

WEED MANAGEMENT WITHIN & NEAR CRITICAL AREAS

PURPOSE

This handout was created to provide general information to the public regarding management of weeds located within or near streams, wetlands and their associated buffers.

This handout is NOT a complete list of permit or code requirements and should NOT be used as a substitute for applicable laws and regulations. It is the sole responsibility of the property owner to apply for permits/approvals that are required.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

But for a few (very narrow) exceptions, anytime a property owner wishes to mow, cut, or dig out weeds within or near a wetland, a stream, or the buffers associated with wetlands or streams they must obtain an approval – in writing – from the City BEFORE completing any work. Additionally, approvals from the Federal Corps of Engineers, the State Department of Ecology, and the State Department of Fish and Wildlife could also be required for any type of work in/near streams, wetlands, or their buffers.

Before any type of weed management is proposed property owners need to make sure the vegetation they wish to remove is actually a weed. The most common weeds in Mount Vernon include English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, reed canary grass, Japanese knotweed, Scotch broom and purple loosestrife.

A full list of weeds allowed to be managed within and near critical areas and their associated buffers can be downloaded from the Skagit County Weed Control Board. You can download this list by clicking [HERE](#), or by calling (360) 416-1467 and requesting a copy of this list.

Following is the list of management practices that must be followed in the order they are listed below. In other words, property owners can't just jump to chemical control of weeds without first demonstrating that you've tried to manage the area with hand pulling, competitive exclusion, and mechanical removal first.

WEED MANAGEMENT PRACTICE #1: HAND PULLING

Hand pulling, similar to weeding in the garden, is generally suitable for small scale infestations of weeds. This method of weed removal requires frequent, persistent, and long term maintenance activities. Hand pulling allows site and species specific control, has a low impact to desirable vegetation, results in immediate plant removal, and is inexpensive on a small scale.

WEED MANAGEMENT PRACTICE #2: COMPETITIVE EXCLUSION

The goal of weed management through competitive exclusion is to establish desirable vegetation that can compete with and reduce the growth and success of undesirable weeds. In a stable, self-sustaining ecosystem with a dense canopy of native species, weeds are not likely to thrive or become dominant. In a healthy ecosystem, weeds are typically excluded because they cannot compete successfully against the well-established native species. In other words, the resources that the weeds need are not available when the environment is healthy and functioning properly.

WEED MANAGEMENT PRACTICE #3: MECHANICAL REMOVAL

When weeds are already well established and/or dominate a large sites, mechanical removal may be necessary. Mechanical removal consists of grading or tilling the site with large machinery to remove all weeds from the site. This large disturbance must be followed immediately with seeding or planting with native plants and erosion control methods.

WEED MANAGEMENT PRACTICE #4: CHEMICAL CONTROL

Herbicide use is allowed only as a last option in weed management. Herbicides can be harmful to humans and the environment if they are not applied correctly and in the appropriate amounts. Only some types of herbicide are acceptable for use in weed management of buffers near riparian or aquatic ecosystems because most herbicides can cause damage to fish, aquatic communities and water quality.

Most herbicides are not approved for use in or near aquatic ecosystems such as streams, rivers, or wetlands. Herbicides can harm beneficial, native plants as well as the undesirable weeds.

If herbicide use is prescribed, it must be done in accordance with federal and state law. The applicator is required to have applicable licenses and must be specifically certified to apply herbicides near aquatic ecosystems (streams, rivers, wetlands and their associated buffers).

Herbicides are required to be applied through spot treating rather than broad application and shall be limited to the minimum mixing ratio that can gain control of the weeds. Following the initial herbicide use, a management plan must be in place that includes hand pulling or physical control of weeds rather than continued herbicide usage.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Below is a list of websites where property owners can download additional resources.

- Mount Vernon’s Critical Areas Regulations (click on Chapter 15.40): <https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/MountVernon>
- Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/>
- Washington State Department of Ecology: <https://ecology.wa.gov/>
- Skagit County Noxious Weed Control Board: <https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/NoxiousWeeds/weedlist.htm>
- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board: <https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/>

Always feel free to call or email the City if you have questions or if you need to apply for a permit/approval.

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