EVALUATING CAOs:
MAPPING RIPARIAN AREAS

In this project, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will evaluate the on-the-ground effectiveness of Critical Area Ordinances (CAOs) in steering habitat disturbances away from riparian (streamside) areas. We will do this by mapping riparian areas and reporting how much clearing and development occurred in these areas since 2006.

What we’re doing
We will create an online map showing
- Riparian ecosystems (as defined by WDFW)
- Riparian buffers (as defined by local CAOs)
- Land cover changes within those areas

We will report the change rate in each county and city.

How we’re doing it
We will use GIS to create two map layers of riparian areas—one based on how tall trees grow and one based on CAOs buffers. We will then use our High Resolution Change Detection dataset to determine how much change occurred in each jurisdiction’s riparian areas.

WHY IS THIS ISSUE IMPORTANT
Sustaining and recovering Puget Sound and salmon relies on conserving riparian areas as the region grows. County and city CAOs are a primary tool for this.

WHAT YOU CAN DO
When your local CAO is updated, work with elected officials and planners to create strong protections for riparian areas, including ongoing evaluations of how well the CAO works and ways it could work better. Volunteer with your local Stream Team. Remove invasive species and plant native trees in riparian areas.

ABOUT WA DEPT OF FISH & WILDLIFE
Fish and wildlife are property of the state; WDFW is charged by the Legislature with perpetuating fish and wildlife on behalf of the people of Washington.

WDFW advises local governments on land use matters through the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) program and 25 Habitat Biologists in the Puget Sound region. PHS recently released a summary of science and management recommendations regarding riparian areas. WDFW scientists created the High Resolution Change Detection dataset to help local planners evaluate habitat changes caused by development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/
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