

Interim Climate Resilience Planning Guidance for Shoreline Master Programs: A Companion to the Comprehensive Plan Climate Element Planning Guidance Executive Summary

Communities around Washington are already experiencing the impacts of climate change on ecosystems, the built environment, and human well-being. The purpose of this guidance is to support local governments in addressing the impacts of climate change on shorelines, focusing on plan consistency and how the process of developing a comprehensive plan climate resilience sub-element can inform future updates to shoreline master programs (SMPs). This guidance is a companion to the Department of Commerce's 2023 [Climate Element Planning Guidance](#). This guidance is interim and establishes no new requirements.

The Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1181 (referred to as HB 1181) in 2023, establishing a requirement to address the impacts of climate change in local planning. All cities and counties that are fully planning under the Growth Management Act must develop a climate resilience sub-element during their comprehensive plan periodic update. HB 1181 directs Ecology to conduct rulemaking to update the SMP guidelines. After the updated rules take effect, local governments will be required to address the impact of sea level rise and increased storm severity in their SMPs.

Comprehensive plan periodic updates and SMP periodic reviews take place on alternating ten-year cycles, with one plan under review every five years. Local governments are currently updating their comprehensive plans. The [Climate Element Planning Guidance](#) establishes a process for developing a comprehensive plan resilience sub-element. We recommend that local governments consider their SMP as they develop their comprehensive plan resilience sub-element and use this process to inform future SMP updates. For example, local governments can include partners with shoreline planning expertise in their advisory committees and use the comprehensive plan tribal engagement process for early coordination around shoreline planning priorities. Local governments can design and conduct vulnerability and risk assessments so that the findings can be used to inform new or updated SMP provisions.

Consistency between comprehensive plans and SMPs is required, and it is important to ensure that comprehensive plan updates do not create conflicts between plans. We recommend ensuring that climate resilience comprehensive plan sub-elements are aligned with SMP policies and regulations.

This guidance includes additional information about sea level rise and SMPs, including key resources and ideas for addressing sea level rise in different areas of an SMP. For example, local governments may choose to assign preferred sea level rise adaptation strategies in alignment with shoreline environment designations. Policies and regulations for flood hazard reduction and setbacks and buffers can be used to increase the resilience of shoreline development patterns. We also briefly highlight other climate hazards, including drought, wildfire, and riverine flooding that may be important to consider and address in SMPs.

Ecology is committed to supporting locally led efforts to build climate resilience through shoreline planning and working closely with local partners as we develop new requirements.



Charlotte Dohrn
charlotte.dohrn@ecy.wa.gov
564-669-1874



To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6831 or email at ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341