Permitting takes time. It is ideal to start the permit application process a full year before the desired work start date. While green shorelines projects are sometimes permitted in as little as three months, the process can be lengthy since several steps have to occur in a specific sequence.

Before you draw any plans, start by reviewing local permitting rules, Corps and WDFW design guidelines, and information requested on the JARPA form. Final out if there are any examples, conditions, or concerns for your specific type of project. Also understand what work windows are and how they might affect your project timeline (see “Building Better Docks”).

Tips to facilitate the Army Corps permit process

The Corps has written several documents that can accelerate the process of getting federal permits. Most significant for green shoreline projects is a “Programmatic Biological Evaluation” for shoreline restoration that the Army Corps wrote in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It includes criteria for cut beaches, fill beaches, and bulkhead plantings. If your project meets the conditions listed, you will be able to forgo the site-specific Endangered Species Act analysis, which is typically the most involved part of getting federal permits. To determine whether your project meets the programmatic conditions, visit: https://www.mvos.usace.army.mil/PublicMenu/Menu.cfm?sitename=REG&page name=Programmatic

Also, a Regional General Permit (RGP) provides clear guidelines for docks on Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, most of which are outlined in “Building Better Docks.” If you can demonstrate that your proposed project meets the conditions of RGP, it will greatly simplify the Corps review. To download RGP, visit: http://www.mvos.usace.army.mil/PublicMenu/Menu.cfm?sitename=REG&page name=mainpage_RGPs

The Corps has a series of general permits known as Nationwide Permits for activities that have minimal environmental impact. If your project does not meet the criteria of RGP, Nationwide Permits 3, 13, and 27 may help streamline permitting. For more information, visit: https://www.mvos.usace.army.mil/PublicMenu/Menu.cfm?sitename=REG&page name=What_is_NWP

The flow chart provided here represents the process for a typical residential shoreline project. It does not cover every possible variation that can arise for specific projects.

Schematic of the permitting process for residential shoreline projects on Lake Washington