



# Critical Areas Ordinance Update

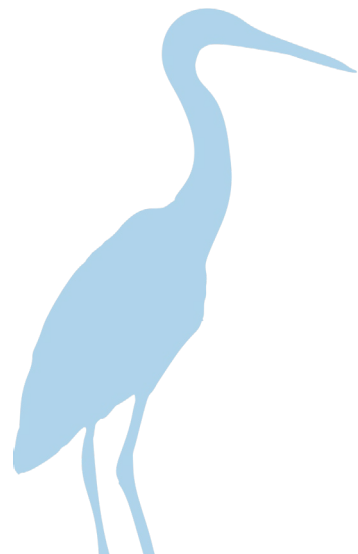
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# Presentation Outline



1. Introduction and Context
2. Wetland Buffers
3. Streams / Riparian Zones
4. FWHCA: Biodiversity
5. FWHCA: Oregon White Oak
6. Flood Hazard Areas
7. Next Steps & Timeline



# Introduction and Context



## Gap Analysis – Key Themes

- Alignment with RCW / WAC definitions and terminology
- Clarify review procedures and submittal items
- Update references to state agency guidance
- Improve consistency and defensibility of code



# Wetland Buffers - Overview



- Current buffers are less than Ecology (ECY) BAS recommendations.
- Current code-allowed buffer reductions are not supported by BAS.
- For Ecology new buffer widths:
  - Standard width buffers must be well vegetated with native species.
  - Non- or poorly vegetated buffers should be increased by 33%.



# Wetland Buffer – ECY Options



## Option 1: Habitat score based buffers (Preferred by Ecology)

- Use two Tables of buffer widths based on wetland category and habitat score
- The smaller buffer widths (Table 1) only allowed if:
  - A 100-foot vegetated habitat corridor connects to other protected areas
  - Impact minimization measures are implemented
- Wetlands with a low habitat score can use the smaller widths without a habitat corridor

## Option 2: Land use impact-based buffers

- Buffers vary based on wetland category and level of land use intensity
- High impact uses (urban residential and commercial) have largest buffers
- Moderate impacts with medium buffers (residential 1 unit/acre, parks)
- Low impact with smallest buffers (passive recreation)



# Wetland Mitigation Requirements



- Current wetland mitigation ratios meet Ecology BAS.
- Include climate resiliency options such as a plant list that includes climate resistant vegetation.
- Evaluate minimum time requirements for mitigation monitoring. BAS recommends more than 5 years, particularly for tree establishment.
- Evaluate in-lieu fee program to provide some mitigation for Category III and IV isolated wetlands less than 1,000 sq. ft. as supported by BAS.
  - Wetlands that meet these criteria are current exempt from any mitigation.

# Wetland Discussion



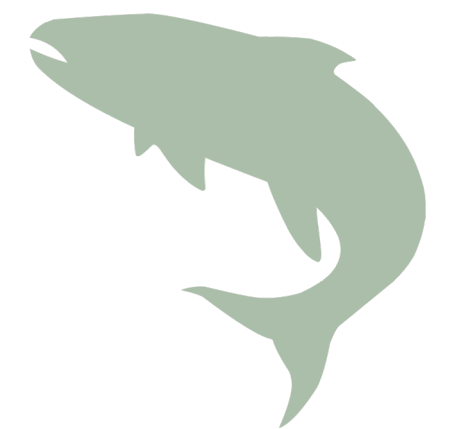
- Removing the Wetland Buffer Reduction option
- Wetland Buffer Widths: ECY Option 1 or 2?
- Mitigation in-lieu fee program for small, isolated wetland impacts



# Streams - Overview



- Updates are needed to reflect Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) 2020 management recommendations.
- BAS indicates larger protection areas are needed.
- Protection areas should be vegetated to provide needed ecosystem functions.
- Stream / riparian zone buffer reductions are not supported by BAS.



# Streams, Riparian Areas, and Buffers



WDFW recommends a new model that protects riparian zones (streams and associated riparian uplands)

- The new model uses the soil type and the potential tree height of an area to determine the size of the riparian zone, measured from the stream bank.
- Typical site potential tree height (SPTH) in Tacoma is 103 feet to 208 feet based on red alder and Douglas Fir.
  - If SPTH is not used, WDFW recommends a minimum stream buffer width of 100 feet for all stream types.

## Stream Restoration and Daylighting

- Add support for daylighting and voluntary restoration



# Stream Discussion



- Should Tacoma adopt the SPTH riparian zone model or enhance the existing system?
- Should protection area/buffer reductions be eliminated?
- What level of support should the code provide for stream daylighting and restoration?

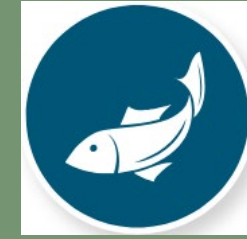




## Biodiversity Areas and Corridors

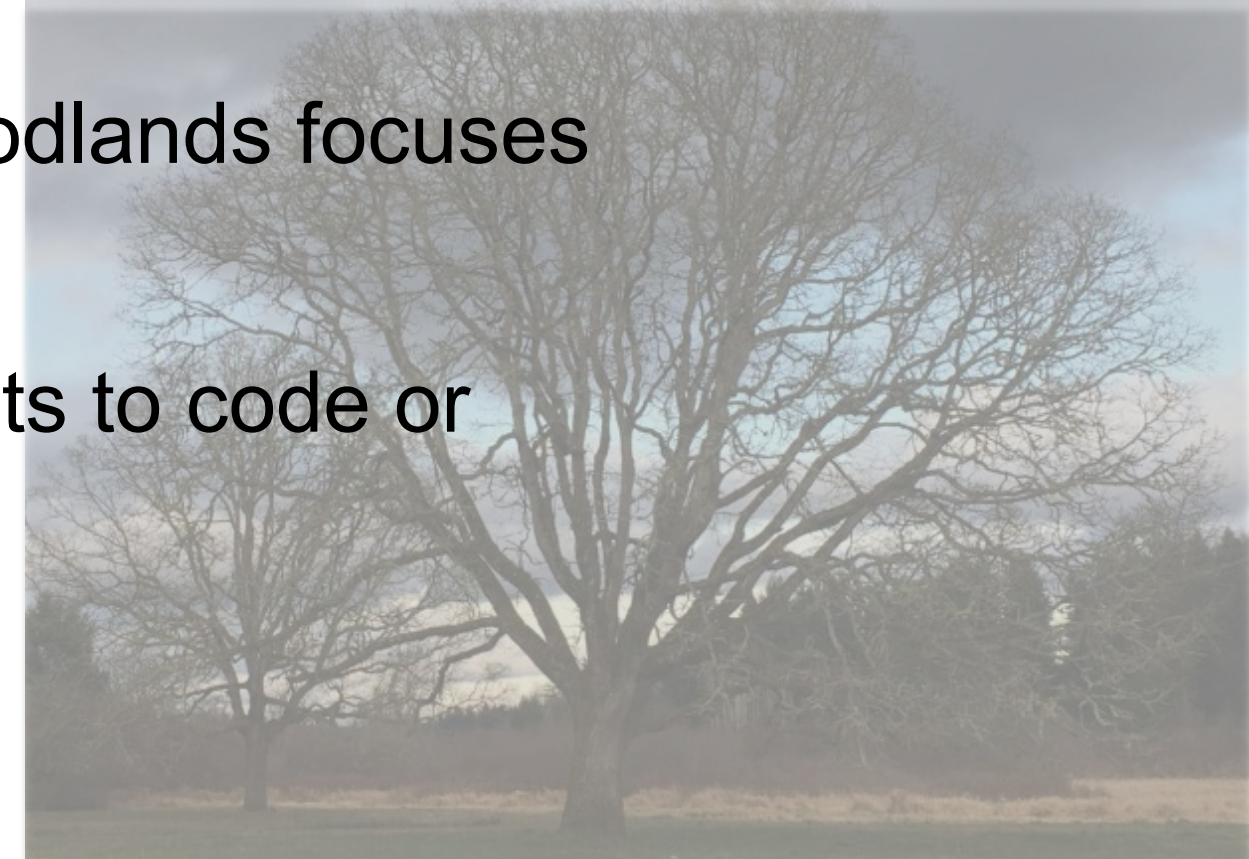
- Clarify biodiversity area definition based on WDFW BAS.
- Clarify that corridors have a minimum width requirement but no minimum size/area requirement.
- Review existing method of determining biodiversity area locations verses an overlay zone corresponding with open space layers and WDFW area/corridor mapping
  - Existing biodiversity areas/corridors determination relies on a site-specific habitat assessment performed by a biologist and reviewed by City NRP biologists.
  - Potential method could implement a biodiversity area/corridor overlay that protects only mapped areas within the overlay.





## Oregon White Oak (OWO) trees and woodlands

- Code references WDFW BAS which was updated in 2024
- WDFW BAS
  - Includes protection requirements in urban areas
  - Detailed information on protecting OWO trees and woodlands focuses on rural settings
- Evaluate the need to add OWO conservation requirements to code or create a policy document.



# FWHCA Discussion



- What is the preferred method for determining biodiversity area/corridor locations? Retain current code methodology of site-by-site analysis or create an overlay area?
- Should specific OWO protection measures be added to the CAO or should CAO refer to WDFW guidance and a clarifying City policy document?



# Flood Hazard Areas



- Review flood hazard area requirements for consistency with Title 2.
- Add information on FEMA Habitat Assessment report requirements for work within flood hazard areas.
- Consider whether flood hazard review should be extended to the 2% chance of flooding/500-year flood maps in recognition of potential climate change effects.



# Next Steps



## May - July

- Continue stakeholder meetings

## July - September

- July 16, 2025: Planning Commission request to set public hearing
- August 20, 2025: Planning Commission public hearing
- September 3, 2025: Public hearing debrief and request for Planning Commission recommendation

## October - December

- City Council Review and Adoption





**THANK YOU**