

## THURSTON COUNTY

# PRAIRIE REVIEW

Building permit applications on prairie soils may require on-site review as part of the County's Critical Areas Ordinance.

### BASIC PROCESS

- On-site visits are conducted during the growing season, typically mid-April through September.
- Properties are visited only one time.
- A biologist walks the property looking for prairie indicator plants listed in the Thurston County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO).
- If prairie criteria are met in the building footprint or a 50-foot buffer, the project is considered an impact to prairie.

### GENERAL PRAIRIE CRITERIA

3 or more CAO-listed prairie plants close together (about 16 feet). Or,

25 individual CAO-listed plants or species. Or,

Presence of plants that provide food or shelter for the Taylors checkerspot butterfly (a federally Endangered Species) or other protected butterfly species. Or,

Presence of rare plants classified as such by Washington's Natural Heritage Program.

Find plant details in the Prairie Plant Guide on the Prairie Review page at [www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org).

### IF PRAIRIE IS FOUND

If prairie criteria is met, property owners have options that comply with the County's Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO).

- Some owners submitted a Reasonable Use Exception.
- Some moved the footprint to avoid impacts.
- Some completed on-site mitigation by replacing prairie plants lost to development.
- Other mitigation may be needed.

[WWW.THURSTONPLANNING.ORG](http://WWW.THURSTONPLANNING.ORG)



### LOOK ONLINE

[www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org)  
click **Prairie Review** for  
plant list and other info.

### ASK STAFF

Check a parcel number or  
address to see if the  
property is on prairie soils.

### READ THE CODE

Title 24: Critical Areas  
Ordinance. Online at  
[www.thurstoncountywa.gov/tchome/Pages/countycodes.aspx](http://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/tchome/Pages/countycodes.aspx)

### STATS

Typically, about 300  
permit applications a year  
require review.



Why the County conducts prairie reviews.

Thurston County is home to the endangered Taylors checkerspot butterfly and several other butterfly species designated as “of greatest conservation need, or species of conservation concern.” The County’s Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and the federal Endangered Species Act protect these butterflies and their prairie habitat.

Prairie habitat is defined in Chapter 24.03 of the Thurston County Code and in Section 24.25.065. Under the CAO, the presence of at least three prairie plant species is required to determine that jurisdictional prairie habitat occurs on a property. These prairie plant species are listed in Appendix 24.25-1 of Chapter 24.25 TCC (specifically Tables 24.25-7 and 24.25-8). Mima-type mounds, described as “unique geologic features” in the CAO prairie definition (Chapter 24.03.010 TCC), are also protected as prairie habitat. The topography of these landforms creates microclimates which support rare, prairie-associated butterflies and plants.

The County’s CAO originated with state law. In 1990, the state of Washington adopted the Growth Management Act, which requires fast-growing areas to regulate development in order to protect five types of critical areas, including prairies. To comply with this state law, Thurston County community members and officials worked through a lengthy public process to develop the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) which includes details about identifying and protecting prairies.

A Prairie Plant Guidebook is coming soon.

The County’s prairie biologist has developed a photo guide to the prairie plants covered in the County’s Critical Areas Ordinance. A draft of the guidebook can be found online at [www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org) on the [Prairie Review](#) page.

## Prairie Review & the Habitat Conservation Plan

Under a County Habitat Conservation Plan, the County’s building permit applicants may no longer have to undergo a prairie review process. An umbrella HCP from the County could provide applicants with one-stop permitting to cover most County and federal permit approvals in a single process, depending upon the final language adopted in the HCP.

[www.thurstonplanning.org](http://www.thurstonplanning.org) See [Prairie Review](#)