

Pierce County Shoreline Master Program

Title 18S

Frequently Asked Questions

Why a new Shoreline Master Program?

The County had been using a Shoreline Master Program that was over 40 years old. Much had changed in the County and the Puget Sound region that needed to be recognized in updated regulations. Additionally, legislation was passed by the State in 2003 that required all jurisdictions to update their Master Programs.

Where does the new Master Program apply?

The new Program, which became effective on October 26, 2018, applies to:

- All marine waters;
- All rivers and streams downstream from a point where the mean annual flow is 20 cubic feet per second;
- All lakes 20 acres or larger.

The regulations and policies apply to the waters themselves, associated wetlands, and generally to the shorelands extending landward for 200 feet as measured from the ordinary high water mark (OHWM) of the water body.

How does the new Master Program impact my ability to:

1. Build a single family Residence?

New homes will not be allowed over the water or in the High Intensity Environment. Homes will be allowed in all other Shoreline Environments, including the Natural Environment.

New homes must be consistent with applicable regulations including the new buffer requirements. Buffer widths vary depending on the Environment Designation of your shoreline:

Shoreline Environment Designation	Buffer Width (in feet)
Natural	150
Conservancy	100
Residential	75
Residential – Lake Tapps	50
High Intensity – Water Dependent	0
High Intensity – Non- Water Dependent	50

2. Build a bulkhead to protect my property?

Bulkheads are allowed subject to demonstrating the need for one to protect an existing structure. You must also demonstrate that you have avoided and minimized the impacts associated with shoreline armoring. In addition to demonstrating need, because of the effect bulkheads have on shoreline function, the new Program requires the consideration of alternatives to traditional hard (i.e. concrete and large rock) bulkheads.

3. Build a boathouse or dock (float, boat lift, buoy)?

The Program allows these sorts of features, subject to applicable regulations.

Why require buffers?

The population of Pierce County has roughly doubled since the old Master Program was created. That increase has an effect on our shorelines that requires a greater level of protection than was provided by the 50 foot setback required by Title 20, the previous Shoreline Master Program.

What can I do in a buffer?

Buffers are intended to remain generally undeveloped and vegetated. However, there are a variety of features and uses typically associated with shoreline residential development (access paths, fire pits, landscaped areas, lawn, view corridors, for example) that may be permitted. These sorts of items will be allowed in buffers subject to applicable Program requirements.

Invasive plant control, hazard tree control, and water dependent uses may also be allowed in buffers.

Have permit requirements changed?

With one exception, the same reviews will be required by Title 18S as were required under the previous Master Program. All development within shoreline jurisdiction requires one or a combination of the following:

- Substantial Development Permit
- Exemption to a Substantial Development Permit*
- Conditional Use Permit
- Administrative Conditional Use Permit**
- Variance

*Exemptions are a narrowly defined group of activities that do not need a Substantial Development Permit but, still require County review. Construction of a single-family residence and many types of repair and maintenance activities are commonly allowed as an Exemption to a Substantial Development Permit.

**The new Master Program has one new permit type – the Administrative Conditional Use Permit. This requires the same level of review as our existing Conditional Use Permit but, will not involve the need for a public hearing before the County Hearing Examiner.

Will the new Program affect me?

If your home is outside shoreline jurisdiction, the Program doesn't affect you. If your home, and any other legally established residential structure, is within shoreline jurisdiction, it can be used, maintained, and repaired – even if the new Program doesn't allow those structures and uses.

The Program will affect you if you intend to expand your home or residential structures. In that case, you will need to follow the applicable requirements of the Shoreline Master Program.

Additional information on the County Master Program update can be found online, at <http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/956/Shoreline-Plan>. Select the link to [Shoreline Environment Designation Maps](#) to see the proposed shoreline environment.

You can also contact Dave Risvold, Shoreline Planning Supervisor, at 253-798-7036 or dave.risvold@piercecounitywa.gov