Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) Update
Best Available Science Overview

Best Available Science (BAS) is the scientific information counties use when updating a Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO). State law requires that these decisions be based on credible, well-supported science—not anecdotes or non-expert opinions. BAS draws from research, monitoring, surveys, mapping, and expert review to help ensure our environmental protections reflect the best information we have today.

What Does BAS Tell Us About Thurston County's Critical Areas?

BAS helps us see how Thurston County's natural systems are doing and which places need extra care. Each critical area will have its own BAS review as part of the CAO update.

Wetlands

The CAO relies on state and federal science to protect wetlands and their essential functions by applying appropriate buffers and mitigation to prevent the loss of ecological value.

Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

The CAO uses state and federal guidance, careful mapping, and best management practices to protect the groundwater Thurston County relies on for drinking water.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Areas

The CAO relies on state guidance to protect key riparian and upland habitats that support priority fish and wildlife species.

Frequently Flooded Areas

The CAO uses FEMA flood maps, local flood and groundwater hazard information, and regional hazard-mitigation plans to guide flood-risk protections in Thurston County.

Geologically Hazardous Areas

The CAO relies on the latest mapping and hazard assessments to help protect people from landslides, earthquakes, volcanic activity, and climate-driven risks.

How Will BAS Guide the CAO Update?

The County will use this science to guide rules that protect our community and our natural resources. As new information becomes available, it will be added so the CAO stays current. The goal is to help Thurston County stay safe and resilient.

Learn more:
ThurstonCriticalAreas.org

THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852