

SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM

The Washington State Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1971 strives to balance development, environmental protection, and public access to shorelines of the state.

Lewis County prepared and adopted its initial Shoreline Master Program (SMP) in 1974 and last updated the document in 1998. In the more than fifteen years that have passed since the County's SMP was last updated, state requirements and the County's shorelines have changed in many ways.

Along with all other jurisdictions with shorelines in the state of Washington, the County is required to update their SMP to reflect these changes.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an SMP and why does the County have one?

The SMP is a combination of goals, policies, and regulations that guide shoreline development. Since the 1970s, Lewis County has been required to have a SMP based on state laws (RCW 90.58) and rules (Chapter 173-26 WAC). The state, through the Department of Ecology, assures that all local SMPs are consistent with these guidelines.

Where in the County does the SMP apply?

As with the most recent Shoreline Master Program (from 1998), the County's draft SMP applies to the following waterbodies in Lewis County:

- Segments of streams or rivers where the mean annual flow is more than 20 cubic feet per second (such as the Chehalis, Cowlitz, and Newaukum Rivers and Bunker, Lincoln, Lost, and Olequa Creeks)
- Lakes and reservoirs 20 acres or greater in area (such as Alder, Mayfield, Mineral, and Riffe Lakes)
- Shorelands adjacent to these waterbodies, including land within 200 feet of the ordinary high water mark; the SMP Flood Course and contiguous floodplain areas within 200 feet of the SMP Flood Course; and all wetlands associated with the streams, rivers, and lakes subject to the SMA.

Over 992 miles of creeks and rivers and 17,147 acres of lakes and reservoirs are located in the County's shoreline jurisdiction.

Why is the SMP being updated?

With the adoption of new SMP Guidelines by the state in 2003, all jurisdictions are required to update their SMP to reflect the changes in the SMA.

Does the SMP apply to my property?

New development in shoreline jurisdiction is subject to the SMP. The SMP will not apply to legally established structures and uses, so long as there are no changes proposed in the shoreline areas of the property. If an alteration is made to an existing structure or use within the shoreline jurisdiction, the change will be subject to the provisions of the SMP.

The Three Primary Goals of the Shoreline Management Act



Will the SMP affect my home?

Existing single-family homes are not impacted by the provisions of the SMP. However, new development, such as accessory structures, building expansions, or the construction of new homes, will be required to meet SMP requirements when located in shoreline jurisdiction.

How do SMPs apply to agriculture?

Existing agricultural uses and development are exempt from the SMP. New agricultural activities or conversions of agricultural land to another use however will be subject to the SMP.

What buffers are required from shorelines?

Shoreline buffers proposed in the SMP update are similar to the existing buffers for streams and rivers in the County's Critical Areas Ordinance. Reduced buffers will be allowed in certain instances, such as for commercial, industrial, or recreational uses that are dependent on or oriented to the water as part of their operation, or in situations where additional mitigation is provided.

Can I clear my vegetation along the shoreline?

Under the SMP, vegetation clearing is limited within shoreline buffers. Where proposed, the vegetation removal will typically require mitigation to ensure that the clearing does not affect the natural characteristics of the shoreline environment.

Vegetation along the shorelines provides a myriad of benefits for water bodies, upland areas, and shoreline residents and users. Vegetation helps to stabilize soils, filter pollutants and fine sediments (contributing to improved water quality), and provide important habitat and food sources for aquatic species. Conserving shoreline vegetation is an important part of retaining the ecological function of shorelines under the SMA.

When is a Permit Required?

Shoreline permit types include Shoreline Substantial Development Permits, Shoreline Conditional Use Permits, Shoreline Variance Permits, and Shoreline Exemptions.

A Shoreline Substantial Development Permit is typically required for a project that proposes to undertake a substantial development within the shoreline jurisdiction. A substantial development is any development that has a total cost or fair market value that exceeds \$6,416, or any development that materially interferes with the normal public use of the water or shorelines of the state.

A Shoreline Conditional Use Permit is required if a proposed use is listed as a conditional use in the SMP, or if the SMP does not address the use. Conditional Use Permits may be required for uses such as bridges, dredging, and placement of in-water fill.

A Shoreline Variance Permit is required for a project that seeks to deviate from the SMP's dimensional standards, including setbacks, height, or impervious surface coverage requirements. A proposed shoreline variance must meet the variance criteria found in the state law and be consistent with other SMP requirements.

A Shoreline Exemption is required for all other projects. While these developments are exempt from substantial development permit requirements, all exempt uses, activities, or development (except for existing agricultural activities), must still comply with the SMP and any applicable development standards.

For Additional Information

If you have any questions about the draft SMP, please contact Fred Evander at the Lewis County Community Development Department at (360) 740-1389 or fred.evander@lewiscountywa.gov.