

---

**Rural Stewardship Plans****Flexible alternatives for rural properties**

Under King County's new Critical Areas Ordinance adopted on October 25, 2004, rural landowners will have the option to pursue a Rural Stewardship Plan in place of standard critical areas requirements when developing their property. The planning process offers landowners an opportunity to tailor wetland and stream buffers to the needs of their property, in exchange for commitment to a management plan that will protect natural resources over the long term.

**Stewardship Plans are available to all rural (RA zoned) landowners**

If your property is zoned Rural Residential (RA) you are eligible to develop a Rural Stewardship Plan that is unique to your property. However, a Rural Stewardship Plan may not be the best option for everyone.

Properties with multiple uses, including rural residences, agriculture and forestry, can be handled under the umbrella of a rural stewardship plan however, there are other planning processes and benefits for agricultural and forestry properties that might be more beneficial, depending on the circumstances.

**Site-specific protections and long-term stewardship**

By developing and implementing a Rural Stewardship Plan that may include restoration, maintenance, and long-term monitoring of critical areas, their buffers, and native vegetation, you may be able to reduce the size of stream and wetland buffers required on your property and increase the amount of clearing allowed. King County has assessed the quality of each basin and will take the unique circumstances of each site, the condition of existing buffers and your location on the stream (upstream vs. downstream) into consideration when helping you develop your plan.

There are several types of critical areas that can be directly addressed through a Rural Stewardship Plan:

- **Aquatic areas** - including rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, estuaries, marine shorelines and shallow aquifers.
- **Wetland areas** - areas that are inundated by surface or groundwater often enough to support specific plants and animals unique to those areas.
- **Wildlife areas** - critical habitats for species found to be of significant importance through King County's Comprehensive Plan. These areas include active nesting and breeding sites for nine priority species and the mapped wildlife habitat network that links wildlife areas with critical areas, trails, parks, priority habitat, and other open space - to allow wildlife migration.

Buffers for other critical areas such as critical aquifer recharge areas or geologic hazard areas (e.g. steep slopes or landslide hazard areas) cannot be reduced through a Rural Stewardship Plan.

### **Goals and objectives of the Rural Stewardship Plan**

In order to qualify for the reduced buffers and clearing standards that a Rural Stewardship Plan can provide, you must meet minimum goals in your Plan. In priority order, they are:

1. To avoid impacts to critical areas to the maximum extent practicable,
2. If there is the potential to impact more than one category of wetland, type of aquatic area, or more than one species of native fish or wildlife, impacts to the highest category of wetland, type of aquatic area, or most protected fish or wildlife species should be avoided first,
3. To maintain or enhance the natural hydrologic systems on site to the maximum extent practicable,
4. To maintain, restore or enhance native plants,
5. To maintain, restore or enhance the function and value of critical areas or critical area buffers,
6. To minimize habitat fragmentation and enhance corridors between wetlands, riparian corridors, wildlife habitat conservation areas and other priority habitats,
7. To minimize development impacts by implementing best management practices and meeting performance standards over the life of the development, and
8. To monitor the effectiveness of stewardship practices and to implement additional practices to maintain, restore or enhance critical area functions when necessary.

### **Benefits for rural property owners**

Designing a Rural Stewardship Plan may help you achieve your short-term and long-term goals for your property. You will also receive technical assistance to help you identify viable stewardship activities for your property.

With an approved Rural Stewardship Plan, you may also have more flexibility in taking certain actions like firewood cutting or weed removal in critical area buffers. In addition, a successful Rural Stewardship Plan may make you eligible for enrollment in the Public Benefit Rating System, an incentive program that could give you property tax benefits.

### **More information**

The public rule that details how Rural Stewardship Plans will work will not be adopted until late January 2005, so some details about how to go about getting a plan are still unresolved. In the meantime, King County staff can answer general questions about the benefits of a Rural Stewardship Plan and help you determine whether your property would be best served by this option.

More information about farm plans and forestry plans is also available. These are alternative planning options for those properties primarily engaged in horticultural or livestock farming or forestry. For more information, see the fliers entitled "Farm Management Plans" or "Forest Management Plans," visit <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/cao>, or ask a King County staff member.

For more information on Rural Stewardship Plans, please contact Katy Vanderpool, King County, at 206-296-8362 or [katy.vanderpool@metrokc.gov](mailto:katy.vanderpool@metrokc.gov)

More information, including the draft Rural Stewardship Planning Handbook, is available online at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/cao>

**Alternative formats available upon request by calling 206-296-6519**