



*Surfrider  
Foundation.*

November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Brian Shea  
Planning and Building Division  
Department of Public Services  
Grays Harbor County  
100 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 31  
Montesano, Washington 98663-3614

RE: Grays Harbor County Critical Areas Ordinance Second Draft

Dear Director Shea:

Thank you for this opportunity to review and comment on the second draft of the Critical Areas Ordinance. Surfrider Foundation appreciates your commitment to preventing harm to residents and property from natural hazards and to protecting habitat areas for wildlife. Protecting private property from storm events and other natural hazards as well as protecting the County's natural habitat areas that support wildlife, recreational opportunities and a high quality of life is essential for building and sustaining a thriving Grays Harbor economy.

The Surfrider Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our world's oceans, waves and beaches. Founded in 1984 by a handful of ocean enthusiasts, the Surfrider Foundation now maintains over 50,000 members and 80 chapters worldwide, including five in Washington State and the South Coast Chapter in Grays Harbor County. We are working in coastal Grays Harbor to protect access to quality recreational opportunities and to engage coastal communities and recreational users in the stewardship of our coast. Because of our vested interest in the long-term health of Pacific Coast beaches and marine waters, we request that you incorporate the following recommendations into the Grays Harbor Critical Areas Ordinance.

**Recommendations**

Having reviewed the first draft and many of the comments submitted, we feel that the second draft needs to go further in incorporating the recommendations of our state natural resource experts at the Department of Ecology, Community Trade and Economic Development and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. This is especially

true in the areas of mitigation banking, monitoring, habitat conservation areas, and buffers.

While there is much scientific uncertainty pertaining to natural resources management, such as how great sea level rise will be and how fast it will happen under climate change, there is also a wealth of knowledge, such as how important woody debris is in providing habitat for anadromous fish. The County has a legal mandate and responsibility to its residents to apply the best available science when protecting the functions and values of critical areas. Falling short of protecting critical areas means that we are more likely to see damage to property caused by flooding, like witnessed last year in the Chehalis Basin, more likely that new species will be added to the endangered list, and more likely that our natural resource-based industries, such as fishing, ocean recreation and tourism will suffer negative impacts.

In addition to the documents listed as Best Available Science, please add the Chehalis Basin Watershed Management Plan and the Salmon Habitat Restoration and Preservation Work Plan for WRIAs 22 and 23. Tailored to local conditions and resource issues, these documents can and should help inform County land use decisions. In addition, please include as additional supporting information, the more current CAOs for Mason (December 2006) and Whatcom Counties (September 2005). These were developed using current best available science requirements.

One area where we would like to see considerable changes in the second draft CAO is with the proposed buffer widths. As documented by current science, in order to protect all functions and values, buffers should be much greater than those proposed, especially in areas that support sensitive species. In order to meet state mandates, comply with best available science and protect important habitat and natural areas for property and wildlife, the proposed buffers need to be significantly increased. Surfrider Foundation recommends that you adopt those proposed by WDFW or refer to those applied in neighboring Thurston County.

Marine nearshore habitat and associated riparian zones provide critical functions and values in mitigating potential storm damage and supporting populations of shorebirds, sea birds, fish and mammals that are endangered, threatened and are important to local communities for recreation and commerce. Surfrider recommends that Grays Harbor designate marine shorelines habitat conservation areas. Development that is directly adjacent to marine shorelines should undergo the same assessment process as those adjacent to wetlands, streams and natural hazard areas.

Science demonstrates that vegetation in buffer areas is more vulnerable to wind, disease, and other forms of disturbance. For this reason, there should be a narrower exception for vegetation removal in buffers. In addition, the CAO should require a 15-foot setback between buildings and buffers. Setbacks are necessary to allow enough distance between development and buffers in order to avoid damage to buffers during the construction process.

Finally, Surfrider Foundation appreciates the policy discussion making strong arguments on behalf of economic prosperity. Standing firmly behind the economic interests of the region, we feel it is essential to protect the functions and values of critical areas. Providing for a strong sense of security in knowing ones property is safe and for abundant wildlife supporting quality recreation, commercial fishing and a strong tourism industry are going to bolster a thriving Grays Harbor economy for the future.

Thank you for consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss these comments, please contact me at 206-940-6509 or [jkennedy@surfrider.org](mailto:jkennedy@surfrider.org). Please notify me of all future public involvement opportunities pertaining to critical areas regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jody Kennedy  
Washington Policy Coordinator