



# Stevenson's Wetlands

## 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; frequently flooded; and geologically hazardous areas.

This Wetland 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.

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### ***What is a Wetland?***

A Wetland is an area that is saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

Wetlands can be identified by three characteristics:

- Hydric soils—soils saturated with water.
- Water—the presence of standing water or saturated soils within the top 12" to 18" of the surface during the growing season.
- Plants—water tolerant or water dependent plant species.

They generally include, but are not limited to, swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

### ***Why are wetlands important?***

Wetlands constitute important natural resources which provide significant environmental functions. Wetlands:

- Control flooding by acting as natural reservoirs for incoming storm flow;
- Improve water quality by filtering contaminants;
- Maintain stream flows by gradually releasing stored water after floods and wet seasons;
- Recharge groundwater;
- Provide fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Create places for recreation, education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.

Uncontrolled urban-density development in and adjacent to wetlands can eliminate or significantly reduce their ability to provide these important functions, thereby detrimentally affecting public health, safety, and general welfare.

### ***Does my property contain a wetland?***

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

Since not all city wetlands were identified in the wetland inventory,

these maps should be used as a general guide for property owners. Your property may still contain a wetland that requires protection under the city's Critical Areas Code. In this case, a qualified wetland specialist should visit your property to determine the presence, type, extent, and boundaries of any wetland(s). You may contact City Hall for a list of qualified wetlands specialists.

### ***Wetland Classification***

The City of Stevenson relies on the Washington State Department of Ecology's Wetlands Classification and Rating System to classify wetlands.

The city's wetlands are classified into four categories base upon their size, function, and value. Briefly, Category I wetlands receive the highest protection since they are the most biologically complex and contain the highest functions and values performed by wetlands. Conversely, Category IV wetlands receive considerably less protection, and are often minimal in size, perform limited functions, and provide less value than the other categories.

In general, all wetlands are regulated, with the exception of isolated wetlands less than 1,000 square feet in size.

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

Buffers are undisturbed areas of native vegetation which surround wetlands or other critical areas. In the City of Stevenson, no activity is allowed within a regulated wetland or its buffer, unless otherwise specified.

Buffer widths range in size according to wetland type, adjacent land use, and habitat score. Wetland buffer widths will fall into the following ranges:

- Category I Wetland – 50-300 feet
- Category II Wetland – 50-300 feet
- Category III Wetland – 40-110 feet
- Category IV Wetland – 25-50 feet

Under certain conditions, the City allows modification of these buffer widths by granting agreements for buffer averaging and decreases in buffer widths.

Existing structures within a wetland or the buffer may be remodeled, reconstructed, or replaced. However, a structure cannot further intrude upon the critical area or its buffer.

## ***Wetland Protection***

Protecting wetlands requires public education, involvement, and cooperation. You can learn more about them by visiting wetland sites and familiarizing yourself with local wetlands ordinances.

If your property contains a wetland, there are ways you can protect it. Avoid dumping, draining, or filling near your wetland. Even fertilizers, pesticides, and yard waste can degrade a wetland's functions and values. Wetland animals need the benefits provided by a buffer zone. Consider marking or fencing off a buffer area around your wetland. Learn about wetland regulations and additional ways to preserve and enhance your wetland by contacting City Hall, the Washington State Department of Ecology, or the US Army Corps of Engineers.

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

Examples of activities which are subject to the standards contained in the Critical Areas Code 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;
- Building and clearing activities adjacent to wetland areas, including home and road construction; and
- Draining, or placing fill in a wetland.

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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