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## County may limit smoking in parks

By Gordon Weeks  
For the Examiner

Smokers enjoying outdoor activities may soon be limited in where they can light up if the Island County commissioners opt to establish specific smoking zones in county parks.

During a June 15 work session, the Island County commissioners voted 2-1 to add that proposal to the county's comprehensive plan on parks, which they will vote on within the next month or two. The proposal was made by Island County Public Works Director Bill Oakes.

Right now, there is no limit on where people can smoke while visiting a county park. Commissioner Helen Price Johnson said she can envision designated smoking areas that are a distance away from ball fields and swings. Commissioner Angie Homola said she also favors designated smoking areas, and pointed out that secondhand smoke is hazardous.

But Commissioner Kelly Emerson said she opposes the proposal, which she said goes "a little too far."

Under the restriction, parents accompanying a young child to the park would have to take their child with them to the designated area if the adults want to smoke, she said.

"It's an open area, not a concert hall," Emerson said. "You can't get more open than in the open air," she added.

The proposal was inspired by the ACHIEVE Coalition – Action Communities for Healthy Innovation and Environmental Change – which lobbied the county to adapt tobacco-free policies that include smoke-free parks, Oakes said.

In 2009, Island County was one of 43 communities to receive a grant to be named an ACHIEVE community. ACHIEVE is a collaborative effort of four national funding partners: the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the National Recreation and Park Association and the YMCA of the USA.

Along with lobbying for tobacco-free parks, the group is working on helping "free-range" children get outside in safe, accessible places, and better connecting parks through walking trails, said Carrie McLachlan, supervisor for assessment and healthy communities with the Island County Public Health Department and a local co-coach of ACHIEVE.

If passed, the county would encourage compliance of smoke-free zones above enforcement, Oakes said. The sheriff's department would be responsible for citing smokers who don't comply, he said.

Oakes stressed the discussions are in the "philosophical stage," and there has been no discussion yet on signage or the costs of enforcement.

Jefferson County parks have no smoking restrictions, reports Matt Tyler, director of the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Department.

Whatcom County only has one area where smoking is discouraged, though not prohibited.

"We ask that persons don't smoke in the fragrance garden area, as this is a garden for the visually impaired," Whatcom Parks and Recreation Director Michael McFarlane said. "Beyond that, the remaining outside areas are open to smoking."

In Skagit County parks, smoking is prohibited in all county-owned leased and maintained facilities, including restrooms, shower facilities, clubhouses and meeting rooms.

The county in 2006 also passed a resolution to install signage at Sharpe Park/Montgomery-Duban Headlands on Fidalgo Island urging park users to voluntarily comply with the request to not smoke in the park.

In parks managed by the Washington State Department of Parks and Recreation, smoking is not allowed inside vacation houses, yurts, cabins or other rustic structures.

And Washington State Parks does not have a separate policy that limits where people can smoke outdoors, Parks Spokeswoman Linda Bumett said.

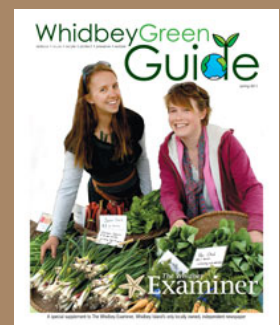
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Posted: Thursday, June 23, 2011

Article comment by: **Jan Thomason**

The designated areas are a good idea. As a smoker I try to stay away from other people (children especially) when smoking. If however smoking becomes completely banned from the parks I won't go.

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