

SMP FACT SHEET #6

Buffers & Setbacks

Definitions

- In the SMP, a *buffer* is an area of separation between a home or other land use and the water.
- The buffer area includes vegetation such as native and deep rooting plants, trees, and grasses. It may also include sand, gravel, rocks, and shoreline fabric.
- Buffer widths are measured horizontally.
- A *setback* may also be applied to buffers. This is the distance that a use or development must be from the edge of a buffer to prevent activities from intruding into the buffer.

Purpose of Buffers

- Buffer vegetation provides habitat for fish & wildlife while also slowing rainwater runoff and reducing erosion.
- Buffer vegetation filters pollutants like fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, vehicle fluids, and other chemicals used around shoreline structures, before they can flow into surface and/or ground water.
- Buffers are very important if you drink water from a well or from the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and/or Tumwater.
- Buffers help keep surface waters clean, making them safer for pets, children, and wildlife.
- Buffers with tall shade trees help keep water cooler, which is vital for the survival of fish, shellfish, and Orcas.

Development Within Buffers

- New development is generally prohibited within buffers.
- Buffer reductions are possible in some scenarios; however, may require a shoreline variance permit and mitigation.
- Trails from homes to water (not applicable to commercial buildings) are permitted; however, size limits apply.
- Storage structures (e.g., for kayaks) and decks may be permitted in the buffer. Size limits and mitigation requirements apply.

Existing Homes & Structures Within New Buffers

- Landowners will not be required to remove existing structures or landscaping within buffer zones.
- See Fact Sheet #2 for more info regarding nonconforming structures.



THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852

Shoreline Master Program (SMP)

***NOT YET ADOPTED - OPEN FOR PUBLIC COMMENT.**

ASK STAFF

Thurston County's SMP covers most shoreline building projects.

Contact Us about your site and which permits may still be required.

READ THE CODE

Title 19

TC Current Shoreline Codes

FIND IT ONLINE

Shoreline Master Program Webpage



Proposed Buffer Sizes by Shoreline Type

- “Urban” and “Suburban” shoreline designations are being eliminated because they are not currently used.

See the chart below for shoreline types and proposed buffers (applied using both the Shoreline Master Program & Critical Areas Ordinance).

Proposed Buffers by Shoreline Environmental Designation (SED) of the Shoreline Master Program (SMP)

	Marine	Lakes	Streams
SED	Buffers in ft.	Buffers in ft.	Buffers in ft.
Shoreline Residential	50	50	250
Urban Conservancy	100	100	250
Rural Conservancy	125	125	250
Natural	200	200	250

- Because the Washington State Department of Ecology has new recommended designations, the current SEDs have been converted to the language of the proposed designations for consistency. Current buffers applied to shorelines of the state are those adopted in the 2012 CAO update, except for freshwater lakes and marine shorelines designated “Shoreline Residential”.
- You may apply for buffer reduction if your project meets certain criteria, such as proposing mitigation, or for situations where lots are constrained by size or topography.