Local governments may modify master programs to reflect changing local circumstances, new information, or improved shoreline management approaches. All changes to master programs require public involvement. At a minimum, local governments must hold public hearings. Substantial revisions are usually written with help from citizen advisory committees.

Ecology provides technical assistance to all local governments undertaking master program amendments. Ecology also provides grants (approximately $425,000 per year) to local governments within the state’s Coastal Zone (jurisdictions within the 15 counties with saltwater shorelines).

Most shoreline master programs were originally written between 1974 and 1978. Since then, approximately 25% of these programs have been modified.

Where does the Shoreline Management Act apply?

The Shoreline Act applies to:
- all marine waters;
- streams with a mean annual flow greater than 20 cubic feet per second;
- water areas of the state larger than 20 acres;
- upland areas called “shorelands” 200 feet landward from the edge of these waters;
- and the following areas when they are associated with one of the above:
  - biological wetlands and river deltas; and
  - some or all of the 100-year floodplain including all wetlands within the entire floodplain.

Shorelines of Statewide Significance

The Shoreline Act also states that “the interests of all the people shall be paramount in the management of shorelines of statewide significance.” These shorelines are defined in the Act as:
- Pacific Coast, Hood Canal and certain Puget Sound shorelines;
- all waters of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca;
- lakes or reservoirs with more than 1,000 surface acres;
- larger rivers (1,000 cubic feet per second or greater for rivers in Western Washington, 200 cubic feet per second and greater east of the Cascade crest); and
- wetlands associated with all the above.
programs have been significantly updated; 50% have only had minor amendments, and 25% have never been amended.

Master program amendments are effective after Ecology’s approval. In reviewing master programs, Ecology is limited to a decision on whether or not the proposed changes are consistent with the policy and provisions of the Act and state master program guidelines.

**Shoreline permits**
Each local government has established a system of permitting for shoreline development.

**Substantial Development Permits** are needed for projects costing over $5,000, or those which materially interfere with the public’s use of the waters.

Some projects and activities are simply prohibited by local master programs or under the policy of the Act. However, it is far more common that the issue is how a development should be done - not whether or not it should be done.

Local governments may also issue **Conditional Use or Variance permits** to allow flexibility and give consideration to special circumstances. Ecology must approve all conditional use and variance permits.

Local governments issue approximately **750 permits every year**.

**Permit exemptions**
The Shoreline Management Act exempts certain developments from the need to obtain a substantial development permit. Among other things, permits are not needed for:
- Single family residences
- Normal protective bulkheads for single family residences
- Normal maintenance and repair of existing structures
- Docks worth less than $5,000 (salt water) or $10,000 (fresh water).

- Normal farming activities
- Emergency construction needed to protect property
- Activities exempted from the need to acquire a permit must still comply with all substantive policies and regulations of the local master program.

**Public involvement and appeals**
The Act strongly supports public involvement in shoreline decision making. Citizens participate on advisory boards preparing local master programs, and public comment is required for individual permits.

The **Shorelines Hearings and Growth Management Boards** are quasi-judicial bodies whose members representing citizen interests. Any aggrieved party may appeal a shoreline permit to the Shorelines Hearings Board. Master program amendments or adoptions may be appealed to a Growth Management Hearings Board (for GMA jurisdictions) or the Shorelines Hearings Board (for non-GMA jurisdictions).

**Ecology’s role**
Most of Ecology’s work involves providing technical assistance prior to a local decision.
- Ecology shoreline specialists work with local planners on the phone, at pre-application meetings, and through site visits.
- Ecology works with applicants to make sure the project does not harm shorelines - in many cases the project can be redesigned so that it meets the policies and regulations of the local master program.
- Ecology often receives early notice of a project through SEPA, and works with applicants and local governments before the permit is filed.

After local government issues its permits, Ecology has 21 days to review substantial development permits and 30 days to review conditional use and variance permits. Ecology’s role is to determine if the local action is consistent with the local master program and the policy of the Act.

If Ecology disagrees with a local decision on a substantial development permit, Ecology may appeal the decision to the Shorelines Hearings Board.

Ecology must approve or deny all conditional use or variance permits.

Ecology’s decisions on conditional use or variance permits may be appealed to the Shorelines Hearings Board.

**Federal Coastal Zone Management Act**
In 1976, Washington became the first state to develop an approved coastal management program under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, a voluntary federal program that fosters active state involvement in managing the nation’s coastal zones. The Shoreline Management Act is the basis of Washington’s CZM program.

The coastal program benefits jurisdictions within the fifteen counties bordering Washington’s 2,337 miles of saltwater shorelines. The coastal zone is home to almost 4 million people, 69% of the state’s population.

The Coastal Zone program gives the state legal muscle over federal projects. The state can require federal projects (and private projects that need federal approval) to meet state standards. This requirement for “federal consistency” is in many cases the only leverage that the state has to influence federal projects.

The CZM program also provides money to Washington State. Since 1976, the state has received $2 million every year. This grant pays for Ecology’s review of shoreline permits, enforcement, technical assistance, and education. Ecology also awards grants ($425,000 annually) to local governments for shoreline master program updates, waterfront revitalization plans, education programs, and public access.