



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

Washington Coastal Zone Management 2024–2026 NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship Application

IMPROVING SHORELINE PUBLIC ACCESS IN WASHINGTON'S COASTAL ZONE



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1. Introduction and Background

Coastal Program Overview

The Washington Coastal Zone Management Program (Coastal Program) is pleased to submit this proposal for a 2024-2026 NOAA Coastal Management Fellow. We strongly believe in the growth and development of the next generation of coastal managers. We have hosted a total of 24 fellows in our Coastal Program since 1996 in partnership with NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management and Washington Sea Grant. This 2024-2026 project is an exciting opportunity to join an enthusiastic team working to promote the public’s ability to enjoy shorelines.

Washington’s Coastal Program is administered by the State Department of Ecology (Ecology). Our program’s Coastal Zone includes all the lands and waters in Washington’s 15 coastal counties and extends seaward three nautical miles into the ocean. Federal and Tribal lands are excluded.

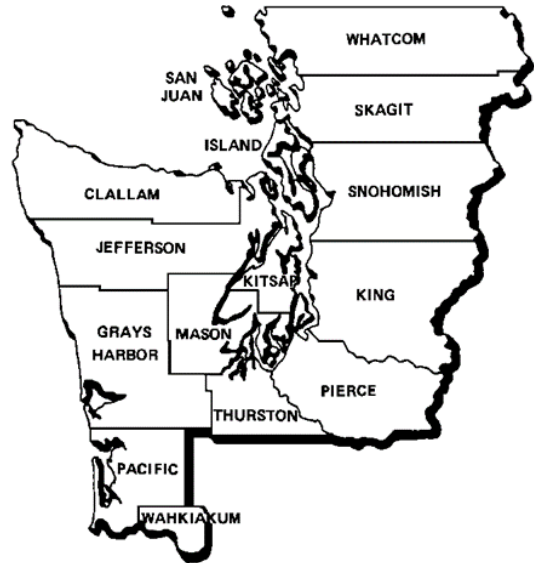
The Coastal Program meets the goals of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act through a comprehensive approach to coastal resource management. This work requires us to balance the often competing—and occasionally conflicting—demands of coastal resources use, economic development, and conservation. We partner with a range of stakeholders, agencies, Tribes, local governments, academics, and non-profits to achieve this mission.

Project Background

This proposal addresses two of the NOAA Office for Coastal Management’s strategic focus areas, advances the [Washington State Coastal Zone Management Section 309 Assessment and Strategy](#)¹ for cumulative and secondary impacts of growth, and supports the Washington State Department of Ecology’s Office of Equity and Environmental Justice in its mission to eliminate environmental and health disparities for communities most at risk from environmental impacts.

Washington’s Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1971 is the state’s foundational shoreline and coastal management legislation. The SMA is implemented by local governments through local Shoreline Master Programs (SMPs). SMPs are local land-use policies and regulations that guide use of Washington’s coastal and shoreline areas. SMPs must, “To the greatest extent feasible consistent with the overall best interest of the state and the people generally, protect the public’s opportunity to enjoy the physical and aesthetic qualities of shorelines of the state, including views of the water.”² Over the last two decades Ecology has partnered with local governments to comprehensively update the 133 SMPs within the state’s federally approved Coastal Zone. We are now in a new phase of monitoring and adaptively managing SMPs to ensure they are accomplishing the intended goals and objectives.

Shoreline public access is one of the three main goals of the SMA, the other two being environmental protection and planning for preferred uses. Shoreline public access is broadly defined by the state to be



¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2106005.html>

² WAC 173-26-221 (4)(b)(iii).

“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.”³ The 2024-2026 Fellow will work on important shoreline public access projects with connections to equity and environmental justice, Tribal treaty rights, climate change impacts and resilience, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

2. Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Increase use of existing marine public access facilities.

Objective A: Provide Washington’s visitors and residents with easily accessible and up-to-date information on marine shoreline public access locations.

Goal 2: Preserve and expand quality shoreline public access throughout Washington’s coastal zone.

Objective A: Update Washington’s Shoreline Permitting Manual to address shoreline public access.

Objective B: Provide broader guidance and best practices for local governments who are interested in comprehensively planning for shoreline public access.

Goal 3: Foster future generations of coastal managers through mentoring the growth and development of the Fellow.

Objective A: The Fellow develops important relationships and gains skills, knowledge, and confidence in key areas of coastal management.

Objective B: The Fellow has documented reflections on the Fellowship experience and prepares for transitioning into the next phase of their career.

3. Milestones and Outcomes

Goal 1, Objective A

Outcome A: The public dataset and website of marine shoreline public access locations is updated.

Outcome B: The Fellow has conducted a self-directed study to evaluate the intersection between marine shoreline public access and a critical shoreline management issue facing the Coastal Program.

Outcome C: The Fellow has identified solutions to the issue studied in the self-directed analysis and shared these solutions with internal and external audiences.

Goal 2, Objective A

Outcome A: The Fellow has synthesized information learned from conducting case studies of permittee-responsible public access and from reviewing permit appeal decisions.

Outcome B: The Fellow is part of a team contributing to the writing of implementation guidance.

Outcome C: The Fellow contributes to published implementation guidance on shoreline public access.

Goal 2, Objective B

Outcome A: The Fellow has completed the background research to develop a best practices handbook that is applicable to all local governments and that incorporates environmental justice principles.

Outcome B: The Fellow has received necessary feedback from Ecology staff, local government partners, and stakeholders to inform the handbook.

³ Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-26-221(4)(a).

Outcome C: The Fellow has published a shoreline public access planning handbook.

Goal 3, Objectives A and B

Outcome A: The Fellow has developed a tailored Professional Development Plan (PDP—see Fellow Mentoring section for more details).

Outcome B: The Fellow implements the PDP to advance professional development in support of the Fellowship project and their personal goals.

Outcome C: The Fellow monitors and adapts the PDP to support both the Fellow and mentors as the Fellow becomes more familiar with the position.

Outcome D: The Fellow has documented reflections on the Fellowship experience and prepares for transitioning into the next phase of their career.

		Year 1 (2024-2025)				Year 2 (2025-2026)			
Outcome		Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-Jul
Goal 1 Objective A	A		X	X	X	X	X	X	✓
	B				X	X	X	✓	
	C						X	X	✓
Goal 2 Objective A	A		X	X	X	✓			
	B					X	X	✓	
	C						X	X	✓
Goal 2 Objective B	A		X	X	X	✓			
	B			X	X	X	✓		
	C					X	X	X	✓
Goal 3 Objectives A & B	A	✓							
	B		X	X	X	X	X	X	✓
	C		X	X	X	X	X	X	✓
	D							X	✓

X = Fellow is working on Objective.

✓ = Fellow has completed Objective.

4. Project Description

Task 1: Update Washington’s marine shoreline public access inventory and use the information to study a pressing coastal management question.

Task 1.1 Inventory and GIS dataset

The Fellow will lead an effort to review and update the existing dataset of marine shoreline public access on Ecology’s [Public Beaches website](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/PublicAccess.aspx)⁴ and [mapper](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/PublicAccessResults.aspx)⁵, which are part of the [Coastal Atlas](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/Default.aspx)⁶ public data portal. The Fellow will be responsible for confirming the availability of existing marine public access, removing defunct access sites, and identifying new sites to add. The Fellow will assess marine

⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/PublicAccess.aspx>

⁵ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/PublicAccessResults.aspx>

⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/Default.aspx>

public access sites for characteristics like ADA accessibility, user fees, availability of amenities like parking and restrooms, and suitability for recreational activities. The Fellow will develop a protocol for conducting the inventory that considers Ecology's unique role as information provider as compared to the roles being played by other entities. The protocol will consider the need for more frequent updates to public access information and how this can best be accomplished.

As necessary, the Fellow will travel to marine public access sites around Washington to ground-truth the availability of public access. Additionally, the Fellow will network with government entities and other providers of public access, and will have the opportunity to use GIS skills and work with Ecology's GIS Unit staff (if the Fellow has an interest in GIS).

Information will be available on the Public Beaches website and will continue to be a valuable resource to Washington's residents and visitors long after the Fellowship concludes.

Task 1.2 Use inventory and dataset to study a pressing public access question.

The Fellow will use the updated inventory of marine shoreline public access to conduct an analysis that evaluates the intersection between public access and a critical shoreline management issue. The Fellow will have discretion to choose a topic and method of analysis that fits their interests and skills. Examples of key opportunities include:

- Evaluate marine public access sites for their resilience to sea level rise. The Fellow may conduct a desktop analysis of public access vulnerability to sea level rise using the State's 2018 projections; or may use social science skills to interview public access site owners about sea level rise concerns and identify needs and opportunities for supporting adaptation planning.
- Explore the intersection between marine shoreline public access and environmental justice. For example, the Fellow may choose to explore whether people of color or low-income populations are less likely to benefit from shoreline public access. The Fellow could also choose to explore cultural differences in the use of public recreation spaces, K-12 access to marine shorelines, transit accessibility to public access facilities, or how public amenities at shoreline facilities relate to the use and enjoyment by diverse groups.
- Partner with the State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation to promote the awareness of culture and history of Native and Indigenous Peoples at public access sites.

Depending on the nature of the analysis, the Fellow may incorporate findings into the shoreline public access planning handbook (Task 3) or other written report that can be shared with partners around Washington. Additionally, the Fellow will be encouraged to share results in webinars, at conferences, and through established newsletters.

Task 2: Support the development of public access implementation guidance.

The Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section is focused on improving SMP implementation (i.e., compliance). One initiative that supports this goal is developing new SMP implementation guidance that supports local governments in their review of individual shoreline proposals. Together, new implementation guidance chapters will be part of an update to Ecology's Shoreline Permitting Manual.⁷

One topic ripe for implementation guidance is public access. Local SMPs require permittees to construct public access for certain new uses. However, Ecology does not have implementation guidance on this

⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1706029.html>

topic. Additionally, Ecology has outdated information on how effective permittee-required public access is at facilitating access to the shoreline.

The Fellow will work as part of a team to develop a new chapter of the Shoreline Permitting Manual on the implementation of permittee-required public access. Implementation guidance will, in part, update a 1990 Ecology publication titled Shoreline Public Access Handbook. Implementation guidance will likely address aspects of public access such as design, accessibility, conditioning public access, negotiating with developers, payment in lieu of dedicating access, liability, signage, safety, and security. Working with a team will allow the Fellow to collaborate with Ecology Headquarters staff, senior regional staff, and the SMA Policy Lead. As part of this project, the Fellow will:

- Review SMPs for their different approaches to shoreline public access.
- Develop case studies of privately developed public access. The Fellow will travel to public access sites, collect information about how the site is functioning, and discuss projects with local planners.
- Review Shorelines Hearings Board and Washington court decisions on shoreline permit appeals involving public access.
- Contribute to the writing of the new Shoreline Permitting Manual chapter.

The research and case studies completed by the Fellow will offer key information used by the team to develop the new guidance. Once completed, the entire Shoreline Permitting Manual will be published on Ecology's website and will be broadly available to Ecology and local government staff.

Task 3: Develop a shoreline public access planning handbook.

Shoreline public access plans are a broader and more comprehensive tool for realizing a community's goals around shoreline access and recreation. They identify a community's need for public access, map priority shoreline public access enhancements, and include an implementation strategy. While every local SMP includes goals, policies, and regulations for public access and recreation, many communities do not have a shoreline public access plan.⁸

The Fellow will lead the development of a shoreline public access planning handbook which will be a resource for local governments. As part of this effort, the Fellow will conduct research, review relevant planning guides for best practices, conduct interviews, and synthesize information into practical guidance for local governments. Topics could include climate resilience, safety, acquisition considerations, ecological sustainability, and accessible design. Findings from Task 1.2 may inform the public access planning handbook.

The handbook will identify the key components of a shoreline public access plan and outline a systematic planning approach to identifying priority public access enhancements. The planning approach will center on the important role of community engagement in translating a community's needs for public access into solutions. The planning approach will address public participation through an environmental justice lens and incorporate strategies for ensuring the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income.

The handbook will also include a list of additional publications and resources, identified by the Fellow. Resources will support local governments in designing and implementing public access. This could

⁸ Such plans are specifically encouraged, but not required, by WAC 173-26-221 (4)(c)

include design guidelines and standards, community needs assessment resources, sign manuals, and information on environmental justice and public participation.

The Fellow will coordinate a small workgroup of Ecology staff that will provide feedback on work products. The Fellow may also develop and implement a strategy for getting feedback from local government partners or other key stakeholders. The mentors will support the Fellow in conducting research, coordinating the internal workgroup, and identifying strategies for collecting feedback. The handbook will be published on Ecology's website, and the mentors will assist the Fellow in identifying opportunities to share the handbook with relevant audiences.

5. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Advancing the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) are a core component of the Ecology's work on shoreline public access. The Fellowship project will have the following outcomes that advance DEIJ:

- Providing easily accessible information on marine public access with a special focus on information that is vital to underserved and historically marginalized communities.
- Empowering local governments to develop comprehensive shoreline public access plans using an approach that ensures the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, and that assesses public access needs/gaps in a way that addresses the needs of underserved or vulnerable populations.
- Ensuring that local governments have the implementation guidance and tools they need so that permittee-responsible public access is provided in a way that meets the goals and policy intent of the local SMP and the Shoreline Management Act.

6. Fellow Mentoring

Mentor

Bobbak Talebi (Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section Manager) will serve as the mentor and supervisor for the Fellow. In addition to being Washington's Coastal Zone Management Program Manager, Bobbak oversees the Shorelands and Environmental Assistance (SEA) Program's statewide shoreline management and floodplain management work.

Fellowship Professional Development Plan

The Fellow will develop and implement a Professional Development Plan (PDP) that will provide a framework for how the Fellow will work with the mentors throughout the Fellowship. The PDP supports evaluation of the Fellow's progress on tasks and professional growth, and ensures clear and open discussions about opportunities for improvement. The plan creates a deliberate approach to the Fellowship experience, using goal-setting, self-evaluation, and supplemental information. These elements establish the foundation for a successful Fellowship and career.

The Fellow will be encouraged to attend relevant meetings, trainings, and other opportunities to gain exposure and understanding of how government and non-governmental organizations work on regional shoreline and coastal management. When opportunities arise, the Fellow will be encouraged to present work to a variety of regional audiences. This experience will connect the Fellow to state, regional, and national partners working on public access and coastal management. Ecology's Core Training Program

offers over 30 training classes that will be available to the Fellow and paid for by Ecology. The mentors will help the Fellow identify relevant professional development opportunities.

The Fellow will work with Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section staff responsible for shoreline policy and coastal management. The Fellow will also work with regional SEA Program staff who work directly with local governments in reviewing permitted activities, including public access development, throughout Washington's coastal zone.

Ecology is committed to a workplace where diversity is celebrated, where we champion equity, where we hold space for all to be included, and where we treat each other with respect and dignity. All Ecology staff are responsible for following through on this commitment. The Fellow will be encouraged to participate in DEIJ initiatives at the Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section, SEA Program, and agency levels. The Fellow will have opportunities to participate in or lead DEIJ discussions at quarterly Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section meetings. The Fellow will also have opportunities to engage with the agency-wide Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Respect team and the Office of Equity and Environmental Justice.

7. Office Environment

Following the pandemic, Ecology has implemented its Modern Work Environment, with guidance and physical changes to office spaces to support hybrid work. Ecology supports hybrid work schedules, with staff having flexibility to telework up to 90%. However, the Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines Management Section values in-office collaboration and routinely works out of the Headquarters office one to two days per week. On other days, staff use Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings, and conference rooms have video conferencing equipment to support hybrid meetings.

The Fellow will be required to live within a commutable distance to the Headquarters office and to work at least one day per week in the office. The primary mentor and supervisor work one to two days in the office, and the secondary mentor works three days in the office.

Staff working 60% or more in the office have dedicated cubicles, and this will be available to the Fellow. Should the Fellow choose to primarily telework, they will use a "hotel" cubicle when in the office that is centrally located to all Coastal-Floodplains-Shorelines staff to facilitate collaboration. Hotel cubicles have a sit-stand desk, chair, two monitors, laptop docking station, keyboard, and locking file cabinet.

The Fellow will have access to all equipment and services available to Ecology staff, including supplies, telephone, personal laptop computer, monitors, wireless headset, wireless mouse, and software. Should the Fellow choose to primarily telework, they will be able to bring their equipment home. The Fellow would be responsible for furnishing their home office and will have access to agency ergonomics resources for support in selecting appropriate furniture. Agency vehicles are available for work-related use. Office administrative, publishing support, GIS, cartography, and computer staff are available.

8. Project Partners

Shoreline public access is provided and maintained by numerous organizations around Washington. The Fellow will be encouraged to learn about and network with organizations like those listed below to successfully complete this project and to advance their professional growth.

Community groups/local practitioners	State Department of Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Districts	State Department of Natural Resources
Fisheries Enhancement Groups	State Parks and Recreation Commission
Local governments (cities, towns, and counties)	State Recreation and Conservation Office
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission	The Nature Conservancy
Northwest Straits Foundation	Tribes
Puget Sound Partnership	University of WA Climate Impacts Group
State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation	Washington Marine Resource Committees
State Department of Commerce	Washington Sea Grant
	Washington State University Extension

9. Cost-Share Description

Ecology will provide the \$15,000 cost-sharing match using funds from the FFY23-24 Washington Coastal Zone Management Grant. In addition, Ecology will provide funds for necessary regional travel, training opportunities, and purchases of data products and software.

10. Strategic Focus Area

Resilient Coastal Communities

As climate change impacts intensify, we anticipate that shoreline public access will be negatively impacted unless we understand and respond to these risks. This project will develop climate-informed planning guidance and resources for shoreline public access and will communicate climate risks to shoreline public access. Through public access case studies, the project will share lessons learned and best practices for implementing resilient shoreline public access. Additionally, the project will increase understanding of equity issues surrounding shoreline public access, including how reduced public access due to climate change may impact communities with environmental justice concerns and how shoreline public access providers can increase equitable access now and in the future.

Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies

Shoreline public access is vital to a strong coastal tourism and recreation economy, as well as to commercial and subsistence natural resource use. This project will increase Washington's understanding of the social implications of shoreline public access management. The project will promote policies and practices that foster more transparent and predictable government decisions to manage shoreline public access and its impacts to coastal resources and economic activities. The data, planning guidance, and resources developed for this project will help coastal communities invest in shoreline public access that is resilient to natural hazards. Ultimately, this project will support public access, recreation, and economic development in an environmentally sustainable and socially conscious manner, now and in the future.