



Shoreline Management

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Why shoreline regulations?

In the early 1970s, several large developments took place along Washington shorelines that dramatically impacted the public use and interest in these areas. The increased public concern with shoreline development resulted in legislative action. The Shoreline Management Act was placed on the ballot and was passed overwhelmingly by the voters of Washington State.

The Whatcom County Shoreline Management Program (SMP) is the document that implements the Washington State Shoreline Management Act at the local level. The SMP applies the policies and goals of the state law to Whatcom County. Because the Whatcom County Master Program is adopted by the Washington State Department of Ecology, it has the authority of state law.

The shorelines of Whatcom County are among the most valuable and fragile of this state's natural resources. With 130 miles of marine shoreline, 60 miles of freshwater lake frontage and 220 miles of stream channels, Whatcom County's shorelines provide habitat for fish and wildlife, economic diversity, and recreational opportunities that are used by residents of all ages.

Shorelines play a large part in enhancing the quality of life for many of our county's citizens. In order to protect, preserve, enhance, and restore the natural systems and resources of

our shorelines while still allowing economic and recreational use of them, development practices must be conducted with sensitivity and minimal environmental impact.

This program works with other chapters of the Whatcom County Code to protect and preserve saltwater and freshwater shorelines throughout the county by managing natural resources and directing development and use suitable for this environment.

What shoreline areas are regulated?

The Shoreline Management Program regulates all streams with a mean average flow of 20 cubic feet per second, all lakes over 20 acres in size, all marine shorelines, all associated wetlands and floodways. The program also has jurisdiction over all surface water and extends landward for 200 feet from the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) of the shoreline. Within these areas, all projects must be consistent with policies and goals of the Whatcom County SMP.

Types of shoreline permits and approvals

Permits are issued for [Shoreline Substantial Development](#), [Shoreline Conditional Use](#), and [Shoreline Variance](#). Additionally, Shoreline Statements of Exemption are issued for minor development activities that are exempt from the formal shoreline permit requirements.

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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Other permits required

None of the shoreline permits may take the place of any other required permit. A project or development may also require, among others, a shoreline substantial development permit, shoreline conditional use permit, shoreline statement of exemption, building permit, clearing or grading permit, a zoning variance or conditional use permit, a State Department of Ecology Water Quality Certification, a State Department of Fish and Wildlife Hydraulic Project Approval, a lease from the State Department of Natural Resources or a federal Army Corps of Engineers permit for work in navigable waters of the United States.

What should I do before applying?

LUSD strongly encourages applicants to have a pre-submittal conference with the Whatcom County Shorelines Administrator prior to making application for a shoreline permit. Staff members can assist and advise applicants on shoreline regulations at any stage of a project's development; however, consultation early in project planning most often will result in smoother processing of an application. Call (360) 676-6907 to arrange a pre-submittal conference with the Whatcom County Shorelines Administrator.

Additional information required

Most developments requiring a permit under the Shoreline Management Program will also require review for compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The Whatcom County SEPA Administrator can advise applicants whether a SEPA checklist will be required. If the checklist is required, it must be submitted at the same time as the shoreline permit application.

If the application does not provide sufficient information to determine the environmental impacts of the proposal, the applicant will be asked to provide additional information as required by SEPA guidelines.

The County may also require applicants to provide additional information or plans to correct deficiencies in the application or to assist in the evaluation of the application. An application may be cancelled if the applicant has failed, without justification, to supply required information or data within 180 days after it has been requested in writing by the County.

Application fees

Fees are due at the time applications are submitted. They are charged in accordance with the current Whatcom County Unified Fee Schedule, which is established annually by the County Council. Information on fees and procedural requirements is available by calling (360) 676-6907.

Information

Due to the administrative complexity of these regulations, it is usually best to visit with our Natural Resource Staff to answer any additional questions.

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Staff Contact: Natural Resource Staff
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