



BEYOND THE SPLIT RAIL

The **EcoProject** is a Commons at Cordata COA neighborhood environmental project designed to educate, inspire, and encourage owners and residents in the common goal of preserving and enhancing surrounding wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas.

The Commons at Cordata development has 18.8 acres of wetlands, buffers and conservation areas. As homeowners we play an integral part in maintaining the stormwater system in these areas. When we protect this delicate ecosystem, we protect our homes, our property values and our surrounding environment. We become environmental stewards.

The split rail fences in our community define where a homeowner's individual property ends. The split rail fence and the property beyond it are owned by The Commons at Cordata Condominium Owners Association (COA). Just as individual homeowners in The Commons at Cordata do not own the sidewalk or street adjoining their property, they do not 'solely' own the split rail fence or buffer or wetlands behind their house. These areas are 'co-owned' by the 77 households that make up the COA, making each square foot in these areas 1/77 owned by every COA member.

Since the split rail fences, wetlands, buffers and conservation areas are the property of The Commons at Cordata COA, the association is responsible for maintaining and preserving these protected areas in accordance with City of Bellingham regulations. Protecting these valuable stormwater management areas means they must be restored and stay in their natural state. They are not designed for personal use or to decorate with decor. Yard art and statuary belong in homeowners' own yards – not in the wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas.

The purpose of the EcoProject is to restore, maintain and protect the environmental health of wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas within The Commons at Cordata so our community can prepare our wetlands, buffers and conservation areas to handle severe weather events, particularly extreme rainfall and stormwater accumulations worsened by climate change.

This involves owners, renters and visitors becoming aware of our surrounding environment, and accountable for personal behavior. The goal is to create an environmentally active community that recognizes the importance of its wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas and is committed to restoring and maintaining the optimal environmental health of these ecosystems. The Commons at Cordata has the opportunity to become an increasingly desirable community as well as an exciting, regional model known for wetlands preservation, community engagement, and personal participation.

ECO TOOLKIT

The environmental toolkit is a way to educate and build awareness of our roles as stewards of our buffers, wetlands and conservation areas.

WAYS YOU CAN PROTECT OUR BUFFERS AND WETLANDS

- Avoid use of herbicides and pesticides. If needed, use only those products approved for use near water bodies.
- Avoid non-native and invasive species of plants. Check with the Whatcom Noxious Weed List.
- Do not dump garbage, grass clippings, yard pruning, toxic materials, motor oil, grass, landscaping bark or other debris in wetlands.
- No filling or clearing of wetlands or buffer areas.
- Pick up after your pets. Pet waste contains harmful organisms and fecal coliform bacteria can filter into our water systems. Bag the waste and put in the garbage. Do not let pets wander in the wetlands.
- Wash your car at a car wash to avoid pollutants going into the storm drain.
- No decorative objects in the wetlands or buffers. Objects such as statues, bird baths and decor can dislodge during storms and clog stormwater culverts.
- Homeowners may remove blackberry plants within five (5) feet beyond the split rail fence and must replace the area with native plants between October and May. Owners can do the work. All other workers must be licensed, bonded and insured to maintain association insurance. Board approval is needed beyond 5 feet removal.
- Some homeowners have disbursement trenches located on their property as a stormwater management tool. Check them regularly, follow the guidelines at www.commonscordata.com.
- Adhere to the impervious cover limit for your unit. Check with the city Public Works Dept. if you have questions about impervious limits.

Contacts

- Public Works Dept. (360-778-7900)
- Community Development Dept. 360-778-8300
- Commons Board: commonscba@gmail.com

YOU ARE INVITED

Members of The Commons community are invited, with board approval, to pursue and coordinate any of the educational efforts listed below.

- Distribute Wetlands Brochure to all owners and residents.
- Promote conservation efforts on The Commons website, quarterly newsletters, emails, and postings on the community bulletin board.
- Hold community clean-up events and other events with guest speakers and guided walks discussing specific aspects of our community's wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas. Topics to include: stormwater movement in our wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas; identification and features of native plants; getting to know our neighborhood birds; wildlife sightings in our community; our community's built stormwater management infrastructure; best practices for removing blackberries and replacing them with native plants.
- Engage with local environmental organizations for resource information and related activities such as: Whatcom Conservation District, Whatcom Community College wetlands restoration staff, COB Parks Department, North Cascades Audubon Society, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, Washington Native Plant Society, and Whatcom Land Trust.
- Establish a team of The Commons volunteers to provide ongoing restoration and maintenance in our wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas and encourage homeowners to participate.
- Establish a team of The Commons volunteer inspectors to regularly monitor the wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas and report findings to the Board of Directors.
- Feature in each community newsletter a Commons resident (any age) with a brief story about what they've observed, experienced, learned while living alongside The Commons' wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas.
- Feature a wetlands' native plant, bird or animal in each community newsletter.
- Create a Commons coloring book of birds, plants, and animals in our wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas.
- Highlight community accomplishments in restoring and maintaining our wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas in our quarterly newsletter and on the community board.
- Collaborate with local nurseries for a native plant discount for planting in The Commons' wetlands and buffers.
- Attend The Commons yearly required City of Bellingham Stormwater Inspections.
- Encourage residents to follow blackberry and noxious weeds removal guidelines along with ways to protect our wetlands.

DEFINING FACTORS

Stormwater can be defined as the water that results from precipitation, which includes rainwater, subsoil water or spring water. The Commons at Cordata has both a natural ecosystem and a built infrastructure system that handle stormwater in our community. Both the natural stormwater ecosystem and the built stormwater system are regulated by the City of Bellingham but owned and maintained by The Commons at Cordata Condominium Owners Association. The Commons at Cordata wetlands, buffers and conservation easements total 18.804 acres with a built stormwater system consisting of 25 catch basins, 4 culverts, 1 pump, and 1 retention pond.

Our stormwater management systems are completely separate from the municipal sewer system. By city ordinance, stormwater is not allowed to go into the sewer system. The municipal sewer system is maintained by the City of Bellingham. The municipal sewer system has 20 sewer manholes/covers in our community.

Climate change has increased environmental risks of one type or another for virtually every community and the Commons at Cordata is no exception. The Commons is at high risk of increasingly severe storms bringing extreme rainfall amounts. We must ensure that both our built infrastructure stormwater management system and our wetlands, buffers and conservation areas are optimally maintained so that they can provide safe drainage in our community. Each and every homeowner is responsible for the actions they take in their own yards and as well as their actions affecting areas beyond the split rail fence.

The year-round beauty of our natural surroundings comes with the responsibility of protecting these fragile ecosystems. Our wetlands, buffers and conservation areas are a critical water management system that also has the ability to reduce soil erosion, flooding, and ground and surface water pollution. Additionally, these natural areas provide us with privacy, quiet, cooling shade on hot summer days, and wondrous opportunities to view birds and other wildlife as well as opportunities to learn about and appreciate native plants.

City of Bellingham Regulations

The City of Bellingham has enacted a number of regulations and code requirements to protect the city's natural resources. One of these - the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) - has as part of its purpose designating and classifying environmentally sensitive areas as "critical areas". One of the goals of the CAO is to prevent cumulative adverse environmental impacts to water quality, wetlands, and fish and wildlife habitat. These "critical areas" have special rules and regulations determining reasonable public and private use while also ensuring protection, maintenance, and restoration of these areas and their functioning. Stormwater requirements for critical areas need to meet standards for stormwater management and account for the sensitivity of the receiving waters.

The wetlands, buffers, and conservation areas in The Commons at Cordata have been designated as "Critical Areas". The City of Bellingham has regulations regarding our wetlands and buffers which the association is obligated to follow. Before commencing special projects or maintenance activities in these critical areas, the Commons is required to obtain permits from the City of Bellingham; these permits are called Minor Critical Area Permits or MCAPs. The MCAPs describe the work to be done and the best practices and conditions for doing it. Additionally, the Commons' Board is bound to enforce the rules and regulations pertaining to homeowners' activities that can affect these critical areas. The Board strives to enforce these rules and regulations accurately and fairly. Homeowners that do not follow the rules and regulations are warned and then fined as per the Violation Fines Procedures as outlined in The Commons at Cordata Rules and Regulations.

The Commons at Cordata Buffers and Wetlands Drainage Map

