

Why take care of our Wetlands?

Our community is fortunate to include protected wetlands and buffers located behind the split rail fences that surround the areas in back of our homes. These protected areas provide our community many benefits including natural beauty, wildlife and water management.

Wetlands provide stormwater cleansing, storage, wildlife habitat, flood reduction, nutrient cycling, and more. The loss of wetlands has contributed worldwide to flooding, property damage, water quality degradation, and loss of habitat.

Stormwater runoff is precipitation that runs off of any surface it can't seep into such as roads, sidewalks, highways, parking lots, and rooftops (impervious surfaces). Faster run-off leads to flooding and pollution. In western Washington, stormwater is a special concern due to our wet climate and urbanization.

Local, State and Federal regulations require privately owned stormwater systems be properly maintained with polluted water and sediments removed and disposed of properly. Property owners could be liable for any pollution. A properly functioning stormwater system is less likely to fail and cause erosion or flooding during a big storm.

The wastewater from our homes go into a sanitary sewer treatment facility before it's released into our waterways. Stormwater, however, travels through our local catch basins, into our storm drain system and into Puget Sound itself. If our streets, rooftops and private stormwater facilities are dirty, then our local waters will be too.

Wetlands are protected through regulations nationwide. In Washington State, the 1990 Growth Management Act required counties and cities to adopt regulations to protect wetlands, streams, and other environmental assets. In 1992, Bellingham adopted its first wetland ordinance to protect and regulate wetlands. Wetlands regulations are found in the critical areas ordinance BMC 16.55.

Ways you can protect our Wetlands

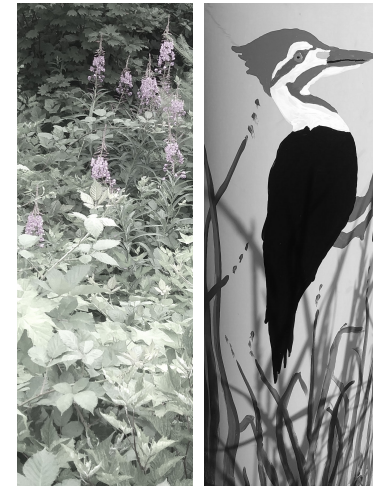
- Avoid use of herbicides and pesticides. If needed, use only those products approved for use near water bodies.
- Avoid non-native and invasive species of plants. Check with the Whatcom Noxious Weed List.
- Do not dump garbage, grass clippings, yard pruning, toxic materials, motor oil, grass, landscaping 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.commonsatcordata.com.
- Adhere to the impervious cover limit for your unit. Check with the city Public Works Dept. if you have questions about impervious limits.

The Common at Cordata Inspectors

Volunteer homeowner inspectors monitor our buffers and wetlands on a regular basis. They report violations and concerns to the board of directors. Warnings and fines may be served to violators.

Contacts

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



Our Wetlands

The natural beauty and quiet of our wetlands give us beautiful scenery, wildlife viewing opportunities, privacy, cooling shade in the summer, stormwater drainage and much more.



What is a Wetland?

Wetlands are areas that, under normal circumstances, are saturated by surface or groundwater frequently enough and long enough to support water-loving plants. Wetlands do not have to be 'wet' year around and the absence of standing water does not mean the area is not a wetland. Wetlands may be forested, shrub covered, marshes, or wet meadows.

Why are Wetlands important?

Wetlands perform a variety of beneficial functions that are important to the environmental and economic well being of Whatcom County, including:

- Reduction of flooding and erosion by storing storm and flood waters becoming an effective water management system
- Improve water quality by filtering nutrients and contaminants
- Combat climate change weather events
- Maintenance of stream flows during low flow periods by slowly releasing water stored after floods and wet seasons
- Groundwater recharge and discharge
- Stabilizing stream banks and shorelines
- Habitat diversity for wildlife
- Opportunities for education, scientific study, and aesthetic appreciation.

What happens in the Wetlands when heavy rain accumulates?

The wetlands store water and release it slowly. Trees within the wetland, like cottonwoods, take up a tremendous amount of water, essentially storing it. In the city, and many areas of the county, clay soils are common, so it doesn't take long for saturation to occur. After continued heavy rain, the groundwater level rises, the water level in wetlands rise, and when neither can store any more, there is ponding or even flooding. Without this storage capacity, we would have significantly more flooding.

The Commons Wetlands

The Commons at Cordata community are owners and stewards of the wetlands. The split rail fencing surrounding our development designates the buffer and wetland areas.

The Commons at Cordata wetlands, buffers and conservation easements total 18.804 acres with a stormwater system consisting of 25 catch basins, 4 culverts, 1 pump, and 1 retention pond. Our sewer system has 20 sewer manholes. The stormwater and sewer systems are regulated by the city of Bellingham but owned and maintained by The Commons at Cordata Condominium Owners Association.

How do trees improve the Wetlands?

Trees perform many ecological benefits—habitat, carbon sequestration, stormwater attenuation, shading, beauty, etc. When living near them, maintenance is sometimes required. Contact the city of Bellingham with concerns about hazard trees.



Why do we have a Detention Pond?

The detention pond was designed and constructed to treat stormwater from impervious surfaces north and south of June Road. The pond takes up pollutants and stores water to produce a slow release that eventually flows into the Nooksack River and then Bellingham Bay.

The detention pond shares many of the functions that natural wetlands do but they require maintenance to continue functioning as designed. The Commons and The Cottage development share in the maintenance costs.

Common Questions

Can I cut down trees in the buffers and wetlands that are close to my home?

Strong winds in the Commons blow the trees and limbs in many different directions. Homeowners are responsible for any damage from falling limbs or trees. It is most often covered by homeowner insurance. Be sure to check yours. If a tree is of concern, a homeowner must hire an ISA-certified arborist to determine if a tree is at risk of falling. Trees may not be cut down without a Minor Critical Area Permit from the city of Bellingham. For every hazard tree removed, three saplings are required to be planted.

Can grass clippings and debris be dumped in buffer and wetland areas?

The wetlands and buffers are not a place for dumping waste. Piles of grass clippings do not compost well, they can create odor and drainage problems.

How do I trap and bait rats?

Rodent management is challenging, whether you live near a wetland or not. There's always the concern about pets or wildlife being injured or killed from the poison. Hire a reputable company to address any concerns. Traps set for rodents should be on private properties, not in the wetland buffer or wetlands.

Are bird feeders advisable?

The Commons at Cordata has some of the best habitat and variety of birds around. Feeding birds is a great way to attract them to your yard and to provide the sustenance they need. Local bird feed stores can advise on products that deter rats and squirrels. Do not put food for wildlife on the ground - it attracts rats.

Where can I find native plants?

A good resource is the Whatcom Conservation District and the King County Native Plant Guide. Look for native plants at local nurseries and Whatcom Conservation Native Yearly Plant Sale.