

## Summary of the Periodic Review Rule (WAC 173-26-090)

### Introduction

This document is an annotated version of Ecology’s rule ([WAC 173-26-090](#)) on conducting periodic reviews of Shoreline Master Programs (SMPs) under the Shoreline Management Act (SMA). The rule was based on [Department of Commerce rules](#) that guide local governments in meeting the analogous Growth Management Act (GMA) “periodic review” requirement.

The following is a brief summary of each section of the rule.

#### Section 1: Locally initiated review

This brief section is from a long-standing rule that encourages local governments to review their SMPs to reflect changing local circumstances, new information or improved data. Ecology retained this section to clarify that local governments may prepare SMP amendments outside the statutorily mandated review period. The rule encourages local governments to consult guidance materials available from Ecology that may inform their reviews.

#### Section 2: Periodic review requirements

The second section summarizes and explains statutory requirements. The SMA requires each city and county to review, and, if necessary, revise their SMP at least once every eight years. The legislature set a staggered schedule that alternates with similar reviews under the Growth Management Act (GMA).<sup>1</sup>

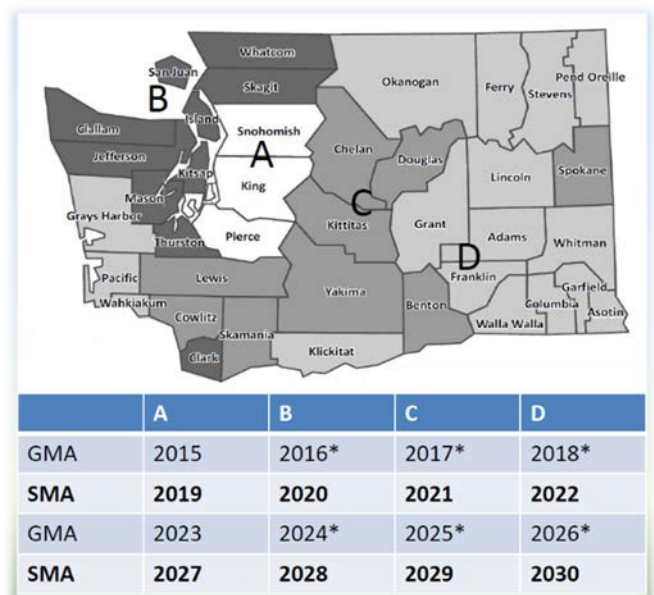


Figure 1. Periodic review schedules under the SMA and GMA. (NOTE \*For GMA reviews, the law gives an extra 2 years for smaller, slower-growing jurisdictions in groups B, C, and D.)

Figure 1 illustrates how GMA and SMA review deadlines alternate over time. For example, Column A indicates that King, Pierce and Snohomish counties and the cities within them have GMA review deadlines in 2015 and eight years later in 2023, interspersed with SMA reviews in 2019 and 2027.

The rule clarifies that local legislative action is required to complete the review, even when a local government determines no changes are needed. It also clarifies how the scope of the periodic review differs from the comprehensive updates that were conducted starting in 2005.

<sup>1</sup> RCW 90.58.080(4)  
 Summary of Periodic Review Rule (WAC 173-26-090)  
 Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program, September 20, 2017

### Section 3: Procedures

The third section of the rule outlines local and state procedures for conducting periodic reviews. The rule follows the GMA periodic review process, with unique steps to reflect Ecology’s formal approval role (see Figure 2).

The rule requires Ecology to maintain a checklist that includes potential review elements. The checklist is used at the beginning to help determine what to review, and at the end to identify where each applicable issue is addressed in the SMP.

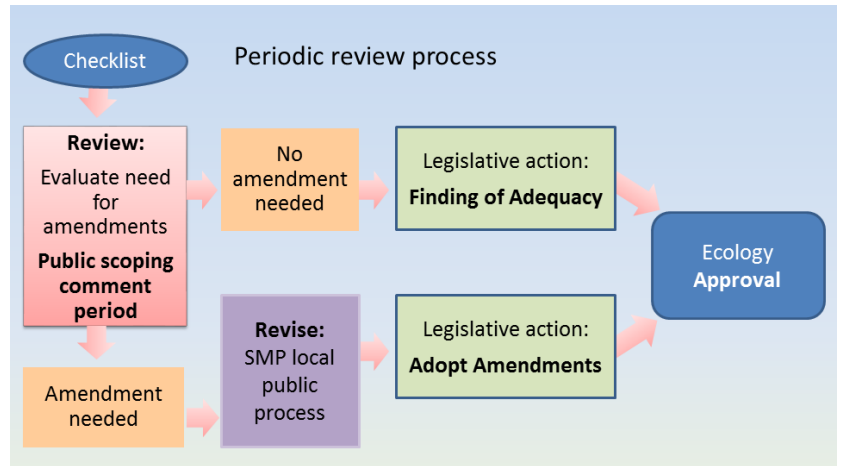


Figure 2. Schematic outline of SMP periodic review process. Ecology final approval triggers an appeal period.

The rule requires a public participation program that provides for early and continuous involvement of interested parties throughout the review process.

For jurisdictions that find no amendments are needed, the scoping could lead directly to final legislative action determining that no amendments are needed (“Finding of Adequacy”). Under the SMA, amendments to SMPs are final only after approval by Ecology. Even when it is determined locally that no amendments are necessary under the periodic review, local governments will submit their Findings of Adequacy to Ecology for review of the local determination and to ensure a definitive conclusion to the periodic review process. If in agreement, Ecology would issue a formal approval. This would provide certainty to all parties that Ecology has concurred with the local determination.

Ecology’s approval triggers the appeal period. Any appeals would be of Ecology’s action as well as the local government action.

Below is the complete text of Ecology’s rule outlining the periodic review requirements and process. The annotation in colored boxes provides context and explanation for each section and is not part of the formally adopted rule.

## WAC 173-26-090 - Locally initiated review—Periodic review—Public involvement and approval procedures.

### (1) Locally initiated master program reviews

Each local government should review its shoreline master program and make amendments deemed necessary to reflect changing local circumstances, new information or improved data.

Local governments are encouraged to consult department guidance for applicable new information on emerging topics such as sea level rise.

The first sentence of §1 has been in place for decades. Ecology retained this direction to emphasize that local governments may amend their SMPs at any time to address changing circumstances, new information or improved data. Ecology’s 2017 amendments suggests local governments consult Ecology guidance for information on emerging issues such as sea level rise. Addressing sea level rise is an example of the kind of work that might be most effectively tackled as part of a broader comprehensive plan initiative, rather than during a focused SMA periodic review. Note that §(3)(b)(iii) calls on local governments to consider these kinds of amendments during the mandatory periodic review. The periodic review can be considered a minimum time period to convene a public process to consider as a community whether your SMP remains relevant with changing conditions. However, these kinds of amendments can be conducted at any time.

### (2) Periodic review requirements.

(a) Following the comprehensive updates required by RCW 90.58.080(2), each local government shall conduct a review of their master program at least once every eight years on a schedule established in the act. Following the review, local governments shall, if necessary, revise their master programs. This review and revision is referred to in this section as the periodic review.

§ 2 (a) starts with direct quotes from the SMA at RCW 90.58.080(4), with an additional clarification that the rule uses the term “periodic review” for the mandatory eight-year review. The term “comprehensive update” refers to the one-time updates required under RCW 90.58.080(2) with deadlines from 2005 – 2014.

#### (2)(b) Deadlines for periodic review.

Local governments must take action to review, and if necessary, revise their master programs according to the schedule established in RCW 90.58.080(4)(b). Deadlines for completion of periodic review are as follows:

*Table WAC 173-26-090.1 Deadlines for Completion of Periodic Review*

Reviews must be completed on or before June 30 of:	Affected counties and the cities and towns within:
<b>2019/2027*</b>	King, Pierce, Snohomish
<b>2020/2028*</b>	Clallam, Clark, Island, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, San Juan, Skagit, Thurston, Whatcom
<b>2021/2029*</b>	Benton, Chelan, Cowlitz, Douglas, Kittitas, Lewis, Skamania, Spokane, Yakima
<b>2022/2030*</b>	Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pacific, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Wahkiakum, Walla Walla, Whitman

\* And every eight years thereafter.

§ 2(b) quotes the statutory directive to review and revise if needed and presents the deadlines in a table.

The statutory requirement is to conduct a periodic review *at least* once every 8 years by June 30 of the year listed. There is no absolute direction in law or rule for how early you can adopt, but as a general guide Ecology recommends conducting periodic review within two years of the deadline. For SMA reviews in particular it will actually be beneficial if local periodic review adoptions are “spread out” around the deadline to distribute the review workload, and ensure Ecology can provide adequate help to individual jurisdictions.

Note that if a local governments simply ignores their deadlines they are potentially vulnerable to a “failure to act” claim before the Growth Management Hearings Boards (for fully planning jurisdictions), or before the Shorelines Hearings Board (for partially planning jurisdictions). Ecology also has authority to adopt SMP amendments by rule under RCW 90.58.070.

### (2)(c) Taking legislative action.

(i) The periodic review must be accomplished through legislative action. Legislative action means the adoption of a resolution, motion, or ordinance following notice and a public hearing including, at a minimum, findings that a review and evaluation has occurred and identifying the revisions made, or that a revision was not needed and the reasons therefore. Legislative findings that no revisions are needed are referred to in this section as "findings of adequacy."

(ii) Legislative action includes two components. It includes a review of the shoreline master program and it includes the adoption of either findings of adequacy or any amendments necessary to bring the program into compliance with the requirements of the act.

(iii) Legislative actions concluding the periodic review must be followed by department approval.

§ 2(c) clarifies that statutory review must be concluded with legislative action. In other words, a local government cannot simply conduct a staff-level review, conclude no local action is needed, and be done with the review obligation. Just like under GMA reviews, the review is a formal public process concluding with elected officials taking formal action after a public hearing.

§ 2(c)(i) creates a new term – locally adopted findings that revisions to the SMP are not needed are called “Findings of Adequacy.” § 2(c)(ii) clarifies that legislative action includes a formal public review and formal action, whether the review results in amendments, or simple findings of adequacy where the review reveals no changes to the SMP are needed. § 2(c) (iii) clarifies Ecology approval is needed to conclude local reviews. This provides a definitive end to the local process. Note that an appeal of local periodic review amendments or local findings of adequacy would also be appeals of Ecology’s approval.

### (2)(d) The required minimum scope of review.

(i) The purpose and scope of the periodic review as established by the act is:

(A) To assure that the master program complies with applicable law and guidelines in effect at the time of the review; and

(B) To assure consistency of the master program with the local government's comprehensive plan and development regulations adopted under chapter 36.70A RCW, if applicable, and other local requirements.

(ii) The review process provides the method for bringing shoreline master programs into compliance with the requirements of the act that have been added or changed since the last review and for

responding to changes in guidelines adopted by the department, together with a review for consistency with amended comprehensive plans and regulations. Local governments should also incorporate amendments to reflect changed circumstances, new information, or improved data. The review ensures that shoreline master programs do not fall out of compliance over time through inaction.

(iii) The periodic review is distinct from the comprehensive updates required by RCW 90.58.080(2). The presumption in the comprehensive update process was that all master programs needed to be revised to comply with the full suite of ecology guidelines. By contrast, the periodic review addresses changes in requirements of the act and guidelines requirements since the comprehensive update or the last periodic review, and changes for consistency with revised comprehensive plans and regulations, together with any changes deemed necessary to reflect changed circumstances, new information or improved data. There is no minimum requirement to comprehensively revise shoreline inventory and characterization reports or restoration plans.

§ 2(d)(i) and (ii) define the required scope of review consistent with the purpose set in statute.

§ 2(d)(iii) is intended to distinguish the periodic reviews from the one-time comprehensive SMP update. Comprehensive updates involved a complete review of the SMP based on Ecology's 2003 SMA rules, and included extensive inventory work to determine shoreline jurisdiction and analyze existing conditions. Periodic reviews are focused on new laws or rules that were not effect when the comprehensive update was adopted, or new information a local government finds warrants local amendments.

### (3) Procedures for conducting periodic reviews.

#### (3)(a) Public participation program.

(i) In conducting the periodic review, the department and local governments, pursuant to RCW 90.58.130, shall make all reasonable efforts to inform, fully involve and encourage participation of all interested persons and private entities, tribes, and agencies of the federal, state or local government having interests and responsibilities relating to shorelines of the state and the local master program. Local governments may follow the public participation procedures under either the standard local process outlined in WAC 173-26-100, or the optional joint review process outlined in WAC 173-26-104.

§ 3(a)(i) clarifies that the periodic review is a public process. Even though conducting the review may lead to the conclusion no actual revisions are necessary, the direction in statute for public involvement applies.

(ii) Counties and cities shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program identifying procedures whereby review of the shoreline master program will be considered by the local governing body consistent with RCW 36.70A.140. Such procedures shall provide for early and continuous public participation through broad dissemination of informative materials, proposals and alternatives, opportunity for written comments, public meetings after effective notice, provision for open discussion, and consideration of and response to public comments.

The public participation program should include a schedule for the periodic review and identify when legislative action on the review and update component are proposed to occur. The public participation program should also inform the public of when to comment on the scope of the review and proposed changes to the master program. Counties and cities may adjust the public participation program to best meet the intent of the participation requirement.

§ 3(a)(ii) require a public participation program for all jurisdictions, not just those fully planning under GMA. The new additions under (A) and (B) are modified from GMA rules [\[WAC 365-196-610\(2\)\(a\)\(i\) and \(ii\)\]](#). The recommendation for a schedule and public scoping addresses Growth Management Hearings Board decisions – highlighting the importance of definitive notice when taking action on periodic reviews.

### (3)(b) Review and analysis to determine need for revisions.

#### (i) Review amendments to the act and shoreline master program guidelines.

Local governments must review amendments to chapter 90.58 RCW and department guidelines that have occurred since the master program was last amended, and determine if local amendments are needed to maintain compliance. The department will maintain a checklist of legislative and rule amendments to assist local governments with this review. The department will provide technical assistance to ensure local governments address applicable changes to the act and master program guidelines.

#### (ii) Review relevant comprehensive plans and regulations.

Local governments must review changes to the comprehensive plan and development regulations to determine if the shoreline master program policies and regulations remain consistent with them.

WAC 173-26-191(1)(e) and 173-26-211(3) provide guidance on determining internal consistency. It is the responsibility of the local government to assure consistency between the master program and other elements of the comprehensive plan and development regulations. Local governments should document the consistency analysis to support proposed changes.

#### (iii) Additional review and analysis.

Local governments should consider during their periodic review whether to incorporate any amendments needed to reflect changed circumstances, new information or improved data as described under subsection (1) of this section. Local governments should consider whether the significance of the changed circumstances, new information or improved data warrants amendments.

§ 3(b) is based on the Commerce GMA periodic update rule [\[WAC 365-196-610\(2\)\(b\)\]](#).

§ 3(b)(i) borrows from the Commerce rule in requiring Ecology to maintain a checklist of statutory and rule amendments.

§ 3(b)(ii) references Ecology's existing rules on how to review SMPs for consistency with GMA plans and regulations. (Those rules clarify that local governments are responsible for determining whether their SMP is consistent with other local plans and regulations, and not Ecology).

§ 3(b)(iii) acknowledges local governments may combine locally initiated amendments together with the periodic review.

### (3)(c) Take legislative action.

(i) At the end of the review process, counties and cities must take legislative action declaring the review process complete.

(ii) The notice of hearing for legislative actions that are intended to address the periodic review process must state that the actions to be considered are part of the periodic review process under RCW 90.58.080(4).

(iii) The findings for any legislative action on the periodic review process must state that the action is intended to satisfy the requirements of RCW 90.58.080(4).

(iv) A local government that determines after review that amendments are not needed shall adopt a resolution, motion, or ordinance declaring findings of adequacy. Findings of adequacy are a local written determination that no revisions to a shoreline master program are needed to comply with the requirements of RCW 90.58.080(4).

§ 3(c)(i) – (iii) is based on the GMA periodic update rule [\[WAC 365-196-610\(2\)\(c\)\]](#). These rules are based on Growth Management Hearings Board decisions that found procedural errors in some local GMA periodic review adoptions. It is important to definitively conclude the periodic review in legislative findings.

§ 3(c)(iv) clarifies that when no changes are needed a local government will adopt formal “Findings of Adequacy.”

### (3)(d) Submittal to the department.

(i) A local government that determines amendments are needed shall submit the amendments to the department consistent with WAC 173-26-110.

(ii) A local government that determines amendments are not needed shall submit the following in lieu of the requirements of WAC 173-26-110:

(A) A resolution or ordinance declaring findings of adequacy.

(B) Evidence of compliance with applicable public notice and consultation requirements.

(C) Copies of all public, agency and tribal comments received during any applicable public comment periods, or where no comments have been received, a statement to that effect.

(D) A completed checklist demonstrating review elements have been considered, and are either inapplicable or have already been addressed through previous locally initiated amendments prior to the scheduled periodic review.

§ 3(d)(i) clarifies that when there are amendments, local governments will follow the normal amendment process.

§ 3(d)(ii) provides submittal requirements when there are no amendments – these are the required elements for complete submittal to accompany “findings of adequacy.”

### (e) State process for approving periodic reviews.

(i) The department must issue a formal approval of any amendment or findings of adequacy. Department approval is necessary to affirmatively conclude the periodic review process, to confirm that state review of local action has occurred, and to establish a definitive appeal window consistent with RCW 90.58.190.

(ii) Where the local government final action includes master program amendments, local governments and the department shall follow applicable adoption procedures described in WAC 173-26-120.

(iii) Where the local government final action is to adopt findings of adequacy, the department shall follow applicable adoption procedures described in WAC 173-26-120. The department shall review the findings of adequacy solely for consistency with RCW 90.58.080(4) and this section.

§ 3(e)(i) clarifies that Ecology must approve any amendment as well as the “findings of adequacy.” Any appeals would be of Ecology’s approval rather than the local government determination.

§ 3(e)(ii) clarifies that the normal adoption process applies if there are amendments.

§ 3(e)(iii) provides submittal requirements where there are no amendments. Ecology will follow the normal adoption process but substitute review of the local “findings of adequacy” with evaluation of actual amendments.