



SAN JUAN COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

WETLAND PROTECTION AND REPORTS

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

A wetland is an area that is inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.



Wetlands are ecologically diverse and provide plant and animal habitat for many species. They also play a critical role in local water cycles, slowing freshwater runoff to prevent flooding, removing pollutants, and reducing stormwater problems.

Background

Maintaining the functions and values of wetlands is important for many reasons. They provide aesthetically pleasing views, decrease water contamination, protect fish and shellfish habitat, reduce flooding, erosion, and siltation, increase wildlife viewing opportunities, and improve property values.

Developing properties near wetlands

The wetland regulations in San Juan County Code 18.35.085 - .105 and 18.50.130 must be followed to protect these critical areas. Unless exempt, most development and activities including land disturbance within 300 feet of a possible wetland located either on, or off of your property require a wetland report to determine water quality and habitat buffers. Conditions in the field control. You may have a wetland on your property that is not shown on the County's possible wetland map.

How do I know if a wetland affects my project?

Please request a critical area /archaeology map review from DCD to determine all potential critical areas on your property <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1301/>. There is no fee for this service and it could save you lots of permitting time.

You may also review the County's possible wetlands map layer on Polaris, mapping software available on the County website: <https://sjcgis.org/PolarisJS/>. The map is an indicator of wetlands, but wetlands exist that are not shown on this map.

If you think there may be a wetland on your property that isn't identified on the Polaris possible wetland map or in your map review response from DCD, please request a critical area site visit by County staff by applying for a Residential Pre-Application (RPA) site visit and check the box for "Critical Area Review". The RPA fee is \$450.

When is a wetland report required?

- ▶ For development or activities proposed within 300 feet of a wetland and that drain to the wetland, regardless of whether the wetland is on the subject property, or mapped on the County's possible wetlands map layer.
- ▶ To remove a wetland from the County's possible wetlands map layer.
- ▶ To modify a wetland boundary shown on the County's possible wetlands map layer.
- ▶ To document a minimum wetland size for an exemption allowed by San Juan County Code (SJCC) 18.35.095.

Questions?

Call:
(360) 370-7586 or 7576

Email:
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Is a wetland report required in a permit application?

Yes, for most development or activities located within 300 feet of a possible wetland. A wetland report and boundary delineation with an appropriate scope and scale is needed to determine compliance with the SJCC 18.35.105.E.

For development proposed within 300 feet of a wetland, a wetland categorization and **reconnaissance** is sufficient if the wetland boundary determined in the field is located in the same location as shown on the County's possible wetland map.

If the location of the wetland boundary in the field is different than the boundary shown on the County's possible wetland map or if the wetland is not shown on the County's possible wetland map, a wetland categorization and **delineation** of the boundary of the wetland closest to the area proposed for development is required. This report must also determine the wetland category, rating and approximate size.

How can I modify wetland boundary or remove a wetland from the County's possible wetland layer?

Submit a wetland delineation conducted pursuant to the methodology contained in the "Corps of Engineers Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual," Technical Report Y-87-1, including any applicable regional supplements. The applicable regional supplement for San Juan County is the "Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region (Version 2.0)." (SJCC 18.35.105.G)

How are wetland reports reviewed?

San Juan County DCD staff will review the report for the minimum requirements. We may visit the site to verify information contained in the report and data sheets, and to review the delineated boundaries. If the report is incomplete or if there is any question as to the location or category of the wetland, staff will request review by an independent third party reviewer who is a qualified wetland professional or by the Washington State Department of Ecology. The cost of third party review is paid by the applicant, so it is important to make sure that the wetland report is complete.

What needs to be included in a wetland report?

The minimum requirements for wetland reports are found in SJCC 18.35.105. The checklist used by San Juan County staff to determine if a report is complete is attached to this bulletin. We recommend that landowners review this checklist with the qualified wetland professional hired to do the report. Staff are available to assist you in defining the scope of what is required for a project.

Who should I hire to prepare a wetland report?

County code requires that a qualified professional prepare a wetland report (SJCC 18.20.170). Anyone certified as a Professional Wetland Scientist by the Society of Wetland Scientists qualifies. Other professional may qualify. Please submit a copy of the qualified professional's resume with the wetland report. The Department of Ecology has some tips on how to select a wetland professional at: <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Wetlands/Tools-resources/Hiring-a-qualified-wetland-professional>.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY WETLANDS

- ▶ Supports wetland plant communities
- ▶ Invasive species are absent, or have minimal cover
- ▶ Minimal alteration of native vegetation, topography, soil, hydrology, nutrients and sediments
- ▶ Intact key ecological processes
- ▶ Expected diversity of species and functional groups present





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San Juan County Wetland Report Checklist

- 1. **Resume attached?** The wetland report must be prepared by a qualified wetland professional (SJCC 18.20.170). Anyone certified as a Professional Wetland Scientist by the Society of Wetland Scientists qualifies.
- 2. The report states whether it is a **reconnaissance or a delineation**.
 - “Wetland reconnaissance”** means an abbreviated wetland evaluation that confirms the presence or absence of a wetland, determines the wetland category, rating, and approximate size, and identifies the edge of the wetland in a limited area, **OR**
 - “Wetland delineation”** means the technical process of determining the edge of the wetland in the field, consistent with the definitions and methods prescribed in the 1987 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers “Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual,” Technical Report Y-87-1, including any applicable regional supplements. (Note: RCW 36.70A.175 and WAC 173-22-035 require the use of this manual.)
- 3. **Methodology.** The report describes the methodology used to determine the presence or absence of the wetland and the wetland category.
- 4. **Map.** A map at a scale and level of accuracy that is appropriate for the site and the project, showing:
 - a. Scale of the map. Standard engineering scale of 1”=20’ to 1”= 60’ is recommended;
 - b. Location of the wetland. If a full delineation is not completed, the map must indicate where the wetland boundaries were delineated, and where they were estimated;
 - c. Location of the required habitat buffer;
 - d. Location of the water quality buffer; and
 - e. Existing and proposed development features including structures, roads, utilities, stormwater and sewage systems, and areas of land disturbing activity such as areas to be cleared, graded, and converted to lawns and gardens.
- 5. **Narrative.** A narrative describing the vegetation communities on site, classified in accordance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Classification of Wetland and Deepwater Habitats of the United States (1979).
- 6. **Wetland Rating Category** based on the Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington – Revised (Ecology Publication No. 04-06-025), as revised by Ecology, and a narrative explaining the basis for the determination of wetland rating category. The wetland rating sheets showing the basis for the wetland determination and wetland category **must be** included in the report.
- 7. **Presence or absence of plants or animals protected as Fish and Wildlife Conservation Areas (FWHCAs).** If the wetland contains particular plants or animals protected as fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (FWHCAs), a higher rating may apply. See SJCC 18.35.115 and 18.35.135.
- 8. **Other elements** that may be necessary to determine compliance with the wetland protection requirements of the County code such as hydrologic conditions, detailed description of wetland functions and values, and proposed mitigation for development proposed within a wetland or its buffer.
- 9. **Expiration date of wetland report.** Wetland reports are valid for a period of five years.