

For Immediate Release

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Goss Lake Eagle in Peril – Residents Urged to End Use of Personal Fireworks

Fourth of July Personal Fireworks May Force Premature Fledging and Harm Our National Symbol

LANGLEY Washington, Island County, June 17, 2024 -- Whidbey Island is home to the symbol of American greatness and patriotism: the Bald Eagle. An eagle's nest on Goss Lake holds a baby that will be approximately 10 weeks old during Fourth of July celebrations, **before** the time when the average eaglet can safely [fledge](#) or learn to fly. Historically, Goss Lake is the scene of personal fireworks explosions before, during, and after the holiday, even though this activity, so close to the nest, is illegal and can cause injury or death to these majestic birds.



Photo by Linda LaMar 6/8/24 Goss Lake

The Island County Sheriff has repeatedly stated in discussions with the Board of Island County Commissioners and Safe and Humane Fireworks that he lacks the staffing to enforce [existing laws](#) that forbid fireworks on private property. Despite the danger and illegality, residents and visitors around Goss Lake explode fireworks well inside the limits of protected space for the eagle's nest during the Fourth of July holiday, year after year. Until more officers are on duty, it is up to citizens to protect eagles and their habitat.

According to the Audubon Society, ten to twelve weeks of age is critical to fledging because that is when eaglets are physically ready to fly -- and why July 4th is such a dangerous time. Eagle parents abandon nests due to the noise, visual disturbance and smells generated by fireworks. "The timing of actual fledging can be influenced by human activity or disturbance around the nest, causing a premature fledge," states the Audubon Society website. "Premature fledging can result in injury or even death of the eaglet. The parents can raise premature fledglings that fall to the ground for a short period, although predators and humans pose threats to survival. This developmental stage of newly flighted eaglets can be a most perilous time."

For more information on the damage that fireworks can do to our wildlife, you can contact Kurt Licence, the District Wildlife Biologist for Island County, at Kurt.Licence@dfw.wa.gov

This Fourth of July, Safe and Humane Fireworks of Island County alerts all residents and visitors to stop using personal fireworks. Visit community fireworks instead to keep the magnificent bald eagles and the habitat we share safe. Scheduled professional fireworks displays will be held in Freeland, Langley and Oak Harbor in 2024.

Safe and Humane Fireworks is an alliance of Island County citizens and organizations that supports permitted municipal fireworks displays on the Fourth of July and other holidays to prevent harm to people, pets, wildlife and the environment and preserve our quality of life. For more information, visit [Safe and Humane Fireworks of Island County](#).

High res images available for print production by contacting the email address above.

Additional images and background content:



Photo by Linda LaMar 6/8/24 Goss Lake



Photo by Linda LaMar 6/8/24 Goss Lake



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<https://avianreport.com/baby-bald-eagles/>

<https://fws.gov/story/do-i-need-eagle-take-permit>



United States Department of the Interior
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June 28, 2022

[REDACTED]
Clinton, WA 98236

FedEx # [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Last July the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) received a complaint that you unlawfully disturbed bald eagles in the vicinity of your property at [REDACTED] by igniting fireworks near an eagle nest containing an eaglet. Activities, such as igniting fireworks, can cause nest disturbance which, if unpermitted, is a violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. To avoid unpermitted nest disturbance, the Service provides permitting recommendations based on activity type and distance from a nest. These recommendations can be found at: <https://www.fws.gov/story/do-i-need-eagle-take-permit>

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act ([16 U.S.C. 668-668c](#)), enacted in 1940, prohibits anyone, without a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior, from "taking" bald or golden eagles, including their parts (including feathers), nests, or eggs.

The Act provides criminal penalties for persons who "take, possess, sell, purchase, barter, offer to sell, purchase or barter, transport, export or import, at any time or any manner, any bald eagle ... [or any golden eagle], alive or dead, or any part (including feathers), nest, or egg thereof."

The Act defines "take" as "pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest or disturb." Regulations further define "disturb" as "to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available, **1) injury to an eagle, 2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or 3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior**" ([50 CFR 22.6](#)).

A violation of the Act can result in a fine of \$100,000 (\$200,000 for organizations), imprisonment for one year, or both, for a first offense. Penalties increase substantially for additional offenses, and a second violation of this Act is a felony.



