

## WETLANDS

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Lake Forest Park Municipal Code Chapter 16.16 regulates development in Environmentally Sensitive Areas. This sensitive area summary is one of a series of four that describes each of these environmentally sensitive areas.

*\*The following information is meant to provide general information about Wetlands. This summary is not a substitute for the actual codes or regulations. The following does not include information pertaining to other land use and building permit requirements and procedures. Additionally, the conditions and regulations described in this bulletin do not address any state or federal regulations regarding the listing of salmonid species under the Endangered Species Act and should not be construed as such. Environmentally Sensitive Areas requirements can and do sometimes change after action by the City Council. Interested parties should always verify current requirements with the City Planning Department.*

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### WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Wetlands occur where the soil is wet for enough time during the growing season to affect the species of plants that are able to grow. The growing season depends on the soil temperature and ranges from 7 months to all year in King County. Even though a wetland may not appear to be wet, the soil may actually be wet under the surface during enough of the growing season that mostly water-tolerant plants can grow.

### WHY ARE WETLANDS IMPORTANT?

Wetlands provide food for wildlife and fish; furnish habitat for nesting, rearing and resting sites for many species; slow the flow of storm water; improve water quality by acting as biofilters; and sometimes act as connection areas with groundwater aquifers.

### IS A WETLAND ON MY PROPERTY?

The City of Lake Forest Park has a sensitive areas map on file which contains an inventory of wetlands within the city. This map was developed based on the King County Wetlands Inventory and additional information on file with the City. However, even if the map does not show a wetland on your property, a wetland may still be present and protected by regulation. Only a qualified wetlands specialist can determine the actual presence or absence of a wetland. In some cases, City staff may provide technical expertise to inform property owners whether or not a wetland is present.

### WETLAND DELINEATION

Wetland specialists consider the following characteristics to determine if an area is a wetland and to “delineate” the edge between the wetland and the surrounding upland:

- Water saturation close to the surface for at least seven continuous days during the growing season;
- Soils with characteristics which result from water saturation (hydric soils); and,
- A higher prevalence of plants that prefer or easily tolerate saturated soils.

Wetlands are also characterized by the type of vegetation that is present (technically known as the “vegetation class”) and whether surface water is present. Common names of vegetation classes include wet meadow, marsh, bog, forested or “scrub-shrub”. A single wetland is often comprised of several vegetation classes.

The concept of “vegetation classification” is easily confused with the different “wetland categorization” system described below.

### WETLAND CATEGORIES

Categorizing wetlands is useful because development restrictions can be tailored to each wetland’s uniqueness and contributions to the environment.

**Category 1 wetlands** have one or more of the following:

- endangered or threatened species, or their habitat
- a listing by the federal or state government as containing critical or outstanding actual habitat for endangered or threatened species
- 40 to 60 percent permanent open water in dispersed patches, and two or more wetland vegetation classes;
- rare plant communities such as peat bogs
- wetlands equal or greater than 10 acres and having three or more wetland classes

- total area of 10 acres or more, and at least 3 vegetation classes, one of which is submerged vegetation in permanent open water.

**Category 2 wetlands** have one or more of the following:

- total area of more than one acre;
- total area equal to one acre or less with at least 3 different wetland classes
- a “forested” wetland with an area of one acre or less;
- heron rookeries or nesting trees for hawks, owls or other raptors.

**Category 3 wetlands** are equal or smaller than one acre and are relatively simple, with two or fewer wetland classes.

**PROTECTION OF WETLANDS**

Development activities in and near wetlands are strictly regulated. The use of herbicides, pesticides and hazardous substances is prohibited in wetlands or buffers unless it is demonstrated that special circumstances require their use.

All protected wetland areas must be well marked on site prior to any construction activity. All permitted alterations are subject to conditions and requirements administered through a sensitive areas work permit.

**WETLAND BUFFERS**

Most sensitive areas have a “buffer” of land that protects them from human activities. No clearing or grading is allowed within this buffer or within the sensitive area itself. In addition, structures must be kept outside a 15-foot building setback that extends beyond the buffer.

The minimum width of the buffer depends on the wetland type:

Wetland Type	Standard Buffer	Buffer with Enhancement
Category 1	150 Feet	105 Feet
Category 2	100 Feet	70 Feet
Category 3	50 Feet	35 Feet

*\*In addition, structures must be kept outside a 15-foot building setback that extends beyond the buffer.*

**WETLAND ENHANCEMENT**

An enhancement is an action that increases the functions and values of a stream, wetland or other sensitive areas. For more information and resources regarding enhancement and restoration projects contact the City of Lake Forest Park Planning Department.

**PERMITTED ALTERATIONS**

Consult the City of Lake Forest Park Sensitive Areas Code or the Planning Department for more specific information about:

- Buffer width averaging
- Livestock restrictions
- Wetlands located near steep slopes
- Increased buffer widths
- Utilities in a wetland buffer
- Surface water management
- Trails
- Wetland crossings
- Alterations to isolated wetlands

**SENSITIVE AREA TRACTS**

Development proposals, including subdivisions, short subdivisions, lot line adjustments, variance requests, conditional use permits and reasonable use requests, which contain wetlands, will be required to set aside the sensitive area in a separate preservation tract. This tract will be recorded on all documents of title or record for all affected lots.

**OTHER JURISDICTIONAL REVIEW**

Applications for work within a stream corridor or its associated buffer must also meet the requirements of other jurisdictions. For example, the US Army Corps of Engineers regulates wetlands under the Clean Water Act. Contact the Seattle branch of the Corps for additional information. A State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review may also be required. SEPA is administered through the City of Lake Forest Park with review by several outside agencies. For more information please contact the City of Lake Forest Park Planning Department.

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**A profile of applicable current land use regulations for specific parcels can be obtained from the City for a charge of \$20.00. A written request that identifies the property by address and legal description is required. Please allow at least two weeks for the written response.**

**For more information please contact the Planning Department**

City of Lake Forest Park Planning Department  
 17425 Ballinger Way NE  
 Lake Forest Park, WA 98155

Phone: (206) 368-5440 Fax: (206) 364-6521  
 Office hours: Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Steve Bennett, Planning Director, (206) 368-5440 X 120**  
**Email: [sbennett@ci.lake-forest-park.wa.us](mailto:sbennett@ci.lake-forest-park.wa.us)**

**Shana Restall, Associate Planner, (206) 368-5440 X 122**  
**Email: [srestall@ci.lake-forest-park.wa.us](mailto:srestall@ci.lake-forest-park.wa.us)**