

# Is a Rural Stewardship Plan right for me?



## **Rural Stewardship Plans offer flexibility to tailor habitat protections**

As a rural landowner in King County, you are the best steward of your land and its natural resources. With this in mind, King County has created a program to offer technical assistance to landowners interested in developing environmental protections tailored to their property and goals.

Because “one size” of land regulation does not always fit every property, King County now offers Rural Stewardship Planning to landowners whose property is zoned Rural Area Residential (RA).

Whether your goal is to site a new house, remodel an existing one or simply find new ways to care for or restore your land, you can create a Rural Stewardship Plan unique to your property and goals. If you are pursuing a permit, Rural Stewardship Planning may streamline the permit process and modify some buffer requirements in exchange for a long term commitment to protect natural resources in other ways.

This booklet will help you understand the basics of Rural Stewardship Planning so you can decide if it is right for you.



**King County**

Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
**Water and Land Resources Division**

## Goals of a Rural Stewardship Plan

The main goal of a Rural Stewardship Plan is to help you achieve your objectives for your property without harming the existing ecosystem or affecting downstream neighbors. This usually means:

- Recognizing and understanding the unique features in your landscape worthy of protection
- Protecting or improving the flow and absorption of both surface water and groundwater on your property
- Identifying specific actions and methods to minimize or offset any environmental harm from development
- Monitoring your plan's success and making adjustments as necessary



*Stewards are available to assist you.*

## Benefits of a Rural Stewardship Plan

By developing and implementing a Rural Stewardship Plan, you may be eligible to take advantage of:

- Technical assistance to look comprehensively at your property, finding options to achieve your short-term and long-term goals while protecting the natural resources present there
- Reduced stream and wetland buffers and increased clearing allowances
- Enrollment in the Public Benefit Rating System, which could reduce your property taxes.
- Access to design, cost share and other resources to help with projects like restoring native vegetation
- A simpler and potentially less expensive permitting process for your development projects now and in the future

## Three key parts of Rural Stewardship Plan development:

### Consider your objectives and your property

- Is a Rural Stewardship Plan right for you?
- What goals do you have for your property? What changes would you like to make? Habitat restoration? House remodel? New development?
- A King County Rural Steward will help you assess your property and how a Plan would fit your needs.
- You'll also get help to identify natural features in your landscape you want to protect or enhance.

### Explore your options

- With the help of a Steward, you can choose your best options for protecting and managing the natural resources on your property while meeting your goals.
- If you are planning to build or expand a house or clear part of your property, we will help you figure out protections to offset any environmental impacts and get you started in the permitting process.

### Develop your plan

- Your final plan will include an agreed-upon set of management actions and a timeline for implementation.
- You will also develop a plan to monitor the effectiveness of those actions and adjust them if needed.

## Good stewardship will help ensure your plan's success

Changes in land use may have both direct and indirect impacts on natural resources. For instance, reducing the size of a wetland's buffer may reduce its wildlife habitat values, groundwater recharge capability, and ability to store and filter water. In accordance with the Rural Stewardship Planning goals, you will need to select management actions for your property that maintain or enhance the level of ecological benefits provided by your natural resources.

These Best Management Practices ("BMPs") will vary with your site and your development plans. Management practices address issues like vegetation management, wildlife habitat protection and enhancement, wetland and stream protection, stormwater management, and land clearing methods.



*Replanting a stream buffer is an example of a BMP.*

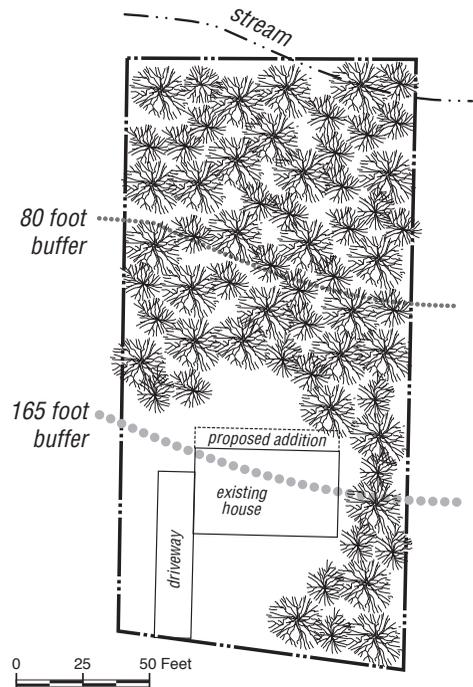
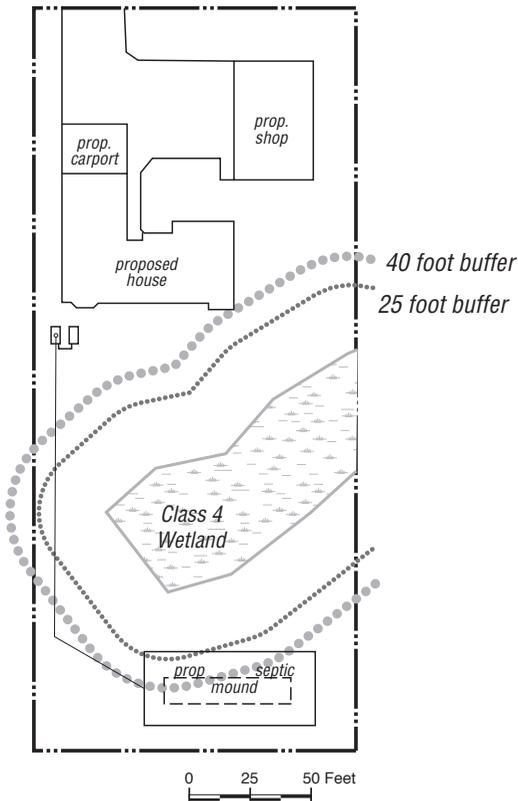
# Rural Stewardship Plans compared to

These comparisons illustrate how a Rural Stewardship Plan can be beneficial to a landowner and their objectives. To get a better idea of how a plan would work on your property, you can attend a workshop or get help from county staff.

The standard Critical Areas requirements allow some flexibility to help you fit your development plans around the critical areas and buffers on your property. In many cases, the outcome would be similar to

## Example 1: Property with a Class 4 wetland (currently in meadow)

The landowner is building a new house on an undeveloped lot. With a Rural Stewardship Plan, the buffer could be reduced from 40 feet to 25 feet to fit the proposed structures. The habitat protections in the plan would most likely include replanting the wetland buffer and enhancing the wetland with native plants and other habitat features.



## Example 2: Wooded property on a Type S ("Shorelines" category) stream with impaired streamside habitat

The landowner wants to expand the house 10 feet toward the stream. With a Rural Stewardship Plan, the buffer could be reduced from 165 feet to 80 feet since the lot is over 70% wooded and the landowner wants to improve forest health. The habitat protections the landowner would select for the plan would most likely include removing blackberries and planting native plants to improve the stream buffer and using native plants in their landscaping.

# standard Critical Areas requirements

Rural Stewardship Planning, but mitigation requirements would be less flexible.

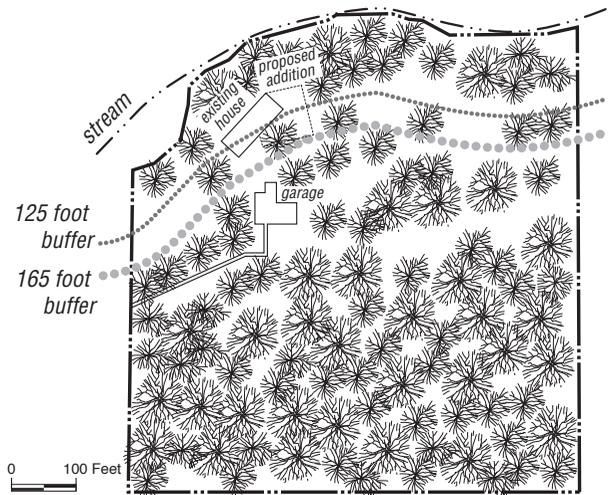
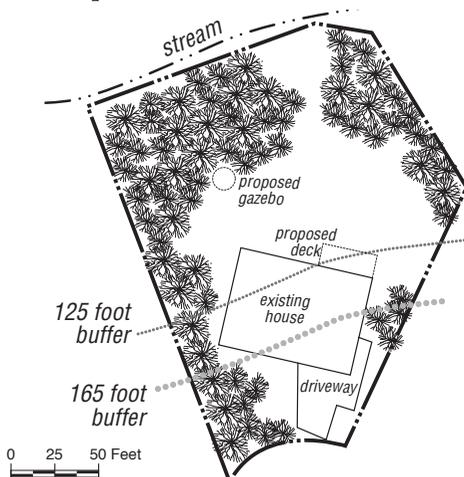
Rural Stewardship Planning will not offer the same benefits to all properties. If you are clearing or developing your property, reductions in buffers or clearing limits will vary depending on the property. In areas with higher quality habitat, stream buffers usually cannot be reduced as much.

*These examples have been simplified to save space but convey the general principles of Rural Stewardship Planning.*

## Example 3: Wooded property on a Type S ("Shorelines" category) stream with impaired streamside habitat

The landowner wants to add a second story to their home. They also want to add a deck next to the house and a gazebo in the backyard. With a Rural Stewardship Plan, the buffer in this example could be reduced from 165 feet to 125 feet (the reduction is less than example 2 since the lot is more than 30% cleared). The gazebo could be placed within the new buffer in an area that is currently cleared, in exchange for reforesting another cleared area. By siting the deck on the east corner of the house, it intrudes on the buffer as little as possible.

The habitat protections the landowner would select might include replacing some of the lawn with native plants to offset the impacts to the buffer, and restoring the buffer along the stream with native plants.



## Example 4: Wooded parcel on Type F (fish-bearing) stream with house inside the buffer

The landowner in this case wants to add 1500 square feet to a legally built house, which is now entirely within the buffer. They'd also like some yard and patio space. With a Rural Stewardship Plan, the buffer can be reduced from 165 feet to 125 feet, but the house is still mostly within the buffer.

The house addition could still continue, as long as the additional area is not added on the side facing the stream. The habitat protections the landowner would select might include enhancement of the buffer, even increasing the buffer area where they don't plan to develop, using native landscaping and green building techniques such as permeable pavement.

## What's included in the Plan?

- An inventory and map showing the existing conditions as well as critical areas, their buffers, and the clearing restrictions under the standard development regulations
- A site map showing your proposed development or other activities, natural areas you are protecting, and the protection and enhancement actions you have selected
- A timeline for implementing your projects and habitat protections and for follow-up monitoring so you will know if your protection actions are working

## Certain development requirements may still apply

If your plan is focused on protecting and restoring habitat and you are not clearing or developing your land, your plan is ready to implement!

However, if you are developing your property, you may still need to comply with some development requirements, and you may need permits from other agencies. If you have worked closely with county staff to develop your plan, you may have completed your critical areas pre-application review as part of the process. With an approved Rural Stewardship Plan, getting subsequent permits from King County should also be quicker, since the county has worked with you and already knows about your property and your plans.

## Resources available to help you with Rural Stewardship Planning

- Free introductory workshops can help you understand the planning process and determine whether it will meet your needs.
- Technical assistance is available to guide you through each step in the plan development process. Much of the non-permit related assistance is free.
- For a more complex plan, particularly if you need to site a new home, well, or septic system, you may choose to hire a consultant to help with the plan and associated permitting.

While the county and consultants may be used for technical support, the final commitment to good stewardship can come only from you.



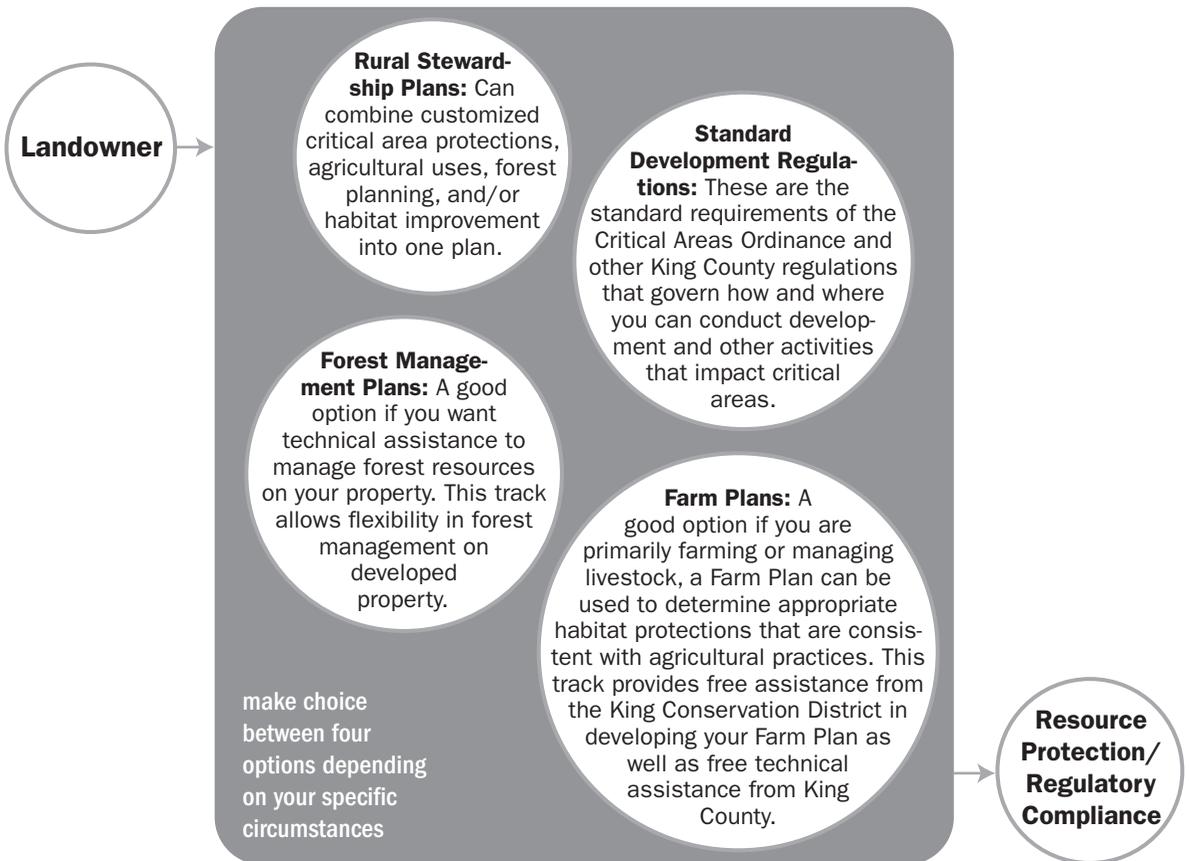
*Resources are available to assist you in finding a solution for managing your land while protecting critical areas.*

## Rural Stewardship Planning is one of four options

A Rural Stewardship Plan is one of four “tracks” available for you to manage and develop your land. The other three include the standard development regulations, Farm Planning, and Forest Management Planning. King County staff can help you explore these options, but you will need to decide which is best for your management goals and your property.



## Four Land Stewardship Tracks



## More information

For more information on Rural Stewardship Plans, please contact **Katy Vanderpool**, King County, at **206-296-8362** or **[katy.vanderpool@metrokc.gov](mailto:katy.vanderpool@metrokc.gov)**

More information is available online at *<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/cao>*

Alternative formats available upon request by calling 206-296-6519



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Department of  
Natural Resources and Parks

#### **Water and Land Resources Division**

201 South Jackson Street, Suite 600  
Seattle, WA 98104-3855

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