

DEVELOPING GUIDANCE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF MARINE RIPARIAN AREAS IN PUGET SOUND, WASHINGTON

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Increasing development pressure along the shorelines of Puget Sound, Washington is an ongoing challenge for the region. The core of the state's federally approved Coastal Zone Management Program is the Shoreline Management Act (SMA). Enacted by the state legislature in 1971, the SMA began as a citizen initiative to address concerns over increasing coastal development. Significantly updated in 2003, the SMA requires—and provides state funding for—local governments to develop, implement, and update Shoreline Master Programs to accomplish several fundamental goals. One of these is to protect shoreline natural resources, including "...the land and its vegetation and wildlife, and the water of the state and their aquatic life..." Updated Shoreline Master Programs are to include regulations that ensure no net loss of ecological functions of the shoreline while encouraging water-dependent development and public access. Cities and counties across Washington State are in the process of updating their Shoreline Master Programs.

Riparian areas along marine shorelines are ecologically important. These are transitional environments connecting adjacent aquatic and terrestrial systems and provide many ecological functions. Coastal trees and other vegetation on shorelines can stabilize the soil, control pollution entering marine waters, provide shade and organic inputs to adjacent marine waters, and provide fish and wildlife habitat. Residential, industrial, and commercial development result in a loss of certain ecological functions and associated goods and services such as fish and wildlife habitat, maintenance of water quality, and recreational opportunities.

Through a collaborative interagency process, the State of Washington is producing guidance to help inform local governments of how best to protect marine riparian areas. The Aquatic Habitat Guidelines group includes the Washington State Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Ecology, Transportation, Natural Resources, Recreation and Conservation Office, and Community, Trade and Economic Development. This group is charged with developing integrated approaches to marine, freshwater, and riparian habitat protection and restoration through comprehensive and effective management of activities affecting Washington's aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

The Aquatic Habitat Guidelines group is working with Washington Sea Grant to produce guidance specific to marine riparian areas of Puget Sound. The first phase of this project was a draft literature review on which to base the guidance. This was completed during the summer of 2008. The second phase of the project, developing guidance for managing the marine riparian areas of Puget Sound in a way that maintains ecologic function, is currently underway and will have a final result in June of 2009. This process includes peer review by an interdisciplinary panel of scientists, and review by state agency experts and a subgroup of local government staff.

By working through this collaborative process, we will produce widely accepted, science-based guidance for city and county Shoreline Master Program regulations, which will result in the conservation of ecological functions of marine riparian areas in Puget Sound.

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