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Thurston County Planning
Commission

CAO Update: Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas BAS and Discussion

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Presentation Outline: Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs)

- Functions, values, and hazards
- Climate change
- Key protection strategies
- Discussion



Intro



Defining CARAs

- WAC Definition:

Critical aquifer recharge areas are areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water, including areas where an aquifer that is a source of drinking water is vulnerable to contamination that would affect the potability of the water, or is susceptible to reduced recharge (Washington Administrative Code 365-190-030)



Classifying CARAs

- Current CAO:
 - 3 categories of sensitivity (CARA I, II, & III)
 - Based on soil types and geologic formations
 - Highest sensitivity category includes wellhead protection areas

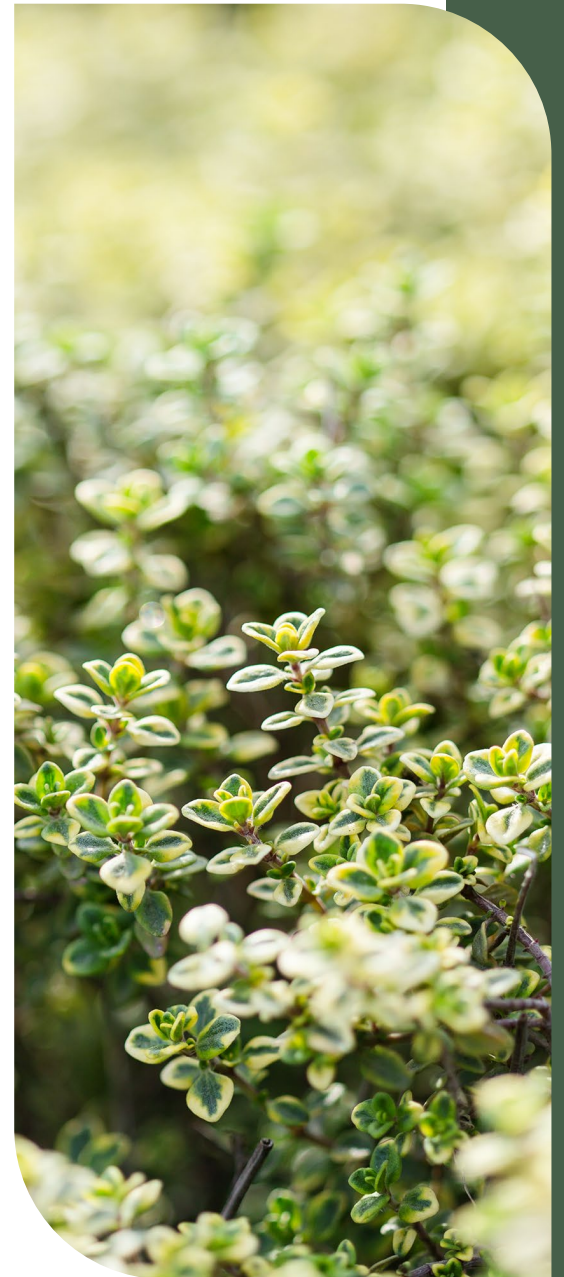


Functions and Values

- Groundwater is Thurston County's primary source of drinking water
- CARAs allow aquifers to recharge with clean water
- Provide clean, cold water to streams and rivers
 - Important during dry months, especially for salmonids



Values



Contamination Risk

- Susceptibility
 - Geologic Setting
 - Depth, geologic formations, soil types, surface geology, vegetation, weather patterns
- Threats
 - Human Development
 - Runoff, spills, failing septic, leaks



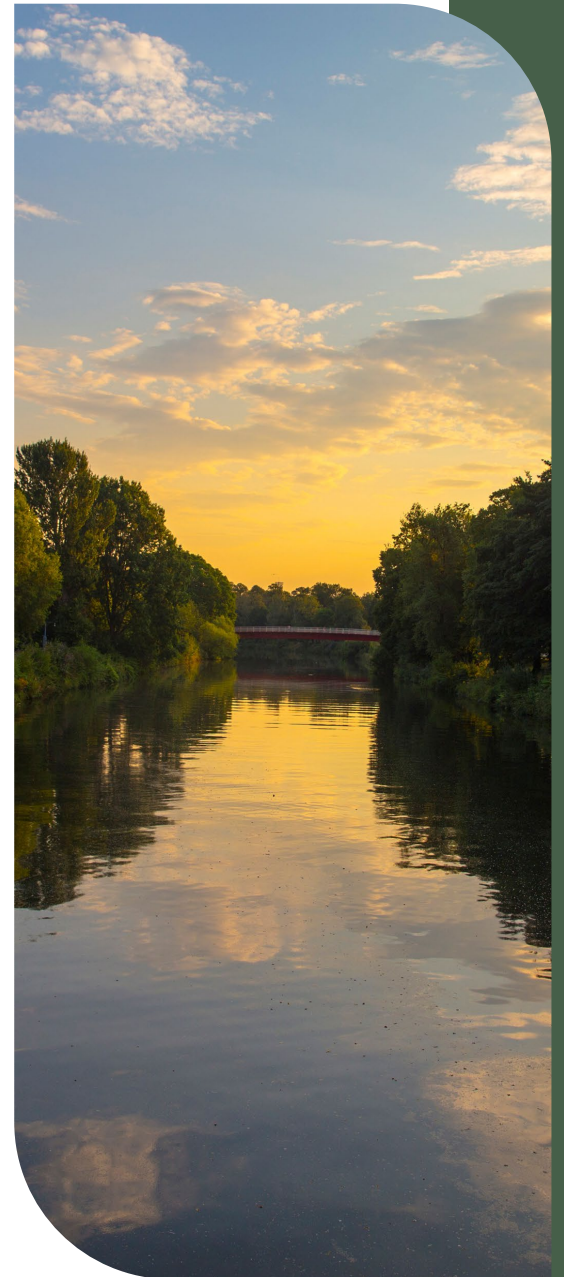
Values

Climate Change

- Hotter, drier summers
- More concentrated, intense rainfall events
- Runoff and flooding
- Saltwater intrusion
- Airborne contaminants from wildfires



Climate Change



Protection and Permitting Strategies

- Identify CARAs with GeoData maps
- Limit, condition, and regulate development in the CAO
- Non-CAO:
 - Environmental Health and Sanitary Code
 - Groundwater conservation programs



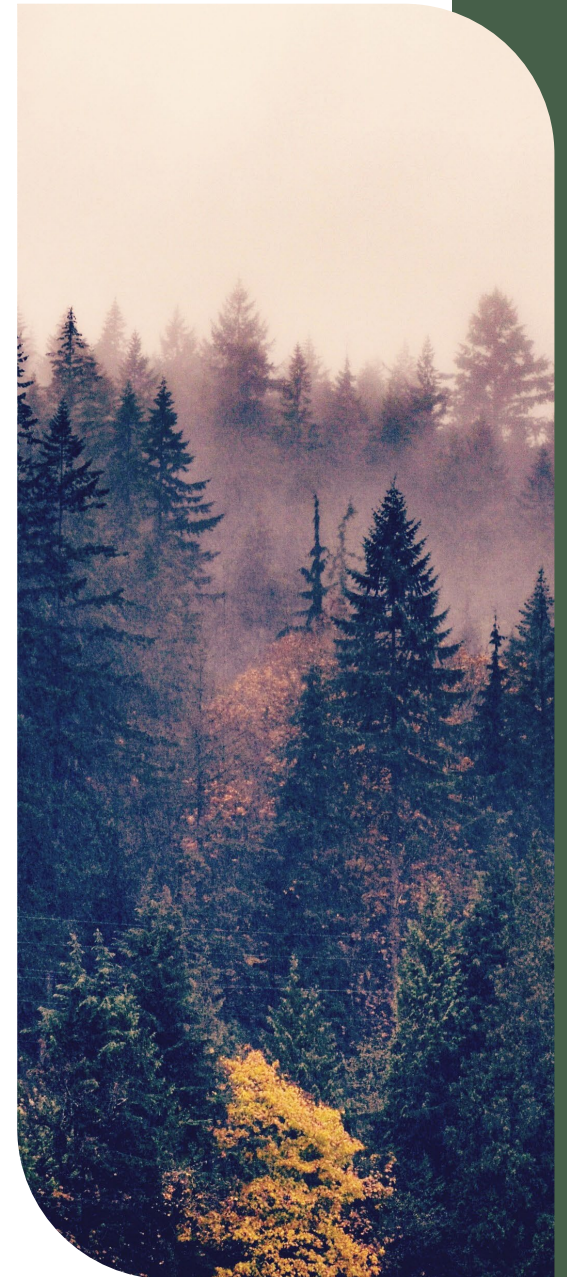
Permitting

Key Discussion Points

- CARA designation and delineation
 - How CARAs are classified
 - Must meet WAC definition and requirements
- Allowed uses
 - What's allowed, restricted, or prohibited
- Permitting process
 - No major changes have been recommended by permitting staff to date



Discussion



10/1/25	Permitting/front counter demonstration
10/15/25	Draft schedule overview and prioritization discussion
11/5/25	Schedule finalization (as needed)
11/19/25	Overview of state guidance and BAS
12/3/25	Geologic Hazard Areas Concepts
12/17/25	No meeting- Power outage
1/7/26	Invite DNR to present new landslide mapping
1/21/26	Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas Concepts
2/4/26	Frequently Flooded Areas Concepts
2/18/26	Geo Hazards code presentation
3/4/26	FFA and CARA code presentation
3/18/26	Wetlands
4/1/26	Wetland and Hydrologic FWHCAs
4/15/26	Dryland Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas
5/6/26	Presentation on SMP and HCP integration
5/20/26	DFW Presentation
6/3/26	Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands code presentation
June-July 2026	Final review, public hearing, and recommendation



Schedule

Questions and Comments

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Find future project updates at ThurstonCriticalAreas.org.

