City of Poulsbo

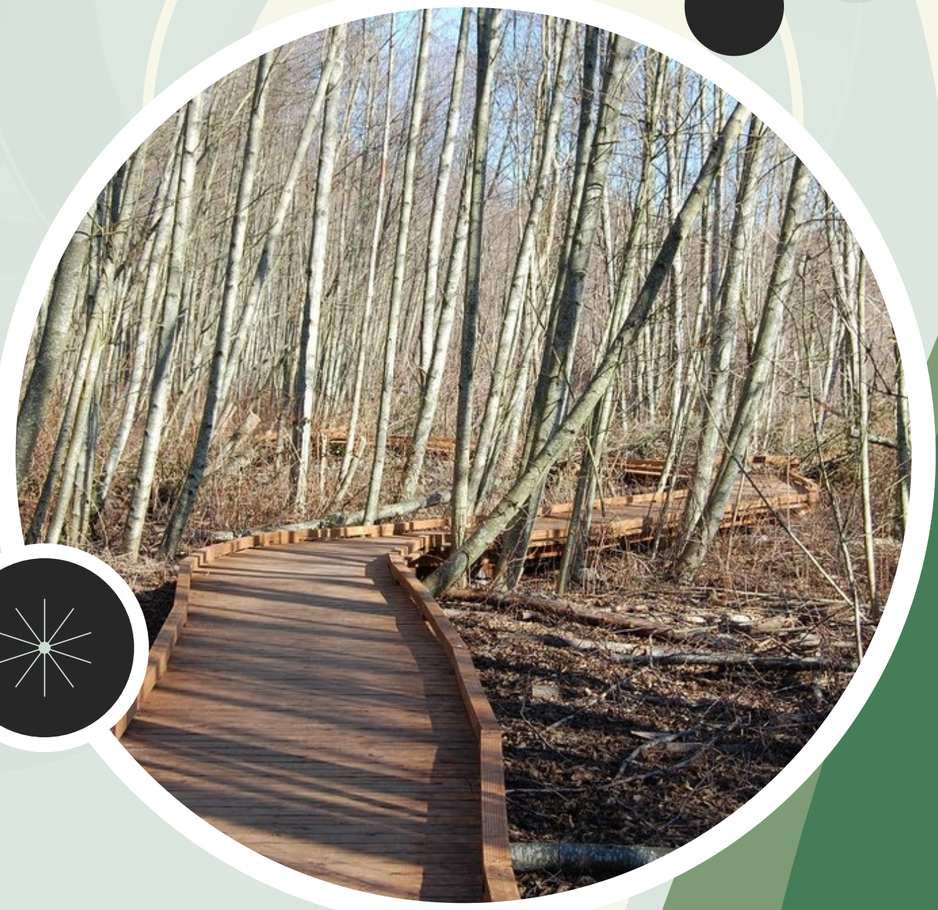
2025 Critical Areas Ordinance Update, Phase 1

City Council Workshop
November 5 , 2025
Nikole Coleman, AICP, Planning Manager

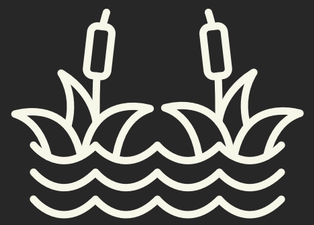
https://cityofpoulsbo.com/criticalareasupdate/

Agenda

- Reminders:
  - What are Critical Areas?
  - Why do we regulate them?
  - Best Available Science
- Phased Approach
- Required Amendments
- Next Steps



Critical Areas Include:



Wetlands

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

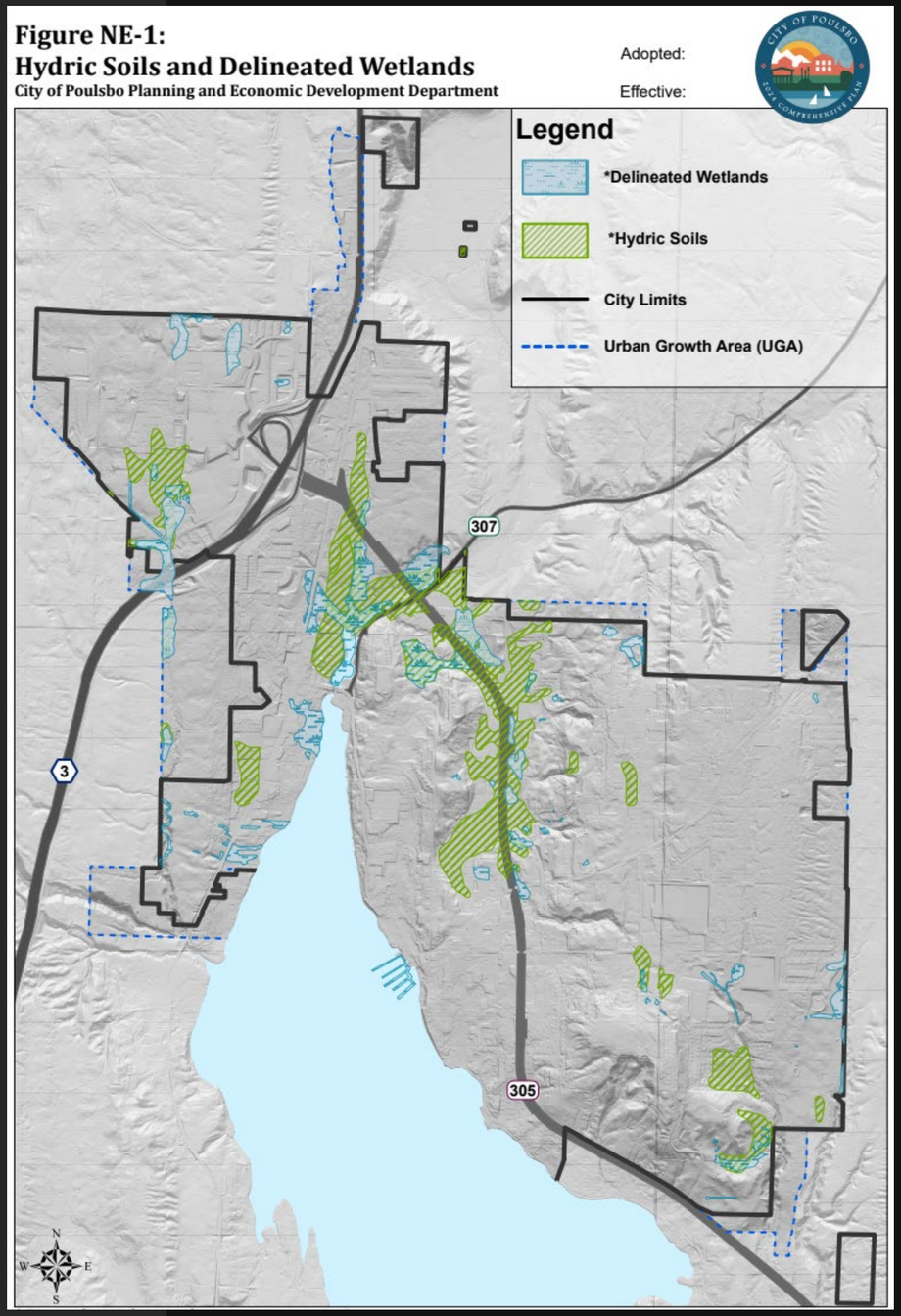
Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Geologically Hazardous Areas

Frequently Flooded Areas

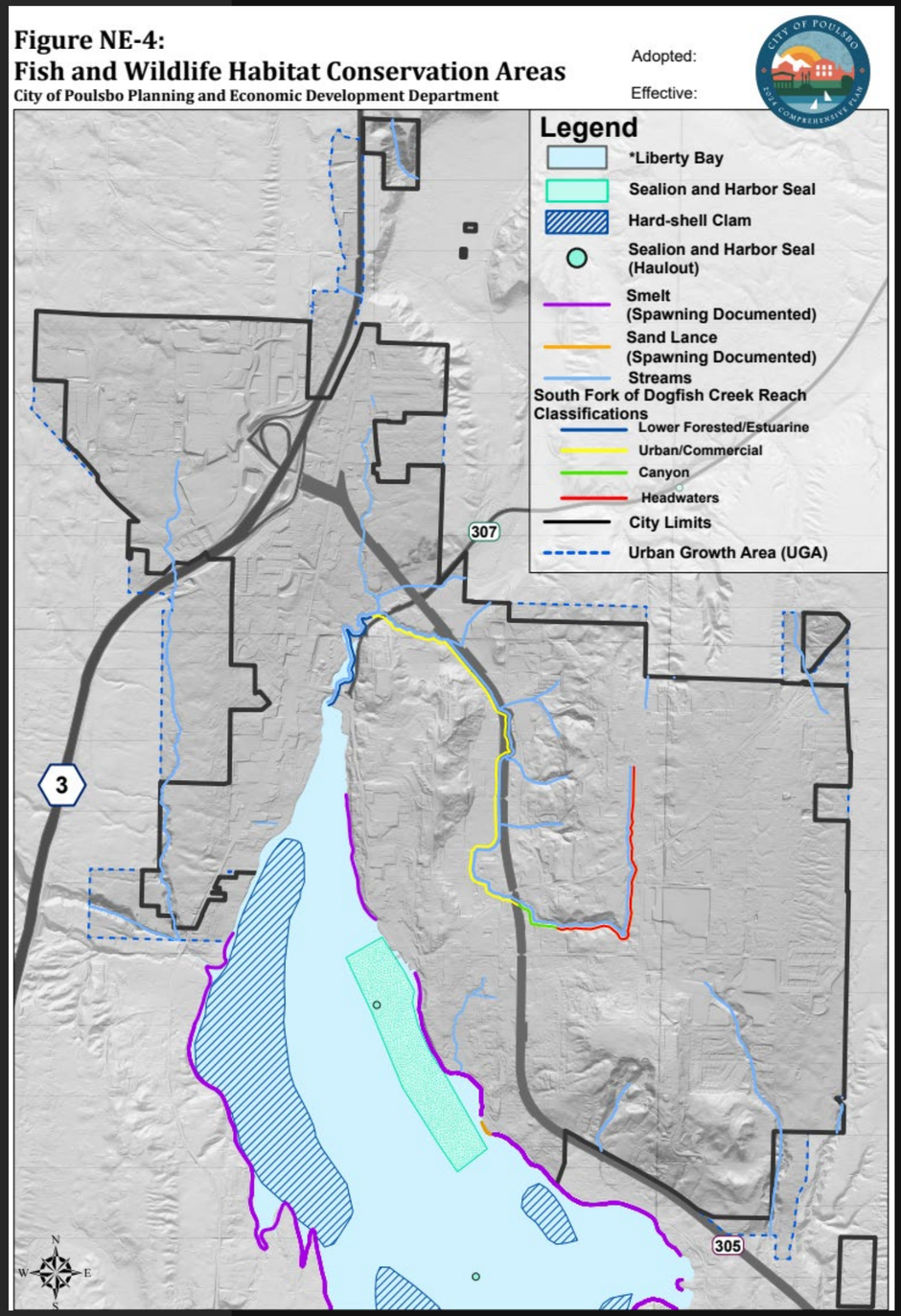
Wetlands

- Wetlands are areas that are frequently or permanently saturated with water such as marshes, swamps, bogs, or other similar lands. Wetlands may be naturally present or intentionally created.
- There are wetlands throughout Poulsbo, many still need to be identified.



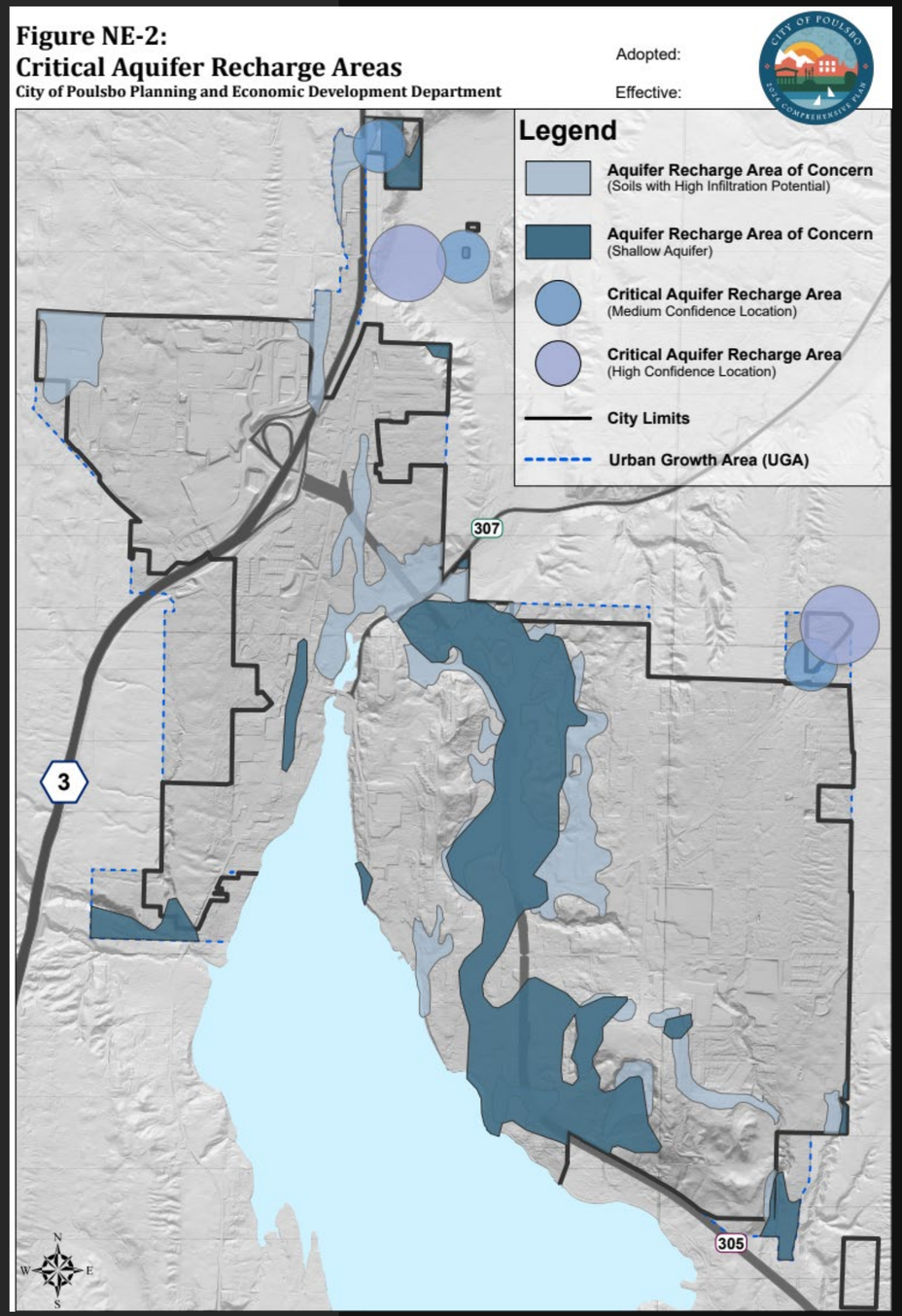
Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

- These are areas needed to conserve or maintain one or more plant or animal species.
- These species, or the environments that support multiple species, may be listed as having federal, state, or local importance.
- Located throughout the Poulsbo and are likely to be found in shorelines and coasts, along rivers and streams, near wetlands, in and near lakes and ponds, on prairies, and in forests.



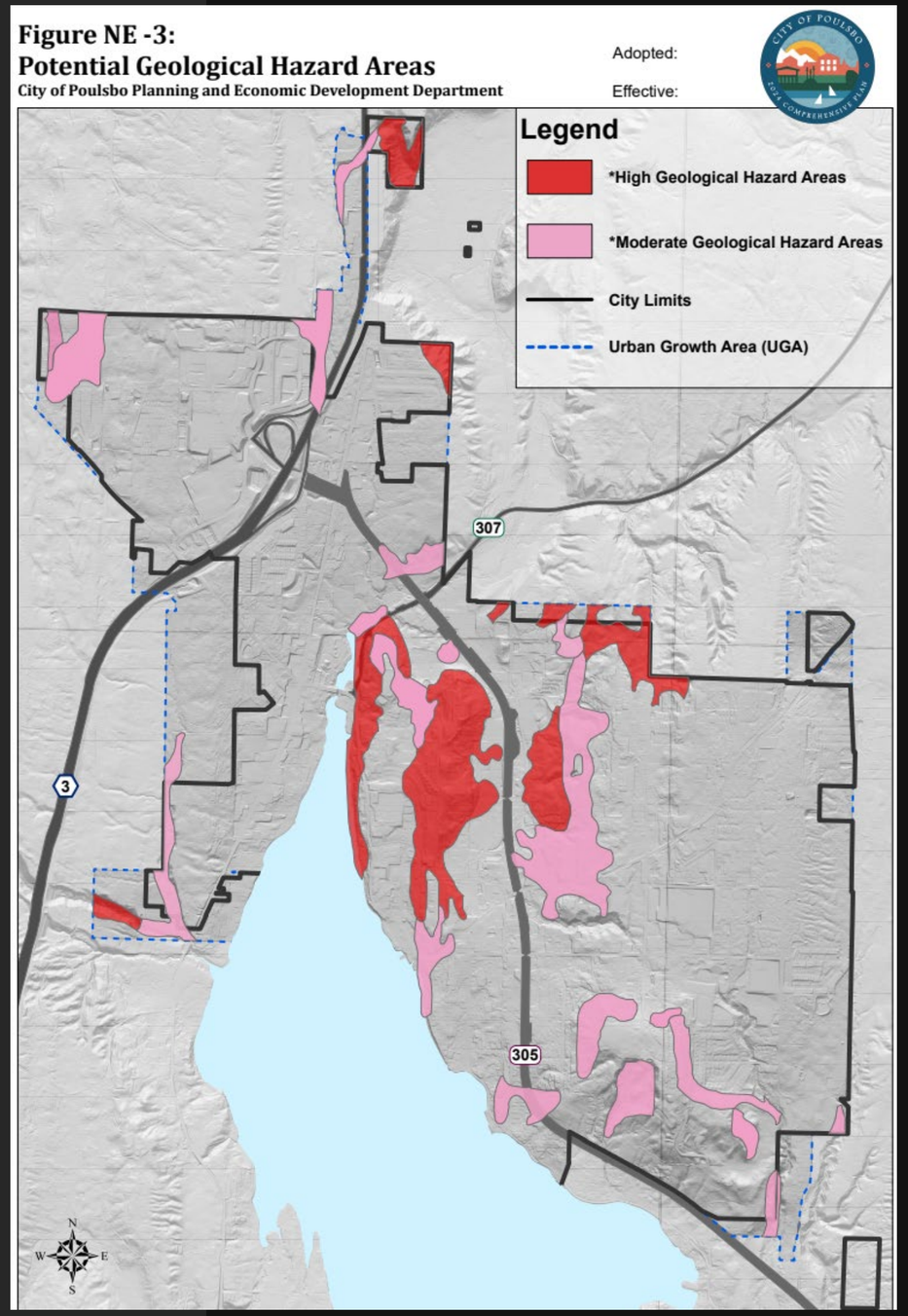
Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

- Classification of recharge areas for aquifers according to the vulnerability of the aquifer.
- Vulnerability is the combined effect of hydrogeological susceptibility to contamination and the contamination loading potential. High vulnerability is indicated by land uses that contribute contamination that may degrade groundwater and hydrogeological conditions that facilitate degradation. Low vulnerability is indicated by land uses that do not contribute contaminants that degrade ground water and those conditions that do not facilitate digression.
- The Poulsbo Aquifer is a sole - source aquifer.



Geologically Hazardous Areas

- Geologically hazardous areas are places highly susceptible to erosion, landslides, earthquakes, or other geologic events.
- In Poulsbo, the most hazardous of these areas is typically found along the marine shorelines and stream ravines. Elevations range from sea level to 440 feet, with moderate to steep slopes. Two ridges run along each side of Liberty Bay and gradually rise in elevation to the north, accentuating the general topographic trend in Poulsbo.



Frequently Flooded Areas

- Frequently flooded areas are lands in the floodplain subject to at least a 1% or greater chance of flooding in any given year, or within areas subject to flooding due to high groundwater.
- FEMA delineates flood hazards along major river and stream corridors to identify areas at risk from floodwater. This information is used for both floodplain management and insurance rating. FEMA maps have been adopted by the city.
- When assessing the potential for a flood hazard on a given site, City staff utilizes the FEMA maps; therefore, flood hazards are not reproduced on the City's Critical Area maps.

Why?

- Under Washington State Law, all counties and cities are required to develop policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas using the best available science (RCW 36.70A.172). All jurisdictions are required to review, evaluate, and, if necessary, revise their critical areas ordinances every 10 years.

- This periodic update provides an opportunity for the City to make sure our regulations are consistent with federal and state policies, and incorporate scientific advancements related to environmental conservation and natural hazards.

- In 2007, the City of Poulsbo passed Ordinance No. 2007-24, which adopted a Critical Areas Ordinance into the city's municipal code. The CAO was last updated in 2017.

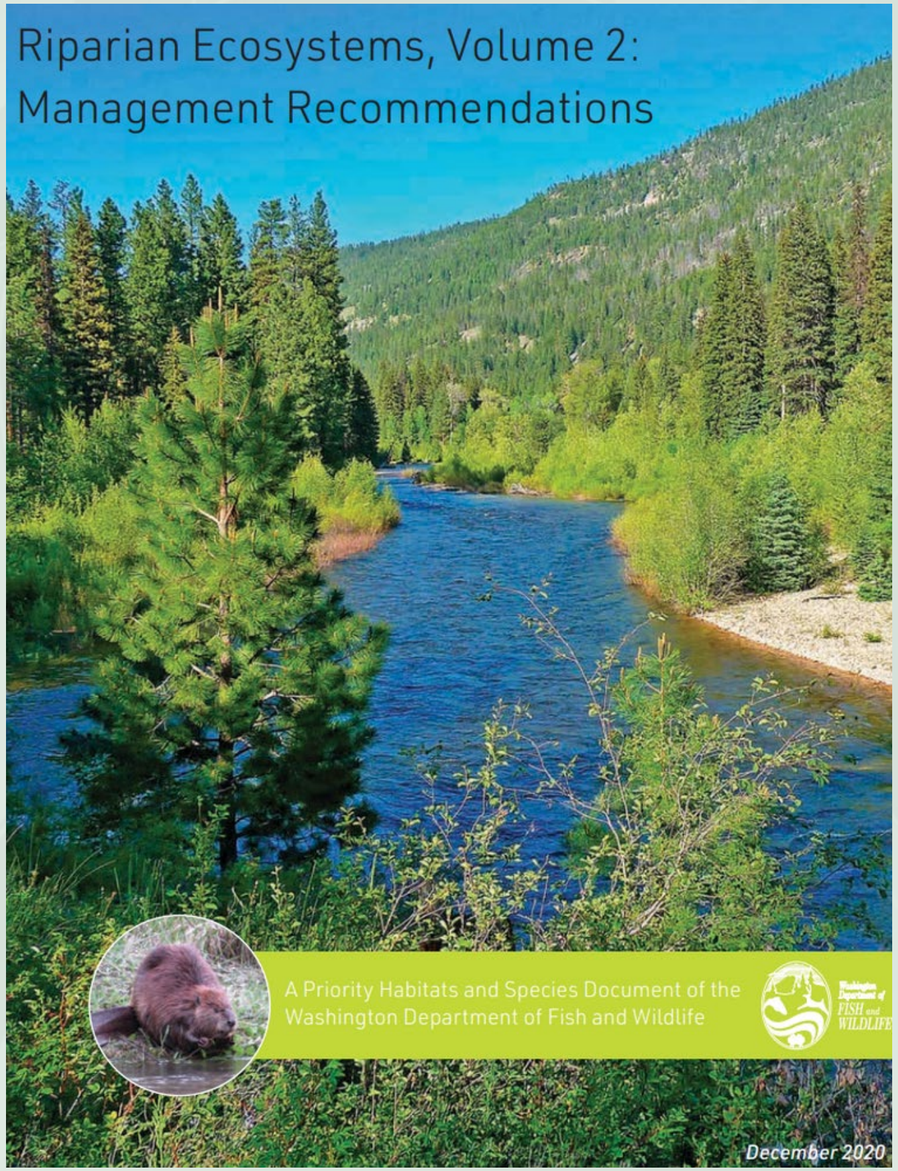
Best Available Science

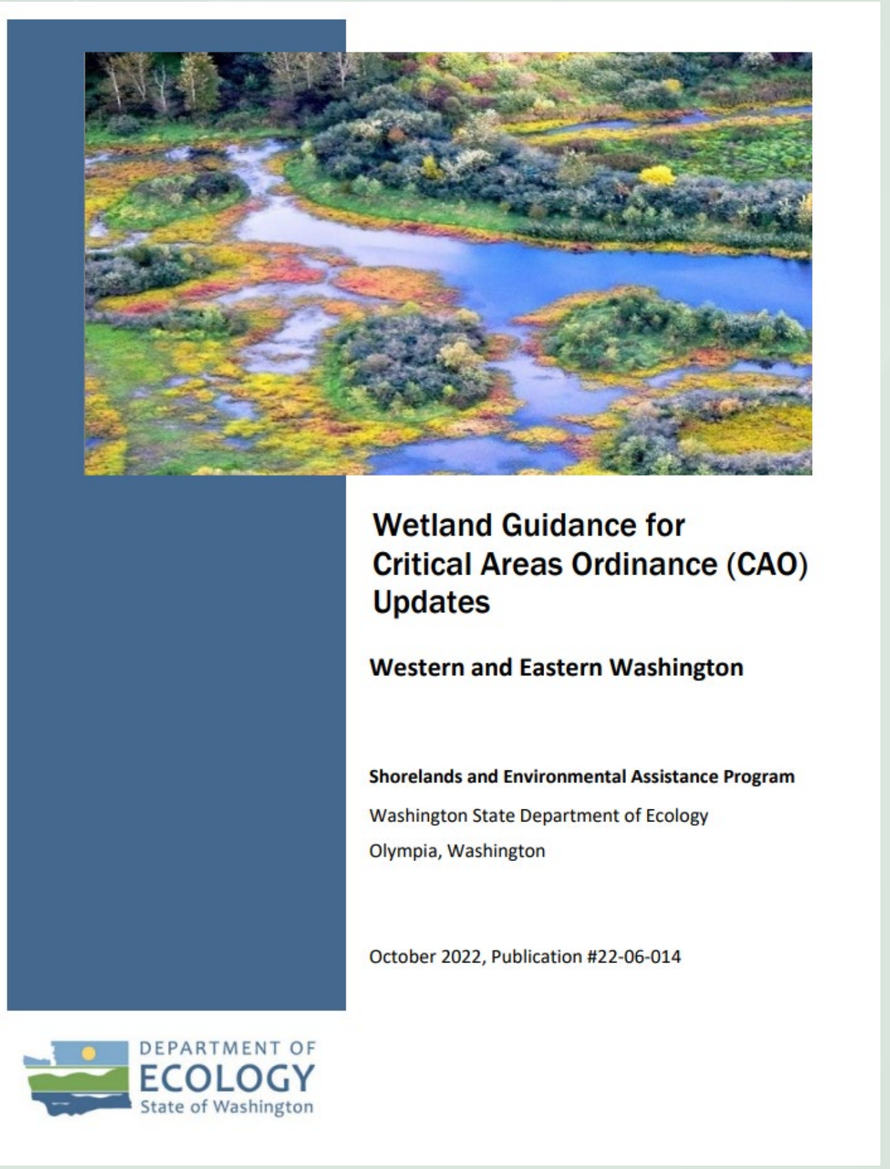
Jurisdictions must demonstrate that the best available science has been considered when creating their critical areas ordinance by documenting scientific sources that support their approach to regulating critical areas and explaining when policies depart from science-based recommendations .

Chapter 365-195 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) serves as a guide for establishing what is considered the best available science .


CITY OF POULSBO

WETLANDS AND FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION AREA BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDED PROTECTION MEASURES REPORT - REVISED


Riparian Ecosystems, Volume 2:
Management Recommendations
A Priority Habitats and Species Document of the
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
December 2020


Wetland Guidance for
Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO)
Updates
Western and Eastern Washington
Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program
Washington State Department of Ecology
Olympia, Washington
October 2022, Publication #22-06-014
DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

No Net Loss

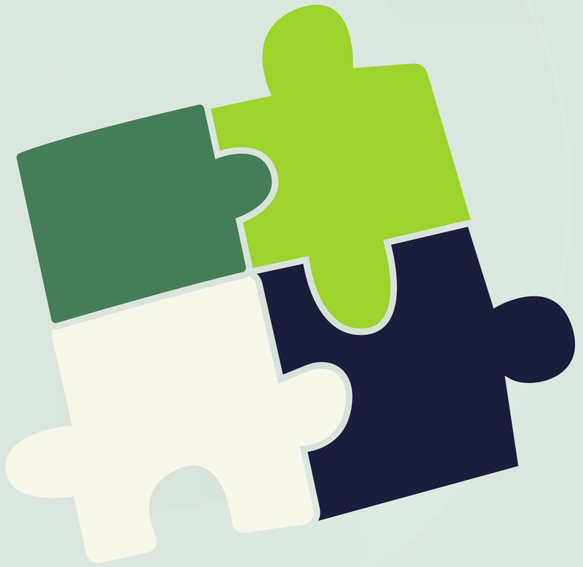
With protection of critical areas, it is important to understand that **protection does not mean that critical areas will not be impacted.**

Rather, impacts to high-quality critical areas should be prohibited except in limited circumstances. Impacts to other critical areas must be avoided and minimized under the mitigation sequence.

When impacts cannot be avoided, new development must replace the lost functions and values through **compensatory mitigation.**

No net loss is measured relative to the baseline of existing conditions; the GMA only requires the prevention of *further* harm to critical areas, not the enhancement of critical areas that were previously damaged.

CAO - Sum of Its Parts



- Goals and Policies - Comprehensive Plan
- Maps - Comprehensive Plan
- Regulations - PMC Chapter 16.20 , Critical Areas Ordinance
- Application Requirements - Title 19, Project Permit Application Procedures
- Relation to the Shoreline Jurisdiction - Wetlands located within the Shoreline Jurisdiction are regulated by the Shoreline Master Program

Phased Approach

To manage workload and provide adequate time for thoughtful review, the City is completing the CAO update in two phases:

- **Phase I (2025):** Required Amendments: This phase focuses on amendments required to bring the CAO into compliance with state law and BAS. These include revised stream buffers, updated definitions, and clarifications to ensure consistency with state-mandated standards. Planning Commission review begins August 26, 2025, with adoption anticipated in November 2025.

- **Phase II (2026):** Discretionary Amendments: Phase II will include discretionary changes aimed at improving implementation, usability, and alignment with local planning priorities. Topics may include buffer averaging procedures, low-impact development integration, streamlining permit processes, and strengthening adaptive management strategies. This phase is anticipated to begin in winter 2026.

Required Changes

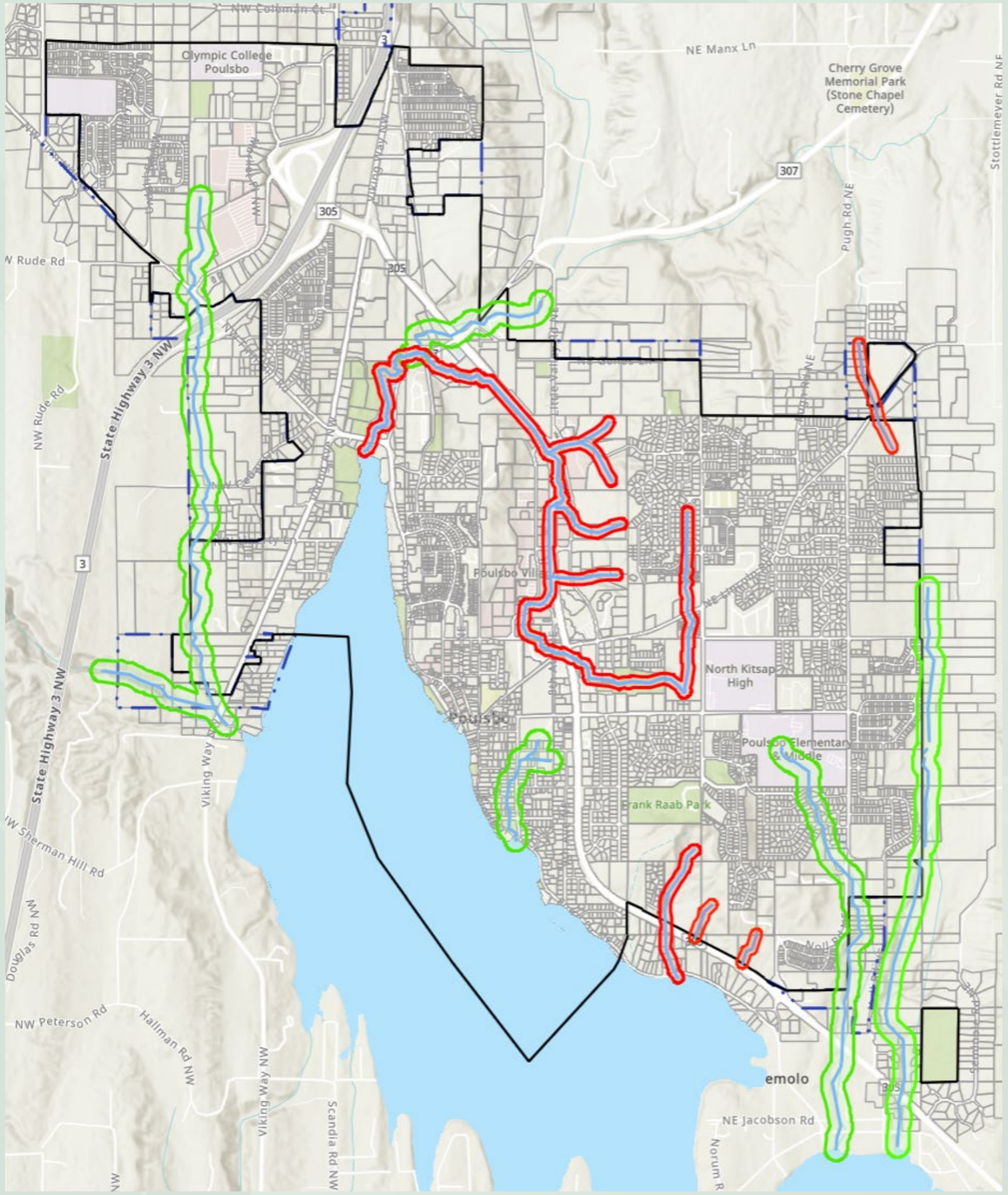
- **General Provisions and Definitions**
  - Minor updates, nothing significant
- **Wetlands :**
  - Minor update to wetland buffer width and habitat scores
  - Update to mitigation replacement ratios
- **Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas :**
  - Buffer = Riparian Management Zone
  - Buffer widths minimum of 100 feet for all streams
  - Amended building/construction setback from 25 feet to 15 feet

Table 16.20.315—Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Area Development Standards		
Riparian Management Zone Setback Requirements		
Water Type	***RMZ Width Current (feet, each side of stream)***	***RMZ Width Proposed (feet, each side of stream)***
F1 (salmonids)	200	200
F2 (nonsalmonids)	150	150
Np	100	100
Ns 1 (connected to S, F, Np)	75	100
Ns 2 (connected to S, F, Np)	50	100

South Fork Dogfish Creek Stream-Reach-Specific RMZ Requirements		
Tidewater/estuarine*	100	100
Lower forested	75, or top of adjacent slope, whichever is greater	100
Urban/commercial	50 for new development and redevelopment; extent of existing constraints for existing development	100
Canyon	Park boundary or top of slope, whichever is closest to stream, otherwise 100 or top of steep slope, whichever is greater	Park boundary or top of slope, whichever is closest to stream, otherwise 100 or top of steep slope, whichever is greater
Headwater	50	100

Public Engagement and Comments

- Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Department of Ecology
- Department of Natural Resources
- Suquamish Tribe
- Postcards sent to all potentially impacted property owners – limited response and concern



IS YOUR PROPERTY AFFECTED BY PROPOSED STREAM BUFFER CHANGES?

Review and Adoption Process

- Planning Commission Workshop - Aug 26
- Planning Commission Public Hearing - Oct 7
- **City Council Workshop – November 5**
- City Council Workshop (if needed) - Nov 12
- City Council Public Hearing and Adoption - Nov 19

Thank You