

WAC 173-26-231 Shoreline modifications. (1) **Applicability.** Local governments are encouraged to prepare master program provisions that distinguish between shoreline modifications and shoreline uses. Shoreline modifications are generally related to construction of a physical element such as a dike, breakwater, dredged basin, or fill, but they can include other actions such as clearing, grading, application of chemicals, or significant vegetation removal. Shoreline modifications usually are undertaken in support of or in preparation for a shoreline use; for example, fill (shoreline modification) required for a cargo terminal (industrial use) or dredging (shoreline modification) to allow for a marina (boating facility use).

The provisions in this section apply to all shoreline modifications within shoreline jurisdiction.

(2) **General principles applicable to all shoreline modifications.**

Master programs shall implement the following principles:

(a) Allow structural shoreline modifications only where they are demonstrated to be necessary to support or protect an allowed primary structure or a legally existing shoreline use that is in danger of loss or substantial damage or are necessary for reconfiguration of the shoreline for mitigation or enhancement purposes.

(b) Reduce the adverse effects of shoreline modifications and, as much as possible, limit shoreline modifications in number and extent.

(c) Allow only shoreline modifications that are appropriate to the specific type of shoreline and environmental conditions for which they are proposed.

(d) Assure that shoreline modifications individually and cumulatively do not result in a net loss of ecological functions. This is to be achieved by giving preference to those types of shoreline modifications that have a lesser impact on ecological functions and requiring mitigation of identified impacts resulting from shoreline modifications.

(e) Where applicable, base provisions on scientific and technical information and a comprehensive analysis of drift cells for marine waters or reach conditions for river and stream systems. Contact the department for available drift cell characterizations.

(f) Plan for the enhancement of impaired ecological functions where feasible and appropriate while accommodating permitted uses. As shoreline modifications occur, incorporate all feasible measures to protect ecological shoreline functions and ecosystem-wide processes.

(g) Avoid and reduce significant ecological impacts according to the mitigation sequence in WAC 173-26-201 (2)(e).

(3) **Provisions for specific shoreline modifications.**

(a) **Shoreline stabilization.**

(i) **Applicability.** Shoreline stabilization includes actions taken to address erosion impacts to property and dwellings, businesses, or structures caused by natural processes, such as current, flood, tides, wind, or wave action. These actions include structural and nonstructural methods.

Nonstructural methods include building setbacks, relocation of the structure to be protected, groundwater management, planning and regulatory measures to avoid the need for structural stabilization.

(ii) **Principles.** Shorelines are by nature unstable, although in varying degrees. Erosion and accretion are natural processes that provide ecological functions and thereby contribute to sustaining the natural resource and ecology of the shoreline. Human use of the shoreline has typically led to hardening of the shoreline for various reasons including reduction of erosion or providing useful space at the

shore or providing access to docks and piers. The impacts of hardening any one property may be minimal but cumulatively the impact of this shoreline modification is significant.

Shoreline hardening typically results in adverse impacts to shoreline ecological functions such as:

- Beach starvation. Sediment supply to nearby beaches is cut off, leading to "starvation" of the beaches for the gravel, sand, and other fine-grained materials that typically constitute a beach.

- Habitat degradation. Vegetation that shades the upper beach or bank is eliminated, thus degrading the value of the shoreline for many ecological functions, including spawning habitat for salmonids and forage fish.

- Sediment impoundment. As a result of shoreline hardening, the sources of sediment on beaches (eroding "feeder" bluffs) are progressively lost and longshore transport is diminished. This leads to lowering of down-drift beaches, the narrowing of the high tide beach, and the coarsening of beach sediment. As beaches become more coarse, less prey for juvenile fish is produced. Sediment starvation may lead to accelerated erosion in down-drift areas.

- Exacerbation of erosion. The hard face of shoreline armoring, particularly concrete bulkheads, reflects wave energy back onto the beach, exacerbating erosion.

- Groundwater impacts. Erosion control structures often raise the water table on the landward side, which leads to higher pore pressures in the beach itself. In some cases, this may lead to accelerated erosion of sand-sized material from the beach.

- Hydraulic impacts. Shoreline armoring generally increases the reflectivity of the shoreline and redirects wave energy back onto the beach. This leads to scouring and lowering of the beach, to coarsening of the beach, and to ultimate failure of the structure.

- Loss of shoreline vegetation. Vegetation provides important "softer" erosion control functions. Vegetation is also critical in maintaining ecological functions.

- Loss of large woody debris. Changed hydraulic regimes and the loss of the high tide beach, along with the prevention of natural erosion of vegetated shorelines, lead to the loss of beached organic material. This material can increase biological diversity, can serve as a stabilizing influence on natural shorelines, and is habitat for many aquatic-based organisms, which are, in turn, important prey for larger organisms.

- Restriction of channel movement and creation of side channels. Hardened shorelines along rivers slow the movement of channels, which, in turn, prevents the input of larger woody debris, gravels for spawning, and the creation of side channels important for juvenile salmon rearing, and can result in increased floods and scour.

Additionally, hard structures, especially vertical walls, often create conditions that lead to failure of the structure. In time, the substrate of the beach coarsens and scours down to bedrock or a hard clay. The footings of bulkheads are exposed, leading to undermining and failure. This process is exacerbated when the original cause of the erosion and "need" for the bulkhead was from upland water drainage problems. Failed bulkheads and walls adversely impact beach aesthetics, may be a safety or navigational hazard, and may adversely impact shoreline ecological functions.

"Hard" structural stabilization measures refer to those with solid, hard surfaces, such as concrete bulkheads, while "soft" structural measures rely on less rigid materials, such as biotechnical vegetation

measures or beach enhancement. There is a range of measures varying from soft to hard that include:

- Vegetation enhancement;
- Upland drainage control;
- Biotechnical measures;
- Beach enhancement;
- Anchor trees;
- Gravel placement;
- Rock revetments;
- Gabions;
- Concrete groins;
- Retaining walls and bluff walls;
- Bulkheads; and
- Seawalls.

Generally, the harder the construction measure, the greater the impact on shoreline processes, including sediment transport, geomorphology, and biological functions.

Structural shoreline stabilization often results in vegetation removal and damage to near-shore habitat and shoreline corridors. Therefore, master program shoreline stabilization provisions shall also be consistent with WAC 173-26-221(5), vegetation conservation, and where applicable, WAC 173-26-221(2), critical areas.

In order to implement RCW 90.58.100(6) and avoid or mitigate adverse impacts to shoreline ecological functions where shoreline alterations are necessary to protect single-family residences and principal appurtenant structures in danger from active shoreline erosion, master programs should include standards setting forth the circumstances under which alteration of the shoreline is permitted, and for the design and type of protective measures and devices.

(iii) **Standards.** In order to avoid the individual and cumulative net loss of ecological functions attributable to shoreline stabilization, master programs shall implement the above principles and apply the following standards:

(A) New development should be located and designed to avoid the need for future shoreline stabilization to the extent feasible. Subdivision of land must be regulated to assure that the lots created will not require shoreline stabilization in order for reasonable development to occur using geotechnical analysis of the site and shoreline characteristics. New development on steep slopes or bluffs shall be set back sufficiently to ensure that shoreline stabilization is unlikely to be necessary during the life of the structure, as demonstrated by a geotechnical analysis. New development that would require shoreline stabilization which causes significant impacts to adjacent or down-current properties and shoreline areas should not be allowed.

(B) New structural stabilization measures shall not be allowed except when necessity is demonstrated in the following manner:

(I) To protect existing primary structures:

• New or enlarged structural shoreline stabilization measures for an existing primary structure, including residences, should not be allowed unless there is conclusive evidence, documented by a geotechnical analysis, that the structure is in danger from shoreline erosion caused by tidal action, currents, or waves. Normal sloughing, erosion of steep bluffs, or shoreline erosion itself, without a scientific or geotechnical analysis, is not demonstration of need. The geotechnical analysis should evaluate on-site drainage issues and address drainage problems away from the shoreline edge before considering structural shoreline stabilization.

- The erosion control structure will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

(II) In support of new nonwater-dependent development, including single-family residences, when all of the conditions below apply:

- The erosion is not being caused by upland conditions, such as the loss of vegetation and drainage.

• Nonstructural measures, such as placing the development further from the shoreline, planting vegetation, or installing on-site drainage improvements, are not feasible or not sufficient.

• The need to protect primary structures from damage due to erosion is demonstrated through a geotechnical report. The damage must be caused by natural processes, such as tidal action, currents, and waves.

- The erosion control structure will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

(III) In support of water-dependent development when all of the conditions below apply:

- The erosion is not being caused by upland conditions, such as the loss of vegetation and drainage.

• Nonstructural measures, planting vegetation, or installing on-site drainage improvements, are not feasible or not sufficient.

• The need to protect primary structures from damage due to erosion is demonstrated through a geotechnical report.

- The erosion control structure will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

(IV) To protect projects for the restoration of ecological functions or hazardous substance remediation projects pursuant to chapter 70.105D RCW when all of the conditions below apply:

- Nonstructural measures, planting vegetation, or installing on-site drainage improvements, are not feasible or not sufficient.

• The erosion control structure will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

(C) An existing shoreline stabilization structure may be replaced with a similar structure if there is a demonstrated need to protect principal uses or structures from erosion caused by currents, tidal action, or waves.

- The replacement structure should be designed, located, sized, and constructed to assure no net loss of ecological functions.

• Replacement walls or bulkheads shall not encroach waterward of the ordinary high-water mark or existing structure unless the residence was occupied prior to January 1, 1992, and there are overriding safety or environmental concerns. In such cases, the replacement structure shall abut the existing shoreline stabilization structure.

- Where a net loss of ecological functions associated with critical saltwater habitats would occur by leaving the existing structure, remove it as part of the replacement measure.

• Soft shoreline stabilization measures that provide restoration of shoreline ecological functions may be permitted waterward of the ordinary high-water mark.

• For purposes of this section standards on shoreline stabilization measures, "replacement" means the construction of a new structure to perform a shoreline stabilization function of an existing structure which can no longer adequately serve its purpose. Additions to or increases in size of existing shoreline stabilization measures shall be considered new structures.

(D) Geotechnical reports pursuant to this section that address the need to prevent potential damage to a primary structure shall ad-

dress the necessity for shoreline stabilization by estimating time frames and rates of erosion and report on the urgency associated with the specific situation. As a general matter, hard armoring solutions should not be authorized except when a report confirms that there is a significant possibility that such a structure will be damaged within three years as a result of shoreline erosion in the absence of such hard armoring measures, or where waiting until the need is that immediate, would foreclose the opportunity to use measures that avoid impacts on ecological functions. Thus, where the geotechnical report confirms a need to prevent potential damage to a primary structure, but the need is not as immediate as the three years, that report may still be used to justify more immediate authorization to protect against erosion using soft measures.

(E) When any structural shoreline stabilization measures are demonstrated to be necessary, pursuant to above provisions.

- Limit the size of stabilization measures to the minimum necessary. Use measures designed to assure no net loss of shoreline ecological functions. Soft approaches shall be used unless demonstrated not to be sufficient to protect primary structures, dwellings, and businesses.

- Ensure that publicly financed or subsidized shoreline erosion control measures do not restrict appropriate public access to the shoreline except where such access is determined to be infeasible because of incompatible uses, safety, security, or harm to ecological functions. See public access provisions; WAC 173-26-221(4). Where feasible, incorporate ecological restoration and public access improvements into the project.

- Mitigate new erosion control measures, including replacement structures, on feeder bluffs or other actions that affect beach sediment-producing areas to avoid and, if that is not possible, to minimize adverse impacts to sediment conveyance systems. Where sediment conveyance systems cross jurisdictional boundaries, local governments should coordinate shoreline management efforts. If beach erosion is threatening existing development, local governments should adopt master program provisions for a beach management district or other institutional mechanism to provide comprehensive mitigation for the adverse impacts of erosion control measures.

(F) For erosion or mass wasting due to upland conditions, see WAC 173-26-221 (2)(c)(ii).

(b) **Piers and docks.** New piers and docks shall be allowed only for water-dependent uses or public access. As used here, a dock associated with a single-family residence is a water-dependent use provided that it is designed and intended as a facility for access to watercraft and otherwise complies with the provisions of this section. Pier and dock construction shall be restricted to the minimum size necessary to meet the needs of the proposed water-dependent use. Water-related and water-enjoyment uses may be allowed as part of mixed-use development on over-water structures where they are clearly auxiliary to and in support of water-dependent uses, provided the minimum size requirement needed to meet the water-dependent use is not violated.

New pier or dock construction, excluding docks accessory to single-family residences, should be permitted only when the applicant has demonstrated that a specific need exists to support the intended water-dependent uses. If a port district or other public or commercial entity involving water-dependent uses has performed a needs analysis or comprehensive master plan projecting the future needs for pier or

dock space, and if the plan or analysis is approved by the local government and consistent with these guidelines, it may serve as the necessary justification for pier design, size, and construction. The intent of this provision is to allow ports and other entities the flexibility necessary to provide for existing and future water-dependent uses.

Where new piers or docks are allowed, master programs should contain provisions to require new residential development of two or more dwellings to provide joint use or community dock facilities, when feasible, rather than allow individual docks for each residence.

Piers and docks, including those accessory to single-family residences, shall be designed and constructed to avoid or, if that is not possible, to minimize and mitigate the impacts to ecological functions, critical areas resources such as eelgrass beds and fish habitats and processes such as currents and littoral drift. See WAC 173-26-221 (2)(c)(iii) and (iv). Master programs should require that structures be made of materials that have been approved by applicable state agencies.

(c) **Fill.** Fills shall be located, designed, and constructed to protect shoreline ecological functions and ecosystem-wide processes, including channel migration.

Fills waterward of the ordinary high-water mark shall be allowed only when necessary to support: Water-dependent use, public access, cleanup and disposal of contaminated sediments as part of an inter-agency environmental clean-up plan, disposal of dredged material considered suitable under, and conducted in accordance with the dredged material management program of the department of natural resources, expansion or alteration of transportation facilities of statewide significance currently located on the shoreline and then only upon a demonstration that alternatives to fill are not feasible, mitigation action, environmental restoration, beach nourishment or enhancement project. Fills waterward of the ordinary high-water mark for any use except ecological restoration should require a conditional use permit.

(d) **Breakwaters, jetties, groins, and weirs.** Breakwaters, jetties, groins, and weirs located waterward of the ordinary high-water mark shall be allowed only where necessary to support water-dependent uses, public access, shoreline stabilization, or other specific public purpose. Breakwaters, jetties, groins, weirs, and similar structures should require a conditional use permit, except for those structures installed to protect or restore ecological functions, such as woody debris installed in streams. Breakwaters, jetties, groins, and weirs shall be designed to protect critical areas and shall provide for mitigation according to the sequence defined in WAC 173-26-201 (2)(e).

(e) **Beach and dunes management.** Washington's beaches and their associated dunes lie along the Pacific Ocean coast between Point Grenville and Cape Disappointment, and as shorelines of statewide significance are mandated to be managed from a statewide perspective by the act. Beaches and dunes within shoreline jurisdiction shall be managed to conserve, protect, where appropriate develop, and where appropriate restore the resources and benefits of coastal beaches. Beaches and dunes should also be managed to reduce the hazard to human life and property from natural or human-induced actions associated with these areas.

Shoreline master programs in coastal marine areas shall provide for diverse and appropriate use of beach and dune areas consistent with their ecological, recreational, aesthetic, and economic values, and consistent with the natural limitations of beaches, dunes, and

dune vegetation for development. Coastal master programs shall institute development setbacks from the shoreline to prevent impacts to the natural, functional, ecological, and aesthetic qualities of the dune.

"Dune modification" is the removal or addition of material to a dune, the reforming or reconfiguration of a dune, or the removal or addition of vegetation that will alter the dune's shape or sediment migration. Dune modification may be proposed for a number of purposes, including protection of property, flood and storm hazard reduction, erosion prevention, and ecological restoration.

Coastal dune modification shall be allowed only consistent with state and federal flood protection standards and when it will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological functions or significant adverse impacts to other shoreline resources and values.

Dune modification to protect views of the water shall be allowed only on properties subdivided and developed prior to the adoption of the master program and where the view is completely obstructed for residences or water-enjoyment uses and where it can be demonstrated that the dunes did not obstruct views at the time of original occupancy, and then only in conformance with the above provisions.

(f) **Dredging and dredge material disposal.** Dredging and dredge material disposal shall be done in a manner which avoids or minimizes significant ecological impacts and impacts which cannot be avoided should be mitigated in a manner that assures no net loss of shoreline ecological functions.

New development should be sited and designed to avoid or, if that is not possible, to minimize the need for new and maintenance dredging. Dredging for the purpose of establishing, expanding, or relocating or reconfiguring navigation channels and basins should be allowed where necessary for assuring safe and efficient accommodation of existing navigational uses and then only when significant ecological impacts are minimized and when mitigation is provided. Maintenance dredging of established navigation channels and basins should be restricted to maintaining previously dredged and/or existing authorized location, depth, and width.

Dredging waterward of the ordinary high-water mark for the primary purpose of obtaining fill material shall not be allowed, except when the material is necessary for the restoration of ecological functions. When allowed, the site where the fill is to be placed must be located waterward of the ordinary high-water mark. The project must be either associated with a MTCA or CERCLA habitat restoration project or, if approved through a shoreline conditional use permit, any other significant habitat enhancement project. Master programs should include provisions for uses of suitable dredge material that benefit shoreline resources. Where applicable, master programs should provide for the implementation of adopted regional interagency dredge material management plans or watershed management planning.

Disposal of dredge material on shorelands or wetlands within a river's channel migration zone shall be discouraged. In the limited instances where it is allowed, such disposal shall require a conditional use permit. This provision is not intended to address discharge of dredge material into the flowing current of the river or in deep water within the channel where it does not substantially affect the geohydrologic character of the channel migration zone.

(g) **Shoreline habitat and natural systems enhancement projects.** Shoreline habitat and natural systems enhancement projects include those activities proposed and conducted specifically for the purpose

of establishing, restoring, or enhancing habitat for priority species in shorelines.

Master programs should include provisions fostering habitat and natural system enhancement projects. Such projects may include shoreline modification actions such as modification of vegetation, removal of nonnative or invasive plants, shoreline stabilization, dredging, and filling, provided that the primary purpose of such actions is clearly restoration of the natural character and ecological functions of the shoreline. Master program provisions should assure that the projects address legitimate restoration needs and priorities and facilitate implementation of the restoration plan developed pursuant to WAC 173-26-201 (2) (f).

[Statutory Authority: RCW 90.58.060 and 90.58.200. WSR 04-01-117 (Order 03-02), § 173-26-231, filed 12/17/03, effective 1/17/04.]