste from contaminating surface water. It is legal to bag your dog waste and put it in the garbage can.

Double bagging the poop is a courtesy to garbage haulers. Don't worry about buying the biodegradable plastic bags – nothing degrades in the landfill – not even food and newspapers. This is a great way to reuse all of those plastic bags that come with us! For more information, see the April 2010 newsletter at http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2010/April2010Newsletter.pdf

Events

Attend a FREE Septic 101 Workshop! Come learn how to properly care for your system, including:

- What everyday maintenance tips can prevent thousands of dollars' worth of repairs?
- How does my septic system work?
- How do I know when to pump my system?
- What should I ask from my septic system service provider to ensure a complete inspection?

Whidbey – Coupeville Rec Hall
Saturday, March 24th - 9:30-11am
Wednesday, July 18th – 7pm-8:30pm
Tuesday, September 18th – 7pm-8:30pm

Camano – Camano Community Center (606 Arrowhead Road)
Monday, April 2nd – 7-8:30pm
Saturday, May 19th – 9:30am-11am

To register for any class please go to the website: www.islandcountyeh.org/Page/118
Or call 679-7350 for Whidbey or for Camano call 629-4522 ext. 7350

This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at www.islandcountymrc.org
The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at http://www.nwstraits.org/

Shore Stewards is a program of Washington State University Extension.

If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters before July 2011, please visit www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter . After that date, visit http://county.wsu.edu/island/nrs/shorestewards/Pages/Newsletter.aspx Your Shore Stewards Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360) 387-3443, ext 258, or email at shorestewards@wsu.edu.