



# Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Review

Critical Areas Ordinance

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## What is the purpose of the Critical Aquifer Recharge Area review?

The purpose of the critical aquifer recharge area review is to preserve, protect and conserve Whatcom County's ground water resources for current and future generations. This review is intended to prioritize management of groundwater recharge areas as sources of potable water supply, and to protect critical aquifer recharge areas from contamination and adverse impacts from development activities that could deplete aquifer storage, reduce ground water levels, and/or diminish infiltration and replenishment of ground water.

## Why are Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas important?

An aquifer is a permeable subsurface soil or rock layer that is capable of storing, transmitting and supplying ground water to wells or springs. Critical aquifer recharge areas have geologic conditions that allow high infiltration rates of surface water, which contribute significantly to the replenishment of ground water in an aquifer. These areas have a crucial effect on aquifers used to supply potable water and they can be highly susceptible to potential groundwater contamination.

It is important to appropriately plan for and manage land use and development activities occurring in these areas to protect needed groundwater supplies.

## Do I have a Critical Aquifer Recharge Area on my property?

The approximate location and extent of Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas are shown on the County's critical areas maps, which are available for review at the front counter of the PDS Permit Center and on the County Natural Resource Management website:

[http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/planning/CAO\\_September/CAO\\_CARA.pdf](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/planning/CAO_September/CAO_CARA.pdf).

It is important to note that the critical areas maps are intended to be used as a guide and do not provide a definitive critical area designation. It may be helpful to meet with the County Geologist to discuss whether or not critical aquifer recharge area review may apply to your specific project property.

## What kinds of projects are subject to critical aquifer recharge review?

The following development activities, when proposed in moderate and high susceptibility critical aquifer recharge areas, have the potential to adversely affect groundwater quality and/or quantity and are required to submit a critical areas assessment report:

- Any development with a domestic on-site septic system at a gross density greater than 1 system per residence per acre.
- All storage tanks and storage facilities for hazardous substances and/or hazardous wastes.

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THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES HANDOUT SERIES

Whatcom County Planning & Development Services  
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226  
Phone (360) 676-6907 ▪ Fax (360) 738-2525 ▪ Inspections (360) 738-2520

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- Vehicle repair, servicing and salvaging facilities.
  - Use of reclaimed waste water.
  - Metals and hard rock mining and new sand and gravel mining.
  - Any other development activity likely to have a significant adverse impact on ground water quality or quantity, or on the recharge of the aquifer.

## **Critical Areas Assessment Report**

When County critical area maps or other sources of credible information indicate that activities subject to critical area review are proposed within a critical aquifer recharge area, the Technical Administrator may require a critical area assessment report and regulate developments accordingly.

In addition to the general critical areas assessment report requirements, assessment reports for aquifer recharge areas must include the following site-specific and proposal-related information unless the Technical Administrator determines that any of these requirements is unnecessary due to the scope and/or scale of the proposal:

- Geologic and hydrogeologic characteristics of the site.
- Ground water depth, flow direction and gradient.
- Data on wells and springs within 1,300 feet of the proposed project area.
- Presence and approximate location of other critical areas within 1,300 feet of the proposed project area.
- Historic water quality data for the area affected by the proposed activity.
- Proposed best management practices.

- Effects on ground water quality and quantity, including predicted effects on:
  - stream flow, wetlands and/or other resources, and on ecosystem processes
  - nearby wells and surface water features
  - contaminant transport based on potential releases to ground water
- A spill prevention/response plan.

## **Fees**

Please refer to the current Whatcom County Unified Fee Schedule for Critical Areas Fees.

## **Information**

Due to the administrative complexity of these regulations, it is usually best to visit with the County Geologist to have any additional questions answered.

Planning and Development Services  
5280 Northwest Drive  
Bellingham, Washington 98226 USA  
E-mail: [pds@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:pds@co.whatcom.wa.us)

Staff Contact: County Geologist  
Phone: (360) 676-6907