

**Orcas Highlands Association (OHA) News**  
**September 2009**

**WINTER WEATHER:** Although it does not seem like it, winter weather will be upon us soon. Therefore, it is time to get ready---especially for those who will not be burrowing in for the long stay. Remember to remove hoses from hose bibs, turn off water to residences and thoroughly drain pipes and toilets before you head out. Let a neighbor or someone on the Board know how to contact you in an emergency.

When it snows, use good judgment about driving up and down the hills; the parking area at the mailboxes has become well used during snowfalls. If you park your car at the mailboxes, be sure no valuables are visible and that the vehicle is locked. And when you are parking, please stay clear of the mailboxes so they mail can be delivered. Avoid the rhododendron side as it's both an escape route for sliding vehicles and a county right of way.

**A NOTE ABOUT PLOWING DURING SNOWSTORMS:** Several Highlands homeowners were dissatisfied with the plowing that occurred during 2008, particularly those who lived higher up on Discovery Way. Our usual plowing service canceled and, because of the holidays, securing a replacement plow was extremely difficult. The County is not responsible for our roads, so plowing must be arranged with local, available contractors. We are aware that Buck Mountain raised its dues substantially a year ago, in part to have a plow operator on retainer (pay a minimum retainer per month regardless of whether need his work or not, to get priority). That association bills the residents directly if the plowing budget is exceeded. Our Board believes that's not feasible for us since it could be a waste of money, but is open to that solution if that is the will of our members, so we need your input if you want us to arrange that.

The Board would like to remind all residents that in metropolitan areas that have sophisticated snow removal systems, homeowners are required to shovel their sidewalks as well as their driveways. This includes snow left in the driveways by snow removal equipment. Always be prepared for heavy snow in the Highlands. Keep a snow shovel on hand and, if you don't have an appropriate 4WD vehicle, plan to ride-share with a neighbor that has.

**BE SURE TO PAY YOUR OHA/WATER BILL:** The Association is willing to work with homeowners in order to pay outstanding bills. If your account is overdue, please notify the Board or Siouxz Duncan so a payment schedule can be created. Because of the dollar amount of the unpaid bills, it was decided at June's annual meeting to create a policy addressing the consequence of nonpayment. Those who are in arrears will be so advised.

**ROADS:** The established speed limit for the Highlands is 15 mile/hour. Please ensure that you, your guests and your renters abide by this speed limit for the safety of all residents. Do not park on the rights of way within the Highlands, as these need to be kept clear for emergency vehicles.

**WATER:** Eastsound Sewer & Water District (ESWD) has set aside funds to explore potential water resources in the Highlands. Permits with the county, and a legal agreement between OHA, ESWD and the well driller are in the works, and drilling for feasible wells will begin ASAP. Board member Rollie Sauer currently serves as an ESWD commissioner.

The result of the WWSC Rate Case with the state Utilities Commission (WUTC) this summer is that the rates we pay WWSC have dropped by about 30%, starting Aug 1. This is of course great news. However, the Highlands has been heavily discriminated against by the UTC, in that our neighbors RPOA and Vusario are getting about 15% more of a reduction than we are. WWSC is now assessing a new "Island Fee" to recoup from Orcas users the direct labor cost of operating the treatment plant, under a very complex rate formula. This fee will (unfairly) be paid almost exclusively by Highlands and the resort users, with RPOA/Vusario users paying almost none of it. Our board has fought this inequity hard, but in the end to no avail. OHA will be paying roughly \$18,000/year excessively for this Island Fee compared to what it would be if all users paid equally. We will be sending you further information about this soon. The new formula is extremely complex, and because we pay each month for total gallons through our bulk meter from WWSC, it requires the OHA board to devise a new formula for billing our members. We expect to have it in place for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter billing in early January in order to reflect the new lower rates.

**COMMUNITY BURN AREA:** The OHA burn area is open, with a new burn permit posted. Residents are invited to burn green waste from their OHA properties. Be sure to read and follow the instructions on the permit. Remember that if you bring materials to burn, YOU burn it. Also, please try to burn within a few days of bringing your green waste to the burn area, as others are waiting. You will find a community hose at the pump house that is long enough and has a sprayer on the end.

If you burn on your own property, you'll need a burn permit for there. You can get one at [www.sjfiremarshal.org/Orcas\\_burn\\_permits.htm](http://www.sjfiremarshal.org/Orcas_burn_permits.htm), or you can pick one up in person on Wednesdays or Fridays between 12-5 p.m. at the Eastsound fire hall.

A large quantity of chips is available at the burn area and they are free for the taking! They can be handy for walkways, paths, plant bedding and so forth.

**RENTERS NEED COPIES OF THE NEWSLETTER:** If you maintain a rental---transient or otherwise, within the Highlands, please share copies of this Newsletter with your renters. They need the information we are distributing in order for them to enjoy the community more fully and be aware of issues facing everyone living here.

**OHA WEBSITE:** The Highlands web site (<http://www.orcashighlandshoa.com>) contains current information on issues affecting all of us including water, Board meeting minutes, OHA CCRs and more.

The Orcas Highlands Association Board