

3. PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

This section defines public access for the purposes of this analysis, discusses the criteria for evaluating existing and potential future public access to shorelines, and presents the results of a preliminary analysis of existing formal and informal public access to shorelines.

As stated in Section 1 of this document, public access is one of the three overarching State goals for shoreline management. The State asks local governments to assure that shoreline recreational development is given priority (WAC 173-26-241(3)(i)), and, along Shorelines of Statewide Significance, the State directs local governments to increase public access to publicly owned shoreline areas (RCW 90.58.020). Local governments are required to promote and enhance the public interest with regard to rights to access waters held in public trust by the State while protecting private property rights and public safety.

A. Defining Public Access

The State defines and provides guidance for shoreline public access. Public access is defined as the ability of the general public to reach, touch, and enjoy the water's edge, to travel on the waters of the state, and to view the water and the shoreline from adjacent locations (WAC 173-26-221(4)(a)).

King County developed the following criteria to identify formal, informal and potential future shoreline public access sites.

- Formal public access sites are those managed specifically for recreational use by the public.
- Informal public access sites include those where access is not managed by a public agency and those where public access is not specifically allowed.
- Potential future public access sites will be evaluated, as a forthcoming portion of the shoreline public access analysis, to fill current gaps in opportunities for public access to shorelines of the state.

King County proposes that existing and potential future shoreline public access sites meet the following criteria:

1. Shoreline public access points, including view points, trails within shoreline areas, and other sites, must minimize impacts to ecologically critical areas;
2. Shoreline public access points must not present a public safety risk;
3. King County site management could minimize effects on adjacent properties, including effects on adjacent land uses, effects on the original size and condition of adjacent lots, impacts to environmental conditions, and effects associated with site access, such as trails and parking; and
4. Use of or access to the site is in accordance with guidance on public use contained in King County property or site management guidance and funding sources associated with King County ownerships.

As an additional consideration, the availability of legal parking or ability to provide legal parking nearby - by the County or otherwise - will be identified for public access sites. However, parking will not be a requirement for public access, as some sites will be accessed by means other than automobiles.

B. Inventory of Existing Shoreline Public Access

Local governments are required to identify public access needs and opportunities within the jurisdiction and explore actions to enhance shoreline recreation facilities (WAC 173-26-201(3)(d)(v)).

As a first step in meeting the above requirement, an inventory of existing County, State and Federal public access sites in the unincorporated King County shoreline jurisdiction was compiled, including:

- Public docks/piers
- Carry-in boat launches and trailer boat launches
- Camping and picnic areas
- Swimming beaches
- Properties enrolled in the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs) that have committed to providing public access to shorelines
- Trailheads and parking lots (associated with shoreline trails)
- Parks
- Trails
- Informal public access sites on King County Water and Land Resources Division natural resource lands and on King County Park lands¹

Statistics on existing public access facilities in King County's shoreline jurisdiction are provided in Table 9 below. Also, see the Map Folio, Map E8.

¹ Informal access sites were identified by King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks field staff based on observations or evidence of public use.

Table 9. Public Access Facilities

Type of Public Access in Unincorporated Shoreline Jurisdiction	# Facilities, Acres or Miles within Shoreline Jurisdiction
Facilities:	
Public docks/piers	4
Carry-in boat launches	30
Trailer boat launches	28
Public camping and/or picnic areas	15
Swimming beaches	2
PBRS parcels providing public Access	45 (824 acres)
Trail heads	1
Parking lots	18
Parks (acres):	
King County Parks	2,040
King County Natural Resource Lands	2,115
District	32
State	1,620
Federal	8,825
Other	12
Trails (miles):	
King County Parks	32
State	2
Federal	25
Private	1
Informal public access (parcels/sites):	
Parks visual access only	11 sites
Parks physical access	22 sites
Natural Lands visual access only	6 parcels
Natural Lands physical access	67 parcels

C. Gaps and Opportunities

To identify gaps in existing formal public access to shorelines, King County parks and natural land managers considered whether there is:

1. A notable geographic absence in public access opportunities;
2. A notable absence in type of public access opportunities:
 - o Visual
 - o Physical
 - o Type of facility/opportunity;
3. Informal access and use of a site in the gap area has been identified, confirming need; and

4. General population in proximity to and demand for access at the site

The results of a draft analysis of shoreline public access gaps and opportunities are presented in the Map Folio, Map E9.

Opportunities for new public access could include expanding facilities at existing formal access sites, improving informal access sites, and creating new access in areas such as public street ends along the shoreline. There are 136 known public street ends at or within sight of the shoreline edge within the shoreline jurisdiction (see the Map Folio, Map E9).

A list of the needed improvements to existing public access facilities and potential new public access sites will be included the Shoreline Master Program – Public Access Plan.

Recent Studies Identifying Public Access Priorities

The following studies and plans were considered in the shoreline public access gaps and opportunities analysis.

- Phase 2 - Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Study – Public Use Concept (1997) presents a recreation use and land management framework. It recommends the location, scale and level of facility development for day and overnight recreation use within one mile of the river corridor, from the mouth of the Valley to Dingford Creek.
- A Study of Public Boating and Fishing Access was recently produced by the Cedar River Council working with King County, City of Renton and City of Seattle. This study identifies the places where the Cedar River and its shorelines may be accessed for boating, fishing, and other recreational activities. Many of these sites remain undeveloped and are neither designed nor maintained for public recreational use or access.
- High priority areas for linking parks and regional trails were identified in the Greenprint analysis completed by the Trust for Public Land in 2005.

NOTE: A discussion of coordination with other programs is included in the Shoreline Master Program goals and policies document.