

# Critical Areas Allowed Activities

## ACTIVITIES ALLOWED WITH STAFF REVIEW

Review and authorization may occur over-the-counter or staff may issue a letter of approval with conditions. Additional information and studies may be requested. Activities must comply with the protective standards of this chapter and provisions of other local, state, and federal laws. If a letter of approval is required, then the applicant will be responsible for paying the applicable fee and the processing time for the approval generally takes 30 days.

- Emergencies. Speak with a City of Tacoma Environmental Specialist as to what defines an emergency.
- Activities in an isolated Category III or Category IV wetlands, which have been classified and identified (by a qualified biologist) as having a total cumulative area of less than 1,000 square feet, provided they meet all of these criteria:
  - Are of low habitat function (less than 20 points in the Washington Wetlands Rating System for Western Washington).
  - Are hydrologically isolated and are not part of a mosaic wetland system.
  - Are not associated with a Shoreline of the state or wetland that is part of a riparian habitat area,
  - Are not critical habitat to local populations of priority species.
- Geotechnical investigation activities, provided that an access plan, protection measures, best management practices, and restoration are utilized to protect and maintain the critical area where possible.
- Reconstruction or exterior remodeling, of existing structures and accessory structures provided that disturbance of native vegetation is kept to a minimum and any vegetation that is disturbed shall be replaced. Activities must comply with WDFW management recommendations where applicable. This shall not apply to reconstruction which is proposed as a result of structural damage associated with a critical area, such as slope failure in a landslide hazard area or flooding in a flood hazard area.
- One-time expansion of existing structures and accessory structures, provided that expansion of the developed footprint within the critical area or buffer does not increase by more than 25 percent and that the new construction or related use extends away from the critical area ; keeps disturbance of native vegetation to a minimum; and replaces native vegetation that may be disturbed This expansion may also occur in a direction parallel to the critical area if

the expansion takes place upon existing impervious surfaces.

- Maintenance and repair of existing bulkheads, shoreline armoring, and bioengineered stabilization measures designed to protect property from erosion, as well as maintenance and repair of existing bulkheads, stream bank armoring and bioengineered stabilization measures designed to protect property from erosion or slope failure.
- Interrupted wetland, stream, and FWHCA buffers. Speak with an Environmental Specialist about what defines an Interrupted wetland, stream, and FWHCA buffer.
- Construction of pedestrian trails (subject to criteria listed in TMC 13.11.210)
- Voluntary enhancement of a critical area or buffer that exceeds the provisions in TMC 13.11.200.B.5 (subject to requirements listed in TMC 13.11.210)
- Tree Pruning (No topping, complete removal or impacts to the health of the tree shall be allowed.)
- The removal of hazard trees, in some instances
- Watershed restoration projects that conform to the provisions of RCW 89.08.460 shall be reviewed **without fee** and approved within 45 days per RCW 89.08.490.
- Fish habitat enhancement projects that conform to the provision of RCW 77.55.181 shall be reviewed **without fee** and comments provided as specified in RCW 77.55.181.
- Demolition of structures.



**Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

# Critical Areas Allowed Activities

## WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE ALLOWED WITHOUT CITY REVIEW OR APPROVAL?

Certain activities that are unlikely to result in critical area impacts are allowed without City review or approval. The activities must comply with the protective standards TMC 13.11 and provisions of other local, state, and federal laws. All activities shall use reasonable methods to avoid and minimize impacts. Any incidental damage to, or alteration of, a critical area, or buffer, shall be restored or replaced at the responsible party's expense. For more information, or if you'd like to speak with an Environmental Specialist prior to conducting work, please call (253) 591-5030.

- Maintenance of legally existing structures, access ways, trails, promenades, stairways, parking lots, and landscaping provided such work does not expand the foot print of the structure or right-of-way and does not alter any regulated critical area or buffer.
- Passive recreational activities, educational activities and scientific research including, but not limited to, fishing, bird watching, walking or hiking and non-motorized boating.
- The following can be removed by hand or hand-held light equipment provided that appropriate methods are used to protect native vegetation. Removal methods may be found in the Green Tacoma Partnership Habitat Steward Field Guide.
  - English Ivy may be removed from plants on which is adhered or rolled up off the ground provided ground disturbance is minimal and does not cause erosion.
  - Regulated noxious weeds as listed on the Pierce County noxious weed list that are required to be eradicated (Class A and Class B) as specified by the Pierce County Noxious Weed Board.
  - Invasive species removal in a critical area buffer when the total area is 1,000 square feet or less and slopes are less than 15%.
  - Refuse and debris.
- Native vegetation planting in a critical area buffer when the total area is 1,000 square feet or less, slopes are less than 15% and a City approved planting plan is utilized.



## SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST FOR REVIEWS REQUIRING LETTER OF APPROVAL

All application materials must be submitted in electronic PDF format on compact disc (CD) or online at [TacomaPermits.org](http://TacomaPermits.org). See [Electronic File Standards Tip Sheet](#).

- Application for Land Use Permit, completed and signed
- Site Plan to scale
- Application fee
- Additional information requested by staff
  - Due to the unique characteristics of critical areas, and the variety of activities covered under this review process, the information requested will vary from one project to the next. It is a good idea to discuss the proposal with City Staff prior to applying for this type of permit.

## APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

- Tacoma Municipal Code Sections: [13.05 – Land Use Permit Procedures](#), [13.11 - Critical Areas Preservation](#)



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