

Linda Engle Introduction: Sustainable Idaho is brought to you by the Portneuf Resource Council.

Madison Long: Welcome to Sustainable Idaho. I'm your host, Madison Long, and this week I'm thrilled to welcome Holly Wilson as the new co-host of Sustainable Idaho. We will first introduce her and then the second half of the show will be dedicated to discussing firework safety. To start, Holly, could you tell us a little about yourself?

Holly Wilson: Right now, I'm in the Bachelor's of Business Administration program here at ISU studying economics and finance. I have a history working with local organizations, specifically in animal welfare where I've worked with organizations like the Portneuf Animal Welfare Society, which is a 501c3 nonprofit. I think that they're really important and they do a lot for our local community.

ML: What inspired you to study economics, and how did that lead you to develop an interest in sustainability?

HW: What economics fundamentally is, is the study of the allocation of limited resources. Within that, we can see that there are real environmental and social costs of things like pollution, deforestation, and carbon emissions, to where these two topics really flow together quite well. And I've always been curious about how these kind of systems work.

ML: What does sustainability mean to you in your personal life?

HW: To me, sustainability just means being aware and being intentional of our impact, both on others and on our planet.

ML: What do you hope you will be able to provide to Sustainable Idaho?

HW: I think my economics background will be a valuable asset. I think a new and interesting perspective to add to the equations of our weekly episodes.

ML: What are your career goals?

HW: Right now, my primary career goal is doing well here at ISU and being able to go to law school. In addition to that, I think that there's also a lot of other great opportunities just within my economics and finance background. Once I have those degrees, I might want to be a financial analyst or policy analyst.

ML: Thank you and welcome to Sustainable Idaho, Holly! Now to enter the second half of our episode, Holly and I talked with Kim Stouse, the Community Risk Reduction Specialist for the Pocatello Fire Department, to share firework and fire safety tips this 4th of July.

January through September of 2024, wildfires burned over 1,190,000 acres of land in Idaho. Recently, we've seen a lot of wildfires in Pocatello with the City Creek Fire last week. Do you feel like wildfires have been increasing over the last 20 years?

Kim Stouse: Unfortunately, yes. I think the data is pretty clear on this. Over the past two decades, we've observed a significant increase in not only acreages burned, we see a lot more in actual wildfires. And obviously, in our region, it's not uncommon, but they're tending to be larger, they're burning more intense, faster, and lasting longer than normal. We often call them the 1% fires, which are your big mega fires. I think we're seeing more and more of those than we have in the years prior.

ML: What do you attribute that increase to?

KS: I think there's several factors. Part of it is that climate change plays a role in leading to drier conditions. When we have rain instead of snow, the snow that we do get tends to have earlier snow melt, which when you have that early on increase in moisture and precipitation, it increases the fuel loads.

And when you look at the data from 100 years ago, suppression efforts weren't what they are today. It wasn't uncommon for a large fire to come through and burn off a lot of the fuels and keep them really in check. But, we've gotten better at firefighting, and those fuel loads increase. The better we get, which is keeping our communities safer, it's also lending itself to more mega fires.

ML: We're getting closer to the 4th of July, and according to the American Pyrotechnics Association, consumer fireworks, which includes any fireworks sold to the public, made a \$2.3 billion revenue. Fireworks can result in noise and pet disturbance, burn injuries typically to the hands and fingers, and can spark fires to homes or brush. In 2021, the National Fire Protection Association estimated that in the U.S., over 12,000 fires were sparked and led to \$59 million cost in direct property damage. In Pocatello, how many firework damage reports would you say are brought in each year?

KS: Last year, we responded to six grass or brush fires. We also had a house that caught on fire because the bush next to the house caught on fire. And then, there's also several dumpster fires, where people are discarding used fireworks. Looking at the police department data from last year, from July 2nd through the 7th, they had 136 calls reporting firework misuse or illegal fireworks, and they issued 45 citations.

ML: What additional costs does the city incur during fireworks season?

KS: The fireworks season, we increase our staffing, we bring on extra brush trucks that can be out patrolling. If we do get a wildfire, we bring in extra resources. There's the wear and the tear on the rigs. And so, it is an impact to our budget, just taxpayer dollars, but it's something that's

necessary to ensure that we're trying to mitigate as many fires as possible, and then address those that aren't using it responsibly.

HW: What regulations are currently in place regarding the use of fireworks in and around Pocatello?

KS: The City of Pocatello has a firework ordinance, and it basically outlines that fireworks are only allowed in certain parts of town. And we'll have a firework map. Basically any area that's yellow or red, fireworks are strictly prohibited, and then in the white areas, they can use what's considered safe and sane fireworks between noon on June 28th through July 6th.

Even in the areas that they're allowed to be used, there's no use of what we call aerial fireworks. Anything that leaves the ground, we're thinking of mortars, bottle rockets. If it says explosion or aerial, those are strictly prohibited. If you purchase fireworks from any firework stand within the city of Pocatello, we go out and inspect all those stands and we ensure that it meets that safe and sane requirement. We also have the QR code that people can scan that shows where they're allowed to be used.

ML: Referencing the Pocatello Fire Department Wildland Urban Interface map, or WUI, Stouse commented that parameters for fire safety are determined by a number of things. In particular, where homes and development meet wildland vegetation. The map is reassessed each year to take into consideration development, new fires, and the last year's fire data.

ML: If a fire is started, who would be liable for the damage caused?

KS: If you are lighting illegal fireworks or doing them in areas that are not allowed, the individual that lit them can be held responsible. If you light an aerial firework in one of the areas that allows safe and sane fireworks but it's an illegal one, it's a hundred dollar fine. And if you're caught lighting any type of firework in one of the prohibited areas, it's actually a misdemeanor and the individual will be required to go to court on it and talk to the judge.

HW: Pocatello Law Enforcement is in charge of patrolling areas, making contact with those misusing fireworks, and then issuing citations if deemed necessary, while the Fire Department is in charge of confiscating fireworks.

How do our local emergency service departments prepare and respond to frequent reports near suburban developments during the time around the 4th of July?

KS: The 4th of July, from a fire department perspective, is one of the busiest times of the year, and so we do increase staffing, patrolling the WUI areas. It's also getting that word out, doing your social media campaigns to really try to educate the public on it. Unfortunately but fortunately, I would say, we had that wildfire off the West Clark City Creek area this past weekend so hopefully that highlights the importance and the significance of how dry the fuels are and people will heed the warnings but it really does take a team approach.

ML: What are the most important things the public should know about firework safety?

KS: I think it's crucial to make sure you know whether it's an area that's prohibited or allowed. Knowing your local laws is first and foremost going to protect you. For those that are using the safe and sane fireworks, make sure you always have a water source nearby. Good rule of thumb is a garden hose or a bucket of water if you have a firework that malfunctions and you need to extinguish it or you can put the fireworks in after you're done to make sure that they're completely cool before you discard them.

Another thing is always making sure you do it outside on a hard, flat surface. We don't want to do it next to any residences, any decks or like wood areas or areas where there's tall grasses. You want to make sure you keep yourself a safe distance. Making sure that adults are lighting them.

HW: What can a concerned citizen do when they see careless use of fireworks in a susceptible area?

KS: I think community partnership is vital in this kind of situation. If you see someone using fireworks carelessly or using illegal fireworks, we don't want you to confront them. We don't want to escalate any kind of disturbances. Your safety is obviously paramount and letting the trained people handle it. What I encourage people to do is to call the non-emergency number and let them know that you see unsafe behavior or illegal fireworks being used or being used in an area that shouldn't be using them. If someone sees a fire started, call 911 immediately. I think vigilance is a huge asset to keeping our community safe.

Truly from a fire department perspective, we would love it if everybody would just go to the professional displays up at the Bannock County Fairgrounds. Those have been vetted, they've got safe defensible space, they've got resources up there to mitigate anything that should happen. They do an awesome job and it's not costing you anything.

ML: Thank you to Kim Stouse for talking with us about firework safety this Fourth of July. We hope everyone has a safe Fourth of July by attending the professional show at the Bannock County Fairgrounds on Friday evening. Information about protection, prevention, and call-in can be accessed on the KISU website at KISU/SustainableIdaho.

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