



WETLANDS



[Kitsap County Code](#) (KCC) Title 19 [Critical Areas Ordinance](#) (CAO) regulates development affecting wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, streams, aquifer recharge areas, and frequently flooded and geologically hazardous areas. This fact sheet is one in a series describing these environmentally critical areas; it is general information and is not intended as a substitute for actual codes and regulations.

What is a wetland?

Wetlands can be identified by three characteristics:

- Hydric soils – saturated with water long enough to cause anaerobic (oxygen depleted) conditions.
- Water – presence of soil saturation or standing water at least part of the year.
- Vegetation – a plant community dominated by water-tolerant or water-dependent species.



They generally include, but are not limited to, ponds, marshes, bogs, wet meadows, and swamps.

Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands provide functions and values that are important to the environmental, cultural, and economic well-being of Kitsap County, such as:

- Controlling flooding by acting as natural reservoirs for storm flow.
- Improving water quality by filtering sediment and contaminants.
- Maintaining stream flows and mitigating drought by releasing stored water gradually.
- Recharging groundwater.
- Stabilizing shoreline areas.
- Providing fish and wildlife habitat.
- Mitigating climate change by sequestering (storing) carbon.
- Preserving places of cultural importance and archaeological value.
- Offering areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.

Does my property contain a wetland?

Wetlands may not be obvious. Look for:

- Low areas like depressions and swales.
- The presence of wet soils or surface water for part of the year.
- Drainage ditches.
- Areas that do not grow vegetation.
- Vegetation that is different from the surrounding plant community.

Critical area and wetland maps are available on the DCD [website](#). These maps serve only as general guidance for property owners, since not all County wetlands have been identified.

If you suspect your property may contain a wetland, even if not yet identified on a map, a qualified wetland specialist should visit your property to determine the presence, type, extent, and boundary of any wetland(s) and their regulated buffers.

Wetlands Classification

To classify wetlands, Kitsap County uses the Washington State Department of Ecology's [Wetlands Classification and Rating System](#) for Western Washington (2014, or as hereafter amended). The County's wetlands are classified into four categories based upon their size, function, and value. Category I wetlands receive the highest level of protection because they are the most biologically complex and perform the highest level of functions and values. Category IV wetlands receive considerably less protection as they are often smaller, perform limited functions and provide less value than the other categories.

Kitsap County Department of Community Development

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Buffers and Building Setbacks

Buffers are areas surrounding wetlands or other critical areas, intended to protect ecological functions and values. This includes preservation of existing native vegetation. In Kitsap County, no activity is allowed within a regulated wetland or its buffer, unless otherwise specified. Buffer widths range in size according to wetland category:

Category I Wetland = 50 - 300 ft

Category II Wetland = 50 - 300 ft

Category III Wetland = 40 - 150 ft

Category IV Wetland = 25 - 50 ft

Under certain conditions, Kitsap County allows modification of buffer widths by granting agreements for buffer averaging and decreases in buffer widths. The County also has the authority to require larger buffer widths when necessary to protect a particular wetlands functions and values.

It is important to note a building and impervious surface setback line of 15 ft is required from the edge of any wetland buffer. Deviations from any required setback must be approved by Kitsap County DCD.

Existing residential structures within a wetland or its buffer may be remodeled or replaced, but may not further intrude upon the critical area or buffer. In addition, a building footprint may only expand by up to 20 percent. These may only occur if reviewed and approved by DCD in advance.

Activities that impact a wetland or its buffer may be allowed under the condition of a mitigation plan designed by a qualified wetland consultant that results in no net loss of ecological functions. The plan must include project-specific criteria for monitoring the site to help the County evaluate whether mitigation has succeeded. The consultant should provide annual monitoring reports for a minimum of five years and up to ten years.

Other Restrictions and Provisions

Examples of activities that are subject to the standards contained in the CAO and other applicable federal, state and local ordinances include:

- Building, grading, and clearing.
- Timber harvesting and associated development.
- Livestock restrictions.
- Drainage features.
- Land division and land use permits.
- Trails and trail-related facilities.

Wetland Protection

Protecting wetlands requires public education, involvement and cooperation. You can learn more about them by visiting wetland sites and becoming familiar with local wetland regulations.

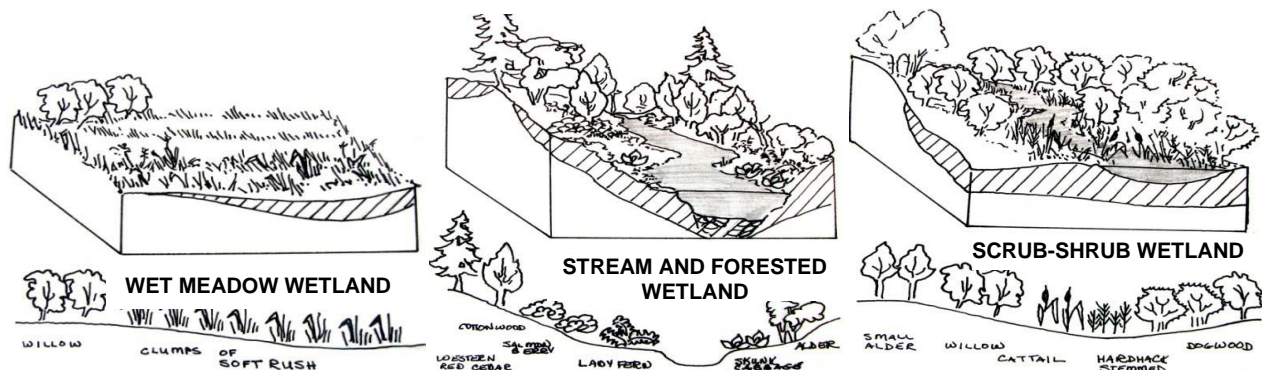
If your property contains a wetland, there are many ways you can protect it, such as:

- Avoid dumping near your wetland - even yard waste can degrade a wetland's functions and values.
- Respect wetland animals' needs for benefits provided by a wetland buffer.
- Consider marking or fencing a buffer area around your wetland.
- Consider enhancing your wetland buffer with native vegetation.

To learn more about wetland regulations and additional ways to protect, preserve and enhance your wetland, [visit our website](#) or contact Kitsap County DCD at (360) 377-5777 or Washington State Department of Ecology at (360) 407-6000.

See the [Critical Area and Shoreline Protection and Monitoring](#) brochure for more information about mitigation plans and monitoring requirements.

Three of the most common wetlands found in Kitsap County



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