Protect the land. Keep your options open.

WASHINGTON LANDOWNER WORKBOOK

120 practical checks. 20 topics. One place to plan your next step.

For private landowners considering farming, timber, building, land division or the long-term care of their property.

Use this workbook alongside the Anton Stetner podcast conversation with Mike Appleby. Sources reviewed October 22, 2026.

Inside

- Your property and goals
- A contents map for all 20 topics
- All 120 checks, with topic sources and space for notes
- First steps, jurisdiction monitoring, current notices and owner calendar
- Podcast context and all five FAQ answers
- All 39 official references and a next-action worksheet

Educational planning guidance, not a parcel-specific legal opinion. Rules vary by jurisdiction, site and activity. Checking a box does not establish a legal right, compliance or permit approval.

Read the open web guide

START HERE

Your property. Your priorities.

Print the pages you need. Check an item when you have reviewed it, then record the evidence and any follow-up. A checked item is not a legal determination.

Property / parcel numbers / jurisdiction

Current lawful uses and approval records

Future options I want to understand

Professionals and agency contacts

Known decisions, notices and deadlines

CONTENTS

Find the topic you need.

The 20 topic worksheets begin on page 4. Every worksheet contains six numbered checks. The supporting guide and reference library follow.

01 Ownership, boundaries & legal lots / page 4

02 A property record that survives the years / page 5

03 Existing uses, nonconforming uses & rebuilding / page 6

04 Vesting, approvals & expiration dates / page 7

05 Wetlands, streams & layered buffers / page 8

06 Critical Area Site Plans & protected tracts / page 9

07 Trees, roots, pruning & hazard removal / page 10

08 Timber harvest & future conversion / page 11

09 Farming, grazing & agricultural uses / page 12

10 Water supply, water rights & nonuse / page 13

11 Shorelines, flooding & channel migration / page 14

12 Slopes, aquifers & sensitive habitat / page 15

13 Septic, sewer & utility capacity / page 16

14 Roads, easements & emergency access / page 17

15 Setbacks & a realistic building envelope / page 18

16 Maintenance, drainage & construction work / page 19

17 Tax classifications & assessments / page 20

18 Covenants, leases & long-term commitments / page 21

19 Contamination, cultural resources & other approvals / page 22

20 Rule changes, hearings & protecting your voice / page 23

Ownership, boundaries & legal lots

Start with what you own, what burdens it, and whether the parcel is a lawful development site.

- [ ] 1. Obtain the deed, full legal description, current title report and every recorded document listed as an exception; a summary is not enough.
- [ ] 2. Have a surveyor resolve uncertain boundaries before placing fences, cutting boundary trees or building. Assessor and online parcel lines are screening tools.
- [ ] 3. Ask planning staff to confirm legal lot status and any merger or lot-of-record issues. A separate tax parcel number does not itself establish buildability.
- [ ] 4. Inventory easements, rights-of-way, reservations, mineral and timber interests, conservation restrictions, liens and recorded notices.
- [ ] 5. Compare the survey with fences, driveways, buildings and neighbor uses. Address encroachments or disputed access promptly with qualified counsel.
- [ ] 6. Keep ownership and mailing records current, monitor recording notices where available, and plan how heirs or successors will receive the property records.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

A property record that survives the years

A dated record helps distinguish an established lawful use from an assumption about the land.

- [ ] 7. Create one property file for deeds, surveys, permits, approved plans, conditions, inspections, utility records and correspondence.
- [ ] 8. Photograph established lawns, fields, roads, buildings, drainage and shoreline improvements from repeatable locations; date and map the photographs.
- [ ] 9. Save historical aerials, crop and grazing records, leases, receipts, maintenance logs and other evidence of actual use.
- [ ] 10. Request the complete city or county permit and enforcement history, including older paper files and the documents incorporated into approvals.
- [ ] 11. Label each document as an application, consultant opinion, agency determination, approval or recorded instrument; preserve its date and scope.
- [ ] 12. Back up the file and keep a short register of unresolved questions, responsible professionals, deadlines and the next action.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

SCC 30.62A.160 - Approved plans and permanent protection

RCW 19.27.095 - Building application vesting

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Existing uses, nonconforming uses & rebuilding

Continuing a use, expanding it and replacing a structure can follow different rules.

- ☐ 13. Confirm that the existing use was lawfully established. Age, tax payments and a seller's description do not establish lawful status by themselves.
- ☐ 14. Distinguish a nonconforming use from a nonconforming structure or lot; ask which local provisions apply to each.
- ☐ 15. Before pausing farming, closing a business or leaving a dwelling vacant, check applicable discontinuance or abandonment rules and exceptions.
- ☐ 16. Maintain lawful existing uses within their authorized footprint and conditions. Mowing or clearing does not create a new development right.
- ☐ 17. Check expansion, change-of-use, demolition, disaster reconstruction and restoration deadlines before removing an old building or changing operations.
- ☐ 18. Get a written determination where available, and preserve evidence of the use and its continuity. Do not manufacture token activity to claim a right.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Snohomish County - Title 30, including nonconforming uses

SCC 30.62A.160 - Approved plans and permanent protection

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Vesting, approvals & expiration dates

Protecting an approved project requires more than an early sketch or a conversation at the permit counter.

- ☐ 19. Ask a local land-use professional which application or agreement can establish vesting for your actual proposal and which rules it covers.
- ☐ 20. Use the jurisdiction's complete-application checklist. A preapplication meeting, fee payment or incomplete submittal is not a universal vesting event.
- ☐ 21. Preserve submission receipts, completeness correspondence, approved plans and the code version used to review the application.
- ☐ 22. Calendar application inactivity, permit expiration, extension, plat recording, construction commencement and inspection deadlines.
- ☐ 23. Check whether revisions, increased impacts, a new use or phasing will require new review or affect existing protections.
- ☐ 24. Keep zoning vesting separate from SEPA conditions, state and federal approvals, utility capacity, construction codes and the right to start work.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

RCW 19.27.095 - Building application vesting

RCW 58.17.033 - Subdivision application vesting

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Wetlands, streams & layered buffers

The visible wet area may be only one part of the constraint on a site.

- ☐ 25. Screen public maps, then obtain qualified field review where needed. An unmapped area or a dry summer visit does not rule out a wetland.
- ☐ 26. Identify wetlands, stream types, seasonal waters and habitat features, including off-site features whose buffers may reach your property.
- ☐ 27. Confirm the applicable rating method, buffer width, measurement point and any additional building setback beyond the buffer.
- ☐ 28. Check report validity and agency acceptance before relying on an old delineation, survey or consultant's conceptual drawing.
- ☐ 29. Evaluate avoidance first, then permitted averaging, enhancement, mitigation or reasonable-use procedures; none is an automatic entitlement.
- ☐ 30. Before filling, draining, ditching or removing vegetation, identify local, Ecology and Corps requirements independently. A federal exclusion does not erase state protection.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Ecology - Wetland regulations

Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

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

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Critical Area Site Plans & protected tracts

An approved plan can be valuable, but its conditions and permanent restrictions matter as much as its boundaries.

- ☐ 31. Search recorded plans for critical area protection areas, native growth protection areas, easements and protected tracts.
- ☐ 32. Ask whether your jurisdiction offers an applicable approval process and what future activities an approved plan would protect.
- ☐ 33. In Snohomish County, evaluate SCC 30.62A.160(6): qualifying consistent activities can be governed by the approved plan's terms.
- ☐ 34. Verify that all required areas were identified and protected, and that the new proposal satisfies the code's consistency conditions.
- ☐ 35. Review permanent restrictions and maintenance duties before approval and recording; a plan can constrain land as well as clarify its use.
- ☐ 36. Retain the approved and recorded versions, and maintain required fencing, signs and mitigation. Recording alone does not freeze every future law.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

SCC 30.62A.160 - Approved plans and permanent protection

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Trees, roots, pruning & hazard removal

Tree rules depend on location, size, condition and the activity you propose.

- ☐ 37. Inventory species, size, condition and location; identify protected trees and trees subject to prior retention or replacement conditions.
- ☐ 38. Check the local rules for pruning, topping, removal, clearing, replacement and permits before hiring a contractor.
- ☐ 39. Have an arborist assess hazards and document the evidence. Follow the jurisdiction's emergency process rather than assuming every unhealthy tree is exempt.
- ☐ 40. Resolve boundary-tree ownership and neighbor consent, and check street-tree or right-of-way authority separately.
- ☐ 41. Protect roots and soil from trenching, vehicles, grade changes and stockpiles; include neighboring trees that affect the work area.
- ☐ 42. Choose new planting locations with future access, utilities and buildings in mind while satisfying approved landscape and mitigation plans.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Seattle - Tree removal requirements

Snohomish County - NGPA/CAPA maintenance and trees

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Timber harvest & future conversion

A timber harvest can affect the timing and legality of a later house, farm conversion or subdivision.

- ☐ 43. Use a qualified forester to establish the forest-practice classification, required application and appropriate harvest plan.
- ☐ 44. Disclose intended conversion accurately; discuss future nonforestry uses and a conversion-option harvest plan with DNR and the local jurisdiction before harvesting.
- ☐ 45. Check existing forest-practice applications, notices, orders and any development prohibition. Certain conversions or violations can trigger a six-year prohibition.
- ☐ 46. Confirm water typing, riparian zones, unstable slopes, habitat restrictions, road work and fish-passage requirements for the proposed operation.
- ☐ 47. Plan reforestation, road maintenance, erosion control, slash treatment, fire precautions and timber-tax reporting before signing the logging contract.
- ☐ 48. Review current DNR rules and court orders before filing. Ask about small-landowner assistance, alternate plans and conservation programs where appropriate.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

DNR - Forest Practices Application and current Type Np notice

RCW 76.09.060 - Forestland conversion

RCW 76.09.460 - Development prohibition

DNR - Small Forest Landowner Office

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Farming, grazing & agricultural uses

Agricultural zoning, actual farm activity, tax classification and environmental exemptions are separate questions.

- ☐ 49. Document crops, grazing, field boundaries, agricultural structures and historic drainage, including periods of normal rotation or fallow use.
- ☐ 50. Confirm the local definition of ongoing agriculture and which activities qualify for applicable critical-area treatment or exemptions.
- ☐ 51. Ask whether the county participates in the Voluntary Stewardship Program and whether your operation falls within its scope.
- ☐ 52. Develop a practical farm plan for livestock access, manure, soil erosion, fertilizer, pesticide use and water quality with the conservation district or relevant specialists.
- ☐ 53. Check farm stands, processing, agritourism, weddings, boarding, worker housing and commercial storage separately; farm ownership does not automatically authorize them.
- ☐ 54. Review prior-converted-cropland status and changes of use carefully. Right-to-farm nuisance protections do not replace required permits or water authorization.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Conservation Commission - Voluntary Stewardship Program

Ecology - Prior converted croplands

RCW 7.48.305 - Agricultural and forest nuisance protections

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Water supply, water rights & nonuse

Water in a well or creek is not the same as a legal, sufficient supply for your intended use.

- ☐ 55. Locate water-right documents, well logs, service agreements and shared-well easements; verify the actual source and authorized place, purpose and quantity of use.
- ☐ 56. Check water quality, dependable yield and public-system capacity alongside legal availability for homes, irrigation, livestock or commercial activities.
- ☐ 57. Check watershed-specific restrictions, instream-flow rules, mitigation and limits on permit-exempt withdrawals; do not assume one statewide allowance fits every project.
- ☐ 58. Keep records of lawful beneficial use. Five successive years of nonuse can expose some rights to relinquishment, subject to statutory exceptions.
- ☐ 59. Before reducing or stopping use, obtain advice on exceptions or a trust-water arrangement. Wasteful pumping does not preserve a right.
- ☐ 60. Respond to adjudication notices and monitor the actual court docket. In WRIA 1, determine whether you must file and verify the current claim deadline.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Ecology - Water rights

Ecology - Water right relinquishment (May 2025)

Ecology - Groundwater permit exemption

Ecology - Nooksack adjudication and current deadline

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Shorelines, flooding & channel migration

Waterfront and floodplain constraints can affect repair work as well as new construction.

- ☐ 61. Identify shoreline jurisdiction, the ordinary high water mark and the applicable shoreline environment designation.
- ☐ 62. Check shoreline setbacks, vegetation conservation, docks, bulkheads, stabilization, beach work and repair or replacement requirements.
- ☐ 63. Obtain any required shoreline exemption determination; exemption from a substantial development permit is not a blanket exemption from the rules.
- ☐ 64. Review effective and preliminary flood maps, floodway limits, channel migration areas, elevation information and recorded flood restrictions.
- ☐ 65. Ask about floodplain permits, substantial-improvement and substantial-damage rules before renovating, rebuilding or placing fill.
- ☐ 66. Keep elevation and insurance records; use the formal map-correction process for a suspected error rather than assuming an inaccurate map can be ignored.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Ecology - Shoreline permits and exemptions

Ecology - Local Shoreline Master Programs

FEMA - Flood maps and map-change records

Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Slopes, aquifers & sensitive habitat

Critical areas include more than wetlands and streams.

- ☐ 67. Screen erosion, landslide, seismic, liquefaction and other mapped geological hazards, then scope field investigation with a qualified professional.
- ☐ 68. Review slope setbacks and drainage before removing trees, excavating, placing a structure or concentrating runoff.
- ☐ 69. Check critical aquifer recharge areas and restrictions on septic systems, fuel, chemicals and other contamination sources.
- ☐ 70. Identify protected habitat, listed species, nesting constraints and any required surveys or seasonal work windows.
- ☐ 71. Consider wildfire access, defensible space and building resilience together with tree, habitat and critical-area restrictions.
- ☐ 72. Reassess conditions after a slide, flood, fire or major tree failure; retain engineering recommendations and coordinate emergency work with the agencies.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

DNR - Small Forest Landowner Office

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

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Septic, sewer & utility capacity

Allowed density is useful only when the site can support the needed services.

- ☐ 73. Locate approved septic designs, as-built drawings, inspections, capacity limits and the designated replacement area.
- ☐ 74. Protect the drainfield and reserve area from buildings, paving, vehicles, livestock damage and inappropriate planting.
- ☐ 75. Confirm maintenance and inspection requirements with the local health jurisdiction, including any transfer-of-ownership requirements.
- ☐ 76. Before adding bedrooms or dwellings, verify sewage capacity and whether sewer connection or system replacement will be required.
- ☐ 77. Obtain utility availability information covering capacity, connection points, main extensions, easements, costs and expiration dates.
- ☐ 78. Plan power, communications, fire flow, meters and shared facilities for possible future phases without assuming a nearby line guarantees service.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Department of Health - On-site sewage management roles

Commerce - Accessory dwelling units

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Roads, easements & emergency access

Physical access, legal access and access adequate for a new use are different things.

- ☐ 79. Verify a continuous legal route to a public road and that each easement benefits the parcel you intend to use.
- ☐ 80. Read easement width, permitted users, purposes, utilities, maintenance duties and limits before increasing traffic or adding lots.
- ☐ 81. Confirm driveway permits, sight distance, road width, grade, turnarounds, bridge loads and fire-apparatus requirements.
- ☐ 82. Inspect culverts, ditches and crossings; determine approvals and work windows before replacement, deepening or stream work.
- ☐ 83. Document road maintenance agreements and cost sharing; address gates, obstructions and encroachments without interfering with others' rights.
- ☐ 84. Reserve feasible routes for future utilities, farm equipment, timber access and additional dwellings when locating fences or new structures.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

WDFW - Hydraulic Project Approvals

DNR - Forest Practices Application and current Type Np notice

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Setbacks & a realistic building envelope

The usable site is what remains after all applicable constraints are considered together.

- ☐ 85. Confirm jurisdiction, zoning, comprehensive-plan designation, urban growth area status, overlays and resource-land designations.
- ☐ 86. Map property-line setbacks, road reservations, easements, critical-area buffers, additional building setbacks, wells and septic separation areas together.
- ☐ 87. Calculate lot coverage, impervious area, height, floor area, parking, open space and any density deductions under the actual local code.
- ☐ 88. Place the first house, barn, driveway and utilities to preserve feasible future access and building areas; compare several layouts before committing.
- ☐ 89. Investigate ADUs, middle housing, lot splits, unit-lot subdivisions, clustering or condominium ownership only where applicable and feasible.
- ☐ 90. Separate ownership structure from construction entitlement. A condominium map, promising rezone or allowed unit count does not guarantee buildable units.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Commerce - Middle housing and land division options

Commerce - Accessory dwelling units

Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Maintenance, drainage & construction work

Routine care protects options when it follows the lawful footprint and the applicable approvals.

- ☐ 91. Write a maintenance plan distinguishing routine authorized upkeep from expansion, grading, clearing or changes to drainage.
- ☐ 92. Control required noxious weeds using methods permitted for the location; coordinate sensitive-area treatment and pesticide requirements.
- ☐ 93. Inspect roofs, foundations, fences, irrigation and drainage so small failures do not become emergency reconstruction or erosion problems.
- ☐ 94. Maintain ditches and culverts only within the authorized scope; a ditch may also carry regulated waters or fish habitat.
- ☐ 95. Check clearing, grading, stormwater, erosion-control and construction permit requirements, including smaller phases within a larger common development plan.
- ☐ 96. Give contractors the approved plans and exclusion zones. Preserve inspection records, material receipts, stabilization records and final approvals.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

RCW 17.10.140 - Noxious weed responsibilities

WDFW - Hydraulic Project Approvals

Ecology - Construction stormwater permit

Snohomish County - NGPA/CAPA maintenance and trees

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Tax classifications & assessments

A lower current tax bill can carry continuing obligations and a cost when the land changes use.

- ☐ 97. Identify whether the land is in farm and agricultural, open space, timber land or designated forest land taxation, and obtain the governing records.
- ☐ 98. Review qualifying acreage, income, use and management requirements with the assessor; keep supporting records.
- ☐ 99. Estimate additional or compensating tax, interest and any penalty before conversion, subdivision, removal or a sale that does not continue classification.
- ☐ 100. Confirm transfer and continuance paperwork before closing; do not assume a buyer inherits the tax treatment automatically.
- ☐ 101. Compare assessed characteristics and value with verified constraints and use the correct assessment appeal process and deadline where warranted.
- ☐ 102. Budget taxes, district assessments, insurance and required upkeep during long holds. A tax classification does not itself authorize land use.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Department of Revenue - Open Space Taxation Act

Department of Revenue - Current-use and forest-land rules

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Covenants, leases & long-term commitments

A private agreement can limit options independently of zoning.

- ☐ 103. Review recorded covenants and association documents, including amendments and statutory limits on enforceability, before relying on or dismissing a restriction.
- ☐ 104. Read conservation easements, development-right transfers and mitigation obligations for permitted uses, building areas, duration and enforcement rights.
- ☐ 105. Review farm, grazing, timber, solar, cell-site and other leases for access, renewal, termination, restoration and assignment terms.
- ☐ 106. Evaluate carbon, habitat and cost-share programs for long-term restrictions, monitoring, repayment and successor-owner obligations before enrollment.
- ☐ 107. Reserve necessary access and utility rights before selling or transferring part of the property, and document shared maintenance duties.
- ☐ 108. Check lender, insurer and co-owner consent requirements for proposed easements, subdivisions, leases or changes in use.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

DNR - Small Forest Landowner Office

Department of Revenue - Open Space Taxation Act

Ecology - Cleanup lists and environmental covenant registry

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Contamination, cultural resources & other approvals

Past activities and overlapping jurisdictions can introduce constraints beyond the zoning map.

- ☐ 109. Investigate prior fuel storage, dumping, imported fill, agricultural chemicals and industrial uses; seek environmental assessment appropriate to the property.
- ☐ 110. Check cleanup records and environmental covenants for excavation, groundwater or residential-use restrictions and ongoing monitoring duties.
- ☐ 111. Confirm asbestos, demolition, waste disposal, burning and air-quality requirements before clearing buildings or burning debris.
- ☐ 112. Screen archaeological and historic-resource issues before ground disturbance and use the required inadvertent-discovery procedure.
- ☐ 113. If suspected human remains are found, stop disturbing the area and contact local law enforcement and the county coroner or medical examiner.
- ☐ 114. Determine federal, tribal, state and local authority for the location and work. Address treaty resources, federal permits and consultation through the appropriate agencies.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Ecology - Residential cleanup and purchase due diligence

Ecology - Cleanup lists and environmental covenant registry

DAHP - Discovery of suspected human remains

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

Ecology - Federal and tribal shoreline jurisdiction

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Rule changes, hearings & protecting your voice

Early participation gives you time to understand a proposal and preserve procedural options.

- ☐ 115. Subscribe to your planning department, council or commission, hearing examiner and relevant agency notices; keep contact details current.
- ☐ 116. Track comprehensive-plan amendments, rezones, critical-area and tree rules, shoreline updates, annexations, moratoria, fees and utility plans.
- ☐ 117. Read the proposed map and code text, staff analysis, effective date and transition provisions; distinguish a proposal from an adopted or stayed rule.
- ☐ 118. Submit timely, specific comments identifying the parcel, existing use, practical effect, supporting evidence and requested change.
- ☐ 119. Keep proof of comments and service, request the decision, and seek counsel promptly on standing, exhaustion, hearing rights and the proper appeal forum.
- ☐ 120. Calendar the actual deadlines. LUPA generally requires filing and service within 21 days of issuance; GMA challenges generally have a 60-day publication-based period. Other deadlines differ.

OFFICIAL STARTING POINTS

Commerce - Comprehensive-plan periodic updates

Commerce - Amendment notices and PlanView

RCW 36.70C.040 - Land use petition filing and service

RCW 36.70A.290 - Growth management petitions

Evidence / questions for my professional

Next action / responsible person / due date

Three habits that protect better decisions.

Whether you own a backyard, a working farm or forest acreage, the starting point is the same: understand your property's actual status before relying on its future potential.

1. Document what exists

Gather your approved plans, recorded restrictions, permits and evidence of lawful existing uses. Put the important dates in one place.

2. Care for what you have

Maintain buildings, fields, trees, roads and drainage within the allowed scope. Check before work changes the footprint, use or environmental impact.

3. Plan before the rules change

Identify the options you care about, confirm the approval path, and follow the agencies and local decisions that affect your land.

"Keep using it" needs context. Lawful existing uses, water rights and future development approvals have different rules. Keeping a field mowed does not erase a wetland or guarantee a future building permit. Confirm the particular use, local code and approval history before acting.

Educational planning guidance, not a parcel-specific legal opinion. Rules vary by jurisdiction, site and activity. Use a Washington land-use attorney and qualified local specialists for decisions about rights, vesting, permits or appeals.

Watch the decisions that reach your property.

Find out which government regulates your parcel. A city mailing address does not necessarily mean your land is inside city limits. County zoning generally governs unincorporated land; city zoning generally governs land inside the city. Other agencies may still control water, health, roads or environmental permits.

Where | What to follow | Your practical action |

Washington State | Legislation and effective dates; Commerce planning guidance; Ecology water and shoreline rules; DNR forest practices; WDFW hydraulic approvals; building-code changes. | Follow the relevant bill and agency rulemaking. Read the adopted text, implementation dates, transition rules and any court stay. |

County | Comprehensive plans, growth boundaries, resource lands, rezones, critical areas, rural uses, roads, health rules, tax classifications and district plans. | Subscribe to council and planning notices. Review the map for your parcel and ask how the proposal changes your intended use. |

City or town | Tree codes, setbacks, lot coverage, ADUs, middle housing, lot splits, shoreline rules, annexations, impact fees and frontage improvements. | Track planning commission and council agendas, then the actual ordinance and effective date. Verify how state housing changes apply locally. |

Other authorities | Utility, fire, irrigation, drainage and diking districts; federal permits; tribal jurisdiction and treaty resources; private recorded restrictions. | Identify every approval and agreement needed. A city or county approval may resolve only part of the project. |

Official planning starting points: Commerce periodic updates (https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/gma-topics/periodic-update/) · PlanView amendment notices (https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/data-research/submitting-documents/) · Middle housing and land division (https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/middle-housing/).

Check the latest status.

Water: a deadline worth checking now. Ecology lists June 1, 2027 as the current Nooksack adjudication claim deadline. Affected self-supplied water users, including qualifying permit-exempt well users, should check their obligations and court notices. Read the current guidance (https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-supply/water-rights/adjudications/nooksack)

Timber: adopted does not always mean currently applied. DNR's current notice says the expanded Western Washington Type Np buffer rule is stayed; while that stay remains, it applies the requirements in effect before August 31, 2026. Recheck before filing or harvesting. Check DNR's current notice (https://dnr.wa.gov/forest-practices/forest-practices-application)

Local critical-area updates deserve a fresh look. Snohomish County reports its last update in June 2025. King County adopted its 2025 critical-area update in December 2025. Review the applicable code and transition provisions, including separate shoreline approval requirements, for your property. Snohomish County (https://snohomishcountywa.gov/2183/Critical-Areas-Regulations-Update) · King County (https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/local-services/buildings-property/development-planning-regulations/regional-planning/king-county-comprehensive-plan/current-adopted-plan)

These examples were checked on October 22, 2026. This page is not a live monitoring service; revisit the linked agency notice before relying on its status.

A practical owner calendar.

Start this month

Build the property file. Identify your jurisdiction and goals. Gather approved plans and title documents. Walk the site, photograph existing conditions, and list the questions that need professional review.

Review each season

Check drainage, crossings, erosion, weeds, trees and fire readiness. Follow permit and farm or forest plan requirements. Record maintenance and conditions after major storms.

Review every year

Update your photos and use records. Review permits, water use, tax classification, insurance and long-term agreements. Revisit local plans, utility projects and your family's future intentions.

Some events cannot wait for the annual review. Read hearing notices, permit decisions, enforcement letters, adjudication papers and renewal notices when they arrive. Before clearing, logging, draining, demolishing, pausing an established use or signing a long-term restriction, check the consequences.

This is a suggested planning routine. Permit conditions, inspection schedules and legal deadlines control when they require a different timetable.

From the podcast to your property file.

THE ANTON STETNER PODCAST | Anton Stetner & Mike Appleby | Recorded October 22, 2026

What can owners do before their options change?

Anton and Mike discuss housing policy, local land-use rules, property rights and the importance of understanding a property's potential. This checklist develops the practical landowner questions raised in that conversation.

The episode recording is being prepared for this page. Watch and listen links will appear when the finished episode is available.

A useful tool from the discussion: the Critical Area Site Plan. For qualifying consistent activities, Snohomish County's code recognizes the terms of a previously approved plan. Its protection is conditional, and permanent restrictions also apply. Review the actual plan and SCC 30.62A.160 (https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/30.62A.160) with your professionals.

Podcast examples, costs, timelines and opinions are speaker statements. They are not statewide guarantees or a determination of what your parcel can support.

A few distinctions that matter.

Does owning the land or paying taxes preserve the zoning I bought under?

Do not assume it does. Washington has specific vesting rules for qualifying complete applications, including building permits (https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=19.27.095) and subdivisions (https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=58.17.033). Determine the actual protection, scope and duration for your project.

Can I keep mowing, farming or maintaining an existing area?

Identify the lawful existing activity and the maintenance allowed by the local code and approvals. New clearing, drainage or expansion may be treated differently. Agricultural protections and exemptions also have conditions. The Voluntary Stewardship Program (https://www.scc.wa.gov/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program) is one pathway to investigate in participating counties.

Should I log now if I might build later?

Discuss the future use before the harvest. The forest-practice application, conversion process, local approvals and reforestation requirements matter. Certain circumstances create a six-year development prohibition (https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=76.09.460); harvesting first can complicate the plan.

Do state housing laws mean I can add homes anywhere?

Start with the applicable ADU rules (https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/adus/) and middle-housing guidance (https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/middle-housing/), then verify local implementation, eligible geography, access, utilities, environmental constraints and ownership documents. An allowed use still needs a feasible site and the required approvals.

How quickly do I need to react to a decision?

Promptly. LUPA (https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70C.040) generally requires both filing and service within 21 days of issuance, while GMA petitions (https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.290) generally have a 60-day publication-based period. Local appeals, SEPA, shoreline and agency proceedings have different rules. Have counsel identify the correct forum, trigger and deadline immediately.

Go to the source.

These are the same 39 references linked from the checklist. State sources describe frameworks; county and city examples apply in their own jurisdictions. Recheck amendments, effective dates and recorded approvals before relying on a rule.

01 Snohomish County - Critical Area Requirements

https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/2925/Critical-Area-Requirements

02 SCC 30.62A.160 - Approved plans and permanent protection

https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/30.62A.160

03 Snohomish County - Title 30, including nonconforming uses

https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7973/County-Code-Title-30

04 RCW 19.27.095 - Building application vesting

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=19.27.095

05 RCW 58.17.033 - Subdivision application vesting

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=58.17.033

06 Ecology - Wetland regulations

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/wetlands/regulations

07 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Seattle District Regulatory

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

08 Seattle - Tree removal requirements

https://www.seattle.gov/construction-and-inspections/permits/permits-we-issue-(a-z)/tree-removal

09 Snohomish County - NGPA/CAPA maintenance and trees

https://snohomishcountywa.gov/6306/90901/NGPACAPA-Frequently-Asked-Questions

10 DNR - Forest Practices Application and current Type Np notice

https://dnr.wa.gov/forest-practices/forest-practices-application

11 RCW 76.09.060 - Forestland conversion

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=76.09.060

Source library, continued

12 RCW 76.09.460 - Development prohibition

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=76.09.460

13 DNR - Small Forest Landowner Office

https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo

14 Conservation Commission - Voluntary Stewardship Program

https://www.scc.wa.gov/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program

15 Ecology - Prior converted croplands

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/wetlands/regulations/state-wetland-regulations/prior-converted-croplands

16 RCW 7.48.305 - Agricultural and forest nuisance protections

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=7.48.305

17 Ecology - Water rights

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-supply/water-rights

18 Ecology - Water right relinquishment (May 2025)

https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/981812wr.pdf

19 Ecology - Groundwater permit exemption

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-supply/water-rights/groundwater-permit-exemption

20 Ecology - Nooksack adjudication and current deadline

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-supply/water-rights/adjudications/nooksack

21 Ecology - Shoreline permits and exemptions

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

22 Ecology - Local Shoreline Master Programs

https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/shoreline-coastal-management/shoreline-coastal-planning/shoreline-master-programs

23 FEMA - Flood maps and map-change records

https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home

Source library, continued

24 Department of Health - On-site sewage management roles

https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/wastewater-management/site-sewage-systems-oss/management-strategy/management-roles

25 WDFW - Hydraulic Project Approvals

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

26 Commerce - Middle housing and land division options

https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/middle-housing/

27 Commerce - Accessory dwelling units

https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/adus/

28 RCW 17.10.140 - Noxious weed responsibilities

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=17.10.140

29 Ecology - Construction stormwater permit

https://www.ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/permits-certifications/stormwater-general-permits/construction-stormwater-permit

30 Department of Revenue - Open Space Taxation Act

https://dor.wa.gov/taxes-rates/property-tax/understanding-open-space-taxation-act

31 Department of Revenue - Current-use and forest-land rules

https://dor.wa.gov/chapter-458-30-open-space-taxation-act-rules

32 Ecology - Residential cleanup and purchase due diligence

https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/guidance-technical-assistance/guidance-for-residential-cleanups

33 Ecology - Cleanup lists and environmental covenant registry

https://www.ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/guidance-technical-assistance/site-register-lists-and-data

34 DAHP - Discovery of suspected human remains

https://dahp.wa.gov/archaeology/human-remains/what-do-i-do-if-ive-found-human-remains

35 Ecology - Federal and tribal shoreline jurisdiction

https://www.ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/shoreline-coastal-management/shoreline-coastal-planning/shoreline-management-act-sma/shoreline-management-act-jurisdiction/federal-and-tribal-activities

Source library, continued

36 Commerce - Comprehensive-plan periodic updates

https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/gma-topics/periodic-update/

37 Commerce - Amendment notices and PlanView

https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/data-research/submitting-documents/

38 RCW 36.70C.040 - Land use petition filing and service

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70C.040

39 RCW 36.70A.290 - Growth management petitions

https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.290

My next three actions.

Prioritize actual deadlines first. Use this page with your attorney, planner, surveyor, forester or other qualified professional. Keep completed notes in your property file.

1. Decision or question / evidence needed

Who will help / next action / due date

2. Decision or question / evidence needed

Who will help / next action / due date

3. Decision or question / evidence needed

Who will help / next action / due date