

King County Channel Migration Public Rule Update and Revisions

January 2026 Report per Ordinance 17485, Section 50.O

Introduction

Channel migration, a type of flood hazard from riverbank erosion and channel shifting, can threaten people and property. King County regulates land uses within mapped channel migration hazard areas to reduce these risks. Channel migration, however, can be present outside of the mapped floodplain areas.

In 1999, King County adopted criteria for mapping channel migration hazard areas and mapped four river areas (Raging, Tolt, Middle Green, and the area of the Three Forks of the Snoqualmie) that were most at risk of channel migration. Other major rivers were not mapped at that time. The County also adopted development regulations to control development within these mapped channel migration hazard areas.

This report includes a summary of work accomplished since June 2025 and lists upcoming milestones for the first and second quarters of 2026.

Ordinance Text

Ordinance 17485, Section 50.O included a King County Comprehensive Plan work program item directing that:¹

By June 1, 2013, the executive shall provide a report detailing the progress of the rule making process, as required by this ordinance, which will develop the criteria for the designation and mapping of the channel migration zone areas in unincorporated King County. Additional reports to provide updates on the progress on the rule making process and implementation of the designation and mapping of channel migration zones shall be provided each January 1 and June 1, until the mapping is completed. The reports required by this subsection shall be transmitted to the council in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers and to the lead staff for the transportation, economy and environment committee, or its successor.

Background

In 2012, the County updated its Shoreline Master Program and the King County Code with respect to channel migration zones (CMZ) as required by the Washington State Department of Ecology to comply with the Shoreline Management Act, Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 90.58.^{2, 3} With these code changes, the Department of Local Services (DLS) and the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) were required to adopt, by public rule, criteria for channel migration designation,

¹ [Link to Ordinance 17485](#)

² [Link to Shoreline Management Act](#)

³ [Link to RCW Chapter 90.58](#)

classification and mapping, and CMZ studies and maps (K.C.C. 21A.24.274A).⁴ Both functions were accomplished by updating the existing King County channel migration public rule in March 2014.⁵

CMZ studies were completed and adopted on the Cedar (2015), South Fork Skykomish (2017), Tolt (2017), Raging (2019), Middle White (2019), and Greenwater (2022) rivers.

Once adopted via the public rule process, the studies are deemed “effective” 30 days after adoption and used to review land-use proposals.⁶ Studies of the remaining rivers are proceeding using the new mapping criteria specified in the public rule. The Lower Snoqualmie River study has been in progress since the second quarter of 2020. The Issaquah Creek study was initiated after a February 2020 flood event resulted in widespread inundation, damage, and channel migration.

This report constitutes the required progress report.

Summary

The public rule serves as the administrative mechanism for adopting completed channel migration studies and the resulting mapping. DNRP applied the mapping criteria in the public rule to prepare a CMZ study and maps for applicable King County stream segments along the Lower Snoqualmie River, beginning in 2020, and along Issaquah Creek, beginning in 2022. After the study and mapping are prepared, DNRP and DLS will present information at a public meeting to engage the landowners and other interested parties in the areas covered by the CMZ study and maps.

Accomplishments during the third and fourth quarters of 2025 include the following:

Issaquah Creek CMZ

- Data synthesis and analysis continued, and draft report and map preparation were completed, in Q3 and Q4 2025.
- Internal review of the draft report and map began in Q4 2025.

Lower Snoqualmie River CMZ

- On June 26, 2025, the Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) and DLS presented the map and technical study and an overview of channel migration zone regulatory rules at a public meeting, which initiated a 45-day public comment period on the map and technical study.
- On September 15, 2025, WLRD transmitted formal responses to public comments and the finalized report and maps to DLS.
- The Public Rule amendment was signed on November 14, 2025 and the map will become effective for land use regulation on December 15, 2025 (30 days after signing).

Next Steps

⁴ [Link to K.C.C. 21A.24.274A](#)

⁵ [Link to King County Channel Migration Public Rule](#)

⁶ [Link to Public Rule LUD-17-1-3-PR](#)

- The Issaquah Creek CMZ draft report and map preparation will continue to undergo internal review in Q1 2026. Preparation for the public process necessary for map adoption and rule amendment will begin in Q1 and continue in Q2 2026.
- The Lower Snoqualmie River CMZ is complete. WLRD will initiate the next CMZ study and map in Q1 2026.
- The next required status report, due to the King County Council on June 1, 2026, will include a schedule update of draft and final study reports and mapping conducted in the first half of 2026.

Information prepared in these CMZ studies is being used in conjunction with flood and landslide hazard mapping to improve information about flood-related hazards along river corridors. The studies also provide information about dynamic habitat-forming river processes and may be useful in planning efforts for regional habitat restoration.