

SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM (SMP)

Okanogan County SMP How-To Guide



This guide was developed by the
Okanogan Conservation District with funding from
the Washington State Department of Ecology.

Published in November 2025.

SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM

RCW 90.58

Shorelines in Washington State are protected by the Washington State Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1971. The law strives to achieve responsible shoreline use and development, environmental protection, and public access. Local governments develop shoreline master Programs (SMPs) based on the law and state guidance and the state ensures local SMPs consider statewide public interests.



GUIDE COMPONENTS

- Purpose and Applicability
- Shoreline Area Designations
- Protecting Critical Areas
- Agricultural Use
- Recommended Best Practices for Shoreline Users
- Permitting and Exemptions
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Additional Resources

PURPOSE

SMP Section 14.15.040 - Purpose and Intent

Listed below are only a few disclosed purposes. For the full list, please refer to this section in the SMP.

- Promote public health, safety, and general welfare of the community by providing comprehensive policies and effective, reasonable regulations for development, use, and protection of Okanogan County shorelines.
- Recognize and protect private property rights.
- Promote reasonable and appropriate use of shorelines which will not jeopardize public and private interests.
- Preserve and protect fragile natural resources and cultural significant features.
- Increase public access to publicly owned areas of shorelines where increased use levels are desirables.
- To manage shorelines in a positive, effective, and equitable manner.
- To further assume and carry out the local government responsibilities established by the Act in RCW 90.58.050 including planning and administering the regulatory program consistent with the policy and provisions of the Act in RCW 90.58.020.
- To adopt and promote the policy in RCW 90.58.020.

Applicability

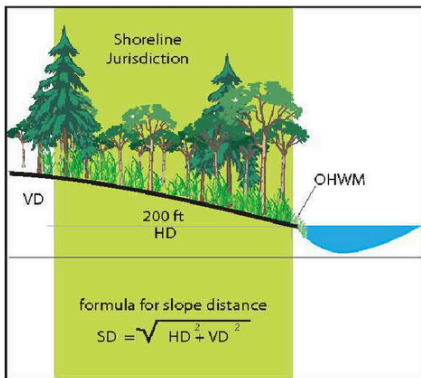
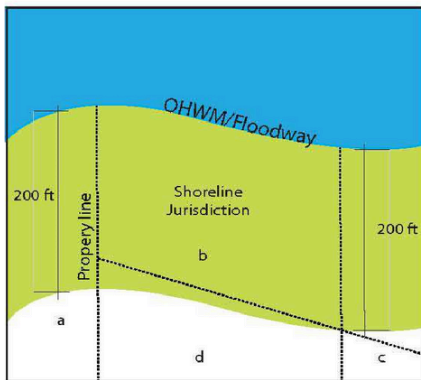
All proposed uses and development occurring within the shoreline jurisdiction must conform to RCW 90.58, the Shoreline Management Act, and the SMP whether or not a permit is required (unless specifically exempted by statute). Permits administered within the boundaries of the Colville Confederated Tribe shall be processed in accordance with CCT's SMP Chapter 4-15. For more, refer to the full version of the SMP and RCW 90.58.020 and 90.58.050.

Okanogan County's SMP was last updated on June 26, 2018. The most recent amendments and editions shall apply.

SHORELINE AREAS

RCW 90.58.030

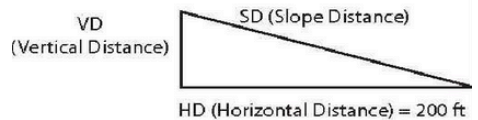
This section aids in understanding shoreline areas, the ordinary high water mark, shoreline classifications, and the purpose for designations and shoreline regulations. Specific permitted and prohibited uses in shoreline areas are not included in this guide.



Shoreline Jurisdiction

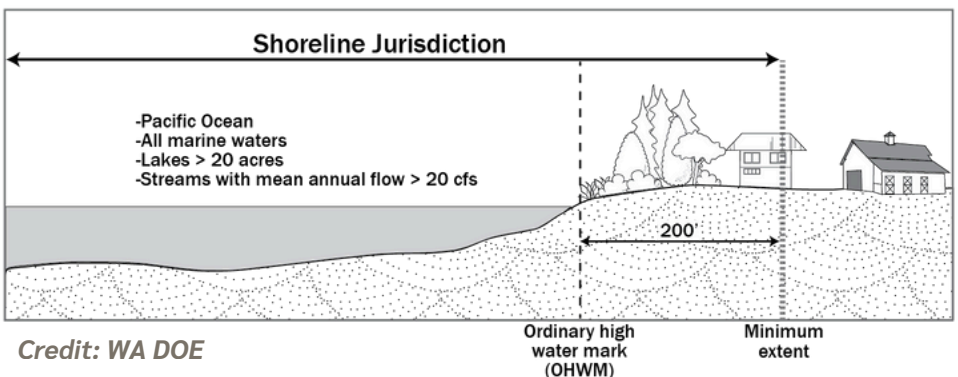
- a & d. Parcels partially within Shoreline Jurisdiction
- b. Parcel wholly within Shoreline Jurisdiction
- c. Parcel outside Shoreline Jurisdiction

Shoreline jurisdiction as measured on the horizontal from the ordinary high watermark



$$\% \text{ slope} = \frac{VD \times 100}{HD}$$

slope distance is the measurement on the ground where the shoreline jurisdiction, setback and buffer are established



Credit: WA DOE

KEY TERMS AND EXAMPLES

Refer to the SMP's OHWM definition for more. Also, Article III "General Use Regulations" and "Use and Activity Table" for specific uses, regulations, building standards, buffer requirements, and more.

Shoreline Jurisdiction or **Shoreline Area** refers to all water areas of the state, including reservoirs and their associated shorelands (within 200-feet of the water body, exceptions may apply) and are subject to regulation of the SMP.

Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) is the line that marks the mean of high water for all lakes and streams indicating areas of shoreline. The OHWM is found by examining beds and banks to identify where the presence and action of waters are common and usual, and so long continued, in all ordinary water years. **The OHWM is determined by a wetland professional.**



Low flows - An area where you see debris racking or where grass isn't growing with soil exposed.

High flows - An area with previous water lines, sediment, or sanding caked to trees, indicating that water floods to the area.

Credit: WA DOE

Example Users and Uses

Homeowners building docks, foundations, outbuildings, berms (mound to keep shoreline from coming in), landscaping, or other property enhancements.

Agriculture building or diverting channels, water sources, fencing, managing and grazing cattle, nutrient run off, infrastructure and storage, road crossings, or other needs.

Recreators visiting shoreline areas to lounge, swim, boat, fish, and removing vegetation or redirecting waterways and flow of streams, lakes, rivers, or other areas of shoreline.

SHORELINE DESIGNATIONS

Shoreline areas in Okanogan County are already determined.

Aquatic Designation 14.15.370

All shoreline areas waterward of the OHWM of rivers, lakes, and streams.

Designated to protect, restore, and manage the unique characteristics and resources of these areas waterward of the OHWM.

Conservancy Designation 14.15.380

Shorelines performing an irreplaceable function or ecosystem-wide process also may have high recreational value or unique historic cultural resources with areas that support human use, is publicly owned, part of an easement, or in platted common area unsuitable for development, and may be supporting low-intensity resource-based users (agriculture, forestry, recreation) or designated agriculture or forest lands.

Designated to protect ecological functions, conserve existing natural resources and valuable historic and cultural areas, and provide recreational opportunities on public lands bound by a limited-use or conservancy agreement for environmental or stewardship purposes.

Natural Designation 14.15.390

Shoreline is ecologically intact and performing an important, irreplaceable function or ecosystem-wide process or considered to represent rare or fragile ecosystems and geological types of scientific or educational interest that could be damaged by development over time or is unable to support development due to significant adverse impacts to ecological functions or risk to human safety.

Designated to protect shoreline areas relatively free of human influence and intact or minimally degraded shoreline functions intolerant of human use. Only very low intensity uses may be allowed and would follow plans for restoration of degraded shorelines within this environment.

■	Classification
■	Purpose

Rural Designation 14.15.400

Shoreline areas with few environmental limitations and that are supporting human uses and may currently be accommodating agricultural and/or residential users, or planned for such use, and exist outside of incorporated municipalities and city expansion areas.

Designation purpose is an area where land exists that is capable of supporting cultivated and irrigated agriculture with associated activities, low intensity residential development, and recreational uses.

Shoreline Residential Designation 14.15.410

Assigned shoreline areas outside of incorporated municipalities that support a predominance of single-family with some duplex and multi-family residential development and are platted for residential development at or exceeding 1 dwelling unit/acre.

Designation is to accommodate residential development outside of existing cities consisting of the infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas that are at an intensity greater than allowed in rural designation areas.

Urban Conservancy Designation 14.15.420

Shoreline areas within city expansion areas that are suitable and planned primarily for public development that is compatible with maintaining or restoring ecological functions of the area and suitable for water-enjoyment users or publicly-owned open spaces.

Designation is to protect and restore ecological function of open space, floodplains, and other lands within incorporated municipalities or city expansion areas while allowing a variety of compatible uses.

SHORELINE DESIGNATIONS

SMP Article IV - Shoreline Designation Regulations cont.

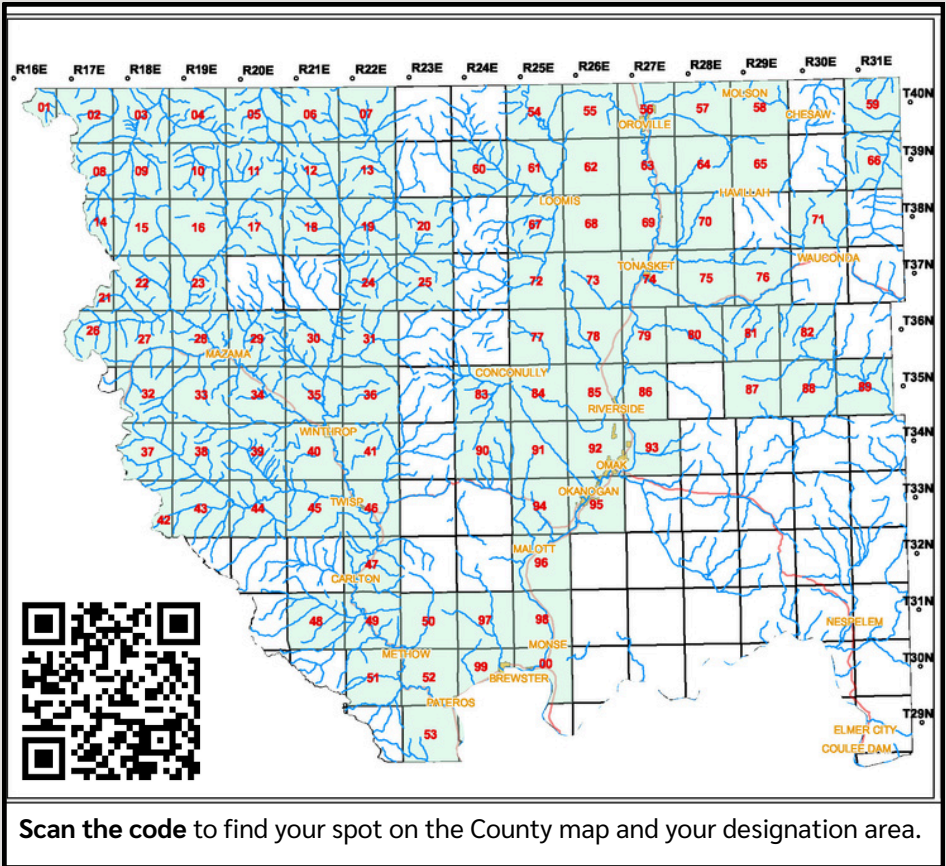


TABLE 10 SHORELINE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



Vegetation Buffer Requirement



Building Setback Requirement

DESIGNATION AREA	NON-WATER RELATED USES		WATER RELATED USES		WATER DEPENDENT USES		HEIGHT
	NON-WATER RELATED USES	NON-WATER RELATED USES	WATER RELATED USES	WATER RELATED USES	WATER DEPENDENT USES	WATER DEPENDENT USES	
Aquatic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Conservancy	100'	125'	100'	125'	50'	75'	35'
Natural	150'	175'	150'	175'	100'	125'	35'
Rural	50'	75'	50'	75'	30'	55'	35'
Shoreline Residential	25'	50'	25'	50'	20'	45'	35'
Urban Conservancy	100'	125'	30'	55'	10'	35'	35'

For full requirements, see SMP Article II - General Regulations - Wetlands, Table 10

PROTECTING CRITICAL AREAS

SMP Section 14.15.110; A-E - Critical Areas within Shoreline Jurisdiction

Critical areas are always protected and can exist in and out of shoreline jurisdiction. The portion of shoreline and critical area buffer within the jurisdiction are regulated by the SMP. The buffer portion that extends beyond the jurisdiction area is subject to the county's critical area ordinance.



Frequently Flooded Areas

Areas within the 100-year floodplain, areas that are considered flood ways and associated floodplains that have a 1% or greater chance of flooding in any given year. These areas can be identified by FEMA Flood Rate Insurance maps.



Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers use for potable water (drinking water), or designated aquifers with protected water quality. Areas are only considered recharge areas if certain porous soil types are found to be present. EX. rivers, creeks, forests, lakes or ponds.



Geologically Hazardous Areas

Areas that are susceptible to erosion, sliding, earthquakes, and other geological events. Wind and water erosion, and channel migration zones are common hazards. Examples may be post-fire areas.



Fish & Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Areas of managed lands and waters to maintain populations of high priority fish and wildlife species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distributions. This includes habitat of endangered species and other local species essential to sustaining fish and wildlife populations.



Wetlands

Areas identified in the National Wetland Inventory (NWI). Areas inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater and support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. EX. swamps, bogs, marshes, or similar areas.

For more information and to learn about the presence of critical areas on property, please contact the County.

AGRICULTURAL USE

SMP Article III - General Use Regulations | Section 14.15.160 - Agriculture

This section in this guide relates only to agricultural use.

For other uses, see “*General Use Regulations*” section of the SMP.

When does the SMP apply to agricultural activities?

Agricultural use and development provisions in the SMP apply to new agricultural activities, including new activities on non-agricultural areas in shorelands and expansion of activities.

SMP provisions do NOT modify or limit *existing* agricultural uses or activities on agricultural lands.

Including, but not limited to, the following uses:

- Producing, breeding, or increasing agricultural products
- Rotating and changing agricultural crops
- Allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie fallow, in which it is plowed and tilled but left unseeded.
- Allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant as a result of adverse agricultural market conditions or due to land being enrolled in a local, state, or federal conservation program, or the land is subject to a conservation easement
- Conducting agricultural operations
- Maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural equipment or facilities, provided that the facility is no closer to the shoreline than the original facility
- Maintaining agricultural lands under production or cultivation

Activities that *are subject to the provisions of the SMP* include new structures, new activities not in place at the time of adoption of the SMP, conversion of agricultural lands or non-agricultural development on agricultural lands, and uses in support of agricultural activities.

These activities require a set of criteria that must be followed to preserve pre-existing riparian habitat, shoreline, and includes a conserved area for native vegetation that is maintained at the location.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR SHORELINE USERS

- Contact the Planning Department before any shoreline project to follow local SMP regulations, avoid loss of resources and investments, and initiate the process to obtain any needed permits.
- Implement conservation practices with the Conservation District or on your own to balance development, minimize shoreline disturbance, and protect native vegetation and ecological function.
 - Projects may include plantings for restoration or native plant installation, vegetation buffers, or more.
- Maintain vegetation buffers and plan to enhance or restore natural areas for wildlife habitat and ecosystem function.
- Effectively manage use of shoreline and critical areas during different times of year to prevent overuse and reduce impacts.
- Manage livestock efficiently to protect livestock, prevent overuse, heavy impact, or bank erosion to shoreline critical areas, and to maintain healthy ecosystem function.
 - Projects may include rotational grazing, grazing management plans, exclusion fence, restoration plantings, or more.



PERMITTING AND EXEMPTIONS

SMP Article V - Administration

All proposed uses, activities, or development occurring within the shoreline jurisdiction must meet federal and state requirements, local laws, and the SMP. Permits allow the County to authorize appropriate development and ensure requirements are being met.

This section overviews the shoreline permit process to help users understand if a permit may apply or not and where in the SMP to seek further direction.

The process includes an application, review, public notice, and permits may be required (permit types: substantial development, conditional use, variance, and authorization/exemption), other permits may also apply. Undergoing the process may take several months to a year and there are associated fees.

Before you begin work, follow the requirements and process:

Requirements:

- Applicant and property owner information and address
- Shoreline area, site description, and site project plan
- If applicable, habitat management and mitigation plans

Application Process:

- Permit review, pre-application and plan, local review, public notice of application (SEPA, if applicable)
- Additional application review, determination, and notice of final decision

Exemptions

Certain types of developments are exempt from shoreline permits per 14.15.510. Examples may include activities where total cost or fair market value does not exceed \$8,504*, maintenance or repair to existing structures, and single-family residences. All proposed uses, activities, or development within the jurisdiction area that are exempt from permits must still comply with the SMP and all development standards (except existing agricultural uses).

For the full permitting process, exemptions, appeals, and more information, see the “Administration” section in the SMP or contact the Okanogan County Planning Department directly.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

What is the Shoreline Master Program (SMP)?

A combination of planning and regulatory documents with mitigation standards that guide shoreline development to balance environment protection, public access, water-oriented uses, and no net loss of ecological function - ensuring that development will not further degrade the natural condition and processes in the shoreline based on the baseline conditions of the County's shoreline when the SMP was updated in 2018. This description of conditions is what the "no net loss" standard is measured against.

Why does Okanogan County have an SMP?

Local governments are required by state law to prepare an SMP. Okanogan County's is tailored to the local environment and to existing and future planned development patterns within the County's shorelines.

What is no net loss of ecological function?

The environmental protection standard under the Shoreline Management Act (SMA). Ecological functions are elements in the environment that provide habitat for fish and wildlife, protect water quality, and enhance flows in the streams and lakes. Protection is accomplished by avoiding or minimizing the introduction of impacts to ecological functions that result from new shoreline development.

When should I contact a qualified professional?

A qualified professional is a person with experience and relevant training in the scientific discipline. This may include educational degrees, two or more years of experience, and a state license. You may contact a professional for wetland delineation and rating, OHWM determination, critical areas, and a habitat mitigation plan.

FAQ CONT.

Does the SMP apply to my property or impact my home?

The SMP applies to all new development that occurs within 200 feet of the ordinary high water mark of the County's shorelines and within its associated wetlands (for waterbodies managed by the SMP, see Appendix D, Shoreline Environment Designation Maps). If you reside within city limits, incorporated areas may determine their own SMP in addition to the County SMP.

Under the current provisions, existing single-family homes are not affected. New development or the replacement of a damaged home on your property will need to meet the shoreline program requirements.

How do SMP's apply to agriculture?

According to law, when local shoreline programs are updated, the new standards, setback, and buffers, do not apply retroactively to existing agricultural development. However, program requirements will apply to new agricultural activities located in shoreline areas and where agricultural activities are converted to other uses. *See SMP section 14.15.160.*

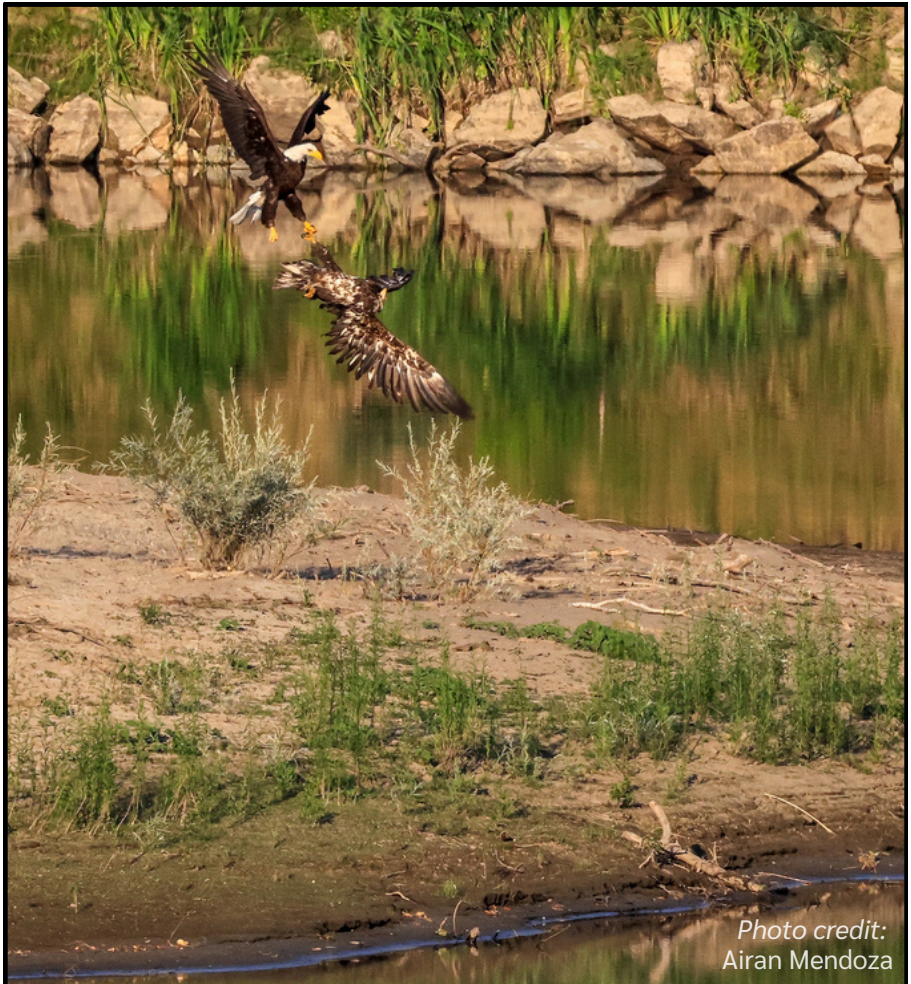
How do I know what uses are or aren't allowed in shoreline designation areas?

Shoreline uses fall into categories: agriculture, aquaculture, forest management, commercial development, boating facilities, mining, outdoor advertising, signs, and billboards, residential, utilities, industry, shoreline modifications, transportation, archaeological, cultural, educational, historic, and scientific resources, and recreation. The full list of uses and permitted or prohibited uses for designated shoreline areas, can be found in the *"Use and Activity Table"* and the *"Shoreline Designation Regulations"* section of the SMP.

OKANOGAN COUNTY SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM HOW-TO GUIDE

“Coordinated planning is necessary in order to protect the public interest associated with the shorelines of the state while, at the same time, recognizing and protecting private property rights consistent with the public interest.”

- RCW 90.58.020



For more information, please refer to the full version of the SMP and contact the Okanogan County Planning Department or the listed additional resources.

VIEW THE FULL VERSION

The purpose of this how-to guide is to overview the local Shoreline Master Program (SMP) for Okanogan County to help inform landowners, agricultural users, and recreational users of its purpose and the importance of protecting shorelines, critical areas, and preserving natural resources. Also, to provide quick reference and access to sections in the full version of the SMP.

Major components of this guide include purpose, applicability, designations and regulation of shoreline areas, agricultural use, permit process, requirements, and exemptions, best management practices for protecting shorelines and ecosystem function of critical areas, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and more.



Scan the code to view the full version
of the Shoreline Master Plan (SMP)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Okanogan County Planning Department

509-422-7117 www.okanogancounty.org

123 5th Ave N Suite 130, Okanogan, WA 98840



Okanogan Conservation District

509-422-0855 www.okanogancd.org

1251 2nd Ave S., Room 102, Okanogan, WA 98840



Washington State Department of Ecology (Central Region Office)

509-379-4541 www.ecology.wa.gov

1250 W. Alder St., Union Gap, WA 98903