

April 1, 2026
Thurston County Planning
Commission

CAO Update: Wetlands BAS and Concepts

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Presentation Outline

- Introduction and Definition
- Functions and Values
- Climate Change
- Protection Strategies
- Discussion



2 Intro



Wetlands Definition – WAC 365-190-030

“Wetland’ or ‘wetlands’ means areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

Wetlands do not include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland sites, grass-lined swales, canals, detention facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, farm ponds, and landscape amenities, or those wetlands created after July 1, 1990, that were unintentionally created as a result of the construction of a road, street, or highway. However, wetlands may include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland areas to mitigate conversion of wetlands, if permitted by the county or city.”

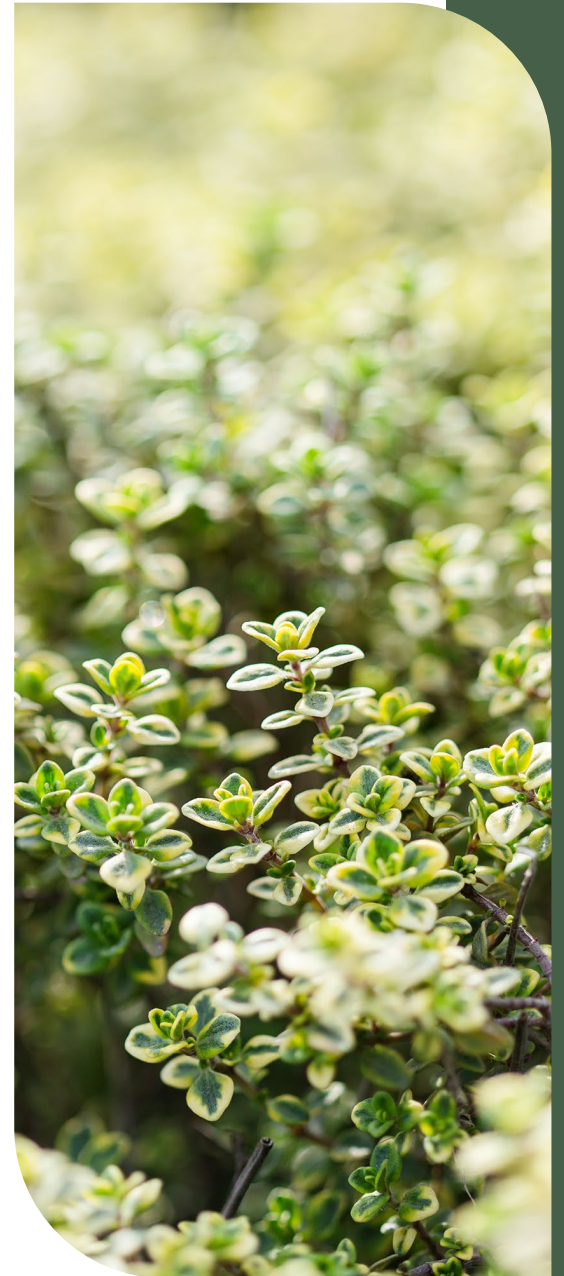


Functions and Values – Water Quality and Quantity

- Absorb and slowly distribute flood water
 - Coastal wetlands protect against storm surges and sea level rise
 - Slow flood release protect against erosion
- Help water infiltrate into aquifers because water flows through slowly
- Soils and vegetation filter out excess nutrients, chemicals, and pollutants



4 Functions and Values



Functions and Values - Habitat

- Wetlands provide habitat for mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians at various life stages
- Support unique plant species which support wetland functions
- Support the Oregon Spotted Frog – an HCP protected species



Climate Change

- Wetlands are impacted by climate change, but also protect against climate change impacts
- Protect against flooding and erosion from sea level rise
- Decrease intensity of flood events
- Provide streams, rivers, and aquifers with cool, clean water
- Act as carbon sinks, reducing greenhouse gasses
- Sensitive to changes in pH cause by pollution, other harmful chemicals, and precipitation and temperature changes



Protection Strategies – 3 Options

- The Dept. of Ecology provides three buffer calculation options using the Wetland Rating System:
- Option 1 is the most specific and most flexible, but also the most complex to implement.
- Option 2 balances simplicity with flexibility and specificity.
- Option 3 is the least flexible, but the simplest.



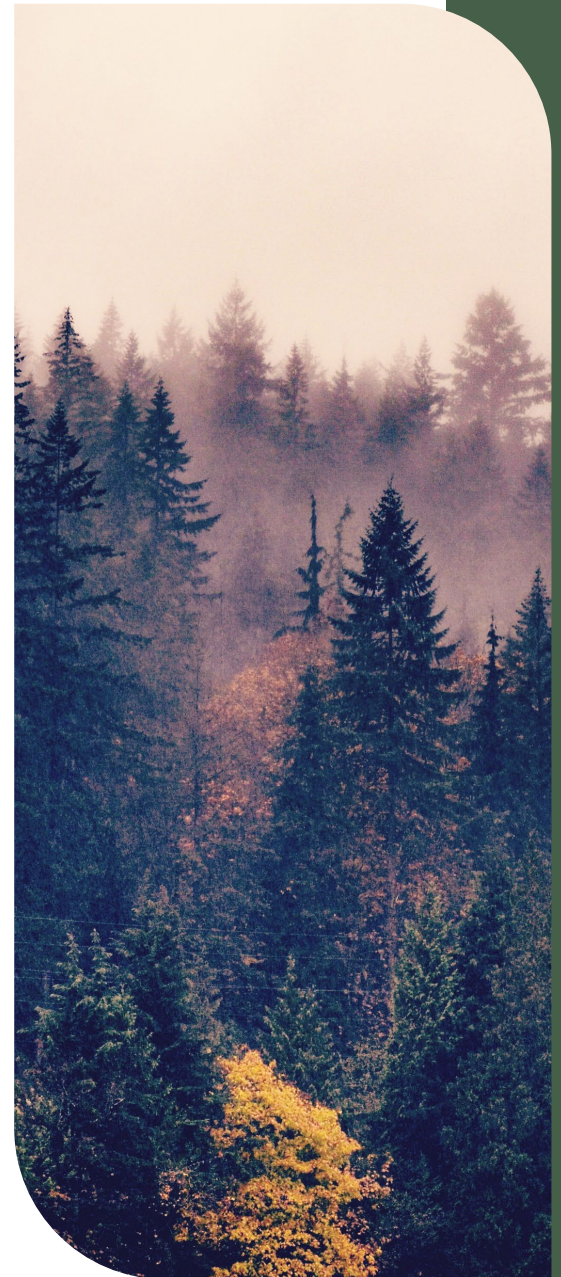
Buffer Option 1

- Ecology's preferred option
- Most site-specific, flexible, and complex, requires the most staff discretion
- Emphasis on habitat scores and wetland category
 - Habitat functions required the most protection
 - Doesn't consider proposed use – assumes high impacts
- Buffer widths can be reduced with impact minimization
- Allows for buffer averaging- more flexibility



Buffer Option 2

- Middle ground between simplicity and flexibility
- Considers wetland type and impact intensity
- No provisions for buffer averaging or reduction
- Considers the specific use being proposed

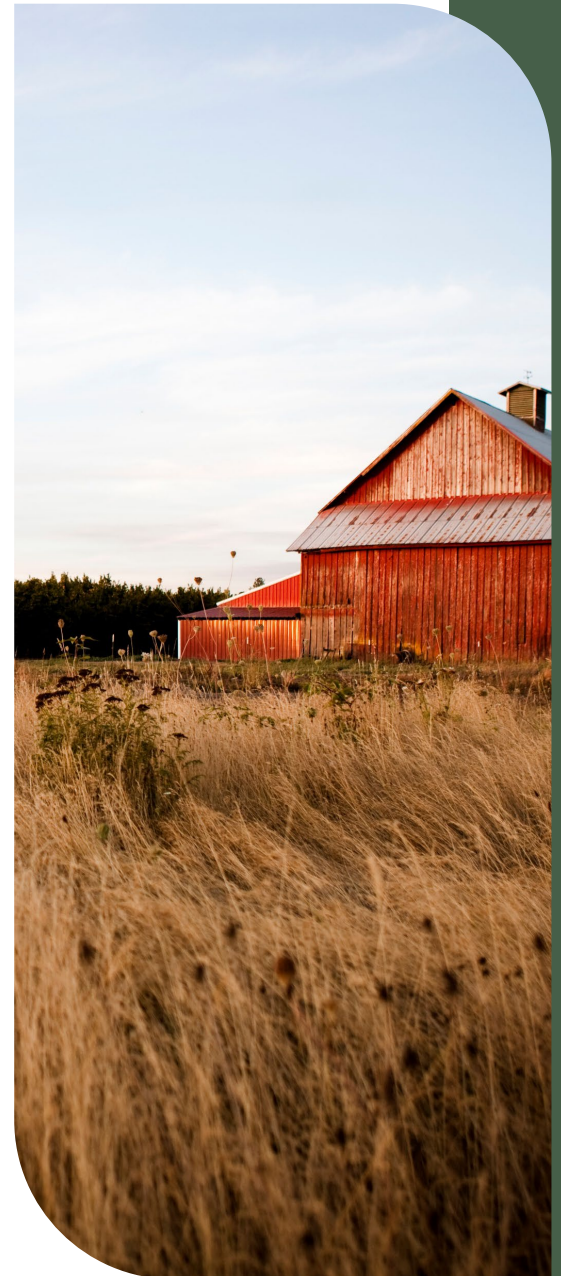


Buffer Option 3

- Simplest and least flexible
- Only considers wetland category
- Assumes high impacts and high habitat scores
- Large buffers to ensure protection with less discretion
- No buffer reduction or averaging
- Recommended for jurisdictions with limited staff capacity or very few wetlands



10 Protection Strategies



Discussion

- Which buffer calculation option is the best fit for the CAO update?
- Are there any major concerns that should be addressed in draft wetland chapter updates?
- Any questions we can plan to address in the upcoming HCP and SMP presentations?
- Is more time needed for general wetland discussion at the next meeting?





Meeting Date	Topic	Code Revisit
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	No Meeting	
3/4/26	Geo Hazards code presentation	
3/18/26	FFA and CARA code presentation	
4/1/26	Wetlands	
4/15/26	Wetland and Hydrologic FWHCAs	
5/6/26	Dryland Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas	Bring back Geo Hazards code
5/20/26	Presentation on SMP and HCP integration	Bring back CARA code
6/3/26	Invite DFW to present on FWHCAs	Bring back FFA code
6/17/26	Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands code presentation	
7/1/26	Revisit Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands	Bring back Permit Processes, FWHCAs and Wetlands
July 2026	Final review, public hearing, and recommendation	

“Permit Processes” will also include other general standards chapters like definitions, nonconforming structures, and special reports.

Schedule

Questions and Comments

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Find future project updates at ThurstonCriticalAreas.org.

