

Shoreline Management Act rulemaking

The Shoreline Management Act (SMA) directs the Department of Ecology to work in partnership with cities and counties to protect, restore, and responsibly develop Washington’s 28,000 miles of stream, lake, and marine shorelines. The Act has three broad objectives:

- Protect the shoreline environment
- Promote access to public shorelines
- Prioritize uses requiring a shoreline location

To implement the SMA, cities and counties adopt land-use policies and regulations, called shoreline master programs (SMPs). 258 cities and counties have state-approved, locally tailored SMPs for their regulated shoreline areas.

Ecology is now proposing to amend the five state rules that implement the SMA. These are Chapters 173-18, 173-20, 173-22, 173-26, and 173-27 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). Once adopted, the new rules will apply to cities and counties when they update their existing SMPs during the next periodic review cycle starting in 2027.

Why are we doing rulemaking?

- To address issues we have identified over the years reviewing and implementing SMPs by providing clarity around SMP amendments, permitting, enforcement, and other topics.
- To help local governments address the impacts of sea level rise and increased storm severity in their SMPs, as required by RCW 90.58.630.

Rulemaking timeline

Date	Activity
May 2, 2024	Announced rulemaking (filed the CR-101 form)
Summer 2024-spring 2026	Rule development
September 2, 2026	Rule proposal (file the CR-102 form)
Spring 2027	Adopt rules (file the CR-103 form), rules effective ~31 days later

Public comment period and public hearings

Ecology will hold a public comment period on the proposed rules from **September 2, 2026 (12am) through November 17, 2026 (11:59pm)**.

We will hold six public hearings during the comment period. Each hearing will be preceded by an open house starting at 5pm. The presentation will start at 6:00pm, followed by the hearing.

- October 15, 2026, Lacey
- October 19, 2026, Anacortes
- October 22, 2026, virtual hearing
- October 28, 2026, Yakima
- October 29, 2026, Spokane
- November 3, 2026, Des Moines

What topics are the primary focus of the proposed rule changes?

Topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Critical areas protection
- Master program amendments
- No net loss of shoreline ecological function
- Permitting, compliance, and enforcement
- Sea level rise and storm severity
- Shoreline modifications and stabilization
- Shorelines of statewide significance

Sea level rise and storm severity

Rising sea levels have significant impacts for coastal communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems. The rulemaking process will establish a new requirement that local governments address the impact of sea level rise and increased storm severity in their SMPs. This is an opportunity to improve the ability of coastal communities to thrive in the present, adapt to climate change challenges, and transform as necessary to meet future threats and opportunities.

Looking forward

During future periodic review cycles, all cities and counties will be required to update their SMPs to align with the new rules. Many local governments are currently undertaking climate planning activities such as updating comprehensive plans and hazard mitigation plans. Local governments should look for opportunities during these processes to help prepare for future SMP reviews.

Environmental justice

As Ecology works to build a healthier environment, we must make sure no community is overburdened by environmental pollution, and that we strive to eliminate environmental and health disparities. As part of our SMA rulemaking efforts, we are completing an environmental justice assessment under the Healthy Environmental for All Act to ensure we hear and address the priorities and concerns of Tribes, overburdened communities, and vulnerable populations.

For more information

Email smarulemaking@ecy.wa.gov with any questions and visit our website to sign up for email updates and access more information (<https://ecy.wa.gov/sma-rulemaking>).

