

Channel Migration Zone Citizen Advisory Committee Frequently Asked Questions & Public Comments

Why is Pierce County so interested in regulating the CMZ in the first place?

By regulating CMZs, the County hopes to protect public resources by reducing foreseeable property losses, while also balancing the total cost to all Pierce County taxpayers. There is a significant imbalance between the cost to maintain our levee systems and the amount of revenues collected in local basins (see discussion of SWM fees below). Stricter land-use regulations are one tool for minimizing that inequality without having to increase Surface Water Management fees.

When will the CMZ regulations and mapping take effect?

The CMZ mapping and regulations for the Puyallup, Carbon and White rivers took effect in March 2005. The maps for South Prairie Creek and the upper Nisqually River were completed in 2005 and 2007, respectively, but have not yet been formally adopted by the Pierce County Council. Concerns about fairness and what regulations are reasonable prompted the Council to put the adoption of those studies on hold and create the CMZ Citizen Advisory Committee. The Council will use the CAC's final recommendations to decide whether and when to apply the CMZ rules to other areas of the County.

How do I find out if the CMZ is going to affect my property?

General information about what flood hazards might affect your property can be found on Pierce County's Public GIS website: <http://matterhorn.co.pierce.wa.us/Publicgis/> Detailed information specific to your parcel can be requested by contacting Pierce County Surface Water Management at (253)798-2725 or pcwater@co.pierce.wa.us. To help us answer your questions, please provide us with your parcel number and daytime contact information.

Will the CMZ severe designation affect my flood insurance?

The CMZ will not affect your flood insurance. The rates for your FEMA flood insurance are based on the elevation of your home relative to the 1% annual chance (or 100-year) floodplain and are not related to the mapped CMZ.

What is the difference between flooding and channel migration?

It is important to differentiate between flooding hazards and channel migration zone hazards as they are very different. Flooding happens when a river leaves its banks during a storm event and then returns to its original channel after the water recedes. Your property may be inundated by water, but only temporarily. Channel migration occurs when a river moves from its original location and chooses a new channel in which to flow. Channel migration often happens during large storm events (that might also result in flooding), but when the storm is over, the river doesn't return neatly to its original banks and is instead in a new location. During a channel migration event, your property may be partially or significantly eroded or may be cut off from other infrastructure such as roads or bridges.



The CMZ Citizen Advisory Committee was created to advise the Council on land use policies in areas where the river may relocate during a flood.

How can I be in a CMZ hazard area if I've never seen the river flood?

Channel migration zones are mapped according to how a particular river behaves and what science tells us about the surrounding geology. The ability of a river to cut a new channel through a landscape is not necessarily related to how often it floods.

How can I be in a CMZ hazard area if my property is located high above the river bottom?

Channel migration zones are not limited by the topography of the surrounding land features in a river valley. Even properties located on a high bank above the river can still be within a CMZ if the bank can be eroded by the river. Rivers cause soil erosion and can cause the base (or "toe") of steep slopes to fail. When this occurs, there is a risk that land at the top of the bank could slide into the river bed.

Don't I already pay for the levees when I pay my Surface Water Management fee? Do my property taxes pay for the levees?

SWM fees are charged on all parcels in unincorporated Pierce County. The fees vary by basin depending on the expected costs within that basin. They range from a basic service charge of \$28.60/year to an enhanced service charge for capital projects and/or river maintenance of \$130.90/year per single family residence. Fees are intended to be spent in the area from which they were collected on a variety of surface water projects, including levee repair and maintenance. However, the cost to maintain some levees far exceeds the amount of money collected from the local community. For example, for the Nisqually Park levee alone, the repair costs have exceeded \$1 million dollars over the last three years, which is much greater than the revenue generated in that area (\$43,598 per year). In this case, the cost of repairing the levee is borne primarily by Pierce County citizens living far away from the levee's benefit.

No property tax revenue is used for levee repair or river maintenance.

What is a "certified" levee and are there any in Pierce County? Will a certified levee protect me from channel migration?

FEMA can "certify" a levee if it is engineered to meet specific standards established by the Army Corps of Engineers and if it provides ample flood protection against 1% chance annual floods. (Certified levees must have at least 3 feet of additional freeboard above the 100-year base flood.) Certified levees are not "CMZ proof" and will not necessarily prevent channel migration. Currently, there are no certified levees in Pierce County.

Pierce County used to dredge the rivers, but then stopped. Why? Are there plans to dredge our rivers again in the future?

Gravel removal is one way to increase flood storage capacity of a river. However, dredging can be expensive when undertaken at the huge scale necessary to prevent channel migration. It can also be damaging to sensitive aquatic and riparian habitats. Pierce County stopped dredging in part because it became extremely difficult to get the many State and Federal permits required to do so. The process often took several years to go through, and then would yield permission to remove only a small amount of gravel. Pierce County isn't opposed to dredging again in the



future; this topic will be discussed when the County updates its Comprehensive Floodplain Management Plan in 2009-2010.

It is important to remember that gravel removal is not an “all at once” solution to flood protection over the long term. Dredging needs to be repeated frequently to be effective and one flood event can erase past efforts in a matter of hours during a flood. This substantially increases the cost, and the question of who should pay for those costs is an important one.

I was planning to build a house on my property, but it is now mapped in a CMZ where new development is not allowed. Will Pierce County be reimbursing me for the loss of potential value to my property?

Pierce County does understand that the regulations and restrictions associated with CMZs may have an impact on people’s plans for their property, which is why the County Council created the CMZ Citizen Advisory Committee. The County currently does not compensate property owners for potential lost value when a CMZ is identified. By regulating areas of known hazard, the County is trying to limit future losses for the owners of properties in those areas.

Where can I find the technical information used for mapping the CMZ?

Information on how CMZs are mapped in Pierce County is available online in the completed channel migration zone studies. The final report for the Puyallup-Carbon-White River, Upper Nisqually River and South Prairie Creek CMZs can be found at www.piercecountywa.org/cmz.

How are the questions and comments from the community going to be addressed through the CMZ CAC process?

Any questions can be directed to Pierce County or the CMZ Citizen Advisory Group through Melissa Paulson at mpaulso@co.pierce.wa.us or (253)798-4686. Your question will be answered directly and in a timely manner whenever possible, although some issues may need to be taken up by the CMZ CAC before they can be answered. The most common questions and answers will also be posted on our website at www.piercecountywa.org/cmzcac. All public comments will be passed on to the CAC for them to consider when developing their recommendations to the County Council. The CAC’s final recommendations are due to the Council by August 2009.

