



# Stevenson's Habitats

## A City of Stevenson Critical Areas Code Fact Sheet

The City of Stevenson Critical Areas Code regulates land use and development affecting wetlands; fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; aquifer recharge areas; and frequently flooded and geologically hazardous areas.

This Habitat fact sheet is one in a series, which describes the above-listed types of environmentally

critical areas protected by the City under SMC 18.13-Critical Areas and Natural Resource Lands. This has been provided to you as general information and is not intended as a substitute for the actual codes or regulations. For more information, stop by City Hall or call us at (509)427-5970.

### ***What is a Critical Habitat?***

A habitat is the environment occupied by individuals of a particular species, population, or community. Critical Habitats within the city of Stevenson have four basic categories, Riparian (Stream) Areas, Threatened or Endangered Species Areas, Priority Habitat and Species Areas, and Local Species and Habitats of Importance.

### ***Does my property contain a critical habitat?***

To assist you in determining if your property may contain a critical habitat, you may contact the City of Stevenson, and we can provide you with maps of inventoried habitats.

Since not all of the city's habitats have been inventoried, these maps should be used as a general guide for property owners. Your property may still contain a critical habitat that requires protection under the Critical Areas Code. In this case, a qualified habitat specialist should visit your property to determine the presence, type, and extent of critical habitat areas. You

may contact City Hall for a list of qualified habitat specialists.

### ***What is a Riparian Area?***

Riparian Areas are the most common Critical Habitat affecting Stevenson's property owners.

A Riparian Area is an area adjacent to aquatic systems with flowing water (Streams) that contain elements of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems that mutually influence each other.

Approximately 90% of Washington's land based vertebrate species prefer, or are dependent upon, riparian habitat for essential life.

A Stream is an area 1) of year-round flow, or 2) where surface waters produce a defined channel or bed. Streams include both natural channels and manmade channels which were constructed to replace a natural stream but do not include erosion rills less than 6 inches wide. The channel or bed need not contain water throughout the year.

### ***Why are streams important?***

Streams benefit the environmental and economic well-being of Stevenson. Streams provide numerous values and functions. They:

- help maintain water quality;
- store and convey stormwater and floodwater by acting as natural stormwater management facilities;
- are a source for groundwater recharge;
- provide important fish and wildlife habitat and food, both instream and within their corridors; and
- offer areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and general aesthetic appreciation.

### ***How does development impact a stream corridor?***

Unless appropriately mitigated, development can degrade a stream's wildlife habitat and water quality, undermining its values and functions. Uncontrolled development can:

- increase stormwater runoff and flooding;

- contribute excessive sediment and higher water conditions, thereby causing erosion;
- increase stream turbidity (cloudy appearance from sediment), which can reduce the light and oxygen necessary for plant and animal life;
- contribute toxic chemicals and organic pollutants; and
- remove vegetation along stream banks, a stream component crucial to maintaining water temperature, bank stabilization, and pollutant filtering capabilities.

## ***Stream Classification***

Throughout the state, water bodies—including streams—have been classified by the Department of Natural Resources based on flow volume and importance to fish and wildlife, domestic use, and public recreation. Streams in Stevenson have been classified as Type S, F, N<sub>P</sub>, and N<sub>S</sub>.

Type S streams (or waters) typically include shorelines of the state and have the largest flows, averaging at least 20 or more cubic feet per second. Type S streams in Stevenson receive the highest protection, because they provide important fish & wildlife habitat and have important visual and scenic values. Examples include the Columbia River and Rock Cove. Conversely, Type N<sub>S</sub> streams receive considerably less protection because they provide the fewest functions and values to Stevenson. Often these streams are very small, seasonal streams and rarely have a name.

You can read more about stream classification in the Forest Practice Rules produced by Washington State Department of Natural Resources in WAC 222-16-031.

## ***Buffers and Building Setbacks***

Streams, as is the case for most critical areas, are provided a “buffer” of native vegetation to protect them from

human activities. Standard buffer width requirements depend on the stream type. These are minimum requirements and may be increased to protect a stream. The buffer requirements are as follows:

- Type S Stream – 150 feet
- Type F Stream – 125 feet
- Type N<sub>P</sub> Stream – 75 feet
- Type N<sub>S</sub> Stream – 50 feet

In some cases, alteration of a stream or its buffer is allowed; however, the City will require a Mitigation Plan demonstrating that the alteration will have no negative effects on the habitat area. The applicant must also meet the requirements of other jurisdictions, such as the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA).

Buffers begin at the “ordinary high water mark” (OHWM) of the stream channel and extend in either direction from the stream. The OHWM is typically placed at the line often found on the bank of streams which is the average extent of high water.

Alternatively, the OHWM may be placed at the top of the bank if this line is not visible, or where the vegetation changes to an upland type.

Buffer widths are increased if there are streamside wetlands which provide overflow storage for stormwater, feed water back to the stream during low flows, or provide shelter and food for fish.

## ***Stream Crossings***

While stream crossings are allowed under the Stevenson Critical Areas Code, all crossings must be the only reasonable alternative and any impacts to the stream and/or its buffer must be fully mitigated.

Please contact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for specific stream crossing requirements.

## ***Livestock Restrictions***

In areas that would allow livestock to access streams, damage should be avoided by fencing along a stream’s outer buffer edge.

## ***Other Restrictions and Provisions***

Examples of activities which are subject to the standards contained in the CAO and other applicable federal, state, and local ordinances include:

- Forest practices, Class IV General and Conversion Option Harvest Plans (COHPs);
- Land divisions, boundary line adjustments, and other land use permits; and
- Building and clearing activities adjacent to habitat areas, including home and road construction.

For specific information you may contact City of Stevenson staff at City Hall or by calling (509)427-5970. Copies of the Critical Areas Code can be made available upon request.

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