

**Baltimore County, Maryland
Environmental Protection & Sustainability (EPS)**

Forest Buffers

The Protection of Water Quality, Streams, Wetlands and Floodplains law requires establishment of a Forest Buffer Easement along wetlands and streams when development occurs on a site. The width of the Easement varies depending on site conditions and stream use and order. Forest Buffers Easements provide long-term water quality protection for the County's streams, wetlands and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. The buffer acts as a sponge to help absorb pollutants from uphill drainage. It also creates and protects wildlife habitat, providing diversity and aesthetic value for all County residents to enjoy. Forested buffers provide habitat and temperature control in streams, particularly important in trout waters. The three drinking water reservoirs also benefit from incoming clean water.

How can I tell if the drainage channel on my property is a stream?

Stream is defined by Baltimore County Code as a perennial or intermittent watercourse identified through a site inspection and as approved by EPS. Perennial streams have flow all year, while an intermittent stream may lose base flow during dry periods. Base flow originates from groundwater and is not related to runoff from rainfall. Groundwater is the same water that is tapped into when a well is drilled. An environmental professional needs to make the final determination and obtain approval from EPS.

How do I know if there are wetlands on my property?

An environmental professional can advise on and complete a wetland determination. EPS will field verify wetland delineations provided by an environmental professional. As defined by the Army Corps of Engineers, evidence of three physical criteria must exist: hydric soil (soil that is formed under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part), hydrophytic vegetation (plants typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions) and hydrology (presence and/or indication of water during the growing season).

How does a Forest Buffer Easement on my property affect my use of the land?

The Forest Buffer Easement is designated as a non-disturbance area. Disturbance includes, but is not limited to, mowing, dumping, storage of materials or firewood, placement of play equipment, sheds or other structures, grading, filling, or cutting of vegetation. Other prohibited practices include the storage or operation of motorized vehicles of any kind, housing or grazing of animals, and the use, storage, or application of pesticides. No disturbance may occur within an Easement without written permission from EPS. The tall grasses and wildflowers growing in an Easement that is not currently forested may not be mowed. This may appear unsightly to some, but it is an important stage in the natural succession process. You are encouraged to enjoy nature and walk within the Easement.

How can I determine if a Forest Buffer Easement exists on my lot?

The record plat for the property will show easements. The Easements will be labeled. A plat may be obtained at the Office of Land Records, Clerk of the Court, located at 401 Bosley Avenue, Towson, Maryland, or Maryland State Archives at www.msa.md.gov and look for the Plats.net link.



Baltimore County EPS
111 W. Chesapeake Avenue, Suite 319
Towson, Maryland 21204
Phone: 410-887-3980 Fax: 410-887-4804
Website: <http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/agencies/eps>



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May I cut trees or clear forest within the Forest Buffer Easement on my property?

Trees within Easements cannot be cut or removed without written permission from this Department. If a tree is dead or dying, a threat to your home and located in an Easement, contact this Department to schedule an assessment by an inspector.

What are native and deciduous trees?

Native trees and shrubs occur naturally in our area, and have adapted to our climate and soil conditions. Our local wildlife depends on native plants for both food and habitat. Deciduous means a tree or shrub that loses its leaves in the fall. The County's Growing Home Campaign offers coupons for the purchase of trees. For more information, please visit www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/environment/growinghome/index.html

What activities require a permit?

Contact the Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections at 410-887-3353 or visit their website at www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/permits/index.html for further information. Many construction activities may require a permit.

Violations—What will happen if I have one or see one?

Violations of environmental regulations are taken seriously. They are typically discovered during routine Easement inspections and/or through concerned citizens. When a violation is discovered, the property owner is notified and advised of the corrective measure(s) to be taken to bring their property into compliance. The objective is to protect the resources and fine violators as a last resort if the problem is not corrected in a timely manner. Fines can be substantial, and add up daily per violation. All violations related to the topics on this Fact Sheet may be reported to 410-887-3980.

Will the Buffers, Easements, streams and wetlands harbor rats, mosquitoes or snakes?

Norway rats are not attracted to tall vegetation unless a food source is present for them to exploit, such as trash, grain crops, fruit trees and dog feces. Proper sanitation in residential areas will preclude the attraction of rats. If you think there is a rodent problem, call Code Enforcement, Rat Program at 410-887-7287 or www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/permits/ridrats. Other rodent species, such as white-footed mice, deer mice, eastern woodrats and meadow voles are typically found in fields and woods. Snakes most often inhabiting the Forest Buffer areas include black rat snake, garter snake and water snake. None of these species is poisonous or otherwise harmful to humans, but do play an important role in controlling populations of insects, amphibians and rodents. Mosquitoes require a dark location with standing water to breed, such as the inside of a discarded tire or birdbath. Most wetlands of Baltimore County do not contain standing water. Swallows, purple martins, bluebirds and eastern phoebes are common bird species that thrive on insects. Providing a birdhouse appropriate to the species may encourage natural mosquito control.

How can I determine if my property is in a floodplain?

Contact the Department of Public Works at 410-887-3984. Staff from that agency handles questions about the FEMA Flood Insurance Maps, as well as, County floodplain resources.



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