
Streams

The Critical Areas Ordinance ([Kitsap County Code \(KCC\) Title 19](#)) protects fish and wildlife habitats by preventing the loss of natural areas, keeping water clean, reducing pollution, and preserving streamside vegetation. It also encourages voluntary conservation and plans for wildlife corridors to reduce conflicts.

What is a Stream?

Streams are areas where water flows strongly enough to form a clear channel or bed. This includes rocky channels, gravel beds, sandy or silty bottoms, and swales with defined channels. Streams don't have to have water year-round. Human made features like irrigation ditches, canals, or stormwater systems are not considered streams – unless they are used by fish, or they carry water from natural streams that existed before construction.

Why are Streams Important?

Streams are vital for the environment and our community. They help keep water clean, manage rain and floodwater naturally, replenish groundwater for drinking, provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife, and offer places for recreation, learning, and enjoying nature.

How Does Development Impact Streams?

If development isn't carefully planned, it can harm streams by lowering water quality and destroying wildlife habitat. Poor design can increase runoff and flooding, cause erosion, cloud the water with sediment, add harmful chemicals and pollutants, and remove plants along stream banks that keep water cool, hold soil in place, and filter pollution.

Are All Streams the Same?

No. Streams are classified by the [Department of Natural Resources](#) based on their function – such as whether they support fish, provide habitat, etc. Each classification has its own rules for buffer size, development and activities that take place in or near the buffer (KCC [19.300.315](#) and Table [19.300.315](#)).

How Do We Protect Streams?

In their natural state, sensitive areas like streams are surrounded by plant buffers, mostly native species and sometimes non-native plants. These buffers protect streams by filtering pollution, reducing erosion, and keeping water cool. When development happens near a stream, there are rules that limit how close construction and buildings can be, require fencing to keep construction activity out of the buffer, require

permanent fencing, signs and sometimes require improvements to the buffer to make it work better. You can find the development standards for fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas in KCC [19.300.315](#).

Are Stream Crossings Allowed?

Yes. In some cases, stream crossings are permitted. They must follow specific rules and may require permits from state agencies in addition to Kitsap County permits. More information about stream crossings can be found in [KCC 19.300.315.D](#).

Can Streams be Moved?

Only under very specific situations. For details, [see KCC 19.300.315.E](#).

Should I Keep My Livestock Out of Steams and Buffers?

Yes. If livestock can access a stream, steps should be taken to prevent damage. This may include installing fencing along the stream buffer, following a farm conservation and management plan approved by the Kitsap Conservation District, and complying with other restrictions and requirements. More information can be found in [KCC 19.300.315.H](#).

More Questions?

Visit: [Contact Us](#)

Call: 360.337.5777

Email: help@kitsap1.com

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