Critical Area Administrative Review

Critical Area Administrative Review (CAAR) is a process to implement the provisions of the Agricultural Critical Areas Ordinance (ACAO), Title 17.15, for agricultural land use activities within a critical area or associated buffer. This does not include the construction of new agricultural structures. Construction of new buildings is covered in Title 24 and requires a Critical Area Review Permit (CARP). Agriculture means the use of a tract of land for the following:

1. The tilling of the soil;
2. The raising, harvesting and processing of crops or plant growth of any kind, including forestry;
3. Pasturage;
4. Horticulture;
5. Dairying;
6. Raising of poultry and livestock;
7. Shellfish or fish farming, including finfish in upland hatcheries; or
8. Raising, harvesting and processing of clams, oysters and mussels.

Critical areas include wetlands, ponds, streams, high groundwater, seasonal drainages, steep slopes, marine bluffs, floodplains and special habitats.

Resource Stewardship Department staff will evaluate the proposed site or activity, potential impacts and compliance with the ACAO. Special environmental reports may be requested to assist in the evaluation process. This may include a full delineation and analysis of the critical area by a qualified professional at the applicant’s expense.

A determination letter will be issued after review of the critical area is complete. The letter will identify the critical area and outline the provisions of the ACAO associated with the critical area, and may include mitigating conditions.

How Do I Apply?
Submit a completed application package to the Permit Assistance Center with the applicable fee. Complete package requirements are outlined on the application form.

Review Process and Timing
A CAAR is reviewed under the Type I procedure. This means that staff is the review authority and the review time can be up to 58 days. The review time may take longer if a request for additional information is necessary. Public notification is not required. Workload may affect the review time.

Staff from Planning will act as case manager. This involves coordinating the review with Environmental Health, Roads and Transportation, and the Assessor.

Appeals
All decisions may be appealed. An appeal form and associated appeal fee must be submitted within 14 days from the date of the decision. All appeal forms are submitted to the Permit Assistance Center.

Expiration
If construction activity or operation has not commenced within three years from the date of the final letter, the determination shall expire. However, if an underlying permit has a different expiration period, that period shall control.

I Still Have Questions…
The information in this bulletin is a general guideline of the procedures and rules. You should not rely on this bulletin to identify the specific requirements for a project. For additional information, speak with a staff member at the Permit Assistance Center. Contact information is listed below. You may also review all Thurston County Codes online on the County website referenced at the bottom of this page.

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