

A HOMEBUYER'S GUIDE TO CRITICAL AREAS

WHAT TO KNOW TO BUILD THE HOME OF YOUR DREAMS

Presented by:

Amber Mikluscak, PLA, GISP, Senior Landscape Architect

Hugh Mortensen, PWS, President, Senior Ecologist

watershedco.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **What kind of projects interact with critical areas?**
3. **When should I start thinking about this during the property-buying process?**
4. **What are the next steps?**

When there are critical areas

When there aren't critical areas

And somewhere in-between

INTRODUCTION



As you hunt for property to develop in Washington State, you'll quickly learn that water-related critical areas – wetlands, streams, and shorelines – are common. Critical areas can add a wrinkle to the home-buying and home-building processes by requiring additional permits and regulatory research, but this should not deter you from buying or building the home of your dreams.

The key is informed decision-making. Knowing you have a wetland or a stream opens up a world of possibilities for sustainable design, but it also carries regulatory responsibilities.

First, let's start with a basic question.

With what kind of projects should you be aware of critical areas regulations?

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS INTERACT WITH CRITICAL AREAS?

You should be aware of critical areas regulations particularly when

- renovating or rebuilding an existing home,
- adding, modifying, or redeveloping elements on a property, such as a dock, patio, deck, or driveway,
- clearing a new area of land,
- building an addition or outbuilding, like a garage or guest cottage,

and

- building a new home or subdivision.

Whatever your redevelopment plans, you can rest assured it is possible to build or remodel on land with critical areas. In fact, it occurs regularly throughout the Pacific Northwest (and gives us a certain charm).

Now that you know you need to know, let's talk about what to do next.



WHEN SHOULD I START THINKING ABOUT THIS?

Here's how critical areas fit into the property-buying process:

1. When you find a property that you're interested in and you anticipate making changes or additions to the property in the future, **order a critical areas inspection** for an expert opinion of the property's developable area. Sometimes, this step occurs when the prospective buyer is ready to order the home inspection.
2. **Call critical areas professionals and convey your desired outcomes** for the property. Maybe you wanted to take down the tree in the backyard and start a garden. Or you like the dock, but wish you could add to it. Knowing your plans will help the professional determine what type of reconnaissance is appropriate for your prospective property. If you love a property "as-is" and redevelopment is not anticipated, on-site critical areas may have little to no effect after your new home or property purchase.
3. Hire a critical areas professional to conduct a **wetland or stream reconnaissance** or **Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) determination**. (See a sample wetland reconnaissance.)



WHEN SHOULD I START THINKING ABOUT THIS?

If the preliminary investigation anticipates little to no critical areas issues, you can proceed with peace of mind regarding your future development project.

If on-site critical areas or buffers are identified that may complicate with your redevelopment project, you can make an informed decision to investigate further, look at other properties, or move forward with the purchase, possibly reevaluating your offering price.

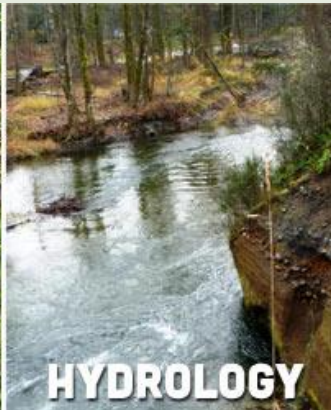


WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

You'll want a delineation study to know the exact location of any critical areas or buffers on the property.

If the redevelopment won't disturb those areas, then you can proceed with buying the property with the confidence that there is a low likelihood of critical areas issues. If a redesign concept is not yet drawn, you can provide the delineation results to your architect or contractor, allowing them to lay out improvements or make adjustments that avoid impacts or minimize the need for mitigation.

If the redevelopment shows the potential to impact critical areas, you might choose to pursue other properties, move forward with additional investigation, or modify your development plan.



What is a Wetland Delineation Study?

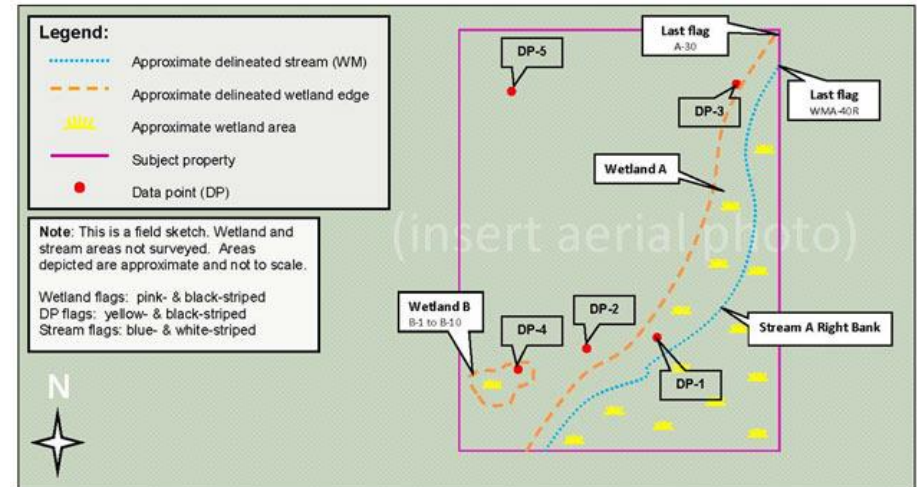
A stream or **wetland delineation study** involves a thorough investigation of any critical areas on-site, including an assessment of the site's vegetation, soils, and hydrology. The critical area boundary is flagged and displayed on a map along with the associated buffer width.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

For the highest level of confidence when purchasing a property for redevelopment, **you will want a feasibility study.**

The feasibility study will explore the implications of implementing your planned modifications, development, or redevelopment concept on a specific property. By laying out an approximate timeline and cost estimates for the critical area process, such as permits and mitigation, a feasibility study will help you to make an informed decision about proceeding with property purchase and development.

With a feasibility study, you can continue with the purchase with a clear understanding of the road ahead, possibly renegotiating the purchase price.



Wetland & Stream Delineation Sketch
Smith Property
Parcel No. 1234567890
Seattle, WA

Delineation date: January 1, 2013
TWC Ref. No. 123456



750 Sixth Street South | Kirkland | WA 98033
p 425.822.5242 f 425.827.8136

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Once you've purchased the property, you will need a formal **critical area study** and **mitigation plans** to submit to jurisdictional agencies for permitting.

Mitigation compensates for impacts to critical area buffers by improving the quality of the un-impacted areas.

- Wetland and stream mitigation typically involves removing weeds and planting native plants.
- Shoreline mitigation often involves restoring a portion of the shore to a more natural condition that will stabilize the shoreline while improving habitat quality for fish and wildlife.



PROJECT EXAMPLES



Stream mitigation allowed these North Bend homeowners to develop their new home and driveway.

Shoreline mitigation allowed these Lake Washington homeowners to build a large detached garage.

By improving their shoreline and landscape with native plantings, they were also able to install a new outdoor storage building, expanded patio, and pool.



LET'S GET STARTED

Contacting a critical areas professional early in the purchase process will produce the best outcome for you as a prospective buyer.

If you are considering buying a property on or near a shoreline, wetland, stream, or lake, give us a call. We can provide reliable evaluation and trusted expertise to help you make an informed determination about whether a property is right for you.

You May Be Interested in These Articles

Looking to Naturalize Your Shoreline?

Check out this guide to learn about our process and see which option is more suitable for your home!

How to Clean Up Your Landscape Within a Critical Area

Have you tried to change or clean up unruly vegetation, only to receive a notice from regulators that the area is within a critical area or buffer? If so, you could benefit from implementing a Vegetation Management Plan for your property. Amber Mikluscak, senior landscape architect at Watershed, explains.

Five Pacific Northwest Native Shrubs to Plant in Your Garden

The palette of native shrubs to choose from in the Pacific Northwest is so wide and varied that it can be difficult to narrow down your options when it's time to start planting. Marina French, restoration designer and landscape architect at Watershed, shares five native shrubs that have a proven track record in our landscape designs (and include tasty berries, too!).

FIND MORE TIPS AND CONTACT US AT
WWW.WATERSHEDCO.COM

