

Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) - Wetlands

effective July 1, 2008

TEN QUICK FACTS

1. Existing Ag is not affected by the new CAO. Separate rules apply for on-going farming practices in critical areas.
2. Reasonable Use of your property is assured - the new wetland rules will not preclude you from building a home on your property. They will, however, affect where you can build.
3. Wetland setbacks are based on the intensity of your project - for example, a single family home on 5 acres has a smaller buffer than a grocery store.
4. Do-it-yourself user guides have been developed so that you can identify wetlands without having to hire wetland professionals - an option that can help you save money.
5. Buffers are based on whether the affected wetland provides high quality habitat value, or water quality protection. Buffers with high habitat value have larger buffers. Water quality can be adequately protected with smaller buffers.
6. At your request, county staff will visit property in advance of a permit application to verify presence of wetlands and make a buffer determination.
7. Rural Stewardship Plans allows landowners to develop a custom plan for their property. By implementing a variety of conservation practices, they are accorded eligibility for a reduction in their property taxes, or a reduction of their land use intensity rating. Owners with an approved Plan also receive expedited permit processing (head of the line privilege). Plan requirements are recorded by the County on the property deed or title.
8. The new regulations recognize that different types of wetlands are more sensitive and/or important than others. Different types of wetlands warrant different means of protection - including different buffer sizes.
9. Septic designers and installers are generally some of the first people to look at property that is being considered for development. The County has incorporated a wetland identification element into the certification requirements that must be met in order for these professionals to practice in Island County.
10. Washington State's Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources and Community, Trade and Economic Development have determined that Island County's critical areas protection program was developed using Best Available Science.

Island County Planning & Community Development

1 NE 6th Street – PO Box 5000, Coupeville, WA 98239-5000

360-679-7339 (North-Central Whidbey), 360-321-5111 x7339 (South Whidbey), 360-387-3443 (Camano)