King County
Local Services

PERMITS

Critical Area Designation (CAD)

A Critical Area Designation (CAD) identifies critical areas on a site in unincorporated King County without requiring the submittal of a development proposal or building permit. A site may be a portion of a parcel, an entire parcel, or multiple adjoining parcels under common ownership or legal control. The result of the CAD is an official letter and site map prepared by the Department of Local Services, Permitting Division (Permitting) that is valid for five years from the approval date.

What are critical areas?

Critical areas are lands with natural geologic hazards or lands that support certain unique, fragile or valuable natural resources including fish, wildlife, water, and habitats such as wetlands, streams, rivers, lakes, and marine waters. King County identifies specific critical areas grouped into five categories:

A. **Flood Hazard Areas**
B. **Wetlands**
C. **Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas**
    1. Aquatic areas
    2. Riparian areas
    3. Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas
    4. Wildlife Habitat Networks
D. **Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA)**
E. **Geologically Hazardous Areas**
    1. Alluvial fan hazard areas
    2. Channel Migration Zones
    3. Coal mine hazard areas
    4. Erosion hazard areas
    5. Landslide hazard areas
    6. Seismic hazard areas
    7. Steep slope hazard areas
    8. Tsunami hazard areas
    9. Volcanic hazard areas

The King County Code (KCC) protects critical areas to protect public health and safety, to promote environmental health and quality of life in the region, and to preserve environmental resources that are valuable to the public. Protection of critical areas is possible by restricting some development activities, avoiding impacts for new allowable development where possible, mitigation and restoration for unavoidable impacts, and other critical areas standards and regulations found in Section 21A.24 of the KCC. For some critical areas, these regulations establish buffers and building setbacks around critical areas. Buffers are areas adjacent to a critical area that are intended to protect and promote the functions and values of the critical area and reduce impacts from nearby land uses.

What are CADs used for?

A CAD provides an applicant with Permitting's determination of the existence, location, and classification of critical areas on their site. This determination is final and effective for five years, except in the event of certain changes that may invalidate the findings, such as official adoption of new critical area maps or methodologies, changes in site conditions, or availability of new information that conflicts with the findings. The most common use for a CAD is in preparation for submitting an application to Seattle-King County Public Health for septic system design or well site approval for residential projects. They can also be used to determine the presence of critical areas as part of real estate transactions, development planning, or in preparation for subdividing or altering parcel boundaries.

The CAD also provides additional information that may help an applicant make informed decisions about their site, but this information should be understood to be preliminary and separate from the determination to which the five-year effective period applies. Additional non-vested information which may be provided in the CAD includes:

- Identification of critical areas within an evaluation area extending 300 feet beyond the limits of the site which may impact a development proposal;
- Introductory information about the critical areas identified on the site and evaluation area; and
- A discussion of development standards and regulations, including standard buffers and building setbacks, that may apply to the site for typical uses.

A CAD does not represent a comprehensive source of all applicable critical area standards or other regulations that may apply to a development proposal. The scope of a CAD is limited by incomplete information such as access to offsite critical areas or the details of future proposed development. The applicant is responsible for preparing a future permit application with the correct buffer widths and other limitations of use specific to their development proposal and all applicable critical areas code. Compliance with all critical areas code and regulations, including the application of appropriate buffer widths, will be determined at the time of critical areas review for a future development permit.

What is the application process?

To apply online: Go to MyBuildingPermit.com and sign up for an account if you don't already have one. The CAD application is located by selecting "King County" under jurisdiction, "Land Use" under application type, "Any Project Type" under project type, and "Critical Areas" under activity type.

Once your application is accepted, it is assigned a permit number (e.g., CADSXX-XXXX) and routed to environmental scientists to review. We will conduct an initial screening and subsequent site visit. After an application is deemed complete and fees are paid, Permitting will prepare the CAD within 65 days, not including any time Permitting is awaiting your response to a Request for Information (RFI).

What reports are required to apply?

CAD application forms are available on MyBuildingPermit.com. Additionally, the application will require you to submit a site plan and an ecological critical area report.

The **site plan** is intended to show the limits of the site. For most applicants, the site is a single parcel of property. In some cases, the site may consist of two or more contiguous parcels under common ownership or legal control. In other cases, such as a very large parcel where the applicant has clear plans to develop only a portion, they may designate only the portion of the parcel they intend to use as the site. Note that the site plan is not required to include proposed development.

The **ecological critical area report** is required to address all ecological critical areas at the entire site and 300-foot evaluation area around the site. It is prepared by an ecological professional. More information on ecological critical area report requirements is available on our website, linked below. The King County iMap GIS website includes some information on ecological critical areas at a regional scale, but this information is incomplete for a specific site.

Alternatively, to the ecological critical area report, if your site is a developed parcel under one acre in size that does not have significant tree or plant cover, you may submit a document which requests an additional **presence/absence site visit** for a fee from Permitting staff ecologists. If the Permitting ecologist agrees that the site qualifies as unlikely to contain ecological critical areas, they will perform a presence/absence site visit to check. If the Permitting ecologist finds evidence of ecological critical areas during the presence/absence site visit, an ecological critical area report will be required.

Note that unless requested by a Permitting staff geologist during CAD review, a geological critical area report is not required to apply for a CAD. In most cases, Permitting has sufficient data from available sources to determine the presence of geological critical areas, or potential geological critical areas which may be confirmed with a geological critical area report under future permit applications.

Where can I find more information?

More information regarding Critical Areas Designation is available on our website.

More information regarding MyBuildingPermit.com application submittal is available online.

- Visit our customer service page for contact information.

King County Department of Local Services, Permitting Division

Property research and maps

Ecological Critical Area Report Requirements

Seattle – King County Public Health, Environmental Health Services

Private wells, plumbing, gas piping and on-site sewage systems

On-site septic as-built record