

Streamline Permits for “Green Shore” Projects on Lake and Marine Shores

The problem

High permitting hurdles discourage property owners from doing the right thing

Many homeowners living on our lake and marine shores currently have bulkheads made of concrete, rocks or other armoring. Bulkheads remove shoreline vegetation and shallow water areas that provide vital habitat. Waves crashing against these structures tend to scour the sand, causing beach erosion and making the environment much less inviting for fish and other creatures. Bulkheads also can limit access to the beach and affect the aesthetic values of our shorelines.

Property owners who want to replace bulkheads with more environmentally-friendly, sustainable designs face a complex set of permits. Unfortunately, these permitting hurdles can be so high that homeowners often take the path of least resistance and just rebuild their existing bulkhead.

The solution

Best practice legislation to benefit property owners and environment

Since 1995, local and state land-use permits have been streamlined for certain fish habitat projects on *streams*. These projects are exempt from shoreline and other local land-use permits as well as review under the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA). Instead, they undergo a streamlined Hydraulic Project Approval process conducted by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife which includes opportunity for comment by local government.

This proposed legislation would apply the same kind of permit streamlining to “green shore” projects on our lake shores that have worked well for stream-oriented habitat projects. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) would first apply this approach to Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish. Then we would evaluate whether it’s successful. If so, the department would recommend what steps ought to be taken to advance “green shore” projects on other lakes and our marine shorelines.

WHY IT MATTERS

The current permitting process is challenging for homeowners who want to use natural, sustainable materials to stabilize and protect their shoreline property.

Innovative techniques such as “bioengineering” protect property from erosion and storms. They also improve property views and provide easier, safer beach access for wading, swimming and paddling.

“Green shores” stabilization also provides vital habitat for critical fish and wildlife species.

Making it easier to get green shores permits will encourage homeowners to do the right thing. The bill would extend green shore streamlining to Lake Washington and Sammamish projects, as the first step in creating new incentives for similar projects on all our lake and marine shorelines.

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Ecology's proposal

Ecology's "green shore" proposal includes:

- **Clearly defining what projects will qualify as green shorelines for streamlined permitting.** Examples include creating pockets of sandy beaches that improve fish habitat while enhancing the property; and using vegetation, logs and other bioengineering tools to dissipate wave energy and hold soil and gravel in place.
- **Initially applying green shore project streamlining procedures to Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish.** Local communities and groups around these lakes have done excellent work to describe various kinds of "green shoreline" alternatives to hard armored bulkheads on these lakes. Property owners on these lakes also identified the complex permit process as a significant obstacle to considering green shoreline alternatives. The proposed permit streamlining would directly complement this previous work.
- **Identifying a path forward to extend green shorelines incentives to other areas.** After a few years, Ecology would examine our experience on these lakes, and recommend a path forward to the Legislature to extend green shorelines incentives to other lakes and marine waters.

How it will benefit Washington

This is a great example of a win-win solution. Streamlining the permitting process will allow homeowners to incorporate sustainable, bioengineered designs on their shoreline property in a way that benefits people and fish. Other gains include:

- Making green shorelines permits easier and less time-consuming to obtain.
- Expanding fish habitats, even in urban settings.
- Using natural materials to dissipate wave energy, guard against erosion, stabilize the soil and protect beaches during storms.
- Offering homeowners safer wading conditions, better swimming access, more waterfront play areas, better views, and an easier way to launch hand-held boats.

More information

- Green Shorelines for Lake Washington & Lake Sammamish
www.govlink.org/watersheds/8/action/GreenShorelines/default.aspx
- Department of Ecology's Legislative Website
www.ecy.wa.gov/legislature.html