

Kittitas County Critical Areas

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What are the wetland setbacks for my property?

Structural wetland setbacks range based on the proposed use and the wetland category. For residential uses the buffer can range from 40-250 feet depending on the category of wetland. In addition to the buffer there is 15-foot structural setback from all wetland buffer edges. CDS does not know the category of wetland on or adjacent to your property and must assume the most restrictive wetland category when additional information is not provided by a qualified professional. For residential uses of one unit per acre or less (moderate impact) the total structural setback will be 205 feet (190 buffer + 15 foot structural setback) unless the applicant submits a wetland delineation indicating a category of wetland with a less restrictive buffer. For residential uses of more than 1 unit per acre (high impact) the total structural setback will be 265 feet unless a wetland delineation is provided by a qualified professional indicating a less restrictive wetland category. CDS maintains a qualified professionals list to assist in determining the wetland category. Wetland delineations often result in less restrictive buffers. Below is the standard buffer width table.

Category of Wetland	Land Use with Low Impact ¹	Land Use with Moderate Impact ²	Land Use with High Impact ³
I	125 ft	190 ft	250 ft
II	100 ft	150 ft	200 ft
III	75 ft	110 ft	150 ft
IV	25 ft	40 ft	50 ft

**An additional 15 foot structural setback is required from the edge of all wetland buffers*

2) How close can I build to a stream?

The Kittitas County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) regulates 3 types of streams; Type F, Type NP, and Type NS. Stream types can be found by looking up your parcel on the County Compas mapping system and activating the “DNR Water Type” layer in the upper right hand corner of the page (sometimes you have to zoom out after activating the layer). These streams are protected with a Riparian Management Zone (RMZ) that serves as a buffer from development. Most of the upper County is within the Cascade Ecoregion and most of the lower County is in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion. You can determine your ecoregion by activating the “EcoRegions” layer on Compas. The table

below indicates the RMZ for each regulated stream type. Some mapped streams are categorized with a “Type 9 (U)” designation. This indicates that the stream type is unknown. This means CDS will require the strictest RMZ standard (Type F standards) if additional information isn’t provided to categorize the stream. Many of these streams are irrigation channels which are not regulated under our CAO. A letter from the applicable irrigation district indicating the stream is in fact irrigation will suffice to remove any CAO requirements. CDS will also accept stream delineations from qualified professional to determine the category of a stream. CDS maintains a qualified professionals list to assist in stream delineations.

Kittitas County Nonshoreline Rivers, Streams, Lakes and Ponds (does not include building setback [[KCC 17A.01.090.5](#)])

Stream Type	Riparian Management Zone Widths ^{1,2}	
	Cascade Ecoregion (feet) Agriculture	Columbia Plateau Ecoregion (feet) Forest
Type S (Shoreline)	See the SMP	See the SMP
Type F	150	100
Type Np	100	65
Type Ns	50	40

** An additional 15 foot structural setback is required from the edge of all RMZ’s*

3) Is there any way to reduce a wetland buffer or Riparian Management Zone?

Wetland buffers and RMZ’s can be reduced in certain situations. In cases where there is need for a reduction of up to 25%, buffer averaging may be an option. This will require a critical areas report and mitigation plan to offset an encroachment into the buffer/RMZ area. The encroachment into the buffer/RMZ area will require a mitigation plan that replaces the buffer function lost from the encroachment. A qualified professional can assist in preparing this documentation.

Sometimes a 25% reduction is not sufficient to provide an adequate developable area. In these cases, an applicant can apply for a Reasonable Use exception. This option will also require critical areas report and mitigation plan, but it is not restricted to a maximum 25% reduction. The applicant must demonstrate that the required buffer/ RMZ denies all reasonable use of the property and the proposed development is the minimum necessary to develop consistent with other comparable uses in the general area while preserving as much of the buffer/RMZ as possible.

4) Where do the County wetland/stream maps come from? How can I change them if they are wrong?

The Kittitas County critical areas mapping layers come from State Agencies. Agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology and Department of Fish and Wildlife all contribute different data sets to the County. This is considered the best available information and its utilization helps the County to ensure we are compliant with standards established under the Growth Management Act. Sometimes this information is inaccurate. CDS can accept studies from qualified professionals that conflict with this mapping for individual projects. The best course of action, if you believe the mapping to be inaccurate, is to hire a qualified professional to perform a critical areas report and submit this with any development applications. We also recommend you retain this report to be used for any development application for up to five years from the date of the report. While this will not change the online mapping, it will allow case specific deviation from the existing maps.

5) Can a County representative come to my property and tell me what type of wetland/stream I have?

Unfortunately, the County does not have the expertise or human resources at this time to delineate a stream or categorize a wetland. Certain State agencies like WDFW may be willing to assist with stream delineations, but that is at their discretion. For wetlands, you will need to hire a qualified professional.

6) I do not have wetlands or streams on my property. Why do I need to hire a professional to verify this?

If the County mapping indicates a stream/wetland may be impacted by a proposed development, CDS is required to act on this mapping until a qualified professional indicates it is inaccurate. Streams can be seasonal and demonstrate little physical evidence when dry. Wetlands take many forms and can exhibit little evidence of their existence. Without the expertise to delineate wetlands, CDS cannot be sure they do not exist. A qualified professional investigation ensures “no net loss” of ecological function which is the standard of protection required under the Washington State Growth Management Act.