



WATERFRONT PROJECT PLANNING

Washington Waterfront Permit Checklist

A practical owner checklist for docks, piers, floats, boat lifts, bulkheads, shoreline stabilization, dredging, and other work in or near Washington waters.

Start here

Waterfront permitting is site-specific. The waterbody, jurisdiction, aquatic-land ownership, habitat, project footprint, and construction method can all change the approval path. Use this checklist to organize the early questions and the information your project team may need.

- ☐ Write down the project purpose: repair, replacement, new access, erosion protection, moorage, lift, dredging, or restoration.
- ☐ Record the site address, parcel number, city or county, waterbody, and shoreline type.
- ☐ Collect existing permits, surveys, as-built drawings, title documents, easements, and historic project photographs.
- ☐ Photograph the shoreline, structures, access route, neighboring conditions, vegetation, and visible habitat at several water levels if possible.
- ☐ Do not assume that a local exemption eliminates state or federal approvals.

Bring WCI the property location, photographs, known permit history, desired use, and timing concerns. Early construction input can help keep the permit concept buildable.

1. Establish the permit pathway

Confirm which reviewers may be involved before the design becomes difficult or expensive to change.

Reviewer	Common role	Starting point
City or county	Shoreline, land-use, building, grading, critical areas	Local permit portal and Shoreline Master Program
WDFW	Hydraulic Project Approval for work affecting state waters	wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/hpa
WA Ecology	Shoreline oversight, water quality, Section 401	ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits
WA DNR	State-owned aquatic-land authorization or lease	dnr.wa.gov/aquatics
U.S. Army Corps	Work in navigable waters; dredge or fill review	nws.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Regulatory
NOAA / USFWS	Listed species, critical habitat, essential fish habitat	fisheries.noaa.gov and fws.gov

Jurisdiction and ownership checks

- [] Confirm whether the property is inside a city or unincorporated county jurisdiction.
- [] Review the local Shoreline Master Program, critical-area rules, setbacks, and allowed uses.
- [] Determine whether the bedlands are privately owned, state owned, federally managed, or subject to an easement or lease.
- [] Ask whether SEPA review, a shoreline substantial-development permit, conditional use, variance, or exemption documentation may apply.
- [] Identify navigation, tribal, cultural-resource, and public-access considerations early.
- [] Confirm whether the project will use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or bed of state waters.

Application coordination

- [] Determine whether the Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA) will be used.
- [] Use the same dimensions, quantities, methods, and drawings across local, state, and federal applications.
- [] Track each agency's file number, reviewer, submittal date, information requests, and decision date.

2. Document the site and the design

A complete, consistent project description helps reviewers understand both permanent and temporary effects.

Base information

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| [] | Boundary and topographic survey with ordinary high water, property lines, easements, and existing structures. |
| [] | Bathymetric or hydrographic information where water depth, piles, dredging, or navigation matters. |
| [] | Existing and proposed plan, profile, cross-section, and detail drawings with dimensions and quantities. |
| [] | Construction access, barge or upland staging, equipment, demolition, debris containment, and material handling. |
| [] | Project schedule, estimated in-water work days, and proposed work window. |
| [] | Photographs keyed to a site plan and a clear narrative explaining why the work is needed. |

Environmental studies to screen

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|-----|--|
| [] | Salmon, steelhead, and other protected fish use; critical habitat; Essential Fish Habitat. |
| [] | Surf smelt, Pacific sand lance, and Pacific herring spawning information or surveys. |
| [] | Eelgrass, kelp, and other aquatic-vegetation mapping where applicable. |
| [] | Wetlands, streams, buffers, ordinary high water, and shoreline vegetation. |
| [] | Beach substrate, drift cells, feeder bluffs, sediment movement, erosion, wave exposure, and drainage. |
| [] | Cultural, archaeological, tribal, and historic resources where review requires them. |
| [] | Water-quality risks, turbidity, treated materials, concrete, fuels, demolition debris, and spill prevention. |

Alternatives and mitigation

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| [] | Document how impacts were avoided first, minimized second, and mitigated where unavoidable. |
| [] | Compare repair, replacement, relocation, smaller footprint, fewer piles, grating, and different orientations. |
| [] | For shoreline erosion, compare drainage, vegetation, beach nourishment, large woody material, hybrid systems, and conventional armoring. |

3. Prepare for permit conditions and construction

The approved permit package must reach the people estimating, scheduling, mobilizing, and performing the work.

Before mobilization

- [] Compile the final approved plans, permits, biological documents, and agency correspondence in one field-ready set.
- [] Create a permit-condition matrix with the responsible person and required completion date.
- [] Confirm approved work windows, start notices, preconstruction meetings, inspections, and reporting.
- [] Verify material, pile, decking, grating, coating, concrete, fill, and beach-nourishment specifications.
- [] Confirm barge access, tides or lake levels, navigation controls, upland staging, utilities, and neighboring-property protection.
- [] Prepare spill prevention, turbidity control, debris containment, and emergency response materials.
- [] Document protected habitat boundaries and no-work areas in the field.

During construction

- [] Keep approved plans and permits available at the site.
- [] Complete required daily logs, photographs, inspections, monitoring, and agency notifications.
- [] Do not make field changes that alter the approved footprint or methods without authorization.
- [] Stop and follow the approved response procedure if cultural materials, protected species, or unexpected contamination are encountered.
- [] Contain demolition debris, concrete, sediment, hydraulic fluid, and other potential pollutants.

Closeout and maintenance

- [] Complete as-built surveys, photographs, mitigation installation, planting, or habitat work required by the permits.
- [] Submit closeout notices and monitoring reports by their deadlines.
- [] Create a maintenance schedule for vegetation, drainage, anchors, piles, decking, floats, and shoreline materials.
- [] Retain the complete permit and construction record for future repairs, ownership changes, or replacement work.

Official starting points

Confirm current requirements and forms directly with the reviewing agencies.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife - Hydraulic Project Approval

<https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/hpa/about>

Washington Department of Ecology - Shoreline permits and enforcement

<https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/permits-certifications/shoreline-permits-enforcement>

Washington Department of Ecology - Shoreline stabilization

<https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/shoreline-coastal-management/hazards/shoreline-stabilization>

Washington Department of Natural Resources - Aquatic lands

<https://dnr.wa.gov/aquatics>

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District - Regulatory Program

<https://www.nws.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Regulatory/>

NOAA - Essential Fish Habitat Mapper

<https://www.habitat.noaa.gov/apps/efhmapper/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - IPaC

<https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/>

WCI Permit Resources

<https://waterfrontconstruction.com/permit-resources/>

WCI Understanding Waterfront Biological Studies

<https://waterfrontconstruction.com/understanding-waterfront-biological-studies/>

WCI Soft Shoreline Construction

<https://waterfrontconstruction.com/soft-shoreline-construction/>

Project contact notes

Agency / consultant	Name	File number	Next action

Educational use only. This checklist is not legal, engineering, biological, or permit advice. Requirements vary by location, ownership, habitat, funding, project scope, and agency policy. Confirm current requirements with the reviewing agencies and qualified professionals before relying on this checklist or beginning work.