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# Make a Difference

By Greg Goforth  
Critical Areas Planner, Island County Planning Department

## KEEP IT GREEN: CONSERVING SHORELINE VEGETATION

I find myself continually fascinated by the complex and beautiful shorelines of Whidbey Island – from the wind-whipped high coastal bluffs along Admiralty Inlet and the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca, to the calmer shores of Saratoga Passage and Holmes Harbor, from sand spits to coastal lagoons – no two stretches of Whidbey Island's shorelines are exactly alike.

Island County's 200+ miles of shoreline are home to abundant fish and wildlife. Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, river otters, waterfowl, forage fish, and salmon (to name a few) all rely upon Island County's shorelines. In addition to providing habitat for fish and wildlife, Island County's shorelines have been home to people since time immemorial. Today, Island County has the second-highest percentage of residential shoreline parcels in Puget Sound and many people continue to make the shorelines of Whidbey Island their home. Consequently, people play an important role in maintaining the integrity of Island County's shorelines and one of the keys to maintaining healthy shoreline habitat is conserving shoreline vegetation.

### Benefits of Shoreline Vegetation

Shoreline vegetation provides many benefits, including habitat for fish and wildlife, natural erosion control, and important hydrologic functions. Shoreline vegetation provides habitat for birds and insects, shading for vulnerable prey species and forage fish eggs, and a source of large woody debris (LWD) for habitat structure. Fish feed on insects from riparian areas, and organic debris from riparian vegetation provides a source of nutrients to the aquatic food web. Native trees and shrubs in the shoreline environment also stabilize banks and provide natural erosion control. Shoreline vegetation can reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality by capturing pollutants before they reach surface waters. Additionally, shoreline vegetation can also reduce the severity of impacts associated with storm surge and coastal flooding events.

### How Island County Protects Shoreline Vegetation

Since the adoption of the Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1972, the State of Washington regulates land use within 200 feet of the "Ordinary High Water Mark" (OHWM) of shorelines of the state to "prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state's shorelines." This 200-foot area landward of the OHWM is referred to as "Shoreline Jurisdiction." The SMA is ultimately implemented by local jurisdictions, like Island County, through the administration of Shoreline Master Programs.

Island County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP) protects shoreline vegetation in a few key ways - the SMP applies regulatory buffers and development standards that limit the encroachment of development within Shoreline Jurisdiction. Applicable buffers and setbacks vary depending upon the character and "Shoreline Environment Designation" (SED) of each section of shoreline, with the intent of facilitating appropriate development while protecting shoreline habitat.

Where new or expanded development is permitted to occur within shoreline buffers or setbacks, shoreline enhancement projects may be required to increase native vegetation

along the shoreline. In addition to the application of regulatory buffers and setbacks, Island County's SMP contains specific standards for the maintenance and conservation of shoreline vegetation. These vegetation standards address activities such as selective pruning of trees for view maintenance, noxious weed removal, and planting, among other activities.

### What You Can Do to Help Conserve Shoreline Vegetation

Shoreline landowners have an important role to play in conserving shoreline vegetation. The following are a few tips for conserving shoreline vegetation:

- If you are a shoreline property owner, get to know your Shoreline Environment Designation (SED). Knowing your SED will help you comply with the applicable buffers, setbacks, and land use standards for your shoreline environment. Island County provides an online, interactive map where you can view these designations at <https://bit.ly/2v4DVGk>.
- Maintain and avoid removal of native vegetation along shorelines and coastal bluffs.
- Plant appropriate native shoreline vegetation. Planting native vegetation is encouraged – it requires less water, less maintenance, and provides important habitat for wildlife. Observe which native plants grow naturally along your stretch of shoreline and consider planting the same species. To get you started, learn more about native plants from the Whidbey Island Conservation District's Native Plant page at [www.whidbeycd.org/native-plants/](http://www.whidbeycd.org/native-plants/).
- Noxious weed removal is encouraged, but necessitates replanting with appropriate native shoreline species. Shoreline review for noxious weed removal and replanting projects requires a no-fee permit. Please contact the Island County Planning Department before starting your noxious weed removal project within Shoreline Jurisdiction or Critical Areas. For a list of Island County Planning Department contacts, visit [www.islandcountywa.gov/Planning/Pages/contactus.aspx](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/Planning/Pages/contactus.aspx). To learn more about noxious weeds, visit the Island County Noxious Weed Control Board at [www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/DNR/Noxious-Weed/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/DNR/Noxious-Weed/Pages/Home.aspx)
- Before undertaking selective pruning or thinning of trees for safety or view maintenance, please contact the Island County Planning Department to ensure your proposed activity complies with the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) vegetation conservation standards.
- If you are unsure about any proposed use along your shoreline, please contact the Island County Planning Department with your questions.

To learn more about Island County's Shoreline Master Program and resources available to shoreline property owners, please visit [www.islandcountywa.gov/Planning/Pages/Shorelines.aspx](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/Planning/Pages/Shorelines.aspx). For shoreline and general land use questions, please contact the Island County Planning and Community Development Department at 360-678-7339. Island County Planning staff are happy to help you achieve responsible management of vegetation on your shoreline property.



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