



Community  
Development

# Riparian Buffers

## Overview

Riparian zones are the vegetated areas along streams, lakes, and shorelines that buffer aquatic habitats from the impacts of human activity and development. Kitsap County's riparian buffer zones have been degraded by historic clearing, development, and transportation facilities. This, in turn, has impacted the quality of our aquatic habitats for fish and wildlife species and the quality of water resources for people.

## Benefits of Riparian Buffers

- Improve water quality by filtering pollutants and excess sediment in runoff entering streams
- Reduce stream temperature by providing shade
- Stabilize stream banks while still allowing for slow, natural erosion needed to nourish streambeds
- Support the food web by providing organic matter and insects to the stream, which are food for fish and other organisms
- Improve stream complexity by providing large wood that creates pools, meanders, side channels, and hiding places for fish
- Improve stream flow conditions by supporting natural floodplains and wetlands that store water
- Provide wildlife habitat through connected forested corridors that allow wildlife to move while avoiding conflicts with humans
- Protect human structures by allowing space for the stream to change over time while keeping structures at a safe distance

## How wide should Riparian Buffers be?

- **Approximately 200 feet** is the recommended riparian buffer width for most of Kitsap County, based on current scientific recommendations
- **Kitsap County's Critical Areas Ordinance** sets buffer requirements for streams, lakes, shorelines, and wetlands based on several site-specific factors



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## Resources for Landowners

There are many resources available to help landowners protect and restore riparian buffer zones on their property. These resources would not be possible without our partners.



### Washington State University (WSU) Extension

- Visit [extension.wsu.edu](http://extension.wsu.edu) for more information
- Offers many water stewardship programs and workshops including: *Kitsap Beach Naturalists, Salmon Docents & Stream Stewards, Septic Sense, Professional Rain Garden Workshop, Regional Small Farms Program*



### Kitsap Conservation District

- Visit [kitsapcd.org](http://kitsapcd.org) for more information
- Backyard Habitat Program can help with habitat restoration projects
- Rain Garden & Low Impact Development Program offers assistance controlling runoff and drainage
- Native Plant Sale offers affordable native plants for sale in bulk to support riparian planting
- Agriculture Technical Assistance program offers assistance to agricultural landowners



### Clean Water Kitsap

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## **We can all help Kitsap County streams by protecting and restoring Riparian Buffers! Here's how:**

### ➤ **Give streams space**

- Avoid building in riparian buffers
- Keep livestock away from streams
- Where possible, relocate structures away from buffers

### ➤ **Protect native plants**

- Avoid mowing, cutting, or clearing native vegetation in riparian buffers
- Control invasive plant species

### ➤ **Enhance buffer plants**

- Install native groundcovers, trees, and shrubs to improve riparian zones

### ➤ **Control drainage**

- Avoid discharging runoff from roads, driveways, and rooftops into streams and riparian buffers
- Consider installing a rain garden