

King County's Critical Areas Ordinance and properties with horses

Important things horse owners should know about King County's Critical Areas Ordinance are:

1. Existing activities and existing clearing are grandfathered.
 2. Fixed buffers and clearing limits do not apply under a farm plan.
 3. Permit costs for some agricultural building permits have been lowered.
 4. Farm plans are free.
 5. Properties with approved farm plans are eligible for receiving cost sharing dollars to implement components of the plan.
 6. Grazed wet meadows can be used for field access roads, stables and confinement areas.
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More detail:

- Horse owners may not be affected by King County's Critical Areas Ordinance and clearing limits:
 - Existing clearing, pastures, barns, paddocks, and other activities are grandfathered into the provisions.
 - With a farm plan, prepared in conjunction with the King Conservation District, the clearing limits do not apply and wetlands and streams are protected through best management practices rather than fixed buffers
 - With a farm plan horse owners will be able to build stables, loading docks, and confinement areas within a grazed wet meadow. This was not allowed before.
- The ordinance lets horse owners protect natural systems by using farm plans to put "best management practices" in place. These practices will protect streams, wetlands, lakes, rivers, and other critical areas. For example, the horse owner might determine through the farm plan to build fences to keep livestock from streams, put manure management practices in place, or plant grass filter strips or hedgerows to protect water quality.
- If the farm plan includes provisions for manure compost bins up to 240sf and installation of livestock bridges designed to pre-approved specifications, a grading permit is not required.
- Large structures like stables or barns will now qualify for small site drainage review instead of the normal, large site drainage review; this is a less expensive process than what is required under former regulations.
- There have been no changes to the current regulations for livestock densities.
- Agricultural operations including horse properties may pay less for permits since farm plans are being offered for free and developed by the King Conservation District with help from DDES and DNRP staff.

For more information visit: www.metrokc.gov/cao or call the DDES Customer Service Phone Line: 206-296-6600.