



BROCHURE # 27

WETLANDS

A KITSAP COUNTY CRITICAL AREAS ORDINANCE FACT SHEET

The Kitsap County 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 CAO fact sheet is one in a series which describes the above types of environmentally critical areas protected by Kitsap County under *Critical Areas*, Title 19, Kitsap County Code (collectively the CAO). This is being provided to you as general information and is not intended as a substitute for actual codes and regulations. For more information, contact the Kitsap County Department of Community Development (DCD) at (360) 337-5777 or [visit our website](#).

What is a wetland?

Wetlands are those areas inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

Wetlands can be identified by three characteristics:

- Hydric Soils – soils saturated with water
- Water – the presence of standing water at least part of the year
- Plants – 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 perform a variety of functions that are important to the environmental and economic well-being of Kitsap County, such as:

- Controlling flooding by acting as natural reservoirs for incoming storm flow
- Improving water quality by filtering contaminants
- Maintaining stream flows by gradually releasing stored water after floods and wet seasons
- Recharging groundwater
- Stabilizing shoreline areas
- Providing fish and wildlife habitat
- Creating places for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation

Does my property contain a wetland?

To assist you in determining if your property contains a wetland, you may contact DCD, who can provide you with inventoried wetland maps. However, since not all County wetlands have been identified in the wetland inventory, these maps should serve only as a general guide for property owners. Your property may still contain a wetland that requires protection under the County's CAO. In this case, a qualified wetlands specialist should visit your property to determine the presence, type, extent, and boundary of any wetland(s). DCD can provide a list of qualified wetland specialists.

Wetlands Classification

To classify wetlands, Kitsap County relies on the Washington State Department of Ecology's Wetlands Classification and Rating System for Western Washington (2004).

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 contain the most functions and values performed by wetlands. On the opposite end of the spectrum are Category IV wetlands which receive considerably less protection. They are often smaller, perform limited functions and provide less value than the other categories.

All wetlands, regardless of their category, are regulated.

BUFFERS AND BUILDING SETBACKS

Buffers are areas surrounding wetlands or other critical areas, intended to protect 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'

Category II Wetland = 50'-300'

Category III Wetland = 40'-150'

Category IV Wetland = 25'- 50'

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 wetland's functions and values.

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

Existing structures within a wetland or the buffer may be remodeled, reconstructed or replaced. However, a structure cannot further intrude upon the critical area or its buffer, nor can the building footprint expand by more than 20 percent without requiring review by DCD.

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 and clearing activities adjacent to wetland areas
- Forest practices
 - Class IV General
 - Conversion Option Harvest Plans (COHPs)
- Livestock restrictions
- Land divisions
- 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 familiarizing yourself 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' need for the benefits provided by a wetland buffer.
- Consider marking or fencing off a buffer area around your wetland.

To learn more about wetland regulations and additional ways to preserve and enhance your wetland, contact Kitsap County DCD or the Washington State Department of Ecology at (360) 407-6000.

Three of the most common wetlands found in Kitsap County

