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Photo Hugh Shipman

ONLINE INFORMATION

www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1190



Photo Kelsey Gianou

This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

Shoreline and Bank Stabilization

(Soft form of shoreline protection/bulkheads/
retaining walls-within shoreline jurisdiction)

Assistance Bulletin

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Snohomish County recognizes that our shorelines are subject to erosion from waves, boat wakes, stream channel migration or other natural shoreline erosion processes. Soft and hard forms of shoreline and bank stabilization measures are used to reduce sedimentation and erosion. The Snohomish County Shoreline Master program is consistent with Washington State Law and governs the construction, maintenance and repair of all shoreline protection and bank stabilization activities. (SCC 30.67.575)

Q: What can I do if my shoreline or bank is eroding?

A: Depending on the rate of erosion and the location of primary structures on the property you may be able to install nonstructural soft stabilization measures, or structural hard stabilization measures (e.g. rock bulkhead/revetment, concrete or steel bulkhead/seawall or retaining walls).

Q: What is a soft shoreline and bank stabilization?

A: Soft shoreline and bank stabilization is the placing of materials that would naturally exist along shoreline to help prevent erosion, such as the addition of sand/gravel, cobble and large woody debris (logs and root wads). Vegetation is often a design component to help maintain bank stability. (See *Soft Shoreline Stabilization Shoreline Master Program Planning and Implementation Guidance, Washington State Department of Ecology, March 2014, Publication No. 14-06-009*)

Q: What is hard/structural shoreline and bank stabilization?

A: Hard/structural shoreline and bank stabilization consists of rock or concrete bulkheads, seawalls, revetments, upland bank retaining walls and similar structural features designed to limit shoreline and bank erosion.

Q: When is new or replacement hard/structural shoreline and bank stabilization permitted?

A: New or replacement hard/structural shoreline and bank stabilization is allowed when it is needed to protect existing primary structures, designated farmland and when restoring shoreline ecological functions. However, new or replacement hard/structural stabilization is only allowed if soft forms of structural shoreline and bank stabilization are inadequate to protect the primary structure from erosion and the primary structure is in danger from erosion within three years as determined by a professional geotechnical engineer.

A geotechnical analysis conducted by a qualified engineer or geologist is required for any new, enlarged, or replacement structural shoreline and bank stabilization measures.

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

Q: When is new or replacement soft shoreline or bank stabilization permitted?

A: New or replacement soft shoreline and bank stabilization is allowed when it is needed to protect existing primary structures, designated farmland and when restoring shoreline ecological functions. Soft shoreline and bank stabilization may also be used when a primary structure is in danger from erosion, however, the danger does not need to be as immediate as within three years.

Q: Do I need a building permit to build or repair structural shoreline protection (bulkhead, seawall, revetment or retaining wall)?

A: Yes. A building permit application, site plan and construction plans must be submitted in accordance with building permit procedures. If you have questions check with counter personnel or email [Ask Permit Tech](#) .

Q: What are the building permit submittal requirements?

A: A structural shoreline protection building permit can be submitted at [MyBuildingPermit.com](#). Submitted documents must include:

- A site plan (see site plan instructions checklist- [Residential Site Plan Checklist](#))
- *Construction* drawings containing a cross section and details.
- SEPA and public notice may be required (some maintenance and repairs are exempt)

Q: What other permits are required?

A: All types of shoreline or bank protection require a Land Disturbing Activity (LDA) Permit and typically require a Flood Hazard Permit (required for any development occurring within a flood hazard area). Any shoreline protection that is at or below the ordinary high water mark requires a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) from the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and may require a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers.

Q: When do I need a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit?

A: If a shoreline or bank stabilization project is for protection of land or other primary structure, which is not a single-family residence, then a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit is required (in addition to the Building Permit, Flood Hazard Permit, Land Disturbing Activity Permit and State and Federal permits listed above). Some shoreline designations require a Shoreline Conditional Use Permit for shoreline and bank stabilization projects, check with counter personnel or email [Ask Permit Tech](#).

Q: When do I need a Shoreline Substantial Development Exemption Letter?

A: A Shoreline Substantial Development Permit Exemption Letter from Snohomish County is required if the shoreline protection proposes any fill below the mean higher high water (MHHW) line and requires approval from the Army Corps of Engineers. To be issued a letter, an applicant must submit a request and the current shoreline exemption processing fee.

Q: Can I repair my shoreline or bank stabilization feature?

A: With proper permits and approvals, yes, normal maintenance and repair is allowed for both hard and soft forms shoreline and bank protection features, including bulkheads. Normal maintenance and repair is limited to the existing size, shape, configuration, location, and external appearance of the existing structure. If complete replacement of a bank stabilization structure is proposed the project is subject to the requirements of SCC 30.67.575(1)(b), and will require submittal of a Geotechnical Report and may require a Shoreline Conditional Use Permit. If you are planning to repair or replace your bulkhead or other shoreline bank stabilization feature we suggest applying for a Pre-application to determine what permits are required for you project.

Q: Should I request a Pre-application review?

A: Yes, shoreline regulations are complicated and a Pre-application can help provide clarity.